

Press Release

05.11.09

**Royal
Geographical
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning

● Off-line and 'e-solated': is digital inequality dividing Britain?

Martha Lane-Fox, the UK Government's first Digital Inclusion Champion, will join psychologist and broadcaster Professor Tanya Bryon at the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) in London on 1 December, to discuss if an estimated 10 million people in the UK currently without access to the Internet risk being left behind by the digital revolution.

Chaired by BBC technology correspondent Rory Cellan-Jones, 'Digital Divide in the UK?' the latest public discussion in the Society's flagship '21st Century Challenges' series, examines the arguments for getting more people online in Britain: where one in four adults has never used the Internet, a third of households has no access to it and half of all those without access are over 65.

Research shows the Internet can connect users to better jobs and cheaper forms of communication, whilst offering an average annual saving of £570 on the purchase of products and services. The panel will discuss why the four million most socially and economically disadvantaged people of those 10 million not currently online are the least likely to want use this technology, but paradoxically have the most to gain.

With improved access to government services and more learning opportunities two more apparent benefits of digital proficiency, the audience will be invited to question the panel on whether technology has the power to transform the lives of some of Britain's most hard-to-reach communities and individuals: from widening the social sphere of those in remote locations, to improving the skill-set of people excluded from the job market.

According to Martha Lane Fox: 'Very soon it's going to be much harder to have the same choices, access the same information and operate as a member of society in the same way as another person if you're not online. We simply can't assume that everyone is riding the same wave of digital excitement.'

'*Digital Divide in the UK?*' begins at 7.00pm (doors open at 6.00pm) on Wednesday 1 December at the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR. Tickets are £7 for RGS-IBG members, £10 for non-members.

'21st Century Challenges' is a series of thought-provoking discussions aimed to improve public understanding of, and engagement with, some of the key issues likely to affect our lives and society in the future. Visit www.21stcenturychallenges.org.



ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. A limited number of press tickets are available. Please contact press@rgs.org or 0207 591 3019.
2. For any journalists attending:
 - All guests are happy for their comments on the evening to be transcribed for press use
 - No filming or recording of the discussion is permitted
 - Images from the Society's official photographer will be available after the event for press purposes. No other photography will be permitted.
3. For more information on the issue 'Digital Divide in the UK?', including an interview with pensioner and YouTube star Peter Oakley, known to his fans as geriatric1927 and an inspiring figure for older people looking to engage with the online world, visit <http://www.21stcenturychallenges.org/challenges/>
4. The Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers) is the learned society and professional body for geography. Formed in 1830, our Royal Charter of 1859 is for 'the advancement of geographical science'. Today, we deliver this objective through developing, supporting and promoting geographical research, expeditions and fieldwork, education, public engagement, and geography input to policy. We aim to foster an understanding and informed enjoyment of our world. We hold the world's largest private geographical collection and provide public access to it. We have a thriving Fellowship and membership and offer the professional accreditation 'Chartered Geographer' www.rgs.org
5. For the full report: 'Champion for Digital Inclusion: The Economic Case for Digital Inclusion', October 2009, visit <http://raceonline2012.org/research>