



DIGITAL SOCIETY & MEDIA PROGRAMME

The ippr's Digital Society & Media programme exists to explore the political implications and opportunities raised by the pervasiveness of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) across our society. Digitisation represents a profound change in the way that information is both managed and transmitted. The purpose of this programme of research is to track changes in information flows, to draw out the political implications of these changes, and to outline a progressive vision of how information flows should be structured in a digital age.

The Policy Challenges of the Digital Society

Democratic institutions are a better, more accountable driver of social change than technology. Successful investment in ICT requires adapting its capabilities around our needs, and not vice versa. Moreover, change is not a good in its own right, but can be unnecessarily disruptive. The policy goals of the digital society should be as follows:

- **Exploit innovation:** Digital technology can improve the productivity of UK businesses, and the effectiveness and efficiency of public services. It can also distribute informational resources more widely, for instance to integrate excluded groups, or enable new working practises. Public policy-makers have a responsibility to ensure that the UK exploits the technology on offer, and distribute the benefits as equitably as possible.
- **Create new institutions:** The removal of technological limitations is not always welcome, and can sometimes require new institutional barriers to replace them. Digital technology eradicates technological barriers between public and private. This makes it critical on the one hand that privacy rights are defended, and on the other that publishers and public service broadcasters develop new bases for their legitimacy.
- **Restructure democracy:** New ways of communicating with one another offer new ways of organising politics. Decentralising tendencies in UK politics can be supported through new decentralised technologies; meanwhile networked technologies are an outlet for new types of civic discourse, requiring new constitutional responses.



Research Focus

The team's work is concentrated on those policy choices where there is most at stake for the public. The central themes of our research programme are the following:

- **Modernising government:** The team has been a leading source of innovative thinking on e-government and new public service delivery models. We will continue to develop this thinking, particularly to consider the role of ICT in the devolution of public service delivery to local communities, and via intermediaries.
- **Intellectual property and innovation:** With a major project on intellectual property in 2005-06, the team will be contributing to the on-going debate about the appropriate scope of IP. Our research pursues firm economic evidence for the benefits of differing IP regimes, and seeks to weigh these against other aspects of the public interest.
- **Public service communications:** The end of spectrum scarcity and the emergence of networked publishing media asks profound questions of what we mean by 'the public sphere'. The greater plurality of media sources, and the arrival of interactive media, changes the responsibilities and definition of a public service broadcaster. The team is a leading source of thinking in this area.
- **Civil society:** Technologies such as mobile phones and the internet have the potential to be 'connecting' technologies, helping people stay in contact with one another. More broadly, they can perform a civic and democratic function, in enabling new forms of participation, protest and dialogue with Government. We are a source of expertise on social capital and political engagement in the digital age.

Team Members

William Davies, Senior Research Fellow, w.davies@ippr.org

William joined the ippr in June 2004, and leads the Digital Society & Media team. Prior to this, he worked on The Work Foundation's iSociety project, where his research focused on the relationship between social networks, communities and new media. He is the author of *Proxicomunication: ICT and the Local Public Realm* (Work Foundation, 2004), *Invisible Villages: Technolocalism and the Enabling Council* (New Local Government Network, 2004) and *You Don't Know Me, But...: Social Capital & Social Software* (Work Foundation 2003). He has written for *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The New Statesman*, *Renewal* and various online publications.

Kay Withers, Research Fellow, k.withers@ippr.org

Kay Withers joined the Institute for Public Policy Research as Research Fellow in 2004. Prior to this, she worked as a researcher to Brian White MP and was previously policy adviser to the Internet Services Providers Association where she led the Association's work on data retention and the Communications Act. Her research interests include e-Government, internet regulation and intellectual property rights. She has contributed articles to several e-Government and IT industry publications on a variety of regulatory issues.



Past Publications

- ***Public Value and eGovernment***, Ian Kearns (2004)
- ***Public Value and eHealth***, Jamie Bend (2004)
- ***Intermediaries and the Electronic Delivery of Public Services***, Mike Bracken & Ian Kearns (2004)
- ***From Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Communications***, Jamie Cowling & Damian Tambini (eds) (2004)
- ***E-Participation in Local Government***, Ian Kearns et al (2002)
- ***Ruled by Recluses: Privacy, Journalism and the Media after the Human Rights Act***, Damian Tambini & Clare Heyward (2002)
- ***Code Red: Progressive Politics in the Digital Age***, Ian Kearns (2002)
- ***New News: Impartial Broadcasting in the Digital Age***, Damian Tambini & Jamie Cowling (2002)

Previous Conferences

- The Digital Society & Media team is instrumental in organising the annual **Oxford Media Convention**, and Will Davies chairs its steering group. The 2005 Oxford Media Convention featured speeches by Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP, Michael Grade and Ed Richards.
- **A Panacea for all Ills? What Can Media Literacy Achieve**, March 2005, with Lord Putnam of Queensgate
- **Is eGovernment Better Government?**, December 2004, with Rt Hon Ruth Kelly MP and Michael Fabricant MP
- **Organising Online: Where Next for Unions and the Internet?** November 2004, with Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC
- **Public Value and Electronic Service Delivery**, March 2004, with Douglas Alexander MP