TCG UK Tech Cluster Group

THE RECOVERY ROADMAP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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WHO ARE THE UK TECH CLUSTER GROUP?

The UK Tech Cluster group (UKTCG) is made up of organisations that represent the technology & digital industry across the UK, outside of London.

Whilst each organisation has a different geographical focus, we all work with grassroots communities of tech people, and businesses to support them in their aspirations to grow.

Our digital reach is over 1.5 million impressions a month and we support over 6.000 businesses annually.

Jointly we have a uniquely in-depth and practical understanding of the needs of tech talent, businesses and ecosystems with an unmatched position as trusted, independent bodies to give advice and support.

The Recovery Roadmap Programme has brought 400 policymakers, from across the United Kingdom, to share best practice and understand how to practically support our communities from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have learned from a breadth of experts from across the country and internationally, from California to Singapore, with speakers coming from high-potential startups and some of the UK's most successful corporate business.

The message is clear - the unprecedented challenge we're facing provides an opportunity to make a step-change in behaviour and create something better, that can support all of our communities nationally.

Technology has become central to the UK's economy and it is imperative we ensure people understand it, can access its knowledge and use it to drive their businesses, whether they're startups or global giants. The Recovery Roadmap programme has built knowledge in three key areas:

1. GROWTH

In the digital sector We need a profusion of new tech start-ups to drive recovery and create new jobs. We must reengineer the support for these businesses from idea to investment, to help the companies which are structurally resilient as well as technically innovative. Traditional businesses must be enabled to embrace the tools and the technology to allow them to thrive and grow through structured support connecting businesses in our communities.

2. INFRASTRUCTURE

As we adapt to the new normal, we need a new approach to the hard and soft physical infrastructure which can better support us in the long term. That approach must bake in smart technology from the outset to support innovation and productivity. We have seen a huge increase in engagement with, and across, our own communities, as networks have taken on a new important role as a form of support infrastructure well beyond their traditional roles.

3. DIGITAL AS AN ENABLER

The UK's workforce has compressed a decade's worth of digital skills adoption into a handful of months. This process has been involuntary, complicated, and not equally available to all. Investment is needed to help users become proficient in digital technology, to equip them with the critical thinking needed to exploit new technologies and to make better provisions for the technical skills which businesses and the economy need.

For us to succeed there is an understanding that the whole of the UK must be supported and help needs to be offered, and available wherever required, on the ground rather than directed centrally.

The UKTCG has an unrivalled, granular knowledge of our communities supporting the local networks of businesses who drive the UK economy, and whose importance will grow.

We are the only organisation, a collective of collectives, that have people on the ground on a national scale. We have the expertise, credibility and networks to target support that levels up our areas and businesses to produce an increasing number of national success stories.

Driven by our deep knowledge, consultation with business and learnings from the Recovery Roadmap event we have made 7 key recommendations for policy that can make a sea change in the way tech can enable the UK to the forefront of the global economy.

1.

There should be a concerted effort to build programmes which will help to establish new product-led tech start-ups across the country.
This will drive a new flow of innovation from across the UK's nations and regions into the pipeline of existing 'scale-up' programmes, grow the digital sector and provide opportunities for people who have lost jobs due to COVID-19.

2.

There needs to be a specialist programme to enable public sector bodies to better utilise digital solutions.
Senior public sector managers need support to help them become digitally-focused critical thinkers through the creation of common standards and best practices. These initiatives will help the public sector to become more efficient, and more reactive to needs, at the provision and procurement levels.

3.

New schemes must consider the local nuances of the nations and regions to ensure successful engagement and impact across the UK.
It is essential that new skills, start-up, or digital adoption schemes be sensitive to the needs on the ground in the local economies where they are being delivered, as well as the diverse backgrounds of their participants and trainees.

4.

There needs to be greater emphasis on providing "test beds" to facilitate close-to-market digital innovation.
Giving tech businesses more opportunities to test, trial and showcase their ideas will provide a gateway to help digital start-ups and SMEs connect to their first corporate customers. It can also provide use-cases of the ways that digital technology, built in the UK, can impact industries around the world.

5.

New forms of collaboration between SMEs and corporates at a local level must be encouraged to drive regional and national R&D investment.
Creating a specific R&D tax incentive, which is beneficial to both entities, will incentivise the use of innovation intermediaries. These will be required, at least in the short-medium term throughout the recovery, to ensure mutual and sustained benefit.

6.

Technology buyers from traditional sectors need more support with their digital adoption and transformation journeys.
This means supporting companies from SMEs to corporations to better understand how digital technology can enable increased productivity, and to trial solutions to show the potential return on investment. This will allow them to keep pace with start-ups, and digital natives, who integrate digital adoption and transformation across all levels of the product cycle.

7.

We need programmes to enable tech careers as an option for people who have lost their jobs as a result of COVID-19, regardless of their previous profession, skill level, or age.

Despite rising unemployment as a result of the pandemic, the tech sector has substantial numbers of vacancies. Stakeholders across government, local authorities, and enterprise partnerships can help us to create awareness of the jobs available in the tech sector and to undertake positive action to reskill people to fill these roles. It is hard for the education bodies and organisations such as the National Careers Service to keep up to date with the changes in the tech sector and to understand where the job opportunities lie and how to access them.

OLIVER DOWDEN
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA, AND SPORT.

“Right now, our clear priority must be growth. Using tech to power us out of the recession, to drive productivity and create jobs in all parts of the industry, region by region, and indeed all parts of our economy.”

For more information

TCG UK Tech Cluster Group

www.uktechclustergroup.com

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