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Government's digital strategy has been 'wholly inadequate' and 'lacking in ambition', Chi Onwurah



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Image: Government's digital strategy has been 'wholly inadequate' and 'lacking in ambition', Chi Onwurah: Source, OpenUK

Shadow minister's remarks come as government announces a dedicated Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Speaking at OpenUK's [State of Open Conference](#) in Westminster, just as PM Rishi Sunak was announcing a mini-government reshuffle, Chi Onwurah, Labour MP for Newcastle upon Tyne Central and shadow minister for science, research & technology, said open source presents an opportunity to democratise technology "and also to foster collaboration, driving competition and innovation."

Unusually for an MP, Onwurah has a background in technology, both as a hardware engineer producing motherboards and on the regulatory side as head of telecoms technology at Ofcom. In her current role, she has focussed largely on cybersecurity, social entrepreneurship and open government.

"I do think that there's so much opportunity to increase the sort of the accessibility and openness of our government and parliament through open data," she said, assessing the government's legislative and political ambition" and being "wholly inadequate"

"It doesn't understand or reflect the opportunities of technology," Onwurah said.

She was particularly critical of an attitude that sees regulation as red tape, rather than something that can be used to support and foster innovation.

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"Regulation can lead to that innovation, and also regulation can support innovation. It can support particularly in many ways, but access of smaller, more agile companies, to government contracts, to marketplaces," she said.

"I think the government has the wrong-headed idea that regulation is anti-growth. There's strong evidence that the lack of agile regulation is undermining competition across many sectors of our economy, dragging down innovation and productivity, and I think that is true in open source.

"As a result we have one of the lowest levels of business investment in the G7. And many of our great tech startups, are being bought up or moving abroad due to a lack of finance, which is related in part to the lack of regulatory certainty."

Open data, "agile regulation" and a stronger focus on open source can be a prime lever for improved transparency and productivity, she argued.

"There's so much opportunity there, driving improvements, bringing services closer to people, making them more effective and efficient, alongside ensuring we have a connected Britain using 5G innovation to its full potential. So the choice is clear, unlock the power of the digital revolution in the interests of the many or continue to benefit a smaller few."

A new Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

While Onwurah was delivering her speech, the government announced a restructure, including the creation of a new department, taking some responsibilities from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

"A dedicated Department for Science, Innovation and Technology will drive the innovation that will deliver improved public services, create new and better-paid jobs and grow the economy," a Downing Street spokesperson said.

"Having a single department focused on turning scientific and technical innovations into practical, applicable solutions to the challenges we face will help make sure the UK is the most innovative economy in the world."

Current culture secretary [Michelle Donelan](#) will be the new secretary of state for the department.

A new Department for Energy Security and Net Zero was also announced



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