

# How to act in cyberspace: an international conference aimed at building consensus

## Foreign and Commonwealth Office



The Foreign Secretary was looking to build consensus with international partners on how countries should act in cyberspace. He announced a conference, to be hosted in the UK within the year.

Officials in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) had to quickly convene colleagues across Whitehall, academia, civil society and industry to develop the policy themes and positions. The team also developed a different style of conference which would be more open and relevant to the cyber agenda.

### Building a multi-disciplinary team

When the Foreign Secretary announced the conference, only one member of staff worked full time on cyber policy. Therefore a new team had to be quickly set up with expertise drawn from across Whitehall.

The team brought together a multi disciplinary group of 25 people from across Cabinet Office, BIS, UKTI, MoD, DfE, MoJ, IPO, DFID, DCMS and more to be ready for the conference taking place in just nine months time. They met frequently to ensure that knowledge and policy positions were shared and developed cohesively, with the relevant subject matter experts taking on different tasks, working with others to develop positions and presenting them back to the group.

### Designing with others

The team and cross-Whitehall group recognised to be a success, views from outside of Government needed to be integral to the conference and its outputs. Policy themes were co-designed externally, with the International Chamber of Commerce engaging industry and Chatham House co-ordinating work with academia and civil society.

### A new style of conference

The topic, and the consensus required to reach solutions, encouraged the Team to organise the conference in a different way. Wherever possible, sessions were open, with short punchy interventions and debate encouraged (rather than longer, dry 'position statements'). Live questions received via Twitter and Facebook were included and some sessions were live streamed to enable an even broader audience to engage. 'Fringe' events ran alongside the main conference. Largely hosted by non-governmental organisations they provided space for a wide range of subjects to be discussed and proved popular with attendees.

### Outcome

The conference broke new ground in opening up an international government conference to wider public participation. Over 160 businesses, 30 academic and civil society organisations came together with 70 states and international organisations. 6,000 followed on line.

The 'London Agenda' established a focus and framework for cyber issues with follow up conferences in South Korea and Hungary demonstrating continued international engagement. The UK has become a 'thought leader' in this area, with foreign ministries increasingly turning to the UK for guidance.

The conference, and the work that enabled its success, has had a lasting impact on how cyber policy is handled across Whitehall. The International Cyber Unit (a joint FCO-Cabinet Office team) has been established to lead international engagement on the subject, with DCMS leading domestically.

Two groups have evolved from the work. The cross-government Wider International Engagement Group on Cyber sustains shared policy development in Whitehall; and the Multi Stakeholder Advisory Group on Internet Governance continues to bring in the views and experience of industry and civil society.

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### **Lessons**

For others trying this approach, the team suggest you:

- Decide quickly your strategic policy outcomes, how the conference will support them and how they will be sustained after the event.
- Don't be afraid to try new ways of doing things. The conference participants appreciated being part of something different.
- Be flexible through the event; learn and tweak as you go to make a success.
- Remember with policy areas like cyber that many Departments will already be operating in the space and have contacts with relevant stakeholders. Avoid duplication and improve the quality of your work by identifying these people early and working with them.
- Engage early with the external groups who will be necessary for your success. They will help ensure your policy is grounded in the real world and add credibility to your message.

