

Speech: Jeremy Wright's speech at the Parliament and Internet Conference

Good afternoon everyone. And thank you to everybody who has contributed to the debates today. Finding the right relationship between technology and Government is an age old question. Especially how we strike the right balance between innovation and regulation. Because technology transforms everything in its path. Our legal frameworks, our ethical values and the everyday norms of our society.

The invention of the printing press required new ways of thinking about copyright and the ownership of ideas.

The 'dark and satanic mills' of the Industrial Revolution led to questions around public health and working conditions.

And the invention of the automobile required us to develop frameworks for speed and safety, beyond a man with a red flag.

So we always need to be thinking about not just what laws we need, but also about who we are online and what values that we hold dear.

Of course we should not do this in a way that stifles innovation and tech. After all, big names from around the world are increasingly seeing the UK as the place to be. In 2017, UK venture capital investment exceeded Germany, France and Sweden combined.

We have the third highest global investment in tech after the USA and China. And we have already become a natural destination for the largest and most innovative companies to operate and invest. Amazon, Apple, Google, IBM and many more firms have bases in the UK, are expanding them, or will soon be setting them up. And these big companies thrive because they are alongside a rich and diverse ecosystem of tech start ups and scale ups. We value tech companies for their ability to solve problems in ways that we never thought possible. And we don't want to put up unnecessary barriers to innovation.

But there is also a role for policy makers too, if we are to have an Internet based on democratic legitimacy and consent. This is at the heart of our Digital Charter. Government, industry and civil society working together to agree norms and rules for the online world and putting them into practice.

I want to leave lots of time for questions but before I do so I wanted to update you on the work we are doing as part of the Charter.

Firstly, online harms. As our digital economy grows, the online harms we face become greater and more sophisticated. The Government has been clear that more needs to be done to tackle online harms. The Internet Safety Strategy is a core pillar of the Charter, which sets out the Government's ambition to make Britain the safest place in the world to be online.

We published our Green Paper on the Internet Safety Strategy in October 2017. This provided details relating to the draft social media code of practice. When published, the statutory code of practice will provide guidance to social media providers on appropriate reporting mechanisms and moderation processes to tackle abusive content.

By setting out clear standards for industry, we will make sure there is improved support for users online, and that more companies are taking consistent action to tackle bullying and insulting conduct. But although we have had success working with companies at a voluntary level, more needs to be done to address harms occurring across a growing range of platforms.

The Government has therefore committed to publishing a joint DCMS-Home Office White Paper in the winter, setting out a range of legislative and non-legislative measures detailing how we will tackle online harms.

Secondly, disinformation. Disinformation, along with misinformation, is one of the most significant issues of our age. We have all seen internationally how it can sow discord and pose a risk to free and fair elections. As the digital revolution continues to transform our lives, the potential to disrupt our civil society and democratic institutions becomes greater than ever.

In our Digital Charter we set out a clear goal to tackle disinformation and misinformation here in the UK. One of the ways we will do this is by giving people the digital literacy and critical thinking skills needed to properly assess online content.

This includes ensuring that these skills are taught in schools and colleges, but also thinking about what more we can do to empower adults to recognise deliberately misleading or false content. And it is encouraging to see so much excellent work underway in this space outside of Government too.

Several news organisations, such as the BBC, the Guardian, and the Times, have developed valuable resources to raise young people's awareness of disinformation and develop their critical thinking skills. It is true that the tech sector has also been taking action, especially Twitter, to make mounting disinformation campaigns more difficult and costly.

This has included the development of algorithms to spot fake accounts and the deletion of hundreds of thousands of suspect accounts, many linked to hostile states such as Russia.

But as new technologies like deep fakes mean we need to stay ahead of the game and fight for truth and accuracy online. Our democracy depends on it.

Thirdly, data. There has been a huge programme of work in recent years to make sure we are promoting its open and transparent use. In the Government we are in a privileged position, as we collect a vast quantity of high quality data as part of the services we run. The Government has already published over 44,000 datasets on data.gov.uk. And this unprecedented level of openness has created many benefits.

But whilst open data is something that we must aspire to, we also need to use

it in a safe and ethical way. Because the rise of AI driven products and services have posed new questions that will impact us all.

Is it right to use technology to be able to determine somebody's likelihood of reoffending? Is it right to use a programme to make hiring decisions? And is it right to have an algorithm to dictate who should be saved in a car crash? This is not science fiction. But real questions that require clear and definitive answers from policy makers.

That's why we recently established our new Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation. The Centre is a world-class advisory body to make sure data and AI delivers the best possible outcomes for society, in support of its innovative and ethical use. This is the first body of its kind to be established anywhere in the world and represents a landmark moment for data ethics in the UK and internationally.

I am pleased that today I have been able to announce the new Board for this Centre. We have already announced that Roger Taylor will be chairing the Board. Roger is a successful entrepreneur and passionate advocate for using data to improve lives and I know that he will do an excellent job.

And as it is clear today, the Board will include many other world renowned experts and leaders in their field. The Board will bring their immense and varied expertise to tackle some of the greatest policy issues of our time.

Finally, we are also working hard to make sure we have a secure Internet, with protection against those who wish to cause harm.

Nearly half of businesses suffered a cyber breach or attack in the past 12 months and this is a threat that will only get more pressing as businesses and services continue to move online. Some of the solutions are regulatory. We've implemented the new Data Protection Act.

This gives people more control than ever before over their data, and requires organisations to have appropriate cyber security measures in place to protect personal data.

Some of the solutions are technical. For example, the NCSC's Active Cyber Defence programme has had a real impact in reducing malicious emails and web domains at a national level. And some of the solutions rest on working closely in partnership with industry, to encourage organisations to act in a way that protects them online.

We are continuing to promote the safe and secure use of data through targeted advice for businesses like the Small Business Guide and the Cyber Essentials scheme. And we are working to improve and expand cyber security skills at all levels; from schools to degree level.

Only last week we launched a new phase of our Cyber Discovery programme to find the cyber security experts of the future. This work is vital. Because a free Internet can only flourish if it is safe and secure.

It is fitting that we are here in Parliament today to talk about the future

of technology. Because the values that can be found in Parliament at its best; democracy, transparency and freedom, should be at the heart of the Internet and emerging technologies.

We have a unique chance to make sure that we strike the right balance. Between promoting our pioneering tech industry and preventing those who cause harm. That is our big question and I'm looking forward to hearing your views on the answers.

Thank you very much.