

How can creativity and technology be harnessed for good?



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Good afternoon everybody. I'm delighted to be invited today as the Minister for Sport, Tourism, Heritage and Civil Society, and as a representative from the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to support these important discussions on 'How will we Create?' and open today's panel session on 'How creativity and technology can be harnessed for 'good'?'

I am honoured to be invited by our friends here in the United Arab Emirates, and I wish to start by congratulating them on the fiftieth anniversary of its founding in 1971.

The United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates are committed to tackling global issues together, in friendship, and in recognition of the opportunity created by the depth of our relationship. Together, we have established a new, and ambitious 'Partnership for the Future' which will strengthen the deep and historic relations that our countries share.

And in the same vein, the United Kingdom and United Arab Emirates are important trading partners. The UK Government is currently laying the foundation for an advanced trade deal between the United Kingdom and the Gulf Cooperation Council, of which of course the United Arab Emirates is a key member. The GCC and UK already enjoy very strong economic relationships, with £30.3 billion of overall trade in goods and services in 2020.

We will build on this history to ensure that the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom are able to work closely together to promote prosperity and security for our citizens, tackle climate change, and expand the exchange of knowledge, skills and ideas.

In this spirit, I am pleased to be here to support this thought-provoking panel session. Before we start, I would like to credit our Official Heritage Partner for the UK Pavilion, The Royal College of Art. The RCA's contribution to the UK Pavilion at Expo 2020 will bring together a wide range of interdisciplinary projects from staff, current students and alumni. It showcases the strength and importance of art, design and innovation - highlighting the significant role creative education plays in ensuring that a global Britain can innovate for a sustainable future. Yesterday, the RCA brilliantly hosted a workshop, and guided students to imagine "A city in a day".

What do we mean by harnessing creativity and technology for 'good'? I believe we mean championing "wellbeing", in the very broad sense, for people and the planet that we live on. I believe we also mean creating economic growth and positive ecological change, which are not and must not be incompatible aims.

Today, as we emerge from a global pandemic, and climate change forces us to rethink and re-evaluate the way we live our lives, humankind's creative and technological talents will be key to demonstrate resilience and innovation, and shape the sustainable society of tomorrow.

I am proud to belong to a Department, and a Government that consistently champions the immense benefits that our cultural and creative industries bring to UK and international audiences. I'm delighted to be joined this week by 27 of the UK's leading creative companies. These companies with us today possess an impressive array of UK creative expertise, and a vast portfolio of successful project experience across a range of disciplines. They are keen to explore how they might help foster more collaboration with decision-makers across the Emirates, and build upon our strong commercial and cultural ties.

Of course 2022 will be a year of celebration for the UK, with a year-round programme of major sporting and cultural events: the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games will form one of three key pillars of landmark events, alongside Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the Unboxed programme: showcasing the nation's talent in science, technology, engineering, arts and maths. As international travel reopens, we want to welcome the world to the UK so visitors can experience these exciting events for themselves.

In the UK, the cultural and creative industries are an integral part of our economy, contributing over £115 billion in 2019 and accounting for almost 6% of GDP and nearly 12% of the UK's international exports. And their influence goes way beyond these economic successes, as they contribute to enriching our communities' wellbeing and inspiring future generations of innovators and artists in the UK and internationally.

And that is why in response to the pandemic, the UK Government introduced an unprecedented set of measures to tackle the crisis facing our most loved cultural and creative organisations, and ensuring these sectors can continue to thrive at home and across the world. We introduced a Culture Recovery Fund totalling nearly £2 billion, along with a further six month extension to the £500 million Film and TV Production Restart Scheme, and extended pan-economy support for both individuals and businesses. The UK's £800 million Live Events Reinsurance Scheme will give the events industry the confidence they need to plan for the future.

As we emerge from the pandemic, our creative sectors will be key to support our resilience, growth and innovation potential. As they create opportunities and boost livelihoods across the country, our film, TV and video games industries are our great British success story, with production and development hubs spread right across the UK.

At home and beyond, UK creative industries will play a crucial role in building a wealthier, innovative and highly skilled economy, sharing new content and ideas with international audiences. UK creative technologies, from immersive

experiences to music streaming platforms, form part of a new generation of startups and scaleups. Sitting between creativity and technology, these businesses deliver impressive revenues, with the UK's virtual reality industry alone growing at an annual rate of 34% and with an estimated £1.2bn in revenue by 2022.

These businesses will play a key role in driving future economic growth. And this is why the UK Government invests in programmes such as Creative Scale-Up and Creative Careers, which have encouraged growth and talent development across the creative industries right across the country. Together with UK Research and Innovation, we continue to provide support for research and development across the UK through the Creative Clusters programme, and encourage these businesses to drive the ideas of tomorrow.

Our creative sectors have demonstrated their resilience, innovation, and staying power over the last two years. Their adoption of digital technology has enabled worldwide online access to our great national and regional museums, concert halls and artists. More than 10 million people viewed the productions of our National Theatre in the first few months of lockdown, and hearteningly, the National Theatre says its streaming figures equate to its venues being completely filled for 11 years, which is a remarkable figure. Although these can never fully match the live experience, digital alternatives have enabled greater access to cultural productions and entertainment.

We will continue to support digital solutions, through programmes such as the UK Research and Innovation's 'Audience of the Future' programme, for the development of innovative content, and pioneering cutting-edge, immersive experiences that are accessible to the general public across the world.

UK creative technologies have the potential to be leading on our response to climate change, through ambitious innovative sustainable practices, and contributing to our Net Zero target for 2050. This impressive site here at Expo 2022 is an example of the wonders innovative design and cutting-edge

technology can bring to life. I want to commend the sustainability-themed pavilion, in particular its landscape design and visitor experience for “Terra”, which was co-led by the Eden project, the UK’s iconic environmental visitor attraction.

The UK is already leading in sustainable fashion of course. From world-leading labels such as Stella McCartney to innovative small to medium organisations, the UK fashion industry is taking significant action on sustainability, which was showcased just last month, through our successful UK Expo 2020 ‘WEAR Breakthrough Moment’. Through the ‘Institute of Positive Fashion programme’ launched by the British Fashion Council, UK businesses are leading the way in driving change to transform the industry to a more circular, sustainable model, which will deliver significant environmental and economic impacts.

Working in partnership, with our friends from the Gulf, is absolutely key to delivering these objectives ahead of us.

I’m looking forward to today’s discussions, which will be a force of collective intelligence, and an opportunity to hear from thought leaders from a vast array of sectors. Including Design: with Priestman Goode, Film and Television: with the British Film Institute, Museums: with the V, and Digital arts and technologies: with the Biome collective and Disguise.

So that’s enough from me, over to the panel, thank you very much.

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