

DIGITAL BRITAIN: THE INTERIM REPORT

RESPONSE FROM THE BRITISH LIBRARY

INTRODUCTION

1. The British Library (BL) welcomes publication of the Government's Digital Britain Interim Report. In our response below we have identified three major areas where we believe the British Library has a significant contribution to make to Digital Britain and to delivering the UK's future competitiveness. We look forward to engaging actively in the Digital Britain agenda going forward and playing our full part in the policy development process and delivery of major developments.
2. The British Library was established by statute in 1972 as the national library of the United Kingdom. It is one of the world's greatest research libraries - it benefits from legal deposit and is the main custodian of the nation's written cultural heritage¹. The Library's incomparable collections have developed over 250 years; they cover three millennia of recorded knowledge, represent every known written language, every aspect of human thought and a considerable sound, music and recordings archive. Sir Isaac Newton said: "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants". This is what the BL seeks to assist its users to do. In 2007/08, more than 8.2 million British Library collection items were consulted by, or loaned to, academic researchers, business researchers, and private individuals. An independent economic impact study commissioned by the British Library suggests that the total value added to the UK economy by the Library each year is £363m, or £4.40 for every £1 of public funding.²
3. The British Library plays a vital function in the life of the nation as a cultural heritage resource by managing, preserving, and ensuring access in perpetuity to the UK's national published archive and the national repository of sound. The Library is an integral component of both the national research infrastructure and the UK Science Base, and it plays a correspondingly significant role in ensuring the research excellence of the UK. The BL contains a vast array of inspirational material and expertise that support the creative industries and, through the services of our Business & Intellectual Property Centre, we

¹ <http://www.bl.uk/>

support entrepreneurs and SMEs in developing, protecting and exploiting their ideas. We operate at the fulcrum of the creative economy and recognise that the ongoing digital revolution in production and distribution technologies is causing fundamental shifts across industry business models and consumer patterns, and is raising broader questions about the traditional balance of rights in intellectual property, between the rights holder and the public good.

4. We believe that the Library can help deliver a truly digital future for Britain by growing faster its role as custodian of Digital Britain's collective memory – acquisition of digital content, ensuring its sustainability and its continuing access and long-term preservation – a critical public service that acts as a springboard for research and education, for new forms of creativity, and for knowledge creation. Without such effort and investment, future researchers and citizens will find a black hole in the knowledge base of the 21st century, and without such guaranteed long-term commitment to preservation, our content and creative industries will be inhibited in their global market success.
5. There are three key areas where the British Library can make a vital contribution to the Digital Britain debate:
 1. **Content.** (a) The digitisation of legacy content on a mass scale as a key infrastructure for education, creativity and competitiveness. (b) The development of the role of public custodian and guarantor of sustainable access to quality content.
 2. **Digital Literacy.** The imperative of widespread digital literacy skills to ensure inclusiveness and optimal exploitation of new opportunities
 3. **Intellectual Property.** Creativity, innovation and a democratic civil society requires copyright law to strike a balance between the private interest of the creator being recognised and remunerated for their work, *and* the interest of the citizen in ensuring access to information and ideas.

Digital Content

The digitisation of legacy content on a mass scale as a key infrastructure for education, creativity and competitiveness.

6. The Library welcomes the recognition in the Digital Britain Interim Report of the importance of both the availability of high quality UK content and also the creation of new digital content. We believe that, within a coherent UK national digital strategy, ubiquitous access to a fully digitised British Library could have an enormous impact on the

² *Measuring our Value: Results of an independent economic impact study commissioned by the British Library to measure the Library's direct and indirect value to the UK economy* (December 2003).

quality of our education, on the competitiveness of our research and innovation, and on the creative potential of our digital society. To support Digital Britain we need to deliver a critical mass of digital content by exploiting a range of sustainable service models, involving commercial and public sector partners. Projects at the British Library are currently delivering:

- 25 million pages or 100,000 19th Century books,
- 3m pages 19th Century newspapers, and
- 4,000 hours of archival sound recordings, all from British Library collections.

7. Partners in the Library's digitisation 'journey' include private sector technology and content industry players and the higher and further education community. We are currently aiming to increase massively our newspaper digitisation working with the industry and to accelerate our out-of-copyright book digitisation in collaboration with the private sector. But the challenges associated with funding the digitisation of our legacy collections in this way are enormous without significant additional public investment to ensure an appropriate balance of public benefit and private gain to stimulate the creative cycle.

The development of the role of public custodian and guarantor of sustainable access to quality content.

8. The Library is working hard with publishers, government and the other UK legal deposit libraries to make a reality of the national archive of electronic publications envisaged by the 2003 Legal Deposit Libraries Act. We are also working with international partners to tackle the difficulties of preserving archived digital material and developing a robust and scalable long-term digital storage and access facility. This is truly a public service - ensuring an independent and trusted bedrock for education, research and commercial innovation, within a public institution with a long term perspective and mission. Future generations will judge us severely if electronic publications of all kinds have not been preserved for posterity.
9. We are focused on creating a comprehensive archive of material from the UK Web domain. Since 2004, the British Library has worked with others to build an archive of web resources of scholarly, educational, cultural, political and scientific importance. There are approximately 8 million³ .uk domain sites in scope currently and growing at 15 – 20% annually, so the scale is enormous, and the value for future research and innovation vast. Without adequate means for preserving it, much web material will be lost for ever and a gap will grow in our record of the nation's published output which cannot be filled

³ Report by the Web Archiving Sub-Committee, LDAP, April 2008. Figure based on 6.1 million .uk domains registered by Nominet in mid-2007, plus approximately 50,000 other domains which can be readily identified as published in the UK. It was estimated that this number would grow by 17% per annum until 2011.

retrospectively because web publishing tends to be so ephemeral. [The only surviving record of the 2000 Sydney Olympics is sustained by the National Library of Australia – as the first truly online Olympics, there were over 150 websites covering the Games – these sites disappeared overnight at the end of the Games. The British Library is undertaking a similar collecting and archiving project for the London 2012 Games].

Digital literacy skills

10. The British Library recognises the progress that is being made by the Government, Ofcom and others in the field of digital and media literacy. The web is revolutionising the way researchers work, allowing them to store, personalise, manipulate, repurpose and share information with their peers through social, professional and enterprise networks. Research commissioned by the British Library and the JISC has overturned the assumption that the 'Google Generation' (born after 1995) is the most web-literate⁴. Moreover, the European Commission's global league table of digital adoption, skills and use shows that the UK, having been in the top seven earlier in the decade, has slipped to twelfth place⁵. Clearly, there is need for good research and information handling skills at all levels. Teachers and researchers need training to use digital resources effectively and also to understand copyright, ethics, data protection and political bias. Researchers themselves need the skills to assess effectively the authenticity of the information they find.

11. The British Library and the JISC have recently commissioned a follow-up study on the research behaviour of 'Generation Y' graduate students born between 1982 and 1994, in order to gain insights into their information seeking and research behaviour and also to establish a benchmark for future studies. More investment is needed in this area if the UK is to develop the proficiency to exploit digital infrastructure and content. Specifically:
 - There is need for good research and information processing skills at all levels. Most people including serious scholars tend to think that 'most' material is available on the web – our search engine, two clicks mentality, will not serve us well as the basis for a digital future;

 - We need to support the development of skills at all levels of critical thinking, and the appreciation of the authenticity and provenance of information. We need to ensure that we are all skilled to make our own assessments about competing truths and views, to distinguish between quality audited and misleading

⁴ <http://www.bl.uk/news/pdf/googlegen.pdf>

⁵ http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/digital_britain_interimreportjan09.pdf

information, vanity publishing and collaborative efforts, to be able to cross-check sources for authenticity and bias;

- There is need to develop a broader understanding of the critical information issues that are at the centre of our digital future – IPR, data protection, privacy, plagiarism, etc. Intellectual property and copyright in the digital age are central areas of policy debate, with strongly held views and arguments on all sides.

To optimise this investment and to join-up existing activity, there will be need to coordinate the work of a range of delivery agencies across Government.

Intellectual property

12. The British Library welcomes the priority given to Intellectual Property and Copyright in the Digital Britain Interim Report to address the challenges presented by the digital age and globalisation. However, the British Library would maintain that in the recent past the debate on copyright has been too heavily focused on infringement in the music and the consumer industries. Digital Britain must also address issues of huge importance to education and to the knowledge economy to ensure that copyright does not act as a constraint on research and innovation.⁶ Specifically:

- The British Library is calling for the recognition of exceptions in generating educational, research and wider value. In a networked world, access and reuse result in economic value. Exceptions must reflect intention of use and not location or medium. Exceptions can facilitate learning, research, education, and the reporting of news as well as support artistic and literary criticism, just to mention a few areas.
- We argue that copyright law must recognise that limitations and exceptions, and therefore one half of the balance in copyright law, are being overridden by contract law. As is the case with the Database Directive and the Computer Programmes Directive, any contractual terms that undermine exceptions in law should be made null and void.
- In addition the UK should adopt an evidence-based, integrated approach to IP policy formation through working with the Strategic Advisory Board on Intellectual Property and the UK Intellectual Property Office.

CONCLUSION

⁶ www.bl.uk/ip

13. The British Library (BL) welcomes publication of the Government's Digital Britain Interim Report. In our response we have identified three major themes where we believe the British Library has a significant contribution to make to Digital Britain and thus to delivering the UK's future competitiveness. The Library stands ready to clarify any points raised in this response. We also look forward to engaging actively in the Digital Britain agenda going forward and playing our full part in the policy development process and delivery of relevant services.