

# Preparing for Scotland's digital future

In Scotland, we are facing a range of new technologies that combine the physical, digital and biological worlds. These new technologies will impact all disciplines, economies and industries, and even challenge our ideas about what it means to be human. It's important that Scotland continues to respond and adapt to this new economic dynamic. BT can play a key part in enabling Scotland to stay at the forefront of this, particularly when it comes to digital innovation.

The pace of innovation is arguably the fastest it's ever been. Organisations in Scotland now understand that they need to invest in long term strategic solutions, as opposed to short term fixes, which are likely to be outdated within a couple of years given the pace of change. Individuals and organisations within Scotland need to prepare for the future of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Intelligent Connectivity and the Internet of Things (IoT), to name just a few digital themes that will redefine the place we live and work. Scotland can't just be thinking about two years down the line, but also what digital infrastructure and solutions will keep us 'ahead of the game' in five to ten years' time, where human-like robots, seamless connectivity and driverless cars will be the norm. 5G is on its way, as demonstrated by the recent EE 5G trial in Canary Wharf - we need to be ready for this, but we also need to be thinking about what's next? 6G and beyond?

The Scottish Government's Digital strategy, *Realising Scotland's full potential in a Digital World*, sets out Scotland's plans to place digital at the heart of Scottish policy. It's focussed on inclusive economic growth, reforming all public services and preparing our

children for the workplace of the future. This strategy for Scotland aims 'to create a culture and environment of partnership in which we take collective action to ensure that nobody is left behind and we all remain safe, secure and confident about the future'.

The Scottish Government also has an ongoing commitment to secure a positive future for Scotland's towns. As a board member of Scottish Towns Partnership, I know very well that the rapid expansion of high-speed services and integrated ICT solutions can significantly revolutionise towns and places in Scotland. BT is a key stakeholder in every community in Scotland and can be an enabler in driving a smarter, digital future. The new fibre network across rural Scotland creates many new possibilities in sectors like healthcare and digital transformation.

In the recent report, *Automatic for the People*, produced jointly by BT, SCDI, The Royal Society of Edinburgh and Scotland IS, existing and future technological change and innovation in Scotland is explored, with particular focus on AI and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The report identifies the implications and recommendations to embrace these changes and also highlights that automation and technological progress have the potential to help boost Scotland's productivity and to generate greater levels of economic growth, even at a time when the working population in Scotland is forecast to fall.

BT provides a full range of connectivity solutions to drive this growth, alongside the scalability and agility to successfully implement these solutions. However, success requires far more than digital

and technological solutions. Success also requires, as well as supportive infrastructure, a true understanding of the Scottish market, its drivers and desired outcomes. BT recognises that culture, managing change and building collaborative relationships is vital to enable Scotland, its businesses and customers to achieve long term digital objectives.

BT also owns world-leading research into optical fibre and next-generation broadband, 5G mobile technologies, AI, security, and the future of TV, enabling cutting-edge solutions that keep Scotland (and the UK) ahead of competitors. BT is a market leader in security, with vast capability in cyber security including at our hubs in Edinburgh and Glasgow. This continued investment in future innovation and keeping pace with change, ensures BT will continue to innovate alongside Scotland, to help achieve the country's current and future ambitions.



**David Wallace is Director for BT in Scotland, with responsibility for all Public Sector business. He is also Chair of the BT Scotland Board and has executive oversight of all business in Scotland.**

