



Digital Britain Interim Report – Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform

Response from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA).

Introduction

The MLA Council (MLA) is the government's agency for museums, libraries and archives. Leading strategically, we promote best practice to inspire innovative, integrated and sustainable services for all.

We welcome the opportunity to feed into the Digital Britain project, where we can move towards universal connectivity and a Digital Britain benefiting all.

Key messages

- MLA have already taken steps towards achieving many of the aims outlined in the interim report, for which we have examples of best practice, and which we hope will be considered in the government's final report on Digital Britain.
- There are a number of issues that are not covered in the report that we believe are essential for the delivery of a digital vision including the need to: join up e-services; bridge the digital divide; consider the public interest with regard to digital rights; and consider digital preservation strategies before e-services are rolled out widely.
- We believe further investment is needed in order to deliver the government's vision, including workforce development, investment in a common public service infrastructure, and in digital literacy activities in the community.
- We are keen to work with the Digital Britain team and stakeholders in the cultural and lifelong learning sectors to further develop the digital network, content and services that will help government achieve its strategic aims for a Digital Britain.

1. Issues not covered by the interim report:

- There is a need for a **joined-up approach to e-service delivery**, including: the development and delivery of content; network infrastructures and compatibility; and the role that online library and information services can play in signposting other public services.
- There is a need to bridge the **digital divide**. Universal connectivity needs to go hand-in-hand with digital and media literacy. Libraries are uniquely placed in the

heart of the community and provide free digital access and support for service users. This potential needs to be maximised in digital inclusion strategies.

- The need to consider the public interest in discussions on **digital rights**, particularly as they relate to free access to resources through libraries, museums and archives.
- **Digital preservation strategies** should be considered at this stage, before e-services are widely rolled out. As more and more important documents migrate online we need to ensure that they are able to be accessed in the future.

2. Digital networks

MLA strongly believes that coherent, compatible and high-quality digital networks are the key to effective delivery of e-public services. We are already in discussions with JISC and other bodies to help enable public libraries to connect to a joined up public service network such as JANET¹. This would be a substantial move in the right direction towards joined-up service delivery, but we would like to work with the Digital Britain team to ensure wider compatibility between public service networks.

MLA also believes there could be a greater level of convergence between existing local authority networks, and that the current high degree of separation militates against cost effective and efficient joined up e-service delivery.

2.1 Next generation access

Next Generation Access networks have the potential to greatly increase the functionality of the digital services provided on-site by museums, libraries and archives. The MLA endorses the aim of making available wide bandwidth digital networks in every community in the country and we believe that high speed broadband should be available for public access in every local library to aid digital inclusion and digital literacy.

2.2 Community networks

We would also recommend that where community networks are established, they are encouraged to include all local public services, including libraries. This will encourage harmonised and consistent public service delivery in the digital arena and will enable services to take advantage of the potential to join up and share resources online. We would particularly point out the traditional role of libraries in signposting and linking up with public services, making an online library service an ideal vehicle for signposting other local online services.

3. Digital content

Museums libraries and archives should be considered in the report's objective to ensure 'content of quality and scale that serves the interests, experiences and needs of all UK citizens'. The organisations we work with possess huge content resources and have already begun making these available online. We would like to ensure that the potential of the sector to contribute relevant and engaging content to a digital society is recognised and maximised.

¹ JANET is a high speed broadband connection with a platform for accessing high quality online learning resources

3.1 Digital rights

Museums libraries and archives currently provide access to copyright material in a legal and controlled environment. If museums, libraries and archives are not taken into account in digital copyright legislation this will seriously affect their ability to provide public access to information and culture in the future. We would like to work with the Intellectual Property Office and the Digital Britain team to understand how we can continue to effectively provide this access in the digital age.

The MLA believes that any **changes in copyright law** need to take into account:

- The principles of fair access to copyright material, open access to culture and digital inclusion;
- The cultural importance of effectively conserving digital content and our responsibility to future generations to ensure that we do so;
- the need for specific exceptions to copyright for digital artefacts in the care of museums, libraries and archives.

In addition, the European Commission is planning copyright legislation in the near future which may impact upon the ability of museums, libraries and archives to provide public access to content. We should ensure that British representations on this legislation highlight the needs of the cultural sector.

With regards to digital rights, the MLA recommend that the government considers the possibility of establishing a **Public Service Publisher**, in order to:

- make publicly funded cultural assets more readily available to people online in ways that would help them to engage creatively with the online world;
- enrich people's experience of existing cultural resources;
- engage more systematically with education resources, and
- allow cultural organisations to use the enhanced value of their combined data and networks to develop joint services with commercial providers.

*Libraries are leading the way on large-scale Public/Private Partnerships to support the creation of a wealth of publicly available digital content. Partnerships such as the **Google Book Digitisation project at the Bodleian Library in Oxford** or the **Microsoft project to digitise 25m pages of the British Library's collections** benefit the public by promoting widespread access to new knowledge and information while also driving millions of pounds of value into the public sector.*

4. Universal connectivity

MLA believes that universal connectivity is an important aim and that its achievement would begin to address the digital divide in Britain. However, there is a long way to go before this aim is achieved. In the mean time, libraries provide a source of free internet access for the public, along with technical support and education programmes to help people learn digital skills for life. Libraries play a crucial role in bridging the digital divide and should be seen as a key pillar of digital inclusion policy, and be used as a stepping stone to developing universal connectivity.

4.1 E-public services

Because libraries provide support as well as access to digital technologies, there is huge potential for libraries to drive take-up of e-public services. Libraries are in many

cases the public face of local councils and are used extensively to access local e-government services. They have a base of experience in delivering digital public services and online library services have the potential to signpost and guide users to other online public services.

Much has already been achieved in this area with the establishment of **The People's Network**, online learning resource access in all public libraries and **Reference Online**, (which brings together world class online reference resources into one place for library users to access from public libraries, and from home).

We are currently scoping out the business case for development of online library loans, where the public could potentially order library books online, for delivery to a place that is convenient for them. We are also looking at options for libraries to provide more download services such as e-books and music.

Other areas we are involved in include:

- The draft **Archives Action Plan**, which we are working on with The National Archives. This will include a drive for digitisation of archive resources, to make them available to the public on the internet.
- Funding **Culture 24** to provide a website that signposts online access to information and learning resources from museums across the country and publishing a range of learning resources. MLA is working with Culture 24 to augment the range of learning resources which it publishes, and over time, to extend the age range covered, to include resources for KS1 and adults.
- We also fund the **Collections Trust** to develop an infrastructure for aggregating cultural content from museums, archives and libraries and serve it dynamically into consumer-facing channels such as Google, the BBC and the European Digital Library.

The sector is also involved in a wealth of digital activity, drives a huge economic value into the sector, and will help to stimulate demand for Next Generation Bandwidth as well promoting digital literacy. Some key projects include:

*Libraries all over the UK are adopting a more active and dynamic approach to marketing their services to users, and are embracing a range of new technologies in the process. For example, **public libraries in Leicester** are working with the City Council's Marketing team to generate highly targeted marketing campaign based on detailed statistics about consumer behaviour. The Council benefits from a richer picture of how people in the area are using physical and digital services, and the libraries benefit from the expertise of a professional marketing team.*

*The **National Museums Online Learning Project**, a £2m programme which provides seamless and comprehensive access to the collections of 9 of the world's pre-eminent museums through a simple search interface. An innovative project from a consortium of **London Museums** to harness the power of Web 2.0 technologies and social media to create highly focussed micro-targeted marketing campaigns to drive take-up of their services during 2012. The development of innovative location-based digital services into mobile content platforms by a wide variety of organisations including **Tate** and the **Fitzwilliam Museum**, Cambridge.*

*One North East has an **extensive film and television archive** and is actively involved in collecting and preserving audiovisual digital content and converting non-digital content into digital formats. This archive includes valuable digital content which can be harnessed for cultural and economic benefit.*

4.2 Digital inclusion

The UK online centre network established in 2002 provides 6000 ICT learning centres in local communities across England. 3000 of these are in public libraries. MLA believes the UK online centre network should be at the heart of any government initiative on digital inclusion and we need to ensure that learners accessing any library receive a high quality consistent support

The potential for libraries, in particular, to drive digital inclusion is evident. Libraries are at the centre of communities. They are free to enter and provide free access to digital technologies. Libraries attract a wide cross-section of the population and visitors on a regular basis, including the key target audiences for digital inclusion. This existing engagement should be recognised in any digital inclusion strategy and harnessed to promote digital inclusion in tandem with other agencies.

Museums and archives can also contribute to digital inclusion through the development of e-services, e-commerce, education materials for lifelong learning, remote access to collections, and interpretation of cultural artefacts. Key groups among the public that could particularly benefit from the development of these e-services include disabled people, people living in isolated rural areas and local history networks.

The sector also has the potential to harness digital inclusion activities so that they support and promote **active citizenship and community cohesion** agendas.

*As part of the Cultural Olympiad, we are working with the public to develop a **People's Record** of the Games which will be available online. It involves teaching digital literacy skills and encouraging communities to work together and reflect on their identity*

*The UK-wide **Their Past Your Future** programme has shown how a blended online and off-line offer can engage audiences old and new, in using technology, creatively and confidently. A rolling programme of reminiscence, exhibitions and collaboratively curated online content, **Their Past Your Future** has generated a huge online legacy by building an archive of the knowledge and memories of the last generation of veterans.*

5. Equipping Everyone to Benefit from Digital Britain

Libraries have already made a substantial contribution to digital and media literacy in the population. As the interim report recognises, UK Online centres are available in 3000 public libraries across Britain, but we also know that more can be done to support the public in developing digital and media literacy.

MLA believes that connecting people to high speed networks is only one part of the solution. People need to be equipped with the necessary online skills and information discernment to ensure they can exploit the available resources properly and safely. We would like to see a **national media literacy programme** rolled out by government with central involvement for the whole UK online centre network.

As mentioned above, this will entail investment in high-speed broadband connections in libraries and will be facilitated by access to more learning resources through a joined up public service network, such as the JANET network. This needs to be supported by investment in the People's Network infrastructure. The People's Network was completed in 2002 and some ad hoc local investment has been made to maintain the ICT hardware. However, to ensure that local communities have access to equipment capable of delivering new high bandwidth high quality online services, a complete refresh of the People's Network is recommended. This would have fairly modest financial implications (c. £20 million).

There is also a need to invest in capability building among staff. Workforce development will be central to the successful delivery of the Digital Britain vision and is particularly important in the lifelong learning sector, where staff are directly involved in encouraging digital literacy in the population. This investment is in particularly important for advanced media literacy skills. All frontline library staff were trained in ECDL 6 yrs ago when the People's Network was introduced but these skills require updating and we cannot necessarily assume younger staff have these skills. To build capacity, library staff could also train others in the community to act as digital mentors.

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