



# Ambassador's Activities

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Speech by HE Bernard Emié,  
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the opening of the  
Franco-British workshop on ICT in Future Cities  
at the French Residence

London, 14 May 2014

*Cher* David Willetts,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Distinguished guests,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all today to the French Residence for the opening of this Franco-British workshop on ICT in Future Cities. This Residence is not just the home of French ambassadors and ministers when they are visiting the UK: I am also very keen to make it the home of French business, culture and of course science. So I am delighted that the Minister for Universities and Science, David Willetts, has agreed to be our guest of honour today.

This bilateral event is the ninth in a series started back in 2010, the previous eight having been organized by the French Embassy around scientific themes of interest common to the UK and France. Although France and the UK can be very different, we also are similar in many ways – whether in terms of our economy, our population or our climate – and we often face the same challenges. In the scientific field, we are convinced that working together more at bilateral level can also bring great added value, especially in research and innovation.

Today's topic, "Future Cities", is about making a positive impact on society. It is about involving public policies at national and European level, and generating social benefits and economic growth.

Today's event is in line with previous workshops organized in the framework of our bilateral scientific collaboration. We have had the opportunity to discuss major issues such as marine energy, synthetic biology and big data.

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The challenges posed by future cities – such as sustainability, energy, security and transport – can be tackled in many ways. For today’s meeting, ICT and Future Cities, we have chosen a particularly cross-cutting theme, of potentially major significance socially and economically. It is a strategic issue for public investment and legal regulation at local, national and global levels.

Ultimately, it comes down to boosting businesses in order to create and maintain jobs. The digital revolution is reshaping and impacting on every sector of the economy, with both our governments recognizing it as a priority. In France and the United Kingdom, the ICT sector is estimated to account for up to 5.5 and 7.5% of GDP respectively, with a positive forecast of more than 10% by 2015 for the UK. We both have leading companies in IT services, and dynamic IT clusters like Tech City in London and Sofia Antipolis in the Nice area. Figures in ICT employment confirm this, with over 600,000 people in France and up to one million in the UK working in the field within the coming years. The French government recently launched a new initiative called “la French Tech”, aimed at bringing together all the talents in the digital economy. Even if Europe remains behind the US and Asia in the growth and competitiveness of its ICT market, it still represents 10% of worldwide ICT trade and have the potential to spearhead the large-scale development of strategies and services for future cities.

Our cities today are already “smart”, but they must now become visionary. How can cities take advantage of the tremendous opportunities offered by emerging ICT technologies to design their future services?

Allow me to quote a famous French scientist, Pierre-Simon Laplace, who exactly 200 years ago – in 1814 – accurately predicted the challenges technology faces today:

*“We may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future. An intellect which at a certain moment would know all forces that set nature in motion (...) if this intellect were also vast enough to submit these data to analysis (...) nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes”.*

That is to say, the challenge of processing ever-greater volumes of data in such a manner as to help us better predict the future.

Thus, the core challenge for future cities lies in mastering new ICT technologies: intelligent infrastructures, mobility, big and open data, data analysis and modelling, to name but a few. If you look closely at the programme for this workshop, you will see these are the very topics of tomorrow’s expert-led debates. They will showcase the very latest in ICT, and what we can expect over the coming years.

We should certainly be enthusiastic and confident about the future of urban services; however, public bodies and citizens are aware that behind the promising technology lie complex challenges. We will see today how governments and cities are addressing these challenges by setting up innovative policies, funding specialized institutes – such as technology incubators and competitiveness clusters – and developing their leadership and interoperability.

I hope this workshop will help identify new opportunities for bilateral and European cooperation in ICT, in areas such as sharing knowledge and skills, systems interoperability, scaling-up, standardization for data collection, storage and usage.

You will be able to comment on this event through our hashtag: #ICTinFutureCities.

I wish you a fruitful workshop../.