



Digital Skills Review

JT's comments on the Terms of Reference of the Digital Skills Sub-panel

Introduction

Gigabit Jersey is the name for JT's programme of replacing the existing copper network with fibre to provide broadband users access to high speeds. JT is two years into a five year programme to provide a ubiquitous fibre network for the island of Jersey which will provide the infrastructure necessary to allow educational establishments, businesses and consumers to connect to internet devices at high speeds of up to 1Gbps (and, indeed, higher in future years as the equipment at either end is upgraded). JT's Gigabit Jersey programme is very much a facilitator in providing the underlying network that is essential to supporting such initiatives and applications as e-learning, e-government and e-health.

The fact that every broadband connection on the Island will be provided over fibre means that where once the extent of access to online skills and learning materials would be limited, by the legacy network in place, this will no longer be the case. Fundamentally, this applies not just to Digital Skills but to skills and education generally, however in the case of the Digital Skills agenda specifically, it is fair to say that without the appropriate connectivity it would be significantly hampered, if not impossible to achieve.

Digital Jersey has ambitions for "a connected society" which it defines in its Developing a Digital Jersey strategy document as:-

one where individuals benefit from easy and low-cost access to digital technologies and the skills to use it.

JT's Gigabit Jersey programme will deliver the "easy and low cost access to digital technologies" and it should be in Education's remit to develop the necessary skills to use it. This aligns with the terms of reference attached to the Digital Skills Review specifically terms 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6.

JT has already installed its fibre network in the majority of schools in readiness for Education’s tender to provide a new IT network for schools. It is anticipated that JT will have completed the installation of the fibre network for the remaining educational establishments by the end of January 2014.

Jersey schools	Already connected to fibre	Connected by January 2014
Secondary	9	0
Primary	26	4
Special Needs Schools	0	3
Highlands College	0	1

At the time of writing, the Gigabit Jersey programme has connected 6,269 homes to fibre and as more homes are connected the families and children living in them will gain further benefits of being able to access educational tools from home.

JT fully supports the adoption of modern technology and new methods of working that the technology will bring. Jersey should embrace the benefits that this will bring to the island and its community and encourage adoption of new technology.

Internet Connectivity Costs

Jersey is very well served with connectivity both on-island and off-island which has resulted from the very high levels of resilience required and relied upon by the finance sector. Jersey and the Channel Islands are connected by a large number of fibre-optic submarine cables owned by the various telecommunication and electricity companies which enables competitive service offerings. This is an expensive infrastructure to install and maintain but is essential for Jersey’s financial institutions. JT has been working closely with Economic Development to put in place appropriate offers to ensure that such connectivity costs (whether they be perceived or otherwise) are not a barrier to growth and new business entry. In addition, the Channel Islands Competition Regulatory Authority (“CICRA”) is currently undertaking a review of the business connectivity market which JT is participating in and we look forward to seeing the outputs of that work.

Broadband services for consumers and businesses on the new fibre infrastructure are very well priced and entry level speeds of 50Mbps are available at affordable levels. It is these broadband services that Educational establishments and students will rely upon to access their materials over the internet and these high speed broadband services will be available to all premises in Jersey.

Summary

JT's investment in fibre broadband services, provided for by the Gigabit Jersey programme, is a very important foundation that is necessary for the realisation of Digital Jersey's Strategy and supports Education, Sport and Culture's Vision for IT in Education providing access to the next generation of e-learning, e-government and e-health services.