

Press release: Digital Strategy to make Britain the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business

- Skills, infrastructure and innovation at the heart of new strategy to support Britain's world-leading digital economy
- Includes a new Digital Skills Partnership and bold new pledges for millions of free digital training opportunities
- Backs the UK digital sectors to invest for the long term and includes measures to help all businesses harness the productivity benefits of digital innovation

More than four million free digital skills training opportunities will be created as part of a [Digital Strategy](#) to make Britain the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business and ensure our digital economy works for everyone.

A pioneering new Digital Skills Partnership will see Government, business, charities and voluntary organisations coming together to make sure people have the right skills for the jobs in their area and are aware of all the digital training opportunities on offer. This Government-led initiative will help both businesses and individuals and make sure no one is left behind.

The strategy includes new commitments, including a plan by Lloyds Banking Group to give face-to-face digital skills training to 2.5 million individuals, charities and small and medium businesses by 2020; plans by Barclays to teach basic coding to 45,000 more children and assist up to one million people with general digital skills and cyber awareness; and a pledge by Google, as part of their commitment of five hours of free digital skills for everyone, to help boost digital skills in seaside towns.

It is part of the Government's ambitions to ensure everyone has the skills they need to flourish in a digitally-driven economy.

The strategy follows the recent modern [Industrial Strategy](#), and will help Britain to build on its strengths to secure a future as a competitive, global nation.

Businesses have played an important role developing the strategy. To capitalise on these new relationships and deliver a thriving, outward-looking digital economy, the strategy also sets out plans to empower innovative

businesses and deliver world-class connectivity. This includes:

- The creation of five international tech hubs in emerging markets to create and develop partnerships between UK companies and local tech firms. These hubs will help provide British businesses with a global competitive edge and drive collaboration on skills, innovation, technology, and research and development. The hubs will be based upon the successful UK-Israel Tech Hub which to date has delivered more than 80 partnerships with a deal value of £62 million.
- A new competition to spark the development of new FinTech products that can support those who struggle to access financial services and provide consumers with the tools they need to manage their finances well. This will build on the UK's existing lead in the FinTech sector, which was worth more than £6.6bn in 2015, and make sure the digital economy works for all, not just the privileged few.
- A commitment to create a Secretary of State-led forum for government and the tech community to work together to spark growth in the digital economy – through innovation and the adoption of digital in the wider economy.
- A Business Connectivity Forum, to be chaired by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, to bring together business organisations, local authorities and communications providers to help businesses access fast, affordable and reliable broadband.
- Confirmation of £1 billion programme to keep Britain at the forefront of digital connectivity, announced at Autumn Statement. This funding will accelerate the development and uptake of next generation digital infrastructure – including full fibre broadband plans and 5G.

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Karen Bradley said:

The UK's world-leading digital sectors are a major driver of growth and productivity, and we are determined to protect and strengthen them.

This Digital Strategy sets a path to make Britain the best place to start and grow a digital business, trial a new technology, or undertake advanced research as part of the Government's plan to build a modern, dynamic and global trading nation.

To do that, we will work closely with businesses and others to make sure the benefits and opportunities are spread across the country so nobody is left behind.

There should be no digital divide – every individual and every business should have the skills and confidence to make the most of digital technology and have easy access to high-quality internet wherever they live, work, travel or learn.

At the heart of the strategy are steps to ensure everyone can develop the skills they need to thrive in an increasingly digital world and measures to help businesses harness the benefits of innovation.

Government has taken the lead in this area and has committed to help adults who lack core digital skills to access training free of charge, similar to the approach taken for literacy and numeracy. The strategy builds on this by establishing a Digital Skills Partnership and, as part of the Digital Strategy, Government has secured the following new pledges from private sector organisations:

- Google will launch a Summer of Skills programme in coastal towns across the UK. It will develop bespoke digital skills training schemes to help boost tourism and growth in seaside towns.
- Lloyds Banking Group is to give face-to-face digital skills training to 2.5 million individuals, small and medium businesses and charities by 2020. The training, as part of its Helping Britain Prosper Plan, will include internet banking.
- Barclays will assist up to 1 million people with general digital skills and cyber awareness in 2017, grow its UK Eagle Lab network by up to 100 per cent, and teach basic coding to 45,000 children.
- BT will expand its Barefoot Computing Project to enable a further 500,000 children to develop early computational thinking skills by the end of the 2017/18 academic year. The scheme helps primary school teachers with no previous computer science background feel confident to teach the new computing science curriculum.
- The HP Foundation will bring a free online learning platform – HP LIFE – to the UK. This will improve business, IT and digital skills for disadvantaged groups in the UK and aims to reach 6,000 new UK users over the next five years.
- Accenture will partner with FutureLearn to develop a new national digital skills programme to boost learning through online collaboration. Through partners, the programme could reach as many as 100,000 people across the UK.

Josh Hardie, CBI Deputy Director-General, said:

UK companies are at the forefront of the digital revolution. The pledges announced by the Government underline businesses' commitment to build the skills we need for a modern economy, as well as tackle barriers to technology adoption.

To uphold our position as a world-leading digital economy businesses, we and the Government need to work together – the strategy's focus on skills, connectivity and innovation provide a useful framework for this.

Gerard Grech, chief executive, Tech City UK, said:

The UK's tech sector is rapidly becoming a global force to reckon with, but we must ensure that we stay ahead by continuing to provide a supportive environment for British startups and digital companies to grow in, especially since other countries are trying to take advantage of our departure from the European Union. In the UK tech sector jobs are being created at twice the rate of the wider economy, and today's Digital Strategy provides an ambitious road map for the industry to continue growing at this rate and building a new economy fit for the future.

Nick Williams, Managing Director, Consumer and Commercial Digital at Lloyds Banking Group, said:

I'm delighted that Lloyds Banking Group, as part of its new Helping Britain Prosper Plan, has made such a significant commitment to improve digital skills in the UK. By working with the Digital Skills Partnership, and our key partners such as Google and The Good Things Foundation, we can help to tackle some of the issues raised by the Government's Digital Strategy. Our commitment to provide face-to-face support will make a huge difference to millions of individuals, small businesses and charities across the UK.

Ronan Harris, Google Managing Director UK & Ireland, said:

We believe that digital can have a transformative impact, no matter where you live and what your job is. Everyone deserves access to the tools and opportunities the web has to offer and that is why we welcome the Government's timely Digital Strategy which ensures the benefits of the digital economy are spread across the country.

We are delighted to be part of the Digital Skills Partnership and will continue to invest in the free skills training offered through the Digital Garage, launch a new programme aiming to help seaside communities, and – as a global first – are launching engineering

apprenticeships, giving young people without a degree the opportunity to join Google's world class software teams.

The strategy also contains new measures to support Britain's world leading AI sector which were announced earlier this week.

- A major AI review led by Wendy Hall and Jérôme Pesenti to identify the critical elements for this exciting technology to thrive and grow in the UK. It will consider how Government and industry could work together to back this technology, with the aim of establishing the potential for a possible sector deal. The UK is already a world-leader in the science underpinning this technology and the sector has the potential to grow further, from early research to commercialisation.
- A funding boost of £17.3 million from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) to support the development of new robotics and artificial intelligence technologies in universities across the UK.

The strategy also builds on the [Government Transformation Strategy](#), launched earlier this month by Minister for the Cabinet Office Ben Gummer, which maps out how Government will transform the relationship between the citizen and the state to improve public services. This has ambitions to make it as easy to renew your passport or report a crime as it is to buy a book online, and aims to sign up to 25 million people onto the Government identity service Verify by 2020.

Media enquiries and interview requests – please contact the DCMS News and Communications team on 020 7211 2210.

Professor Dame Wendy Hall FRS FREng is Regius Professor of Computer Science at the University of Southampton. Wendy is an entrepreneur, and one of the world's leading computer scientists. She was a founding director of the Web Science Research Initiative, now the Web Science Trust, and is the Executive Director of the Web Science Institute at Southampton. She was president of the British Computer Society from 2003-04 and was the first person from outside North America to be elected President of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) from 2008-10. Since 2014, she has served as a commissioner for the Global Commission on Internet Governance and is a non-executive director of Dstl and the Digital Catapult.

Jérôme Pesenti is the CEO of BenevolentTech, the technology division of BenevolentAI, a British technology company using artificial intelligence to accelerate scientific discovery. He is a world-leading pioneer in the commercialisation of AI. He co-founded Vivisimo, a tech firm specialising in text mining and enterprise search engines, which was acquired by IBM. At IBM he became chief scientist of big data, and created and led the development of the Watson Platform – the first comprehensive cloud platform for artificial intelligence.