



Digital Britain – Interim Report:  
Response by National Institute  
of Adult Continuing Education  
(NIACE)

March 2009

## ***About NIACE***

1. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is an independent non-governmental organisation and charity. Its corporate and individual members come from a range of places where adults learn: in further education colleges and local community settings; in universities, workplaces and prisons as well as in their homes through the media and information technology. The ends to which NIACE activities are directed can be summarised as being to secure more, different and better opportunities for adult learners. NIACE works to secure both formal and informal learning at all levels.
2. NIACE is a leading voice in adult learning and represents the interests of all learners, advocating increased opportunities for adult learning and for better quality provision. However as an organisation it is particularly concerned to advance the interests of those who have benefited least from education and training in UK society. The Institute carries out its work through advocacy, research, development and promotion, in partnership with all stakeholders in adult learning.

## **NIACE's response**

3. NIACE welcomes the Government's proposals in the Digital Britain Interim Report in particular we welcome the dual commitments to 'fairness' and 'economic competitiveness'.
4. NIACE is particularly pleased with the Government's plans for a long-term and sustainable second public service broadcasting organisation. However, the opportunity should not be missed to ensure that this body has a clear remit to promote lifelong learning and offer educational content for adults in ways that can be integrated with online and face-to-face learning activities.
5. The report's chapter on Equipping Everyone to Benefit from Digital Britain recognises rightly the importance of digital skills in the workforce, as well as in families and communities. However, the strong emphasis on young people in this section does not reflect adequately the importance of these skills to adults - something which NIACE hopes will be addressed in the final report.
6. NIACE believes that reducing inequalities in access to digital technology is vitally important. We must ensure adequate opportunities for learning both about digital technology and with digital technology.
7. The commitment to a National Media Literacy Plan is welcomed and in developing a new definition of media literacy NIACE urges that this

takes account of the needs of adults in the 21st century. This plan should ensure that adults not only have access to digital content but that they can develop the ability to judge content from a huge variety of sources and acquire the skills for content creation and for improved democratic engagement.

8. We know from the report of our recent national conference on Informal Adult Learning that both learners and learning providers have high expectations of our digital networks for enabling learning to take place in a media-rich online environment. Improved bandwidth will satisfy the infrastructure need but it will raise a demand for more media-rich content and high quality interactive learning spaces. The plan should take account of the economic opportunities for the development of educational resources for Superfast Broadband.

## **Conclusion**

9. In conclusion, NIACE believes that the interim report is very timely and that it represents a positive vision for the use of our new digital networks. We hope that the final report will provide a more focussed commitment to the deployment of digital networks for informal and formal learning. We also hope to see greater recognition of the importance of training and education for adults. We need to identify training for our specialist workforce in advanced technical skills but also we should point to learning programmes for all citizens, which prepare them for practical ICT skills and the skills of media literacy.
10. NIACE can provide the Department for Culture Media and Sport and the Department Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform with further information and comment about anything in this document. The organisation is also ready to assist the Government at any time in carrying forward the outcomes of the consultation. Please contact Alastair Clark or Alastair Thomson in the first instance.

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