



UK Internet Governance Forum

Report from the UK Internet Governance Forum Spring messaging event Tuesday 8 February

Summary

It was important that the UK became a leading voice on the governance of the internet at the global level, MPs and industry leaders heard today.

Introduction

Labour MP Alun Michael, Chair of the UK IGF, set the scene for the event as starting the preparation for the next international IGF in Nairobi in 2011. The day's speeches and meetings were intended to help identify those issues that the UK should introduce to the Nairobi conference.

Mr Michael said that UK interests did not necessarily reflect those of other countries. China, in particular, did not share the same values as UK politicians and industry leaders regarding internet governance, Mr Michael stressed. He was worried about the IGF's future, given that a date had not yet been set for the Nairobi event.

This introductory speech ended with the warning that, at a time of cuts, politicians and the industry must make sure to not exclude forever those that had not yet ever accessed the internet.

Nominet Awards

Baroness Rennie Fritchie, Nominet Chair, opened the 2010 Nominet Internet Awards on Tuesday 8 February, explaining Nominet's aim to celebrate those organisations and individuals working to ensure that the internet is a safe, useful, and enjoyable place.

The awards were established to celebrate the many people and organisations that were making a difference on the Internet, focussing on success, rather than on failure. This was originally intended to provide content and ideas for the United Nations Internet Governance Forum, Baroness Fritchie noted. Now it was satisfying to see other countries following suit with their own awards, she remarked.

Annika Small from the Nominet Trust heralded the internet as empowering positive change, and saluted the awards for recognising and celebrating those enacting this positive change.

Natasha Innocent detailed the composition of her organisation, Race Online 2012, a Coalition of people to support the 9.2million in the UK who have never been online. Race Online's 1,000 partners had so far helped 2 million people online for the first time. Pointing to their new partnership with the Open University, Ms Innocent said Race Online 2012 is now firmly in delivery mode as its partners assist those people who have never been online.

Tony Osborn from Symantec warned that an improved awareness of how children spend time on the internet is required, and that there has been a dramatic change in the nature of the threats and risks. Symantec, and its commercial wing Norton, protect 180 million computers worldwide, Mr Osborn detailed. He described how one computer is infected every four seconds and there was more 'Malware' created last year than every year before it combined.

Adrian Arthur from the British Library was proud to be sponsoring the Nominet Awards, with the institution having won three awards in previous years. Mr Arthur asserted that libraries are not passive but inspiring places where new knowledge is created through the connections people make.

The next speaker was Richard Williams from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, the largest umbrella body in England. Mr Williams argued that charities are an underrated and significant contributor to the economy. He compared the £35.5bn total income of the charity sector annually with the £60bn profit of the insurance industry. However, most of these charities are small and looking to innovate cheaply, Mr Williams suggested. Many Local Authorities are front-loading the cuts they have to make onto charities for two reasons: they are not cutting smartly and they are decimated by short-term cuts. Therefore the internet was becoming increasingly important for many of the charities his organisation represents, Mr Williams concluded.

Will Gardner of Childnet International, spoke to the Forum via video. He stated that he was delighted with the recognition Childnet had received, having won three awards before and looked forward to lending their support to this year's awards.

Digital Communications Minister Ed Vaizey emphasises that online developments needed to be industry-driven

Culture, Communications and Creative Industries Minister Ed Vaizey opened his keynote speech by describing himself as 'Minister for the Internet'.

The United Nations had renewed the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum, Mr Vaizey announced. He congratulated the IGF's 'extremely valuable' work engaging stakeholders and informing government policy.

The internet was a global resource, and business must step up to support the IGF through funding, Mr Vaizey argued.

The theme of the previous international IGF in Vilnius was an increase in international cohesion. Mr Vaizey was pleased that not only were there many MPs in attendance but also that a quarter of all attendees did so remotely. Following Vilnius, the Nairobi conference must have full engagement of stakeholders, especially from developing countries, the minister affirmed. Consequently, development must be the key theme of Nairobi, Mr Vaizey added.

There have been initial successes in development in Africa with the laying of seabed cables. However, Mr Vaizey was concerned that engagement and communication with developing countries was still lacking. Therefore involving all stakeholders would help Nairobi avoid the perception that laws were made in a clandestine manner, Mr Vaizey asserted.

Turning to ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), the Minister welcomed the recommendations that complete transparency was required to ensure competence. Mr Vaizey reassured the audience that the government would ensure ICANN made the proposed changes soon. These proposed changes to ICANN were important at a time when there would be new domain names to rival ".com" he said. Change must be fair, where benefits to the economy outweigh the costs, Mr Vaizey added.

Mr Vaizey saw this meeting as coming at a time of great change in internet governance, as work was undertaken to address the particular problem of net neutrality and other key issues.

Turning to the International Telecommunications Union, which had held its Plenipotentiary Conference in October, there has been significant change to its position towards ICANN and

the management of the domain name system and the operation of the Internet. Accordingly, Mr Vaizey told the audience that ICANN must reach out to the ITU and, in turn, the ITU must reach out to ICANN, if the recent achievements at the United Nations were to be realised. Cooperation was key.

The UK government's essential principals were absolutely clear, the Minister stated. The expansion of the internet must be led by the private sector with government intervention only when absolutely necessary for safety and important regulation, he maintained.

Addressing Nominet directly, the minister described it as an impressive example of bottom-up self-regulation.

The government needed to ensure that expansion of the domain name system does not undermine established national "brands": city and regional geographical names such as the long-standing ".Cymru" initiative to promote Welsh culture and business, Mr Vaizey said. The government must seek to ensure there were no obvious risks involved in the expansion, he affirmed. Nevertheless, he did not believe it was the role of the Government to lead change, which instead needed to come from private sector bodies such as ICANN.

Concluding his speech, Mr Vaizey said that at a time where there was fundamental change to how the internet operated, there needed to be a transition from 'IPV4' to 'IPV6'. This was becoming increasingly urgent, he believed. Everyone must work together to make it work at all, he stated.

Mr Vaizey finished by wishing the audience well in their preparations for Nairobi and announced that the future of the internet would be high on the next G8 agenda (to be chaired by France).

Martha Lane-Fox calls for more cohesion to establish a 'network nation allowing the internet for all that wanted it

Following Mr Michael's introduction, Martha Lane-Fox, the UK's Digital Champion, began her keynote speech by stating her unease with her title she has been given. In 1997, the UK was internet-barren, Ms Lane-Fox declared. Consequently, her own business success was a result of hard work and luck, she argued. However, Ms Lane-Fox admitted that she was delighted to be asked by the current government to help enhance the lives of the most vulnerable through technology as a Digital Champion.

The online company that she co-founded, lastminute.com, had been successful because it filled a niche that people needed and wanted, she said. The main argument of Ms Lane-Fox's speech was that all internet users had an original need or desire. There was already an enormous amount happening, but the current system needed to be better connected, she contended.

There were, Ms Lane-Fox asserted, three 'hooks' that need to be created to get new users on the internet - encouragement, inspiration, and support. Ms Lane-Fox believed that this could have been achieved with co-operation amongst the private, public, and charitable sectors.

Highlighting the combination of Britain's relatively good broadband, the highest concentration of e-commerce in the world, eager government, strong academic involvement, and de-regulated telecommunications industry, Ms Lane-Fox said that this led her to be bullish about the future of the internet in the country. However, she added the caveat that the internet remained far less widely used than television.

Moving on, Ms Lane-Fox expressed her frustration at current public adverts that advertised price competitiveness but did not explain the benefits of the internet. Ms Lane-Fox argued that this was a specific area where the government should take the lead to change the current dynamic.

Turning to Google Chief Eric Schmidt's comments that any service that didn't put the internet first would die out, Ms Lane-Fox claimed that you could not put a bad service on the internet. Businesses must look at how their services could be utilised by the internet, she insisted.

It was unnecessary for the government to have more than 150 websites, she said. A Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude supported Ms Lane-Fox's proposals to streamline these in principal, she confirmed. Ms Lane-Fox then explained that she would look next at Directgov, and noted as an example how the Baltic States reinvented government using the internet.

Returning to the problem in Britain, Ms Lane-Fox hoped that a 'network nation' could be created in Britain first before helping others. In Britain, two million computers were currently refurbished, with one million of these going abroad. The one million that remained in Britain should be widely distributed to remove the obstacle of cost to those that struggle to afford computers, she said. Nothing new needed to be invented to create the network nation, she stressed, but more cohesion was required.

Concluding her speech, Ms Lane-Fox pointed to the power the internet had given groups in the Middle East. The role of industry and government was not to focus on the few that did not wish to have the internet, but to focus on the many more that do want it, she said.

IdenTrust's Karen Wendel calls for action to address the 'unintended pernicious consequences' of the internet

Following this, Karen Wendel, Chief Executive of IdenTrust, framed her keynote speech around three concepts: identity, accountability, and consequences.

Identity was described by Ms Wendel as 'the elephant in the room'. This was because online a person's identity lacks boundaries. The problem facing the online community was knowing who was out there and working out how to protect them, Ms Wendel said. As identity lacked geographical boundaries, once someone was online they cease to be British but an 'internet user', she contended.

The concept of accountability was born from a desire to protect our physical actions online, such as internet banking. Ms Wendel noted that there is no effective monitoring system of the internet. Tying accountability back to identity, Ms Wendel demonstrated to the audience that there was nobody to verify and monitor on Facebook your identity and status.

Ms Wendel's suggestion to this problem was to not have a centralised system but have authority passed down to relevant pockets to ensure that authority was maintained throughout the online community.

Turning to the furore regarding Google Street view, Ms Wendel talked about the law of unintended consequences and also noted that algorithms of faces to verify identity could also become a tool of repression. Some thought needed to be given to the implications and consequences before launching new ideas on the internet.

Even if the idea in itself was noble, she said, it may have unintended pernicious consequences to unsuspecting members of the community.

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