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Q&A with the Great Nephew of Alan Turing

Carrying on the legacy of a famous relative is a no easy task, particularly for someone as renown as [Alan Turing](#), who is widely considered to be the [father](#) of theoretical computer science and [artificial intelligence](#). But this hasn't stopped his great nephew James Turing and his parents from giving it a go.

Several years ago they launched the [Turing Trust](#), which aims to promote education through the use of IT to bring essential learning resources to rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa. And this summer, on 13 June they are launching a new TED-esque lecture series called the [Turing Talks](#), which will feature many brilliant speakers including IBM's own [Geoffrey Siwo](#).

James, who is doing research in Kenya, recently visited IBM's lab in Nairobi to meet the team and see if there are opportunities to collaborate. Before heading out he took the time to answer a few questions about his famous great uncle and his work.

Honored to host James Turing (yes, his great uncle is Alan Turing) at IBM Research – Africa today to talk about innovation for the continent pic.twitter.com/rWEIYLinl5

— IBM Research (@IBMRResearch) [March 30, 2017](#)

Q. What's it like being the great nephew of a luminary such as Alan Turing?

James Turing (JT): *Throughout my life there's certainly been a sense of Alan's legacy and how it will no doubt be near impossible to come close to his achievements; however, it also gives me a great sense of purpose as seeing the impact he has had on the world makes me believe that within my lifetime we could live in a society where everyone has equal access to the digital world.*

Q. If he were still alive today what would you like to ask him?

JT: *I'd love to see the expression on his face once he realises how different the world is because of the '[universal machine](#)'.*

Q. As part of the new generation of Turing's what plans do you have for keeping carrying on his legacy?

JT: *For me the honour of bearing some responsibility for Alan's legacy has always been in believing that everything he did was not borne of selfish intent, and therefore, the one thing that he would dearly have loved was for anything he created to be shared with everyone in the world. For me, this means bridging the digital divide and at the Turing Trust we have two exciting ways we're doing this in 2017:*

1. [The Turing Talks](#) – on 13th June we're hosting a one day conference exploring innovative technology and its use in the developing world with an inspirational line up of speakers at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh It is aimed at leaders in the field and those who want to make change happen. We believe this conference will be our next step to defining how the worlds 3.6 billion people without Internet access can also benefit from the information age.
2. [The SolarBerry](#) – is our self-financing, community-owned off-grid computer lab powered by solar energy with energy-efficient Raspberry Pi computers. So far the Turing Trust has installed thousands of computers into on-grid classrooms – the SolarBerry is how we will connect off-grid schools to our digital age using renewable energy.

Q. How important is the role of public private partnerships (PPP) in addressing the challenges and opportunities in Africa?

JT: *Personally I see PPPs as an interesting route to scale solutions quickly in Africa, whilst ensuring they're sustainable in the long-run. Without government support in many countries, there simply isn't a viable way to help solve these public challenges, yet without the skills and efficient approach of private business then being able to scale and create lasting change will be a long fight. Of course, a PPP must be the right fit and there are myriad elements that need be considered, but in taking advantage of private innovations, there are great opportunities in Africa for the public good.*

Q. You recently visited IBM's lab in Kenya. What was your impression? Any surprises?

JT: *The IBM Research Lab in Nairobi is certainly an impressive place. Hidden within the leafy Karen suburbs it's somewhat of an idyllic setting for tech innovation in Africa. I think what I was most heartened by was that in chatting with some of the inspiring IBM team, how many were going the extra mile in order to address the development challenges they were working with. Even better, was hearing about IBM's Corporate Responsibility scheme that rewards staff time spent volunteering with funds they can then use to build the projects they're volunteering for. I think this approach is something that many could learn from as it ensures real buy-in from everyone and can lead to the long-term change that's what we're all working for.*

Hear from IBM healthcare scientist [@gsiwo](#) and other innovators at the [@theturingtalks](#) on 13 June in Scotland <https://t.co/owYWYH5VG5> pic.twitter.com/PLPsnInKgq

— IBM Research (@IBMResearch) April 25, 2017

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James Turing

"...makes me believe that within my lifetime we could live in a society where everyone has equal access to the digital world."

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