MORNING
TECHNOLOGY UK

By LAURIE CLARKE

with TOM BRISTOW, JOSEPH BAMBRIDGE and MARK SCOTT

🎧 **View in your browser or listen to audio**

— **AI summit malaise is setting in — before it has even started.**

— **Donelan said the government wants to unleash the opportunities of AI and won't rush to legislate.**

— **A new report calls for an industrial strategy for AI to ensure public value.**

Good morning and happy Wednesday,

This is Laurie, just trying to get through the next two weeks.

You can get in touch with your news, tips and views by emailing Vincent Manancourt, Tom Bristow and Laurie Clarke. You can also follow us on Twitter, @vmanancourt, @TomSBristow and @llaurieclarke.

DRIVING THE DAY

SUMMIT DING DONG: DSIT Secretary Michelle Donelan yesterday sought to reclaim the narrative on the U.K.'s AI policy amid questions over what it hopes to achieve from next week's international summit. More on that speech below, but first…

Skeptics, assemble! Interviews with 50 policymakers in London, Washington, Brussels and Berlin have found widespread criticism of No. 10's focus on existential AI risks at Bletchley Park.

Top line: The report from Global Counsel says some U.K. and EU officials were "highly skeptical" of the event's attention on future AI threats, such as bioweapons, over more present dangers such as misinformation or cyber crime.

Captured: One of the report's authors, Megan Stagman, told us: "We found a great deal of skepticism about the AI summit on the EU side. They saw the U.K.'s focus on existential risks as a distraction from the more mundane, but also more relevant, issues – deliberately propagated by Big Tech and taking hold in the U.K. because of Rishi's close relationships."

Not just EU: "What was really interesting is we heard from U.K. government officials that they didn't agree with that as a focal point either," Stagman added. One official told the authors that voluntary commitments, as agreed by AI companies at the White House in July, were a "distraction technique."

We disagree: A U.K. government spokesperson dismissed fears of regulatory capture by Big Tech firms.

You could say that again: The U.K. is having "a bit of a moment," Rebecca Finlay, CEO of the industry-backed non-profit Partnership for AI, joked as she opened the AI Policy Forum in London yesterday. But the question on most people's lips was what would come of it, particularly as questions linger about who will show up to the summit, and prospective outputs already widely reported.

Two paths: Speaking at the same event, Apple's director of AI research, Jerremy Holland, contrasted attention on "perceived potential risk" with solutions to "known and actionable risks" as he launched the Partnership's new guidance on AI deployment.

Then what? You can't discuss everything in just two days, and the U.K. does have genuine expertise in frontier AI, David Leslie, director of ethics at the Alan Turing Institute, pointed out. The real question, he said, was: "Could the narrowing be more than just the summit?"

Reasons for concern: Focusing efforts on frontier AI, dominated by a clutch of Big Tech firms, could "serve certain interests," Leslie said, comparing it to the U.K.'s world-leading work on AI ethics before ChatGPT sparked generative AI hysteria. Still, a broader conversation would take place "come what may" at the AI Fringe, Leslie said.

Friendly faces: The U.K. nevertheless got some timely backing for its attention on advanced AI safety from several leading experts, including Geoffrey Hinton and Yoshua Bengio, who argue in a new paper that governments should spend much more on safety research and introduce a licensing system for frontier development.

AGENDA

COMPETITION CONFAB: TechUK holds a roundtable at **9 a.m.** on the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill, with former minister Robert Buckland and representatives from Spotify, Amazon and Taso Advisory.

What to expect: The panel will consider questions like how the Digital Markets Unit will use its broad powers over strategic market status firms, as well as "checks and balances" — suggesting the question of appeals standards is sure to come up.

IN AI LAND: It's day two of the AI Policy Forum. Today's agenda has an international flavor, featuring officials from Germany, Singapore, Australia, the U.S. and the U.N. Foreign Office Head of Tech Policy Will Cutler represents the U.K., and Lib Dem peer Tim Clement-Jones has snagged the opening keynote at **9:10 a.m.**

COMMITTEE SESSION: After publishing an interim report in August, the science, innovation and technology committee resumes its inquiry into AI governance, and has managed to secure attendance from all the big regulators.

How it plays out: At **9:30 a.m.** Ofcom chief executive Melanie Dawes and CMA digital markets director Will Hayter will give evidence, followed by Digital Regulation Cooperation Forum chief executive Kate Jones, Information Commissioner John Edwards, and the Financial Conduct Authority's Jessica Rusu at **10:30 a.m.**

ELSEWHERE IN PARLIAMENT: The Procurement Bill plays another round of ping pong between the houses.

AROUND THE WORLD

BREXIT BURN: An EU Commission official has told POLITICO that post-Brexit the EU was "not obsessed" about working with Britain, describing the relationship as hardly the "centerpiece of our digital policies."

On China: The same official quoted above also said they had "some reservations on the ability to have a very deep conversation" with China due to its "very different perspective on this technology." Michelle Donelan told the Bloomberg Technology Summit yesterday that it would be "naive" to leave China off the summit guestlist.

SEE YA: Minister For Science And Technology Wang Zhigang was one of three senior Chinese officials sacked by Xi Jingping in an apparent purge of his top team. We'll put him down as a "no" for the summit...

EU OPTIMISM: An European Commission official said they "want to remain optimistic" regarding the chances of the bloc's AI Act being approved by the end of the year ahead of further negotiations today.

META ON THE DOCK: More than 30 U.S. states filed a federal lawsuit against Meta, alleging the company's apps are designed to be addictive and harm children's mental health. More here.

Whether it's the vibrant energy from Davos' WEF or the diplomatic core at NYC's UNGA – Suzanne Lynch ensures you're always informed. Engage with global trailblazers. See what shapes the global narrative. Stay connected, always. Join the global dialogue. Subscribe to Global Playbook in one click.**

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

MYTH-BUSTING: The tech secretary used a speech yesterday "to smash the myths that have emerged" around the government's AI approach.

Eyes on the prize: "To some," the government's attention to AI safety "might well sound overcautious, or that we are driven by fear, or the risks have captured us," Michelle Donelan said in a speech at the Onward think tank. Actually, it's "the opportunities that we are focusing on."

Safety first: "The country which tackles key AI safety risks really will be the first to fully take advantage of the huge potential that AI has to provide," Donelan explained. "Boosting consumer confidence is what will really make the difference."

Model to the world: "That is why the U.K. is putting more investment into these questions right now than any other country in the world," she continued. The Frontier AI Taskforce had attracted renowned experts to its cause, and its future is "certainly something we are thinking about."

Home front: Donelan defended the U.K.'s principles-based approach to domestic regulation, and said in response to a question from POLITICO that the government would not legislate before understanding the problem first. A response to March's white paper would come this year, but not before the summit, she added.

Chipping in: That government isn't rushing to legislate would be welcomed by industry, TechUK's Neil Ross said during Q&A. Others used the opportunity to ask what the government was actually doing to support adoption of the tech.

Clear and present: Donelan also justified the summit agenda, saying frontier AI, and its risks, is already here and firms want clarity. However, she said the summit would also address risks like disinformation, she said.

Remember this? When it was announced back in June, the summit was meant to "agree safety measures to evaluate and monitor the most significant risks from AI." Now, Donelan listed her ambitions for the summit as reaching a shared view of frontier AI risks, establishing an international research network, and agreeing to further summits in the future.

Perspective: Just getting world leaders to talk about the issue was "a really big deal," Donelan stressed.

INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

AI FOR PUBLIC GOOD: The government's AI summit plans lack ambition and should "outline a positive vision for how AI can help create public value" in addition to discussing harms, the progressive Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) think tank charges in a new report.

Mind the gap: "It feels like there is just a huge gap in the debate around AI for public good," says IPPR economist Carsten Jung. Right now, the debate is dominated by technologists with "an engineering view," focusing on issues like bias and transparency. Instead, people should also be considering "what does [societal] good actually look like?" with regards to deploying these systems, Jung says.

Big picture: IPPR would like to see more focus on how AI systems can be leveraged to tackle challenges like improving public health, augmenting (rather than displacing) jobs and enhancing public services. Its calling for an industrial strategy for AI, encompassing economic incentives like subsidies, taxes and regulations, as well as the building of public digital infrastructure.

Narrow-minded: The think tank also argues the government's definition of 'safety' is too narrow. "It ignores potential structural harms to the economy, such as subtle ways of consumer deception and runaway market dominance of a small number of players," says the report.

What's more: IPPR proposes the establishment of an Advanced AI Monitoring Hub to provide oversight of "systemically important AI infrastructure." This specialized agency would track how advanced AI is deployed and assess emerging risks, collaborating with regulators and fulfilling the central regulatory function outlined in the AI white paper.

Finance is the mold: Financial regulators' focus on spotting emerging structural risks is an apt example because "you have a certain type of technology that imposes a systemic risk on society and the economy," says Jung. We face a stark choice, he says, between "a model based on democratic oversight over [with] sophisticated supervisors," — or else "we basically hope for the best and just let companies mark their own homework."

BEFORE YOU GO

OVERWHELMED WITH ABUSE: The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) is warning that AI-generated images threaten to "overwhelm" the internet. The organization, which works with tech firms and authorities to detect and remove child sexual abuse images from the web, says its "worst nightmares" have come true, and international collaboration is needed to stop a "deluge" of harm.

Harrowing stats: Criminals active on dark web forums are using AI tools to generate illegal images of child sexual abuse, sometimes featuring the faces of real abuse victims, the IWF says. In just one month, it uncovered nearly 3,000 illegal AI-generated images on a forum, of which more than 2,500 were realistic enough to merit legal action and over 500 fell into the most serious category of abuse.

MAD NAD: Nadine Dorries penned an, err, interesting Daily Mail op-ed railing against Big Tech and chastising Sunak's government for apparently watering down tech laws. The former digital secretary recounted a meeting with Google execs where she accused them of pushing left-wing content, brandishing as evidence a Google search of her own name where "negative news stories in Left-leaning publications" dominated.

The only problem… Different search results came up during the meeting, scuppering Dorries' attempted gotcha. "Someone obviously had their hand on the Google dial prior to that meeting," she wrote. "It was pretty embarrassing," we were told by someone who was present. Last year, POLITICO revealed another gaffe, where Dorries asked when Microsoft planned to "get rid of algorithms"…

Morning Technology wouldn't happen without Oscar Williams, Joseph Bambridge and the production team.

HEADLINES

Here's a recap of yesterday's news, along with Pro articles and alerts from overnight.

We won't rush to legislate on AI, says UK tech minister
By Laurie Clarke, Joseph Bambridge · Oct 24, 2023, 5:47 PM

European Commission not withdrawing from Web Summit
By Pieter Haeck · Oct 24, 2023, 12:19 PM

Pro Intelligence Connections

Procurement
Consideration of Commons amendments
Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers
The Committee divided
UK to host first global summit on Artificial Intel…
Jun 7, 2023 • Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing…
Show all (4)