



Government *WORLD*™

April- June 2026 British Edition

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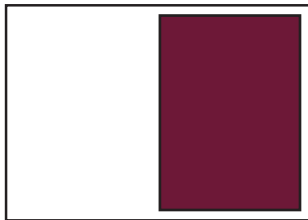
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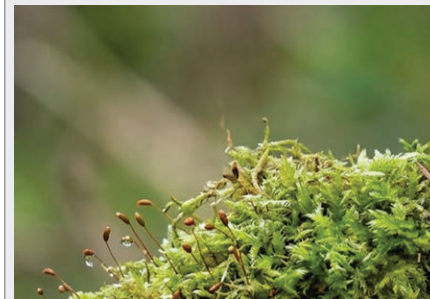
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The wonder of nature - beautiful fungi

Consumers to save around £400 million every year from government crackdown on costly subscription traps

April

From: Department for Business and Trade and Kate Dearden MP

Hard working Brits will keep more of their cash under a new government crackdown on unwanted and misleading subscriptions, which will save consumers around £400 million every year.

- New measures set out to make subscriptions clearer and far easier to manage or cancel
- Changes will help tackle the cost of living, by saving consumers around £400m annually with new rules to stop “free trials” turning into pricey surprises
- Consumers at the heart of action, with protections against daily grinds such as endless phone queues to cancel subscriptions signed up to with the click of a button

New rules, announced today [2 April],

will make it simpler and far less painful to escape unwanted subscriptions, stop people being silently rolled onto expensive contracts and ensure that companies are upfront and open when selling subscription services.

This will help tackle the cost-of-living head on by giving consumers greater control over their spending to help them keep hold of their hard-earned cash at a time when household budgets are under pressure.

Kate Dearden MP, Minister for Consumer Protection, said:

“There’s nothing more frustrating than seeing money you’ve worked hard for, disappear from your account for a subscription you’ve forgotten you had.

These new rules will put consumers back in control of their money – making subscriptions clearer, fairer and far easier

to cancel.”

Once the rules come into force, expected to be in Spring 2027, consumers will benefit from:

- Clear, simple information before signing up to any subscription
- Reminders before free or discounted trials end, or 12month+ contracts automatically renew
- Straightforward cancellations, including online exits for online sign ups
- A new 14-day cooling off period, after a free or discounted trial ends, or when a contract renews for 12 months or longer

Across the UK, there are 155 million active subscriptions – with nearly 10 million of them believed to be

unwanted.

Over 3.5 million people are being quietly rolled from free or discounted trials into fully costed contracts, whilst another 1.3 million are caught out by unexpected autorenewals.

By making it easier to cancel unwanted services, consumers could save around £14 every month (on average) per unwanted subscription - nearly £170 a year.

Sue Davies, Which? Head of Consumer Rights Policy, said:

“Subscription traps can be costly and wreak havoc on finances that are already under strain from the cost-of-living crisis.

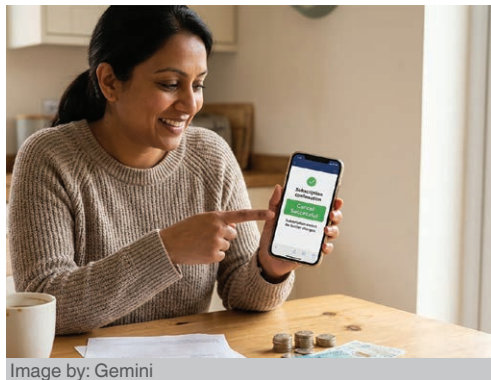


Image by: Gemini

The strengthening of subscription laws will be welcome news for those struggling with rising costs.

These new rules will help put consumers in the driving seat with proper transparency and protection.”

New measures mark another major milestone in enhancing consumer protections and implementing measures introduced in the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 (DMCCA).

As well as strengthening consumer rights, measures will support competition and growth by ensuring all businesses operate on a level playing field.

The measures are expected to come into force in spring 2027.

Lord Richard Walker, Government's Cost of Living Champion, said:

“At a time when every pound matters, these new rules will give consumers the clarity and control they deserve.

By stopping companies from quietly rolling people onto costly contracts and making cancellations far simpler, households can stay on top of their

budgets and keep more of their money where it belongs: in their own pockets.”

Tackling subscription traps is just one of the many steps this government is taking to support consumers. Other recent action includes rewiring enforcement to clamp down on rogue traders like rip-off locksmiths and launching a new Smart Data strategy as part of our Industrial Strategy.

Smart Data empowers consumers by giving them secure access to their own data and the ability to share it safely with trusted third parties, enabling personalised tools that help shoppers identify better-value products and services.

This strengthens and helps ensure firms offer fair prices and high-quality outcomes for consumers.

Today the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Business and Trade have written to all Secretaries of State and heads of regulators asking them for new ideas to protect consumers to drive down the cost of living. These will be published in a consumer action plan later this year.

Egg-cellent time for chatting with your kids about what they're seeing online this Easter

April

From: Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and Kanishka Narayan MP

As millions of children enjoy the Easter holidays, the government is stepping up to take the pressure off parents battling to keep their children safe online

- Parents can access the government's free 'You Won't Know until You Ask' campaign, which provides practical tools and conversation starters to help families talk about harmful online content over the school holidays

- The government is taking tough action to make tech platforms do more to protect children online, with a landmark consultation open until 26 May setting out proposals including minimum age limits for social media

and overnight curfews on addictive features

- New government guidance published last week sets out clear, judgement-free advice on healthy screen time for children under 5

Parents across the country are navigating that daily balancing act with screens - wondering what their children are seeing, how much time they're spending online, and whether they're doing enough to keep them safe. It's a lot to carry, and it shouldn't all fall on families.

That's why the government is preparing to take tough action to make tech platforms take responsibility - and at the same time giving parents the free, practical tools they've been asking for, so they feel supported

rather than on their own.

The landmark consultation on children's online safety, which is open right now, sets out some of the most ambitious proposals ever put forward by any government - including minimum age limits for social media, overnight curfews on addictive features like infinite scrolling and autoplay, and tighter restrictions on AI chatbots for young people.

The government has promised to act quickly on the findings, and new legal powers mean ministers can move within months rather than waiting years for new legislation. The response has already been significant, over 38,000 people have had their say in just the first month since it

launched. The consultation closes on 26 May and there are dedicated versions for both parents and young people - so this is a real chance for families to shape what happens next.

Online Safety Minister, Kanishka Narayan, said:

"I've been hearing from parents and children across the country, and it's clear this matters deeply to families. Platforms must be held accountable - and they will be. We are taking

action to make sure they meet their responsibilities.

But I've also heard that parents want support, not just reassurance. Regulation alone won't change culture overnight, and that's why we're giving families free, practical tools to have those conversations at home. We want every family to feel equipped and confident, not overwhelmed."

Alongside this, the government is also reminding parents about its

'You Won't Know until You Ask' campaign, a no-nonsense and free toolkit packed with practical advice to help mums and dads feel confident starting those conversations, without it turning into a row at the dinner table. Over 120,000* families have already visited the campaign website since it launched in February, with thousands** setting weekly reminders to check in with their children about what they're seeing online.

With another week of the school holidays ahead, there's never been a better time to take five minutes to explore what your children are seeing online. A simple question can go a long way and the government's free guidance is there to help when you need it.

You can access the free 'You Won't Know until You Ask' guidance at [kidsonlinesafety.campaign.gov.uk](https://www.kidsonlinesafety.campaign.gov.uk). The screen time guidance is available at the Best Start in Life website. To take part in the consultation, visit [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

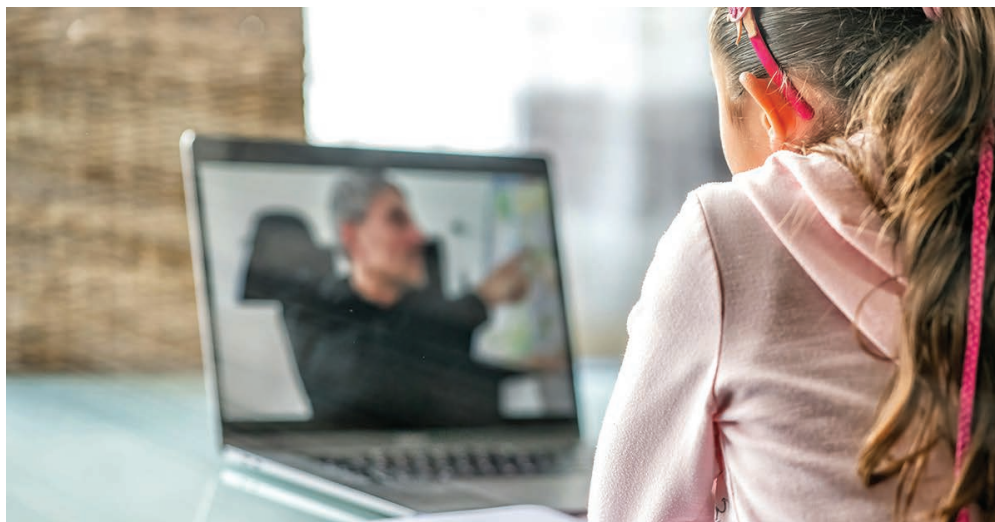


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Government approves UK's largest power-producing solar farm

April

From: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Michael Shanks MP

800 MW Springwell Solar farm given approval – the largest solar project in the UK terms of power generation.

- Marks the 25th nationally significant clean energy project approved by the government since July 2024 – enough clean energy to power the equivalent of over 12.5 million homes
- The decision is part of government drive to go further and faster on clean, homegrown power to protect the British people from volatile fossil fuel markets following conflict in the Middle East
- Solar is one of the cheapest forms of power available – approval builds on recent measures to roll out plug-in solar in UK stores and ensure all new homes in England are built with solar as a standard

Families and businesses will benefit from more solar power, one of the cheapest forms of power available, as the government today (Wednesday 8 April) approves a major new solar power project.

The Springwell Solar Farm is set to be the largest power-producing solar farm in

the UK – according to the developer it could power over 180,000 homes a year, the equivalent of half the homes in Lincolnshire.

The decision marks the 25th nationally significant clean energy project approved by the government since July 2024 – enough clean

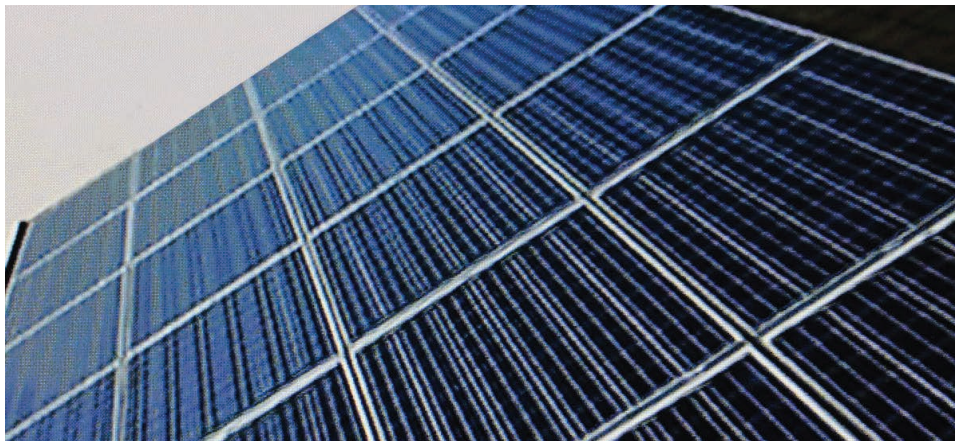


Image by: Keith Welters

energy to power the equivalent of more than 12.5 million homes.

Global instability – from Ukraine to the war in Iran – has exposed the cost of relying on fossil fuel markets Britain does not control. Solar is one of the cheapest forms of power available for the country, and central to the government's clean power mission to bring stability and lower bills, in an uncertain world.

Today's approval builds on decisive action the government has taken to learn the lessons from the conflict in the Middle East. This includes bringing plug-in solar to the UK, fitting solar on new homes as standard and fast-tracking the next renewables auction to July this year.

Energy Minister Michael Shanks said:

"We are driving further and faster for clean homegrown power that we control to protect the British people and bring down bills for good.

It is crucial we learn the lessons of the conflict in the Middle East – solar is one of the cheapest forms of power available and is how we get off the rollercoaster of international fossil fuel markets and secure our own energy independence."

Victims and bereaved get more time to challenge lenient sentences

April

From: Ministry of Justice, The Rt Hon Ellie Reeves KC MP, Alex Davies-Jones MP and Jake Richards MP

Victims and bereaved families will get longer to challenge sentences they don't feel fit the crime they've suffered

- Victims and families of most heinous crimes to get longer to challenge sentences
- Reforms mean no victim be left in the dark about right to challenge Crown Court sentences
- Move will help deliver justice for all victims and restore faith in the justice system as part of the Plan for Change

Victims and bereaved families will have longer than ever to challenge sentences they don't feel fit the crime they've suffered as the Government reforms the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme (9 April 2026).

Listening to courageous campaigners such as Tracey Hanson and Katie Brett, who both lost loved ones to horrific murder, the Government has today confirmed victims and their bereaved families will have up to six months to ask for a sentence to be reconsidered - rather than being strictly limited to 28 days.

This important change is in recognition of the fact that, in the immediate aftermath of a heinous crime that has upended their lives, grieving families and traumatised victims cannot also be expected to engage with the justice system again in such a short period of time.

The Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme allows any member of the public to refer a sentence to the Attorney General and the Solicitor General – the Government's senior legal advisers - if they believe it is too lenient. They can then request the Court of Appeal

reviews the sentence – a vital safeguard to help ensure sentences reflect the seriousness of the offence.

Ensuring that no one is left in the dark about their rights, the Government will also be introducing a legal duty in the Victims' Code to notify survivors of the existence of the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme.

Deputy Prime Minister and Justice Secretary David Lammy said:

"When someone's been through the ordeal of seeking justice and watched the person who hurt them or their loved one be sentenced, the last thing they should be worrying about is a ticking clock.

People need time to breathe, to talk to their families, to get advice. This change means they'll have more time to do this – and most importantly, get the justice they deserve."

The Victims and Courts Bill will also extend the time limit the Attorney General and Solicitor General have to review a sentence, allowing an additional 14 days if the case is submitted two weeks before the limit. This ensures sufficient time for each case to be reviewed thoroughly and for the most appropriate decision to be made.

This is the latest in the Government's Plan for Change to ensure fairer justice through

the Victims and Courts Bill – using victims' voices as the driving force for change. The Bill also introduced stern sanctions for non-attendance at sentencing hearings in the Crown Court, making clear to cowardly criminals that facing justice will never be optional.

Minister for victims and tackling VAWG Alex Davies-Jones said:

"When sentences aren't right, people deserve the chance to say so and have their reasoning heard.

I've heard from too many families who missed the deadline while they were still reeling from what happened in court – Tracey Hanson who lost her beloved son to murder wasn't even told about the scheme until it was too late.

Victims deserve to know that the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme exists, and they shouldn't pay a price if they don't. That will no longer be the case. We're making sure the system works for victims, not against them."

Solicitor General Ellie Reeves KC MP said:

"Victims deserve to know that the justice system is on their side. By giving victims and bereaved family members up to six months to challenge sentences when it is in the interests of justice, we are providing

people the time and space they need to come forward.

These changes send a clear message: if a sentence doesn't fit the crime, there will be a proper opportunity to challenge it. This government is committed to a justice system that improves public confidence and puts victims first."

The Victims' Commissioner, Claire Waxman, said:

"I am delighted that, after years of campaigning led by Tracey Hanson following the tragic death of her son Josh, and supported by bereaved



Image by: RDNE stock project on Pexels

families, the government has finally listened. I have long supported and worked closely with Tracey on her campaign since 2019, following the appalling injustice she experienced, and I hope this marks an important step towards greater parity between victims and offenders – particularly in securing fair and reasonable timeframes to receive information and request appeals.

The new duty to ensure victims are notified about the unduly lenient sentence scheme, alongside extending the rigid 28-day time limit, represents a significant and long overdue reform - ensuring families and victims are not only properly informed but also able to access the scheme even if they were previously unaware. I pay tribute to Tracey's determination in securing these changes to honour Josh. This is a testament to her campaign, and to the many families who stood alongside her to ensure their voices were heard."

Tracey Hanson said:

"After seven years of relentless campaigning through the Josh Hanson Trust, this is a significant and long-awaited victory for victims' rights. Following our extensive advocacy, the Government has agreed to transformative amendments to the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme.

These changes represent a hard-fought victory in ensuring that families are no longer left in the dark or rushed through a traumatising process during the most painful moments of their lives. These reforms are a testament to Josh's memory and the passion and dedication of everyone who stood with the Josh Hanson Trust. We have moved forward, but the fight for full equality in the eyes of the law continues."

Katie Brett said:

"Our lives were turned upside down when my 16 year old sister Sasha was murdered. Like all victims, we only had 28 days to appeal the sentence and we were not told until it was too late.

It's a relief that in Sasha's memory, victims and their families will have 6 months to



Image by: geralt on Pixabay

challenge an unduly lenient sentence and the new legal duty to be notified means every family will know their rights to be able to do so. No family should ever be left in the dark like we were, every victim deserves support. We're grateful these steps are being taken to redress the balance that so often feels weighted against victims."

This comes alongside a whole host of measures the government has introduced to support victims and ensure they get the fast and fair justice they deserve. This includes:

- Strengthening the Victims' Code so every victim - including children – knows their rights
- Investing £550 million over the next three years in specialist victim and witness services
- Ensuring free access to transcripts of judges' sentencing remarks to better support victims going through the Crown Court.
- Modernising criminal courts by combining bold reforms, record investment and action to tackle inefficiencies across the system - so victims get the fast and fair justice they deserve.

Threatened species set for major funding boost

April

From: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, Natural England and The Rt Hon Emma Reynolds MP

The government has unveiled the first five species set to benefit from the largest ever amount of government funding for threatened species.

The turtle dove, diamond-backed spider, Eurasian oystercatcher, red-billed croucher and glutinous snail are among the hundreds of species set to benefit from new funding for recovery projects across England.

The government will invest £60m over the next three years – more than double the previous round of funding – into the Species Recovery Programme, which is administered by Natural England. A further £30m will be dedicated to fund species recovery on the national forest estate.

It comes as Defra reveals a new

campaign, “Wild Again: Restoring England’s Wildlife”, which will encompass the government’s existing and future work to protect and recover native species through projects including the flagship Species Recovery Programme.

Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds said:

“We are a nation of nature lovers, and our wildlife is a huge source of pride for communities across the country.

This record investment into species recovery will give help some of our most iconic species the chance to truly flourish - from the turtle dove to the red-billed croucher - with many more projects set to follow in the months ahead.”

Natural England Chair Tony Juniper said:

“Once widespread and characteristic wildlife was in the very fabric of our

nation. Following centuries of decline that fabric has become frayed and tattered, but all is not lost. New government support to assist with the recovery of some of our most threatened species brings hope through practical action.

There are some extraordinary stories behind the recovery projects we are helping, including that of the red-billed croucher that was once extinct in England, but which is now growing in number and spreading. We are also backing action for lesser-known species, such as the diamond-backed spider and glutinous snail, which while less familiar are no less important threads in the web of life.”

Today, the government has revealed five of the threatened species set to benefit from Species Recovery Programme funding:

Turtle dove

The turtle dove is one of our most vulnerable species and, for those lucky enough to hear its call, part of the soundtrack for an English summer.

However, that sound has become harder to find over recent decades, as the turtle dove population in England has declined by an estimated 99% between the 1960s and 2023. This is largely due to the loss of seed-rich food sources.

However, turtle doves are set to benefit from new funding for their recovery through a project led by the RSPB, with Kent Wildlife Trust & Natural England. This builds on previous work, which has seen the Southeast of England become a



Image by: Mosharraf Hossain on Unsplash

stronghold for turtle doves. Nature friendly farming schemes are helping to provide more of the wildflower seeds that these birds need to survive and new funding to help the turtle dove population recover will drive further progress.

The turtle dove is known not only for its distinctive markings, but also for its enduring status as a cultural symbol of romance. Through the centuries, poetry including Shakespeare's "The Phoenix and the Turtle", cemented its symbolic status — and it remains most famous in popular culture for its mention in "The Twelve Days of Christmas".

Diamond-backed spider

Few conservation stories are as dramatic as that of the diamond-backed spider.

The spider, named for its distinctive markings, was thought to be extinct in the UK for nearly half a century, before it was rediscovered at Clumber Park, a National Trust site in Nottinghamshire in 2017.

Now, Clumber Park is still the only place where the diamond-backed spider can be found in the UK. This makes the tiny population of the species we have in this country extremely vulnerable, as any threats to this area of habitat could render

the rare spider nationally extinct once more.

Aside from being one of our rarest species, diamond-backed spiders also have a role to play in promoting healthy ecosystems. Spiders act as nature's pest controller, feeding flies, aphids and moths, helping to manage their numbers and prevent damage to plants.

New government funding for the National Trust will help this population to flourish into the future, ensuring that we don't see one of our rarest arachnids disappear from the wild in England.

Red-billed chough



Image by: Alicia Chant on Pixabay

New funding will offer renewed hope for the red-billed chough, a bird which has been much beleaguered over the centuries.

The red-billed chough has been subject to persecution since the Middle Ages, when folklore cast them as fireraisers and claimed they got their red legs and bill from paddling in the blood of Tomas Becket after his execution.

Now, red-billed choughs are being recognised as ecosystem engineers for promoting biodiversity in grasslands by altering soil structure and managing invertebrate populations, but they are facing the twin threats of the loss of habitat and food sources.

Government funding will be used to build on ongoing work to help the red-billed chough recover in Kent. In July 2023, Kent Wildlife Trust and Wildwood Trust released eight choughs near Dover, and by May 2024 the first wild chough chick to be born in Kent for generations was discovered at Dover Castle.

Eurasian oystercatcher

The Eurasian oystercatcher is one of England's most recognisable coastal birds: boldly patterned in black and white



Image by: Adrien Stachowiak on Unsplash

with a carrot-coloured bill, very talkative, and almost impossible to overlook. They can also be remarkably long-lived, with some individuals known to have lived for nearly half a century.

Britain supports an internationally important number of wintering oystercatchers, with up to 45% of Europe's population spending the winter here. However, the oystercatcher has been facing decline in Europe, largely due to driven by habitat degradation and the over-exploitation of mussel and cockle beds on which it depends.

A new project by the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and Natural England will help to promote the breeding success of oystercatcher in England, making sure that England remains a haven for the species.

Glutinous snail

The glutinous snail is one of our most unusual species, notable for its jelly-like mantle which protects its thin and delicate shell. This gives the animal a glassy appearance and makes it sticky to the touch, giving it its name.

This distinctive creature is extinct in England and, in Britain, is now found in just one lake: Llyn Tegid in North Wales. In England, the last known population was found at Kennington Pit, a pond on the edge of Oxford, where it was recorded until the early 1990s. Its decline is thought to be linked to habitat deterioration, as the species is particularly sensitive to water quality.

A new project by the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums, alongside a consortium of zoos, will reintroduce these weird and wonderful creatures in England and support their recovery.

Space Worms! UK scientists launch microscopic crew into orbit to support future Moon missions

April

From: UK Space Agency

British scientists have launched a crew of microscopic worms to the International Space Station in a pioneering experiment that could help unlock the secrets of long-duration space travel - and support ambitions to reach the Moon and beyond.

The project is a miniature space laboratory designed to study how biological organisms respond to the extreme conditions faced by astronauts. It has been led by the University of Exeter, engineered and built by the University of Leicester at Space Park Leicester, and funded by the UK Space Agency.

It follows the launch of NASA's Artemis II mission to send four astronauts on a 10-day journey around the Moon and back ahead of a future mission to return astronauts to the lunar surface for the first time since 1972. Scientists believe the project could help provide new insights

into how biological systems change in space and hence how astronauts can stay fit and healthy while travelling to and from the Moon, as well as during long-term stays following NASA's plans to build a base there.

The experiment launched on NASA's Northrop Grumman CRS-24 Mission from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida at 12.41pm BST today heading for the ISS, where it will be mounted on the outside of the station by a robotic arm, so that researchers can conduct tests on dozens of microscopic worms, called *C. elegans* nematode worms, controlling the equipment remotely from Earth. These worms, which are 1mm in length, are commonly used in scientific research on Earth.

The mission addresses a critical challenge in humanity's ambitions to explore the Moon and other planets: the harmful effects of extended space

travel on human health. Microgravity can cause bone and muscle loss, fluid shift and vision problems, while radiation exposure can lead to genetic damage and increased cancer risk.

Space Minister Liz Lloyd said:

"It might sound surprising, but these tiny worms could play a big role in the future of human spaceflight. This remarkable mission – backed by government funding – shows the ingenuity and ambition of UK space science, using a small experiment to tackle one of the biggest challenges of long-duration space travel: protecting human health.

As we prepare for a new era of exploration, including future missions to the Moon, research like this will help astronauts stay healthy and return home safely. It's a great example of how we're driving

innovation to grow the economy and keep the UK at the forefront of future technologies.”

Dr Tim Etheridge, from the University of Exeter, said:

“NASA’s Artemis programme marks a new era of human exploration, with astronauts set to live and work on the Moon for extended periods for the first time. To do that safely, we need to understand how the body responds to the extreme conditions of deep space. By studying how these worms survive and adapt in space, we can begin to identify the biological mechanisms that will ultimately help protect astronauts during long-duration missions - and bring us one step closer to humans living on the Moon.”

The experiment will also show that complex biology experiments can be done in space at miniature scale and relatively lower cost. The project builds on an earlier concept funded by the UK Space Agency and has been developed in partnership with the University of Leicester, which designed and built the hardware, and Voyager Space Technologies, which is managing the mission and launch.

The Petri Pod is a self-contained experiment housed in a unit measuring approximately 10x10x30cm and weighing around 3kg. It contains 12 experimental chambers, four of which can be actively imaged using fluorescent and white light imaging capabilities.

Each chamber provides a miniaturised ‘life support’ environment, by maintaining temperature, pressure and a trapped volume of air for organisms to breathe when exposed to the vacuum of space. The specimens receive food and water through an agar carrier.

Initially, the experiment will spend time inside the ISS before being deployed outside on an experimental platform, exposing it to the vacuum and radiation of space along with microgravity for up to 15 weeks.

During the mission, researchers will monitor the worms’ health using

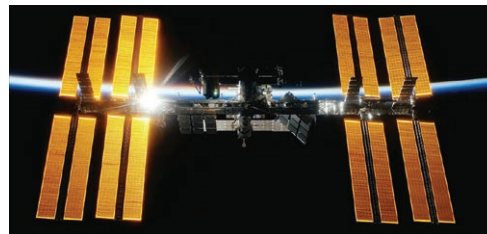


Image by: NASA on Unsplash

fluorescent glowing signals and white light optics, captured via photographic stills and time-lapse video captured with miniature cameras. The system will collect data on temperature, pressure and accumulated radiation dose, with information relayed to Earth.

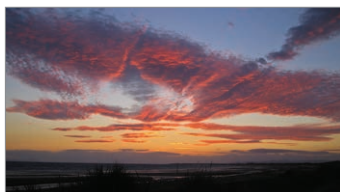
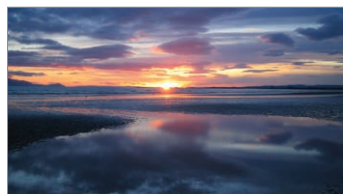
Professor Mark Sims, project manager for the Fluorescent Deep Space Petri-Pods project at Leicester, said:

“FDSPP is Leicester’s first major microgravity life sciences project, and it has been both an interesting and challenging instrument to design and build. The project builds upon previous work with Tim Etheridge and the University of Exeter.

Having now delivered the experiment to Voyager Space Technologies, who provide the interface to NASA and its flight on the International Space Station, the project team at Leicester look forward to seeing the first images from orbit. We hope this will contribute to our understanding of the microgravity environment, and we’re excited about the potential to further develop the instrument concept in the future.”



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Innovative walking, wheeling and cycling projects win share of £1 million

May

From: Department for Transport, Active Travel England and Lilian Greenwood MP

The 12 winning projects will provide more people with healthier and sustainable active travel options across England.

- shared cycle schemes, gamified walking campaigns and accessible wheeling apps among 12 winning projects
- grants of up to £100,000 awarded



Image by: Keith Welters

to small businesses and community organisations

investment supports government plans to back entrepreneurship and boost the economy

Communities across England will benefit from a diverse range of innovative walking, wheeling and cycling projects, after Active Travel England (ATE) awarded grants through its £1 million Innovation Fund.

The 12 successful projects, ranging from e-cargo bike share schemes and community behaviour change programmes, to 'gamified' walking campaigns and accessible wheeling apps, will each receive grants of up to £100,000, following a competitive bid process.

The Active Travel Innovation Fund was launched in October last year to enable

small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to develop new ideas or expand successful initiatives that are already making a difference.

Funded projects will provide more people with healthier and sustainable active travel options, especially those from under-represented groups, supporting the government's missions to improve public health, create safer streets and cut carbon emissions.

Active Travel Commissioner, Chris Boardman, said:

"These projects are about testing fresh ideas in the real world and finding out what works. By backing smaller, innovative organisations across the country, we are tapping into more imaginations, reaching people in the heart of the community and building a strong evidence

base that will further improve everyday journeys for people who walk, wheel and cycle now and in the future. The lessons we learn will help councils, businesses and communities invest in approaches that are inclusive, practical and deliver tangible benefits. It's about making it easier for more people to choose active travel for everyday trips, whatever their age, ability or background."

Local Transport Minister, Lilian Greenwood, said:

"We're backing bold, community-led ideas that get more people walking, wheeling and cycling.

These projects show how innovation and entrepreneurship can deliver healthier journeys, safer streets and real benefits for communities across the country.

On top of this, the government is investing £626 million for local authorities up to 2030 to deliver vital walking and cycling schemes, which is enough for 500 miles of new walking and cycling routes and 170,000 more active trips per day. This will also help boost local businesses, grow local economies and ease pressure on the NHS."

The winning projects include Walk Ride

Greater Manchester, which will support the set-up, coordination and scaling of walking and bike buses, helping hundreds of primary school children travel to school in a fun and active way.

Go Jauntly is an award-winning UK walking app that will use the funding to run a gamified city-versus-city campaign to increase walking and wheeling among women and families in Birmingham and Liverpool.

PedalUK will set up, deliver and evaluate a 5-cycle 'Our Bike' community-led e-cargo bike-sharing pilot in Brighton and Hove.

Other funded projects include Mobility



Image by: Keith Welters

Mapper, a Bristol-based intervention that will develop a digital mapping platform, accessed via an app, aimed at enabling wheelers to travel more safely and confidently.

General Manager at PedalUK/ OurBike, Emma Hughes, said:

"This funding enables OurBike to launch and test our London e-cargo bike share scheme outside the capital in Brighton and Hove. Building on research from the University of Brighton and working with Brighton and Hove City Council and local partners, we are addressing the real barriers to e-cargo bike use by embedding bikes in communities and making everyday cycling more accessible and affordable for families and businesses carrying children, goods or equipment."

CEO at Go Jauntly, Hana Sutch, said:

"At Go Jauntly, we believe walking and wheeling should feel accessible, safe and joyful for everyone, especially women and families who are often overlooked.

Thanks to Active Travel England funding, we are expanding our behaviour change programmes

to meet people in their own neighbourhoods, making everyday movement fun, easier and more inclusive.”

Director of Walk Ride Greater Manchester, Harry Gray, said:

“We’re delighted to have received funding from Active Travel England’s Innovation Fund to deliver a Walking and Cycling Bus Pilot across Manchester and Trafford.

This funding enables us to provide a full-time project coordinator to grow and sustain walking and cycling buses at scale. Every child across Greater Manchester should have access to a safe, active travel route to school – walking and cycling buses are where that journey begins.”

Founder of Mobility Mapper, Sonya Ridden, said:

“Active Travel England innovation funding is essential in helping Mobility Mapper begin mapping the routes wheelers can actually use. By creating a wheelable network built from real journeys, we will help people plan ahead with confidence, avoid unsuitable routes, make everyday wheeling easier and safer, and make active travel more inclusive.”

13 new bathing sites open across England helping communities and waterways

May

From: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and Emma Hardy MP

Designated sites include first-ever site on the River Thames in London

13 new bathing sites have opened across the country, helping to restore pride in local areas, giving a boost to outdoor and swimming groups, and protecting cherished rivers and beaches.

The sites, including the first-ever on the River Thames in London, have now officially received designated status as the

bathing water season begins.

The 13 new sites take the total to over 460 bathing waters, covering nearly every coastal county in England as well as several more inland swimming spots.

They will be rigorously and regularly tested by the Environment Agency throughout the bathing season meaning swimmers are better informed about water quality, and can swim with greater confidence.

The designations follow a public consultation with each site receiving overwhelming public support, with 90% of responders in favour of designation and a record number endorsing the Ham & Kingston site.

The Government’s commitment to improving water quality and expanding monitoring is delivering clear results for swimmers and the environment, with



Image by: Keith Walters

four in five bathing sites being rated as either 'Excellent' or 'Good'.

Water Minister Emma Hardy said:

"The introduction of these new bathing sites means better monitoring of our waterways, a boost for local tourism, and greater confidence for local swimmers.

Following years of indifference towards bathing waters, this government has expanded the number of sites as part of our overhaul of the water sector.

We're committed to generational reform of our water industry and won't stop until the job is done."

The Environment Agency regularly monitors water quality at designated bathing water sites and assesses whether action is needed to cut pollution levels – working with local communities, farmers, and water companies to improve water quality at these locations.

What that means is environmental officers on site every week at each of these locations throughout the summer, taking and assessing water samples, and publishing that information online for the benefit of swimmers.

Alan Lovell, Chair of the Environment

Agency, said:

"The growing number of designations across the country reflects the importance communities place in their local environment and water quality.

If you're planning on going open water swimming this summer, I'd advise everyone to get informed - checking water quality and conditions before you go.

Across the bathing water season, Environment Agency teams will be out conducting over 7000 tests across over 460 locations. Through strong regulation and the right data, we will continue to drive improvements to bathing water quality, working closely with local partners to direct investment and target action in the right places."



Image by: Keith Welters

The filming location for the iconic ITV drama Broadchurch in Bridport, Dorset is another confirmed bathing water site. Government will also provide funding towards signage to ensure people have clear access to these new sites.

Sites also play a vital role in connecting people with nature - bringing important social and health benefits and helping towns prosper through increased tourism, delivering on the government's wider commitment to empower communities to shape how their local environment is protected and enjoyed.

These new designations come alongside recent changes to the bathing water regulations that will modernise the system, helping to ensure it is fit for today and reflects how people use rivers and beaches.

Last year, 93% of England's bathing waters met acceptable standards for swimming, with 87% rated as 'Excellent' or 'Good'. The government's new Bathing Water Regulation reforms will allow us to move away from a 'one size fits all' approach to better reflect how people use our beaches, lakes and rivers.

This announcement is in line with the upcoming Clean Water Bill,

announced this week in the King's Speech, which will continue momentum on once-in-a-generation reforms to end weak oversight, stop water companies marking their own homework and restore public trust.

Supportive quotes:

Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy Mete Coban said:

“The announcement of the first-ever river swimming site on the River Thames in London is a moment of celebration for Londoners and highlights the role of community groups in helping to make London’s rivers and waterways cleaner and more accessible spaces.

There is still more work to be done, and the Mayor and I are committed to improving water quality in all the capital’s waterways. This is why we are launching the Clean and Healthy Waterways plan in the summer to ensure they are safe and welcoming spaces for all, as we continue to build a better, greener London for everyone.”

Ben Seal, Head of Access & Environment, Paddle UK said:

“The designation of these 13 new bathing sites, is another positive step forward in

protecting our precious waters. For the millions of people who love being in, on, and beside the water, access to safe, regularly monitored blue space is vital. This expansion ensures that more communities can be better informed when choosing where and when to access the water. Furthermore, the overwhelming public demand for these new designated sites just proves how passionate the public is about being and being active in blue spaces.

Together, the increase in designated bathing water sites and the Clean Water Bill represent a historic opportunity to secure healthy, pollution-free waters for everyone to enjoy.”

Marlene Lawrence, Leader and Founder of the Teddington Bluetits chill swimmers, said:

“We are absolutely delighted to have achieved Bathing Water status for the Thames at Ham and Kingston. The river is widely used by all ages to swim, row, paddle and sail, and it is wonderful to have such a natural resource to use to enhance our health and mental well-being.

With water testing throughout the bathing water season, I really want to encourage more people to enjoy leisure time in and on the Thames here.”



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First Olympics in the North of England in government's sights alongside stadium regeneration push

May

From: Department for Culture, Media and Sport and
The Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP

Initial strategic assessment commissioned into potential bid for Olympic and Paralympic Games in the North of England in the 2040s

- Assessment will test if hosting could deliver transformational regeneration and growth in the North

- Towns and cities across England also set to benefit from sports infrastructure accelerator programme, to remove barriers to major sports led regeneration

The government has commissioned its expert arm's-length body UK Sport to carry out an initial strategic assessment examining whether the UK could host an Olympic and Paralympic Games in the North of England during the 2040s, as part of an ambitious growth drive to use sports to power regeneration of towns and cities.

Initial work examining whether the UK could

host the Games for the first time since London 2012 will assess key factors such as potential cost, socioeconomic benefit and any bid's chance of success.

The Government firmly sees major sporting events and sporting facilities as playing a key role in driving economic growth, regeneration, improving pride in place, and bolstering the UK's global appeal.

Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy said:

"London 2012 showed what the Olympics can do for our country. It inspired a generation through sport, attracted huge investment and showed the best of Britain to the world.

But while the North of England has driven so much sporting excellence, no matter the talent we produce, the sporting moments we create, and the world-class events we attract - for too long we have been told the Olympics is simply too big and too important to be hosted in the North.

Not any more. It's time the Olympics came North and we showed what we can offer to the world. I couldn't be more pleased to announce that we're starting the firing gun on a long overdue vote of confidence in the North."

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, said:

"Britain's sporting prowess is recognised and respected around the world. It's something we are determined to capitalise on to breathe life into our communities and build a stronger and more secure economy.



Image by: Hert Niks on Pexels

That's why we're throwing our full support behind bringing the Games back home which will boost our Northern Growth Corridor. It's also why we're backing stadium regeneration plans, like at Elland Road, to deliver new homes, business opportunities and public spaces in Leeds and beyond."

The Government has also announced a wave of new work to use sport as a catalyst for local regeneration and economic growth. This includes:

- **A Stadium Regeneration Accelerator:**

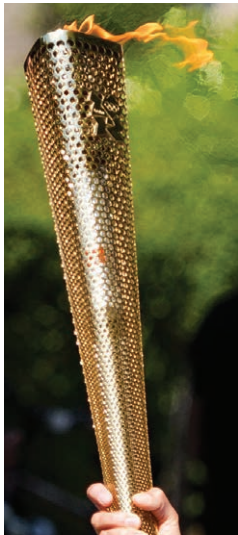


Image by: PublicDomain-Pictures on Pixabay

In a further growth boost for towns and cities across England, a new cross-government programme will work with sporting bodies on priority sports infrastructure development projects - such as stadiums - that can help deliver local regeneration and commercial growth. Funding will not be used for the regeneration of these stadiums but the government

will work with sports clubs and leagues to unlock opportunities for large-scale housing delivery, jobs, apprenticeships, transport improvement and community sports facilities. DCMS will work alongside the Office for Investment (OfI) HM Treasury and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government with sports bodies such as the Premier League, the English Football League and the WSL Football. Together they will identify, and unblock, barriers to development at both a national and local level - and will include projects across the sports sector. The OfI will act as the front door for potential investors to be involved in the programme. Planned projects across England include proposals in Greater Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Leeds, Liverpool and London that have the potential to regenerate their surrounding areas. The government will also look at how we can learn lessons and share best practice with counterparts from Europe and further afield.

- **A new Sporting Events Bill:**

Introduced to Parliament on Thursday, the new Bill will make it easier to bid for, secure and deliver major sporting events in future, including UEFA EURO 2028. It will also make the unauthorised resale of tickets for designated major events a criminal offence, ensuring more tickets reach real fans at face value rather than being snapped up by touts and resold.

- **UK Government Strategy for Major Events:**

The government will set out its plans to support and provide leadership to the nation's wider major events sector, by delivering a cross-sector strategy within the coming year. The strategy will cover major events in all sectors - cultural, sporting and business - and will ensure that major events continue to drive economic growth, enhance the UK's soft power across the globe, and strengthen social cohesion in our towns and cities. This will build on the UK's outstanding track record — from the 80th commemorations of VE day and the billions of pounds generated every year from hosting business events, to the record-breaking Women's Rugby World Cup last year.

- **A Ministerial Adviser on Soft Power and Major Events:**

The government has also appointed Lord McConnell as a Ministerial Adviser on Soft Power and Major Events. Lord McConnell, who was central to bringing the Commonwealth Games to Glasgow in 2014, will support the government's ambition to cement the UK's position as the go-to destination for the world's most prestigious sporting and cultural events, drawing on his experience in international affairs, public policy and

supporting the delivery of major events.

The UK has a phenomenal pipeline of major sporting events to look forward to. This summer alone brings the ICC Women's T20 World Cup, the European Athletics Championships in Birmingham and the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. In 2027, the Tour de France and Tour de France Femmes Grands Départs will be the most accessible major sporting event ever held in Great Britain. UEFA EURO 2028 is forecast to generate £3.2 billion in socioeconomic benefits - creating jobs, driving regional growth, and drawing a surge of international visitors to communities the length and breadth of the country.

The Government is already backing bids to host the World Athletics and Para-Athletics Championships in 2029, as well as the 2035 FIFA Women's World Cup, as part of its commitment to driving a decade of change in women's sport.

Alongside more than £500 million invested into the delivery of major sporting events, the Government is making a serious and sustained commitment to grassroots sport. At least £400 million is being invested in community facilities across the country, ensuring that the legacy of every major event is felt far and wide.

Broken fit note system to be overhauled

May

From: Department for Work and Pensions and
Department of Health and Social Care

Patients, employers and GPs are set to benefit from an overhaul of the broken fit note system following the launch of several pilots by the Government today to reform the system for workers who fall ill.

- Radical overhaul of broken fit note system to be piloted so it works for patients, employers, and healthcare professionals.
- Trials to be delivered through selected NHS WorkWell sites and major employers.
- Comes as new report shows just 29% of primary care staff see issuing fit notes as a good use of GP time.

The current system sees some 11 million fit notes issued every year, with more than nine in ten declaring the person 'not fit for work'.

Four pilots, in different areas, in England will look at the best way to end this tick-box exercise which does not offer any support or guidance and replace it with personalised 'stay in work' and 'return to work' plans for workers who fall ill.

The pilots will cover up to 100,000 appointments and last up to a year, with continuous testing, in order to narrow down the most effective approach to tackling the inherited steep increase in number of fit notes issued.

Patients will be offered either an initial fit note from a GP and then referred to community health workers – or go through the whole process without an initial fit note from a GP, and will instead be supported by a separate service staffed by clinical and non-clinical practitioners.

They will provide a range of work

and health support, including three-way conversations between patients, employers, and trained professionals - covering reasonable adjustments and keeping people connected to their workplace from the first day of absence, helping more people to stay in work with support.

It is the first step in the Government's ambition for radical fit note reform - with pilot findings due to be shaped by patients, healthcare staff, and employers - before the Government brings forward legislation to further reform the broken system.

Work and Pensions Secretary Pat McFadden, said:

"Fit notes are too often a dead end - a piece of paper that tells people they can't work but does nothing to help them get better.

We're changing that. By bringing employers, the NHS, and patients together we can help people recover faster, stay connected to their jobs, and get the economy firing on all cylinders.

That's what these pilots are about, and that's what this Government is committed to - fixing what is broken."

The launch comes as the Government publishes the Fit Note Call for Evidence which shows just three in 10 Healthcare Professionals in Primary Care say fit notes are a good use of GPs time, while six in 10 employers think the current process is ineffective at supporting their employees' work and health needs.

Trials of a new approach was recommended by the former John Lewis chairman Sir Charlie Mayfield in his landmark Keep Britain Working Review into economic inactivity, which noted that the fit note system is "not working as intended" and had become a barrier to contact with employers.

Minister of State for Care Stephen Kinnock said:

"Ever since I was appointed Minister of State for Care in July 2024, NHS staff have been telling me that the current fit note system isn't working - not for patients, and not for the clinicians who sign them off.

These pilots mark the beginning of the end for that broken system, giving people personalised support to get back into work and freeing up GPs from unnecessary admin so they can focus on what they do

best: caring for their patients.

This is what our 10 Year Health Plan is all about - earlier support, from the right people, in the right place."

From July, the NHS will test new approaches through four existing WorkWell sites, backed by £3 million in the first year. The areas will test the following models:



Image by: cottonbro studio on Pexels

- Birmingham and Solihull - GPs issue the first fit note where needed, with all patients referred to a new support service led primarily by non-clinical staff, including social prescribers and work and health coaches
- Coventry and Warwickshire - GPs issue the first fit note, with patients able to be referred to a support service made up of both clinical and non-clinical staff
- Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly - GPs refer patients directly to a non-clinical support service, without issuing a fit note
- Lancashire and South Cumbria - GPs refer patients to a support service made up of both clinical and non-clinical staff, without issuing a fit note.

BMA's Practice Business policy lead for GPs committee England Dr Clare Bannon said:

"The BMA has contributed to the design of these pilots with DWP to overhaul the fit note system as we feel the current system is not working for GPs or patients. We welcome the opportunity to test how different models work and ensure the new process reduces unnecessary appointments for GPs, but most importantly provides support to patients.

We will continue to input into the pilots to ensure they have appropriate occupational health support and do not inadvertently increase pressure on general practice or affect patient care. While we are supportive of this pilot, it must be underpinned by appropriate training, clinical oversight and clear governance."

Professor Victoria Tzortziou Brown, President of the Royal College of GPs, said:

"GPs take our responsibility to appropriately issue fit notes seriously, but the current system can involve significant administrative work that takes time away from patient care.

We are open to exploring evidence-based reforms that could help improve outcomes for patients. However, any reform of the fit note process must put the health and wellbeing of patients first, be fully resourced and avoid creating additional workload for general practice. As such we look forward to seeing a comprehensive evaluation of this pilot."

The Government is also confirming local funding allocations for WorkWell - the proven health-and-employment service through which the NHS-based fit note

pilots will be delivered - as the programme expands nationally to support up to 250,000 people with a disability or health condition to get into or stay in work.

WorkWell is a local, health-led service connecting NHS, council and community support to keep people in work and help them return quickly if they don't.

It comes as part of the Government's wider £3.5 billion employment support package which meets sick and disabled people where they are, and builds on recent changes including the right for people on benefits to try work without fear of immediate reassessment, and the redeployment of 1,000 Pathways to Work advisers who are supporting those left behind by the previous Government.

Those who need time off to recover will still get it, with the Government's Statutory Sick Pay reforms meaning employees receive support from day one of sickness absence, putting an extra £400 million a year into people's pockets.

Alongside the NHS pilots, Keep Britain Working Vanguard businesses

- including EDF Energy – will work out how employers can play a practical role in preventing absence where possible, and supporting safe, swift returns when it does occur.

Jacob Lant, Chief Executive of National Voices, said:

“The current tick-box system for fit notes isn’t working for anyone, particularly patients. It makes people who are unwell jump through unnecessary admin hoops, and yet the process rarely offers people the support they need to get well and manage their conditions long-term.

The Department for Work and Pensions is absolutely right to test out new ways of supporting those who are signed off, and it is vital that patients are fully involved in that testing process, able to feed back over what works and what doesn’t. This is the only way to reliably avoid unintended consequences and create a system that actually helps both those who can’t work and those who would be able to with the appropriate support.

Ultimately the goal has to be about focusing on improving people’s health and getting them well, this is the hallmark of a compassionate state. In the end, investing in this approach will also pay dividends in

terms of more people feeling able to work and being able to enjoy all the positives that come as a result.”

Nottingham GP Dr Sanjoy Kumar said:

“I am really pleased the government is looking seriously at new approaches to fit notes, a change which is urgently needed. As a GP for over 25 years, I know how much of our clinical time is taken up with issuing these, which for many patients is not the right approach.”

Dr Steve Taylor GP Co-Lead Doctors Association UK said:

“The Doctors Association UK has been involved in discussions over the past few months with the Department of Work and Pensions around Fit Note reform. These discussions were broad and included many groups: GPs, employers, patients and occupational health. We agree that the current system of fit-notes isn’t working well for patients, GPs and employers. It often lacks the nuance to deal with specific work situations and reasons that people have for not being able to work their full or part of their role.

We hope these pilots will give the opportunity to explore a different way for people to engage with the periods

of ill health and ways to make work more accessible and achievable. This recognises that GPs aren’t always best equipped to understand the options for work and we hope that active engagement between patients, GPs, employers and this new service will provide a better experience for everyone.

It is important that no one is forced to work who cannot, but it is also important that those who can, should be encouraged and given options to work. This could be a great improvement and we look forward to seeing the outcomes from these 4 pilots.”

Chief Policy & Campaigns Officer John Foster at Confederation of British Industry said:

“The fit note system is broken and fails employers, workers, and the economy. Business welcomes these pilots. They are an important step towards building a better system.

Employers have increased their investment in supporting employee health and wellbeing and hope that these pilots will direct efforts to interventions that have the greatest

impact.

An improved system also needs to restore employers' confidence that absence from work is only recommended when it is justified."

Professor Neil Greenberg, the Society of Occupational Medicine said:

"The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) welcomes DWP's proposed fit note pilots, particularly the workability plan. The current fit note system is not working. Too many people who could potentially be supported to stay and return to work are not.

The fit note reform offers clear benefits for employees, employers, and the NHS. SOM anticipate the pilots will generate useful data to improve how fit notes will support employees, alleviate GP pressures and help bridge the gap between employers and employees.

SOM will be interested to see if the pilots will support better health outcomes through reduced absenteeism, and improved retention. SOM looks forward to working with the DWP to achieve a better fit note system."

Charlotte Osborn-Forde, Chief Executive

of The National Academy for Social Prescribing:

"We are pleased that social prescribers - also known as link workers - will play a part in the fit note pilots. Link workers can support people with social issues that affect their health, including loneliness, isolation and problems with debt or housing. They focus on what matters to people and connect them to community-based support - including advice on money or housing, carers' support, physical activity groups or local activities. There is strong evidence that this approach can benefit wellbeing and mental health.

No one who is unable to work should be pressured into doing so, but this voluntary scheme should help join the dots between the NHS, employers and communities, and help people get the right support for wider issues that affect their health."

Head of Policy and Practice at the Royal College of Occupational Therapists, Joe Brunwin, said:

"These pilots are a real chance to help more people stay in or return to work and are centred around a core skill of occupational therapy: understanding people as individuals and considering how

their environment and circumstances affect their ability to work."

Fit note evaluations and pilots show occupational therapists are more likely to take a work-focused approach, using 'may be fit' advice and adjustments to support return to work. As well as signing fit notes occupational therapists can provide clinical supervision and governance for non-clinical staff.

It's encouraging to see a shift away from a purely medical approach to work absence, towards taking a more holistic approach. We look forward to seeing how this initiative makes use of occupational therapy expertise and how we can continue to work together as part of a multidisciplinary team, supporting people to stay in, return to and thrive in work.



Image by: subarasikiai on Pixabay

UK plays leading role as landmark mission launches to unlock secrets of Earth's magnetic shield

May

From: UK Space Agency

UK scientists and companies are at the heart of a pioneering mission, launched into orbit today, that will transform our understanding of how Earth is protected from the Sun.

- SMILE launches to provide first complete picture of how Earth's magnetic field responds to the solar wind, improving predictions of solar storms that disrupt GPS, communications and power grids.
- UK Space Agency has provided £15 million for the mission, with Mullard Space

Science Laboratory at UCL leading the science and the University of Leicester developing the first instrument to observe Earth's magnetic field in X-rays.

- The UK is a leading partner in the mission, with British companies building critical mission hardware and software that will strengthen space weather forecasting and protect vital infrastructure.

The Solar wind Magnetosphere Ionosphere Link Explorer (SMILE) — a joint mission between the European Space Agency (ESA) and the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) — lifted off aboard a Vega-C rocket from Europe's Spaceport in French Guiana on Tuesday 19 May.

Now in orbit, SMILE will provide scientists with the first complete picture of how Earth's magnetic field responds to the solar wind — the constant stream of charged particles emitted by the Sun.

When the solar wind intensifies into solar storms, the effects are felt here on Earth. GPS systems can fail, shortwave radio communications can be knocked out, and in the most extreme cases, power grids can be overwhelmed.

The potential economic impact on the UK was estimated at around £9 billion in the Met Office's 2022 risk assessment. The more we understand about how and why these storms occur, the better placed we are to protect the infrastructure that modern life depends on — from the satellites guiding aircraft and emergency services, to the energy networks keeping homes warm.

SMILE will give scientists the tools to build more accurate space weather forecasts, helping to reduce the worst effects of solar storms before they strike. This mission backs the government's Plan for

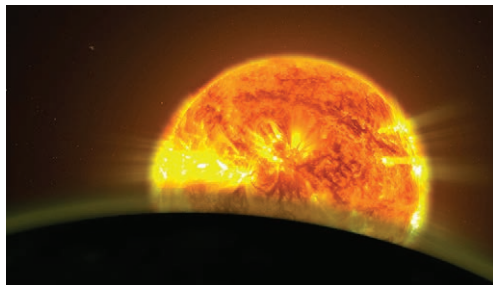


Image by: NASA Hubble Space Telescope on Unsplash

Change by strengthening UK resilience against space-weather disruption, while supporting high-skill jobs and exportable technology through world-leading British science and industry.

The UK at the heart of the mission

The UK Space Agency has provided £15 million funding for UK involvement in SMILE, supporting a significant British contribution to the mission's science and technology. British researchers are leading the mission's science at the highest level. Dr Colin Forsyth of University College London's Mullard Space Science Laboratory (UCL-MSSL) serves as Co-Principal Investigator for the overall mission.

UK scientists are also leading one of SMILE's four science instruments — the Soft X-ray Imager (SXI). SMILE is the first space telescope to look at Earth's magnetic field in X-rays, allowing scientists to uncover for the first time exactly where and how the solar wind interacts with our planet's magnetic shield.

Dr Steven Sembay of the University of Leicester leads the European consortium responsible for building the SXI, which uses innovative 'lobster-eye' micropore optics technology developed at Leicester.

SXI is the first instrument to be delivered using facilities at the University's Space Park Leicester.

While extreme space weather events are rare, the UK is better prepared than ever before - backed by world-class monitoring from the Met Office Space Weather Operations Centre, one of only a handful of 24/7 centres of its kind globally, and a £300 million stake in Vigil, an ESA satellite mission that will deliver faster and more accurate space weather warnings.

The UK SMILE team has already begun working with the Met Office to explore how SMILE data could strengthen forecasting capabilities, helping to reduce the worst effects of solar storms on the ground and in orbit.

Space Minister Liz Lloyd said:

"SMILE is an excellent example of what British science and industry can achieve on the world stage. From the brilliant researchers leading the mission's science to the precision engineering of companies building the spacecraft's instruments, the UK is central to this mission.

Understanding how our planet's magnetic shield protects us from the Sun isn't just fascinating science — it has real

consequences for how we safeguard our satellites, our infrastructure and our astronauts. I'm proud that the UK is helping to answer some of the biggest questions in space science, and inspiring the next generation of scientists and engineers in the process."

Dr Colin Forsyth, Co-Principal Investigator, Mullard Space Science Laboratory at UCL, said:

"Previous missions have been able to detect the edge of our magnetic field as they pass through it, providing single point measurements. But we can only tell the size and shape of the field by averaging these positions under different conditions - we've never been able to image its boundary before.

With SMILE, we will be able to see how our magnetic bubble changes its shape, whether it does this smoothly or in steps, and how it gets squeezed down as eruptions from the Sun pass Earth. We've never done anything like this before. We have lots of models and theoretical frameworks but now we get to see what's going on."

Dr Steven Sembay, Principal

Investigator, University of Leicester, said:

“It has been an honour to lead the development of the Soft X-ray Imager and work with an incredibly talented and motivated team. Now we will soon move from the engineering challenges of delivering the hardware to the data analysis challenges of providing the scientific community with the data products that should be transformative in the study of the Sun-Earth interaction. Exciting times ahead!”

British industry delivering cutting-edge technology and support

UK companies have made vital hardware and software contributions to the mission.

Teledyne e2v, based in Chelmsford, supplied the SXI's Charge-Coupled Device (CCD) detectors — the largest ever flown for X-ray detection — under an approximately £1.5 million contract with ESA. Work with the Centre for Electronic Imaging (CEI) at the Open University on the CCD development programme improved the space radiation hardness of the detectors, maintaining a key UK technology capability with strong commercial and export potential.

Photek Ltd has been contracted to

assemble the detector system for the Ultraviolet Imager (UVI) instrument. The UVI will make SMILE the first mission since 2008 to observe the auroras globally in ultraviolet light, and the first ever to record the northern lights continuously for up to 45 hours at a time — giving scientists an unprecedented view of how Earth responds to the solar wind.

Axon' Cable provides high-performance wiring using its MicroMach connectors and Low Mass SpaceWire cables to enable data rates up to 3 GB/s. This ESA-qualified interconnect solution significantly reduces mass and crosstalk, ensuring reliable data transmission between scientific instruments in the mission's harsh orbital environment.

The CGI team in Bristol developed the application software for the instrument payloads. This real-time embedded system controls all four of the platform's instruments, managing the flow of science data, instrument health and enabling automated payload operations through the deployment of On-Board Macro Procedures.

The SXI Instrument underwent launch and space environment testing in the advanced test facilities operated by the Science and Technology Facilities

Council's RAL Space.

Alongside its scientific discoveries, SMILE will deliver real-world benefits by helping to improve space weather forecasting. Severe space weather events — where solar storms disturb Earth's magnetic environment — can disrupt satellites, knock out communications systems and damage power infrastructure. SMILE will address three of the most pressing open questions in space science: what happens where the solar wind meets Earth's magnetic shield; what causes magnetic disturbances on the night side of Earth; and how we can better predict the most dangerous solar storms.



Image by: Keith Walters

Power of Youth Charter gives young people a voice in government

June

From: Department for Culture, Media and Sport and
Stephanie Peacock MP

DCMS becomes the first central Government department to sign the Power of Youth Charter.

- Charter will give young people the opportunity to shape how Government programmes are designed and measured from the start.
- Charter will commit to young people having opportunities to hold the government to account on its National Youth Strategy through an Annual Hearing.

Youth and Civil Society Minister Stephanie Peacock has signed 'The Power of Youth Charter', meaning young people will continue their direct role in shaping the £500 million investment in National Youth Strategy 'Youth Matters', from sitting on recruitment panels to

influencing how youth programmes are designed and evaluated.

Developed by the #iWill movement and backed by more than 400 organisations including NHS England and the Premier League, the Power of Youth Charter commits signatories to creating meaningful opportunities for young people to influence decisions and drive positive change in their communities.

The commitment is the next step in the government's engagement of young



Image by: StockSnap on Pixabay

people in its work following a major consultation with over 14,000 young people for the creation of the National Youth Strategy.

As part of its commitments, DCMS will:

- Provide shadowing opportunities for young people within DCMS policy teams to demystify the civil service and its processes.
- Give young people opportunities to hold the Government to account on the National Youth Strategy: Youth Matters through an Annual Hearing
- Involve young people in grant-making or recruitment panels that relate to Youth Matters.
- Invite young people to speak at DCMS events so they can share their experiences directly with Ministers,

staff and other partners

Minister for Sport, Tourism, Civil Society and Youth Stephanie Peacock said:

“The Power of Youth Charter demonstrates our commitment to making sure the voices of young people are heard at every stage of the decisions that shape their lives.

Since we began developing the National Youth Strategy, young people have told us clearly what they need: real opportunities, spaces to connect with each other and trusted adults, and their voices heard in government.

We’re taking the steps by investing in grassroots sport, and community spaces but we know they need to have a voice in the room where it happens. This charter

gives young people that voice.”

The signing takes place on Power of Youth Day, held annually during Volunteers’ Week, which this year is themed Common Ground. Minister Peacock was joined at the signing by #iWill co-chair Molly Taylor alongside representatives from the #iWill movement including Volunteering Matters and UK Youth. The event also brought together #iWill ambassadors from across the country to mark Power of Youth Day.

#iWill co-chair, Molly Taylor said:

“DCMS signing the Power of Youth Charter signals the importance of youth social action in building Common Ground amongst young people across the country.

We see this in our work supporting young people to build towns and cities of youth social action, where youth power through volunteering and activism changes communities every day.”

The Power of Youth charter signing builds on the Government’s landmark National Youth Strategy, Youth Matters, published in December 2025 the first cross-government youth strategy for England in 15 years.



Image by: rawpixel on Pixabay



Universal theme park to be UK's most popular tourist attraction

June

From: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, HM Treasury, Department for Business and Trade, The Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP and The Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP

The Universal United Kingdom Resort, one of the largest ever investments in the UK tourism sector, will employ thousands and entertain millions of people.

- Comcast NBCUniversal has committed to invest over £5bn in the entertainment resort complex during the expected 5 years of construction, as well as an additional £1bn in capital investment over the first 10 years of operation
- Government will support the project with an investment of £1.3bn on regional and local community infrastructure to ensure the park can operate successfully, with improved transport links for local residents and visitors from across the UK and abroad
- Development will create 28,000 jobs

between construction and operation across a range of industries, including in Industrial Strategy growth driving sectors like creative, technology, hospitality and construction, and is estimated to generate nearly £50bn of economic benefit for the UK

- Future entertainment resort complex will be named 'Universal United Kingdom Resort' as Chancellor visits site where construction will soon begin and meets first UK team members employed on the project

One of the largest ever investments in the UK tourism sector has been agreed between the government and Comcast NBCUniversal to build an entertainment resort complex, the Universal United Kingdom Resort, in Bedfordshire that will employ thousands and entertain millions of people.

Featuring a world-class theme park and resort, the project will be developed by

the company's Universal Destinations & Experiences segment and is the brand's first major destination in the UK and Europe.

Comcast NBCUniversal's investment will also bring nearly 20,000 jobs during construction and a further 8,000 jobs when it opens in 2031. With immersive storytelling, thrilling attractions and hospitality, Universal expects the site to generate nearly £50 billion of economic benefit for the economy by 2055.

The government's investment unlocks regional transport and infrastructure improvements that will maximise the benefits of the development and enable wider growth across the region. The theme park and resort is expected to attract millions of visitors each year including more than a million additional overseas visitors.

With enabling works on the site now

in progress and construction soon to begin, today marks a significant milestone in Universal advancing this landmark project. Over 100 people in the UK have been employed to work on the project, with Universal receiving expressions of employment interest from over 33,000 individuals. Approximately 80% of employees at the theme park and resort are expected to come from Bedfordshire and the surrounding regions.

To mark this milestone, Chancellor Rachel Reeves and Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy hosted Brian Roberts, Chairman of Comcast Corporation, and Mark Woodbury, Chairman and CEO of Universal Destinations & Experiences, at 11 Downing Street to unveil the name and logo for the theme park and resort.

Additionally the Chancellor visited the site this morning (Wednesday) where she met with Mr Woodbury and other senior executives from Universal Destinations & Experiences, as well as many of Universal's new hires already based in Bedford.

The government is committed to making the UK the best place in the world for investors. Universal choosing Bedford for its first European park is a testament to the strength of the UK's visitor offering and creative industries, a demonstration that the UK is open for business and the modern Industrial Strategy in action. The package announced today is likely to be one of the most significant investments made in the United Kingdom during this parliament.

Separately, Universal and the government are also cooperating to maximise benefits to local colleges and universities. For example, Universal has committed to world-class training opportunities for the next generation of its workforce, including through a range of apprenticeships and internships. This aligns with the government's ongoing work to unleash the potential of the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor and lay the foundations for Bedford to become an innovation hub.

As part of its total £1.3 billion investment, the government will provide a grant of £400 million through the exceptional Regional Growth Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will provide a grant of £438 million to invest in new community infrastructure to maximise the benefits of the development and support growth across the region. These grants will only be paid once Universal has completed the community infrastructure (in the case of the DCMS grant) and officially opened the theme park and resort.

The Department for Transport is also going ahead with plans to upgrade the strategic road and rail network, on the A421 and at Wixams station, which will provide wider resilience and improved connectivity within the region, at an expected cost of £474 million.

As one of the key investment commitments in the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy (2025), this project directly supports the government's plan to increase business investment in the creative industries from £17 billion to £31 billion by 2035, contributing to the broader UK growth mission. The UK's Creative Industries are a global engine of innovation



Image by: Darshan Patel on Unsplash

and growth - generating £124 billion for our economy and supporting over 2.3 million jobs. As a cornerstone of our modern Industrial Strategy, this sector drives creativity, competitiveness, and opportunity.

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Lisa Nandy said:

“This unparalleled investment is a huge vote of confidence in the UK and puts rocket boosters under our entertainment industry.

When it comes to creating world class experiences, the UK is second to none. We’re proud to be backing British industry, investing in local talent and partnering with powerhouses like Universal to create jobs, growth and opportunities across the UK.”

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves said:

“This landmark investment in the heart of the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor will unlock nearly £50 billion of economic growth and create tens of thousands of jobs across Bedfordshire in construction, hospitality, creative and technology sectors.

Our own investment in transport and

infrastructure means that local people will benefit — improving connectivity, backing our creative industries, and bringing millions of visitors to the UK from across the world.

We have the right economic plan — working with global investors and local leaders so we can deliver jobs, opportunity and long-term prosperity for Britain.”

Brian Roberts, Chairman of Comcast Corporation, said:

“This historic partnership is a special moment for our company as we bring our first Universal theme park and resort to Europe. We have a long and proud history in the United Kingdom through Sky and NBCUniversal and look forward to creating a spectacular destination that supports the UK creative industries and brings joy to millions for generations to come.”

Mark Woodbury, Chairman and CEO of Universal Destinations & Experiences, said:

Today marks a significant milestone on our journey to bring Universal United Kingdom Resort, featuring immersive storytelling, thrilling attractions and unparalleled creativity and innovation to the UK. This new theme park and resort will create so

many new opportunities for the people of Bedford and beyond and allow us to share our distinct experiences with guests from around the world.”

Business and Trade Secretary Peter Kyle said:

“This landmark investment is a powerful vote of confidence in the UK’s economy and world-leading creative industries.

Through our modern Industrial Strategy, we are backing high-growth sectors and partnering with leading global investors to drive long-term growth, create opportunities, and ensure the benefits are felt in communities across the UK.”



Image by: Julliane Monari on Pexels

New online service opens access to centuries of coal mining history

June

From: Mining Remediation Authority

A major milestone in the preservation of Great Britain's industrial heritage has been reached with the launch of a free online tool giving the public access to thousands of historical coal mining plans.

This digitised collection brings together detailed maps and plans from former collieries across England, Scotland and Wales, offering an extraordinary view into the history of local landscapes, mining operations, and the lives of the communities who worked within them.

You can now search, view, and explore these original mining records from any device, from wherever you are.

Geraldine Wildman, Digital and Information Director, at the Mining Remediation Authority, said:

"This resource opens a door to the past,

providing a valuable historical record of mining activity across Great Britain.

The archive includes around 120,000 coal mine plans, some dating back to the 17th century. Despite their age, these plans remain a critical source of intelligence on underground conditions, including the extent and connectivity of coal mine workings.

For communities built on coal mining, these plans represent family history, shared memory, and a deep-rooted

connection to their local area. Making them available ensures that this heritage is preserved and celebrated."

For many coalfield communities, the online tool represents the first opportunity for people, including the families of miners, to understand how earlier generations shaped the places they live today.

To make the coal mine plans publicly available online, the Mining Remediation Authority worked in partnership with the British Geological Survey. Through this shared service, users can search for both coal and non-coal mine plans held by either organisation and view high-quality scans directly in their web browser.

Alison Steven, NGDC Data Operations and Governance Lead at the British Geological Survey, said:



Image by: bocux on Pixabay

“The launch of the new Mine Plans Catalogue is a part of wider initiative at BGS to make legacy geological data more accessible. Working alongside the Mining Remediation Authority we have brought these plans together into a single Mine Plans Catalogue. This means users can now discover records held by both organisations in one place, making it easier than ever to explore the ground beneath our feet.

Not only will this help communities reconnect with the stories that shaped their local heritage, but wider access to these plans also supports society’s evolving interests in how the subsurface is used, from the rising demand for geothermal energy installations to the need for robust subsurface data that underpins responsible land use planning decisions.”

The coal mine plans are also available through the Mining Remediation Authority’s online map viewer, alongside a wider range of data relating to the nature and extent of mining across Great Britain. This includes specific information to support safe planning and development on the coalfield, data on the potential for mine water heat, and records of historical metal mining in England.

End of exploitative zero hours contracts to give people security and predictability at work

June

From: Department for Business and Trade, Kate Dearden MP and The Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP

- Changes will end one-sided flexibility, help people plan their finances and daily lives, or enjoy benefits of a zero hours contract if they wish to keep one.
- This will help save workers in some of the most deprived areas up to £600 in lost income from the hidden costs of insecure work.
- Millions of workers who currently face uncertainty over their weekly hours and earnings will benefit from government reforms that will give them certainty and predictability over their income.

Ministers have today taken the next step to ending exploitative zero hours contracts by launching a consultation to help deliver reforms to benefit more than 18 million people, some of whom currently face uncertainty over their weekly hours and earnings.

Nearly six in ten of workers who have variable hours currently receive less than a week’s notice of their shifts, according to the Living Wage Foundation. That means millions of working people struggling to plan their lives and budgets. In the worst cases it means shifts cancelled the night before or even while people are already on their way to work.

This will help save workers in some of the most deprived areas up to £600 in lost income from the hidden costs of insecure work.

While those who value the flexibility of a zero hours contract will still be able to choose one, exploitative arrangements, where employers take all the flexibility and workers bear all the risk, will be banned.

Workers, who qualify, will also be entitled to receive reasonable notice

of their shifts and a payment if their shifts are cancelled, moved, or curtailed at short notice. This will stop workers travelling into work for shifts or arranging care for children and relatives, only for a shift to be cancelled at the last minute without pay.

This open consultation, which will close at the end of August, will ask employers and workers about a range of potential hours thresholds to help the Government to strike the right balance between protecting workers from insecure work and retaining flexibility for businesses and workers who benefit from it, while building a more resilient economy and guarding against unintended consequences from this major change to the Labour market.

Employers who already provide this security and predictability for their workers will benefit from a level playing field. These measures will help drive up standards and eliminate undercutting.

Business Secretary Peter Kyle said:



Image by: Sean-Paul McKee on Pexels

“It’s not right that people can work regular hours but still have no certainty about their pay from week to week. These vital changes will mean more certainty for millions of people and will save the lowest paid workers hundreds of pounds.

Banning exploitative zero hours contracts is totemic because this government believes that people should be treated with dignity and respect at work.

We’re consulting because we need to get the detail right to ensure these reforms work in practice and guard against unintended consequences from this major change to the labour market.”

Employment Rights Minister Kate Dearden said:

“Ending uncertainty over hours and pay is one of the best ways we can boost living standards for millions of people and families across the country.

These reforms put workers in the driving seat, giving those who want guaranteed hours the certainty they deserve, whilst protecting others who prefer the flexibility a zero hours contract offers.”

Businesses can reduce staff turnover, improve skills, and boost productivity by

improving job quality and workforce wellbeing by giving workers more security. This in turn can provide a boost to growth in the economy.

The government wants to hear from workers, employers and other organisations to help shape the final detail of these reforms and ensure they work in practice.

Niall Mackenzie, Acas Chief Executive, said:

“These reforms aim to end irresponsible use of zero hours contracts, with guaranteed hours for workers to help give them financial stability and security. Some workers may value the flexibility of a zero hours contract if they are being used fairly and responsibly and this consultation aims to get this balance right.

I would encourage employers and workers to respond with evidence on what would work best in practice, alongside any further guidance that would be useful. Acas currently has free advice for employers on how to use zero hours contracts responsibly, which will be updated once these new changes come into effect.”

More families to benefit from lower bills through plug-in panels

June

From: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Martin McCluskey MP

Retailers join government plans to bring plug-in solar panels to UK homes, helping families save money on bills.

- B&Q and Currys join government plans to bring plug-in solar to UK homes
- Rooftop solar panels are already saving families up to £480 a month
- Government launches consultation for industry views on ensuring consumer safety

More families are set to save money on bills as flagship retailers Currys, B&Q, Amazon and Lidl join government plans to bring plug-in solar panels to UK homes.

At a roundtable of some of the biggest retailers in the country, with a combined total of almost four thousand stores and

significant online presence, Minister for Energy Consumers Martin McCluskey discussed the crucial role of plug-in solar in the clean energy revolution.

Those in attendance included Amazon, Asda, B&Q, Currys, Screwfix and Wickes, who discussed the technology and how it can offer a cheaper route for people to save money on bills.

This follows rule changes announced by the government earlier this year that will allow UK homeowners to self-install plug-in solar panels in the coming months and builds on savings of up to £480 consumers can already make from rooftop panels.

Minister for Energy Consumers Martin McCluskey said:

“Plug-in panels can be transformative for renters or those on lower incomes, so I welcome the conversation today

with household names such as B&Q and Currys showing a huge amount of support for getting the panels in people’s homes.

This easy to install tech can cut people’s bills and help make the UK less reliant on global fossil fuel markets.”

John Bournemouth, UK & Ireland Country Manager, Amazon said:

“This is a fantastic opportunity to make renewable energy more accessible to people around the UK. Amazon is the largest corporate buyer of carbon-free energy in the UK – we’ve invested in over 40 large scale solar and wind projects to date.

Enabling households to generate their own power with self-install plug-in solar panels is a practical step that supports household budgets and

delivering against net zero goals.”

Graham Bell, CEO of B&Q, said:

“We welcome the introduction of plug-in solar panels to the UK market, which will help households to generate their own energy and reduce their bills. This builds on our existing range of portable solar and battery solutions.

We are working closely with government and suppliers to understand and help shape the guidance, ensuring any products we offer are safe, compliant and straightforward to install. We look forward to making plug-in solar available to our customers as soon as possible.”

Georgina Hall, corporate affairs director at Lidl GB, said:

“At Lidl GB, we want to make sustainable choices affordable and accessible to every household which is why we are supporting DESNZ’s latest steps toward modernising regulations for ‘plug-and-play’ technology.

By establishing a clear, robust framework to bring plug-in solar to market safely and efficiently, it could unlock a highly effective, low-cost route for people to reduce their energy bills. We welcome this

consultation and look forward to working alongside the government and industry partners to explore how these products can safely play their role in the UK’s clean energy revolution.”

Michelle Gorringer-Smith, Director of New Categories at Currys, said:

“We’re delighted to be working with DESNZ to bring plug-in solar panels to the UK market. With energy bills continuing to rise, enabling the safe roll-out of these products will mark an important step for consumers across the UK - including the more than 80% of UK households that shop at Currys.”

This technology, already widely used by households throughout Europe, is easy to install and could save many households significant amounts on their energy bills,



Image by: Chelsea on Unsplash

while helping make the UK less reliant on global fossil fuel markets.

The low-cost panels can be put on balconies or in any outdoor space, providing free solar power that can be used directly through a mains socket like any other device, without an installation cost, thereby reducing the amount of electricity taken from the grid.

Alongside the roundtable, the government has today (Tuesday 16 June) launched a consultation seeking industry views on enforcing the rules so consumers can safely install plug-in panels in their homes.

Households across Britain are already embracing solar power in record numbers. 2025 saw a record 269,000 solar installations completed in the UK - the highest total ever recorded in a calendar year and 37% larger than the year before.

Around 255,000 of these were rooftop solar - meaning at least 95% of all new solar was installed on homes, businesses and other buildings. This equates to a new rooftop solar installation every two minutes throughout 2025.

Universities face ban on international students over visa abuse

June

From: Home Office, UK Visas and Immigration and Mike Tapp MP

Universities will be stripped of the right to recruit international students if too many drop out, as the government tightens the screws on visa abuse.

New sponsorship rules will introduce a sliding scale of penalties for higher education institutions that fail to recruit responsibly.

It comes after asylum claims from work, study and tourist visas more than tripled under the previous government – reaching 37% of all claims, with foreign students accounting for the largest share.

Asylum claims by students have since fallen by 30% in the past year alone following tough action taken in partnership with the sector.

The Home Secretary has also imposed a first-of-its-kind visa brake on study visas

for nationals of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan following a surge in asylum claims.

These reforms build on that progress, raising the pass marks of the annual test used to monitor visa sponsors – across all three of its metrics:

Visa refusal rate: must remain below 5% (previously 10%)

Course enrolment rate: must reach at least 95% (previously 90%)

Course completion rate: must reach at least 90% (previously 85%)

High drop-out rates can indicate students have entered the illegal working economy rather than studied whilst high visa rejection rates or low enrolment figures suggest some institutions have not done enough due diligence on applicants. But from summer 2027, a new traffic light rating system will make clear to regulators,

and the public, which institutions are recruiting responsibly.

Those rated red will face restrictions on the number of students they can recruit and must fund a 12-month action plan to fix failing practices.

Those that don't improve face losing international student recruitment rights altogether.

The changes were announced during a visit to Manchester Metropolitan University by Home Office Minister Mike Tapp, hosted by Vice-Chancellor Professor Malcolm Press and Universities UK.



Image by: Mathias Reding on Pexels

Social media to be banned for under-16s in landmark government move to give kids their childhood back

June

From: Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, The Rt Hon Liz Kendall MP and The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP

Social media platforms to be blocked from offering services to under-16s, marking a line in the sand and setting a new normal for future generations.



Image by: Pixelkult on Pixabay

- UK will go further to protect kids with world-leading additional restrictions on harmful features online such as live streaming and strangers communicating with children
- Government action shows clear choice to side with families over tech companies to put power back in parents' hands and give kids the childhood they deserve
- Decisive action – backed by 9 in 10 parents – expected to be brought to Parliament before Christmas, with protections expected to come into force in Spring 2027

Children will be given back their childhoods thanks to government action to ban social media platforms from offering services to under-16s, with less time for scrolling and more time for play.

The plans will set a new normal for future generations, kickstarting a cultural shift and driving forward the government's fight to give every child the best start in life.

The government plans to use the same model for a social media ban as Australia. This would capture user-to-user platforms, whose purpose is to enable social interaction and which allow users to post material, alongside algorithms.

The ban will therefore include platforms like Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and X. We do not intend for messaging services like WhatsApp and Signal to be included in the social media ban.

In a move to protect children online and address the scale of the challenge, the government will also go further than a blanket ban on social media with world-leading blocks on harmful functions such as livestreaming and stranger communication with children for under-16s. These restrictions – which together with the ban go further than any other country – will apply to a wider range of online services, including on gaming

sites.

Restrictions on these functionalities will also be on by default for 16- and 17-year-olds to prevent a cliff-edge at 16. The government will also be looking in more detail at overnight curfews and breaks in infinite scrolling for under-18-year-olds and will set out more detail in July.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said:

“Parents want to keep their kids safe and happy, but the online world has made that harder than ever.

I’ve heard first hand from families crying out for change and we will do right by them.

That’s why we’re going further than any country in the world by banning social media for under-16s and putting wider protections in place to give kids their childhood back.

This is a line in the sand. Tech giants had their chance and failed, but we’re stepping in to protect children, back parents and set a new normal for future generations.”

So-called AI ‘romantic companion’ chatbots – designed to simulate sexual relationships or roleplay with users – will have to enforce a minimum age of 18. Similar intimate functionalities will be restricted for under-

18s on AI chatbots more widely.

Taken together, these measures will mean a much more comprehensive model than just a blanket ban on social media — one that responds to how children experience harm online, rather than just where it happens.

The changes will back parents grappling with the risks for children that come from the online world and help empower them



Image by: Radik 2707 on Pexels

by providing a clear decision on what is safe and age-appropriate for children.

This is a decisive first step by the government which marks a clear choice to put children’s wellbeing first and give them a healthy life online. We stand ready to take further measures in the future.

Technology Secretary Liz Kendall said:

“Today we take a bold and significant step, towards creating a safer, healthier life online, for our children and future generations.

Tech companies have had countless opportunities to keep children safe, yet they have failed to act. That is why we are a taking power away from the tech giants and putting it back in parents’ hands.

My driving force has always been to give every child, from every background, the best possible start in life. That is what these regulations will deliver.”

The government will also learn the lessons from Australia’s experience by introducing more highly effective age assurance (HEAA) measures to support compliance, making it far harder for children to bypass safeguards.

Ofcom will conduct a rapid study on what is effective age assurance for verifying whether someone is over 16. The Secretary of State has also written to the new Chair of Ofcom to ask for an urgent review of Ofcom's enforcement capabilities with a clear enforcement strategy to be published as soon as possible.

In her letter, the Secretary of State confirmed the government will ensure Ofcom has the funding it needs to carry out its new responsibilities – as well as continue its vital work to enforce the existing provisions of the Online Safety

Act, including protecting women and girls online, tackling harmful content that puts vulnerable people at risk, and taking action against serious illegal activity such as child sexual abuse material and online fraud and scams.

Today's announcement follows one of the biggest national conversations held by this government, with more than 116,000 responses submitted by parents, children and experts across the country. The responses showed overwhelming public backing for tougher action. 9 in 10 parents said they would support a social media ban for children under 16.

The majority of young people also backed action, with two-thirds agreeing that children younger than 16 should not be allowed to use at least some social media platforms.

On social media services, real-time content makes harmful material harder to moderate, and algorithmic feeds can intensify exposure to dangerous, distressing or overly engaging material.

Parents rightly expect government to take action as quickly as possible, which is why the government has already taken powers through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act to act fast — using secondary legislation to introduce targeted protections without needing to wait to bring

in a whole new Act. This means the first set of regulations could be in effect in Spring 2027.

Today's action builds on the government's work to date to go further and faster to protect children online and fight for their wellbeing. Last week, the Prime Minister challenged tech companies so that Britain will be the first country in the world to make it impossible for children to take, share or view nude images – with a 3-month deadline to make meaningful progress.

This watershed moment will come alongside the government's drive to remove barriers to opportunity and set every child up for happy, fulfilling lives. Yesterday, the government set out further steps to make sure children in every part of the country get greater access to enrichment opportunities in sport, creative activities, nature and the arts both in and out of school.

This builds on wider work to halve the participation gap and reclaim childhood for all young people, including through reforms to the curriculum so that every child gets the skills they need to get on in life, and support throughout their school years to explore and develop their talents, regardless of their background or where they live.



Image by: Brian Ramirez on Pexels

New plan to make English farming profitable, productive, sustainable and resilient

June

From: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and The Rt Hon Emma Reynolds MP

For the first time in this country's history, the government is today committing to the future of farming beyond the next harvest, ending years of uncertainty with a landmark roadmap that marks the most significant moment for English agriculture since the Second World War.

Farmers produce around 65% of the nation's food, manage 70% of England's land, and underpin the £153 billion agri-



food sector recognised as Critical National Infrastructure. With the growing impacts of extreme weather and climate, Farming Roadmap 2050: Growing England's Future sets out how farmers can adapt through nature-based solutions such as improved soil health and water management.

Developed in partnership with farmers, the roadmap sets out how the government will provide long-term stability. Backed by immediate action from the government's response to Baroness Minette Batters' independent Farming Profitability Review, farmers will have better access to the tools, technology, skills and supply chains they need to invest, innovate and grow.

Collaborative models such as co-operatives will play a much larger role, enabling collective purchasing and joint investment that lower costs, spread risk and support stronger returns.

An additional £53 million for the Farming Innovation Programme brings total

innovation funding this year to £123 million, including dedicated funding rounds focused on robotics and soil health and water management.

The government will also review how the economic value of agriculture is measured, ensuring farming receives the recognition it deserves. A single figure of 0.6% of Gross Value Added is misleading because it captures only primary agricultural activities. Working with the Office for National Statistics, the government will look to develop new supplementary statistics to include the wider food supply chain, from processing and manufacturing to distribution and retail.

Seasonal Worker visas will continue until at least 2030, providing reassurance to the UK horticulture sector.

Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds said:

“Farmers feed our nation and manage the land that shapes our countryside, yet their contribution has never been valued in the way it deserves. Our roadmap marks a shift away from only looking to the next harvest and towards a plan that gives farmers the long-term clarity they need to innovate, invest and grow with confidence for generations to come.

I have spent every day in this role rebuilding our relationship with farmers brick by brick because they're such an important part of our economy, our society and our environment. We are looking at how farming is valued economically and socially to ensure it receives the recognition it deserves.”

To boost profits and productivity, the government will work in partnership with industry to create Sector Growth Plans starting with horticulture and poultry and bring farmers, retailers and investors together on the Farming and Food Partnership Board. It will also cut EU trade friction through a new Sanitary and Phytosanitary agreement and give egg and fresh produce growers legal protection against unfair supply chain practices.

To build resilience, the roadmap sets out how farmers can reduce reliance on costly inputs like fertiliser through new technology and smarter nutrient management and

adapt to the growing impacts of extreme weather and climate change through nature-based solutions such as improved soil health and water management. Multiple government services will, over time, be replaced with a single digital farming account to reduce administrative burdens, alongside improved data quality and standards to enable access to private markets.

On sustainability, Environmental Land Management schemes will become more focused and better targeted, with mitigation and conversion payments phased out over time as good practice becomes standard practice with regulatory standards increasing in some areas, while long-term payments for public goods such as habitat creation will continue.

While the roadmap sets the long-term direction, the government response to the Farming Profitability Review reflects immediate action to improve farm



Image by: Keith Walters

profitability now. Measures being taken forward include:

- Extending supply chain fair dealing regulations to egg producers and fresh produce
- Launching a dedicated task-and-finish group to unlock private sector investment in sustainable farming
- Establishing a new UK-EU Sanitary and Phytosanitary area to cut export friction
- Opening the new SFI26 application window to all eligible farmers this month
- Opening the new £30 million Farmer Collaboration Fund this summer to support groups of farmers to grow their businesses, build partnerships and share best practice
- Transferring the Groceries Code Adjudicator from the Department of Business and Trade to Defra to support a more joined-up approach to food supply chain fairness
- Considering changes to the National Planning Policy Framework following recent consultation, including proposals to make the system more supportive of the infrastructure farmers need.

Government pushes forward with conversion practices ban to protect LGBT+ people from abuse

June

From: Office for Equality and Opportunity and Olivia Bailey MP

- Government publishes a draft bill that will deliver a landmark ban on abusive conversion practices in England and Wales.
- Current legal loopholes leave victims at risk, and new legislation will fill gaps in the law to protect people from abhorrent abuse.
- Proposed ban includes safeguards for legitimate healthcare and therapy, and robust thresholds that protect open conversations, and free speech.

LGBT+ people will be protected from physical and psychological abuse to change who they are, as the government announces a landmark ban on abusive conversion practices in England and Wales, with the publication of the draft Conversion Practices Bill.

The proposed ban will set the criminal threshold for conversion practices as conduct that aims to change someone's sexual

orientation or transgender identity through abusive acts that seriously harm the victim.

These abhorrent practices are still happening today, with people being subjected to physical, sexual, economic and psychological abuse. Victims of conversion practices have recounted stories that range from beatings and rape to verbal threats, manipulation and exorcisms.

Conversion practices are still happening in 2026 because of a series of legal loopholes that allow perpetrators to escape justice. Existing pieces of legislation that cover domestic violence, coercive control and communications offences do not adequately address the unique nature of abusive conversion practices, leaving a gap in the law that can be exploited. In addition, the lack of a legal definition of abusive conversion practices makes it challenging for police and prosecutors to act. The only way to tackle these problems is through this legislation.

The legislation will create the following criminal offences:

- carrying out abusive conversion practices that cause serious harm, alarm or distress to the victim

- encouraging or assisting an abusive conversion practice performed outside England and Wales

It also creates new civil Conversion Practice Protection Orders and breach offences to support victims as well as those currently at risk of abuse. These will be similar to protection orders for forced marriage and female genital mutilation and will pre-emptively protect people.

Someone found guilty of conducting abusive conversion practices could face an unlimited fine, a custodial sentence of up to 5 years, or both.

Olivia Bailey MP, Minister for Equalities, said:

“Conversion practices are driven by the false belief that being LGBT+ is shameful and can be forcibly changed.

No-one should face abuse just because of who they are. That's why we are delivering on our manifesto commitment to ban abusive conversion practices.

Legal loopholes have left LGBT+ people vulnerable to these harmful acts which is why we must legislate."

Dr Hilary Cass, author of the Cass Review, said:

"I am pleased to see that the government is bringing forward legislation which not only gives a clearer definition of what conversion practices are, compared to previous drafts, but also what they are not.

It is important that healthcare professionals providing much needed holistic care to young people feel confident that they are able to do their job without fear of litigation and the minister has kept that important issue in mind at the same time as the need to protect vulnerable young people.

I look forward to the pre legislative scrutiny process which will facilitate further constructive debate."

Jasmine O'Connor OBE, Co-CEO at Galop, said:

"As LGBT+ anti-abuse experts, Galop frequently witnesses the devastating impacts caused by conversion practices. We know all too well how gaps in legislation have

left LGBT+ people unprotected against covert and insidious forms of abuse, and we welcome this long-overdue legislation – it's a vital first step toward addressing conversion practices as a distinct form of harm. As Galop's latest research shows, conversion practices are happening today. This legislation is urgently needed, and we will keep working to inform the parliamentary process and ensure the ban protects LGBT+ people from all conversion practices."

Simon Blake, CEO at Stonewall, said:

"People from the LGBTQ+ community are not broken or in need of 'fixing'. That's why I'm so pleased the government have published a draft bill to ban conversion practices that



attempt to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity. These practices are abuse, and every day without a ban in place leaves people at risk of serious harm.

This is testament to the hard work of campaigners and survivors who have bravely shared their stories and refused to give up. We look forward to continuing our work with sector partners, Parliament, and government to ensure the legislation is robust and effective."

Saba Ali, Chair at the Ban Conversion Therapy Coalition, said:

"No one should ever be told they can't be who they are, or love who they love. LGBTQ+ identities are beautiful, diverse, and should be celebrated, and yet attempts to change and suppress them are still happening across the UK, causing profound suffering.

Today's announcement of the publication of draft legislation to ban conversion practices is a significant and welcome step forward, but it is also long overdue. The coalition look forward to continuing to work with the government to ensure the legislation delivers the comprehensive protections all LGBTQ+ people deserve.

This moment belongs to a movement. Over eighty coalition organisations, countless survivors, clinicians, faith

leaders, Parliamentarians and campaigners have refused to let this be forgotten. Today proves what we achieve when we stand together.”

Professor Subodh Dave, President of Royal College at Psychiatrists, said:

“The College have long called for a ban to these harmful practices and we strongly support the publication of this draft Bill.

We welcome the pre-legislative approach that will help ensure the Bill works in practice. It is important that in protecting people from these unacceptable practices, this legislation also supports healthcare professionals to continue to have appropriate exploratory conversations with their patients.”

Dame Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, said:

“Subjecting a family member or partner to harm or coercing them to change who they are is domestic abuse and it must be stopped. I’m pleased to see this draft Bill brought forward so we can finally ban these deeply harmful practices, which have damaged too many people’s lives. I look forward to continuing to work with Ministers, as this legislation progresses to ensure it delivers the much-needed protections for all LGBT+ victims and survivors.”

The Rt Revd Dr David Walker, Church of England, said:

“I welcome the publication of this draft Bill as a positive step towards banning conversion practices. These have harmed LGBT people over many years, leaving many with lifelong trauma. This work is long overdue, and comes after the General Synod of the Church of England voted, by a very large majority, in favour of the Government bringing forward a ban in 2017. I am pleased that this will bring an opportunity for consultation and scrutiny, so that substantial progress can at last be made.”

The draft legislation is clear that the government is not seeking to criminalise expressing beliefs about LGBT+ identities, nor is it seeking to ban explorative conversations and questioning about someone’s identity. That is why a high threshold for criminality has been included, so that only the acts that are abusive, seeking to change someone’s identity, and create real harm to the person, will be in scope.

The proposed ban includes exemptions for legitimate healthcare. This ensures that healthcare professionals, therapists and counsellors can be confident that they can continue their work to support patients and have free and open conversations about sexuality and transgender identity.

Our proposed ban aligns with international best practices by being trans-inclusive, protecting individuals from harm, and including a custodial sentence for perpetrators. Through targeting abusive

conduct intended to change someone’s identity, the offence mirrors parts of New Zealand’s approach while remaining tailored to the UK legal framework.

The government has recognised that this is a complex legal area and is seeking to build a genuine consensus around a ban. That is why the draft bill will now undergo pre-legislative scrutiny to give opportunity to draw on the expertise and insight of a range of parliamentarians and stakeholders, ensuring that a ban is as effective as possible in the long term.

Today’s draft bill is the latest action taken by the government to tackle abuse against the LGBT+ community and comes after legislation passed in spring equalised hate crime protections for LGBT+ people.

The government has also taken further action to fulfil its commitments to the LGBT+ community, including:

- righting the historic wrongs committed against LGBT veterans
- publishing a HIV Action Plan to end new transmissions by 2030
- investing £21 million in global LGBT+ rights

