



DECEMBER MEETING NON-VERBATIM MINUTES

Topic: Can digital support the UK's economic recovery and improve social mobility simultaneously?

Date: Tuesday 8 December 2020

Time: 14:00– 15:00, via Zoom

Chair: Julie Elliott MP, Chair of the APPG on Digital Skills

Speakers:

- Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Chair of the Science and Technology Committee and former Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and former Community and Local Government Secretary
- Rt Hon, Baroness Morgan of Cotes, Former Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, former Education Secretary and member of the COVID-19 Committee in the House of Lords
- Professor Kerensa Jennings, Group Director of Digital Impact, BT
- Aidan Corley, Government Affairs & Public Policy Manager, Economic Affairs, Google

Parliamentary Attendees

- Carol Monaghan MP, Glasgow North West
- Gagan Mohindra MP, South West Hertfordshire
- Baroness Verma
- Lord Clement-Jones
- Lord Puttnam

Attended on behalf of the Parliamentary Office for:

- Lord Skidelsky's researcher – Alex Bagenal
- Lord Taylor's researcher - Ryan Pratt
- Owen Thompson MP's researcher – Jack Capener
- Catherine McKinnell MP's researcher - Michael Mordey
- Steven Bonnar MP – Stephen Kirley

Minutes

Chair of the APPG **Julie Elliott MP** welcomed guests and introduced the APPG and its primary aim: to promote the importance of digital skills and to encourage a greater understanding of digital skills for personal, educational and career development.

Julie Elliott MP then outlined the topic of the meeting, which was to examine if developing people's digital skills can support the UK's economic recovery, whilst improving social mobility. She then introduced speakers Baroness Morgan, Greg Clark MP, Professor Kerensa Jennings and Aidan Corley.

Baroness Morgan introduced herself and outlined that digital education is not just a focus for young people but that we all need to be aware of the constant need to continuously update our

digital skills as technology evolves. She said that no industry is immune from the impact of digital and that it is important to be mindful of the potential downsides to living online – she explained that we can hold meetings and remain productive, but the lack of social contact means we are potentially missing out from the creativity when meeting colleagues in person. She also touched on the great deal of misinformation and potential lack of safety online – but applauded that new technology is being used by social media giants to help filter out some of that misinformation.

Greg Clark MP, Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, said that there has never been a better time to persuade the Government and private sector to grasp the moment. COVID is accelerating a lot of changes that are already underway – such as holding meetings digitally and shopping online. The Industrial Strategy has been developed to anticipate some of these trends and therefore the requirements to equip society with the ability to respond in an advantageous way to these developments. In the UK, there remains a big opportunity to leverage digital skills. The analysis of Big Data, for example, is something he suggested we should consciously champion, and also continue to invest more in at every level of education. He stressed that employers were already reporting technical skills shortages before the pandemic. Greg Clark explained that we have been hearing the need to do better in technical skills, but the country has been slow to enact the degree of transformation that is now needed. A transformation is now needed at pace. Whilst the virtual world will never completely replace the personal interactions that we have, there is a need to recognise its role. Greg Clark highlighted how it is striking that global trends over the past 15-20 years meant the pandemic happened just at the time that shared working spaces and the development of clusters of industry and technology reached a place where skills can be a crucial dimension to recovery.

Professor Kerensa Jennings, from BT, explained that the more we do to help tackle social mobility, the more people are economically active, the better the economic recovery will be. She stressed that it is important to help both Work Life and Home Life, such as those families with low or no digital skills. Barefoot is a CPD platform, for example, that helps teachers to gain the confidence to use resources and tasks to teach children. This has helped teachers continue to teach during home-learning over the course of the pandemic. She stressed that it is important to help people with adaptability and resilience schemes – and that this will be needed by everyone. She highlighted that tackling social mobility is helping economic recovery. Professor Jennings touched on the Small Business Support Scheme, which is enabling cash, confidence and connectivity, and helping SMEs to adopt digital – by connecting small businesses with digital experts in ecommerce, project management and cyber security. These small businesses have received 1-2-1 mentoring to help power them forward into the digital age. BT has also worked closely with Small Business Britain, and supported the Small Business Virtual Bus Tour to provide mentoring and training across the country, and helping people to put their businesses online.

Aidan Corley from Google said that Google understands the ongoing destruction to businesses, educators, charities and wider retail that the pandemic has been having. He explained that Google has focused on adapting its digital skills programme and providing it free of charge, to make sure that everyone can access the support that they need. Google has been working alongside Government to make sure that tech can help support the ‘new normal’. He stressed that tech and digital provides an opportunity, but that if you lack basic digital skills, you will struggle in the workplace and in life beyond it. This is why Google has invested significant time and resources to mould tools, to help enable people to have the best chance in life. Ultimately, being digitally literate is crucial to social mobility, from things as simple as writing a CV in what is a challenging job market. He stressed that Google has trained more than half a million people through their free programmes, and reached 70% of primary schools.



Julie Elliott MP then opened the discussion to the rest of the group. The conversation focused on the following key points:

Baroness Verma stressed that we must not allow those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in rural areas to fall behind in issues such as home-schooling and the rise of domestic violence.

Baroness Morgan stressed that even if you provide digital hardware and devices, people may not be ready or skilled enough to use them or be in a position to support their children and grandchildren to access education. She stressed it is not necessary for everyone to become an expert, but that we do need basic digital skills to access government services and health appointments, for example.

Professor Jennings noted that if we want to see change, it must be mandated. COVID has brought into sharp focus the changing approach people have to technology, where they might have been more intimidated to try before. It was of particular interest that before the pandemic struck, 82% of jobs advertised required basic digital skills.

Carol Monaghan MP touched on every primary school child in Scotland being provided with an iPad, something that was planned pre-COVID. This however creates a wariness around problems such as the safety of children online.

Aidan Corley stressed that Google's driving principle is making sure that everyone is safe online – which has manifested in the Internet Legends programme – where Google has collaborated with a local constituency MP and put together an assembly for pupils on how to stay safe online.

Julie Elliott MP thanked the speakers and attendees and summarised the need for digital to support the economic recovery; she then concluded the meeting.