All-Party Parliamentary Group on Artificial Intelligence
Evidence Meeting 1 – Data Governance
Monday, 28 January 2019 | 5:30-7:00 PM - Committee Room 1, House of Lords

Jeni Tennison, CEO, Open Data Institute

Biography: Jeni Tennison is the CEO of the Open Data Institute. She gained a PhD in Artificial Intelligence, then worked as an independent consultant specialising in open data publishing and consumption. She was the Technical Architect and Lead Developer for legislation.gov.uk before joining the ODI as Technical Director in 2012, becoming CEO in 2016. Jeni sits on the UK’s Open Standards Board; the Advisory Board for the Open Contracting Partnership; the Board of Ada, the UK’s National College for Digital Skills; the Co-operative’s Digital Advisory Board; and the Board of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

How is data currently being collected and used by AI technologies, and is our data infrastructure fit for purpose?

- We wrote a report on AI business models last year. This emphasised the challenge of large tech companies determining what gets collected, and exclusive access to that data. It discussed the need to share data to increase the visibility of and reduce bias, and to support innovation, new entrants and new services.

- Data infrastructure consists of data assets, the organisations that operate and maintain them, and guides describing how to use and manage the data. Trustworthy data infrastructure is sustainably funded and is directed to maximise data use and value, meeting society’s needs.

- We’re all still building a data infrastructure that’s fit for purpose. Right now there are issues with, among other things, quality, interoperability, accessibility, reliability, equity and sustainability.

What is the proper way of seeking consent for using an individual’s data?

- We should be wary of talking about “an individual’s data”. Data about one person is about lots of others: their friends and family, their doctors and nurses, their teachers, or even people who are similar to them. Data is collected about people who aren’t direct users of services as well as those who are.
• Individual consent is important but not the only mechanism for getting consent for the use of data. There are a number of cases where we have decided democratically that data should be collected and used whether individuals consent or not: the census and registration of company directors are examples.

• There are also challenges around existing approaches to consent. We can never give fully informed consent about future uses of data. Individual consent needs to be layered over fundamental regulatory protections. It is also worth looking at the roles of trusted intermediaries who may be granted delegated responsibility, and participative approaches such as citizen juries to help organisations understand public acceptability.

Who should ultimately oversee the use of personal data for AI systems?

• Many organisations are putting in place internal ethical principles and practices. It is good to see data ethics being recognised as important within businesses. However, these mean very little without some mechanism for accountability when ethical principles are violated.

• One layer of oversight has to come from regulators. These include sector specific regulators such as in finance or telecoms, as well as the ICO. They include local government when there are devolved powers such as around transport or accommodation as well as national and potentially multinational regulators.

• We should not forget the role of consumer groups, trade unions, professional bodies or the media. These are important in other places where there is a need for accountability, consumer protection, or citizen empowerment; they are no less important when data is involved.

• Both regulators and civil society require some level of transparency, monitoring frameworks, whistleblowers, auditing powers and so on to enable them to do their job.