

Digital Britain, The Interim Report – a regional, creative industries response

Introduction to the East Midlands Creative and Cultural Economy Partnership

The East Midlands Creative and Cultural Economy Partnership (EMCCEP*) has been formed to bring together key regional players in the Creative and Cultural Industries, better to align their business support mechanisms and to deliver significant benefits to the sector through more coherent, visible and effective use of resources. The Partnership's overall ambition is to "champion the growth of the creative and cultural enterprises for the benefit of the people and the economy of the East Midlands". Its focus is on people working, learning, documenting and sharing their experiences in the creative and cultural sector.

Its other priorities include making a difference to the number of businesses accessing generic business support, increasing the number of businesses engaging with applied learning – and, in particular, ensuring a robust evidence base is available to the economic development specialists charged with building the Integrated Regional Strategy. The Partnership also champions new, ambitious and innovative support structures in the sector.

EMCCEP's aims and ambitions were catalysed by 'Creative Britain', groundbreaking in its joined-up ambitions across government - and for recognising the fast growing impact the creative sector on the UK economy. 'Digital Britain' takes this a stage further by addressing the policy gap between the fundamental infrastructures (both technological and human) that bring about the growth of the sector. In doing so, it is welcomed by those who recognise the immediate and future economic and cultural benefits offered by the so-called digital revolution.

In this context, EMCCEP comments here on the detail of the objectives and actions proposed in 'Digital Britain'. In doing so, it understands that the report is an interim one with a further, final draft to come. We have, therefore, highlighted areas for further investigation as well as those which are likely to have most impact on creative businesses.

The Objectives:

The report's overall focus on linking infrastructure, content and its applications is very much in tune with the sector's experience of working in digital formats. The emphasis, in particular, on 'content' and 'access' coincides with the long-standing priorities placed on participation and engagement by creative and cultural organisations.

In economic terms, it is vital that this emphasis on users should not detrimentally affect UK consumers wishing to access the best of **global** content. The sector's experience reflects the reality of global marketing, production and consumption which challenges UK content producers and distributors to operate in an international (and not necessarily English-speaking) market.

It may, therefore, be to the UK's advantage to occupy this territory and to encourage, in a genuinely Digital Britain, an infrastructure which reflects the global nature of digital transactions - one able to cope with constant, rapid exchanges rather than the old linear transactional models used in the traditional broadcast and film industries.

The Actions:

Action 5 – an umbrella body for local and community networks offering technical and advisory support. There should arguably be a role for agencies which support content creation to work with such an umbrella body to ensure effective communication between infrastructure and content builders.

Action 8 – Digital Switchover: we would encourage the final report to require that a region-by-region information programme be delivered through creative and cultural businesses which have the capability to enthuse and excite users and audiences – rather than simply inform them.

Actions 10, 11 and 12 – addressing the challenge for digital content: the Partnership shares the report's ambition to foster creative ambition as well as the sector's skills and resources. It may be useful in the final report to engage with the processes of creating digital content in order to avoid the risk of only addressing the challenges faced by the current gatekeepers of digital content. At the heart of digital creation is creative content, old and new. Its continued availability will be critical to ensuring the survival of any content distributor, whether broadcaster or publisher. We would also encourage engagement with the broader creative sector in order to examine and test the reality of a 'copyright enforcement' approach (to the exclusion of a copyright management approach) in a digital economy.

Actions 14, 15 and 16 – EMCCEP would welcome a broader set of actions relating to the wider area of original UK content rather than the apparent single focus on the future of public service broadcasting. The UK broadcasting industry undoubtedly supplies key elements of the creative ecology of the country – but original UK content is far from being limited to broadcast programming. Original plays, musicals, scores, animation, film, digitised archive materials and historical records, advertising and writing all contribute to the UK's knowledge-based economy. Therefore regional partnerships working across the landscape may be very useful in suggesting ways of supporting the objectives of the report.

Action 22 – the Partnership welcomes the review of the ambitions for a National Media Literacy plan, especially in connection with Digital Work, Life and Economy skills in which our partners are involved. Current activities in this region support the view that business, education providers and voluntary sectors need to come together to deliver on the skills agenda in the creative industries.

Conclusion:

The interim Digital Britain report has swiftly begun to map out the key issues facing the UK in the field. EMCCEP believes the deep connections between a Digital Britain and a Creative Britain can be energised by the publication of the final report. It looks forward to a final version of 'Digital Britain' offering recommendations for the inclusion of creative and cultural support organisations and networks (beyond those falling within OFCOM's remit) when considering routes for delivery.

* the partners are: Arts Council England (ACE), EM Media, Museums Libraries and Archives (MLA), East Midlands development agency (*emda*), East Midlands Universities Association (EMUA), Skillset, Creative and Cultural Skills, Cultivate, East

Midlands Association of Colleges (EMAOC), East Midlands further education council (EMFEC)