

Speech: Matt Hancock speaking at the launch of Tech Nation

Good morning.

It's a great pleasure to be here and it's a very exciting day to mark Tech City UK and Tech North evolving into Tech Nation and the launch of this fourth Tech Nation report .

The name says a lot. This rebranding shows Tech Nation's commitment to being the sort of dynamic organisation that we've got used to round here in east London, but also spreading the benefits right across the country as a whole.

I warmly welcome this move and the progress you have been making in recent years.

Today's milestone is a great opportunity to step back and think about what we're doing, and to keep up this momentum for the UK as a place to start and grow a tech business.

Because it is as vital now as it's ever been. The impact over the last decade has been huge.

The tech sector has been growing over two-and-a-half times faster than the rest of the economy; but there is much more to do. There are challenges we must face and people snapping at our heels.

And along with Tech Nation, we are working regionally, nationally and globally so the UK is ready for these challenges that lie ahead.

Regional

Tech Nation and its predecessors, have been championing regional tech clusters since 2014.

And I am thrilled with the ambitious plans to help 40,000 entrepreneurs and 4,000 start-ups to scale and to deliver this support directly into a dozen key cities around the UK.

And the crucial Government aim, stated clearly in our Digital Strategy, is making sure that the benefits of growth and the tech sector work for everyone in our country.

We are committed to encouraging investment and developing tech clusters right across the UK.

It is easy, especially here in the centre of London, to focus on the prosperity that we see here in London, and of course this is mission critical. Nobody gains by doing down our world beating capital.

But we need to have a full-spectrum approach, so everybody can participate and get the benefits. And so far, there have been some brilliant results.

London is a fantastic haven for European tech investment. But did you know this? Nearly 70 per cent of investment into the UK tech sector last year was in regional clusters beyond the capital.

The benefits of digital for local economies are incredibly clear – 16 towns now show a higher proportion of digital tech employment than the UK average.

And over 1.5 million people across the country belong to more than 3,000 informal tech meetup groups.

That's people up and down this country working together to develop their businesses, and as they do so, powering their local economies.

So I'm really encouraged that Tech Nation is going to take this work to the next level and provide some of that entrepreneurial juice to expand their programmes even further, to truly connect right across the cities of the UK.

National

As a nation, our digital tech sector is in great shape, supported by the fantastic work Tech Nation has done and the engagement with all of you here.

But to attract more investment and support, we need to fly even higher in the future, and we need to shout loud about this success.

After all, the tech sector nationally is booming and the numbers speak for themselves.

Over £100 billion added to the UK economy in 2016 and real opportunities for investment. After Silicon Valley, London ranks as the second most connected place for tech in the whole world.

And you can rest assured we are firmly committed to maintaining this thriving tech sector and this energy.

Because we want the UK to be the location of choice for tech innovation and investment – so we can build our world-leading digital economy.

Our Digital Strategy, launched about 15 months ago, sets out the key pillars of how we are putting that into practice.

It's about making sure that nationally there's great infrastructure. This means rolling out the existing infrastructure, but also unlocking the potential of full fibre and 5G.

Second, making sure the skills needed are there to fully engage with the digital world.

A full spectrum approach, from people getting on the internet for the first time, which now includes over 90% of the population, all the way through to

the highest end skills and capabilities and beyond.

From making coding in the curriculum compulsory at school age, through to supporting a more flexible labour market and expanding digital training for adults, so we have a far-reaching programme to support digital skills.

Third, making sure the UK is the safest place to live and work online. Not least through the National Cyber Security Programme and it is great to see people from the upcoming London Cyber Innovation Centre here.

All of these things mark us out as an incredible destination for tech.

Part of our task is to pull off the tricky balance between ensuring we make the UK a safe place to be online, whilst also being unambiguous about our enthusiasm and support for innovation.

And for making sure that we use the freedoms that this amazing technology brings.

And I want Tech Nation to be both conveners and cheerleaders – encouraging investment and also telling the world what our tech sector can do.

I want everybody here to talk to the Government about what more we can do to make the UK a great place to grow a digital business.

As someone who started in a tech company, I know that answers to this questions are not only to be found in Whitehall but are to be found in conversations with you as you grow your businesses.

Asking the questions. What can we do to make your lives easier? And how can we help you to expand?

Global

The Tech Nation report has quickly been established as an invaluable industry resource.

And this year's report confirms we are well placed to achieve our goal of making the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business.

It has also been helpful in identifying where our strengths lie.

One of those important strengths is in Fintech and AI. We and Tech Nation are doing a huge amount to cultivate AI.

And travelling to America and India in the last couple of weeks, people have already noticed the effort and cold hard cash we have put into driving its development.

The nature of tech is collaborative. But having said all that I still want the UK to be the leader...

So we'll work with you and Tech Nation to make sure this happens.

I'm sure you all know that research already ranks the UK as the most AI ready country in the world.

That's to say we're the best prepared to seize and exploit the amazing potential of this transformative technology.

But we are a medium sized country and the US, China, India and other larger countries are working hard to make sure they too are leading.

This is not an opportunity we are prepared to let slip. The investment from Government is deadly serious and crucially it can only be done in partnership, with you, in the private sector.

You may have seen last month brought the fantastic news that the British cybersecurity company, Darktrace, whose "immune system" is powered by AI, have become the latest unicorn, when they hit a valuation of over a billion dollars.

We should all take confidence from Darktrace and its success.

And we are seeing this dominance in FinTech too. There are now more people working in UK Fintech than in New York – or in Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia combined.

We have real strengths in bitcoin, cryptocurrencies and in crowdfunding.

And this spirit of innovation and enterprise is exactly what we need. To work with other nations at a time when agreements and frameworks on new technologies will become more important than ever.

And especially as we leave the EU, we are determined to seize many opportunities around the world, as part of becoming a truly Global Britain.

Open and outward looking. Engaging with the world and gregarious.

And to do that, we need the best tech talent from home and abroad. Making sure that we train people here at home, but also attracting the brightest and best.

We have doubled the number of exceptional talent visas. We have met with technology experts to make sure the processes are as efficient as possible.

While we are updating immigration rules so that world-leading scientists and researchers endorsed as 'exceptional talent' can apply for settlement after three years in this country.

The countries and economies that succeed in this digital world are those that are outward-looking and forward-looking and that is the approach we will take as we leave the EU.

Conclusion

I am determined that the UK will be the best place in the world to become a

digital citizen.

Because tech is a real force for good.

It makes our services better and our products faster.

It creates wider benefits for communities across the UK.

We can't do this alone in Government, just as private companies can't do it alone either.

The answer lies in working together to create the conditions for success and that's why Tech Nation is such an asset.

You've been driving the creation of jobs. The development of skills and improvement of productivity.

It's great for our economy and it is great for our society too.

And every single person in this room has their part to play.

You're part of a Great British renaissance and it's a joy and honour to be part of it too.

Thank you very much.