



British
Consulate-General
San Francisco

24th June 2022

Office of HM Consul General &
Tech Envoy, Joe White, MBE.

1 Sansome Street
Suite 850
San Francisco, CA 94104-4429

Tel: +1 (415) 617-1300
Fax: +1 (415) 434-2018
<http://ukinusa.fco.gov.uk>

Dear Mr Chairman,

Tech Envoy submission: FAC report on Tech and the Future of UK Foreign Policy

The Integrated Review determined that Science and Technology would be an arena of systemic competition over the coming decade and recognised that the ability to advance and exploit S&T will be an increasingly important metric of global power, conferring economic, political, and military advantages. Technology is non-linear in its impact, prone to winner takes all outcomes, and will enable all sectors, services and industries – so success in S&T will also impact our success in education, healthcare, defence, the provision of public services, and the overall functioning of the economy. The UK must continue to develop and expand its thriving tech sector to ensure it remains strong on the global stage. In addition, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has brought a renewed and sharpened focus on the role that tech companies, infrastructure providers and social media platforms play at times of international crisis.

Tech and tech companies are created by a process that starts in science, research and fundamental engineering (often in universities and labs), which then requires successful tech transfer and application – firstly in the early stage start-up ecosystem, then through commercialisation at scale fuelled by aggressive investment and finally with access to large global markets. This is a process that spans the remits of DfE (education), BEIS (R&D), DCMS (tech policy), FCDO (international norms and influence), DIT (market access and trade), HMT (capital and incentives), and the defence and security organisations which are both customers and partners in technology. For the UK to design and implement a cohesive and agile strategy creating sustained science and technology advantage, it requires coordination and delivery across all these departments in both the domestic and international agenda. This is being provided by the recently constituted PM-chaired National Council for Science and Technology (NSTC). Tech diplomacy supports this strategy by advancing the UK's Technology ambitions through international relationships, creating a two-way flow of insight and influence to benefit the UK.

Tech Diplomacy scope

My role as the UK's first Tech Envoy to the United States should be seen as a pilot from which to iterate to maximise impact for the UK across the globe. Having delivered the role now for 18 months, the agenda covers four main areas: i) Tech Policy – projecting UK Tech Policy and influencing policy makers at State and Federal level to align with UK objectives (DCMS, FCDO, HO). ii) R&D – promoting UK/US research collaboration and commercialisation of research for UK benefit (BEIS/SIN). iii) Tech Trade – supporting digital trade, FDI into the UK, and export growth for UK tech companies. iv) National Security – Tech is a fundamental enabler of defence and national security and increasingly drives their agenda (SIS, FCDO, MOD).

The UK has a real opportunity to shape emerging international tech norms with focused and expert tech diplomacy. The UK has credibility across R&D, our tech sector, sufficient economic scale (though we should not overestimate it), stable democracy and a strong rule of law. Now outside the EU we have greater legislative flexibility and agility, with the ability to pass pragmatic and proportionate legislation and enforce it with strong, independent regulators. These factors provide us with the opportunity to utilise global innovation to benefit businesses and support our broader international leadership role.

First year impact

In my first year as US Tech Envoy, and as a former tech entrepreneur and investor, I have been able to leverage my experience and network to provide expert insight and innovative policy thinking to support UK objectives. I have enhanced and deepened relationships with powerful tech actors in the US across tech, innovation, venture capital and policy, and driven tech co-ordination and coherence across both the US network and back into UK Departments.

I have had multiple engagements with major tech companies, research institutions, the venture capital community and policy makers at the state and federal level. This has included meetings with executives at Google, Meta, Amazon, Apple, and Microsoft, among many others, to discuss a range of topics on core HMG objectives. Substantial progress has been made in raising awareness and preparing the industry for the UK's forthcoming Online Safety Bill, and representing UK interests in the end-to-end encryption debate, balancing necessary user privacy with UK public safety requirements. Further areas of exploration and debate with the tech sector have included international data flows, cyber security, emerging technologies, as well as science and tech collaboration, COP26, digital competition and taxation, and investment into the UK.

We have hosted and supported visits from Senior Officials, Trade Delegations, Regulators and Ministers on both the West Coast and in DC through the Embassy in Washington which have delivered direct policy impact and influenced UK policy direction. This has included West Coast visits from Secretary of State DIT (now Foreign Secretary), the Chancellor and Economic Secretary to the Treasury, the BEIS Select Committee, Competition and Markets Authority, the London Mayor and senior officials across OSTs, NSTC and SIS; with DC visits also covering the tech agenda including by the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Secretaries of State for DCMS, DIT and BEIS, and many senior officials.

These visits have enhanced understanding and co-operation among policy makers and regulators around online safety and competition in digital markets with regular meetings with US OSTP, NSC, DOJ and FTC; shaped HMG thinking on tech transfer and commercialisation of research taking lessons from the Stanford ecosystem and feeding directly into OSTs and BEIS policy groups; supported tech trade and trade missions with a renewed focus on venture capital investment and expertise informing HMT thinking on UK institutional capital, talent mobility and crypto currency regulation and leading to further UK FDI from US venture capital groups including establishing UK offices; and developed several national security work streams connecting HMG security leadership with US counterparts and with investors and innovative companies in the ecosystem leading to bilateral trade and investment.

I have regular contact with teams in No10, FCDO, HMT, DCMS, BEIS, DIT, HO, OSTs/CO and Intelligence Agencies. This is a two-way relationship with insight from the US Network and our US relationships informing policy development, and our positioning with respect to international competitors to help achieve our ambition to become a S&T superpower by 2030.

Underpinning this has been the creation of a working structure for the US Tech Network and an integrated work plan across Tech Policy, SIN and DIT Tech, with strong co-ordination to cyber and national security teams – the output of which has fed into FCDO as a potential blueprint for global co-ordination under the forthcoming International Tech Strategy.

We have deepened our collaboration with the US under the UK/US Landmark Bilateral Technology Partnership agreed by President Biden and the Prime Minister at Carbis Bay in June 2021. This work includes: a new joint statement on quantum collaboration; operationalising the 2020 agreement on AI to progress R&D collaboration; progress on data cooperation, including in the regular working groups on both the future adequacy agreement and the UK-US Data Access Agreement; collaboration on Privacy Enhancing Technologies, including the announcement of the bilateral innovation prize challenge; establishing a semiconductor dialogue to support cooperation on resilient and diverse manufacturing, R&D and security and increased technical discussions identifying areas for R&D collaboration on

telecoms diversification and 6G. We will continue to build on these achievements and agree future priorities with the US linked to the forthcoming International Tech Strategy.

Resourcing and UK tech narrative

The United States is a strong bilateral partner and global market leader across all four areas of tech diplomacy (Tech Policy, Science and Innovation, Tech Trade and National Security), so our activity with the US needs to span all four, ideally in depth.

This is a huge agenda, covering a continent-sized country and for which other nations are trying out varying alternative engagement models. Denmark and Australia have global tech ambassador roles supported by 30+ dedicated staff – which is arguably too broad an approach. Most consulates in San Francisco have tech as part of their consulate agenda, but without specialist tech diplomats or specialist teams. However, they are investing heavily in the Bay Area, recognising it rightly as the world's leading tech hub, with Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Ireland, the EU and others creating dedicated tech spaces to promote national expertise and interest – the UK could benefit from a similar 'showcase' space to promote UK companies and expertise. It is challenging for HMG to compete with the pay offer of tech organisations, especially in San Francisco where pay levels are some of the highest in the US. We note that when Tech Envoys 'double hat' as heads of mission, there are also additional issues that require careful consideration.

Implementing the UK's International Tech Strategy

FCDO and DCMS are leading work on the International Tech Strategy, alongside OSTIS/NSTC from the Cabinet Office, to ensure tech advantage underpins all government policy and delivery.

To best project UK S&T strength, we should focus our resources, ensure clear central coordination of S&T spend, and back a small set of priority missions in strategic locations that maximise UK S&T objectives. Investing in broad S&T capability within our staff, and diplomatic networks, would ensure we can deploy people with the necessary skills and experience to negotiate, and influence in line with UK interests.

Finally, to compete in a crowded field the UK needs a strong S&T narrative supported by global communications and campaign resources, ideally with senior political championing and taken up across the whole of government. We have heard many times with senior HMG visitors to Silicon Valley that the UK now has less of a capability problem – in that we have the R&D, tech ecosystem, tech unicorns, and talent (though there is still work to do on commercialisation of research and later stage capital investment) – but we retain a

communications and narrative problem in effectively telling our tech story to global markets which means we don't get the full recognition for our excellent progress.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe White". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joe" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "White".

Joe White, MBE

Tech Envoy & HM Consul General to San Francisco