

## **Westminster eForum, 17 July 2009 – Broadband for all? Access and inclusion and media literacy**

### **Keynote address by Anna Bradley, Chair, Communications Consumer Panel**

It's just over four weeks now since the Government published the Digital Britain final report. During that time there has been a huge amount of comment – in the press, in the blogosphere and at events like this. And people have expressed many different views.

At last week's Westminster Media Forum event, most agreed the report was a good thing, but with some devilish detail to be worked through. But dissenters have variously criticised the report for lacking vision, leaving too much uncertain or focusing too much on networks – the pipes – and not enough about content – the poetry.

One reason for the wide range of views is that the report covers such a wide range of issues. And this makes it easy to lose sight of the fact that if the Government's vision is achieved, the future could look and feel very different.

The role of the Communications Consumer Panel, which I Chair, is to encourage policy makers, regulators and industry to look at issues through the eyes of consumers and citizens. And looking at the report in that way, it contains some significant commitments:

- By 2012 we can expect to see 2MB/s broadband and digital terrestrial TV available throughout the UK, and more public services online.
- By 2015 we can expect everyone in the UK to have access to digital radio.
- By 2017 we can expect the rollout of next-generation broadband to at least 90 per cent of the UK and this would be a substantial improvement on what the market alone is likely to deliver.
- We can also expect to see the more widespread rollout of 3G and next-generation mobile services.

For consumers and citizens these initiatives add up to a substantial package. It includes many of the things that the Panel has been arguing for over the last few years and particularly during the Digital Britain process. But (and there always is one of course) in many cases we have yet to hear the Government's detailed implementation plans. And the Panel will be examining these practical details closely to see that the interests of consumers and citizens are protected and promoted.

But making services available is clearly not enough on its own. So today I'm going to focus on a part of the Digital Britain report that has received relatively little attention – the Government's intention to develop a National Plan for Digital Participation. The rationale for the plan is simple. If Government is going to invest in making services available to everyone – the supply-side – then it makes sense to also think about how to help people get the most out of those services – the demand-side.

Digital participation is defined in the report as:

“Increasing the reach, breadth and depth of digital technology use across all sections of society – to maximise digital participation and the economic and social benefits it can bring.”

To achieve the most significant social and economic benefits we need not just to get people on-line, but help them to get the most out of digital technologies and to deepen their engagement. In the Panel's view, digital participation should be the ultimate objective of all

the initiatives set out in the report. Promoting digital participation is the really compelling idea that should unite us all. We need pipes, we need poetry and we need participation.

The Government has moved a long way. In the interim report, the idea of a national plan for media literacy was the final action in a long list of 22, and frankly appeared to be an afterthought. In the final report, the first main chapter sets out the Government's ambition that everyone should be able to share in the benefits of a Digital Britain.

In setting out this ambition the Government moves away from using the term "media literacy". It describes media literacy as a "technocratic and specialist term understood by policy makers but not really part of the everyday language." The Panel agrees. The term "digital participation" gives a much better sense of how communications services and devices can contribute to a better, more inclusive society. It also has a wider meaning than media literacy and reflects the fact that people need to be able to choose and use communications services and devices, as well as understand and create content.

The chapter on digital participation begins with a quote from Steve Ballmer, the Chief Executive of Microsoft. I think this quote is worth repeating:

"“The number one benefit of information technology is that it empowers people to do what they want to do. It lets people be creative. It lets people be productive. It lets people learn things they didn't think they could learn before, and so in a sense it is all about potential.”"

So the challenge is to help everyone realise their potential – regardless of whether they are young or old, regardless of whether they are rich or poor, and regardless of where they live in the UK.

In the Panel's view, promoting digital participation and so enabling people to fulfil their potential, should start with identifying the full range of consumers' and citizens' needs. So we carried out research during the Digital Britain process so we could understand how people's needs are likely to evolve over the next few years, and the role of communications services and devices in meeting them. The findings highlighted the fact that people have a variety of needs and attitudes, and different motivations for using digital services. For the Panel there are broadly four categories of need: to choose, to use, to understand and to create. I will describe them one at a time.

To choose the right products and services, people need to know what they want to do, they need information about products and services, and the ability to understand and evaluate it. Those already engaged need to be able to switch provider easily, including where services are bundled together.

To use services and devices effectively, services must be available together with equipment that it is affordable, easy to set up and easy to use. People need skills, confidence and knowledge, and they need help in the event of technical problems. They also need to be able to protect themselves and their families, and control the use of their personal information.

To understand, people need to be aware of the benefits digital services can offer and be able to understand and evaluate content. But understanding goes beyond that: people also need to understand their rights and obligations and know how to get redress when things go wrong.

Finally, people need to be able to create: to communicate effectively online, and if they want to, join social networks and create their own content.

Mapping out people's needs in this way can help in thinking about how best to address them – whether directly through targeting consumers and citizens , or indirectly by calling for action from Government and industry.

We conclude that in all the digital participation work we need to start with people, not the things we want them to learn or to do. I am sure everyone in this room recognises how frustrating it is to feel like a parcel, pushed from one advisor to another to find the sum total of what you want. Or worse still finding solutions are available to only some, but not all of your problems. We need to avoid this if we are to make it easier for people to participate in the digital world.

To succeed with digital participation, we need to understand the nature of consumer and citizen journeys and then design our programmes taking account of the full set of their needs. Only then will we be able to provide education, information, support and advice that fits the bill. The Panel will be carrying out some ethnographic research to understand better the journeys that people make in getting connected and learning how to benefit from online services and activities.

To promote digital participation successfully we also need initiatives that focus on the people who most need help – the six million people at risk of both social and digital exclusion. Focusing on this group of people – generally referred to as promoting digital inclusion – is a vital subset of the plan to expand digital participation.

In helping to shape the Government's thinking on digital inclusion, the Panel called for a clearly focused priorities so that we can achieve real advances in a relatively short time scale before moving on to another target group. There are three key groups: older people, people with disabilities and families on low incomes. The recent Oxford Internet Institute survey shows that 70 per cent of people in the UK are connected to the internet. But only 41 per cent of people with disabilities are connected and only 34 per cent of retired people. There are also significant differences between socio-economic groups – among ABC1s 88 per cent are connected, whereas among C2Des only 69 per cent are connected.

If addressing consumers in general means understanding consumer journeys better, addressing the six million socially and digitally excluded means an even more sympathetic and customised approach to delivery. We need to work close enough to people to be sensitive to their particular needs. This means community-level delivery that can find the people in need of help and push the buttons that are right for them. There are many successful community initiatives already out there and I don't plan to talk about what they are doing or achieving. I will leave that to the experts who will be speaking later this morning. Suffice to say that their strength is in their proximity to service users.

If that is about the approach, what about the delivery?

The Digital Inclusion Champion, Martha Lane Fox will be keeping digital inclusion high up the political agenda. She will play a major role in channelling increased help towards the 6 million people who most need it, encouraging a scaling up of the work that is being done already and developing innovative new approaches. As a member of the Digital Inclusion Taskforce I look forward to working with Martha and my Taskforce colleagues in pursuing these goals and in monitoring and measuring progress at community-level.

The Consumer Expert Group will also make a significant contribution to promoting digital inclusion. It has been asked by Government to report on the particular issues that people with disabilities face in using the internet. This report will be very valuable in targeting help for this group of people and so increase their ability to participate digitally. But let's not forget that as an ageing population, more and more of us will reap the benefits of services and products that are easy to use.

Last but not least, the Digital Participation Consortium will be a key player in helping everyone to share in the benefits of a Digital Britain. Brought together by Ofcom, their task is to get the 17 million on-line and deepen the engagement of those who are online already. The Panel welcomes the Government's decision to set up the Consortium and to support it with funding of £12m over the next three years.

The Government has given the consortium two tasks. First, to carry out a communications campaign to highlight the benefits of digital participation and spark interest among people who are not interested at the moment. Second, to engage those people who need support through targeted outreach.

The consortium already includes a large number of institutions (commercial and not-for-profit). They have different agendas, but a shared sense of commitment to the task in hand. As we move to implement the Government's plans to increase digital participation, it is vital that we have a strategic and co-ordinated approach to delivery. We need clear and well-defined objectives, and intensified and scaled-up effort to make sure that we achieve them.

The Panel believe that it will be essential for Government to establish a mechanism to oversee the work of the Consortium, including setting priorities and measuring progress. This would give the consortium a clear focus on delivery. The Panel supports therefore the idea of a steering group to carry out this oversight and priority setting role.

The Panel also supports the idea of a social marketing programme. The trick will be to convey the general message about digital participation at the same time as recognising that different services or activities will appeal to different people. It will be vital for the social marketing programme to be linked to the delivery of services at community-level that are tailored to the needs of those groups that need most help. So for this reason it makes sense for the Consortium to play a part in targeted outreach activities.

There is one further important dimension to the Government's plan to increase digital participation. This is the intention to improve online public service delivery. The Panel has welcomed this. Our research shows that better, more convenient access to public services may encourage some people to engage more with digital services, as well as leading to savings for tax payers. We think there is scope to deliver public services online in really innovative, creative ways and in the process reduce social isolation. But everyone will need to have the digital participation skills to use online services effectively.

We face a big challenge, but it is my hope that digital participation will come to be seen as central to the achievement of a more inclusive, more creative, and more productive Digital Britain where everyone is better able to realise their potential. I hope that digital participation will become the idea that unifies all those with a role in implementing the Digital Britain report regardless of whether they favour pipes or poetry.