

# The UK has a vital role to play in leading the global fourth industrial revolution

[This article appeared in CityAM on 28 October 2019.](#)

For nearly a year, my mayoral programme – Shaping Tomorrow’s City Today – has promoted UK innovation and technology, addressed social and digital exclusion, and championed digital skills.

And during my recent business delegation visit to Kenya, I saw the great potential that technological innovation offers to individuals and communities seeking financial empowerment.

Over the last 12 months, I have had many such glimpses of a bright digital future.

In Estonia, it was the power of augmented reality to make teaching more interactive. In Indonesia, it was a motorcycle ride-hailing app to improve urban transport. Around the world, the fourth industrial revolution is well under way.

On my recent visit to Nairobi, alongside the Department for International Development, I was able to announce £10m of UK aid to support a local catalyst fund. This will help local fintech companies to connect with UK and international investors.

I met many local startups: one is making it safer and more affordable to cook with clean gas, while another combines agricultural data and behavioural analytics to help farmers know how to better plan their financial year.

With the Prime Minister hosting the UK-Africa Investment Summit early next year, the UK has the opportunity to offer its expertise and backing to exciting new enterprises like these.

In doing so, we can forge partnerships across Africa that turbocharge national economies, create thousands of jobs, and enrich lives all over the continent, while building a relationship of mutual prosperity.

Shaping Tomorrow’s City Today has also focused on digital and social inclusion in the UK, through widening social mobility and developing digital skills. The skills gap is already costing the UK economy billions of pounds each year, while more than 11m UK adults lack the vital skills needed to make the most of new technology.

That’s why the “future.now” initiative, launched earlier this month, is so important. This coalition of leading companies, digital skills providers, and charities is working with the government to empower everyone to thrive in a digital UK.

Backed by more than 40 members and our six founding partners – Accenture, BT, City of London Corporation, Good Things Foundation, Lloyds Banking Group and Nominet – future.now will reach millions of people across the country with the best in digital skills training.

I've seen for myself the relentless pace of digitisation across the global economy. It's becoming ever more difficult to distinguish between today and tomorrow. I've also seen how businesses and societies across the world are already mastering innovation and technology to shape a better and fairer global economy.

The startling growth of the UK's tech, media, and creative sectors – as well as our reputation for innovation in financial services – mean that we have a vital role to play in the fourth industrial revolution across the globe.

As my mayoralty comes to its conclusion, it is my hope – and expectation – that the UK will continue to play a leading role.