

Jeremy Wright speech to Conservative Party Conference 2018

Jeremy Wright MP, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, speaking today at Conservative Party Conference at The ICC, Birmingham, said:

(Check against delivery)

“It’s a pleasure to be here in Birmingham, the city that gave me my first job, to talk about the job I am privileged to have now.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is a very wide-ranging portfolio and I can’t cover all of it in this speech. To cover it in Government needs an exceptional team of ministers and I’m lucky to have just such a team in Margot James, Michael Ellis, Tracey Crouch and Henry Ashton, along with our whips Mims Davies and James Younger and our PPSs Nigel Huddleston and Andrew Bowie. I’d like to thank them for all they do.

It may not be immediately obvious what connects the different elements of my Department’s title, but I think what connects them is what connects us – as individuals, as communities and as a country. The ties of Civil Society that bind us – the sports clubs and youth clubs, the churches and the charities, the arts projects, the libraries and the community groups of all sorts that bring people together and bind our nation.

The ties that help us to reflect together as we do in the Centenary of the end of the First World War, and in commemorations that move us all.

And of course there are the digital links needed to get the most out of 21st Century life. As Conservatives we should be proud of the fact that we have made superfast broadband available to 95% of premises as we said we would. But the truth is that is not much comfort if you are in the 5% not covered.

So we can and we must do more. By 2020 everyone will have the right to minimum speeds of 10 megabits per second, and mobile coverage must expand further across the UK.

But technology is changing all the time and we must have infrastructure that can support whatever we will need in the future. That’s why we are investing in 5G mobile technology and developing what it can do, including in an urban setting right here in the West Midlands.

It’s also why our focus will now be on a fibre optic network for broadband that will really make us fit for the future. That is sensible planning.

But we must also make sure that everyone can benefit from what these technologies offer. So as we build a fibre network, we will identify the places the market won’t reach on its own and we will connect them – not as an afterthought but in parallel with the places it’s profitable to connect.

Because if technology has the power to connect us all, nobody should be left behind.

Technology is changing our lives in many ways, and we can be proud of the fact that many of those changing the world are here in the United Kingdom.

Our digital technology sector is worth nearly £184 billion and employs 2.1 million people.

Last year, venture capital investment in London's tech sector was more than in Germany and France combined.

The internet is an amazing resource, and social media lets us reach others faster and more easily than we ever have before.

But these things have a dark side too. There are those who use social media to bully or intimidate, to isolate rather than to include. And it is having an effect – 16 to 25 year olds are the most connected generation of all, but they are lonelier than the over 65s.

There are also those who use the internet to abuse children or promote terrorism, and I don't believe there is anything so special about the online world that the normal rules of human behaviour, and the law, should not apply there too.

So the time has come to define those rules and how they should apply online, and if that needs new law, that is what we will do. Britain can lead the world on this, and we should.

Of course, there are many other things that connect us – our heritage, our history, our art and performing arts, film and television. The creative industries more broadly add a huge amount to our economy and to our identity.

They don't just enrich our lives, they help to make us who we are – as individuals, as communities and as a nation.

They are strengths we will celebrate in a festival of national pride and international impact in 2022.

Our culture and heritage are vital aspects of the Britain we project to the world, the ingredients of the soft power we are so good at, and need to stay good at, through Brexit and beyond.

And while we're on that subject, some of you may have heard that I might be delivering this speech as a hologram. To those of you who have spent the last 5 minutes thinking this is the most realistic hologram you've ever seen, I should make it clear that I decided not to.

At this moment, and especially on a subject like Brexit, I don't think our political debate needs more virtual reality, it needs more actual reality. And the reality is we are leaving the European Union.

We are leaving because Parliament decided to ask the people of this country

as a whole to make this choice and they made it.

However they voted in the referendum two years ago, I believe the vast majority of them now want us to get on with it.

And to all those who can't get over the referendum result, to those who seek to avoid it or ignore it, and to those who want to do it all over again, I say it's time to move on.

Leaving the European Union in a way that gives us the best possible platform for the future is something we can do, but it is one of the most complex and challenging things the United Kingdom has ever had to do, and we don't have a single talent or intellect to waste in that effort.

So however you voted then, help to build our future now.

But we should recognise that the Brexit process has divided us, and recognise too those things that can bring us back together, as the England football team did with character, skill and real heart this summer.

And they weren't the only ones to lift our spirits this year. We have seen the best ever medal haul in a Winter Olympics, a wonderful European Championships in Glasgow and all 3 Grand Tours in Cycling won by Britons, not to mention the Ryder Cup.

Sport has always had the power to inspire us, most of all when we can see our heroes and heroines do amazing things.

That's why, over 20 years ago, a Conservative Government legislated for a list of sporting events you shouldn't have to pay a subscription to watch. That principle is just as important today, and making sure it still applies as viewing habits change is work the independent regulator Ofcom is doing now.

But some of the finest sporting moments of the last few years have been in womens' and disability sport – the Paralympics and Invictus Games, Netball Gold at the Commonwealth Games, and England and Scotland womens' football teams qualifying for the 2019 World Cup.

Equality means visibility, and I recognise the progress that has been made in broadcasting more of these events. But whoever we are, we have the right to be inspired by diversity in sport that shows the best in all of us. So we will work with sports bodies, broadcasters, and the wider media to do better. It's 2018 and it's about time.

And we have the capacity not just to put in great sporting performances, but also to put on great sporting events. We showed the world that with the 2012 London Olympics and we will show them again with the 2022 Commonwealth Games here in Birmingham.

And wouldn't it be great to put on a World Cup in style in the UK and Ireland in 2030? If the FAs are ready to bid, we are ready to make it happen.

Because we don't just need to project the United Kingdom to the world, we need the world to come here and see it for themselves. Last year the UK attracted record numbers of visitors and we are predicted to do even better this year.

And, crucially, tourists are going beyond London – record numbers for example going to Scotland, to the North West and here to the West Midlands.

And as hosts of the Great Exhibition of the North and described by the Rough Guides as the number one place in the world to visit in 2018, Newcastle Gateshead welcomed more than 4 million visitors over the summer, including the Cabinet.

But in truth tourism has gone almost unnoticed for years as a major employer and as a major contributor to our economy.

For the sake of the communities up and down our country for whom tourism is essential, I intend to change that, and we will work with the tourism industry to find practical ways for Government to help.

So for the international community, and for our local communities, our culture has a lot to offer. But it also has a lot to offer us as individuals.

When I was 13, I was shy and didn't much like being the centre of attention. I've changed. But that year I was persuaded to take a large part in a school play.

The effect on my self-confidence, on what I felt I could do, was significant and long-lasting – so much so that I feel able to say to you that if I had not stood on that stage then, I would not be standing on this stage now.

I want more young people to have that feeling.

There are many schools and youth theatre groups doing a great job of providing those opportunities, but there are still too many young people, in too many places, who don't have the chance to be part of a production, on stage or behind the scenes.

So working with the Secretary of State for Education, we are going to give them that chance.

In 5 different areas across the country, we will spend £5 million to give thousands more young people the chance to perform on stage at school.

And what they perform matters too. Britain has a remarkable theatrical heritage, the names of our famous playwrights are known the world over. But there are also great British playwrights the world does not yet know, from different parts of the country and from different backgrounds.

I want our young people to know their cultural past, but also to get to know their cultural future – to meet the people, who come from where they come from and who are writing great plays today. So we will help to promote the

work of these new playwrights, and help young people to perform their plays.

Because our culture belongs to us all and it is as strong as it has ever been.

We are proud of our past, but we are prouder still of who we are now and of what we will do next.

We Conservatives are in Government at this pivotal moment in our history. What a challenge, certainly, but also what an opportunity – the chance to design our future.

For centuries Britain led the world in exploration, invention and imagination.

For centuries in the arts, in the written and spoken word, the world looked to these islands for thought and feeling on what it means to be human.

And now, in a century where success will be defined by innovation and creativity, we still lead the world in these things.

So this is not a moment to lose our self-confidence. This is a moment, our moment, to show the world that just as Britain shaped the past, Britain can shape the future.”

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For further information, please contact the Press Office on 020 7984 8121.