

Speech: Intellectual Property Minister speaks of the importance of ensuring UK IP remains some of the best in the world

It's a pleasure to be here. M.I.P. is a valued resource across the world and it's a privilege to speak at today's conference.

I've only been in post for 3 months. And I'm in a slightly unusual situation, in that I'm a Minister in 2 departments – the Business Department and the Department for Education.

This means my poor staff are forced to endure something of a nomadic existence in Whitehall. It also means I have a diverse brief – ranging from technology, to universities and space exploration.

Anyone in government – or anyone honest – will tell you that finding your way through a new Ministerial brief is a daunting task.

But not long into the job I had a eureka moment: I realised that one element of my portfolio united all the others.

That intellectual property is the nerve centre of my role; it links research to economic growth, it links the arts to the sciences. And it underpins everything we are trying to achieve across the economy as a whole.

And that means this is an area we have to get right. Which is why I'm committed to protecting and strengthening our IP system

To helping it adjust to the changes we see around us

To talking to experts like you to understand how we can stay ahead

And, ultimately, to ensuring that UK IP remains some of the best in the world.

The importance of IP

It costs well over a billion pounds, on average, to bring a new drug to market. Hollywood films typically cost in excess of 60 million dollars to produce.

What would be the motivation, let alone the justification, if the fruits of your labours weren't your own?

This simple principle demonstrates why IP is central to our plans for the economy.

Last year we published our industrial strategy. A key aim of which is to encourage innovation across the economy.

We're increasing R&D spend to 2.4% of GDP. And we're encouraging the commercialisation of research in our fantastic universities.

This simply wouldn't be achievable without a strong IP system.

Last week I met representatives from Stanford and MIT. Both extraordinary centres of innovation. So much so that venture capitalists are buying-up properties adjacent to campus to ensure their staff are close to the action.

It was clear in that meeting that IP protection is vital if those universities are to retain the talent they need to thrive.

I was recently privileged enough to visit the British Library IP archives and see the original patent of the spinning Jenny – one of the sparks of the industrial revolution.

It was an apt reminder that IP underpinned the economic changes of the past. Just as it will today.

If we are to keep the best minds working in Britain. If we are to attract inward investment. And if we are to build the world's most innovative economy, a strong IP system is key.

The UK IP Framework

Fortunately, the UK has a deserved reputation as a great place to develop and protect IP.

Just last month the US Chamber of Commerce Global IP Centre ranked our IP framework second out of 50 jurisdictions, beaten only by the USA. And we're ranked first in the world for patents by the Taylor Wessing Global IP Index.

But to maintain this position we need to be able to adapt and respond to the changes we see around us.

Before I was a politician, I was an historian.

And what history shows us is that intellectual property evolves, shaped by changes in, politics, technology and markets.

In the seventeenth century as Parliament and the monarchy tussled for power, control of patents was transferred from the King to the courts.

2 centuries later, we saw the first major international IP agreements, in response to the expansion of communication technologies and the explosion of global trade.

Today, once again, we're in the midst of significant technological and political change. And IP must adapt.

Innovation, technology and IP

Firstly, as the technological revolution continues to unfold, we need to ensure we understand its impact on IP.

So I'm pleased to announce that this summer we will host conference with the World Intellectual Property Organization, considering the implications of artificial intelligence – or AI – for IP.

But we also need to help our IP systems to respond to the changes we see around us

Both so it can deal with the issues raised by technologies like block chain and AI, whilst supporting innovation.

And so our Intellectual Property Office – or IPO – remains at the cutting edge.

So, last year, for example, we announced research funding to look at how AI can modernise the process of filing Intellectual Property Rights.

And we continue to talk to experts.

I've personally visited our IPO offices in both London and Newport to meet with staff and listen to their plans for the future.

And later this year I'll organise roundtables with key IP stakeholders to understand your views on what we need to do to stay ahead – I hope I'll see many of you there.

Brexit

But for a nation like ours, with a long and proud history of trading with the world, IP will always be as much an international as a domestic matter.

And of course, one of the complex international challenges the UK has faced in recent years is our withdrawal from the European Union.

This has created a period of huge uncertainty. But, throughout, our priority has been to provide clarity. And to ensure a smooth and effective IP system, regardless of the outcome of the negotiations and parliamentary wrangling.

So although we are focused on delivering the deal negotiated with the EU, we have prepared for all eventualities – including no deal.

I've personally taken 4 Statutory Instruments through the Commons in the past few weeks – one of them just yesterday. These ensure we have a fully functioning IP statute book when the UK leaves the EU.

So I am confident that we will continue to have one of the world's best IP regimes, whatever the outcome. And that the transition will be a smooth one.

International work

As a foundation of global trade, IP plays a crucial role as we leave the EU and forge new relations across the globe.

So we are encouraging consistent and effective systems to help British firms do business internationally

Particularly, through our international attaché network, which operates around the world – from India to Brazil. Promoting respect for intellectual property. Encouraging cross-border collaboration. And helping UK businesses.

Last year alone the network helped British businesses resolve issues worth almost one hundred million pounds. And now we are expanding the network, strengthening our international reach.

We have a new post in North America. And we are increasing resources in China and South East Asia – helping UK firms to make the most of these expanding and lucrative markets.

And I will be visiting China myself next month to discuss important IP issues with my Chinese counterparts, and others.

Conclusion

When I took over this job at the beginning of the year, I was aware that my predecessors had dubbed it the best in government. 8 weeks in, I have to agree.

We live in exciting times. Times of technological revolution and global shifts.

I am immensely proud of the IPO – the work they do, their ability to adapt, and their appetite to succeed in a complex and changing environment.

And I am well aware that this work is enhanced by many of you here – our expert partners – sharing insights and ideas. I'm very grateful to you all and I want us to keep talking.

Because while there are undoubtedly further challenges ahead, I am confident that, together, we will continue to provide one of the world's best IP systems.

Encouraging innovation and investment, attracting the best talent, and, ultimately, creating the economy our country needs.

Thank you.