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| **Council Working Group on International Internet-related Public Policy Issues Sixteenth meeting – Virtual meeting, 23 September 2021** |  |
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**Contribution by the United Kingdom**

TOPICS FOR THE NEXT COUNCIL WORKING GROUP OPEN CONSULTATION

The United Kingdom is pleased to submit this contribution to the Council Working Group (Internet). We welcome the opportunity the Group provides to identify, study and develop international Internet-related public policy issues. For the next open consultation, we invite the Council Working Group to consider the following topics.

1. **Environmental impacts and benefits of the Internet**

With COP26 fast approaching, there is an ever-increasing need to put environmental issues at the forefront of Internet discussions. As a vital means of monitoring climate change and reducing physical travel and simultaneously a key contributor of greenhouse gas emissions, the Internet has a range of both positive and harmful effects on the climate. At the same time, the environment is fundamental to the continuity, sustainability and robustness of the Internet, as mentioned in the Annex to Council resolution 1303.

A discussion in the Council Working Group would therefore be an excellent opportunity to explore the role of the Internet in environmental issues and to develop strategies for harnessing its potential to tackle climate-related challenges going forward. Given the urgency and gravity of the issue, and in light of intersections with developmental and sustainability issues, the next meeting of the Group would provide a valuable forum for such a discussion.

We propose the following questions for consultation:

* *What effects does the Internet have on the environment and vice-versa?*
* *How can we improve the impact the Internet has on the environment and take advantage of its potential to help address climate-related issues?*
* *What role should stakeholders play in shaping the environmental impacts of the Internet?*

1. **Digital skills and capacity building**

As evident in contributions to the most recent CWG-Internet open consultation, the Covid-19 pandemic has transformed the role the Internet plays in our everyday lives. This has, in turn, starkly exposed the dangers of digital exclusion and the need to ensure that everyone has the skills they need to access the vital, and in some cases life-saving, services that the Internet offers. Without the necessary digital skills, it is often not possible to achieve meaningful connectivity. It is therefore becoming increasingly urgent that we close the digital skills gap so as to ensure no one is left behind and avoid further exacerbating existing inequalities (as addressed in the ITU Academy’s [Digital Skills Insights 2020 issue](https://academy.itu.int/main-activities/research-publications/digital-skills-insights/digital-skills-insights-2020)).

The Council Working Group provides an excellent platform to share ideas, experiences and information on how to develop vital digital skills in communities around the world. It would be an opportunity for governments and other stakeholders to exchange insights on how to tackle some of the challenges to closing the digital skills gaps and devise strategies to overcome them. Furthermore, an open consultation on this topic would enable us to address a number of issues listed in the Annex to Council resolution 1303, including capacity building and developmental aspects of the Internet.

We propose the following questions for consultation:

* *What must be done in order to close the digital skills gap? Which approaches are most effective?*
* *What are the challenges or obstacles involved in building digital skills in target communities?*
* *What role can stakeholders play in improving digital skills in communities around the world?*

We look forward to both the Council Working Group meeting in September and future sessions. Further to the above proposals, we would like to suggest that the topic(s) not selected for the September meeting might be considered for the future work program of the Group.

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