

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.

Speech: Belfast Partners launch event

Thank you for inviting me to speak at the inaugural Belfast-London Network event, I am very grateful for the invitation.

Belfast Partners is an exciting initiative aiming to showcase all that Belfast has to offer across the globe.

And it makes sense for it to begin in London, reinforcing and strengthening already established links between these two great cities.

Belfast has a long and illustrious economic history, from the turn of the 19th Century, when it was the largest linen producing country in the world, or from when it housed the world's largest shipyard.

And today Belfast has a significant role to play in growing the economy across Northern Ireland.

Of course there are already significant trades from the City that flow through Belfast.

In finance, Citi Bank, which established a Belfast presence in 2004 to support its London offices, now employs around 2000 people in a range of activities.

And last year, Tullett Prebon, one of the world's leading interdealer brokers, announced plans to create 300 new Belfast-based IT jobs. In legal services, Allen & Overy, one of the world's largest international law firms, has pledged to create over 48 jobs in Belfast by 2019, building on the success of the operation it has built there since 2011.

While Herbert Smith Freehills, one of the oldest and most established firms in the City of London, has over 200 staff in Belfast, including qualified lawyers and legal assistants.

I could go on.

It is clear Belfast is already providing important and valuable support to established London businesses.

And there is much too London can learn from Belfast, where the city is already a world leader in areas such as cyber security.

Belfast, and Northern Ireland more generally – ably led by its Universities – also has much to offer in the field of science, research and innovation, a key pillar of the Industrial Strategy.

And this has already been recognised by Government.

In a clear example of the potential this Government sees in Northern Ireland,

Innovate UK, the UK's innovation agency, has embedded a business manager within Invest NI in Belfast, to help find and drive the scientific and technological innovations that will help to grow the NI, and UK, economy.

This Government is serious about developing the economy across the country.

We now have the highest number of people in employment on record and the UK's economic deficit is down by almost two thirds.

In 2016, the UK economy grew faster than any other major advanced economy across the globe and the Bank of England has positively revised its economic projections for this year.

And this growth is reflected across the county.

In Northern Ireland, there are now almost 54,000 more people in work than in 2010 and the number of people in receipt of unemployment benefit is almost 50% lower than at its peak, and has now fallen for nine months in a row.

But this is not enough.

Much more remains to be done to realise the Prime Minister's vision of an economy that works for everyone and not just a privileged elite.

For businesses, and I know many of you will have a vested interest here, the National Productivity Investment Fund will add £23 billion in high value investment, including bringing significant benefits to Northern Ireland.

And the modern Industrial Strategy, currently out to consultation, aims to build an economy that will grow from strength to strength, not just for years but for decades to come, increasing productivity and improving living standards across the country as a whole.

I am already engaging with my Business Advisory Group to ensure the interests of Northern Ireland are best represented, and I encourage everyone here to respond to the Green Paper to make your voice heard.

The Government also remains committed to the devolution of corporation tax to the Northern Ireland Executive.

The legislation is ready and waiting, on the statute books, but it can only be activated if there is a stable, functioning government that is demonstrating sustainable finances.

That is why making politics work in Northern Ireland so important.

Belfast City Council is the cornerstone sponsor of Belfast Partners, and I know the Council's CEO Suzanne Wylie, who will be speaking shortly, has ambitious plans for the City.

I will let Suzanne say more, but the Council has a vision for growing Belfast economically and boosting the quality of its public services.

However, many of the levers for realising this vision sit with the devolved Executive.

That is why it is so important for political leaders to come together after the election this week and work for the good of everyone in Northern Ireland.

I remain in no doubt that Northern Ireland is best served by strong, accountable and effective devolved government.

This is a message that I hope can be echoed from here tonight.

On the topic of our withdrawal from the EU, I fully understand that businesses need certainty to prosper.

That is why we are moving as quickly as possible to trigger Article 50 no later than the end of March.

The Prime Minister recognises the impact uncertainty can have, and has moved to very clearly set out the UK's key objectives for the upcoming negotiations:

To control our own laws and end the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice;

To strengthen the precious Union between the four countries of our United Kingdom;

To maintain the Common Travel Area with Ireland;

To control immigration from Europe while continuing to attract the brightest and best to study and work here;

To guarantee rights for British nationals in the EU and EU nationals living here;

To protect workers' rights;

To pursuing an ambitious free trade agreement with the EU, outside the single market but allowing for the freest possible trade in goods and services between Britain and EU member states;

To strike new trade agreements with other countries around the world;

To keep the UK as the best place for science and innovation;

To continue to co-operate in the fight against crime and terrorism;

And finally, to ensure a smooth, orderly Brexit with an agreement about our future partnership by the time the two year Article 50 process has concluded, followed by a phased process of implementation.

Leaving the EU now offers us an opportunity to forge a new role for ourselves in the world: to negotiate our own trade agreements and to be a positive and powerful force for free trade.

We will continue to promote the wonderful exports that Northern Ireland has to offer and highlight that Northern Ireland has great potential as a base for exports to the EU.

And, as we have made clear from the moment the people decided to leave the EU, we will be steadfast in our determination to recognise Northern Ireland's unique economic, social and political context.

One of the central tenets of the Government's Industrial Strategy is driving growth and prosperity from London and the South-East out across the whole country.

I hope this event will spark the conversations and ideas that champion the benefits of Northern Ireland as a place to do business, enhancing partnerships wherever they already exist and igniting new relationships.

I understand that the London-Belfast partnership is just the beginning, and I look forward to partnerships growing between Belfast and other cities across the globe.

We must move to capitalise on the skills available in Northern Ireland, growing science and innovation, boosting further our tourist industry and encouraging the flourishing digital and creative industries.

We know through companies like First Derivatives, with headquarters in Newry and employing 1700 people worldwide, business can grow and prosper in Northern Ireland.

Hopefully you can make the connections here tonight, and at future events, to let others see what we see when we talk about the potential of Northern Ireland and the success story that Northern Ireland can continue to be

[Speech: "This is Russia's seventh veto on Syria in five years."](#)

Thank you Mr President.

I am appalled that Russia has vetoed this resolution today and I am surprised and disappointed that China has chosen to join them – at complete odds with the principles of non-proliferation that both China and Russia claim to support so strongly.

As permanent members of this Council and as Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Russia and China have a clear responsibility to take action against the use and proliferation of chemical weapons. By vetoing this resolution today, they have undermined the credibility of this Council and of

the international rules preventing the use of these barbaric weapons.

In Security Council resolution 2118 we all agreed – Russia and China included – that any use of chemical weapons by anyone in the Syrian Arab Republic will lead to this Council imposing measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Thanks to those vetoes today, we have failed to do so.

This wasn't a political text. It was a technical resolution in response to an impartial and factual report by the Security Council-mandated Joint UN-OPCW Investigative Mechanism. It was a report we all called for. It was an investigation we all supported.

But instead of backing the resolution, we have seen yet again that Russia is prepared to abuse its veto power to stand by a regime that has no regard for its own people. That has no regard for the most basic rules of war or international treaties; a regime that has indiscriminately bombed and besieged its own people. A regime that has turned chemical weapons on its own population, killing six year old children like Mohammed.

This is Russia's seventh veto on Syria in five years. What further evidence do we need that Russia will always prioritise the Asad regime over the protection of the Syrian people? Well, today we have learnt that they will plunge to new depths; that they would rather cover up for Asad then prevent the further use and proliferation of chemical weapons.

The Russians will say this resolution is based on weak or flawed evidence. But the JIM was a fully independent UN mechanism which Russia created. Russia agreed the methodology the JIM would apply. And yet when they came up with an answer Russia didn't like, all of a sudden, there's a problem.

Russia's answer is that Syria should conduct its own investigation. The idea that the guilty party should investigate itself is absurd and it is clearly recorded that the JIM's investigation has been obstructed by the Syrian regime.

Russia will claim the JIM doesn't meet a legal standard of evidence. Well, it was never intended to. As we all agreed in SCR 2235 it was meant to examine the available evidence in an impartial manner and come to a conclusion.

Russia will claim that we should be focusing on Daesh's use of chemical weapons. But we already have robust and comprehensive measures in place to combat Daesh. The draft resolution would have reaffirmed our commitment to those measures and reiterated our condemnation of Daesh.

Russia will say that supporting this resolution will disrupt the Syrian political process. Well, this is simply not true. The United Kingdom remains committed to working with Russia, and everyone else, through the UN to help the Syrian people reach a lasting political settlement.

But not taking action against chemical weapons use undermines confidence in the international community's ability to tackle flagrant violations of international law. It undermines confidence and trust of ordinary Syrians affected by these horrific attacks. This is no way to build the right

conditions for successful political talks.

Despite Russia and China's actions Mr President, I want to reiterate our thanks to the JIM for their work and to international partners who helped the JIM. Because of that tireless work, we know without doubt that the Asad regime and Daesh used toxic chemicals as weapons against civilians in Syria.

Those responsible for such attacks remain free and unpunished to this day. Today we had a chance to step up and begin to end that impunity. Instead, Russia and China have let down the people of Marea, the people of Talamenes, Sarmin and Qaminas, and the wider international community that seeks justice for those horrific attacks.

Without a clear response to these flagrant abuses of international law, the Asad regime is only going to be emboldened to preserve its chemical weapons capabilities and to continue to use those chemical weapons. We should all be concerned by reports of further chemical weapons use in Syria, most recently in Aleppo and East Hama last year.

And in response to these vetoes, Daesh too will surely only be encouraged to continue using chemical weapons – something that Russia claims to oppose. And the longer term credibility and utility of the Chemical Weapons Convention will also suffer.

But the United Kingdom will not let Russia's actions today stop us from working with international partners to see justice for the victims, and to prevent the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere. This includes the international, impartial and independent mechanism on Syria agreed by the General Assembly last year. We must be able to demonstrate that the international system works, and that we are able to bring those responsible for using chemical weapons to account. Anything less is not an option.

Thank you.

Speech: "Will we take action against those who use chemical weapons in Syria? It's that simple."

Thank you Mr President.

This Council is about to be asked a simple question. Will we take action against those who use chemical weapons in Syria? It's that simple.

Will we take action on behalf of those whose lives have been destroyed by these senseless weapons?

Will we take action for people like Mohammed Abdul-Razzuk Alhashash?

Thanks to the testimony of those on the ground, we know that Mohammed was admitted to hospital at 1:30 PM on the 21st of April 2014. A couple of hours earlier a Syrian regime helicopter had dropped two containers on his home town of Talmenes, exposing him and many others to a yellow toxic gas.

After the attack Mohammed was unable to breathe. He lost consciousness. On arrival at hospital he was intubated under mechanical ventilation. His face was red. Pink foam poured from his mouth. His pupils were dilated. His lungs were crackling. His heartbeat and breathing stopped. CPR was performed but all attempts to revive him failed. Mohammad died at two o'clock. He was six years old.

Mohammed is why we are here today. We are here in this Chamber to begin to bring justice for him, for his family and for the hundreds, if not thousands of other Syrians whose stories are all too similar to his own.

This isn't about politics. At its core this isn't really about the JIM or the OPCW. Forget the acronyms. This isn't even about Syria. This is about taking a stand when children are poisoned. It's that simple. It's about taking a stand when civilians are maimed and murdered with toxic weapons; weapons used in complete disregard for the international rules and norms that we all claim to uphold.

So in a moment when we are asked to vote on this resolution, I hope that all members of this Council will lift their hands in favour of this text – and do so with Mohammed in their minds.

Thank you.

[News story: Foreign Secretary responds to UNSC vote on chemical weapons use in Syria](#)

It is deeply disappointing that Russia and China have blocked the UN Security Council from taking action in response to the appalling use of chemical weapons in Syria. The Security Council's own investigation has found attacks were committed by the Syrian regime and Daesh on the Syrian people. Despite support from the majority of the Security Council, Russia, along with China, has chosen to prevent action.

Along with our international partners, the UK will continue to seek justice for the victims of these heinous chemical weapons attacks and work to deter the further use of chemical weapons in Syria and elsewhere.