# Digital Nation: An Internet-Enabled Recovery

The continued rise of, and advances in, digital technology comes at a hugely important time for the future of the UK. The coronavirus pandemic, which caused the world to grind to a halt in so many ways during 2020, showed how vital the internet and digital technology is to people, families and businesses.

Internet Association's report - 'Digital Nation: An Internet-Enabled Recovery' - details how the internet industry can continue to play a significant role by:
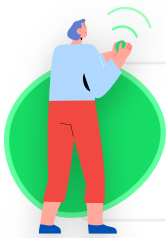
making society better
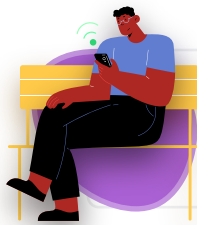
powering our communities

driving the economic recovery

The Internet Was Crucial For People And Businesses During Coronavirus

The report also includes the views of the public – taken from a poll of 1,000 UK adults conducted in June 2020. The public are clear that the internet played a vital role during the coronavirus pandemic, and will be crucial in helping enable the UK's post-pandemic recovery.

89%

Eighty-nine percent of people in the UK felt the internet was either essential or important to them during the pandemic.

50%

Half of the UK public (50 percent) bought a product or service from a local business via the internet during the lockdown because they could not visit the premises as normal.

76%

Three-quarters of the UK public (76 percent) said that the internet has been important in helping them stay in touch with family and friends.

Over 8 million people in the UK joined a community group such as a residents' association, neighbourhood or church group on the internet during the pandemic.

The Internet Will Drive The Post-Coronavirus Economic Recovery

81%
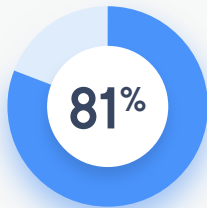
Eighty-one percent of UK people believe that the internet has a role to play in supporting businesses who will not open fully in the coming months and years.

75%
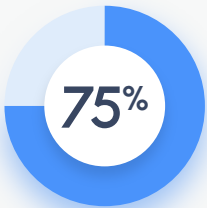
Three-quarters of the UK public (75 percent) agree that businesses and organisations that adopt technology will be more productive and in turn help speed up the post-coronavirus recovery.

Recommendations For Future Digital Policy

This is a moment to increase collaboration between government and industry. The government should take a pro-tech mindset across all policy areas, to support the UK's tech ecosystem to deliver growth, investment, jobs, and innovation in the UK.

This means growth not only from internet companies themselves, but also from the thousands of businesses - large and small, in a range of sectors - that use technology to boost their productivity and deliver growth in their own right.

Internet sector growth, jobs and businesses are not simply concentrated in London and the South East, contrary to popular assumptions.

→ IA believes that there is no better place for the government to start than encouraging the internet sector in trying to meet the ambition to "level-up" the UK economy. We should particularly focus efforts on those constituencies that have a below-average number of internet businesses, to ensure we have an internet-led levelling-up right across the UK.

The internet sector also has a particularly important role to play in supporting the growth of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and microbusinesses, across the UK.

→ IA believes that industry and government should work together to ensure that UK SMEs are equipped to make the most of digital technology in the future through training and educational resources to unleash the next generation of globally-connected small businesses.

To deliver these benefits, IA calls on policymakers to enhance the internet sector's positive contribution in the UK through the following actions:

→ "Lock in" the benefits of faster adoption of digital technology. The UK has seen a decade's worth of digital transformation occur in just a few months during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the government should encourage further adoption of digital technology across the entire economy to boost productivity and innovation in businesses large and small.

→ Provide universal access to digital skills training and prevent a "digital divide." The benefits of the internet will only be maximised if British people have the skills to take full advantage. The government should prevent a "digital divide" emerging between those who can and cannot take advantage of all the internet has to offer, through investing in digital skills training and education, and supporting the faster rollout of superfast broadband across the UK.

→ Enhance digital citizenship. As the internet becomes a greater part of people's lives, the expectations for behaviour online should be the same as for behaviour offline. Internet companies have launched a number of digital citizenship initiatives, and the government should promote a wide-ranging approach to education on digital citizenship, and launch its new media literacy strategy as soon as possible.

→ Champion digital trade, and include "best-in-class" digital provisions in future trade deals. The internet enables British businesses to export. Cross-border data flows will be especially important in the future as an input into research and production processes. Any future trade agreements should have strong digital provisions that enable cross-border data flows, encourage vibrant e-commerce markets, and facilitate digital exports.

→ Encourage inflows of tech talent and investment. The UK is already a significant hub for foreign tech investment, and the government should seek to attract even more investment from abroad, as well as ensuring the immigration system – such as the Global Talent visa – encourages foreign tech talent to come to the UK and work alongside world-leading British talent.

In addition to taking these positive actions, this is equally a moment for government to think carefully about planned future regulation, and how that might affect the internet sector's ability to drive economic growth. There are a significant number of current policy and regulatory initiatives affecting the digital sector, and IA therefore calls on government to:

→ Conduct an audit of ongoing tech policy and regulation. The internet industry is focused on delivering the products and services that benefit the economy, communities and society. However this contribution will be held back if the government and regulators do not take into account the cumulative impact of regulation in the sector, or equally do not carefully manage the interplay between different, new regulations affecting the sector. We are open to new regulation, but there needs to be more coherence to ensure we don't harm the internet's ability to deliver benefits to the UK.