



We want to encourage Britain to innovate for a successful digital future

economic era

"Birmingham is like many locations in the UK that need to make the transition from being a traditional industrial city to a modern digital city – the Digital Britain report is to be welcomed for outlining some of the vital ways in which this can be achieved."

Technology Strategy Board chief executive Iain Gray said: "The Technology Strategy Board will take a leading role in helping to make the 'digital Britain' envisaged in the Government's report a reality."

"We want to encourage Britain to innovate for a successful digital future and are proud to be visiting Birmingham and finding out more about this city's vision of the part it wants to play."

The afternoon sees the event dividing into four panel debates.

Stephen Dodson, director of DC10 Plus, the nationwide network of organisations promoting digital inclusion, will be chairing a debate entitled 'Empowering people for a digital age' which focuses on people, media literacy, skills and inclusion.

Digital Birmingham's director Chris Price will address infrastructure issues in 'Delivering a digital Britain', discussing bandwidth, spectrum, broadband and the digital switchover, whilst *Birmingham Post* editor Marc Reeves will head up the "Content is king" session, focusing on public service broadcasting, content protection, IPR and managing the shift in control from produc-

ers and distributors to citizens.

Channel 4's Tom Loosemore will talk about the future for digital development with the "Staying ahead of the game" panel, which looks at research and innovation that will create the climate for investment and enable us to compete in a global economy.

Lord Carter will take time later in the day to visit the Digital Britain Unconference at Fazeley Studios in Digbeth, where digital creatives and SMEs are getting together to discuss the report's findings and recommendations.

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What do we need to do to make a real Digital Britain

Stephen Dodson is director of DC10Plus, a collaborative network of local authorities and their partners which aims to promote social inclusion through the use of technology. Ahead of chairing the Empowering People for a Digital Age panel at the Digital Britain event on Wednesday, he discusses how the report needs to start by meeting consumer demand and customer need

which these benefits can be realised, but also herald an age where people can take a more proactive role in their local and self-selected communities to engage with local policy makers and service deliverers.

Politicians both nationally and locally make much of consulting with their electorate. If the internet is made available to all –



Regardless of age, income level, or ability, people can see a marked benefit to their lives once introduced to the internet

'Digital Britain' is an ambitious term, but one which holds the potential for realising the benefits of the internet in tackling social, economic and environmental issues and providing better services for everyone.

I strongly believe, however, that unless Digital Britain starts by meeting consumer demand and customer need, it will remain an ambition rather than a reality.

More than 35 per cent of the population are still not using the internet, and the panel will explore how the report will help these people to benefit from this vital technology.

Numerous studies show that, regardless of age, income level, or ability, people can see a marked benefit to their own lives once introduced to the internet. This could be via a computer, interactive digital TV, mobile phone or even a games console: will the panel recognise that there is more to bridging the digital divide than being able to use a computer?

I would like to explore the panel's opinions on how the report's findings will help people increase their skills and educational levels and make themselves more employable in a world that increasingly relies on ICT skills.

Do we think it is important that people can save money shopping, keep in contact with distant relatives, and create social networks online?

We'll also discuss how those who are disabled or need more care can be helped by the technological advancements in areas like telemedicine and telecare.

Being able to carry out routine self-health checks at home can save people time and money, and avoid the hassle of attending clinics or hospitals. Similarly, advances in non-intrusive monitoring can literally be a lifeline. However, there are potential ethical and moral questions to the use of ICT in this way.

Lord Carter's report could set the scene for an infrastructure upon

and there are many different ways of accessing it – true and meaningful political engagement could be a genuine possibility.

But does this mean that people who are not online, or who don't know how to use these new consulting methods, will then be pushed further away from the democratic process?

Finally, I would like to explore with the panel the value they believe will come from every household having access to high speed broadband which is likely to be a key recommendation of the report.

This single step could pave the way for a revolution in the lives of ordinary people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. It could enable schoolchildren and their parents to mirror the school or college environment in their home and bring healthcare facilities closer to an ageing population through telecare and telemedicine.

It could support the creation of a more innovative, enterprising, flexible and greener business landscape by providing the connectivity to allow people to work from home in ways which suit them, their employers and customers.

Enabling developments like this would surely reveal the promise of a truly 'Digital Britain'.

