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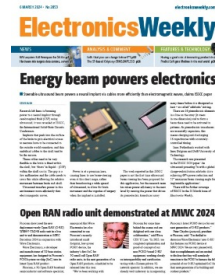
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By [Alun Williams](#) 6th March 2024

Spring Budget 2024: NHS AI, Space Connectivity, Quantum computing

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Jeremy Hunt, has finished presenting his Spring Budget 2024 to the House of Commons.

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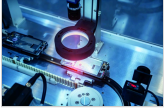
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Technology-related subjects included the use of AI in the NHS, connectivity from space, a quantum computing error correction programme, and funding for the SaxaVord Spaceport, along with mentions of drones and facial recognition systems.

For example, one of the budget announcements involved a Connectivity in Low Earth Orbit (CLEO) programme: the government is confirming up to £100 million to launch the national component of the full £160 million programme. This will, it [says](#), "enable UK researchers and businesses to perform the research and development needed for the next generation of satellite constellations".

Such space-based connectivity will support geo-political security, the government has previously [said](#), and be "key to offering connectivity in remote and rural parts of UK, bridging the digital divide and levelling-up our country while growing the economy". The programme includes £60m from the European Space Agency's (ESA) UK-backed Advanced Research in Telecommunications Systems (ARTES) programme.)

In today's budget there was also mention of quantum technology: the government is allocating £1.6 million in 2024-25 to an error correction programme in quantum computing.

Additionally, the SaxaVord Spaceport, on the Shetland Islands, will receive a £10m investment from the investment.

“This latest investment will help us capitalise on the rapid pace of construction as we work towards the first-ever orbital launch from UK and European soil,” [said](#) the Unst-based [spaceport](#).

Public Sector Productivity

The Chancellor also announced a Public Sector Productivity Plan, which "marks the first step towards returning public sector productivity back to pre-pandemic levels and will ensure taxpayers' money is spent as efficiently as possible".

"Backed by £4.2 billion in funding, the plan will allow public services to invest in new technologies like AI, replace

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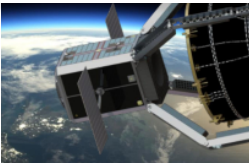


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down the line," said Hunt.

“The NHS will receive an additional £3.4 billion as part of this to invest in new tech and digital transformation, including making the NHS app a single front door for patients, piloting new AI to halve form-filling times for doctors, rolling out universal electronic patient records, and over one hundred upgraded AI-fitted scanners so doctors can read MRI scans more accurately and quickly.”

Additionally, the government plans include £800 million to be invested to “boost productivity across other public services”. This will include £230 million for drones and new technology like facial recognition to free up police time for more frontline work.

Finally, the £250 million Faraday Discovery Fellowships and £150 million Green Future Fellowships will be funded through endowments to the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering.

Cyber attacks

One industry voice highlighted a lack of mention for cyber security, however:

“The Government spends billions on its defence budget and millions shoring up the UK’s borders from illegal immigrants,” said AI Lakhani, CEO of [IDEE](#). “Yet, it does so little to protect UK businesses and public sector bodies from cyber-attacks. We all understand that attacks no longer need to cross physical boundaries to create havoc. But its legislation regarding the use of cybersecurity solutions is weak – well behind what you see in the US and EU – and its investment in cyber is generally lacklustre, as today’s Budget proves once again. This point is all the more pertinent given the huge investment announced for the digital transformation of the NHS and public sector more generally, which will only increase the threat they face from hackers.

“Spending on the military and clamping down on immigration clearly play better with the voters. But if the Government continues to do so at the expense of protecting the country – its people, its businesses and its public services – from the huge, evolving threat of cyber-attacks, then it is sleepwalking into a digital war zone where defeat is guaranteed.”

UK tech

Another critical voice highlighted skills training and tax breaks for investment.

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“The Budget hasn’t delivered much upon the promise that the UK tech sector can be evolved into the next Silicon Valley – with the budget offering little to enable skills building or to build on the current tax breaks for serious investors. Although the introduction of the new £5k individual ISA for investment in the UK is a welcome concept the scale lacks the necessary vision to meet the needs of building that sector.”

Spring Budget 2024

You can read the official record of the Spring Budget 2024 speech [here](#).

See also: [Budget 2023: R&D investment](#), [Exascale supercomputer](#), [AI Research](#)



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