

Speech: Jeremy Wright's keynote speech at Viva Tech conference

Merci, et bon après-midi à vous tous.

C'est un vrai plaisir d'être ici à Paris, représentant le gouvernement du Royaume-Uni.

[Thank you and good afternoon everyone. It is a real pleasure to be here representing the UK Government in Paris.]

Divided by just 33 kilometers of water, there is so much that unites the nations of France and the United Kingdom.

From Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities, to Dame Vivienne Westwood's regular shows in Paris, our national stories have intertwined in so many ways.

And there are few better examples of this than the historic and awe-inspiring Bayeux Tapestry.

I am delighted that this will be coming to the UK, so new audiences can see it first hand.

And as President Macron said last year we are now creating a new tapestry, based on close co-operation around a range of issues, including trade, security and of course technology.

I know that many of the headlines emerging from the UK recently have been about Brexit.

But although we have seen a passionate debate in the UK about how we leave the EU, this does not mean we are turning inwards.

We are still committed to being open, outward looking and optimistic about the world beyond us and opportunities provided by new technologies.

And we still care about the positive development of these technologies, and making them work for the benefit of humankind.

That is what I wanted to talk about today. The work we are doing in the UK, and with our friends and partners across the world, to make technology work for the common good.

Tech for good

Because when we look back on this remarkable era of technological change, we won't just judge it by the numbers on balance sheets.

We will judge it on the impact that it has had on humanity as a whole and whether it has made us safer, happier and more fulfilled.

And Governments have an important role, supporting the mission driven organisations who want to use technology for the greater good.

We have seen real progress here both sides of the Channel.

Station F, the world's biggest startup campus, is supporting so many worthwhile social technology ventures here in Paris.

And in the UK, a recent report from Tech Nation confirmed that the UK is a global centre for Tech for Good, with social tech companies valued at 2.3 billion pounds last year.

And as part of the British delegation here in Paris this week, we have a number of tech for good firms, who are tackling a range of issues, from financial inclusion to sanitation. Our technology and civil society sectors are, at their core, all about shaking up established conventions and solving problems.

And there are so many opportunities for them to join forces and harness the power of digital to help us solve our major social issues.

In the UK, as in many countries, we see loneliness as a major public health challenge. Up to a fifth of all UK adults feel lonely most or all of the time.

In January I announced that the UK Government will invest a million pounds to drive social tech innovation in civil society, to help develop solutions to tackle loneliness and bring communities together.

Successful participants will be rewarded with a cash incentive and ongoing business support.

And we have also backed the UK's leading dedicated supporter in social tech ventures – the Social Tech Trust – to set up a new investment fund.

This fund will provide ventures with the access to capital that they need at the right time.

The aim is to raise up to 30 million pounds for this investment fund, to help ventures focused in three key areas of social transformation: health, wealth, and communities.

To continue this momentum, Microsoft are also working in partnership with Social Tech Trust to create an immersive accelerator programme, focused on 'AI for Good'.

Ventures will be given access to resources to help them scale solutions in the areas of AI for accessibility and AI for environmental sustainability.

We are a natural home for tech pioneers like these, who have big ideas and big ambitions to make the world a better place.

Part of this is about having an immigration system that welcomes the world's

top tech talent.

Which is why we have also doubled the number of Tier 1 Exceptional Talent visas.

And we have opened two new visa routes for tech specialists. The Start-up route for those starting a business for the first time and the Innovator route for more experienced business people with funds to invest in their firm.

We are open to those with the skills and the determination to join this tech for good movement.

But the other way we can show our commitment to this agenda is by playing our part in the big debates surrounding the development of new technologies.

Developing technology in the right way

Next month, we will be welcoming tech pioneers from all across the world to London as part of London Tech Week, as well as Bloomberg's flagship Sooner Than You Think technology series.

And there is plenty to talk about. Over the past few months we have seen the subject of digital ethics coming to the fore.

Issues like content moderation, online disinformation and data ethics are now the subject of mainstream debate, as digital technology plays an increasing part in our everyday life and our political discourse.

If we do not provide coherent answers to these questions, there is a real risk that the optimism and enthusiasm that greeted the digital revolution will evaporate.

I believe we find ourselves at a crossroads here, particularly around online harms.

The tragic massacre in New Zealand in March showed just how quickly illegal terrorist and extremist content can spread.

This atrocity was broadcast live over the Internet, with recordings and manifestos circulating faster than platforms could remove them.

We are also seeing increasing numbers of people closing their social media accounts after unacceptable online abuse.

We cannot allow this behaviour to undermine the very real benefits that the digital revolution can bring.

If we surrender our online spaces to those who spread hate, abuse, fear and vitriolic content, then we all lose.

This approach was at the forefront of our recent plans for legislation around online harms.

We set out how we will create a new duty of care, establishing that companies have a responsibility for the safety of their users, and must take reasonable steps to tackle harmful content and activity.

Compliance will be overseen and enforced by an independent regulator, with significant penalties available to it.

But Government and regulators cannot solve these problems alone. Technology itself has a crucial role to play.

I have seen some groundbreaking work already; software that identifies terrorist content and apps to help young people monitor the time they spend online.

To encourage this, the new regulator will also have broader responsibilities to promote the development and adoption of technology to tackle online harms.

The Government will also work with industry and civil society to develop a framework for safety by design – setting out clear principles on how to include online safety features in new applications.

That will make it easier for start-ups and small businesses to embed safety during the development of their products.

International co-operation around online harms

I am proud of the work we have done in the UK to strike a balance between how we are going to protect people online and how we will protect online freedoms.

But we cannot see this as solely a domestic issue.

We have seen how disinformation and harassment can have an impact thousands of miles from its original source.

And how technology, in the wrong hands, can promote extremism and criminality across borders.

Throughout history, our two nations have always thrived when we partnered with like minded nations who share our values, like freedom of speech, democracy and the rule of law.

The UK and France have always been at the forefront of new technologies, working on ambitious projects like the Channel Tunnel and Concorde.

And we have also been leading voices around how we can responsibly develop emerging technologies, so they are shaped according to the values we hold dear.

Our joint UK-France Data Summit has been invaluable in helping us to explore how to make the most of our data.

And our universities have been joining forces to conduct groundbreaking joint

research into new digital technologies.

The theme for France's presidency of the G7 is 'Building Digital Trust Together' and this needs to be our mantra for this presidency and beyond.

And so I am pleased that this week we have joined with other G7 member states to reaffirm our commitment to defending the founding principles of the Internet.

To show our support for the freedom, universal access and transparency that it brings.

Whilst demonstrating that we will take meaningful action against hate speech, terrorist content and harassment online.

Looking ahead

And we also need to look further ahead, to see how we can address the ethical issues that lie even further down the road.

Algorithms and artificial intelligence are playing a greater role in our everyday lives.

For example, the use of predictive algorithms in both policing and judicial decision making is a growing field.

It goes without saying that inaccurate and unfair decision-making in this sector can have enormous consequences for individuals and society.

These are the kind of issues that we want to explore through our recently established Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation.

It's a world-leading advisory body designed to make sure data and AI delivers the best possible outcomes for society, in support of their innovative and ethical use.

And I know a number of countries have already been in touch with the Centre to find out more about their approach.

As you may have heard from the Chair of the Centre, Roger Taylor, earlier today the Centre is already working on some groundbreaking projects.

Including reviews on the use of online targeting, and the potential for bias in the use of algorithms.

And they will be looking internationally, to work with partners from around the world, and to learn from best practice wherever it can be found. With this in mind, I am also pleased today to be announcing the members of our new AI Council.

This is an independent committee that convenes experts from a range of sectors, to provide leadership to boost growth in the artificial intelligence sector and promote its adoption in other sectors of the economy.

The Council will be able to bring to bear its expertise from around the world and from a range of different backgrounds.

They will represent the UK's AI Sector on the international stage, and help us put in place the right skills, data and ethics so we can make the most of AI technologies.

This Council will be a valuable forum for ideas, not just in the UK but all across the world.

Conclusion

Because it is critical that we develop positive shared values for the digital age, as we have for the offline world.

And we need our two countries to be at the vanguard of this movement and exemplars for how technology can solve, rather than exacerbate, the problems and divisions that we face.

Just as the Bayeux Tapestry set out one of our earliest chapters, there is a new chapter to be written in the relations between our two countries.

And let's make sure it will tell how we used the transforming power of technology to make life better for people all across the world.

Je vous remercie.

[Thank you very much]