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Organising questions for the Oxford Internet Institute's enquiry into public broadband

General

1. How should we define and characterise broadband? Moreover, what is public broadband and who should contribute to its discourse?
2. Should we take as given that public take-up of broadband should be encouraged? What are the particular benefits broadband would bring to your area of expertise? What about costs (at all levels) that widespread adoption of this new technology entails?
3. How should access penetration and uptake be measured, in the absence of a standardised metric?
4. Are current movements such as grassroots wireless bandwidth sharing likely to change public access and provision of broadband services?
5. Can the provision of broadband to/from the private sector be uncoupled from public sector access issues? What are the particular sticking points that make this issue such a complex hybrid?
6. How long is broadband (as it is variously defined) likely to persist? Should substantial effort be focussed elsewhere to avoid too much investment in an intermediate-stage technology?
7. What difficulties exist and have existed in increasing uptake of broadband services? Can any of these be generalised and used to inform future efforts, both around broadband and other technologies?

8. With vertical integration of content and bandwidth, do broadband providers find themselves in the position of shaping consumer behaviour online? Is this desirable from a public interest/business/infrastructure standpoint? How might anticompetitive practices influence the expansion of access, as well as future iterations of technology?
9. How does newer, faster, less-tethered technology (IEEE 802.11, WiFi, 3G) alter the current debate about broadband?
10. Is an open access model of content/conduit provision more likely to succeed in making broadband more compelling to end users? (cf. Transact Communications in Australia).
11. Rural regions that are located beyond the reach of telephone-line access to xDSL services, or that are underserved by high-quality cable face a unique problem: even willing communities that want high-speed access and can afford it may not be able to obtain broadband services for at least one more generation of technology. What particular issues are raised by the disparity this fosters? What stopgap solutions exist?
12. In a market environment where as many as 75% of users report satisfaction with their current dial-up connection speeds (Parks Associates study, 11/01), what can be done to increase uptake of broadband? What are the consequences of not improving end-user bandwidth provision?

Infrastructure

13. What responsibilities does a government have to making sure that its citizenry is able to obtain and afford broadband access?
14. Is there a critical point of uptake at which users will feel compelled to abandon slower, narrowband access? If this is the case, what services might disappear with more widespread broadband adoption? What new services will emerge/ gain popularity?
15. If xDSL systems are the most popular mode of delivery of broadband service, is the telephone company that installed the copper wiring responsible for upkeep and repairs, even in the face of such unforeseen infrastructure usage?
16. What ownership issues exist around ownership and sharing of telephone lines? Is local loop unbundling and co-location of third party routing equipment at exchanges unrealistic? What about fixed-cost sharing amongst cable providers and ISPs, as well as open access to cable infrastructure?
17. How much price reduction in the form of discounted hardware sold as a loss-leader is tenable in a sector that is already struggling? What protections exist to keep broadband providers solvent while their customer base grows to a self-sustaining size?

Policy

18. What role(s) should the state play regulating broadband conduits? How should privatised telecommunications provision be regulated so as to encourage broadband uptake?
19. Should limits and/or tariffs be placed on content streams? If so, which kinds of content are most readily regulated?
20. What remains to be done to achieve the UK Government's goal of being the G7's most competitive broadband market by 2005? Who gauges competitiveness, and by what metrics? How much of a priority is this commitment?
21. How can the OECD's recommendation that competition be used as a driving force to foster expansion of broadband connectivity be implemented?
22. How can the work of independent regulators like Ofcom and Ofwat be used to provide a counterpoint to broadband market regulation? Are regulation and the fostering of market competition mutually exclusive?
23. Does broadband offer new opportunities for political transparency? How can high-speed connectivity be exploited in the service of providing easy access to public documents?
24. Can broadband technology improve corporate and organisational transparency? If so, how?
25. What new issues around privacy become germane with public access to high bandwidth connectivity?
26. What are the costs and benefits of utilising broadband technology to improve dialogue between constituencies and policy-makers?

Public Services

27. Can and should public gathering places such as libraries and community centres provide access to high-speed Internet? What advantages accrue to those that do? Why do they not (by and large) do so already?
28. How do public service organisations like the NHS and the DHSS benefit from expanded broadband access? Is there an additional improvement to the organisation-public interface when high-speed connectivity is more ubiquitous?
29. Can broadband be used as a tool to improve voter participation at local and national levels? Authentication and privacy are of utmost concern in changing election systems—how can high bandwidth be exploited to overcome practical difficulties in holding distributed elections? Are there further psephological difficulties?

30. What role should advocacy groups like the Broadband Britain Committee and the Broadband Stakeholder Group play in encouraging public and private sector uptake of broadband?
31. How might improved connectivity benefit processes of teaching and learning in classrooms? What new training opportunities become possible with broadband access that were problematic or nonexistent with slower dial-up access?
32. How might schools, colleges, and universities benefit from improved connectivity in terms of internal and local administration, professional co-operation, and communication with users and stakeholders?
33. Does the development and expansion of distance learning depend on the uptake of end-user broadband connectivity?