



**Speech by Jamie Bend, Digital Society Programme, ippr
Broadband Stakeholder Group Conference, London, October 29th 2003**

Just under a year ago the Prime Minister made his speech to the e-summit in which he committed to rolling out broadband throughout the public sector.

It was in that speech that he pledged £1bn with which to harness broadband in order to improve public services, promising to deliver broadband to every school in the country and throughout the public sector in order to help deliver the government's objectives in health, in education, in the criminal justice system and in other areas.

ippr has been doing some work examining the existing and potential uses of broadband in the delivery of public services and I'd like to give you a flavour of that work this morning as well as talking about the political context in which broadband is being used.

Specifically, I'd like to do three things:

- First, I'd like to briefly outline the approach that we've been taking in looking for benefits that use of broadband in the public sector might deliver. While many of the potential benefits of broadband, such as cost savings, apply to both the public and private sectors, capturing all the possible benefits created through effective delivery of public services requires different assessment frameworks to those often used in the private sector. I'm going to talk about the concept of Public Value, which we have been using to examine the impact of broadband.
- Second, I'd like to give you a few examples of situations where the harnessing of broadband in the public sector might have delivered Public Value. We've spent some time looking at health-related applications and services that require broadband and I want to describe to you some situations in the health sector, and also one in the education sector, where broadband might be key in creating value.
- And finally I want to talk about where we'd like to be this time next year. The last year has seen the first few pieces of solid evidence emerging on the impact of broadband in the public sector and I'd like to make a couple of recommendations about how we move forward.



First, as this session is about the Public Value of Broadband, a few words about the concept of Public Value.

First what Public Value isn't. It isn't an attempt to simply transfer principles developed in the private sector to the public sector. That approach has been tried before and has been unsuccessful because it doesn't take account of the difference between private goods and goods provided through public services.

What Public Value is is a framework with which to assess the impact of government activity that is informed by our values and beliefs and that takes account of the range of benefits, many of which are currently not measured, that might derive from the delivery of public services.

In the paper on this topic published by the Prime Minister's Strategy unit last year, three sources of Public Value are identified and I'd just like to run through them.

The first source of value is better outcomes. Public services, if they are effective, should lead to better outcomes for citizens. In the health context that means healthier patients and a healthier public. In education it could mean higher levels of academic achievement and greater involvement of those from traditionally excluded groups in the education system. Similarly in the area of criminal justice it involves reducing crime and reducing fear of crime.

Secondly, Public Value is also derived from improved services. This does mean services that are delivered more efficiently and effectively. But perception of services is also important, with high levels of satisfaction with services creating additional Public Value. Satisfaction with a service might be increased by delivering shorter waiting times, better relationships between the citizen and the provider of a service or by increasing the fairness of the provision of that service.

And thirdly Public Value is created if levels of trust and confidence in government are increased. Trustworthiness is seen as being important by the public and high levels of trust in the relationship between governed and government are important. Citizen's trust in government gives legitimacy to government actions and enables the creation of Public Value elsewhere. For example, the fair delivery of healthcare through the NHS would become impossible if people didn't believe that the government was acting legitimately in staking a claim to be the organisation ultimately responsible for delivering health services.



So how could the use of broadband help to deliver Public Value?¹ We've been using the Public Value framework as a tool with which to examine some of the existing evaluations of e-government activity and we have found some good news stories. Evaluations haven't been perfect but I want to set out some examples where the emerging evidence suggests that use of broadband might deliver benefits.

First, a few examples from the health sector, where our research has been focussed so far.

Applications and services enabled by broadband could help to drive up health outcomes. There is currently an explicit drive within the health sector towards what's termed evidence based medicine. Information about the likely outcomes of different treatments should clearly be taken into account when decisions are being made. But this is a challenge because of the growing mismatch between the vast amount that we now know about health and medicine and the limited capacity of the human mind to retain and recall that knowledge.

Use of broadband could help to overcome this by enabling decision support systems or summaries of available evidence on a given condition to be made available to professionals electronically. This would allow evidence-based principles to be adhered to, helping to ensure safe and effective treatment based on the most recent information available. There is evidence from the UK that such systems work. An evaluation of the government's National electronic Library for Health showed that availability of these types of resources made clinicians more likely to enquire about the evidence base for their decisions. And more decisions made on the basis of what has led to better outcomes in the past will lead to better outcomes for patients in the future.

As well as improving outcomes, use of broadband might improve patients' satisfaction with the services that they receive from the health service. The quality of a patient's relationship with the professional who's treating them and the degree to which they feel informed about their condition and treatment are key determinants of their satisfaction with the service they receive. Trials using digital television to deliver health information have been shown to have a positive impact on both of these issues.

¹ Examples in this section are drawn from recent ippr research and further information on these and other case studies will be available in forthcoming ippr publications.



Two thirds of the users of the service provided in one of these pilots felt that it had made them better informed about their condition and patients reported that using the interactive television service helped them in their offline interactions with the health service: over half of those asked had accessed the information available either before or after a consultation and four in ten believed that the information that they had then obtained had helped them in their dealings with their doctor.

Trials of the use of Electronic Health Records also suggest that they could have a positive effect on patients' satisfaction with the services that they receive. Allowing patients to access their health records electronically seemed to make patients more concerned about and interested in their health. For example, patients with diabetes reported that they were inspired to seek extra information about their condition and also began to monitor their blood sugar, weight and diet more carefully.

Evidence that broadband is having this kind of positive impact is important given that the quality of the NHS is seen by the public as the most important public services issue currently facing the country. The emergence of evidence that broadband can increase satisfaction with the health service and the quality of care provided puts better use of broadband right at the heart of this government's mission to improve public services and makes it key to its electoral success.

In other policy areas too, there is evidence emerging that services enabled or improved by access to broadband are helping to deliver Public Value.

For example in education, the Impact2 research conducted by Becta is still often quoted a year after its publication because it provides some of the first solid evidence that use of ICT in schools can increase educational attainment. While the report didn't examine broadband in particular, and subsequent research has shown that schools aren't always using networked technologies effectively, the report's findings are encouraging. In every case but one examined during the research there was evidence of a positive relationship between use of ICT and pupils' attainment. If this impact is replicated throughout the country and over time it could have an effect on education levels throughout society, on skills and a knock-on effect on economic prosperity.



So there is evidence emerging of the impact that broadband might have in several of the government's key policy areas. We've come on from where we were one year ago. At last year's conference there was little more than anecdote to suggest that broadband could have an impact on the performance of public services in this country. We are now starting to see real evidence coming through but this process needs to be accelerated in the year ahead.

Over the next twelve months more and more of our public services will get access to broadband. By June this year 37% of schools, including over ninety per cent of secondary schools had broadband and the roll out process is continuing. Similarly in health, the award of the contract for N3, the New National Network, is expected in January and will accelerate the process of giving broadband access to every organisation in the National Health Service.

As this process occurs there are two things on which we should focus: Listening to the potential users of broadband. And measuring the impact that broadband is having.

First we need to listen to citizens and those working in the public sector and hear what they're saying about broadband and about ICT more widely.

In situations, such as in the NHS, where new, large projects are being put in place this means effective consultation and involvement of users. Top-down only approaches to implementation will not work and if the investment being made today is to pay dividends tomorrow attention must be paid to the knowledge, needs and motivations of those who are to use new services, whether professionals or citizens.

Listening to those who are getting broadband for the first time will also help us to identify new services that broadband might facilitate and to encourage innovation. Those at the front line of public service provision know most about the problems that they face, and given a tool like broadband they will use it to try and solve some of those problems. We have seen this in the field of telemedicine already with innovative clinicians adopting technology to solve capacity shortages or the inconvenience of journeys to hospital. But the problem has always been replicating successful innovations. As broadband rollout inspires innovation we need to look carefully at what broadband's being used for. We need to support successful new services and ensure they can be used more widely. We're very supportive of Michael Wilkinson's work in this area.



Secondly, we need to measure the impact of broadband more diligently. Although there is now at least some evidence that broadband's delivering Public Value in public services, evaluation is generally being done poorly. We didn't expect evaluations to be perfect and to be measuring every source of Public Value. Firstly simply because Public Value is a relatively new concept. And secondly because things such as trust and satisfaction with services are soft issues that we know have traditionally not been measured well. But in spite of this we've been surprised by the low quality of evaluation.

In many cases there simply was no evaluation occurring. Where evaluation was happening, often the right things weren't being examined. And even where issues such as citizen satisfaction or trust were examined, evaluations were often methodologically weak.

None of this means broadband isn't delivering value now. But effective evaluation is necessary if we're to demonstrate the value being added. This is crucial if the political case for investment in broadband is to be made effectively.

We want to see methodologically sound evaluation programmes looking for the hoped-for benefits of broadband across the Public Value framework. This work needs to start now to measure baselines as new broadband networks are being rolled out. Otherwise one year, or even five years, down the line we will be suffering from the same paucity of hard evidence that we suffer from now.

If we reach that situation – if we're unable to argue persuasively that spending on broadband for the public sector delivers value for citizens – then we will have failed. Our work hints that broadband should bring real benefits for citizens, for patients, for pupils, and for other consumers of public services. The challenge for the year ahead is to prove that it does.