

LNER, free broadband and a new bill to protect UK tech firms

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Temps de lecture : minute

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LNER selects 5 startups to improve rail travel in the UK

LNER will be working with five of the most innovative startups around the world to accelerate new projects to improve rail travel in the UK.

The accelerator projects are part of LNER's ground-breaking innovation programme, *LNER FutureLabs*.

Startups were invited to pitch their pioneering ideas in three key areas:

- More Journeys, More Often
- Personalised Customer Experience
- Responsible Business

Following two consecutive pitch days with startups from around the world – all held via Microsoft Teams – the panel selected five successful startups to take forward:

- QikServe, from Edinburgh, will be using their experience of digital self-service technology to help deliver an 'at seat' personalised customer experience

- Skignz, a global leader in augmented reality based in Middlesbrough, will be looking at how to create a personalised mapping and information experience for customers at and nearby LNER stations
- iomob, based in Barcelona, will aim to encourage more people to travel by train through the use of technology that supports better mobility
- Green City Solutions, from Berlin, will be working to provide clean air and healthy spaces for customers as part of LNER's Responsible Business plan
- Sirenum will also be looking at the area of Responsible Business through advanced systems management from their headquarters in London.

“It was fantastic to hear from startups from as far away as North America and the Middle East about how they would apply their innovative approaches to the UK rail industry. There was a tough competition, but we have selected five startups that will now move onto the next stage of the accelerator programme and to see some of the ideas start to come to life. They certainly have the potential to make a real difference to the lives of our customers, communities and colleagues.” - Danny Gonzalez, Chief Digital and Innovation Officer at LNER

The five successful startups will receive unprecedented access to LNER's live operational environments and one-to-one mentoring from senior team

members as they develop their proof of concepts. A Demo Day will then be held in Central London in September.

Vodafone UK offers six months free business broadband to SMEs

This week, Vodafone UK has launched a broadband rescue package for more than 5M small businesses to help them get through the COVID-19 crisis and ease their return to work. Vodafone will make Unlimited Business Broadband and Microsoft 365 Business Standard free for six months, with the offer available to all small business owners, including those already in a contract with Vodafone.

The new offer can be taken up at any time in the next three months. This means that small business owners, even those who are already Vodafone broadband customers, can sign up to a new 24-month contract and have the first six months completely free, with no set-up costs.

“Our role in these challenging times is to keep the UK connected and help businesses return to work. Small businesses have been hit particularly hard by this crisis. By reducing their costs and providing them with our brilliant technology and expertise, we hope to help them get back on their feet and return to growth. A little financial help now, will go a long way in the future.” - Nick Jeffery, CEO of Vodafone UK

The government to protect UK tech firms from foreign takeovers

According to IT Pro Portal, the UK Government is preparing a new bill that would make it more difficult for foreign investors to buy the nation's tech startups. The bill has been in the works for a number of years, but Boris Johnson is under pressure to address foreign takeovers, especially from Chinese VCs. He announced he would accelerate measures to protect the country "technological base". Another article in The Telegraph expressed that while some are satisfied with this measure, others think the bill could limit the ability of startups to raise the funding they need to survive.

The new bill may be linked to the ongoing effort to minimise the UK's reliance on Chinese businesses and Johnson had announced that he would reverse his decision to enable Huawei to work on the UK 5G network and will now aim to remove the company from the network by 2023.

Article by Maddyne