

Investing in modern government

The public have had an enforced home course in doing much more on line. During the lock down you had to pay bills by electronic means, buy non food items over the net, talk to friends and family by phone or video conference. I had to do most of my contact work by video or phone link, and everything else by email or blog. Many people have got used to working from home, linking to their colleagues, employer, clients and in my case constituents by the web.

This experience provides opportunity for government to make more progress with its digital transition. Much of government is about taking money off people and giving money to people who need state assistance. Road fund licence, congestion charges, many parking charges and other vehicle taxes are now collected electronically. Many people do now fill in on line tax returns, and VAT is paid often without people realising it when they settle a bill with a credit or debit card. There has also been substantial progress with paying benefits through on line claims.

The two large employers of the state, health and education, are likely now to adopt more of the digital revolution as a result of their experiences during the CV 19 crisis. Patients are being encouraged to go for on line or video based consultations. These can be adapted so the GP who might need an expert opinion can use the pictures to engage a specialist colleague rapidly when the symptoms are shown over the video link. Use is already made of remote technology for ordering follow on prescriptions.

Schools have been learning about remote teaching and the electronic assistance to receiving and marking home work. This can be useful when things have returned to a more normal pattern. Remote technology could allow more pupils to access exceptional lectures or lessons as state schools build a library of great lessons from their filmed activities.

Many service businesses already offer digital only services which are often better value because they only use individual employees to do the things that require judgement and differentiation. They can standardise and automate the rest. Opportunity presents to government and state services. On line is usually more efficient and cheaper offering economies to government as it adopts these methods.