Culture Secretary addresses Telegraph's Tech for Good conference

Thank you very much.

It is a real pleasure to be here to open this important conference on how to make sure that technology transforms lives for the better.

It is not an exaggeration to say that this is one of the most important policy questions facing Governments all across the world.

Get this wrong and we can entrench the divisions that exist in our society, and create tools for abuse and harm.

But if we get this right the opportunities are monumental.

To build a fairer and happier society, with more targeted services and a freer exchange of ideas.

So it is really exciting to me, and the Government that the tech for good movement has grown so rapidly in the past few years, and that so many of these pioneering firms are forming and basing themselves here.

We have so many tech for good firms in the UK and they have raised over a billion in total venture capital between them.

Our 'tech for social good' sector was worth 2.3 billion pounds last year, with a turnover of 732 million pounds.

This really demonstrates how the dial is shifting in favour of socially minded technology – and the wider tech sector is playing a role in this shift too.

From initiatives like Versus Arthritis, which is using IBM's Watson technology to deliver ongoing care and support to arthritis sufferers nationwide…

To Vodafone, who are using their expertise around connectivity to better understand how technology can help tackle complex problems like loneliness.

Because driving innovation and responsible technology are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they are mutually reinforcing.

Responsible technology builds the trust amongst users that is needed to ensure its widespread adoption.

And so before today's conference gets underway, I wanted to offer some views about the role we can all play – Governments, businesses and civil society – to keep this momentum going.

Creating the right conditions in the UK

First, we need to create the right conditions right here in the UK.

It is fantastic that so many of our top tech firms are working on solutions to major social challenges.

And as technology plays an increasingly large part in our lives, Governments have a duty to support the firms who are able to make a difference.

One way of doing this is through a relentless focus on digital skills and tech talent.

As new technologies continue to change the nature of work, we need a digitally skilled workforce, so everyone can take advantage of the jobs and opportunities on offer, and nobody gets left behind.

So from making coding in the curriculum compulsory at school age, through to expanding digital training for adults, we have a far-reaching programme to support digital skills.

Just look at the activity this month. We have seen large scale investment in tech talent across all tiers, including new research programmes, and more AI masters places, thanks to new collaborations between industry and academia.

And today I am pleased to announce that we have appointed five new academic fellows, who will be working with the Alan Turing Institute, the UK's national institute for data science and AI.

The Fellows will be building research teams to secure the economic and societal benefits that AI can bring.

For example, one project will be using high performance mathematical simulations to develop new methods of building faster, lighter, and more sustainable aircraft.

And these five fellowships are just the start. We will be appointing many more as part of our mission to attract, retain and develop world leading AI academic talent.

Another aspect of this skills agenda is making sure charities have the digital capability they need.

If they embrace the tech for good agenda, then they can increase their reach, better serve their beneficiaries, and make their organisations more resilient in the face of ongoing change.

And we want to help them to do this.

Our million pound Digital Leadership Fund has given essential digital skills training to around 1,500 charity leaders, from the South West to the Scottish border.

And we have also supported the Catalyst, a movement that aims to upskill 10,000 charities over the next two years to help them use digital to achieve their goals.

The Catalyst will massively accelerate how charities and voluntary organisations use digital, which means they can be even more responsive to the communities they interact with.

The second area where we are working to create the right conditions is making sure firms have access to investment.

Customers and investors are becoming increasingly discerning about where they spend their money and the impact that their purchases have.

But although last year investment in UK tech was the highest in Europe, social tech ventures sometimes report that they find it hard to raise capital.

And according to a report from Tech Nation, who I see are a Knowledge Partner today, 45 per cent of the companies that make up our tech for good sector are at seed stage.

So we need to make sure there is sufficient access to capital to keep these companies growing and thriving.

We have supported the creation of a fund, run by the Social Tech Trust.

This is aiming to raise up to 30 million pounds to focus on three key strands of investment; communities, health and financial inclusion, where targeted funding has the potential to transform society.

There are many success stories in this room today and we want to create even more.

Later you will hear from Paul Miller, the CEO of Bethnal Green Ventures, Europe's leading early-stage tech for good investor.

The Government has been a strong supporter of Bethnal Green Ventures, providing them with funding through our Social Incubator Fund.

Since then, along with other incubators and accelerators, they have gone on to help hundreds of Tech for Good organisations to scale.

Bethnal Green Ventures, as the name suggests, is based here in the capital, which has now been cemented as a global tech for good hub.

In London in 2016 there were 22,000 tech meetups, nearly three times that of Berlin, Paris or Amsterdam.

But the tech for good movement offers opportunities to promote thriving tech hubs outside the capital, and we are already making great progress here.

The data shows that median funding for tech for good firms is higher in the

South West and Northern Ireland than it is in London.

So we must use this positive momentum to promote our regional economies and spread opportunity all across the United Kingdom.

International focus

But we cannot see tech for good as solely a domestic matter. In an increasingly connected world, we need to look internationally in our response.

The social issues that our tech for good companies are tackling, like climate change, healthcare and poverty, span borders and Governments.

So to fulfil the potential of technology we must work with global partners, share our best practice, and learn from innovation wherever we find it.

The UK is leading the global debate in this area.

And I want us to use our platform to keep advocating the values we believe in, to shape digital norms and ethics which balance security, openness, fairness, innovation and growth.

Part of this involves working with like minded Governments to develop meaningful frameworks on issues like online harms and terrorist material online, and we are seeing some incredible technological advances here.

But we also need to develop tech for good partnerships with other nations where the tech ecosystem is maturing; so we can support inclusive and sustainable development and create global social benefits.

That is why DCMS is establishing a network of International Tech Hubs, in a number of countries including Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, Brazil, India and Indonesia, alongside the existing UK-Israel Tech Hub.

Led by experts from the local tech sector, the Hubs are focused on expanding and developing local digital economies and high-end digital skills.

This will support tech for good entrepreneurs, and provide opportunities for international partnerships and increased investment.

One of the network's flagship programmes is Go Global, which equips early-stage tech for good startups with the tools needed to expand globally. Earlier this year, Go Global Africa brought together 18 of the continent's most ambitious development-focused startups, who are using technology to solve important issues in their communities.

From social enterprises providing credit for women running small businesses in rural areas in Kenya…

to companies providing mobile-based health resources for pregnant women in Nigeria…

Go Global alumni are at the forefront of applying cutting-edge tech for good.

Throughout an immersive two week programme they exchanged ideas, learnt how to scale and grow their business, and showcased their innovations to investors and leading figures from the UK's tech sector.

This work is so important. Because tech for good is truly an international mission.

And if we want new technologies to reflect the values that we hold dear, then will need to form strong and enduring international partnerships with like minded nations.

Diversity

The final area I wanted to discuss today is very close to my heart — how we need to make sure our tech sector is representative of the people it seeks to benefit.

I am pleased to see that there is a session later today about diversity and inclusion.

Because so much of the tech for good agenda is about answering the ethical questions that underpin the development of technology.

Important questions like how to handle data and how to ensure algorithms are free from subconscious bias.

And the groups who are at risk from the adverse development of new technologies should be at the table when decisions like these are made.

So diversity, of all kinds, is a crucial element in the tech for good equation.

But the figures show that there is a lot of work to be done.

A Tech Nation report showed that while women make up 49 per cent of the workforce, they make up only 19 per cent of tech roles.

And Colorintech's FTSE diversity audit also found only 2.6 per cent of UK tech company board members were from BAME backgrounds.

So we are working to make tech open to everyone, whether it's through embedding tech in the school curriculum, or delivering flexible AI and data science conversion courses, and scholarships for under-represented groups.

We are already seeing the impact of the Digital Skills and Inclusion Innovation Funds, launched last August.

Totalling over 1.4 million pounds, the Funds have been supporting initiatives to tackle digital exclusion and help women, disabled people and residents in disadvantaged areas to gain vital skills to pursue digital careers.

And we are also striving to get greater diversity in tech roles through our

Tech Talent Charter.

Signatories pledge to implement recruitment and retention practices that will address the imbalance in so many tech roles.

We recently doubled our funding for this Charter, bringing it up to over 350,000 pounds to date.

Over 400 companies, from international tech giants right through to start-ups and charities, have already signed up, and I hope that those of you who haven't yet done so will look at doing the same.

Because decision making is always improved by diversity of thought.

And we will need to make use of all our available talent if we are to make this digital revolution a success.

Conclusion

Tech for good is at its core all about connections.

Connections between the tech sector and civil society.

And connections between like minded businesses and nations all across the world.

Events like this one today are so important in forging connections, and encouraging the exchange of ideas.

And tech for good pioneers like those in this room will not only make technology better, they will make the world better.

So please keep innovating and creating, and forging a better future for us all.

Thank you very much.