

DCIA DISSEMINATION EVENT - SEPTEMBER 2022

The Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator (DCIA) September Dissemination Event: Momentum and learnings from across the four workstreams

In mid-September the DCIA project held its second quarterly dissemination event. Attended by over 120 people from both the public sector and industry, once again it felt like a coming together of stakeholders dedicated to driving digital connectivity forward. Planned rail strikes and the mourning period for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II meant that this ended up being a virtual event, but the sense of engagement and discussion was no less vibrant than the last event in Bristol. Indeed, through a series of presentations and breakout sessions, there was a real sense of energy and momentum, with clear progress being made across all four of the project's workstream.

Nick Wiggin, DCMS, kicked off the day and explained that the agenda had been developed to not only show the latest progress on the DCIA pilots, but also to provide updates on the other workstreams: PFI contracts, standard contracts, and standards for smart infrastructure.

Discover key takeouts from the event

Future Network Programmes

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Simon Rowell, Head of Programme Development for the Future Network Programmes (FNP) at DCMS, began the formal presentations of the day by outlining DCMS' approach to interventions in the digital connectivity area. He started by observing that while he is fairly new to the programme, he has been struck by the vast number of professional personnel and the amount that everyone wants to achieve. As he succinctly put it to attendees: "you're in good hands with the DCMS team".

Rowell went on to provide an overview of the FNP, a government programme led by DCMS to deliver telecoms R&D interventions to the community. He explained that it is comprised of three main parts:

1. **5G Testbeds & Trials Programme:** now coming to a close, this has targeted 5G use cases and where they can be adopted into key sectors
2. **Shared Outcomes Fund:** this is where DCIA sits, alongside other initiatives such as Fibre In Water which is exploring the potential ability to lay fibre cables in water networks across the UK
3. **Open Networks Programme:** made up of £250m of funding this, is about bringing R&D in the telecoms macro environment into the UK

Going on to explain the Open Networks Programme in more detail, Rowell outlined the focus on diversification of telecoms R&D and the particular focus on accelerating development of the underlying technologies, around Open RAN capabilities and open networks. The programme was set up to address market failures that we have in the UK, although it was recognised this is not a challenge unique to the UK, with Rowell observing that "we are in the same boat as many of our partners in terms of what we're trying to achieve".

He went on to outline the three main objectives of the programme:

- **To build interoperability and standards across the market to support open innovation** - this is mainly being achieved through R&D interventions
- **To incentivise and de-risk** – DCMS wants to encourage a network of operators that can deploy open network solutions. With open standards, operators are not tied to any one player, and can work with multiple partner
- **To develop an international perspective** - DCMS understands that we don't have all the answers in the UK and wants to work with "best in breed" partners around the world that can help us achieve our objectives

“If you look at the interventions we have had or are planning” Rowell said, “they’re all around achieving that diversification in the supply chain. In building this environment we want to achieve that diverse telecoms environment around the equipment supply chain and we hope that building this foundation will make it much more sustainable for the country going forward”.

The interventions being designed therefore are focused on four strategic themes:

1. **Accelerating maturity** – specifically focusing on working with the wider UK community to design and co-fund R&D research around the development of technologies, testing and integration. The UK has a large number of vendors, and integrators as well as significant strengths and capabilities around semiconductor design, power efficiency, software development and AI. “We can utilise all these elements within the country to achieve our objectives” Rowell observed.
2. **Fostering an innovation ecosystem** – Rowell explained that the UK Telecoms Innovation Network (UKTIN) - due to start in October - will be the central hub for the ecosystem, ensuring the sector can “feed off itself and achieve these objectives longer term”. UKTIN will function as a conduit to provide info to not just established organisations in the sector but all new players, SMEs, and entrants from overseas.
3. **Facilities & demonstrations** – providing places and labs for people to test their tech and demonstrate their capabilities to the wider community. “That will be an important part of achieving this” Rowell stated, “we need to show what we’ve designed and what we’re capable of”.
4. **Driving adoption** – “we need to drive that in the community, to make sure all the things that have been created can be adopted throughout the UK”, Rowell explained, before stating that DCMS is committed to cooperating with vendors, MNOs and integrators to achieve that.

Rowell went on to provide one example of an intervention currently ‘live’: High Density Demand. “Urban networks provide some of the greater challenges for Open RAN” he explained, “particularly around achieving scale in urban areas”. DCMS is therefore designing an intervention to look at overcoming this challenge, working with MNOs to enable Open RAN deployment at scale, and particularly in dense urban environments. The first part is currently underway, to identify the most crucial technology requirements to meet high density demand.

Nick Wiggin went on to state that there is strong opportunity for many stakeholders, in identifying how DCIA pilot consortia and EAG participants can get involved in these future interventions.

In conclusion, Rowell stated, “our ambition is large – we want to achieve a lot and make the UK a major telecoms hub globally”.

Insights and Updates from the DCIA pilots

Attendees were able to hear updates from all eight of the digital asset management pilots, with clear progress having been made on all sides since the last event in June. Dejan Bojic, DCMS, explained that at its heart, DCIA is about processes – “making them easier, faster, making them digital, streamlining those interactions and processes, ironing out any kinks, and minimising friction between the public and private sectors”.

DCIA Dissemination Event: Delving into the other DCIA workstreams

Whereas the June event focused primarily on the digital asset management pilots, this time round, attendees were able to also hear more about the remit - and significant progress - being made across the other three workstreams. Dave Kinshott, DCMS, introduced this section of the event, observing that while the other workstreams are smaller than the pilots, “they are equally important and offer value in different ways”.