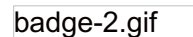# Superfast broadband – pipes and people

**blogs.lse.ac.uk**/polis/2009/01/22/superfast-broadband-pipes-and-people/

badge-2.gif    We already know that those ISP commericials promising superfast broadband speeds don't generally deliver the digital power as advertised. By the time it gets to your PC it seems to slow to a trickle just as you need to download a huge document or upload that stunning piece of video.

Stephen Carter's job with his Digital Britain review is to make sure that the same thing doesn't happen with a national policy for superfast broadband.

At the Oxford Media Convention we heard how the recession has slowed the pace on developing this infrastructure and how this could impact on everything from arts to news.

Emma Gilthorpe from BT described it as a 'risky business' before the crash – now it is a 'very risky business'. They will still lash out £1.5 billion on fibre to bring it to 40% of households, but they are worried about the regulatory regime's effects on their profits.

They are also worried about take up from Joe Public. It has stalled, and not just because of affordability. Gilthorpe said that the content just isn't good enough at present, although that might change as mainstream broadcasters put more stuff onlline, as with the BBC's iPlayer.

Anna Bradley from Ofcom's consumer advisory group knows what the public are thinking. She says that the citizen now assumes that the Internet is free, and they mean, in effect, Broadband – ie Internet that is always on and can do anything.

This is important if you want to make superfast broadband a universal infrastructure. It makes it much harder. It has to be free, flexible and full of great public service content that can entertain, educate and connect.

So how do you deliver that? Anna says:

1. There has to be a strategy for delivery of current and next generation broadband
2. Start thinking about defining universal service in a new way (it's a public service)
3. Need to achieve availability and then take up of the service (it doesn't work if it isn't everywhere)

Why does this matter? why didn't I go to the panel on media and politics where I could have had yet another row with John Lloyd? The fact is that my vision of an online population with all the interactivity and participation in media ultimately depends on an Internet that is easy to use, reliable and a suitable platform for the vast volume of wonderful content that I can think that we can go forth and create.

So, yes people matter, but so do the pipes.