



# King's Speech 2024: Science, technology and innovation

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This research briefing sets out the Labour Party's commitments covering science, technology and innovation, drawing on its manifesto and other material in the public domain. It has been written in advance of the King's Speech to help members of the House of Lords prepare for the debate on the speech. It does not constitute official information about the government's intentions or provide a complete list of bills to be announced.

Alongside its headline pledge to make the UK a "clean energy superpower",<sup>1</sup> the Labour Party's 2024 general election manifesto contained several measures which it contended would drive innovation and scientific and technological development. Labour has also pledged to further regulate some key areas of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and further protecting individuals online, as examined below.

## I. New industrial strategy and promoting innovation

The Labour Party's manifesto stated that a Labour government would ensure economic regulation supported growth and investment, promoted competition, worked for consumers, and enabled innovation.<sup>2</sup> As part of that process, the manifesto stated that Labour would introduce a new industrial strategy and implement reforms to the planning system to support innovation by making it easier to build laboratories, digital infrastructure, and gigafactories.<sup>3</sup> Labour has pledged to fund such innovation in part through a national wealth fund valued at £7.3bn, which will reportedly provide £1.5bn of funding for new gigafactories, £1bn to accelerate the deployment of carbon capture and £500mn to support the manufacture of green hydrogen.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is covered in detail in the House of Lords Library briefing '[King's Speech 2024: Energy security, net zero, environment and agriculture](#)'.

<sup>2</sup> Labour Party, '[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)', June 2024, p 32.

<sup>3</sup> Gigafactories are large facilities capable of producing high quantities of manufactured outputs, in particular batteries for electric vehicles as pioneered by the car company Tesla.

<sup>4</sup> Guardian, '[Labour's green plans will create 650,000 jobs, says Rachel Reeves](#)', 16 June 2024.





The manifesto also pledged to support the development of the AI sector, in particular by removing planning barriers to new datacentres. In addition, the manifesto promised the creation of a national data library to “bring together existing research programmes and help deliver data-driven public services, whilst maintaining strong safeguards and ensuring all of the public benefit”.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to the election, the then Shadow Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology Peter Kyle confirmed that Labour would retain the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) (established under the previous Conservative administration) to “harness the power of science and technology, to fuel economic growth and transform our public services”.<sup>6</sup> On 8 July 2024, the new Labour government announced that DSIT would be expanded in both scope and size by bringing together experts in data, digital and AI from the Government Digital Service, the Central Digital and Data Office, and the Incubator for AI to “unite efforts in the digital transformation of public services under one department”.<sup>7</sup>

Stating that Britain’s communication network was vital in the modern, interconnected world, the Labour Party manifesto also pledged to engage in a “renewed push” to fulfil the ambition of full gigabit and national 5G coverage by 2030.<sup>8</sup> The manifesto does not detail how this ambition would be achieved. On healthcare and innovation, Labour’s manifesto pledged to use AI to speed up NHS diagnostic services and improve their accuracy; to “transform” the NHS App and make it more effective; and to digitise the Red Book record of children’s health.

In addition, Labour has pledged to help close the so-called ‘digital divide’ between those able to access new technology and high-speed broadband and those without such access. Speaking prior to the election at London Tech Week in June 2024, Peter Kyle said that a Labour government would “lead by example” by looking to donate appropriate laptops, tablets and phones to digital inclusion schemes when they are no longer used by government departments.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, p 35.

<sup>6</sup> The National, ‘[Labour promises to get tougher on AI safety](#)’, 12 June 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, ‘[DSIT bolstered to better serve the British public through science and technology](#)’, 8 July 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, p 32.

<sup>9</sup> Capacity, ‘[What would a Labour government mean for the UK’s telecoms industry?](#)’, 25 June 2024.



## 2. Regulating emerging technologies including artificial intelligence

In contrast to the approach taken by the previous Conservative government, the Labour Party manifesto contended that existing UK regulators were ill-equipped to deal with the “dramatic development of new technologies” such as AI, which often cut across traditional industries and sectors.<sup>10</sup> As a result, the manifesto pledged to create a new regulatory innovation office, bringing together existing functions across government. This office is intended to help regulators update regulation, speed up approval timelines, and coordinate issues that span existing boundaries.

Specifically on AI, the Labour manifesto stated that a Labour government would ensure the safe development and use of AI models by introducing “binding regulation” on the handful of companies developing the most powerful AI models and by banning the creation of sexually explicit deepfakes.<sup>11</sup>

It is unclear what form such regulation might take. However, it appears more likely from statements made by senior Labour figures that, rather than a wide-ranging piece of primary legislation such as the EU’s AI Act, the proposals will take the form of more specific regulation based around narrower safety concerns.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, the party has indicated that a Labour government would put the existing voluntary AI safety commitments made by major tech companies, notably in response to the UK’s AI safety summit in November 2023, onto a statutory footing.<sup>13</sup> As part of this move, Labour has stated that it will require the developers of cutting edge or so-called ‘frontier AI’ models to release their safety data.

Speaking at London Tech Week in June 2024, Peter Kyle said:

At the moment, there’s a voluntary code regulating AI, particularly frontier AI. [...] We would legislate to require the frontier AI labs to release their safety data. That’s to make sure we legislate the standards that are already in the voluntary code.

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<sup>10</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, p 35.

<sup>11</sup> As above.

<sup>12</sup> Further information on the EU’s AI Act is available in the House of Lords Library briefing ‘[Artificial Intelligence \(Regulation\) Bill \[HL\]](#)’ (18 March 2024).

<sup>13</sup> Osbourne Clarke, ‘[What will the next UK government do about regulating and supporting AI?](#)’, 14 June 2024.



We don't seek to disrupt the voluntary code, but we will certainly make sure [the standards] are maintained and that any new entrants into the market will know that there's a legislative foundation that must be adhered to.<sup>14</sup>

With the exception of the prohibition of sexually explicit deepfakes, there is little mention in the Labour Party manifesto about the challenges associated with current generative AI models which are already deployed to the public. These include concerns around copyright and the material used to train large language models (LLMs), bias and discrimination, and the potential for their use in creating and promoting misinformation and disinformation. For example, the thinktank the Centre for Long-Term Resilience has recently called for a system for recording misuse and malfunctions in AI so that the government can track these incidents.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the Creative Rights Alliance has called for further action to ensure that the growth and development of AI does not damage the UK's creative industries and the significant contribution that they make to the economy.<sup>16</sup> The manifesto does say that Labour will implement the party's creative industries sector plan published in March 2024.<sup>17</sup> That document committed to the following with regard to AI and human creators:

Labour believes both in human-centred creativity and the potential of AI to unlock new creative frontiers. We know that Intellectual Property rights for creators are the raw materials of our successful creative industries, and that long-standing legal protections of intellectual property such as copyright and patents are important.

Labour will soon set out its broader strategy on AI, and the creative industries will be part of developing that strategy. Finding the right balance between fostering innovation and ensuring protection for creators and the ongoing viability of the creative industries will require thoughtful engagement and consultation within the creative industries and with companies driving AI development.<sup>18</sup>

On sexually explicit deepfakes, it is already an offence following changes made through the Online Safety Act 2023 to share intimate images—including deepfakes—of those depicted without their consent.<sup>19</sup> The previous Conservative government had announced plans to go further by legislating to also prohibit the creation of such material in April 2024.<sup>20</sup> Labour

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<sup>14</sup> The National, '[Labour promises to get tougher on AI safety](#)', 12 June 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Guardian, '[UK needs system for recording AI misuse and malfunctions, thinktank says](#)', 26 June 2026.

<sup>16</sup> Creative Rights Alliance, '[Artificial intelligence and creative work](#)', accessed 5 July 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Labour Party, '[Creating growth: Labour's Plan for Arts, Culture and Creative Industries](#)', March 2024.

<sup>18</sup> As above, p 17.

<sup>19</sup> HM Government, '[Criminal Justice Bill: Intimate images](#)', 23 February 2024.

<sup>20</sup> HM Government, '[Government cracks down on 'deepfakes' creation](#)', 16 April 2024.



was supportive of the move at the time, claiming that the government had acted in response to concerns Labour had raised.<sup>21</sup> It was intended that this change would be introduced via an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill 2023–24, but this legislation fell as a result of the dissolution of Parliament ahead of this summer’s general election.<sup>22</sup>

There are concerns, however, that the Labour manifesto did not go further in addressing other types of deepfake content or misinformation generated using AI beyond a pledge to tackle “misinformation campaigns which seek to subvert our democracy”.<sup>23</sup> The fact-checking organisation Full Fact has called upon the incoming government to strengthen online safety legislation to counter harmful misinformation, especially relating to health or when generated by AI.<sup>24</sup> It has also argued for more action on media literacy to aid the public in identifying false and misleading online material.

There was also no mention in Labour’s manifesto on the potential impact of AI on the workplace. However, Labour’s ‘[Plan to make work pay](#)’, published in May 2024, did contain pledges to promote safeguards against the invasion of privacy through surveillance technology (including those that track workers in their roles) and discriminatory algorithmic decision-making.<sup>25</sup> It said that “at a minimum” there should be consultation and negotiation with unions or elected employee representatives before employers introduce surveillance technologies.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) are among those who have called for new legislation to create further legal protections for workers and employers in relation to the use of AI.<sup>26</sup> In April 2024, the TUC produced a draft bill which would seek to regulate the use of AI in relation to workers, employees and jobseekers to protect their rights and interests in the workplace. It would also provide for trade union rights in relation to the use of AI systems by employers and seek to enable the development of safe, secure and fair systems in the employment field.

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<sup>21</sup> Guardian, ‘[Creating sexually explicit deepfake images to be made offence in UK](#)’, 16 April 2024.

<sup>22</sup> UK Parliament, ‘[Criminal Justice Bill](#)’, accessed 5 July 2024; and Herbert Smith Freehills, ‘[Criminalising deepfakes—the UK’s new offences following the Online Safety Act](#)’, 21 May 2024.

<sup>23</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, p 15.

<sup>24</sup> Full Fact, ‘[Assessing the manifestos against our calls for change](#)’, 26 June 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour’s plan to make work pay](#)’, May 2024.

<sup>26</sup> Trade Unions Congress, ‘[Artificial Intelligence \(Regulation and Employment Rights\) Bill](#)’, 18 April 2024.



### 3. Funding for research and development and life sciences plan

As part of its manifesto, Labour has pledged to abolish short funding cycles for key research and development (R&D) institutions, typically three years in length, in favour of ten-year budgets that allow “meaningful partnerships with industry to keep the UK at the forefront of global innovation”.<sup>27</sup> Labour have identified six areas for ten-year budgets, including aerospace, AI, automotive, defence, energy and life sciences. These areas align with Labour’s industrial strategy priorities and sector plans they have pledged to develop in government.<sup>28</sup> Labour have also indicated that they will maintain the current structure and the current rates of R&D tax credits (at a minimum) over the next parliament, whilst “cracking down on fraudulent claims and those made in error”.<sup>29</sup>

Further, the manifesto states that a Labour government will work with universities to support spinouts, and work with industry to ensure start-ups have the access to finance they need to grow.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the manifesto committed to simplifying the procurement process to support innovation and reduce micromanagement with a “mission-driven approach”.

In January 2024, Labour also set out its plan for the life sciences.<sup>31</sup> In addition to the pledges set out in the manifesto, such as creating the regulatory innovation office, it committed to the investment of £10bn into R&D. Further, the plan said that Labour would see the creation of 100,000 jobs in the life sciences sector by 2030. The document contains a range of further pledges including strengthening the Office for Life Sciences and the Life Sciences Council, and to bring laboratory clusters within the scope of the ‘Nationally significant infrastructure regime’ in England.<sup>32</sup>

### 4. Safety of children and young people online

According to Labour’s manifesto, children and young people face significant harm online, with

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<sup>27</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), June 2024, p 35.

<sup>28</sup> Campaign for Science and Engineering, [‘Analysis of the 2024 Labour Party manifesto’](#), 13 June 2024.

<sup>29</sup> Labour Party, [‘A prescription for growth: Labour’s plan for the life sciences sector’](#), 5 February 2024, p 29.

<sup>30</sup> Spinouts are typically where an organisation turns a portion of itself into a separate business.

<sup>31</sup> Labour Party, [‘A prescription for growth: Labour’s plan for the life sciences sector’](#), 5 February 2024.

<sup>32</sup> The result of these changes would mean such developments could bypass local planning requirements (Local Government Association, [‘Nationally significant infrastructure projects’](#), accessed 5 July 2024).



inappropriate content too easily available at their fingertips on a smartphone.<sup>33</sup> It described an increase in online extreme misogynistic content which it argued was “driving a culture of violence against women”. In response, the manifesto stated that a Labour government would “build on the Online Safety Act, bringing forward provisions as quickly as possible, and explore further measures to keep everyone safe online, particularly when using social media”.<sup>34</sup>

The manifesto is not specific about what form these proposals would take. It was explicit on one area, however, which is that a Labour government would act to give coroners more powers to access information held by technology companies after a child’s death.<sup>35</sup> This follows a campaign following the case of Molly Russell, a 14-year-old who ended her life in November 2017 after viewing suicide and self-harm content online.<sup>36</sup> The subsequent coroner’s report called for more protection for children online and for tech companies and the government to consider measures such as separate platforms for adults and children, and age verification before joining a platform.<sup>37</sup> The Online Safety Act 2023 introduced some changes including requiring social media companies to enforce their age limits consistently and protect their child users.<sup>38</sup> It did not introduce measures on giving coroners better access to material accessed by children online after their deaths, however, which both Labour and the Conservatives had pledged to act upon prior to the election.

On 2 June 2024, Labour promised to move “as fast as possible” to enable this change following the election if in government.<sup>39</sup> Also, questioned on allowing bereaved parents to access their children’s data on their mobile phones or tablets on the BBC’s Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg programme on 2 June 2024, the then Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper said: “We do need to pursue this. And there’s a series of areas where we need really quite urgent action around online safety, around implementing online safety measures”.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), June 2024, p 103.

<sup>34</sup> As above.

<sup>35</sup> Financial Times (£), [‘Labour plans to force tech giants to compensate online fraud victims’](#), 28 June 2024.

<sup>36</sup> BBC News, [‘Molly Russell: Coroner’s report urges social media changes’](#), 14 October 2022.

<sup>37</sup> BBC News, [‘Molly Russell: Coroner’s report urges social media changes’](#), 14 October 2022.

<sup>38</sup> HM Government, [‘Online Safety Act: Explainer’](#), 8 May 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Independent, [‘Labour promises to give bereaved families access to children’s social media ‘as fast as possible’](#), 2 June 2024.

<sup>40</sup> As above.



## 5. Cybersecurity and online fraud

Labour announced in its manifesto that it would conduct a strategic defence review in Labour's first year of government which will assess the threat of cyber-attacks but also of "misinformation campaigns which seek to subvert our democracy".<sup>41</sup> It did not provide further detail on how it would tackle such misinformation.

Labour's manifesto also committed to a new fraud strategy to tackle online, public sector and serious fraud.<sup>42</sup> As part of this, Labour have said that they will partner with tech companies to prevent fraud on their platforms. Further, as part of this strategy Labour have said that they will work with national policing bodies to standardise IT procurement, standards and training.

Though they were not contained in the manifesto, Labour has also reportedly drafted plans to make tech companies liable to reimburse victims of online fraud, in a departure from existing rules that predominantly place the burden on banks and financial services providers. According to a document seen by the Financial Times, party officials have criticised big tech companies who "contribute very little" to tackling online fraud or compensating victims.<sup>43</sup> As reported by the Financial Times (FT), the paper in question addressed the issue of authorised push payment (APP) fraud where victims are tricked into sending money to fraudsters from their bank accounts. According to trade body UK Finance, individuals in the UK lost £460mn to APP fraud in 2023, 70 percent of which involved ordered goods that never materialised.<sup>44</sup> The Labour Party document reportedly said:

Britain's banks rightly believe it is both unfair and unsustainable that they should be expected to shoulder so much of the burden of trying to tackle APP fraud and reimburse victims, while the big tech companies on whose platforms this fraud takes place, contribute very little to either effort. [...] It is clear that a new approach is required [...] The big tech companies who provide the platforms on which this fraud takes place must take their proper share of the responsibility for tackling APP fraud and reimbursing victims.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Labour Party, '[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)', June 2024. (This is examined in greater detail in the House of Lords Library briefing '[King's Speech 2024: Defence](#)'.)

<sup>42</sup> Labour Party, '[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)', June 2024.

<sup>43</sup> Financial Times (£), '[Labour plans to force tech giants to compensate online fraud victims](#)', 28 June 2024.

<sup>44</sup> UK Finance, '[Fraud remains a major problem as over £1 billion is stolen by criminals in 2023](#)', 22 May 2024.

<sup>45</sup> Financial Times (£), '[Labour plans to force tech giants to compensate online fraud victims](#)', 28 June 2024.





When asked by the FT about the plan, party officials reportedly said “Labour is committed to tackling online fraud, working with technology companies to do so. This draft paper is not policy but was produced to help develop options for tackling the issue”.<sup>46</sup> Other measures in the document included giving statutory footing to the online fraud charter, a 2023 voluntary agreement to prevent fraud signed by major tech groups including Facebook, Amazon, Google and Microsoft.

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<sup>46</sup> Financial Times (£), [‘Labour plans to force tech giants to compensate online fraud victims’](#), 28 June 2024.

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