

DIGITAL ECONOMY COUNCIL
1600-1700, Wednesday 7th July 2021 (virtual meeting)
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

Attendees:

- The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP (Co-Chair) Secretary of State, DCMS
- Dan Korski CBE Public
- David Dunn Sunderland Software City
- Debbie Forster MBE Tech Talent Charter
- Deborah Okenla YSYS
- Dom Hallas Coadec
- Eileen Burbidge MBE Passion Capital
- Gerard Grech Tech Nation
- Helen Margetts OBE Oxford Internet Institute
- Jeremy Silver Digital Catapult
- Joel Gladwin Digital Policy Advisor, DCMS
- John Boumphrey Amazon
- Juergen Maier The Northern Powerhouse
Partnership
- Julian David Tech UK
- Olly Benzecry CBE Accenture
- Poppy Gustafsson OBE Darktrace
- Priya Lakhani OBE CENTURY Tech
- Ron Kalifa OBE Network International
- Ronan Harris Google
- Sabby Gill Thomas International
- Tabitha Goldstaub CogX
- Tera Allas CBE McKinsey
- Wendy Tan White X, Alphabet's Moonshot Factory

Apologies:

- Amanda Solloway MP Minister for Science, Research
and
- Innovation, BEIS
- Graham Stuart MP Minister for Exports, DIT
- Cindy Rose OBE Microsoft
- Nicola Mendelsohn Facebook
- Phil Smith OBE Digital Skills Partnership
- Reshma Sohoni MBE Seedcamp
- Saul Klein CBE LocalGlobe

Senior officials:

- Susannah Storey DCMS
- Blake Bower DCMS
- Rebecca Stephens DCMS
- Oriel Petry DIT

Item 1: Secretary of State Opening Remarks

- The Secretary of State welcomed members to the second meeting of the new Digital Economy Council, and began with a reflection on progression against the government's [Ten Tech Priorities](#) announced in March. Since then:
 - The UK hosted the G7, at which governments agreed an historic deal to tackle tax avoidance globally and level the international playing field;
 - The government backed the Tech Zero Task Force announced at CogX in June, to speed up the UK's race to net zero with the tech sector leading the charge;
 - Government responded to the consultation of the [National Data Strategy](#), setting out in further detail how we will unlock the power of data to tackle COVID-19 and the challenges of tomorrow.
- Officials from DIT and BEIS updated on the latest digital policy work in their departments:
 - Upcoming UK trade agreements with Australia, Singapore and the EEA countries include landmark digital provisions, which demonstrate the UK's pioneering role in pushing the boundaries of digital trade.
 - The Innovation Strategy will be published shortly and will articulate the UK's ambition to become a global leader in innovation and R&D investment. The strategy has identified seven key strategic technology areas where the UK must secure a competitive advantage to enable the UK economy to prosper.

Item 2: Tech and the Levelling Up Agenda

- The Secretary of State opened the discussion by highlighting that the UK tech sector is growing at a faster rate than the economy as a whole, and it has a huge part to play in driving the government's levelling up agenda.
- The Secretary of State thanked Tech Nation for supporting growth in all the UK's regions, and the UK Tech Cluster Group's *12 Clusters of Tech* reports for shining a light on some of the businesses across the UK who are part of the tech ecosystem.
- Beyond the government's ongoing digital infrastructure rollout, the Secretary of State asked members what industry and government can do to support UK regional tech ecosystems, and ensure their benefits are distributed equally across the entire country.
- The discussion included the following key points:
 - Members welcomed DCMS's ongoing quantitative and qualitative work in recognising that different regions across the country face different challenges, which is essential to enable more tech clusters to develop, and drive further growth, investment and job creation outside of London.
 - It is essential that this research drives action however - local government leaders don't always know how to begin creating digital growth, and are looking to the central government to drive further growth in the upcoming Spending Review.
 - Members also encouraged a focus beyond building digital infrastructure, which is essential in supporting long-term growth but doesn't provide

short-term support to digital ecosystems. Government must identify areas where tech has a realistic prospect to support wider regional growth.

- Members also agreed on the need to improve digital skills in supporting deep tech cluster growth - however, improving basic digital skills in non-tech sectors will also make a huge difference in driving the levelling up agenda.
 - Initiatives that go beyond supporting deep tech skills development, such as digital bootcamps, will be needed for the adult population already in work to enable them to develop the problem-solving skills needed in the future.
 - However, members noted the success of UK cities outside London in unicorn development, putting them ahead of many European capitals and major cities. Unicorns drive investment and job creation, so government support for advanced digital skills is also essential.
- The Secretary of State thanked members for their contributions, and highlighted that the government will continue to promote regional tech clusters. The key challenge going forward is identifying the meaningful marginal interventions in promoting digital skills across the country.

Item 3: Plan for Digital Regulation

- The Secretary of State opened the discussion by noting the publication of DCMS's Plan for Digital Regulation, which outlines the next steps in developing a pro-growth, pro-innovation answer to one of the most pressing questions of our age: how should we govern tech?
- The Plan sets out new principles which will guide how the government designs and implements digital regulation, as well as setting out practical proposals to support a more streamlined regulatory landscape. Policymakers will actively promote innovation, achieve coherent and forward-looking regulatory outcomes, and exploit opportunities and address regulatory challenges in the international arena.
- The Plan is not intended as the final say, but rather the start of a conversation regarding this important agenda to cement the UK's position as the tech capital of Europe.
- Members welcomed the Plan, and the discussion including the following key points:
 - The Plan has gone down well with international audiences, as it articulates the UK's vision for governing tech in an innovation friendly way while protecting UK consumers.
 - The UK's regulatory environment is seen as advanced - however, the Online Harms Bill is perceived internationally as one of the most complex interventions in the digital space. It is important that it doesn't seek to do too many things and risk destabilization.
 - Members also discussed the role of regulators. Some regulators are too big and unwieldy with multiple objectives - others are too small and ineffectual. There is no definitive list of regulators in the UK, and the landscape is complex to navigate.
 - Members emphasised the need for broader simplification of the regulatory landscape - DCMS should act as a common front door for the sector to understand the broader regulatory landscape.
 - Government should also lean on the sector to communicate why regulation and legislation is important - too often, there is an assumption that online

legislation will cover the entirety of the internet. A clearer understanding of the purpose of legislation is needed.

The date of the next meeting will be announced in due course.