



# Labour frontbencher advocates for open source software and regulatory innovation

## Regulation can promote rather than stifle innovation, says Chi Onwurah



**John Leonard**

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Image: Chi Onwurah

In a keynote address, Chi Onwurah, shadow Minister for Science, Research and Digital, spoke of the importance of open source software and appropriate regulation.

Speaking at OpenUK's *State of Open Conference* on Tuesday, Onwurah outlined Labour's plans to build public trust in emerging technologies like AI through "well-targeted, activist regulation." She advocated for standardisation to give people confidence that technology is safe.

Onwurah insisted that regulation can promote rather than stifle innovation by creating a level playing field, and prioritised actions to prevent too much power being in too few hands.

"A Labour government would urgently introduce binding regulation of a small group of companies developing the most powerful AI models, for example," she said.

"Our plans for regulation will build public trust and deliver security and opportunity for working people. Because, just as with food or an electrical product, people need to have a basic level of trust that technology products are safe."

Onwurah also discussed Labour's proposal for a Regulatory Innovation Office to remove barriers to innovation and support small businesses. Some fintech companies find themselves subject to 11 different regulators, she noted.

An engineer by background, Onwurah described herself as a tech evangelist and "the closest thing to a dev in the House."

She emphasised her "abiding dislike of proprietary software languages" and said that open source is important for democratising technology and building public trust and confidence, and giving people a sense of control over their relationships with the tech that shapes their lives.

She said Labour would emphasise digital-based economic growth, which would require maximising the potential of open source and working with the tech industry and academia on long-term R&D initiatives to develop cutting-edge skills.

Labour's industrial strategy includes a 10-year R&D programme for key institutions to help develop those partnerships, and plans to harness data for the public good, she said.

Onwurah accused the government of "13 years of drift," for failing to create the skills required by industry. She pointed to Labour's plans for Skills England, a body mooted in 2022 to replace the current Unit for Skills within the Department for Education to oversee the support of new skills.

She also spoke of plans for new technical excellence colleges.

Onwurah highlighted progress made in diversifying the tech sector but said more work remains to make it fully representative.

A representative of the House of Lords also spoke at the event. Conservative peer Baroness Stowell, who chairs the Communications and Digital Select Committee, said the [government must not take sides between open and closed source tech](#).

## Computing says:

The open source community has long felt ignored or misunderstood by politicians, who, with very few exceptions, are non-technical. It is heartening therefore that speakers from both sides of Parliament felt it is now important enough that they should address a tech event in person. Representatives of other parts of government were also in attendance to learn more.

*Computing* shares the view that open technology is vital for our economic wellbeing and the health of our democracy, which is why we were pleased to support the nonprofit OpenUK as a media partner for this event.

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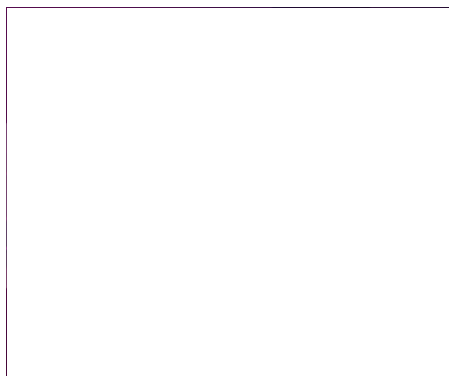
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