



Digital Britain Unconferences: A Report

26 May 2009

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The Process

The Digital Britain Unconferences were a series of UK-wide, volunteer-organised events quickly set up in reaction to the British Library hosted *Digital Britain Summit* on April 17th 2009. Their aim was to produce a representative 'grassroots response' to the interim report and gather set of positive, realistic contributions for consideration in the final report.

A week after the Summit, and with a nod from the Digital Britain team that they were listening, a website was launched with these simple instructions:

Anyone can attend or hold an event and associate it with Digital Britain Unconferences, you'll just need to summarise your discussions and hold it by 13th May 2009! Yes, time is very tight.

By the May 13th, twelve unconferences had taken place from Glasgow in the north to Truro in the south west. All attendees were encouraged to read the Interim Report and the level of engagement and serious thinking across each event was exemplary. The events included a virtual discussion focusing on rural issues related to Digital Britain and a family unconference held in Tutbury, Derbyshire, as well as large events of over 50 people in London and Manchester.

Such a speedy reaction was made possible by the free social media tools such as Yahoo Groups, Twitter, wikis, blogs and instant messaging. Few phone calls were made by the organisers. The process exemplifies what is possible for Digital Britain when these tools are combined with channelling existing loosely connected networks and motivations, and demonstrates the phenomenon described by Clay Shirky in his recent book *Here Comes Everybody* when he notes that 'when we change how we communicate, we change society'.

This report is based on the submissions received from the events held around the UK. Lightly edited versions of the full reports are also included for reference, and the original submissions are all available online via the *Digital Britain Unconference* website:
<http://digitalbritainunconference.wordpress.com>

Executive Summary

More Ideas Than You Can Shake a Stick At

Perhaps we should begin by noting that the unconferences provide an excellent demonstration of why traditional forms of consultation should no longer be seen as the only or optimal means of gathering responses to policy proposals of wide public concern.

The range of issues covered is unsurprising since 'Digital Britain' is really just 'Britain in a digital world', with all the richness, complexity and variety that implies.

As the reports came in it rapidly became clear that it would not be feasible to produce an authoritative but short narrative summary of such a disparate set of self-organising meetings, despite our promise to the Digital Britain team that we would keep our submission brief and to the point.

The 'unconference' ethos meant that each event was self-organising, varying from the open-ended conversation in Cambridge, through the decision to break into 'working groups' in London, but also including the videos made by the Fibre to the Home team and the Tutbury 'family unconference'.

Since the agenda for meetings was set by those attending based on our request that the discussion should focus on *positive and realistic contributions for consideration in the final report* we have used this criterion to select the main themes that we believe the Digital Britain team should pay attention to.

However we would like to stress again that this is our view having read through all the material, that the full reports are all available online, and that other summaries, perspectives and emphasises have been written-up elsewhere by other reputable agents.

Kathryn Corrick
Alastair Duncan
Tom de Grunwald
Bill Thompson

Think Globally, Meet Local Needs

The network is a utility, and recent developments are about the realisation of the network's inherent capability as a space for conversations between participants who will both send and receive information. The internet has always been two-way, now its most significant application, the World Wide Web, is also a read-write medium.

This poses significant challenges for all of us, and is driving massive technological, economic, social, political and cultural change. Digital Britain must be about all of these, and not just the economic aspects of the transformation taking place; it must take account of the needs of individuals, families, rural communities and small businesses and not just large corporations, central government and the major media players; it must show ambition and articulate a vision of a network future that we can believe in, one that is not based around a centralised and managerial agenda that is rapidly becoming obsolete.

Infrastructure

Getting the infrastructure right is a necessary but not sufficient condition for progress. Without fast, reliable and universally available access to an IP network then nothing else is possible and the potential we all see in the internet will not be achieved. The past is not a good guide here, especially when it comes to the take-up of services, as network effects and unpredictable thresholds come into play again and again.

There was a general feeling that the interim report's aspiration to offer universal 2mbps access by 2012 lacked ambition and that while universal access was vital it should be based on significantly faster network speeds.

It may be useful to consider the situation in Cornwall, which has been able to benefit from EU convergence funds for the county-wide rollout of first-generation broadband. The ActNow project has ensured that 10,000 businesses and 99% of people in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly now enjoy broadband download speeds of up to 8Mb/s

This has allowed innovative businesses to be set up all over the county, giving a much-needed boost to the rural economy, reducing carbon footprint, employing people locally and enabling traditional and new industries alike to find customers across the country and across the world via the internet. ActNow says that "over 80% of businesses in Cornwall say that the Internet is now critical to their business."

This shows how near-universal access to the latest broadband technology can regenerate and revitalise not just urban areas but an entire county, yet the 'vision' outlined in the Digital Britain Interim Report will actually set Cornwall *back* to where it was in 2002.

Businesses currently based in rural areas would be forced to relocate to urban areas served by NGA networks. This would put pressure on roads and transport networks, cause currently-vibrant small towns and villages to stagnate, and have a detrimental impact on the environment by increasing commuting.

The architecture of the network was also felt to be important. Experience teaches us that an effective network should adhere to the end-to-end principle and route the traffic sent over it as efficiently and effectively as possible rather than offering different levels of service, so network neutrality is an important principle.

Most consumer connections to the Internet are asymmetric, with download speeds some multiple of upload speeds. In Digital Britain creative individuals and organisations will benefit more from symmetric networks. Any universal service obligation should at least cover the issue of upload speeds, even if equality cannot be mandated.

In order to support this it may be necessary to bring the voluntary code on broadband speed under Ofcom's statutory control so that ISPs are more likely to deliver on their promises. It may also be appropriate to have the Office of Fair Trading or Local Authority Trading Standards offices monitor broadband speeds.

Britain would benefit from the digital equivalent of the London Eye or Buckingham Palace, pieces of 'digital architecture.' For example a National geospatial backbone project to offer mapping data and services might inspire entrepreneurship and creativity.

Universality and Inclusion

It was widely argued that there needs to be much more focus in the final report in supporting and inspiring the people who can get online but who choose not to do. The issue concerns people, not just infrastructure. Digital Britain needs to be far more ambitious about digital inclusion, perhaps setting a bold target of getting 3m more people online within a reasonable timeframe.

An entitlement to basic digital skills should be included in the final report, but strategies often focus on the people at the bottom (with no skills) or the people at the top (with the highest skills). The report should instead focus on a continuum of digital skills that can inspire and involve all citizens.

This *continuum* model is as much about role models, sharing creativity and innovation, and business creation as much as skills. The final report should ensure that there is an understanding of this throughout Government, throughout all education institutions, and throughout all employers and employer support agencies.

Parity for urban and rural communities in connectivity should be a core principle and not simply an aspiration. Bold targets should be set for access and also for digital inclusion, with digital skills and access to the internet seen as entitlements for all.

One model for this might be to offer families with low income a free "personal data allowance" perhaps a free data stick with 3GB per month, or 10GB pm via their phone line or a mobile internet connection.

Wireless backhaul should be considered more seriously as a solution for areas where wired infrastructure is hard to deliver. This would deliver a symmetric connection to users, while the options for increasing the backhaul are open to competition and technology neutral.

Education, Skills and Economic Development

More recognition should be given to the potential of connectivity for new forms of co-creativity.

We will all soon be content creators as well as content consumers, and attention should be given to how to promote the creativity of individuals, small businesses and people working from home

Birmingham offers a good example of how things change when there is public support for creative, cultural and digital businesses, which in turn attracts further investment from the private sector

Education has a cultural role for digital media and citizenship, but we need to move the debate beyond business and technology. While media literacy is taught in school the current ICT curriculum in England and Wales does not go far enough to prepare children for the digital age.

We should actively promote a culture of experimental enterprise. Learn from Silicon Valley, rather than lament it. Ideas for supporting digital businesses include:

- Start a government-funded Graduate Digital Apprenticeship Scheme to encourage graduates to apply for apprenticeships in digitally engaged businesses.

- Set up an Enterprise Bank for long term success in ideas rather than short term return to shareholder.

- Establish an Innovator Loan Scheme

More also needs to be done to encourage an active digital community outside the 'digital sector.' For example, public service engagement should be digital by default, while BBC content should be more easily available for people to reuse or adapt.

Privacy is a major issue, and one that requires more attention. Education in privacy risks is vital, as is a strengthened legal and regulatory framework for data protection.

Content and IP

A commitment to alternative models of IP

Copyright needs a rethink, in rebalancing complete control and public interest. The 'public domain' should be explicitly supported, and publicly funded material should be in the public domain rather than protected by Crown Copyright or Parliamentary Copyright.

The government should commit to opening up information and letting third parties utilise it, as access to data encourages innovation and creativity.

It is important to recognise that consumers don't always want to download content illegally, but often have no option as commercial offerings don't reflect what consumers would like to watch/listen to.

The government should uphold the law on the uploaders of illegal content, not the downloaders.

While industry has to make it a lot easier for consumers to get what we want when they want it and to pay for it at the point they want it, regulation should not simply reflect the demands of the content providers. For example, it may be appropriate to target those who upload material without permission rather than downloaders.

The Old Order

Government should be more visionary in encouraging new players to grow and generate new economic activity. Reviewing and regenerating the legacy players is not enough. Defining 'public service broadcasting' is complex, but should allow for incubating new forms of content, new producers and new forms of consumption.

'Community TV' and 'Community Radio' are analogue terms. Support communities that publish their own news and information, regardless of medium, and support training them to do so.

Appendix 1: Headline Issues

Kathryn Corrick and Alastair Duncan reviewed the submissions and identified the following themes and common points. This list formed the basis of the summary given above.

2 Mbps not enough

Upload/download symmetry is vital

Consider rural Britain

Connectivity

Think about the creativity of individuals, small businesses and people working from home

Treat broadband as a utility

Next generation broadband and universal access to broadband and wifi

Skills for the digital industry

Content and intellectual property and how it is paid for

DRM unworkable in current format

We all produce content

IP considerations

Vision and ambition, not just economics please

Network neutrality

Wider bandwidth is also about opening up learning solutions

We will all soon be content creators as well as content consumers

Birmingham's experience in teaching / educating people in a meaningful and accessible way

Birmingham's experience of what's happened when there is public support for creative, cultural and digital businesses, which in turn attracts further investment from the private sector

Parity for urban and rural communities in connectivity

Web on TV for those in areas where networks don't reach

Invest in universities for knowledge transfer and research

A commitment to alternative models of IP

Recognition of small producers (SMEs)

Education as a cultural role for digital media and citizenship - need to move the debate beyond business and technology

Government to commit to opening up information and letting third parties utilise it (access to data encourages innovation and creativity)

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The report doesn't talk about what individuals, families or businesses might want

The centrist agenda the report outlines is already obsolete

Ofcom needs to get tougher on ISPs who don't deliver broadband speeds and bandwidths that they promise. This should no longer be a voluntary code.

Consider letting Office of Fair Trading or Local Authority Trading Standards to monitor broadband delivery against what companies advertise

Web 3.0 is about our individual control of the web

Recognise that consumers don't always want to download content illegally, but often have no option as commercial offerings don't reflect what consumers would like to watch/listen to.

Broadcast: an online searchable source for all broadcast output for pay-per-view and subscriptions

The government should uphold the law on the uploaders of illegal content, not the downloaders

The industry has to make it a lot easier for us to get what we want when we want it and to pay for it at the point we want it? They need a business model which doesn't try to restrict the flow of content to the consumer, with ease of access, quality and range of content as their USP.

On inclusion: Every home in the UK with a family income of less than £25k pa (maybe based on tax code?) should have a FREE "personal data allowance" - a free data stick with 3GB per month, or 10GB pm via their phone line (regardless of whether they have a phone).

We're moving towards VLE teaching where I could be delivering one lesson across the web to kids in different schools.

We should teach media from year seven, instead of only at GCSE

Idea to encourage/support digital businesses: a government-funded Graduate Digital Apprenticeship Scheme. Encouraging graduates to apply for apprenticeships in businesses working in innovation, hi-tech, digital media

Government should set up an Innovator Loan Scheme

On future of local media: 'Community TV' and 'Community Radio' are analogue baggage terms. Support communities that publish their own news and information, regardless of medium, and support training them to do so.

On national scale digital infrastructure: Britain needs a digital equivalent of the London Eye or Buckingham Palace, pieces of 'digital architecture.' (For example a National geospatial backbone project)

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On privacy: Include online privacy as a key objective. Establish view on privacy risk and unsatisfactory regulatory process.

On digital Skills and inclusion: Be more ambitious for digital inclusion. Set a bold target for 3m more to come online. Establish an 'entitlement' to digital skills and access.

On community usage and inter-authorship: Recognise the potential of connectivity for new forms of co-creativity. UK content should not be to the exclusion of international community debate and sharing - for example, how to manage flooding or natural disaster.

On creating billionaire businesses: Actively promote a culture of experimental enterprise. Learn from Silicon Valley, rather than lament it. For example, establish an Enterprise Bank for long term success in the idea rather than short term return to shareholder.

On the Uploaders' Charter: Upload rights (and speed) must be included in the Universal service obligation. Currently it's all about download (and broadcast obsession).

On rights: Copyright needs a rethink, in rebalancing complete control and public interest. The 'public domain' needs a rethink. Publicly funded material should be in the public domain. For example, crown copyright should fall away.

On Digital Britons: More needs to be done to encourage an active digital community outside the 'digital sector.' For example, public service engagement should be digital by default, BBC products should be free to British license payers

On broadcast: The report should be more visionary in encouraging new players to grow and generate new economic activity. Reviewing and regenerating the legacy players is not enough. Defining 'public service broadcasting' is complex, but should allow for incubating new forms of content and new forms of consumption.

Appendix 2: Report Submissions Received

Reports were received from:

- Birmingham
- Cambridge
- Didcot
- Glasgow
- Leeds
- London
- Manchester
- Nottingham
- Truro
- Tutbury, Derbyshire (a family response)
- A rural response

Most of the original reports are available online via the Digital Britain Unconference blog, online at:

<http://digitalbritainunconference.wordpress.com/>

The versions here have been lightly edited and prioritise the major recommendations and proposals.

We encourage anyone who is looking at the outcome of the Unconferences to review all of the submissions, as the summary is necessarily limited in its scope and treatment of the issues.

Birmingham

Date May 12 2009
Location Birmingham School of Art, Margaret Street,
Birmingham
Attendees 25
Submitted by Jon Hickman

These notes are taken from the flipcharts produced at the event.

General observations

The report seems to be concerned with protecting existing businesses rather than encouraging new entrants to markets.

The report is focused on the needs of business not the needs of the public

NETworks

ISP's should see opportunities as well as threats

Report should recognise that uploading is a majority activity e.g. Flickr, Facebook

Producers at grassroots need fast UPLOADS as well as downloads

Consumer rights need to be championed

Tech that is good for consumers

The public are not CONSUMERS but PARTICIPANTS

Get people included in conversation, not just businesses

Networks should be key in conversations about DIGITAL INCLUSION –

Require ISPs to charge proportionally for up and down stream. Don't penalise uploaders by charging them for fast uploads: this effects creative SMEs

Parity for urban and rural communities in connectivity – support for rural creative and cultural industries who need access to good network infrastructure

Web on TV especially in areas we can't get networks to

Pre-empt demand for bandwidth

Is 2Mbps really enough? If it is a minimum, what should most of the country expect?

Investment

An overview of Birmingham & West Midlands

Lots of support activity from AWM, 4IP to accessible funds are good

WM are ahead of the game in terms of funds

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The public support for creative & cultural and digital business in West Midlands attracts further investment (from private sector) and creative talent to the region.

What sort of funds and investment?

Grants or investments?

Is government looking to support for digital industry? Or creative industry? Or Cultural industries?

How do we help creativity (not just chasing funding)?

Government commitment to projects in digital content e.g. Wellness agenda – in establishing digital content, as key purchases of services

Universities need investment for knowledge transfer and research

Opportunities for Birmingham and West Midlands

Longbridge as another digital cluster

Attract organisations like building societies who would bring infrastructure investment as well as jobs

IT businesses and their concerns are part of this discussion too

Intellectual Property (IP)

It's broken: start from scratch

Some ideas for the carrot (encouraging legal behaviour) as well as the stick (policing IP)

Commitment to alternative models of IP within the discussion

Education for businesses not just consumers: they need to know opportunities not just threats from digital and its effect on IP

Copyright laws and rights agencies seem to be already moving ahead based on old models: how do we make them stop?

Free up old media products: media as culture. If content isn't being used to generate revenue anymore, then it should be freely available

Some acknowledgment of consumers position not just media companies

What do artists/producers want? People to consume their products! They don't want their audience to be criminalised

IP roles need to work for all types of media

Public Service/Broadcast production

Opportunity for independent producers

A clearer vision: Producers can't see more than 12 months ahead, so show them there is a longer term strategy and get them to invest time in that

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Independent producers should be more innovative in approach to IP and to co-working with both their peers and their audience

Clarity is needed as to what Public Service means in a digital age.

Ad inventory: why is this a problem?

In a free market new companies should be able to enter the market and sell advertising space

Concerns over ad inventory contradicts references to ensuring “competitiveness” in the report and seem protectionist

Ad models need to change: recognise Google as an innovator

Recognise small producers in these policies

Education & Skills

Links between industry and education: report asks what there should be – so what should there be?

Training vs. Education: training has limits education will produce flexible digital media literacy and workers.

Beyond online tutorials: proper education

Education for the cultural role of digital media, and for digital citizenship

Move the debate beyond business and technology

Open up general debates around role of digital media in society: more away from “Facebook rots your brain” (Daily Mail) angle of mainstream media

Let’s not throw away pedagogy it’s still education: don’t get distracted by the kit

Meaningful and accessible training for the kit that people have and use

Birmingham: we need to shout about what we do already.

Skills for delivery of public services and interface with government

Talks about mechanics of e-government but not about underpinning ideas of citizenship, e-democracy

Define universal service provision – who for? – how does it work?

We need digital media literacy not just the ability to use a computer

Education policies that work towards wider educational goals, that aren’t barriers to other learning.

Open access to internet in schools and public places should not be locked down

Government sees Web as broadcast: government should open up information and let third parties utilise it

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But we need a conversation about how transparency might work

Clear REWARD to encourage engagement otherwise people won't be interested

Access to data encourages innovation and creativity

Cambridge

Date May 7 2009
Location Parker's Piece/Arts Picturehouse
Attendees 7
Submitted by Richard G Elen and Bill Thompson

Report

On the agenda were three main areas:

- Infrastructure
- Broadcasting
- Rights.

Infrastructure

The growth of websites like YouTube and Facebook demonstrates that many network users are generating their own content. In order to meet their needs the internet should offer symmetric service, with upload speeds much closer to download speeds than the current network architecture offers.

The 2 mbps proposal in the report does not seem adequate for many users, and a solution which offered fibre to the kerb or fibre into premises would be far preferable. We take the view that if South Korea can aim high then so can we, and we really ought to offer people something in the order of 200Mbps/

Where direct fibre access is not possible a point-to-point microwave link could be used to carry a data feed out to a remote village, for example, with land-based distribution at the far end.

In addition we would envisage the establishment of an extensive wireless network, using WiMax or similar technology. This would provide high-speed mobile access, backup in the case of a pickaxe through a cable, and distribution within rural areas.

Broadcasting

Most UK television services are now viewable online either live or via a catch-up service. This should be promoted since replacing dedicated broadcast channels with IP traffic will free up spectrum and allow for many new devices to offer TV/radio like services.

How's it done?

It's quite obvious that a high-speed National Network Infrastructure is not going to be built by private companies on their own. Even with Government support it could be difficult. Everyone would want to focus on the easy and thus profitable urban and inter-urban paths and nobody would be up for the rural areas. When the telephone system was installed, it was a national public monopoly. As a result,

the profitable and easy urban routings were able to subsidise the difficult and thus expensive rural ones.

The NNI could be a public company, managed and operated on a national basis and responsible for bringing a fast data pipe into all premises and maintaining a service. Beyond that the user would install, or have installed, their own routers and other equipment, and could employ specialist providers to handle this along with maintenance and other facilities.

The 'traditional' ISP business model then disappears, but instead ISPs become "Internet Services Providers", providing the web, email and data management services that people cannot, or choose not to, operate themselves. In addition, with the NNI's responsibility ending at the doorstep, there would be plenty of room for independent contractors as well as larger organisations to supply, install, configure and maintain the routers and other on-site infrastructure required by subscribers to access the system.

How would it be paid for?

The system would be most easily covered by direct taxation, making the individual contribution relatively small. It seems that "spare" digital switchover funds have already been spoken for at least twice so I would not expect those to be available, and in any event, this is a rather larger project than 2Mb/s.

Digital Rights

If we are going to let a million broadcasters bloom and make it possible to download an HD movie in a matter of minutes, people need to have the rights to handle copyright material legally. The obvious answer is a form of blanket licensing, where for an annual fee, you can do what you like. Averaged out over the online population this would be a relatively small amount.

Distribution initially could be via a "black box" system in which all the income goes into a fund which would be distributed proportionally to artists and rights holders in the same proportion as other rights. However there could be a cap, as with the Public Lending Right, or a sliding scale, so the income for an extremely popular artist would level off somewhat, while still remaining substantial. A fund would be set up, administered by the royalty collection societies, to earmark a proportion of this income for developing new talent.

If necessary a distinction could be made between consumers, creators and distributors of copyright material so, for example, there might be a blanket fee for enjoying copyright material and an additional fee for running a music radio station. The principle should be to encourage user-generated content and rely on the fact that lots of people paying a small amount will probably generate a great deal more money than a few paying a lot.

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In the long term a “black box” system would become unworkable as the royalties generated by NNI usage would become the most significant source, and thus there would be no reference against which to distribute them proportionally. At this point there would be the need to introduce an automatic logging system in which each media usage was recorded and used to calculate royalty payments.

Regarding copyright in more general terms, the principle should be established that no public-domain work should ever be taken out of the public domain: changes of copyright legislation could not be retroactive as a matter of principle.

Didcot

Date	May 1 2009
Location	Rutherford Appleton Laboratory
Attendees	7
Submitted by	Cameron Neylon and Lilly Evans
Attendees	Cameron Neylon, Lilly Evans, David Humphries, Nava Whiteford, Lucy Power, Howard Morrie, Andrew McKensey

We had a wide ranging conversation that spread from infrastructure to rights management to government monitoring via education, health, and enterprise. However despite that we kept seeming to revolve around one or two specific themes. The most important of these revolved around user generated content and how this changes the playing field.

The central issue to address is that the Interim Report focuses on broadcast and the future is in multicast, where the consumer needs to be able to upload and DRM simply won't work unless it protects everyone in a fair way whether they be one person or a massive broadcaster.

The Citizen Content Producer

The interim report focuses on the existing broadcast industry and their existing business models. Yet the promise of a Digital Britain lies in enabling the users to be content producers. The report barely includes the words "people" or "users". The potential for real innovation, particularly in the current economic climate, lies in enabling micro-industries, user/content producers, and communities to compete on a level playing field with existing suppliers.

This means:

Net neutrality is crucial – anything short of this stifles innovation and content production

Infrastructure must enable the upload path – if we're producing content we need to be able to upload it easily

We need a social and legal infrastructure that supports content production – simple and easily understood rights and management approaches based on enabling rather than limiting the ability to create content.

Walking the walk

The second main theme that came out of our meeting was the need for any response from this community effort to demonstrate the values and principles that it proposes. The key principles identified at our meeting were:

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Transparency – all the material should be available if someone wishes to dive into it, no hidden process

Use the medium/media – collect video, audio, tweets, and above allow people to comment on them. The Read-Write web is key to both the potential and what is missing from the report.

Detail and real numbers – it was pointed out the notion of “2 megabit” is totally meaningless without details of contention. We need to provide examples to backup assertions and to query the report where needed and where things are vague.

Glasgow

Date	May 8 2009
Location	The Living Room, St Vincent Street, Glasgow
Attendees	23
Submitted by	Craig McGill

Report

Scotland is a separate nation from England and it was felt that many of the issues addressed in the Digital Britain report - and subsequent meetings - were more biased towards those of the large urban networks and specifically, the south-east of England. There appears to have been little consideration given to the huge areas of the country with small and remote communities (note, this also applies to parts of Wales) in how digital can help them.

The 'digerati' to use a phrase are no longer vanguards. Despite what some businesses and communities think, digital is now everywhere, meaning there is now a real danger of a divide. However that does not mean digital connectivity should be forced upon people; what it means is that people should have the option and the availability to explore digital if they wish.

It was asked if there is a moral need to give people access to information via digital just as there should be a moral right to heat/shelter/water and the consensus was that there may not be a moral need to give it to people, but people should have the ability to explore digital.

The first issue noted was that in Scotland connectivity in all forms remains an issue: the infrastructure isn't there at the moment and it is worthless to talk about a digital Britain when so much of the country is left out. To that end, in Scotland there are two digital divides - the haves and have-nots of digital connectivity and those who use and do not use digital.

It was recognised that short of a digital Andrew Carnegie stepping forward (Tom Hunter? David Murray? Steven Leach?) or a large corporation/government involvement then infrastructure in these areas could not - practically and in a recession - reach every household.

However between strong 3G signals and public wifi, it would certainly be capable of ensuring each community had a location where they could go for digital connectivity - post offices were touted as being the perfect (and symbolic) venue for this. While still allowing for post offices to survive, they could embrace the digital by offering the connectivity that people cannot get easily in their homes. The post office would then be a hub for the community. How each community used that hub would be up to them.

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Wired Sussex was also put forward as a way of unifying/galvanising/showcasing the various digital strands to Scotland.

You cannot predict the technologies that will be successful or how they will be used - who would have seen texting as a popular use for a mobile phone for example?

15% of even well-networked areas like Glasgow don't have email. The question is: do they want one? Can they afford one? (note on the idea of affordability of computers. A few years ago the Government let people buy very cheap laptops. In certain parts of Glasgow, most of them ended up being sold on at profit) Or has digital moved past email? Many teens hardly other now and use FaceBook, Twitter and so on.

Is there a form of common good ownership that can be used to help spread digital (and other items) or is it too radical an idea in this very personalised/individualised post-Thatcher age of ownership?

The question was also asked why NHS24 wasn't on Skype. As an afterthought, why aren't the likes of the Samaritans doing more with instant messaging?

Similarly it was also raised that too many of the large, interesting digital events seem to take place in London.

The Digital Britain formal events were criticised for being invite-only north of the border and one attendee pointed out that they had been the preserve of CEO's "more or less all trying to cling to their part of the pie - was about safeguarding them more than forward looking visions for the people". It was also pointed out that the people with digital passion had more or less been absent from the events.

It was suggested that there should be a Scottish Digital campaign group/lobby group to be representing the digital interests in Scotland as there appears to be no representation at a Scottish Government level - no digital Czar for example. It was also mooted if Scotland should use the 3p tax varying powers as a boost to Scotland's digital - to help the successful gaming industry, to boost infrastructure or a similar initiative.

Another issue raised - no one around the table had learned about digital or became passionate about the benefits as their main career or development: it had happened because they were either interested in it or they recognised the growing importance. Therefore, there is an issue of education and personal development - something Scotland has traditionally struggled with - people either learn at work or school and that's it. Continual Personal Development has never been a strong factor in Scotland, therefore there is also a need for pointing out the benefits of digital - everyone has to be an ambassador - to their colleagues, employers, bosses, family and friends but it's about engaging people in what interests them.

Leeds

Date	May 5 2009
Location	Old Broadcasting House, Leeds
Attendees	3 in the room, 20 virtual via live video stream Twitter, online chat, and Skype.
Submitted by	John Popham

Report

The discussion focused largely on issues of connectivity, and widespread discontent at the Digital Britain interim report's suggestion of a Universal Service Obligation to deliver connections of at least 2 Mbps to every household.

It was felt that this commitment was based on hopelessly outdated thinking and failed to recognise the evolving uses of the Internet which require much greater levels of connectivity. In particular, participants were concerned that lack of high speed connections would throttle individual and collective creativity, preventing the creation and dissemination of content from home or the small business.

Many of the remote participants were from rural areas and were particularly exercised by the lack of action on rural connectivity. This was felt to be an additional driver behind rural depopulation and a brake on economic development in remote areas. Young people are already leaving rural areas in large numbers due to lack of affordable housing and paucity of job opportunities, as many of the younger population are interested in using the Internet for work, leisure and socialising, they see the greater availability of connectivity in urban areas as a further incentive to move away from their roots.

On the other hand, rural areas have in recent years relied to some extent on relatively wealthy incomers moving in for lifestyle reasons, and thus providing limited stimulus to local economies as well as renovating and maintaining properties.

As high speed Internet connections become an increasingly important factor in people's lives, there is already anecdotal evidence that people are choosing not to live in areas where connectivity is limited. Modern communications ought to break down barriers to effective working from remote areas, enabling more people to work from home and removing the need to live close to large population centres, this vision is only realisable, however, if the infrastructure in place to deliver real-time communications and the sharing of content on a two-way basis.

People in rural areas are sceptical in the extreme about the suggestion that wireless technologies might provide the answer to their problems. They point to trials with a limited degree of success, which have hit problems with hills, trees and buildings providing obstacles to line-of-sight connectivity. One of the remote participants in the unconference

runs a village wireless network which has provided a vital communications link for the local population, but this network has suffered a degree of problems, and is reaching the end of its useful life as the demands of increasingly data-rich applications test the limits of its functionality.

Most of the rural participants are convinced that fibre cable connectivity is the only long term solution to their needs, and that this will never be provided if left to the present market system. The preferred option is for broadband to be treated as a true utility, and for public intervention to ensure that fast and robust infrastructure is in place for all that need it.

A final strand in the discussion was the need for public service organisations to have fast connectivity both to improve the way they deliver services and to improve communications between staff. Current systems do not allow public agencies to work in modern ways, and better connections would allow them to achieve efficiency savings, both in front-line service provision, and in back office functions including communicating with field staff.

London

Date	May 6 2009
Location	Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Mall, London
Attendees	55
Submitted by	Session reports edited by Alastair Duncan

The London Unconference attracted a significant attendance. The group suggested discussion topics and broke into smaller groups to manage the debate on the eleven topics that got at least four votes each. The sessions were fed back to the whole group, and written up, of which edited summaries follow:

Session 1. Local media

Input: William Perrin

Key question considered:

What is the future of local media given rise of self publishing and decline of commercial models?

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

Recognise that the future of local news and information is bottom up, community generated, not top down broadcaster or printer generated.

Stop using 1950s analogue language "community 'TV' and 'local radio', instead use the phrase "community publishing" which is media neutral. Recognise that the web empowers communities to choose for themselves which medium (written word, audio, video) they need to empower themselves in communication, leave that choice to them, and support them.

Recognise that traditional broadcasters and printers and their lobby have not adapted their business models – stop rewarding failed business models with funding.

Research extent of community web publishing in the UK - in some communities the local website is far more popular than broadcast current affairs shows see for instance:

<http://www.kingscrossenvironment.com>

<http://www.parwich.org>

<http://www.digbeth.org>

<http://www.ventnorblog.com>

<http://www.london-se1.co.uk>

<http://www.talkaboutlocal.org>

Directing funding to local media

Apply value for money criteria to the spend per person engaged in producing the medium, awarding a large number (hundreds or

thousands) of very small grants (£2,000 for training say 15 people), rather than a small number of large ones

Focus on skills and empowerment on the web, not technology.

Community web publishing is cheap to free on the ground (using free web publishing tools) - the only funding needed is some basic skills. Money put aside for digital switchover subsidy or money allocated to community radio and television should be made 'medium-neutral' and open to people to bid for on vfm criteria of cost per person engaged in producing the medium.

The existing spectrum for community TV and radio could be auctioned off and the money put into online grass roots bottom up web publishing. 4IP is a good model - funding for venturing on the web.

Session 2. National-scale digital infrastructure

Input: Vinay Gupta

Key question considered:

What are the digital equivalents of the London Eye or Buckingham Palace?

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

The government needs to support British design build and utilisation of digital equivalents of the London Eye, Millenium Dome, or Buckingham Palace. One suggestion here is a National Geospatial Backbone - sort of like an online Ordnance Survey, but with two additional features.

Firstly, an API to allow ordinary citizens to upload map features and layers. Secondly, a trust system to allow groups like local authorities, police and fire services to add features to the national map in a trusted way so that ordinary users could see what they publish. The purpose of the utility would be to genuinely build a digital Britain: a layer over the entire country showing where things are, what they are, and what they mean.

How might these proposals be funded?

This is a fairly cheap project - most of the data is already owned by the Government in the form of Ordnance Survey and other mapping tools. Perhaps it could even be done by some group like the BBC - sort of "data broadcasting."

Session 3. Infrastructure (UK Data Transport) and Greater Use of Wifi Access

By Mike Kiely

Key questions considered:

- 1. Could free wifi (801..11 & 802.17) be more readily encouraged in public spaces and in municipally managed buildings including public housing?*
- 2. Digital Britain report should include a description of the current UK Data Transport Infrastructure (what's its capable of – best efforts broadband and a strategy for where we need it to be to support critical services?*

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

1. Initiatives to support greater use of wifi.
2. A description of the Data Transport infrastructure to support the Universal Service. Mike Kiely has offered to provide a draft.

How might these proposals be funded?

Item 2 is summarising the planning rules and underlying assumptions of BT's 21CN, Virgin Core network, Carphone (opal) and even C&W. The picture we are seeking describes the attributes of these networks today thus what's possible and what application are not possible. Our current internet access is not engineered for Broadcast TV.

A mathematical and statistical picture of our broadband networks previously presented to Ofcom can be examined here -

<http://www.pnsol.com/publications.html#pmdtq>

Further material on the minimum quality and performance needed is available here -

<http://bbbritain.co.uk/guarantee.aspx>

Implicit within this description will be the nature of the outcomes we as a society can expect to achieve.

Session 4. Privacy

Input: Jim Killock

Key questions considered:

- 1. Technology is powerful, with potential for mass surveillance*
- 2. State, government and individuals are actors*
- 3. Protections, legal and technical are woefully inadequate*
- 4. Future of the net depends on trust and therefore privacy*

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5. Proportionality needs to be applied when privacy is removed

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

1. Include online privacy as a key objective for Digital Britain
2. Recommend ISO standard for privacy, compulsory for business over a certain size
3. Recommend that opt out right should be mandatory (can be excluded by contract, for example mortgage providers that insist they will data share)
4. Simplify regulation: enforce co-operation to stop buck-passing or merge regulators
5. Access audit of large databases should be mandatory
6. User education is needed
7. Communicate privacy agreements in simple terms (in icons like CC licenses)

How might these proposals be funded?

Many of the concerns are dealt with through better business practice or system design, needing legislation rather than funding. Governments would need to allocate better levels of funding to create 'privacy by design' when making new systems.

Session 5. Digital skills and inclusion

Input: Helen Milner

Key questions considered:

1. *Do people of Britain have the digital skills they need to take part in Digital Britain?* No
2. *Does Digital Britain need to do more for people who never use the internet (but for whom the broadband infrastructure is already in place)?* Yes, there needs to be much more focus in the final report in supporting and inspiring the people who can get online but don't. It's about people, not just infrastructure.
3. *Does Digital Britain need to do more for all citizens so that Britain can excel in digital innovation and business creation?* Yes,
4. *What would basic digital skills look like?*
5. *How can we move more people into wanting to be part of an innovative and creative Digital Britain?*

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

1. Digital Britain needs to be far more ambitious about digital inclusion. The unconference would like to see a bold target, for example, getting 3m more people online.

2. People can't use digital technologies without the skills to use them. An entitlement to basic digital skills should be included in the final report.

3. New strategies often focus on the people at the bottom (with no skills) or the people at the top (with the highest skills). Focus on a continuum of digital skills that can inspire and involve all citizens will turn us into a Digital Britain that believes that the skills and ambition of its people is the bedrock of excellence and success.

This *continuum* model is as much about role models, sharing creativity and innovation, and business creation as much as skills. The final report should ensure that there is an understanding of this throughout Government, throughout all education institutions, and throughout all employers and employer support agencies.

How might these proposals be funded?

1. 3m more people online will create £600m - £900m industry value, take the money needed for this (approx £100m) from infrastructure build and ask industry to pay the final £100m when the Government has got another 3m people online.

2. The Department of Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS) can look to their internal skills budgets to ensure an entitlement can be funded.

3. Start small with an awareness campaign amongst partners, develop a pledge to support digital excellence and creativity, host annual awards role modelling new businesses as well as community digital activists.

Embed in further and higher education, and make sure this is an ambition for all not just an elite.

Session 6. Community usage and interauthorship

Input: Ghislaine Boddington

This session set out to cover

- *public authored content*
- *crowd sourced content*
- *user generated content*
- *micro communities creating joint content*

There was real concern that the report did not cover this important area. To enable the use of the web to its key potential, connectivity between small to large groups of people, working/creating together through local-to-local processes, is an imperative. These *group creations* need to be taken into account, as do the process of rights protection in relationship to these projects i.e. creative commons etc

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Examples were put forward from within the groups' experience of community activist and networking sites, where the community is empowered through the use of simple publishing tools to develop web sites allowing them to publish issues and concerns of the locality, creating a network of information - online group creations processes developed through the uploading of media (video, sound and text) by communities at a distance to each other to co-create projects e.g. books.

Other creative examples included projects of sentences written in relay by 500 people, films using 30 sec clips uploaded by 300 different people, community gatherings for live events and mass creation projects, the use of telematics (full bodied video conferencing) to connect people in gestures, in debate and in performances for educational and social usage. These shared mapping of human geographies - economics, social and political - linked to community concerns - community owned networks for exchange and broadcast - can be used for care in community projects, local news, rural connectivity and so on.

There was concern about UK Original content - is any content really for the UK only? It was felt that local-to-local connectivity, one of the key potentials of the web, must be used to enable debate between one community and another distant community with a similar issue e.g flooding, farming, education, whatever country the communities are in. This should not be limited by UK focussed thinking; good advice and information may come from a community in another country.

Session 7. Billionaire Businesses

Input: Ellie Louis

Key questions considered:

- 1. What do we have to do to create the conditions and the right environment for significant internet based business in the UK?*
- 2. What do we have to stop doing?*
- 3. Where are the gaps in our investment ecology?*
- 4. How does the new landscape allow for small business 'pebbles' to grow alongside big 20th style business 'boulders'?*
- 5. Should the UK actively intervene with the big internet players on behalf of UK users? - In particular French/US sites?*
- 6. Why don't we use our language to our advantage more?*

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report

1. Promote a culture of enterprise that allows experimentation in new business models. Seek to develop approaches to digital business that go beyond the accepted norms of 20th Century success models.

This means supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs in the taking of risks. This means being realistic about expectations as to potential failure rates. Provide funding that allows for "failure" in the pursuit of the big innovative wins.

2. Lead the online innovation culture through social networks of highly creative individuals and entrepreneurs who can coach and mentor and also get involved with supporting new ideas as they evolve for digital businesses.

3. Establish sources of funding for new digital enterprises that have a stake in the success of the business idea rather than shareholder value. This could be in the form of an Enterprise Bank managed along the lines of the former personal bank manager approach.

4. Learn from other digital enterprise cultures such as Silicon Valley - find out how ideas are developed into successful business propositions. How is risk viewed? Attitudes to failure? Funding support?

5. Stop focussing on large 20th Century business as the bedrock for the Digital Britain of the future. Start focussing more on smaller more nimble business that can adapt with the same speed to the changing environment and rules.

6. Start the culture of digital entrepreneurship with children in schools. Strongly associate creative thinking with business skills: idea generation, communication, social skills, design, P&L management, cash flow, analysis of customer needs.

How might these proposals be funded?

More incentives for investors into UK business

Use existing innovation funding to focus on digital enterprises

Commission payments based on success of business

Session 8. Defining the Uploaders Charter

Input: Brian Condon

Key question considered

Why doesn't the report consider the uploader as much as the downloader?

There are three points that 'we almost managed to agree on' [laughter].

Uploaders' Charter Clause 1 - Fair recognition of value creation.

Where communities create value by uploading and sharing content, there should be symmetry in how that value is shared out. Currently too much of the value is trapped by people who are not the creators of that value. Such value needs to be reinvested in the community which creates the content.

Uploaders' Charter Clause 2 - Rights protection must be 'symmetrical'.

The rights of all content creators shall be equally respected. The creator must be able to determine licensing rights. The rights of individuals and SMEs shall be protected with equal force to those of large powerful organisations whether public or private. Participants described many instances of large enterprises with significant market power ignoring the rights of individual creators of content.

Should a Rights Agency be created (and there was significant disagreement in the group as to the practicability or efficacy of a Rights Agency), there should be symmetrical treatment of all.

The group noted that there is already a significant body of law around copyright which applies to content. It may be that this can form the basis of protection in the 'new world', although we risk corrupting the new world by using the tools of the past.

Uploaders' Charter Clause 3 - networks must be symmetrical

In Digital Britain, upload speeds will play an increasing role in the level of participation and inclusion for individuals and groups. Any Universal Service Obligation must ensure that services are symmetrical (in that upload speeds should equal download speeds). In any case, upload speeds need to be explicit and included, as they are not currently. Participants will be brought much more into Digital Britain through more symmetrical access. Upload speeds will become increasingly important in future as an engine of value creation.

Symmetry is an important driving concept for Digital Britain, in value creation, in rights and in the universal services obligation.

Session 9. Rights

Input: Bill Thompson

Key questions considered:

- 1. The balance between rights holders desires for complete control and the wider public interest*
- 2. The nature and importance of the public domain*

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

1. There is scope for negotiation between rights-holders and the general public over extensions to copyright law and what is offered in

return. For example, in return for higher penalties or criminal prosecution of serious commercial infringers we could ask for compulsory labelling of DRM, a service-level agreement allowing for refunds if eg capabilities are removed from devices and an undertaking to respect copyright law over contract provisions

2. The public domain will become increasingly important as digital tools allow more creative expression to be shared. There should be an undertaking from government that no laws will be passed which remove material from the public domain.

3. In order to enhance the public domain provision should be made to remove Crown and Parliamentary Copyright and place material created with public funding in the public domain

4. Just as economic impact assessments of policies are prepared as part of the legislative process, we should have public impact assessments that look at the impact of proposed law on the creative use of the internet, freedom of access to material and the long term effect on the creative industries

How might these proposals be funded?

The proposals made here should be revenue neutral as they do not require any direct investment, and indeed if the economic benefits of the sharing culture are taken into account then the negotiation between rights holders and the public could be positive.

Session 10. Digital Britons

Input: Andy Gibson

Key questions considered:

What does digital mean for the people of Britain?

How do we balance the needs of "Digital Britain" with being part of a globally-connected community?

What are the wider implications of the digital age on society and the economy, beyond the "digital sector"?

How does the digital revolution impact on our personal skills needs, and our personal wellbeing?

What are the implications of digital technologies for social inclusion and participation?

Action points that could be included in the Digital Britain final report:

1. Engagement with public services to be digital by default to increase efficiency but give service users a choice of engagement channels to avoid replacing one set of exclusions/barriers to access with another.

2. "Digital DIY" skills should be encouraged. - Key skills training should include not just use of software but how to use digital and

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social tools to build communities, campaign for key issues and contribute to and create new social media.

3. Fund research into the impact of digital technologies on our mental and physical health, and training for the public in how to incorporate new technologies into our lives in healthy and sustainable ways.

(See <http://www.digitalhealthservice.com> for more information)

4. Support digital enterprise to help Britain become the economic and cultural leader in the digital economy, but ensure that this wealth and influence is shared fairly with the people of Britain, particularly those who contribute content to it.

5. Better use of digital tools to create a sense of "membership" of the British state, particularly to give the nation a tighter sense of unity in an age where technology is eroding the value of national boundaries.

6. Public-funded content, including that produced by the BBC, to be made freely available digitally to the "members" who have funded its creation. Derivative products (e.g. DVDs) should be discounted to license-payers or tax-payers

How might these proposals be funded?

Cost-savings on e-government to be directed towards public skills and digital inclusion initiatives in the first 3-5 years.

Public partnership with community groups, social enterprises and hacker/tech communities to deliver e-government and e-participation agenda, and 'digital DIY' skills training.

Create New lightweight company structures for digital enterprises offering tax incentives in return for co-operative style membership structure to remunerate content producers and community members.

Session 11. Broadcast

Input: Andrew Wise

This work stream focused on the Digital Britain Interim Report's recommendations concerning the broadcast industry (TV and Radio) and the print media / journalism.

[Editor's Note - The report submitted for this session was a very detailed view of the state of the broadcast, print media and journalism sectors and actions described in the Interim Report. This edited summary highlights the session recommendations only. The full report detail is available online at <http://digitalbritainunconference.wordpress.com/>.]

Look beyond the legacy

We ask that the report looks further than the narrow confines of the existing "legacy players" and embraces the new players and how they

can be encouraged to grow and generate new economic activity in the future.

Liberate new business models

We know the business models and value chains are evolving and ask are the existing players regulatory and financing structures helping to liberate new business models or suppress competitive innovation?

Redefine the vision and remit of a 'Public Service Broadcaster

We concluded that the final report needs to be more visionary and evaluate "What do we mean by Public Service Broadcaster" – what public service do we want them to offer and how would that be interpreted in the new Digital world

Should part of the public service remit be to incubate new digital content and/or be a route to market for such content?

Should organisation such as the BBC be providing infrastructure for community radio and / or taking some of its output and mashing into their own – likewise for other audio, video and text content (and if so then the IPR of the content creators needs to be fully acknowledged and respected)

The privileges given to the PSB sector must not be allowed to out compete the new digital competition, especially in its early stages as it struggles to get a foothold and shape the new markets.

Support the fundamental change require for existing broadcasters, but not to the exclusion of new entrants.

We asked the question "How does the report help the existing broadcasters prepare for the new digital age?"

It may be an unanswerable question to ask what their future business models need to be in order to be sustainable in a digital world of multi channel, multi creator content – but we felt that the report should at least make some recognition that change needs to happen, will happen and is happening.

Fundamental change is required, not just tinkering at the margins of should we merge this part of the BBC with that part of Channel 4.

Have more faith in the law-abiding businesses

We draw comfort from some developments, as ever the vast majority of the public will utilise the services of recognised and trusted brands – in the past this has been players such as the BBC – in the future it could be YouTube.

We see evidence that responsible brand owners wish to respect IPR and Privacy

It is sine qua non that a trusted brand must be seen to respect things like privacy and IPR. The bad publicity generated by Facebook's recent attempt to change its terms & conditions relating to IPR forced it to back down or lose brand equity. Likewise YouTube is no longer

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the bad boy of pirate video, clips of Premier League football and F1 racing are generally taken down quickly at the request of the IPR owners.

Have more faith in the law-abiding citizen

Indeed, the change that is needed is a way to make the content that users want legitimately available to them in the format they want it in – when you make MP3 music available for purchase the generally law abiding public flocks to buy it.

Just as business models and value chains are changed by digital technology – so are marketing concepts. Media Brands are moving away from single linear product to “market hotels” creating a space for consumers to come and experience content from a variety of sources in a recognisable trusted environment. This is not something the government should or could play a role in, but it needs to be aware that fundamental structural change is upon us from all angles in the Great Digital Britain (or is that the Digital Great Britain? Either way it’s great to be here).

Manchester

Date	May 12 2009
Location	Manchester Digital
Attendees	Some 40 people attended the evening coming from digital businesses, public sector, third sector and as individuals. Most, but not all, were Manchester Digital members.
Submitted by	Shaun Fenson

Report

It was agreed to split into three themed groups – each with a facilitator and note taker. Each group worked out their own set of key points, edited by the note taker on screen so all could see. After the group sessions everyone re-convened as a big group and made final adjustments to the aggregated document.

It appears below as we left it after 2 hours – not a polished text, but containing what it was we thought. While some had different priorities, all who attended backed the document in a unanimous vote.

As a general point, it was felt that this whole process requires regular review and consultation.

Themes

- Content and intellectual property and how it is paid for
- Next generation broadband and universal access to broadband
- Skills for the digital industry

Content

Need infrastructure to be able to access content. Content will drive need for better infrastructure. The infrastructure is more than just broadband, for example cloud computing and mobile.

Sharing, reuse, mashup - two way interaction. The report has a very old fashioned outlook. We all produce content. Digital Rights Management (DRM) is unworkable in its current format.

Government data on individuals should be owned by the individual, in a common format, and sharable at the individual's discretion.

Funding of content, models other than advertising. Alternative models of advertising should be investigated to encourage the creation and sharing of content by brands, end users and the general public.

Encouraging the creation and sharing of content within schools.

The report is too biased towards the broadcast media and should take into account public services. Improving public services. NHS, MySociety, local councils, directgov, local GPs, etc.

Government should simplify IP, particularly for small businesses. Moving towards a free model, like Creative Commons. Business models need to change due to digital copying, rather than government trying to enforce stricter copyright restrictions.

Broadband

Broadband should be treated as a utility where everyone has a right to broadband access. A 2mb standard for the UK is unacceptable and not considered sufficient for immediate needs.

We need lots more bandwidth and we will continue to need lots more bandwidth

Local government needs to develop a strategy that treats broadband access as an urgent priority at local level

Early adopters can drive this by demonstrating the potential uses of this technology in areas where it appears

Legitimate for the government to act, given the counter-incentives that the incumbent network providers suffer from (sunk costs in the copper network)

Proof and evidence required for the economic benefits provided by this infrastructure, especially outside of the obvious urban centres

Efforts needed to create demand by demonstrating the potential uses. Blue sky thinking is vital for this. We need to be clear about who will benefit.

Now is a good time to push this project, both for Keynesian reasons and because the economic crisis means that we need new business models. Now is a good time to sell the benefits of change, as businesses are open to change in how they operate.

This is not just a project that can be justified on a cost-benefit analysis, it is also something that requires vision and ambition. It is worth doing for its own sake.

Vision and leadership is important, and the people who drive this project forward will be creating something of value for generations. It should be thought of in the same manner as the canals, the railways or the Apollo moon missions.

Maintain existing network neutrality giving open access to all.

Skills

Apprenticeship skills type training – learning on the job

Training whilst working rather than full time education

Creation of training contracts with both education and placement driven degrees

Abolishment of performance based funding for education bodies

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Local business and industry representatives to have greater control over training funding

Development of best practice and standards within the industry to be followed by “all”

Development of creative and technical skills within suitable environments

Create a culture of innovation and creativity from an early age

Creation of a Chartered Institute for the Digital Industry driven by industry practitioners. Would have connections with by not be driven by education (primary, secondary, higher and further), public sector (for funding and support), business support organisations etc

Development of better training courses that can be studied whilst working - small bite sizes courses, possibly e-learning driven

Nottingham

Date	May 9 2009
Location	Lace Market House, Nottingham, as part of MediaCampNottingham
Attendees	around 20 digital media professionals
Submitted by	Susi O'Neill

Report

Key messages

Digital Britain is a compromise. We can't keep EVERYONE happy and in money – the government needs to be bolder and protect the rights of children, universal education, and access to all – not just protecting the interests of big business.

Consultation

The publication did not have enough engagement with industry prior to publication. Some reputable people (e.g. social media experts) were consulted but were their views accurately reflected?

The report should be a wiki – user contribution is vital to form understanding of the range of views.

Key omissions

No mention of micro-blogging, focus needs to not just reflect home computers and broadband but wifi, netbooks, mobile, and handheld devices.

Next Generation Networks

Wifi

Some of us are starting to carry our own wifi hotspots, but wifi should be a universal access. Access and speed of wifi is incredibly important in ensuring competitiveness. Milton Keynes is the only place in the UK to trial wi-max with a 7-11 mile range. In Japan this has redefined the economy; the UK is a generation behind. This can be installed with street lightening or as part of the upgrade of infrastructure. This will create 'Supercities' based on solid, ICT infrastructure. However, there are problems with establishing wifi spots as there are with public objections to phone masts.

Video and multimedia learning

Bandwidth is also about opening up new forms of content and learning solutions. Bigger bandwidth in Africa is more about getting children to use video and mobile video for learning and communications which is a better solution than text and laptop solutions. In Africa now, and in the UK in the future, the keyboard is

an archaic device. The future is in multimedia content – therefore we will need faster bandwidth.

Connection speeds

2Mb is an embarrassing ambition for 2012 – we need to aim towards 75% towards the cutting edge level (e.g. Japan, South Korea) – talking about GB access not MB. EVERYTHING Digital Britain was to achieve for the future is reliant on the speed of connection – connection is King.

The government should be speaking more about uptime connection, not just downtime, recognising that in the future we will all be content creators, not just passive consumers. For households we need asymmetric bandwidth, at a minimum of 5Mb/s up and down time. A social housing project in the North East experimenting with giving a housing estate's 15-20Mb broadband connectivity to encourage use.

Photo sharing web service Zoomr moved their business from San Francisco to Japan based on the speed of the internet there. They couldn't deliver on their USPs, speed and delivery, from their USA base.

Network regulation

The Government has the technology but does not want to implement it – it is relying on the private sector – do we need privatisation to ensure standards?

Networks need to be regulated as to price and quality/speed and response time for installation and faults – need to understand what we are buying and ensuring longevity of contract.

ISPs should be encouraged to scrap allocations and encourage unlimited use.

Switching between ISP suppliers can be difficult – in Sweden Ethernet box you can select between a range of six service providers at different connection speeds. The BT infrastructure is too limited.

We have energy chart for houses in Home Information Packs - this should include what broadband speed is available.

We are too entrenched in using the internet to accept how it is delivered and regulated. There needs to be more transparency to know why or how our liberties may be compromised with current legislation e.g. monitoring emails.

Mobile Wireless

Mobile solutions present new opportunities to connect locally small business and community groups with bigger businesses.

Why are mobile and broadband networks seen as separate issues? Are there ways services could be co-delivered? Wifi is accelerating the convergence between mobile and broadband.

Digital TV

A lot of money is being spent on a small group of people who don't have digital, and many will fail to migrate to the new platform anyway. This money would be better spent on improving quality of the service.

Digital Radio

Digital Radio is suffering from poor quality – people vote with their feet and are not accessing it. Radio is most popular in the car – a digital switch off will not work until more cars have DAB radio.

Digital Content

The Digital Rights Agency will only benefit the top 1% of richest artists according to Open Rights Group research and is neither in the interest of content creators or consumers – it should be scrapped.

Good mobile broadband will change content ownership – access, e.g. streaming models like Spotify, are more critical than ownership.

Access to information should not be taxed through ISPs. Monitoring infringes on civil rights. The 'three strikes and you're offline' proposal is immoral. Reducing access to internet is an infringement of human rights. ISPs are beyond control – hackers can infiltrate people's network access and lead to false accusations.

Original UK Content

BBC is resisting competition from Channel 4, but Channel 4 cannot have it both ways – it either needs to be commercial sustainable or fail.

There is still a role for a public broadcaster like the BBC, not here to give people what they WANT but what they NEED – there needs to be an educator creating quality output.

But we have enough pipes to get information out there without television - Is the future putting camera in people's shirts , or the balls at Wimbledon, we can log on and create our own unique camera views to direct our own online TV.

Universal Connectivity

Promoting usage

The majority of the population do not have an idea about what Digital Britain is about. People will uptake on broadband use when they realise what benefits it can offer them, unique to their interests and business. There is a government role in selling and educating users as to the benefits of using web for both transactions and creation.

The government should move towards the use of digital as the primary communication tool - don't send post about swine flu, this is potentially dangerously slow and wasteful – send a text message or use web to communicate key messages

Focus on what children will be using internet for in the future. Like Moore's Law, the learning growth is accelerating exponentially. Government needs an internal HR policy across the board that reflects the technology changes going on.

Community broadband

BT Fon scheme can become a public hotspot to open up half of your network to others for Pay-As-You-Go on other people's networks.

Centres and large business have the 'big pipe' to allow other people buy into it in smaller quantities. This has been done in rural communities using the church spire as the main aerial for broadband. This has other social benefits: 'church' means meeting place, it could get the church used the other 6 days of week as an internet cafe for the community.

In the Scottish Knoydart wilderness – the most remote part of Britain, only accessible by boat – 5Mb/s satellite broadband is being installed at 5Mb, funded by the Scottish government. Universal access is not impossible but needs to be publicly financed.

Nottingham's Solution

What we can do in Nottingham to implement Digital Britain

Infrastructure

Decisions on where you go – personally like a cafe – or a business making a decision on where to base will be heavily influenced by availability of wifi and/or high speed broadband access. Nottingham can be at a major strategic disadvantage to other UK and European territories if we do not have a high quality of high-speed broadband and wifi.

Wifi solutions need to be county wide or wider not just city wide offering access for everyone.

Can we collate together solutions for mobile, broadband, digital TV, digital radio – look collectively to invest in a new infrastructure with a consolidation between all industries, sharing the cost of infrastructure. Data connectivity becomes a solid, collectively owned structure like roads. The separation between different data industries is not helpful for the consumer. Can next phase of Nottingham's tram infrastructure be utilised to implant the wires or sensors for high fibre broadband?

We need to ensure planning regulations include future proofing new building for public use – galleries, schools, offices – to ensuring latest wifi speeds and a solid platform for upgrading in the future – however recognising that in preference we would prefer a better investment in universal wifi access.

Public sector

Job descriptions in the public sector need to ask for willingness to learn and change to access new forms of communications, and to integrate them into public roles with a purpose. Organisations need to make a collective effort to train people to learn about digital communications, changing attitudes and behaviours.

There appears to be a lack of skills and insight from the decision-making bodies. What is the public sector's qualification to support or not support an initiative?

Council procurement is not always helping local businesses, e.g. Nottingham City Council's website was procured from Devon – how can smaller local companies be involved? There is an excessive process involved in tendering, could we look at a tiered approach of initial online pre-tendering for smaller to medium budget projects?

Local councillors are approachable for small funds and single gateway application model for next tier funding – but we need to communicate how we do this.

Online reporting structure for public services e.g. reporting a fault in street is good, but it's not good at communicating back progress. Solutions need to be two-way responsive.

E-democracy needs to be further investigated locally - we need to test smaller grained projects, using agile development to get small pilot projects off the ground with small amounts of money to test it. Building local participation in projects to self-enable for delivery, small grants to deliver community projects e.g. community blogs or digital training for elderly.

Education

Students are ahead of their teachers in technology learning. Students have a right to access learning using digital tools, e.g. Howard Rheingold's Social Media Classroom work. Could Djanogly Academy be a pilot training ground for a social media curriculum?

Nottingham's Digital Industries

The digital creative network in Nottingham is well-connected, but its ecosystem is strong without the public sector, however, we are losing competitiveness to larger cities where the public sector (Local Authorities and RDAs) are investing heavily in the creative and digital industries, particularly in high level skills.

East Midlands has a good globalised computer games industry, but there is less of an association of the region as a producer of great content. Computer games is seen as a strength in Nottingham, e.g. NTU games courses, Game City conference – education is important in developing this: Computer Science and Maths enrollment falling, yet these subjects are important to all tech industries, including games.

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Nottingham City Council could set up an action plan for delivering against Digital Britain agenda –developed in consultation with and lead by local businesses.

Could we have a BBC Big Screen in Nottingham? Providing access to and celebrate local content e.g. Wii games, film. Encourage community participation in digital content.

Truro

Date	May 12 2009
Location	Penryn, Cornwall
Attendees	15
Submitted by	Fiona Campbell-Howes, Radix Communications Ltd

Report

Part of the Cornwall Social Media Café (CSMC), a group of people from Cornwall’s business, local government, not-for-profit and academic communities who have an interest in using social media to network, form interest groups, conduct business, and share ideas, expertise and information.

Fifteen people attended the meeting, including representatives from Cornwall Council, Cornwall Development Company and Cornwall’s digital industry. It consisted of a brief introduction to the report delivered by Fiona Campbell-Howes, followed by an hour-long discussion of the main points affecting Cornwall and the country as a whole.

As time was tight, the group chose to focus on the most pressing aspect of the report, which is the enormous discrepancy between the first of Digital Britain’s five objectives:

“Upgrading and modernising our digital networks – wired, wireless and broadcast – so that Britain has an infrastructure that enables it to remain globally competitive in the digital world.”

and its statement of action no. 17:

“We will develop plans for a Universal Service Commitment to be effective by 2012, delivered by a mixture of fixed, mobile and wireless means. Subject to further study of the costs and benefits, we will set out our plans for the level of service which we believe should be universal. We anticipate this consideration will include options up to 2Mb/s.”

The group welcomes the Government’s recognition that next-generation access (NGA) broadband will be essential to maintaining the country’s competitive position in a global digital economy.

However, the group is deeply concerned at the Government’s intention to leave the rollout of NGA up to commercial providers such as Virgin and BT. It finds the USO of 2Mb/s by 2012 deeply inadequate for those who will not have access to NGA – not to mention embarrassing for the country as a whole. With countries like Korea already investing in a 1Gb/s broadband network by 2015, failing to keep up with developments in broadband technology will be economically suicidal for Britain, which, as the report notes, has already fallen to 12th place in the European Commission’s league table of digital adoption.

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Particularly worrying is the following statement on p.19 of the Interim Report:

“If these investments [Virgin Media’s fibre-to-the-home network and BT’s 21CN fibre network] are carried to completion, we can reasonably expect at least half of the UK population to have access to NGA services and possibly a periphery around that – perhaps as much as 60% or more.”

As a county with a high proportion of businesses and individuals based in rural areas, much of Cornwall will fall into the 40% or 50% (perhaps more, if BT and Virgin’s investments are not carried to completion) of the population that lies outside of the NGA services being rolled out by Virgin and BT.

The group anticipated that the resulting ‘two-speed Britain’ would have a detrimental effect on rural businesses not just in Cornwall but also across the country, as next-generation broadband fast becomes a prerequisite for conducting business and participating in 21st-century society.

In particular, the following points were raised:

Cornwall has been immensely fortunate to benefit from EU convergence funds for the county-wide rollout of first-generation broadband. The ActNow project has ensured that 10,000 businesses and 99% of people in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly now enjoy broadband download speeds of up to 8Mb/s (although actual speeds vary depending on distance from the nearest exchange, plus upload speeds are a fraction of download and are already not sufficient for some more rurally-based businesses who rely on transfer of large files, video streaming etc. – a warning of things to come).

This has allowed innovative businesses to be set up all over the county, giving a much-needed boost to the rural economy, reducing carbon footprint, employing people locally and enabling traditional and new industries alike to find customers across the country and across the world via the internet. ActNow says that “over 80% of businesses in Cornwall say that the Internet is now critical to their business.”

Cornwall is therefore an excellent case study in how near-universal access to the latest broadband technology can regenerate and revitalise not just urban areas but an entire county. From farmers to web designers, florists to PR agencies, Cornish businesses have been transformed by universal broadband access, and the county as a whole has benefited.

Far from being the brave step into the future envisaged by the Government, the ‘vision’ outlined in the Digital Britain Interim Report will actually set Cornwall *back* to where it was in 2002. Businesses currently based in rural areas would be forced to relocate to urban areas served by NGA networks. This would put pressure on roads and transport networks, cause currently-vibrant small towns and villages

to stagnate, and have a detrimental impact on the environment by increasing commuting.

In Cornwall, NGA is currently envisaged for just Truro and Falmouth – and that will be thanks to EU convergence funds, not commercial market drivers. (NB Virgin Media is not present in Cornwall at all.) The group felt that Cornwall was fortunate compared with counties that do not benefit from EU funding, and that the myopic ‘vision’ of a 2Mb/s ‘Digital Britain’ could set their economies back even more.

Conclusion

Members of the Cornwall Social Media Café believe that a USO of 2Mb/s (especially where upload speeds will be a fraction of that) is insufficient for Britain’s economy today, let alone in 2012. Handing over the rollout of NGA entirely to the market means that half the country will soon find itself unable to compete effectively in the national/global economy, losing out to urban areas and other countries that enjoy next-generation broadband access. Thousands of businesses will find themselves set back years.

In conclusion, the rollout of NGA cannot be left up to the market. CSMC urges the Government to reconsider this decision and to actively explore ways to invest now in an NGA infrastructure on which the prosperity and economic future of the whole country – not just its towns and cities – can be built.

Tutbury, Derbyshire

Date May 11 2009
Location Cross Keys, Tutbury, Derbyshire
Attendees 8
Submitted by Sue Greenwood
Attendees Sue Greenwood, Greg Finney, Rob and Sian Alexander, Rick Ostler, Emily, Owen, Mollie and Jacob Finney

Sue Greenwood and family

Response

We decided to produce a family response to the Digital Britain Interim Report. Why? Because you could, if you wanted to, call us a 'digital family'. You couldn't really call us a 'traditional' family, we're definitely more Simpsons than Waltons, and we do make up a rising trend of 'second' families formed by the 38% of remarrying couples.

In our 'digital' rather than 'nuclear' family unit, we own 17 personal computers and games consoles and only two TVs. Which is another trend we think we reflect, ie the move to on-demand, individualised entertainment. You'll almost never find us doing this nowadays.

And, because only one of our six children is under 16, we're also a family that has grown up through the age of becoming digital and sees the web as a tool, or a plaything, but not a toy.

We are Sue Greenwood, Greg Finney, Rob and Sian Alexander, Rick Ostler, Emily, Owen, Mollie and Jacob Finney. We live in Tutbury, Hull, Manchester, Bedford, Sheffield and Cardiff. As individuals we: run four web-based businesses; teach inner-city kids design technology; lecture in web journalism; work in public relations; run an arts festival; are a TA soldier; are a graduate; are a student; are at school.

SUE: So, Greg, I made you sit down tonight and read the Digital Britain report summary. What's your initial response?

GREG: The most depressing document I've read in years!

SUE: That's a bit harsh, why?

GREG: It's already talking about actions, such as re-tasking Channel 4 or getting Chief Executives of big companies to look at what small companies should do. It's talking about getting these people to do things but it isn't talking about what we as individuals, families or businesses might actually want.

It's centrist and top-down. They're trying to use the establishment, such as the BBC and current telecoms companies, to drive an agenda that's already obsolete.

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SUE: I felt I was reading a three-year-old document, written by people who believe they can influence the direction an iceberg moves. It's already irrelevant to the people we know and their experience of the internet and digital media. But, if the aim of the document is to try to boost the UK's position as a global digital heavyweight, what should the government's role be in that?

GREG: There's a law, not sure what it's called, that basically says the more roads you build, the more people will use them. The government's role should be about building the roads and infrastructure. If they want to win the race, we need to be driving a faster car.

SUE: But should the government be using our money to pay commercial companies to put in faster pipes and build the infrastructure? Isn't it about legislating, twisting arms to make sure the companies providing the networks do it at faster speeds, across bigger areas?

GREG: Not about legislating, if you start with the principle that an objective is to make Britain more digital, the pinch point is we don't have the cheap bandwidth and connectivity to make that happen.

SUE: Or we do, but not everywhere. And companies don't deliver on their promises, like Talk Talk "traffic shaping" our home and business bandwidth.

GREG: Yes, restricting bandwidth way below promises. And 3G blocking streaming.

SUE: The govt doesn't need a 'Digital Exclusion Champion' it just needs Ofcom to get tough on broadband companies that don't deliver what they tell customers they'll deliver, instead of the voluntary code we've currently got.

Okay, so suggestion number ONE: look at Ofcom's role. It can't protect consumer's rights and at the same time license such a mammoth and fast-moving industry. Why not let the Office of Fair Trading, or better still Local Authority Trading Standards, monitor broadband delivery against what the companies advertise they'll deliver?

GREG: It's like saying electricity generators are only ever going to supply you 25% of the electricity they advertise. It's a frontier product and needs to be delivered to spec.

Here's suggestion number TWO: The "network" is a utility. We can get the bins emptied, we can get the gas delivered safely, we get our water delivered cleanly. We all want 50GB per month at 10Mb/s and we want it now. Government should sort out the plumbing by incentivising the suppliers and let the market do the rest.

SUE: I hate that I can't watch what I want when I want to watch it. For me it's about the difference between new media and a user-first

approach and traditional media, where it's about what the producer wants to deliver, when and where.

The future is about individuals, not companies. It's narrowcasting, not broadcasting, we already know that. So why the focus in the report on the BBC and Channel 4? If web 1.0 was about putting stuff online for people to look at and web 2.0 about people sharing stuff online, web 3.0 is about our individual control of the web.

GREG: The broadcast TV model requires ratings and volume and creates a demand in the market So they practise regional prohibition - region 1, region 2, restriction on what you can download on from iTunes UK compared to US. Fox releasing programmes in the US and not the UK. It's at odds with a networked society. You create the demand and then you try and restrict the supply. It worked in the past but can't work now.

SUE: I don't think companies like Fox realise how much people actually do want to pay for what they want to watch. Illegal downloading might be wrong, but I hate even more that a company like Fox should decide whether I'm allowed to watch a particular programme in the UK.

I hate it that none of them can get their act together to offer a legal, pay-per-download option that isn't limited to just a selection of one company's broadcast output. Make the whole broadcast archive available in one searchable source behind a cheap pay-per-view or subscription model and I'll be in the queue!

Okay, suggestion number THREE: Can the BBC punch above its weight and negotiate with US and European TV channels to set up and deliver an online system for legal distribution of media? The BBC could do it because it's non commercial (just about) so might be seen as fair. Let it take a global lead on delivering something we all want - an online system that lets us legally pay to watch whatever we want to, when we want to.

GREG: The report concentrates on policing the consumers - getting the ISPs to monitor what we do and finding ways to basically make the old network work. The Rights Agency idea focuses on prohibition rather than recognising there's a demand there, enabling access to content and then taxing it. Most people will want to pay for it legitimately, but we want to be in control of our viewing.

SIAN: Me and Rob download music, if I hear a song somewhere that I like the sound of, I put the lyrics into Google and find the song and then download it. It's about the ease of getting hold of it but also cost - 79p for a song from iTunes is too much. We don't download TV because we've got Sky and Sky Plus so there's rarely anything we want to watch that we can't get.

If the Rights Agency is going for the multi-million-pound piracy industry, then ok, but I don't see how it would help beyond what police can do already within existing powers?

EMILY: I dig the idea of the Rights Agency because people shouldn't steal from bands and film-makers but I think the government should tackle the uploaders not the downloaders. And, there's all that stuff about "piracy costs the industry blah", so I expect the cost of buying music and programmes to come down significantly if the govt is taking money to tackle it!

RICK: I don't download stuff illegally, but my friends do and I watch what they've downloaded! It annoys me that I have to watch stuff illegally because it isn't available to buy on DVD or released in UK - like Dollhouse and 24. I'd much rather own the thing itself on DVD so I can rewatch it, but I don't want to wait a year for it appear in the shops.

OWEN: I think the government should uphold the law on uploading - not Hollywood. My friends probably download masses of stuff - pirate music from Limewire, TV from Torrents, football from illegal live streams. But they don't upload stuff.

I think we're also pretty typical of students now. I've got my own PC, I use X-Box Online, Freeview and Mobile Phone (GPRS), it's all just part of our lives. But I hate the unreliability of the networks and I hate spam, viruses and popups.

SUE: Ok. So we basically think there needs to be some control over illegal filesharing, if only to protect the creatives behind the material we want to carry on watching or listening to?

But we think the Rights Agency hitting on us, the downloaders, isn't the way to do it and, if they really wanted to stop illegal file-sharing, the industry has to make it a lot easier for us to get what we want when we want it and to pay for it at the point we want it? They need a business model which doesn't try to restrict the flow of content to the consumer, with ease of access, quality and range of content as their USP.

SIAN: Moving on. The National Media Literacy proposal in the report makes me think of schoolkids but they're not the ones who should be targeted. Kids get a basic grounding in school on the internet but then they teach each other how to use it. It would be useful to encourage more older people to become more digitally literate and they need to be targeted because they're more likely to be worried about digital switchover and digital radio and such.

It's all a bit unknown but they're also missing the benefits. I think about grandma who would get a lot from being on the internet but wouldn't dream of using it. I believe more people should be on the internet. In terms of speed of access to knowledge and broadening horizons it gives access to such a huge range of material and access to other people and communities. I think it puts people back in touch with each other and encourages communication.

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But 70% of older people have never used the internet and 25% of people have never accessed the internet - 35% of homes aren't connected to the web.

The government has to offer incentives for people who are harder to reach or excluded from digital world to be able to tap into this technology and knowledge. Broadband is great creation but we're relying on a small number of companies to provide it over inadequate infrastructure.

GREG: So this is suggestion number FOUR. Every home in the UK with a family income of less than £25k pa (maybe based on tax code?) should have a FREE "personal data allowance" - a free data stick with 3GB per month, or 10GB pm via their phone line (regardless of whether they have a phone).

ROB: I think you also need to look at kids and what we're teaching them in relation to digital media and the internet. I've been teaching design and technology and construction engineering at high school for about six years and I've seen a massive change. All the teachers have laptops now, every classroom at our school has an interactive whiteboard and a projector. I'd say about 65-70% of what we teach is delivered on or through digital media.

Four or five years ago, only about half the kids would have had computers at home and even less have the internet at home, now it's most of them. We're moving towards VLE teaching where I could be delivering one lesson across the web to kids in different schools.

I think most kids make very good users of the technology but don't understand it. They download stuff, watch YouTube but don't have the foggiest idea how it works. Not just technically but lies behind it all. They don't understand the need to question what they see. We should teach media from year seven, instead of only at GCSE. We have a duty to turn out well-rounded citizens who understand the media and what's behind it all. Kids are being hit from four-years-old with advertising and they need to know what that's all about. It's not just about the technology they're growing up with.

RICK: I'm graduating in Maths this year. The university as whole does pretty much everything online, all the admin and information. But mathematics is different because it's still taught with a lecturer writing on a blackboard. Completely different to school.

SUE: The report talks about encouraging more people to go into the hi-tech and digital industries. What could the govt do to encourage you, with your maths degree, to go into the digital industries?

RICK: It's down to the jobs and they're not there. They need to encourage the companies working in those areas to take more young people on. Most apprenticeship schemes are at college level, and for manual jobs like plumbing and such, and they're run by councils. The graduate entry schemes are run by companies, usually global

companies, so govt has little say in that. But the recession's closing up opportunities, so the government could do more.

SUE: A government-sponsored graduate scheme? How about if that was in digital and hi-tech industries?

RICK: That would work. Encouraging even small firms working in those sectors to take on graduates as apprentices.

SUE: So, suggestion number FIVE is a government-funded Graduate Digital Apprenticeship Scheme. Encouraging graduates to apply for apprenticeships in businesses working in innovation, hi-tech, digital media? I'd like that, I'd certainly take someone on for sweeble through a scheme like that.

RICK: One other thing I thought about was I noticed the report talking about creating a digital infrastructure for business. I think eBay is a prime example, of that and how it's created an infrastructure that works at a really small level for people starting up in business.

For example, me and Sarah set up our own eBay shop to make extra money. We've sold 400 pairs of shoes from our flat, right across the world. We've just sold eight pairs to someone in France so instantly money is coming into the country through us. It makes it so easy, we don't need experience or training in business, anyone can just go ahead and do it because of the Internet. There are so many people like us now. The govt could make it easier for us to earn more though, we pay too much to eBay in the UK because of high taxes.

SUE: The government really has to focus on doing the very big and the very small stuff in relation to Digital Britain. The big, grand ideas that could see the UK race ahead globally, like, I dunno, building a wind-power, super-low energy giant server farm in the North Sea and becoming the world centre for green servers.

GREG: Or using an improved broadband network as the basis for building non PC-based platforms, eg thin clients, pda, mobiles, low energy computing with higher end tasks delegated to efficient central nodes.

SUE: But the small stuff has to be people-based - the targeted free broadband access, the Digital Apprenticeships and, the thing we've talked about a lot - more help for the entrepreneurs and digital start-ups.

I can't remember now where I first saw this idea, but a variation on a sort of loan scheme for innovators would be my preference. Suggestion number SIX is for the govt to set up an Innovator Loan Scheme, but run through the existing Student Loan Scheme structure. The innovator would know that they were putting their own future earnings behind their idea. You could offer up to £25k to the individual, paid back when their earnings hit a certain level, like with the student loan scheme, and maybe let them take it in smaller

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amounts up to the limit so they can use it to try out a couple of ideas over time.

Running it through the student loan structure means local authorities could collect the information and have a better idea who was trying to start up what in their area, which could then inform what business infrastructure they and regional funding bodies put their cash into.

GREG: And at the same time drop a lot of the business-link style quangos that cost so much to run and deliver so little to small businesses like us?

SUE: That would be nice!

A Rural response: Fibre to the Home UK

<http://5tth.blogspot.com/2009/05/all-three-vids-of-jfdi-ftth-crew.html>

This response includes 3 videos inserted into the blog post above, and is a wonderful example of what can be done with new technologies. Do watch the videos if poss.

I need to stress that one of the most important reasons for this JFDI FTTH exercise is the fact that there is no ADSL in the vicinity. Whereas we have been pushing for FiWi for years (Fibre--> wireless), these connections have to be wireless-fibre because of the lack of fibre in close proximity, nor decent copper for that matter.

This situation is rife across rural UK but has managed to vanish under the radar over the years, despite attempts to highlight the huge number of not-spots and the impact this has on rural regeneration, quality of life, innovation, business development and so on.

However, there are some advantages to this route of starting with wireless backhaul. Firstly, the wireless connection is symmetrical and so users can upload and download at the same speed. The importance of upload speeds and capacity should never be under-estimated in this age of consumer generated content and pro-sumers.

Secondly, the options for increasing the backhaul are open to competition and technology neutral - no reliance on nor even presence of copper capable of taking over from the wireless here. And unsurprisingly, those operators wishing to get involved in this type of rural connectivity have been coming out of the woodwork even prior to this video series.

Appendix 3: Authors

This report has been collated from the individual submissions from each event, edited and summarised by

Kathryn Corrick

Alastair Duncan

Tom de Grunwald

Bill Thompson

We would like to thank all of those who took part for permission to use their reports.

Birmingham: Jon Hickman

Cambridge: Richard G Elen

Didcot: Cameron Neylon and Lilly Evans

Glasgow: Craig McGill

Leeds: John Popham

London: Mike Kiely, Andrew Wise, Helen Milner, Andy Gibson, Vinay Gupta, Brian Condon, Bill Thompson, Jim Killock, William Perrin, Ellie Louis

Manchester: Shaun Fenson

Nottingham: Susi O'Neill

Truro: Fiona Campbell-Howes

Tutbury: Sue Greenwood and family

Rural: Christine Doyle

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<http://digitalbritainunconference.wordpress.com>