

# Future Tech Forum – Opening Keynote

Good morning everyone.

It's an absolute pleasure to welcome you all to London, to the inaugural Future Tech Forum.

It's the first major summit I've hosted since becoming Digital Secretary in September and what better place to be hosting a discussion about the future of tech, than in the Science Museum?

As you wander around this building over the next couple of days, you will spot "NeXTcube" – the computer that Tim Berners-Lee was sitting at when he designed the World Wide Web. With his invention in 1989, Berners-Lee set off a chain of events that have led us all here today.

Because digital technology has fundamentally changed our way of life. In fact, the entire infrastructure of the global economy – and modern society – is now built around tech. The five biggest tech companies are now worth almost \$10 trillion – more than the next 27 most valuable U.S. companies put together. Amazon is the third biggest employer on the planet. Apple's stock is worth more than Belgium's entire wealth.

These companies track who we are, and what we like, and where we go and what we buy. They are an ever-present fixture of our daily lives. And they've done a huge amount to improve our existence. They connect us with friends and family. They've revolutionised working life. And given that the economies of some of these tech companies are the size of countries it's great to see them tackling country-sized challenges like looking at tackling global welfare and development – as you'll see in the first session with Microsoft today.

Meanwhile, the pace of technological change is astounding. We've got doctors performing surgery in a room miles away from their patient, armed with a joystick and some 3D equipment. Groundbreaking companies are exploring wild ways to manipulate biology – like reviving the smell of extinct flowers to create new perfumes.

At the same time, AI is everywhere – and getting more sophisticated by the day. Almost all experts think that within this century we'll see a situation where machines are more intelligent than humans. In the long history of humanity, we are now officially living in the Digital Age. So it's no wonder that governments all over the world are racing to set the rules for this new era.

Because if there's anything we've learnt over the last 20 years, it's that without the right governance and values built in from the start, tech can create some very serious problems. Problems that are hard to fix once they've happened.

Algorithms can send dangerous misinformation and poisonous abuse all over the world in a matter of seconds. Authoritarian governments can use tech to

track, to intimidate, and to repress. News services can be blocked with the flick of a switch, and competitors crowded out with the tweak of an algorithm.

All of this has ramifications: for our privacy, and prosperity and for society as a whole.

And so I'm gathering you all here today to start a new and frank conversation about the future of tech: About how we can work together to harness its incredible potential, particularly when it comes to tackling the biggest challenges we face, like climate change while protecting people from the darker side of the Digital Age.

It's on us, as like-minded partners, to make sure the tech revolution is a democratic one. And together, we'll be discussing a number of challenges over the next two days.

Like: How do we get the governance of tech right from the start, rather than playing catch-up? What are the issues we need to think about now, before the adoption of new and emerging tech becomes widespread? How do we ensure new technologies reflect our liberal and democratic values? And where do we need international solutions – given tech is global in its very nature – and how do we deliver them? Every country in the world is grappling with these very same questions but the UK is leading the way in answering many of them.

The most obvious example is our Online Safety Bill, which we introduced in Parliament in July. That Bill is a truly groundbreaking piece of legislation. We'll be going further than any other country to regulate social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and TikTok.

I know that the world will be watching what we do, and looking to follow our lead in many cases. We've got a 10-year plan to become a global AI superpower, through our National AI Strategy. We've broken yet more ground with a new, pro-competition Digital Markets Unit, to oversee the world's most powerful tech companies.

We're at the cutting edge of deepening Digital Trade, and I'm particularly pleased to welcome colleagues from Singapore here today, with whom we're negotiating a ground-breaking Digital Economy Agreement.

And in a year of international leadership for the UK, we have used our presidency of the G7 to draw a number of lines in the sand about the future of tech: We agreed that as we tackle illegal and harmful content online, we should do so in a way that also protects fundamental democratic rights, like freedom of speech.

We agreed to work together on digital technical standards, and to promote the trusted and free flow of data. We agreed to accelerate the use of digital technologies to boost trade. And finally, we agreed to secure critical digital infrastructure, like our telecoms networks. I want to build on that work over the next two days, as our G7 leadership comes to a close and that's why I'm delighted that so many people have travelled from all over the world

to be here today.

We've got representatives from every corner of the planet – from the Republic of Korea to Kenya, Finland and the United States And I'm very excited about the UK's new Digital Trade Network, which is going to make the most of fast-growing tech markets in the Asia Pacific region.

But we know that governments can't meet these challenges alone. We've got to change the existing model, and bring together government, industry and academia to write the next chapter of tech together. To work together in a way that is more collaborative, more frank and more honest than it has perhaps been so in the past.

So the Future Tech Forum is bringing together the widest group of thought leaders from across government, industry and academia.

As the Prime Minister said when he announced this summit in his speech to the UN General Assembly in 2019, we have pulled together the broadest possible coalition to take on this task. And if we get these questions right, the potential benefits for our countries are enormous. So as I officially open the Future Tech Forum, I'd like to finish by saying that I think we're facing a fundamental choice about our future:

Is tech going to be a force for good, or a force for bad? We're all here today because we are determined to make it the former. So without further ado, let's get things underway with the first session, on tech and democracy.

I'm delighted to welcome to the stage:

Former Danish Prime Minister and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen

Microsoft Vice President John Frank

And last but by no means least, my colleague Julia Lopez, the Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure.