

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]

Press release: Invasive non-native plant species found in Derbyshire brook

American Skunk Cabbage, one of the hundreds of invasive non-native species which threaten Britain's native plants and animals, has been found in the East Midlands area for the first time, at Thulston Brook in Derby.

The invasive plant species is native to north-western America and was originally introduced to the UK at the beginning of the 20th century as an ornamental plant in gardens. Since then it has spread and established large populations across the UK.

The ornamental bog plant has big yellow flowers and emits a strong skunk-like odour. Its large leaves form dense colonies, over-shading native plants and impacting other water life. Once established, American Skunk Cabbage can spread quickly. Infestations can dominate large areas and crowd out native

species in important habitats such as wet woodlands.

Officers from the [Environment Agency](#) in the East Midlands are working to eradicate the invasive species by removing the flower heads to prevent them seeding and spreading.

Louise Hill, Biodiversity Officer at the Environment Agency said:

We are working to eradicate the American Skunk Cabbage from Thulston Brook before it becomes too established.

Invasive non-native species pose one of the biggest threats to our environment by outcompeting native species, altering the status quo and introducing disease. It is important we tackle invasive non-native species such as American Skunk Cabbage to protect our country's native plants.

In 2016, American Skunk Cabbage was banned from sale in the UK. Now gardeners are being urged to make sure that they "[Be Plant Wise](#)", dispose of plants correctly and ensure they do not discard this species in the natural environment.

Invasive Species Week

This week (13 to 17 May 2019) is [Invasive Species Week](#) and the Environment Agency is working with organisations across the UK to raise awareness of invasive non-native species to help prevent their spread, to protect the environment and recreational spaces for future generations to enjoy.

[Press release: Offensive Weapons Act receives Royal Assent](#)

The Offensive Weapons Act has today (Thursday 16 May) received Royal Assent, bringing in tough new measures that strengthen law enforcement's response to violent crime.

The Act will make it illegal to possess dangerous weapons in private, including knuckledusters, zombie knives and death star knives, and will make it a criminal offence to dispatch bladed products sold online without verifying the buyer is over 18.

The Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, is also providing additional support to the police through Knife Crime Prevention Orders. These Orders will act as a deterrent to those vulnerable to becoming involved in knife crime. They will also enable the courts to place restrictions on individuals to help the

police manage those at risk in the community.

Guidance on the process for Knife Crime Prevention Orders will be published, including operational guidance to police forces, ahead of a pilot in London.

Sajid Javid, Home Secretary said:

As Home Secretary, I'm doing everything in my power to tackle the scourge of serious violence. Our new Offensive Weapons Act is a central part of this.

These new laws will give police extra powers to seize dangerous weapons and ensure knives are less likely to make their way onto the streets in the first place. The Act will also see the introduction of Knife Crime Prevention Orders – a power the police called for.

As well as tough law enforcement, it's hugely important we continue our work to steer young people away from a life of crime in the first place.

The Act includes a number of other measures to tackle serious violence, including:

- a ban on the possession, manufacture and sale of rapid firing rifles and bump stocks, which increase a rifle's rate of fire. The ban on the manufacture and sale of these weapons has now come into force with immediate effect
- a ban on selling bladed products to a residential address without age verification
- updating the definition of flick knives to reflect changing weapon designs and banning private possession of flick knives and gravity knives
- changing the legal definition for threatening someone with an offensive weapon to make prosecutions easier
- banning the sale of corrosive products to under 18s
- making it an offence to possess a corrosive substance in a public place

The government will also consult on guidance for some of the new measures in the Act and engage with businesses and industry on how the legislation will affect them before it comes into force.

The Offensive Weapons Act and strong law enforcement form part of the government's Serious Violence Strategy, which combines tough action with the vital need to steer young people away from crime in the first place.

Recently the government launched a £200 million 10-year [Youth Endowment Fund](#) to create a generational shift in violent crime. There is also an ongoing consultation on a new 'public health duty' which is intended to help spot the warning signs that a young person could be in danger.

Speech: Economic Secretary speech to Equifax Spark 2019 Conference

It's a great pleasure to speak to you today.

Technology and innovation is one of the most exciting and uplifting parts of my brief as City Minister and that's particularly true right now with the political situation.

The digital revolution rumbles on at breakneck speed, throwing up all sorts of interesting questions for the future of financial services...

How do we protect consumers and investors without stifling growth and enterprise?

How can technology help us balance the needs of an aging population against the aspirations of young people?

And how do we ensure that the most vulnerable members of our society aren't locked out of the opportunities or left behind by the pace of change?

Our answers to these questions, and others like them, will shape the strength and success of our economy every bit as much as Brexit, if not more so.

It's not a job for government alone. Government can play a convening role; but it's a shared effort with business and academia.

So the subject of today's conference – Making Smart Decisions Together – is apt, and not just from a technological standpoint.

I congratulate Equifax for putting together a programme that's open to the social as well as the financial opportunities that arise from the advent of Open Banking, Big Data and Artificial Intelligence.

What I'd like to do this morning is frame these discussions by outlining what the government is doing to ensure the UK remains at the forefront of innovation in these areas; and what we're doing to help direct this technology towards the challenge of financial inclusion.

Throughout history, there have been moments when technology takes a great leap forward...

The invention of the World Wide Web – thirty years ago – was a case in point.

Tim Berners-Lee's supervisor famously described his proposal as "vague but interesting", which must surely be the understatement of the century.

Certainly, it has transformed the way we trade, bank, invest, borrow, pay and

donate money, as well as how we work and communicate with one another.

And the UK has been right at the heart of this transformation.

In fairness, our geography helped.

Wall Street is 2,500 miles from Silicon Valley – but on this side of the pond, you can walk from the Square Mile to the Silicon Roundabout in about twenty minutes.

But, just as importantly, we had the connectivity and the skills necessary to flourish.

The global reach of the City of London – allied to our nationwide strengths in research and innovation – proved a truly winning combination.

Today, the UK is regularly voted the best place in the world to start and grow a FinTech business...

...ahead of New York.

...ahead of Paris.

...ahead of Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai.

Savour that for a moment... it's a real tonic for those of us who believe Britain still has what it takes to tread a bold and ambitious path in the world.

We have something very precious indeed, and the government wants to do everything we can to nurture the formula behind our success.

We want our financial services sector to be the most competitive and innovative in the world.

One that continues to fuel jobs and growth, while delivering choice and value for customers.

And to achieve that ambition, we need to be ready to take advantage of the next great technological leaps as and when they arrive.

Open Banking is a case in point.

Two years ago, the Competition and Markets Authority published its ground-breaking Retail Market Investigation Order.

It requires the nine largest banks in the UK to build standardised systems, so customers can share their financial information with FinTech firms quickly and securely.

This has kick-started a transformation in retail banking.

In November last year, a beauty salon in Kent became the first small business to apply for a loan in the UK using Open Banking.

The lender, Iwoca, was able to use the customer's banking transaction history to speed up the decision-making process – funds were released within an hour-and-a-half.

Likewise, M&S Bank is using Open Banking to simplify its mortgage application process: now the data is readily available, most customers are no longer required to provide traditional bank statements.

We can expect to see a growing number of new products and innovations appear as Open Banking gains traction.

But this is nothing compared to the possibilities of Artificial Intelligence and machine learning.

This data-driven revolution has already arrived – or at least, that's what Alexa told me to say this morning.

Of course, Equifax is itself one of the pioneers.

Your patented NeuroDecision machine learning technology is paving the way for the use of advanced neural network modelling in credit scoring.

And whether it's banks using chatbots to provide personalised customer services...

...investors drawing on big data analytics to make faster and more accurate market forecasts...

...or insurance companies employing algorithms to spot financial crime...

...no part of the sector will be left untouched.

The UK is currently ranked first in the Government (AI) Readiness Index, based on our ability to absorb and exploit the potential of this technology.

We're already home to some of the most established names in the business, like Deepmind and Swiftkey.

But we're also home to the rising stars...

Like Cleo, a London-based start-up which uses AI to analyse people's spending habits to help them better manage their money. Founded in 2016, it now has 600,000 users across the UK and North America.

And Onfido, which uses photo recognition algorithms to help companies verify their customers using live images. Established by three Oxford University graduates, it now employs 200 people in five countries.

(PWC) predict that by 2030, (AI) could boost our national (GDP) by 10%.

But this £230-billion opportunity won't come about by itself.

That's why the government's (AI) Sector Deal is bringing together almost £1 billion's worth of contributions from government, industry and academia to

unlock this potential.

Together, we're seeking to attract the best and the brightest from around the world with our new Turing (AI) Fellowships...

And we're investing in home-grown talent by creating more than 1,000 (AI) PhD and Masters places at universities across the country.

Meanwhile, our pioneering Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation seeks to ensure the benefits of this technology are felt evenly across our society.

This leads me to the crux of my message this morning.

Digital innovation can't just be about providing wealthy people with sophisticated products and services.

If that's all we achieve, then we will have failed to grasp the full potential of this technology.

Because the real opportunity before us is to bring about a stronger and more resilient financial sector – one that caters for everyone in our society.

I'm not trying to be all touchy-feely.

I'm a red-blooded capitalist. I believe in the power of markets to lift people out of poverty and drive our individual and collective prosperity.

But the hard truth is that a growing number of people feel like our economy doesn't work for them, or their families.

I encounter examples at my constituency surgery every week.

Young people who can't get on the housing ladder.

Single mums and dads struggling with the costs of pay-day loans and rent-to-own schemes.

Older people worrying about how to meet the cost of care without selling their home.

My view is simple.

Government and industry has an obligation to put this right, and to ensure everyone can access safe and affordable forms of credit that are appropriate to their needs.

For our part, the government is directing £55 million from dormant bank accounts to help address the supply of affordable credit.

This money will be arranged through a new independent organisation – Fair4All Finance – which will be fully operational in the autumn.

In terms of the role for business, the government doesn't want to mandate firms to provide products and services...

Rather, we want to encourage lenders to think about how technology can help vulnerable individuals tell a more convincing story about their financial integrity, so they can access the normal financial choices that most of us take for granted.

Take housing as an example.

Many people who rent accommodation go on to face problems getting a mortgage because they have a low credit score.

In 2017 we launched the Rent Recognition Challenge to find a simple way to record and share rental payment data with lenders and credit reference agencies.

It was a 'Dragons Den' style competition, backed by a £2 million prize fund.

One of the three winners – Bud – is using its share of this money to build an artificial-intelligence driven rental recognition tool which automatically detects when an individual is paying rent and prompts them to get the payments verified.

It also takes advantage of Open Banking by allowing lenders to integrate this service into their apps, so people can use the data when they apply for a mortgage.

This for me is indicative of the real power of FinTech – products that deliver a social as well as a financial benefit.

Following on the success of the Rent Recognition Challenge, we are launching the Affordable Credit Challenge.

We want to create a whole new market of products to serve credit unions and other social lenders – ones that are tailored to the needs of this diverse sector and the communities they serve.

Applications open this summer, and I'm looking forward to seeing what ideas emerge.

Of course, these are just two examples.

Financial inclusion is a complex issue.

But as the digital revolution continues, I have faith that it will offer more and more solutions.

The only limit is whether we have the attitude, aptitude and ambition to make them most of the opportunity.

I'm optimistic that we have, because every time I attend events like this, I'm reminded that the dynamism and energy of our financial services sector is alive and kicking.

And I'm encouraged that together we can help tackle some of the great

financial challenges of our time.

So I wish you every success in your discussions today.

And as we look to the growing opportunities for FinTech, let me assure you – the government is there to support you every step of the way.

[News story: Academy London seminar: County lines – the inside story](#)

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