

WOMEN LEADING DEEPTECH

On Wednesday 20th May, GTA was delighted to host the Women Leading Deeptech event, bringing together an inspiring group of founders, investors and policymakers to discuss how the UK's record-breaking growth in AI and deeptech can be built on a truly diverse talent pool.

I had the pleasure of MC'ing the evening alongside Suki Fuller, Co-Lead of the TLA Women Leading Tech initiative. The event was hosted by TLA sponsor and partner Vorboss, and featured an outstanding lineup of speakers and moderators, including:

- **Sana Khareghani**, former Head of the UK Government's Office for AI
- **Dr Christina Yan Zhang**, CEO of The Metaverse Institute
- **Zahra Shah**, AI and Frontier Technology Expert
- **Caroline O'Brien**, CEO of CSA Catapult
- **Janet Collyer MBE**, Non-Executive Director and Advisor
- **Ekaterina Almasque**, Founding Partner at BlankPage Capital
- **Sue Daley OBE**, Director at techUK
- **Clare Schramm**, Lloyds Banking Group
- **Wenmiao Yu**, Co-Founder of Quantum Dice
- **Harini Gopalakrishnan**, Founder of thehaze





OBSERVATIONS ON THE DEEPTECH ECOSYSTEM

To open the evening, Kirstie Lane shared how Vorboss manages its own end-to-end fibre network across London – a powerful reminder of the critical physical infrastructure needed to support the high-bandwidth, transformative work taking place across the deeptech sector.

Across the panels, there was a strong focus on real-world deployment. One recurring theme was the gap between developing breakthrough technologies and successfully implementing them at scale. Speakers stressed that innovation must be grounded in solving genuine societal challenges, from improving healthcare systems through AI-driven simulations to building more resilient public services.

While panellists acknowledged that the UK is unlikely to compete with the US purely on raw computing power, there was broad consensus that the UK can lead by developing trustworthy AI and a sovereign, “Best of British” technology stack. Achieving this will require a highly specialised and diverse workforce with a deep understanding of hardware, infrastructure and complex supply chains.



BRIDGING THE COMMERCIALISATION GAP

The discussion also explored the commercial realities of scaling deeptech businesses. While the UK's academic institutions remain world-class and continue to produce groundbreaking research, many speakers noted that we have historically struggled to translate that innovation into commercial success.

A key theme was the existence of a structural patience gap in funding. Deeptech companies often operate on development cycles of 15-20 years, requiring investment models that recognise the long-term nature of innovation. To ensure the UK retains its best intellectual property as companies scale through Series B and beyond, investors must be willing to treat risk capital as genuine long-term risk and provide founders with the runway they need to succeed.

The final panel focused on the importance of strategic partnerships and procurement reform. A major takeaway was that corporate procurement processes need to become significantly more agile.

If deeptech startups are expected to navigate the same compliance requirements as FTSE 100 companies from day one, UK innovation risks being stifled before it has the opportunity to scale. Instead, established organisations should adopt a more innovation-led mindset - acting as first customers, collaborators and connectors to help founders transition from pilot projects to full-scale production.

A huge thank you to our hosts at Vorboss and to all of our fantastic speakers for contributing to such an engaging and thought-provoking evening. The energy in the room was a powerful testament to the strength of the UK's tech ecosystem, and to the women leading innovation across the deeptech sector.

