MORNING
TECHNOLOGY UK

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SNEAK PEEK

— **On AI safety leadership, the EU and U.K. are sparring in public — but officials are talking in private.**

— **The OSB may practically be law, but Wikipedia won't be complying with it.**

— **British researchers will soon have a new supercomputer to play with.**

Good morning and happy Thursday,

This is Laurie, only mildly fuzzy after the quest to find the perfect watering hole by our new offices last night.

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

EU THROWS DOWN THE GAUNTLET? In her state of the European Union speech on Wednesday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called for the creation of an AI experts group to advise on any new global rules on the tech, saying there's a "narrowing window of opportunity to guide this technology responsibly."

Extinction risk: Citing calls from AI developers, academics and experts on the risk of mitigating the risk of extinction from AI, she said Europe should lead the way on a global framework with guardrails, governance and guiding innovation.

Sound familiar? Michelle Donelan said she wanted to become the "global centre of AI safety" on Tuesday. But not everyone can lead…

Indeed: Von der Leyen's speech sounded more akin to the mood music emanating from the U.K. government, which has set its focus on "frontier" AI (the largest, most powerful models) and "AI safety" — a byword for the existential threats they pose. It has also hinted that it would like to be the home of some kind of global governance body on AI. It may have to lock horns with von der Leyen first!

Take that, Rishi! According to MEP Dragoș Tudorache, who leads the European Parliament's work on the EU AI Act, the EU has a trump card in the global race to regulate AI. "Facts are stronger than words. The fact is we are the first jurisdiction in the world that will have rules on AI, not guidelines, not principles, not conferences, which will inevitably represent a standard that will be followed entirely or partially and be a reference point for many other jurisdictions," Tudorache said referencing, err, no-one in particular. Von der Leyen herself said the EU's AI Act is a "blueprint for the whole world."

Back in Brussels: Von der Leyen's lofty talk of threats of AI wiping out humanity raised some eyebrows in Brussels, which has hitherto taken a more down-to-earth focus on real world harms in its upcoming AI rulebook. "The mention of extinction is worrying. AI systems certainly pose serious risks to our rights, but the threat of human extinction from AI belongs in the realm of science fiction rather than policy," said Daniel Leufer of digital rights NGO Access Now.

Coincidence? Amid the shadow boxing on AI safety leadership between London and Brussels, the two sides at least now seem to be talking. The prime minister's special representatives for the AI Safety Summit, Jonathan Black and Matt Clifford, were in Brussels on Wednesday. The pair were in Washington last week, too.

AGENDA

COGX DAY THREE: DSIT Permanent Secretary Sarah Munby will walk the CogX audience through the government's whole-of-government effort to deliver the Science and Technology Framework from 9:20 a.m. Expect to hear about how traditional government structures will need to become more agile in an era of rapid technological change.

Deeptech day: The final day of CogX goes big on deeptech and semiconductors. Munby's DSIT colleague Scott Bailey joins a panel on the government's semiconductor strategy with ARM's Stephen Pattison and Techworks CEO Charles Sturman from 11 a.m.

Celeb spotting: Alan Turing Institute Chairman Doug Gurr, University of Southampton's Wendy Hall and ARIA CEO Ilan Gur are all down to speak today, as well as famous names like Wikipedia's Jimmy Wales and Wayve's Alex Kendall.

NOT JUST AI: Science Minister George Freeman will today convene the first meeting of the U.K. Biosecurity Leadership Council. Bioengineering is another fast developing sector that promises both huge benefits and risks. The council is charged with helping policymakers shape governance in bioengineering and make the U.K. a world leader in its safe and responsible use, DSIT tells us. Members include reps from academia, DeepMind, GSK and AstraZeneca.

AROUND THE WORLD

HAPPY IPO: Cambridge-based chip designer ARM makes its long-awaited debut on New York's stock exchange today. The NYT has [a good read](#) on the challenges, from geopolitical tension to high expectations, that it faces.

ON CAPITOL HILL: Execs at some of the world's biggest tech companies joined U.S. lawmakers in a closed-door forum on Wednesday to discuss what to do about AI. One issue, though — not all the execs agree, as the WSJ [points out](#).

Case in point: Ahead of the session one of the attendees, Microsoft President Brad Smith, took a different to many of his peers, telling our U.S. colleagues that [he would support a licensing regime](#) for advanced AI models.

NOT US: China has denied reports that it has banned the use of Apple iPhones by employees of state agencies. Instead, a government spokesperson said it was simply flagging security incidents involving the phones, Bloomberg [reports](#).

MORE BAD NEWS: French regulators have halted sales of an older iPhone model over radiation fears, the BBC [reports](#).

PRINCE OF CHAOS: Internal mayhem when Elon Musk took over Twitter may have caused the company to violate U.S. court orders mandating better data controls, the Guardian [reports](#).

HAVEN OF HATE: The amount of child sexual abuse material being hosted in the EU in recent months has increased 26 percent over the same period last year, the Internet Watch Foundation reports. Susie Hargreaves, chief executive of the IWF says criminals see the EU as a "safe haven" and is urging the bloc to pass new laws.

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ONLINE SAFETY

NOT SO FAST: Tuesday's Online Safety Bill debate triggered a round of back-slapping among MPs for finally dragging the bill to the finish line (never mind the fraught journey along the way). But while policymakers have made their peace with it, Wikipedia are significantly less satisfied with where the bill has ended up.

You've got the wrong guy: Wikipedia argues that public interest projects such as itself have been mistakenly caught up in a legislative dragnet that it can't — and won't — comply with. Specifically, the organization says it won't implement age verification or assurance technology. "It would require us to have a lot more data about who is visiting Wikipedia than we are able to collect," says Rebecca MacKinnon, VP of global advocacy at the Wikimedia Foundation, Wikipedia's parent organization.

Quel dommage: Unlike the OSB, MacKinnon says the EU's Digital Services Act *does* make such allowances. "We were successful in persuading MEPs in Brussels to make a distinction between content rules that are set [and enforced] by the platforms themselves… and community run platforms."

Moving target: MacKinnon says that now the opportunities to influence the bill have all but evaporated, the only thing left is to try to influence Ofcom to make an exception in the raft of guidance the regulator has promised to publish soon after the bill becomes law.

Slight problem: "The advice that we keep receiving is… you need to develop a good relationship with Ofcom and talk to them a lot and educate them on how Wikipedia works," says MacKinnon. "The problem with this is that it assumes we have the staff and the bandwidth to have regular meetings with Ofcom…and we don't."

Bigger fish to fry: Instead, MacKinnon says the organization will prioritize "iprotecting our users from genuine threats all over the world," given their volunteers are under physical threat in countries such as Russia.

Be ungovernable: If the organization is saddled with compliance demands it can't meet, "we will just be out of compliance," says MacKinnon. This doesn't mean pulling out of the U.K. – the site still operates in Russia, for example – but "it forces the government to make a decision about whether they're going to allow us to remain accessible…or if they want to block us before Russia does."

You brought a blowtorch to a knife fight: "Worldwide, we're seeing this trend where no politician wants to be accused of softening a bill that is labeled as protecting children, even if the provisions in the bill are nonsense," says MacKinnon. Instead of the subtle tools required, she says it's as if "there's a cockroach in your kitchen and you blowtorch the kitchen and burn all your children's food to cinders in the interest of keeping the cockroach away from your children."

RESEARCH

HOPE YOU LIKE CIDER: Bristol — freshly crowned the U.K.'s booziest city — will soon play host to a new AI supercomputer, the government confirmed Wednesday. The new AI Research Resource (AIRR) at the University of Bristol "will serve as a national facility to help researchers maximise the potential of AI and support critical work into the potential and safe use of the technology."

Reminder: The AIRR was first announced in March's budget, and will be funded from £900 million set aside by the Chancellor to scale the U.K.'s computing powers. Last month, the Telegraph reported officials were in advanced talks to order up to 5,000 high-end chips for the cluster, but the government's press release only says it will feature "thousands of state-of-the-art graphics processing units."

Call me Izzy: The machine will be nicknamed "Isambard-AI" after civil engineer Isambard Brunel (duh). DSIT Secretary Michelle Donelan said it will be "one of the most powerful supercomputers in Europe, and will help industry experts and researchers harness the game-changing potential of AI, including through the mission-critical work of our Frontier AI Taskforce."

BEFORE YOU GO

MEDIA BILL: Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer told the Lords communications and digital committee that passing a Media Bill was one of her main priorities — but wouldn't commit to it appearing in November's King's Speech.

Friends, promise: Frazer also tried her best to reassure peers that DCMS and DSIT work seamlessly together on areas of overlap — including AI and intellectual property, where Frazer said she was

working closely with DSIT and the Intellectual Property Office to come to the "right answer" on a code of practice. If you forgot, that code was once promised "by the summer."

PROCUREMENT BILL: MPs last night paved the way for the Procurement Bill to become law, rejecting a Lords amendment. The bill prohibits the use of Chinese surveillance tech from sensitive parts of the government estate and contains other provisions that make it easier for ministers to exclude companies deemed a national security risk in the awarding of public sector contracts.

DATA DON: A dedicated minister for "digital transformation across Whitehall" is one of several recommendations made by Global Counsel in a new report on how the public sector can become more productive by the smarter use of data.

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.

EU calls for global AI experts' group
By Mathieu Pollet · Sep 13, 2023, 7:49 AM

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