

Speech: PM speech opening London Tech Week: 10 June 2019

Thank you. I am delighted to be at Here East to launch London Tech Week.

Of all the events I go to as Prime Minister few I think have the energy and excitement of the week ahead – and few tell us so much about the power of technology to transform the very world we live in.

How we harness that technological change and how we support you as pioneers of that technology is fundamental not only to the future of our entire economy – but the vision that I set out on my first day as Prime Minister – to build a country that works for everyone.

I profoundly believe that technology can change people's lives for the better.

And indeed over the course of my own lifetime I have seen extraordinary advances.

A year after I was born, the first ever satellite – Sputnik 1 – was launched into orbit around the earth, and several years later President Kennedy declared the US mission for man to land on the moon. Now, we have left the outer edges of our solar system.

In the 1960s, computers were the size of rooms and not very fast. Now we all walk around with an incredibly sophisticated computer in our hands.

And when I was working at the Association for Payment Clearing Services in the 1990s, I remember we were looking at how great it would be, rather than cash, to use a single card to pay for everything.

It took a while for that technology to catch on – but last year there were 7.4 billion contactless transactions, up nearly a third from the year before.

As Bill Gates once said: “We always overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next ten.”

And we should not underestimate the scale of change over the next ten years, and the dramatic ways in which it is set to transform our world.

It will bring opportunities for high-skilled and high-paid jobs in new sectors and new industries – the like of which we can only begin to imagine.

And I am determined that we should seize these opportunities and spread the benefits of this future growth to every part of our country.

But along with the opportunities that technological change will bring, is also uncertainty.

We face profound challenges over the changing nature of work and what it will mean for the jobs of the future and the skills our young people will need to do them.

We face profound questions about how we generate our future energy supplies in a sustainable way; how we travel; and how we harness new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence while ensuring that it cannot be exploited by those with malevolent intentions. So that technology is the force for progress that we all know it can be.

And the only way to build an economy and country that works for everyone is to be at the forefront of working to answer those questions.

That's why I have put harnessing the power of technology to seize these opportunities and meet these challenges at the heart of our modern industrial strategy.

It is a strategic long-term commitment – a partnership between business and government to make Britain the best place in the world in which to start or grow a business.

It gets the fundamentals right – investing in infrastructure at local and national level, delivering the biggest ever long-term increase in R&D in our history. With a 2.4% of GDP target for R&D that is not about a single parliamentary term, but rather a decades-long commitment meant to transform the whole economy, and harness the opportunities presented by emergent technologies and new industries.

It invests in equipping people with the skills they need – and the skills you need as dynamic tech-driven businesses – so you can succeed in an ever changing and ever more competitive global economy.

And crucially it seeks to get us on the front foot in seizing the opportunities of technology and meeting the four grand challenges of our time – driving clean growth, breaking new ground in methods of future mobility, meeting the needs of an ageing population, and leading the world in Artificial Intelligence and Data.

And that is why we have set defining missions:

To use new technologies and modern construction practices to at least halve the energy usage of new buildings by 2030.

To put the UK at the forefront of the design and manufacturing of zero emission vehicles and for all new cars and vans to be effectively zero emission by 2040.

To establish the world's first net-zero carbon industrial cluster by 2040 and at least one low-carbon cluster by 2030.

To ensure that people can enjoy five extra, independent years of life by 2035.

And to use Artificial Intelligence and Data to transform the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of chronic disease by 2030.

And we are backing these ambitions with action. Take Quantum as an example.

It is set to have a profound impact on our everyday lives.

Quantum devices might be able to see round corners.

Quantum processors could model chemical reactions that would be beyond any existing supercomputer. This technology could transform computing, imaging and communications. We cannot put a limit on its potential – just as we could never have estimated how far and fast the Internet would transform our lives.

The UK is already a global leader in Quantum, but I want to do more.

So today we are investing over £150m towards this new technology, including how we can unlock its commercial value, and secure the benefits for the UK economy.

In areas like this where the UK leads, we must also promote what we do around the world, and strike partnerships in research and best practice with key international partners.

Because while we are not alone in identifying the Challenges that every other country will also have to grapple with – we can be at the forefront in finding answers.

Delivering our Industrial Strategy internationally can have a real impact at home. It will drive UK exports, secure inward investment and mean local companies can expand into new global markets.

To support this, we will launch future economy trade and partnership missions to world regions, each focused on one of our Industrial Strategy Grand Challenges. The first four of these will take place this year and act as a catalyst for sustained engagement on issues of trade, cutting edge research and the future of public policy.

Because strengthening our knowledge networks will ensure we stay on the front foot.

This is about backing Britain for the long-term.

With Government playing an active role: working to provide the eco-system in which innovation can flourish.

There is no part of that vision for our future success that does not involve the people in this room. Because even now it seems an anomaly to talk about a “tech” sector, as something separate from the rest of the economy. Digital technology – like earlier revolutions such as the printed word, or electricity – is rapidly becoming integral to everything else we do.

And I am incredibly proud that the UK is at the heart of that revolution.

Already we are one of the best places in the world to start and grow a tech business. British Tech is growing over one and a half times faster than the rest of the economy, adding more than one hundred and thirty billion pounds to our economy every year.

We have a first-rate financial sector eager to invest, and last year tech venture investment was the highest in Europe. Our regulatory environment is second to none.

We are home to extraordinary talent with the largest tech community in Europe. And when WhatsApp recently announced it will be opening a London office – it referenced the cosmopolitan nature of our workforce as a major reason in this decision.

One of the great attractions of our business environment here in the UK, is that our consumers are innovative and always keen to try new things out. That is why we lead the world in online commerce, and why contactless payment in this country has grown so quickly.

And of course, while we are here to celebrate London Tech Week, you can find tech thriving up and down the country: from gaming in Dundee and “Silicon Suburb” in Edinburgh, to fast-growing clusters in Manchester, Bristol, Bath and beyond.

Oxford and Cambridge have outperformed Paris in producing ten unicorns, while Manchester – with five – has produced as many as Barcelona and Madrid combined.

And it is fantastic that tech companies around the world are backing Britain today, with news of further investment totalling £1.2 billion. I am looking forward to meeting a number of these key investors later on, as well as the leaders of some of the UK’s biggest tech start-ups.

British tech is thriving.

But if we are going to maintain our position as a global leader, our challenge is how we develop British Tech and make it even better.

We want this to be the place everyone thinks of – and comes to – first when they want to develop their world-changing tech ideas.

This is a challenge shared between industry and Government.

You tell us what matters most is building a competitive environment where you can thrive, and access to talent.

I want to make sure Britain stays the best place in Europe to launch and grow a start-up.

So I am delighted that leading figures from the tech community – including Cindy Rose – have agreed to undertake an industry-led Tech Competitiveness Study, reporting later this year.

It will consider how to build on the UK's competitive advantage, and what we can do better.

I've heard from businesses that we should set up a major new hub, or series of hubs, for tech – one-stop shops where international investors and UK businesses can connect effectively with the sector.

And the study will look closely at the case for this too.

On talent, we want the brightest and the best to come to the UK.

Our future immigration policy will clearly be at the heart of this.

So that's why in the immigration White Paper, we committed to looking at how ambitious start-ups can bring in skilled workers, taking into account the particular needs and circumstances of the tech industry.

The Immigration Minister will use her roundtable this week to engage with you further on this issue, and we are also talking directly to countries like Canada and Denmark to understand best practice.

We also know that delays to hiring skilled migrant workers can hold back business – so that is why in the White Paper we set an ambition to significantly improve the overall processing time to 10-15 working days, up there with the best systems in the world.

But talent is more than just about mobility – it's about home-grown skills too.

And that's why we've made coding compulsory at primary school.

And it's why we have invested £100 million for up to one thousand new AI PhDs and launched a new prestigious fellowship scheme for top AI researchers.

Today, I can announce we are going further.

We are creating up to 2,500 places in AI and data masters conversion courses around the country, starting next year.

These courses will help people who have originally trained in other degree disciplines to contribute to the ongoing AI revolution.

As part of this, we will fund up to 1,000 scholarships to ensure we open up these opportunities to everyone, no matter what your background.

And as Government opens up doors for people across the country, I want to see the sector do more to reach out to diverse groups, where I believe there is huge untapped potential.

Getting talent right is crucial for the future of the sector.

But, to be truly competitive globally, we need to look wider than talent too.

Creating the right conditions for growth also means we have a framework that

inspires confidence. I firmly believe the right regulation is what makes capitalism work.

It's been true of previous technological revolutions.

Both Government, and the sector as it becomes more mature, now see smart regulation as part of a thriving digital economy, rather than a threat to innovation.

There are two ways in which we need to make this technological revolution work in the UK – how we create a fair market, and how we protect citizens.

I want to thank Professor Jason Furman for his excellent work showing how we can boost competition in digital markets.

And I am pleased that Professor Furman has today agreed that he will advise on the next phase of work on how we can implement his recommendation to create a new Digital Markets Unit.

Building a strong environment for business also means ensuring we maintain the public's trust in a rapidly changing environment.

We all agree there are legitimate concerns about how technology is used, and Government has a role to play in setting standards for industry.

Our Online Harms White Paper, published earlier this year, sets out our approach to protecting citizens, while maintaining an environment where business can thrive.

And to get it right, we want to work with you – and I am pleased that industry has been working thoughtfully with both the Digital and Home Secretaries on the details.

Our response to online harms, though, is not just about how Government and business come together.

It's also about how you work together as an industry.

I was struck at last month's Extremism Summit in Paris at how powerful it was to have the world's top companies coming together with a joint statement of action.

And I want to see this spirit of cooperation continue as we face both the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Because today as we sit on the cusp of the next great industrial revolution, we have the opportunity to work together and ensure that the advances we see transform our world for the better, and for the benefit of everyone.

Government will back you all the way.

But it will also take your talent.

And if ever we needed any more evidence of the energy and creativity that

exists here in the UK – then we only need to take a look around us at where we are today.

A home to exciting businesses and innovative enterprises – at the very place which broadcast to the world the amazing success story of the 2012 Olympics.

Your ingenuity, your expertise and your vision are what are going to propel us to Britain's success stories of the future.

You are the reason why Britain is home to some of the most exciting tech businesses in the world.

So let us work together, and create a Tech Nation that truly is worlds apart.