

**F28      Preparing the Ground: Stimulating Growth in the Digital Economy (Information Technology Policy Paper)**

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Conference believes that IT has the power to transform our society by empowering citizens, improving and extending services, and enabling innovation. Conference therefore endorses the proposals in policy paper 101, Preparing the Ground: Stimulating Growth in the Digital Economy, to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to benefit from the digital revolution by:

- A. Creating a fair environment for innovation and business.
- B. Improving digital inclusion and skill levels in the population and in government.
- C. Reducing regulation and red tape.
- D. Safeguarding the essential freedom of the internet, while ensuring the reasonable.
- E. Protection of individuals and businesses.

Conference in particular welcomes the paper's proposals to:

1. Create a focus on growth in the creative industries by:
  - a) Recognising the importance of and protecting the intellectual property rights of creators.
  - b) Targeting government policy at helping existing businesses grow and supporting innovative start-ups.
  - c) Repealing sections 3-18 of the Digital Economy Act, which lack a robust evidence base and democratic legitimacy.
  - d) Setting up an independent review of the true impact of file-sharing on the creative industries to establish more clearly the relationship between illegal activity and legitimate sales.
2. Protect the essential freedom of the internet by:
  - a) Putting in place additional safeguards for online freedom of speech including:
    - i) Additional protection in libel law for those merely hosting the content of others.
    - ii) Amendment of section 127 of the 2003 Communications Act which is used to prosecute innocent users of social media for non-intentional remarks taken out of context and has a chilling effect on free expression.
  - b) Oppose the granting of any additional powers for the police or the Government to restrict access to the internet or social media or to order its suspension.
  - c) Making it clear that the Government will not allow a two-tier internet, and will hold to the principle of net neutrality, if necessary through regulation.

3. Create a level playing field for business by:
  - a) Broadening the definition of research and development tax credits to apply better to IT research and development, and ensuring that they are more accessible to small and medium-sized businesses.
  - b) Taking a leading role in establishing links between universities and the creative industries.
  - c) Suspending IR35 in order to gather more data on permanent abolition.
4. Restore the ownership of data to citizens by:
  - a) Establishing the central principle that data should belong to the individual to whom it refers.
  - b) Making all government data consistent with open standards, and ensuring that all public data belongs to the nation.
  - c) Ensuring that all data is held securely within its specific department, and cannot be accessed by other departments without passing established levels of authority.
  - d) Returning to elected representatives (typically the Secretary of State concerned) all decisions relating to the balance between liberty and security.
5. Close the government skills gap by:
  - a) Establishing a new government office, encompassing the work of the current Chief Information Officer and staffed with experts in the IT field.
  - b) Ensuring that all procurement policy and oversight of major IT contracts across government is channelled through this office, thereby promoting interconnectivity.
  - c) Driving up experience and skills in the Civil Service and local government across all departments by encouraging all staff above a certain grade to undergo a period of initial training upon appointment, which is refreshed annually.
6. Improve digital inclusion by:
  - a) Ensuring that all appropriate public services are available online and are accessible by an average retail mobile phone.
  - b) Working with the telecommunications industry to make government services and data free to access via mobile phones and on public wi-fi networks.
  - c) Accelerating and improving the roll-out of faster broadband by promoting online government services and working with industry to improve infrastructure where necessary.
7. Stimulate political involvement by:
  - a) Encouraging Parliament to present information on its business that is aimed at members of the public, not procedural experts.
  - b) Introducing online public consultations during the writing stage of the legislative process.

- c) Giving citizens the right to petition government at all levels, and to receive a proportionate response from decision-makers.

Accepting all the above, the conference nevertheless upholds the right of individuals particularly in their private or community lives to use long established methods of communication – the postal system, the telephone, books and papers traditionally printed and in particular:

- a) Applauds the decision not to abolish cheques.
- b) Encourages the Press Complaints Commission to issue guidelines to those placing articles or advertisements not to restrict responses to email addresses but also show telephone numbers and/or postal addresses.
- c) Encourages TV and radio channels to adopt similar guidelines.

Applicability: Federal, except 3 b) (lines 35-36), aspects of 5 b) and c) (lines 50-54), and aspects of 6 (lines 55-62) which are England only.