

Bradley: Conference Speech

Karen Bradley, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, speaking today at Conservative Party Conference in Manchester said:

(Check against delivery)

“Thank you, Conference.

It’s great to be with you here in Manchester – a home to digital innovation and vibrant arts.

It was also the home of my grandparents, and it’s not a million miles from my hometown, Leek, in Staffordshire Moorlands.

This is such a dynamic city.

You don’t have to walk far from this hall to see memorials to people who lived in Manchester and have shaped our world, from Alan Turing to Sir Matt Busby.

And in Manchester there will soon be another statue to a great Mancunian: Emmeline Pankhurst.

This dynamic city has such a fantastic past and future – but I must also mention the horrendous evening of May 22.

The pleasure and excitement of going to a concert is something that everyone should be able to enjoy without fear.

What happened at the Manchester Arena that night was a particularly sickening and cowardly attack.

I know our thoughts remain with everyone affected by that awful day, and by the other terrible events we have seen this year.

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As Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, I have seen first-hand the innovation where our country leads the world.

From the success of another great Northern industrial city, Hull, this year’s UK City of Culture, to the amazing achievements of our women’s sports teams in the summer, and from Tech City to Media City – there is so much variety and so much opportunity for all across the country.

But it has always been the case that great design, great art, great culture have relied on great science and great engineering. We are brilliant in this country at bringing these together to make Britain world leading in both. We add creativity to engineering and provide new technology to deliver art and design.

So I want to talk to you today about two things:

Firstly, that by enabling our unique creativity and innovation, we will help to build that country that works for everyone.

And secondly, the principle this government has long been guided by:

That we are here to make life better for the British people and when we find an injustice or a problem that is holding them back we set our minds to fixing it.

Luckily, I work with brilliant ministers:

John Glen, Lord Henry Ashton, Tracey Crouch and Matt Hancock.

I also want to thank Rob Wilson who was a fantastic minister for civil society, making the role his own in both the Cabinet Office and DCMS.

We have superb whips in Craig Whittaker and Carline Chisholm.

And our great PPSs Matt Warman and Nigel Huddleston.

Together they make a great team.

Earlier this year, I changed the D in DCMS from “Department” to “Digital” to reflect that fact that in today’s world, digital is an ever-increasing part of everything we do.

This year the number of data subscriptions – to allow us to connect our phones, tablets, computers to the internet – will exceed the number of people on the planet – 7.5 billion!

This is changing the way that we do business, keep in touch with each other and manage our lives.

The digital world is making life better for every person, family and community across our country – as well as bringing new challenges which this government is determined to confront so everybody can enjoy the benefits.

When we came into government seven years ago we were a nation with pitifully low levels of broadband access, thanks to years of Labour mismanagement.

While other countries were forging ahead, Britain was stuck in the slow lane. Too many families and businesses were forced to put up with frustratingly slow and unreliable internet connections, with no alternative available to them.

It was, quite simply, not good enough.

This government has got on with sorting it out.

That’s what Conservatives do.

We have increased broadband coverage to over 93 per cent of the U.K. – and it will be at 95 per cent by the end of the year.

That 95 per cent will then become 100 per cent when the universal right to a broadband connection – put into law by the Conservatives – is implemented by 2020.

That means that families, businesses and communities in every corner of our four nations can now access superfast internet speeds.

This is good news for jobs.

For our GDP

And for the economy.

Make no mistake this is massive – the digital sector contributes more than £118 billion a year, thanks in part to the policies that this government has prioritised.

But it’s not just about intangible numbers.

It’s about our day to day lives.

It’s being able to use online banking or doing the food shop

Or more exciting things like buying concert tickets or video calling loved ones around the world.

It also means that you can peacefully watch films on your laptop while your family plays online games next door – something essential in my house!

Better digital connectivity is essential for cultural activities to thrive.

It is all very well having good access to the internet, but I want to ensure we have the most exciting content too.

And in the UK we already have the best cultural offering in the world.

But if you live outside London, you may feel that not enough of this culture is either available to you or represents your life.

So we are working to make sure it is available across the country – for everyone.

That is why the Prime Minister and I are determined to ensure that this nation’s cultural highlights are not centralised in London, but instead

spread across each of our nations and regions.

Whether you grow up in Newquay or Neath, Nottingham or North Berwick, I want to ensure you have access to everything this country has to offer.

You shouldn't always have to get on a train to London – Conservatives know that opportunity should not be determined by where you are born.

Our regional museums, not least the Whitworth here in Manchester, have fantastic collections that we should all be proud of.

Thanks to the hard work of this government and our fantastic cultural sector we have seen visits to regional museums and galleries increase again this year so thousands more children are appreciating and learning about the best Britain has to offer.

We are making progress, but this drive to rebalance our country is not over. We have to keep striving to get more investment, more jobs and more opportunities into all regions and to make sure our cultural offering reflects all of our great country.

Widening the presence of arts and media across the whole country will strengthen the unique combination that Britain offers: we have world-leading technological innovation and the most exciting cultural offering in the world.

It is only when our most creative minds come together with our most analytical ones that we truly realise our nation's potential.

This combination of digital and culture is going to provide a great contribution to making a success of Brexit – which I know we will do.

Because what we offer as a nation will always be deeply compelling to the whole world.

After all, are we really saying that only people in the 27 EU states listen to Adele, watch Sherlock or support Man City?

People come in their millions to visit us and they download, watch and listen to what we produce wherever they are.

In Australia as much as Austria, in India as much as Italy, China as much as the Czech Republic, people across the whole world love our arts and our sport. Ballet or rugby – or a thousand other activities – are enriching pursuits in their own right, but they are also often the hook that brings people and business to Britain to invest here.

And in today's world, they need innovative digital industry and thriving media to succeed.

So I hope you agree with me that there are exciting prospects for Britain ahead.

But we all know that the digital world can be a dangerous place too.

Each younger generation is more at ease with technology and quicker to understand the latest innovation – I know my children are.

But as a government we also have a duty to protect children and vulnerable people from the less-family friendly corners of the internet.

We have all heard about the dangers of cyber-bullying, Twitter abuse and trolling on the internet.

These are problems that Conservatives are tackling head on.

I'd like to pay particular tribute to Maria Miller and Seema Kennedy for speaking out about these difficult problems.

I believe Britain should be the safest place in the world to go online and this government is determined to make that a reality.

Put simply, behaviour that is unacceptable in normal life should be

unacceptable on a computer screen.

That's why next week I will publish the Internet Safety Strategy green paper. This will be an important step forward on how we tackle this crucial issue. As part of this strategy, we will work with key players to introduce a comprehensive response to the problem, including:

- an Online Code of Practice that I want to see every social media company sign up to
- A call for companies to think about safety during the design of their products, to ensure that basic safety features are included from the outset;
- And a plan to ensure that every child is taught the skills they need to be safe online.

Because we all have a responsibility to make sure the internet is as safe as it possibly can be.

By doing this, and more, we will take a positive step forward in tackling a growing and critical challenge confronting our country.

So Conference.

With every week that passes we see new and exciting digital and cultural innovations.

They will bring future benefits to our country and world that we can't yet imagine.

But they will also bring challenges – challenges this government will continue to face up to and to solve.

You can be assured that the Prime Minister, my department and this government are working flat out to build a Britain where everybody in every region, and from any background, can take advantage of the latest digital technology, culture and sport – while staying safe.

Thank you."

ENDS