

## **Media Trust response to Digital Britain Interim Report March 2009**

### **Summary and recommendations**

Media Trust welcomes the emphasis in the Report on serving the interests and needs of all UK citizens, universality, access, skills and training, and creative content. We welcome the five objectives of Digital Britain.

### **Media Trust recommends much more explicit acknowledgement, across the Report and particularly in the Actions and recommendations, of the potential of the Third Sector - charities, voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprise - to play a key role in delivering Digital Britain's vision.**

The Third Sector is key to successful delivery of major objectives valued by government and our wider society, including building strong and empowered communities; delivering and enhancing civil society and democracy; reaching, supporting and engaging disadvantaged and marginalised communities and citizens; and, key to the aims of Digital Britain, inspiring and delivering innovation in public service delivery.

### **Media Trust is recommending wider consultation with and across the wider Third Sector and the communities supported by this sector, and can play a role in facilitating this.**

We are disappointed that seemingly very little consultation with the Third Sector and communities has taken place in advance of the interim report, and that very few plans seem to be in place to deliver this consultation before the final report. Media Trust can support this consultation, and has done so for the BBC and Ofcom over the past ten years, via online and print communications, conferences and seminars.

### **Media Trust recommends the creation of a dedicated Digital Communities Fund to support digital innovation and engagement through and across the Third Sector, including the charity, voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors.**

This fund should support:

- Digital platforms and applications
- Digital content
- Digital training, volunteers and mentors
- Research and sharing of best practice and innovation
- Voice, democratic engagement and community participation, including in sports, arts and culture
- Public service delivery by the Third Sector
- Digital enterprise and social enterprise at grassroots and community levels

We believe that a new generation of local digital entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs can grow up through facilitating a wide range of very small investments in digital media enterprises and start-ups. We are particularly keen to see investment in social enterprises that have digital content and technology at their heart.

The Mediabox model (DCSF youth media fund of £3m a year for social content across all media – video, games, online, print, radio, mobile etc, - produced by marginalised young people aged 13-19, and supported by youth organisations, media mentors, media partnerships and content distribution) could be replicated for digital Britain, creating a

catalyst fund for the wider Third Sector to use specifically to engage those least engaged in digital media – across all age groups and sectors.

We believe that existing public funds (Big Lottery, 4IP, NESTA etc) could be brought together to achieve this, alongside a new contribution from government.

**Media Trust recommends investment in engaging digital volunteers and mentors, harnessing the skills, creativity and resources of the digital and creative industries to support Digital Communities.**

Media Trust already harnesses the skills and creativity of tens of thousands of creative and media professionals across the UK as volunteers and mentors for communities, voluntary organisations and charities, and marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

This proven model, where both sides benefit, could be expanded to include a wide range of digital skills across technical, strategic, creative and business applications of digital communications. The model is extremely cost-effective, and for every £1 spent releases at least £100 of pro-bono creative resource to our communities.

**Media Trust recommends investment in a dedicated Third Sector Public Service Delivery digital innovation fund.**

The potential to harness the Third Sector to support the delivery of public services is enormous, and wasted. The Third Sector has unique skills and abilities to reach those most hard-to-reach communities and citizens. Only a fraction of the government's outreach and communications budget is spent with the Third Sector, even though this sector is in daily and often face-to-face contact with these communities, and even though the Third Sector has a track-record of effective and cost-effective delivery in this area.

Media Trust is proposing a dedicated Third Sector public service digital innovation fund to pilot a sustained and managed investment in public service delivery via charities, voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises. We believe that this can have most impact working across departmental priorities, creating delivery paths that link up services in health, unemployment, work and training, children and families, volunteering and community engagement.

## **Feedback on Actions in the Report**

### **Digital Networks**

**Action 5:** We were interested to read about the Community Broadband Network's proposal for an umbrella body for community networks. We would recommend that it is important to differentiate between the infrastructure needs for community networks, and creation and enabling of community content, applications, skills, digital enterprise, public service delivery, and other digital developments within communities.

We have some nervousness about a scheme that could lead to isolating community networks from mainstream networks/telcos/BBC, and would welcome further discussion and consultation in this area.

**Action 6:** Mobile is a key way of connecting with, and giving voice to, marginalised groups and particularly with those young people who are not online or linked up to broadband for cultural, social and economic reasons.

We would recommend that more consultation, alongside specific recommendations, is given to the benefits of mobile communications for these target groups in advance of the final report, including around delivery of public services via mobile, and that the positive implications of mobile broadband for citizens, as well as for consumers, are addressed.

**Action 8:** The UK-wide Community Channel, on digital television and online, has a key role to play in driving television users into broadband take-up through community-based applications, content creation, and public services delivered via the Third Sector. Community Channel is the only not-for-profit UK-wide digital platform available free-to-air on digital television and online. The television platform has a wide demographic among current broadband rejectors, and is able to engage and inspire these groups to move onto a trusted and accessible online platform. It is able to showcase on television community-based online content and applications.

**Action 9:** There has been considerable demand from the Third Sector, and from the Digital Radio owners, for a UK-wide 'Community Channel' on digital radio, linking up local, regional, national and global content under one umbrella, and acting as a support to local and community radio stations through provision of cross-promotion, additional content, training etc. This would work alongside the UK-wide Community Channel on digital television and online, and in the future, on mobile.

We welcome the proposed extension of existing community radio licenses, and the report's recognition of the social and democratic role community radio can play. We would like this recognition to be widened to include community media of all sort, at a local, regional and UK-wide level, on all digital platforms, including the importance of linking local communities across the UK, and indeed globally.

## **Digital Content**

We welcome the recognition that digital television has created widespread opportunities for additional content and content providers, and would highlight the role that Community Channel has played as a catalyst for new content creation, and in creating opportunities for increased voice and visibility for marginalised and disadvantaged groups, opportunities to showcase local activity across the UK, and to link up communities of interest nationally and globally. Community Channel is increasingly acting as a driver into and promoter of a wide range of community-based and citizen-led online services, aggregating and linking ultra-local, local, regional, national and international digital activity.

We see Community Channel acting as a key bridge from digital television to digital broadband and mobile, supported by the Media Trust's UK-wide network of training, creative volunteers and mentors, and media partnerships, acting as a key catalyst for a new generation of creative social media entrepreneurs, across our communities, bringing new talent and voices into the digital creative economy.

BBC: the BBC's role in driving universal broadband access, take-up and active engagement is key. See below.

**Action 16:** We welcome the concept of a long-term and sustainable second public service organisation to ensure competition in both quality and reach. Delivery through partnerships should be at the heart of this body's purpose, including partnerships with the Third Sector and communities, not just with the private and public sectors as outlined in the report.

Community Channel's role as a digital hub bringing together and linking community content and voices and public service delivery across the UK, should be sustained and strengthened through a commitment to funding for content, distribution and skills as part of this fund, acting as a catalyst for content creation and digital communications across the Third Sector, and among our most marginalised and disadvantaged communities.

### **Universal Connectivity**

Media Trust endorses the priority in the report to drive universal connectivity, particularly among those sections of society most in need. We agree, from our widespread experience of working across these groups, that lack of access to, or take up of broadband is a key contributor to social exclusion, to lack of voice, and to lack of take up of, or engagement with, public services, education and training, volunteering opportunities, and democratic engagement.

We would welcome more consultation with the Third Sector around how best to reach these groups, given the Third Sector's experience in this area, and more practical actions to engage with the Third Sector in order to do this.

**Action 19: Appointment of champions:** We recommend that champions from the Third Sector and communities should be appointed, including from among marginalised communities, young people (broadband rejectors) etc, and we can assist with recommending suitable people.

**Action 20: BBC:** The BBC is THE key potential driver of digital Britain. However, it is important that the BBC's reach, resources and public trust are used as a catalyst for Third Sector and community digital initiatives – networks, channels, content creation from local to UK-wide to global.

Media Trust would like to see the BBC developing a wider range of partnerships with the not-for-profit and Third Sector, and particularly in its outreach into marginalised and disadvantaged communities.

Media Trust would like to see a dedicated BBC fund for commissioning digital content from the third Sector and communities – independent to or merged to a parallel fund coming from a second public service communications organisation.

We would like to see an increase in opportunities for BBC staff to share their skills through volunteering, mentoring, secondments and training initiatives in the community.

The potential for BBC cross-promotion and connections to communities is enormous. We would like to see this objective built into all BBC digital activity, reflecting the BBC's core purposes.

### **Action 21: Public Service Delivery via the voluntary and community sector**

The potential to harness the Third Sector to support public service delivery via digital is enormous, and wasted. The Third Sector has unique skills and abilities to reach those most hard to reach communities and target groups. Only a fraction of the government's outreach and communications budget is spent on the Third Sector, even though this sector is in daily and often face-to-face contact with these communities. We are now building a body of evidence to show that the Third Sector is able to reach hard-to-reach communities far more effectively, and cost-effectively, than traditional suppliers of marcoms outreach via the COI etc.

Media Trust is proposing a dedicated public service digital innovation fund to pilot a sustained and managed investment in public service delivery via charities, voluntary organisations and community organisations and social enterprises. We believe that this would have most impact working across departmental priorities, creating delivery paths that linked up services in health, unemployment, work and training, children and families, volunteering and community engagement.

### **Equipping Everyone to Benefit from Digital Britain**

Media Trust welcomes the endorsement of widespread training and skills opportunities. However we are disappointed that the report does not reflect or refer to the wide range of existing activity ongoing across the UK, mostly delivered by the Third Sector, and that the report does not identify the opportunities to build on and expand these opportunities to benefit both the digital creative economy, public service delivery and community development.

Reliance on the Sector Skills councils to identify and deliver training support leaves a real knowledge gap in relation to those communities and digital training activities supported by the Third Sector.

We recommend a widespread review of the range of education and training activity going on across the Third Sector in digital-related areas, and the range of organisations involved in delivering this activity, to inform the potential for this sector to make a significant contribution, and to feed into the final report.

Working in partnership with the wider media and communications industry we can also endorse the reference to cutbacks in skills and training within the creative industries.

We recommend investment in a new fund to skill up a new generation of digital entrepreneurs at local levels.

### **Conclusion**

The UK has a unique and one-off opportunity to deliver three key and linked objectives for 2012: digital switchover, universal broadband and successful delivery of the wider vision for the 2012 Games – a movement across the UK of participation and engagement in communities, sports, arts and culture.

To achieve this linked vision the full engagement and participation of the Third Sector – of charities, voluntary organisations, communities and social entrepreneurs – is vital.

This participation and engagement must be resourced, but that resource will be hugely cost-effective and act as a catalyst for a new generation of digital communities and connections across the UK.

## **Background to Media Trust and Community Channel**

### **Media Trust**

Set up in 1994 as a registered charity, Media Trust works in partnership with the media and communications industry to support the communications needs of the Third Sector – charities, voluntary and community organisations, social enterprise and citizens' interest groups.

Media Trust delivers a range of services including training and advice, content production and distribution, media volunteers and mentors, Mediabox, youth media and campaigns. [www.mediatrust.org](http://www.mediatrust.org)

Media Trust runs Community Newswire, a partnership with The Press Association, distributing 30 community news stories a day to the UK media. [www.communitynewswire.org](http://www.communitynewswire.org)

Media Trust owns and runs Community Channel, the UK digital television and broadband platform for communities, broadcasting 24 hours a day on Sky 539 and Virgin 233, 3 hours a day on Freeview 87, and online at [www.communitychannel.org](http://www.communitychannel.org)

Community Channel is supported by the wider media industry, including the BBC. Media industry partners provide bandwidth, content and cross-promotion. The Cabinet Office provides core grant of c.£1m a year. According to BARB the Channel has 1.5m viewers a month, and an annual reach of 7.5m.

**Media Trust corporate members** include: BBC, BSkyB, Channel 4, Daily Mail and General Trust, Discovery Networks Europe, Disney Channel UK, Guardian Media Group, IPC Media, ITV, MTV Networks UK & Ireland, News International, Newsquest Media Group, OMD, Warner Bros. and WPP Group.

**Trustees and non-executive directors** of Media Trust and Community Channel include: Andy Duncan (Chairman), Jon Snow (Deputy Chair), Dawn Airey, Tony Ball, Paddy Coulter, Rupert Howell, Jane Reed and Mark Thompson.

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