# Foreword

The digital information and communications sector is one of the sectors in the economy, alongside energy and financial services, upon which the whole of the economy rests. The success and health of this sector is of interest and concern not just to those employed in it but also to the 22 million of us who depend upon it for our daily work, and to the employing organisations for whom effective modern communications is a critical source of efficiency and competitiveness.

It is also a sector that touches all aspects of our lives, at home and at leisure as well as at work. The average British adult spends almost half of all their waking hours using the services of the communications sector or browsing, watching or listening to the audio-visual content it distributes, content that at its best can engage and delight us as consumers and inform us as active citizens in a democracy.

It is a sector where we have international strengths:

- digital satellite
- the development of GSM, the world standard for mobile communications
- public safety networks
- the success of local loop unbundling, for affordable higher-speed broadband
- the development and deployment of universal digital terrestrial television
- the pioneering of digital broadcasting in radio
- our leading position in global entertainment formats, advertising, marketing services and research
- the emergence of internationally-recognised talent in online, and in particular mobile, small screen content development.

But we cannot rest on our past or present successes, not least because other countries are increasingly making the development of a digital, knowledge economy a centrepiece of their own economic development.

Technology change, entrepreneurial and creative imagination and network infrastructure are now coming together in ways that, over the next five years, will transform our living and working patterns; this is convergence. Nowhere is this more evident than in the contribution that information and communications technology, in combination with energy technology, can make in delivering a low carbon knowledge economy.

Much of this change, indeed most of it, must be driven by the market, by innovation and by changing consumer demand. But it should be the market backed by the best of public thinking and clear Government direction.

Government is a major purchaser of digital, knowledge economy services and it uses them increasingly in the wider delivery of public services; the education and skills system influence the capabilities of those entering or working in the sector; regulation can help or hinder investment or innovation; the Government is the guardian of national resources – such as wireless radio spectrum – that are critical to the sector. The Government has legitimate wider public policy interests: the availability of high quality UK content and of impartial news from a wide range of sources; increasing the relevance, accessibility and ease of access to digital services to limit digital exclusion. These are all themes which the Interim Digital Britain Report seeks to address.

At a minimum this Report seeks to bring both focus and stimulus to this sector. If, in the final Report we make the right decisions, we can create an effective programme and partnership for the Digital Economy; one that can drive the upgrading of our digital networks, significantly enhance our national competitive position in these critical markets, secure competition for choice and quality in content, connect with the interests of the rising, digital generation and improve access, affordability and inclusion for all. This is the prize on offer, it will require a common effort to deliver it.

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