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# Towards a progressive vision for data and AI policy

**‘Never has there been a period in which political leadership was confronted with more baffling problems or dazzling opportunities’**

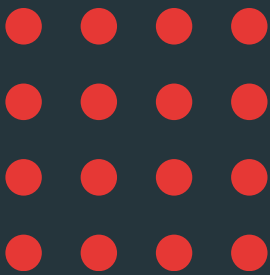
*Signposts for the Sixties, Labour Party (1961)*

Harold Wilson’s famous speech about the ‘white heat’ of technology was delivered 60 years ago. A year later, after 13 years of opposition, he was Prime Minister.

He acknowledged worries about the impact of automation and confronted those who put their heads in the sand. He argued that politics could make all the difference, for ‘the conscious, planned, purposive use of scientific progress.’

After another 13 years in opposition, Labour could soon inherit a mountain of baffling problems. But there are dazzling opportunities too: to rebuild a public realm fit for the digital age and ensure that data, technology and AI work for people and communities up and down the country.

Despite the media attention, data and AI policy can feel abstract and perplexing. Progressives need a vision for data and AI that isn't about 1s and 0s and academic symposiums. It should have people at its heart.



**Data and AI is political as well as technical.**

**It's about power and priorities.**

**It's about whose side you are on as a government.**

Technology will never fix bad policy. Progressive political choices can make technology work for us, ensure data about us is used for us, and shape the use of AI and other technologies for the public good.

A progressive tech policy and an enlightened state that backs its principles with power can help empower the public and make sure that tech helps people help people. It's about better work, better public services, greater opportunities for all and a brighter future for everyone.

Keir Starmer told the 2022 conference that the Labour Party is at its best when we glimpse the future and lead our country towards it. Data and AI are central to that future.

Connected by Data engaged experts, civil society organisations and think tanks including Labour Together to discuss our digital future. This pamphlet summarises those conversations.

# Values and vision

We want a world that is just, equitable and sustainable. The tools of technology should purposefully support those aims with appropriate safeguards.

## We need a new relationship with technology

- that is safe, inclusive, and empowering, where technology acts in service to lifelong education, good work, and happy and healthy lives, alleviating suffering and improving quality of life for all
- in which citizens and communities are active participants in the development and use of data and digital services, and where common value is stewarded and shared for public good
- where innovation is not exclusive to big companies, but happens across startups, small businesses, civil society, and the public sector.

## This requires an active and accountable state that

- is agile and responsive to new developments while anticipating and shaping outcomes, not swept up in tech hype or panic
- ensures data and technology are democratically accountable, including via regulators with capacity, status and teeth
- convenes best practice, domestic and global, to direct technology towards public purpose, such as the climate crisis, good work, and better public services
- empowers local and devolved governments to meet the needs and priorities of their communities and works in social partnership with organisations representing collective interests
- leads by example, through public datasets, transparent and accountable digital procurement and the adoption of open standards; and whose own use of data and AI is transparent, rights-respecting and subject to independent scrutiny.

# Principles and policies

## Preparation

### We can shape this change

The world is being transformed by data and technology. We can prepare for, pre-empt, and shape the coming changes:

- skill people up through the curriculum and lifelong learning; empower unions and ensure a just technological transition for workers
- make public organisations fit for the future through training, best-in-class kit, robust tech procurement practices and embedding data and tech in policy proposals
- create institutions and infrastructure – a Digital Future Regulation Accelerator, a tech infrastructure review, open source components for local government digital services, and regional versions of the London Office of Technology and Innovation

## Principles

### We can regulate technology

We can ensure organisations using data and AI comply with our democratic, rule of law, and human rights principles by building mechanisms for effective regulation, accountability and redress, through:

- legislation, reforming the Data Protection Bill and prioritising citizen benefit, through provisions for redress and collective action, humane algorithmic decision making and certainty for innovators
- transparency, including a published register of tech procured for use in schools and other sensitive sectors, and provisions for businesses to consult with the public and share impact assessments with regulators
- empowering and connecting regulators, such as creating the equivalent of the Digital Regulation Cooperation Forum for regulating public sector data and algorithms, and scaling up the West Midlands Ethics Committee to provide national accountability in policing

## Participation

### We can have a democratic say

Communities and other groups (e.g. workers, patients and students) should have a say in decisions about tech that will shape their lives:

- embed meaningful participation into government processes so citizen voice has an equal place at the table alongside tech firms
- introduce a 'right to participate' so organisations consult and negotiate with the people, groups and communities affected
- support a wide range of bodies, including civil society and SMEs, to take part in setting standards

## Prosperity

### We can all share in tech's benefits

The wealth that arises from data and technology should be shared equitably:

- place conditions on public investment and procurement to ensure public benefit: open up data, require transparency and open standards/open source tech, and ensure companies supported by public tech, data or money create public value
- enable investment: make it easier for pension funds to invest in UK tech companies, and allow SMEs to apply to a Compute Fund
- mandate interoperability and real-time data mobility through Smart Data schemes to empower consumers and small businesses

## Power

### We can decide

Organisations that collect data and provide AI and digital services hold power that should be subject to the public's consent. Citizens, communities and elected representatives should make political choices about who exercises power, how it is exercised for the public good and how it is held to account.

# Meeting Labour's missions

## Economic growth

An equitable tech policy should share prosperity more equally, harness the power of data for the public good and actively shape new technologies to help 'increase productivity, deliver better public services and improve quality of life for all'. It should give businesses the certainty and stability they need to innovate, through long term R&D support and patient finance.

## Breaking down barriers to opportunity

Labour's 'curriculum fit for the digital age' would help nurture digital skills – but it will need to be future proof. Every child and adult will need the data, AI and digital literacy to understand the risks and opportunities of new technologies. To mitigate risks, the proposed 'Children's Number' needs robust governance, safeguards, design and training for public servants.

## Making Britain a clean energy superpower

Data and AI has a key role to play in new green energy infrastructure, from grid management to finding charging points and helping consumers switch to better energy deals. We have to reckon with the carbon cost and water consumption of tech infrastructure.

## Building an NHS fit for the future

Putting patients in control of data could build trust and join up health and care records. But a Labour government needs to learn from recent botched attempts to make better use of patient data and engage the public throughout. Making data more open and accessible for the public sector, business, researchers and citizens must also protect democratic, privacy and security rights.

## Making streets safe

A trusted police force fit for the 21st Century must put trustworthiness at the heart of how it deploys technology. Better use of data can help bring police and justice systems together for better outcomes – but justice system data is sensitive and the system has huge impacts on people's lives. The ethics and effectiveness of tech deployment needs careful consideration and community voice.



# About this progressive vision

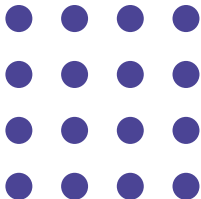
**Connected by Data is a campaign for communities to have a powerful say in decisions about data and AI to create a just, equitable and sustainable world.**

Working with Labour Together and a group of experts, we convened a process to discuss a progressive vision for data and AI. More detail is available at <https://connectedbydata.org/resources/progressive-vision>.

Expert group members are not formally associated with the Labour Party; this document does not necessarily represent a consensus, or individual or organisational views.

Josh Simons, Josh Williams (Labour Together); Dylan Rogers (Hanbury Strategy); Anna Thomas (Institute for the Future of Work); Swee Leng Harris (Luminate); Natalie Byrom (UCL); Benedict Macon-Cooney (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change); Kirsty Innes (then Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, now Labour Together Tech); Elliot Jones (Ada Lovelace Institute); Emily Middleton (Public Digital); Helen Fairfax-Wall (Which?); Jen Persson (Defend Digital Me); Damian Tambini (LSE/Oxford Internet Institute); James Plunkett (then Citizens Advice, now Nesta); Rachel Rank (Global Canopy); Seyi Akiwowo, Hilary Watson (Glitch); Andrew Bennett (Form Ventures); Jeni Tennison, Jonathan Smith, Gavin Freeguard, Adam Cantwell-Corn, Tim Davies (Connected by Data); Labour staff and advisors.

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# Tests for progressive data and AI policy



## Preparation

Does the policy properly equip the public, public servants and business (through literacy, equipment and funding) and consider the practicalities of data and technology use at every stage?

## Principles

Is there a clear vision for the policy that aligns with values of the rule of law, democracy, and human rights?

## Participation

Is citizen voice – individuals, workers, communities and their representatives – built into the regulation, oversight and deployment of data, AI and other technology and given at least equal representation to industry?

## Prosperity

Does the policy consider how benefits will be shared – across different demographic groups, parts of the country and with the digitally excluded – and include mitigations to address any inequitable distribution?

## Power

Are decisions about the digital future made with people and their communities and not done to them?

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