Speech: Matt Hancock speaking at the Future of Work Summit

Part of the job of the Digital Secretary during London Tech Week, and we've never had a Digital Secretary during a London Tech Week before so this is very exciting, is to get out there and bang the drum.

And to make sure that we get our message across about the deep and rich ecosystem that we've got and that we're building here in the UK.

We doubled tech investment in the last year.

We are the biggest destination for tech investment outside of the USA and China.

As a politician elsewhere elsewhere in Europe might put it, we are en marche. And this isn't just about the rhetoric; it's about the depth of the ecosystem and its richness.

But the reason I specifically wanted to come to this event is because whilst the enthusiasm for the potential that tech has is unambiguous and is very strong, we also must ensure that we harness it for the betterment of society.

And the question of the future of work and the impact of technology on work is of course a very live one, which is why we're all here today.

I think that it's very important that tech companies, big and small, are addressing this question. Firstly, we think that the exponential nature of artificial intelligence means that by its nature, by the fact that it learns for itself, it has the potential to have a bigger impact than almost any technology yet invented.

As I like to put it, people talk about accelerating change. I like to think of it the other way round. Which is that we are currently living through the slowest rate of change that we're going to experience for the rest of our lives.

At the same time, we are living in an era of record levels of employment, both in the UK and around the world.

The figures out this week showed employment at record levels, both in absolute and percentage terms.

It showed womens' employment at a new record high.

And it showed real disposable income at record levels.

So the labour market performance in the UK is very, very strong. And around the world there are record employment levels in many different countries.

And this is happening at the same time as an understandable concern about the impact of technology and a sense that people don't feel this very positive economic performance for a complicated set of reasons.

So we need to understand it properly, not just with the 'lump of labour fallacy' that the robots are trying to take the existing jobs and therefore people will have nothing to do.

I think that view is static and wrong and it misses the point of human ingenuity. That it is people who create jobs and that the technology itself is creating jobs too.

But it seems to be that the risk is not that we adopt new technologies that will change jobs.

That is not the risk, because that's going to happen whether we choose for it happen or not, because that is the nature of business.

I think the risk comes from not adopting new technologies and from failing to create jobs of the future.

And that means that we have this difficult balance between the need to support the disrupters who are creating new technologies, creating the new jobs and ultimately generating productivity growth.

And at the same time supporting those who are disrupted. Because whilst in the long term improvements in technology improve productivity, we live our lives in the short term.

And it's no good having a job in the long term if you don't have one in the short term.

So we need to make sure that we support those who are disrupted as well as supporting the disruption itself.

We want to see redeployment not unemployment, by creating the jobs of the future and making sure people have the skills and capabilities to excel to accept them and generate them.

And the nature of work of course is also changing as part of this. The mundane tasks and some of the dangerous tasks are going and this is a good thing.

Take the mining industry, which has far fewer people underground than they ever have before around the world. And at the same time capabilities and human skills like empathy will be more important than ever before.

I'm an optimist for human nature. I think there are things that human beings can do that machines will never be able to do, like connecting between people and having creative sparks that make life worth living.

And this greater productivity also has a big potential upside, not only in terms of prosperity but also in terms of work life balance.

People throughout time have always worried about the impact on employment.

I declare a historic interest because when I was researching this I discovered that my forebearers were leaders of the Luddites.

And a certain Richard Hancock in the early 19th century led a gang of a thousand people in Nottinghamshire, who had been employed in the hand weaving industry. And they went and smashed the Arkwright loom all the way across Nottinghamshire and he was eventually deported to Australia.

I'm glad to say that the Hancock family has learnt a thing or two over the following two centuries and now we accept that they should have been on a digital skills training programme…

But the advantage of this greater prosperity is also an improvement in work-life balance.

Since then the amount of work that anyone has had to do on average in the UK, in order to feed themselves or feed their family and live a decent life has collapsed, in terms of the number of hours. Even over the last couple of decades this has continued. In 1995, Britons worked on average 39 hours a week and now it's 37.5 hours a week.

In my view that is using some of the increase in prosperity of the last few decades to work a bit less. Because whilst many of us love our jobs and work incredibly hard and probably work more hours than we absolutely need to, that is not true for everyone. They might prefer a better work life balance.

And then, of course, there's the skills piece, which I'm glad is now an absolute core of the debate about the future of work.

And we need to make sure everyone is able to increase their skills and capabilities to succeed in the digital age.

People who have never been online before all the way through to the very top PhDs and that we are attracting the brightest and the best from around the world.

And we're making progress on both of those matters as you may have seen in the news over the last couple of days.

Ultimately I'm optimistic that so long as we get the policy response right and so long as the tech industry more broadly responds to this challenge in the right way, then we can make a success of it.

After all, we are attracting the jobs to the UK that are building that technology driven future.

We are making sure that the UK is at the leading edge of these changes in order to try to bring that prosperity here.

And we're doing everything we can to ensure that prosperity is shared. For instance, with the new National Living Wage, which has led to the fastest

rise in pay to the lowest paid quarter of the population in history. So making sure that jobs are available, that people get the skills and that we can benefit from this technology.

But we cannot be complacent about it and we must make sure we get the analysis correct so we get the response correct as a society. And make sure that this great technological revolution that we are all involved in and living through works for everybody in our country.

That is our goal.

Press release: Fruit retailer fined after failing to meet marketing standards

Appearing at Sunderland Magistrates on 11 June, Marc Philip Farnsworth, owner of M Farnsworth, in Bede Precinct, Jarrow, was found guilty of displaying and offering for sale fresh fruit below the minimum standards permitted.

The court fined Mr Farnsworth £1,000 and ordered him to pay full investigation costs of £2,826, prosecution costs of £620, and a £100 Victims Surcharge – making a total penalty awarded of £4,546.

The case was brought following an investigation by the Rural Payments Agency's (RPA) Horticultural Marketing Inspectors (HMI). The inspectors are responsible for the enforcement of the EU marketing standards for fresh fruit, vegetables, salad crops, nuts and cultivated mushroom, throughout England and Wales, wherever fresh produce is grown, imported, exported, bought or sold. These standards will continue to be enforced after we have left the European Union.

Several visits were made to the Jarrow store, during which inspectors found it was selling apples that were severely bruised– making them unfit for human consumption. Rotten figs and bruised and rotten peaches were also for sale.

Mark Buckle, regional manager for HMI, said:

> On visiting the store our inspectors found apples that were so badly bruised they should not be eaten – let alone placed for sale. Repeated attempts were made to engage the store's owner in addressing the issues, but he failed to take action and it was necessary to progress this through the courts.
>
> We will do all we can to ensure unsatisfactory produce is kept off

> the market. The fine received here should serve as a warning to others that if they are not labelling products correctly, or selling fruit and veg that is of an unacceptable quality then action will be taken against them.

Press release: UK responds to OPCW report on chemical attacks in Ltamenah, Syria

Minister Burt said:

> Today the OPCW confirmed that the town of Ltamenah, in northern Syria was attacked on 24 March 2017 with sarin and on 25 March 2017 with chlorine. This is confirmation of a spate of chemical attacks in the town in just one week, the OPCW having previously confirmed that a sarin attack took place on 30 March 2017.
>
> Tragically there is still no international mechanism to attribute responsibility for these attacks on Ltamenah. Just a few days after the OPCW confirmation of sarin use on 30 March in Ltamenah, the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism was shut down, putting an end to their ability to investigate responsibility for such attacks.
>
> Repeated chemical attacks within Syria in such a short space of time only serve to underline the grave threat to the integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Close to 90 countries have recognised that threat, and supported a call for an urgent Special Session of the Conference of States Parties on 26-27 June. The international community should come together and strengthen the OPCW's capability to prevent the further use of chemical weapons, including by attributing responsibility for these heinous crimes.

Further information

- Follow Minister Burt on Twitter @AlistairBurtUK
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter @foreignoffice and Facebook
- Follow the Foreign Office on Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn

Media enquiries

For journalists

Email
newsdesk@fco.gov.uk

Newsdesk
020 7008 3100

Press release: PM’s roundtable with the tech industry: 13 June 2018

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

> The Prime Minister began by thanking the guests for their tremendous contribution to the tech community in the UK, creating jobs, supporting the economy, and driving growth.
>
> She added that Venture Capital investment in the UK was $7.8bn in 2017, and that the opportunities offered here are demonstrated by the fact that the UK contributes 13 of the 34 start-up companies valued at over $1 billion in Europe.
>
> She then invited views from around the table on how the UK can build on its position as a world-leading destination for tech investment.
>
> Guests welcomed the announcement of the £2.5 billion Patient Capital Fund, as a means of ensuring that promising UK start-ups can access the capital they need to expand and become world-beating.

There was discussion of the strength and depth of the UK's tech industry, and the advantages associated provided by access to and partnerships with the UK's top universities.

Guests then discussed methods of addressing the skills gap and agreed on the importance of ensuring that nobody is left behind by advancements in technology and digital skills.

There was also agreement on the importance of mentoring, whereby entrepreneurs who have been through the whole cycle share their knowledge and expertise with fresh talent.

The Prime Minister concluded by reiterating the importance of the tech sector, saying that she wanted to see a continued pipeline of tech entrepreneurs coming forward and growing their businesses in the UK.

Press release: World's Fastest 3D Microphone Array Simulation Software

Based on technology originally developed for the UK Home Office, A3S gives developers the ability to dramatically reduce audio array simulation times, improve the fidelity of results, and increase performance using fewer components. Significantly decreasing simulation times during product development from eight hours to 30 seconds* (a reduction of 99.9 per cent), A3S calculates in near real-time the physical configuration of the audio array in order to achieve optimum performance.

For the first time manufacturers will be able to fully exploit the potential of audio arrays, and deliver microphone/speaker-based products which:

- Require fewer audio components and reduce device size – tests of an off-the-shelf product reduced the number of microphones by two-thirds, while improving audio performance.
- Minimise development costs – less product development time can be spent simulating and prototyping arrays. It also allows the modelling of more frequencies, resulting in a product with greater confidence in its

performance, and potentially removing the need for costly redesigns.
- Are smarter – products can be optimised to cope with changing environments, as near real-time characterisation allows beamforming to be conducted on-the-fly to dynamically focus microphones and cancel out noise.
- Are less power hungry – less processing power required by fewer microphones.

Gerry Scott, Commercialisation Manager at Ploughshare Innovations, said:

> A common development approach is to deploy multiple microphones and speakers in a product to achieve an acceptable level of performance. However, without full optimisation, they will still under-perform.The developers of A3S have proven that simulations can be conducted 1,000 times faster than current approaches, allowing developers to create high performing products with more confidence. Reducing the number of components also means that high-end audio products can be created with a smaller form factor and at less overall cost, giving manufacturers potentially significant cost savings. A high-end audio experience will become more widely available to us all.

Examples of what applications could use A3S to improve audio product performance include voice recognition, smartphones, automotive, immersive audio and gaming/home cinema.

- In tests, the simulation time of a 16 microphone array was reduced from eight hours to
30 seconds. In addition, A3S simulated hundreds of frequencies – significantly more that than the eight frequencies managed by the conventional method.

About Ploughshare Innovations (www.ploughshareinnovations.com)
Ploughshare Innovations is the technology transfer organisation for the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD). It turns ‘swords into ploughshares’ by enabling businesses to gain access to defence and security technology developed by leading government laboratories. Ploughshare ensures Government technology is put to good use and benefits the UK, society as a whole, and humanity by applying innovative technology to improve people’s lives. Since its creation in 2005, the company has licensed 120 technologies and attracted £140 million of investment.

For further information please contact:
Sarah Miles
Blaze PR
07500 042587
smiles@blaze-pr.co.uk
James Horne
Ploughshare Innovations
01794 301602

james.horne@ploughshareinnovations.com