

**Response to Digital Britain interim report  
By W4B-The TV and Radio Charity**

W4B The TV and Radio Charity welcomes the opportunity to respond to the interim report.

We feel that the report is helpful in considering under the one umbrella areas of digital technology that are converging. The charity remains the largest single provider of TV and Radios within and across the UK .The charity's primary interest is catering for elderly and disabled people who can be very isolated and confined. To help relieve this isolation the charity has traditionally provided radios and televisions over the last 70 years. However, its remit and interests are not necessarily just in these areas, for example we have an ongoing interest in the internet, mobiles and landline phones. The charity is a member of the CEG, part of the Ofcom Consumer Forum, but would welcome greater involvement in many of the areas outlined in the Digital Britain interim report.

The charity has the following concerns:

- 1. The report does not take account of the impact that the proposals could have for the charity which has been engaged in this area of work for the last 70 years. Such developments could lead to increasing demand and cost upon the charity and could undermine its role if it is not fully included as a key stakeholder. There need to be safeguards so the ongoing and long term support the charity provides, to some of the most vulnerable in society, is not undermined. This was an action point in the consumer report to the Digital Radio Group This, as well as the other recommendations seem to have been disregarded and need to be included as action points in the final Digital Britain report.**
- 2. The interim report needs to take account of vulnerable consumers. Overall the report seems to be responding to the concerns and needs of industry rather than consumers. The meaningful inclusion of 3<sup>rd</sup> sector bodies and consumer groups as key stakeholders at decision making level needs to be addressed now.**
- 3. Is it in the consumers' best interest that they enter into changes that will not only incur costs to them as tax payers, but also potentially pull them in to the expense of new technologies to access services they already can with present provision? Convergence may involve the consumer in a technology race they do not have the economic ability to enter or keep up with.**
- 4. Dedicated help schemes will be needed if vulnerable and low income citizens are not to be left behind.**
- 5. Though safeguards are discussed in terms of online access, the rights of the consumer and the data that could be generated through their use of technology has not be covered, safeguards need to be implemented in this area.**
- 6. We are used to the concept of the digital divide / exclusion of consumers due to the cost and lack of skills to utilise technology. Yet there may be the potential that technology itself may lead to isolating consumers within their own homes if it is felt that service and information is accessible to them through digital networks. The danger remains that some of the most isolated and disenfranchised may have services withdrawn or marginalised leaving them yet more isolated and**

disempowered. An example of this is how difficult it can be to contact a service provider by phone or by letter rather than by email.

7. Equipping everyone to benefit from Digital Britain is accounted for in the main by the concepts of education and skills development. The fact that consumers may not wish to engage, nor have the appreciation of the benefits of engaging is not really addressed in Digital Britain. It is this group who could be most at risk of being isolated through the technology. An active programme of engagement needs to be set up to target this group.
8. Accessibility and user friendliness will be an issue for all areas of the technology concerned. All consumer needs should be met and safeguarded to maximise engagement.
9. Urban – rural split. In the USA service providers have pulled out of providing the same quality of service to rural areas as they have with urban ones. This is a possibility in the UK if government does not push for universal standards of delivery.
10. The Charity is concerned the Digital Britain interim report seems to be overwhelmingly dominated by the interests of industry and the consumer has been lost. Consumers need to drive the process if it is to succeed and be economically viable. Belief in, and the suitability of new technology will be key in the move forward to a Digital Britain. It's vital therefore that the public, young and old, have some say and representation in this report.

Tim Leech  
W4B-The TV and Radio Charity

March 2009