UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Department of Computer
Science and Technology

The Computer Laboratory
Cambridge, CB3 0FD

6th June 2023

Rt Hon Chloe Smith MP
Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology

Dear Secretary of State,

Your Government has placed the UK's ambitions to be a Science Superpower at the heart of our national agenda. I have worked hard to help deliver those ambitions by ensuring we build digital solutions that work for people, science, and society. For the last eight years I have worked together with government to deliver an agenda that through a combination of pragmatism, vision, and endeavour should ensure that the UK's important voice will be heard on the international stage.

There are dangers associated with any new technology but through roles with the Government's AI Council, the Centre for Data, Ethics and Innovation and as a Turing AI Fellow I have been focussed on building an interdisciplinary community that can identify and address those concerns while enabling the many benefits these technologies should bring. The community we built has placed the UK at the forefront of the international debate around ethical deployment of digital technologies.

However, I have become concerned at the steer which the wider public debate has now taken. At this time, it feels more important than ever that we remain focussed on how we use new technologies to better serve our citizens. Where risks are identified we should be talking about some of the pragmatic solutions that have already been proposed to address them. Ongoing efforts include the Online Safety Bill; the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill; Data Intermediaries; and the Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standard. Where opportunities to resolve existing inequalities and improve services are identified we should be vigorously pursuing them.

I continue to strongly support the vision laid out in the AI White Paper that suggests our priority should be towards empowering our existing regulators to resolve the challenges we face, while carefully monitoring the ecosystem for emergent issues. I welcome debate about how we can improve these proposals but warn against being drawn into simplistic narratives around existential threats.

Yours sincerely,

Neil D. Lawrence
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