

# Response to the Terms of Reference of the States of Jersey, Economic Affairs Scrutiny Panel, Digital Skills Sub-panel

## 1 Background

The Economic Affairs Scrutiny Panel has established a Sub-panel to undertake a Review examining the merits of two newly launched strategies; Education, Sport and Culture's *Vision for IT in Education* and the *Digital Jersey Strategy and Business Plan* (focusing primarily on aspects relevant to skills development). In addition, the Sub-panel will be examining whether the strategies 'dovetail' appropriately, and establishing the appropriateness of the criteria and process by which individual schools will now be invited to submit their IT Strategies and associated funding bids.

The Sub-panel has established a Terms of Reference for the review and C5 Alliance, as a member of the digital industry, has been invited by the Sub-panel to make a written submission that may cover any or all of the Terms of Reference.

## 2 Terms of Reference

### 2.1 To examine whether the approach to improving digital skills in the Island contained within the *Digital Jersey Strategy and Business Plan*, to enable delivery of its key objectives and related targets, is supported by stakeholders.

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The C5 Alliance Group broadly supports the business plan put forward by Digital Jersey. We are pleased that the key enablers are sufficiently well defined and that these appear to represent the opinions of the majority of the digital industry.

We do however feel that business development plans are less well defined and would like to see greater clarity around what types of digital businesses are being targeted, and in which markets. There would be more confidence in the plans set out by Digital Jersey if they were verified by some independent, off-island research, similar to the London Business School Report which was done for Jersey Finance and gave them clear direction and focus over five years. In our minds scoping a brief to enable a piece of work of this nature should be the first priority for Digital Jersey in 2014.

That said, we recognise that enablers are being put in place to stimulate demand such as the Innovation Fund and believe that this is a good start.

Whilst the plan rightly focuses on longer term skills development through education, we would also like to see more around short to medium term initiatives such as re-skilling of



existing resources and incentives for the industry to develop existing school and college leavers.

We are pleased that Digital Jersey has helped drive digital initiatives in schools and whilst this is useful, we would like to think that this is just the start of a much more integrated plan with Education, Sport and Culture (ESC) to work closely together in future.

## 2.2 To examine whether the approach to improving digital skills in schools contained within the *Vision for IT in Education*, is supported by stakeholders.?

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We broadly support the vision for digital skills and believe that it focuses on the right areas, it is however only a vision at this stage and not a plan. We would like to see this developed into a clear strategic plan with measurable targets. The vision has a number of initiatives highlighted to ESC over 2 years ago. We hope that turning the vision into a strategic plan will not take as long.

There is some good work being undertaken today, particularly at Highlands, with its Information Technology BTEC courses, and the newly created Digital Learning Hub is also promising. Supplementing this work with a well-executed plan will go a long way in significantly improving core digital skills in our students.

We are concerned about the lead-time to execute the plan and the implications this could have in meeting the targets outlined in the Digital Jersey plan. Skilled teaching resources in this area are limited. Whilst training of existing teaching resources will meet some of the needs, we believe that specialist resources will need to be hired in much the same way as done today with core subjects like Maths.

To maximise the value from digital skills we feel that it is important that we don't just focus on teaching digital skills as a subject, rather they should be used to support the wider curriculum by using digital technologies more effectively as a teaching aid. To that end, all teaching resources should be trained sufficiently to use the tools available.

The vision implies that individual schools will be enabled to deliver their plans, but there is a concern that this could lead to a fragmented approach with both an inconsistency in teaching and potential results. Whilst empowerment is good, we believe that because this is a new core subject that is likely to evolve rapidly, the programme would benefit from some key central pillars that minimise the risk of inconsistent standards and delivery across schools. We also believe that the evolution of the programme should be undertaken in conjunction with industry possibly through Digital Jersey to make sure that as the programme evolves it continues to meet the future needs of the industry.

Our students will be in high demand and there is a risk of talent drain becoming one of the side effects of a successful digital strategy. We need to recognise this and ensure that there is a compelling reason for students going off island to study are sufficiently compelled to return post completion. This may for example be in the form of artificial stimulus such as tax breaks or grants.

## 2.3 To examine whether the Vision for IT in Education and the Digital Jersey Strategy and Business Plan are complementary.

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We believe that the Vision for IT in Education and the Digital Jersey Strategy and Business plan are broadly aligned in their objectives.

At implementation level however there is little evidence that Digital Jersey's plans and ESC's vision are coordinated. Industry is keen to assist with ESC plans. At the moment industry involvement is informal and ad-hoc.

This is a long-term programme and the plans cannot operate in silos. Whilst current discussions are about making them cohesive, this focus will need to remain throughout the lifecycle to achieve the value we are looking for. This will require strong governance between stakeholders, as the very nature of fast moving technological change will inevitably mean that the plans will need to be reviewed and revised frequently. If these are not managed cohesively the benefits are likely to be diluted.

Industry needs a commercial incentive to be part of the wider development plans. Industry already suffers from a skills shortage. E-Government could be a critical short-term incentive for the industry to have the confidence to invest in developing talent. We have seen this work well with programmes like the Windows 7 desktop rollout across the States which was won locally and delivered by a local supplier private / public partnership. The program has allowed C5 to develop fresh talent in a mutually beneficial way. This type of program is a helpful blueprint for what could and should happen with e-government

## 2.4 To compare the *Vision for IT in Education* to related strategies developed in other relevant jurisdictions.

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We have indirect experience with other jurisdictions although Malta would make a good comparison. With approximately 300 skilled resources going into the Digital industry each year from education versus approximately 20 per year currently in Jersey, Malta is more advanced with its digital skills initiatives and incentives. These include tax breaks, adult education schemes, Digital divide schemes, Internet access and significant investment in further education. Malta has been developing a talent stream over the last decade to the extent that the C5 Alliance Group currently outsources some work to Malta where we have capacity constraint and it makes sense.

## 2.5 To identify the framework for the implementation of the *Vision for IT in Education* in schools, with particular attention on the process and criteria for the development of individual school strategies.

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Whilst broadly supportive of plans and vision as well as being pleased that something is happening and that funds are being made available, we do have concerns about the approach as highlighted earlier.

Development of individual school strategies in a fast moving environment could lead to vastly different outcomes across schools. We feel that a more defined centralised strategy rolled out across the schools and implemented locally would deliver a more consistent result and be easier to manage with other stakeholders such as Digital Jersey and Industry.

Accountability for the success of the programme will be more difficult to manage if the strategies are to be de-centralised. Given the importance of the success of the programme, we feel that accountability needs to rest at Governmental level.

## 2.6 With particular regard to Digital Jersey's e-government objectives and targets, to examine the existing and proposed provision for adult training and education to improve digital skills in Jersey.

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We would agree that this is a key component and work needs to be undertaken. There appear to be no obvious strategies in this space. We feel that this may need initiatives and incentives for e-learning. This would be similar to strategies put in place in Malta.

## 3 Key messages:

- Stakeholder involvement in digital strategies needs to be an ongoing commitment
- Strategy is dynamic and long term and not just a one off exercise at the outset
- Will require strong governance with clear accountabilities to make sure plans remain aligned and re-worked as necessary over time.
- Industry is keen to play its part but it is has to be commercial. Government needs to think about how it can generate short to medium term incentives for Industry to commit to the program whilst inward investment ramps up. The obvious enabler here will be e-government.