

June 19, 2014 | By Doug Ramsey

## UK Government Science Minister and Startup CEOs Talk Robotics at UC San Diego

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*Diego-san, one of the humanoid teaching robots under development in the Machine Perception Lab of the Qualcomm Institute at UC San Diego.*

What will be the role of robotics in the workplace? How can startups in robotics become mass-market success stories? And what will the robotics industry look like in five, or even 50 years? Those are some of the topics up for discussion June 23 when academic, government and industry participants from the UK and California explore “The Future of Robotics and Autonomous Systems” on the University of California, San Diego campus.

Hosted by the Qualcomm Institute, the panel is part of a week-long visit to California by the United Kingdom’s Minister of State for Universities and Science, the Rt. Hon. David Willetts, MP. Willetts is leading a “digital trade mission” to California with a group of seven high-flying British robotics companies, most of them relatively recent startups or small-to medium-sized enterprises. All are eager to explore the status of the robotics industry in the United States, and areas of potential collaboration between the industry and university researchers.

The one-hour panel discussion and Q&A will begin at 1:30 p.m. Pacific time (9:30 pm BST) on Monday, June 23, in UC San Diego’s Calit2 Auditorium, Atkinson Hall. The event is open to the public and free of charge, and the session will be streamed live on YouTube, so that the proceedings can also benefit British and American researchers and executives who are not in San Diego this week. The webcast will subsequently be archived for on-demand viewing.



*Rt. Hon. David Willetts, MP, UK Minister of State for Universities and Science.*

The UK Robotics Mission begins in San Diego, but the delegates are also planning to visit Silicon Valley and San Francisco. The program of meetings, briefings and networking is “designed to provide a unique insight into the U.S. robotics landscape, building connections

with potential customers, investors and partners,” according to UK officials. The British companies are also hoping to develop quality contacts in California as potential customers, investors or research partners.

“The Qualcomm Institute is delighted to welcome the UK delegation to California, and we’re honored that our institute and UC San Diego are the first stop on a very ambitious and hectic five-day agenda,” said institute director Ramesh Rao, one of the leading faculty members involved in a robotics initiative at UC San Diego. “California companies and investors also have a lot to learn from the early successes in Britain’s robotics industry, and it’s worth remembering that the industry in the UK and California owes much of its strength to the ideas and personnel coming out of the world-class universities in both places.”

During the panel discussion, UC San Diego Associate Vice Chancellor for Research Miroslav Krstic will welcome the UK delegation to the campus. Willetts, who has been a Cabinet member since 2010 and a Member of Parliament (for Havant in Hampshire) since 1992, will deliver the keynote talk on UK science policy and the Conservative government’s efforts to nurture the startup environment for companies and investors in British robotics ventures – and his vision for cooperation between UK and California companies. Also on the panel:

- Ramesh Rao, Director, Qualcomm Institute and holder of the Qualcomm Endowed Chair in Information Technologies and Telecommunications in the Electrical and Computer Engineering department (moderator);
- Todd Hylton, Senior Vice President, Brain Corporation;
- Andra Keay, Managing Director, Silicon Valley Robotics; and
- Rich Walker, Managing Director, Shadow Robot Company. Founded in 1987, Shadow Robot’s leading product is the Dexterous Hand, which gives robots the same capability and flexibility as the human hand with 20 degrees of freedom and over 100 sensors in a package the same size as a human hand.

Other British companies participating in the trade mission include: Agilic Ltd.; Aura Tech Engineering Ltd.; D-risQ; Maplebirg Ltd.; Q-Bot; Reach Robotics; and Sebastian Conran Associates.

Prior to the panel discussion, the UK delegation will hear from some of UC San Diego’s leading experts in robotics. They will get briefings from Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering professor Thomas Bewley and Structural Engineering professor Falko Kuester. Bewley directs the Coordinated Robotics Lab, which specializes in using feedback control to impart stability to robots, and his technology is licensed to the manufacturer of the new self-balancing toy robot,

MiP, which could earn UC San Diego \$1 million in tech-transfer fees. For his part, Kuester is focusing on the use of robotics in fields as divergent as structural engineering and cultural heritage. The UK delegates will tour the Qualcomm Institute's Machine Perception Lab – best known for its educational and humanoid robots – and they will hear from Scripps Institution of Oceanography director Margaret Leinen and researchers from the Scripps lab that builds underwater robotic systems.



*MAE Prof. Tom Bewley holds the MiP toy robot with a self-balancing control system developed in Bewley's UCSD lab.*

Backed by the Technology Strategy Board, UK Trade & Investment, and UK Science and Innovation Network, and organized by Chinwag, the UK mission is a specially-developed program for companies who want to lay the groundwork for expanding their business into one of the largest and most dynamic robotics markets in the world – the U.S. in general, and California in particular.

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