



Science and Technology Committee

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From Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP, Chair

Rt Hon Jeremy Wright MP
Secretary of State
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London, SW1A 2BQ

10 July 2018

Dear Jeremy,

Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation

In the Science and Technology Committee's report, 'Algorithms in Decision-Making', which we published in May, we made some recommendations about the role of the Centre for Data Ethics & Innovation. I am writing on behalf of the Committee to highlight our report and to ask that our recommendations are fed into your recently announced consultation on the remit of the new Centre.

As we described in our report, the ethics around data use, including issues around consent, privacy and accountability, are key challenges posed by machine-learning algorithms. While we support the inclusion of data ethics in the Centre's proposed role, it will be important that it addresses the broader ethical issues, beyond the handling of data, and include ensuring algorithms do not unfairly discriminate and designing algorithms in ways that allow data subjects to challenge their results. Although these issues do not feature explicitly in the aims and objectives of the Centre, set out in the consultation document, we are pleased to see that 'fairness' and 'transparency' are among the Centre's six planned activities.

Also included in the Centre's planned activities is work on data access. It is good that you address the need for data sharing frameworks and, in your recent response to the Lords Artificial Intelligence Select Committee (CM 9645), you commit the Centre to work towards establishing Data Trusts. However, it is not just the means for data sharing that need to be addressed: the public sector must recognise the unique value of the datasets it holds. In our report, we described the increasing number of deals between the public and private sectors, notably involving NHS trusts. Securing value in these deals is important and, as in our report, we would encourage the Centre to work with the Crown Commercial Service, the Alan Turing Institute and other expert bodies to set out an appropriate procurement model for algorithms.

Your consultation paper looks to sector regulators to produce codes of conduct that will allow for effective and ethical uses of data and AI. There is a role for the Centre for Data Ethics & Innovation to play in producing overarching guidelines and principles on which such codes should draw. We welcome the fact that the Centre's draft terms of reference includes the setting of 'high-level ethical principles' as a means to generate the responsible use of data.

Finally, you rightly recognise in the consultation document the need for the work of the Centre to be transparent and open in order to build confidence. We support your proposal to make the Centre's reports and recommendations public, as well as publishing the Government's response to these recommendations on an annual basis. The vital nature of the Centre's work and the dynamism of the machine-learning industry led our Committee to recommend that the Centre for Data Ethics & Innovation report to Parliament annually. We would prefer such a frequency, rather than your proposal that the Centre reports only once a Parliament.

We await the Government's response to our Algorithms report with interest, and in the meantime very much hope that our report's recommendations will be taken on board as part of your consultation exercise.

Yours,



Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP
Chair

Congratulations!