

Notes from the eGovernment Unit* Workshop on 18th June 2004

Preamble

In February of this year the OeE set up a Digital Inclusion Panel (DIP) at the request of the e-Envoy, Andrew Pinder, with a view to alerting government to the growing issue of digital exclusion. Those invited to participate included government, industry and the third (voluntary) sector. The purpose of the panel was to produce a report that identified the critical issues and made specific recommendations to government as to how to address these issues. The DIP held its first meeting in April 2004. This was followed in June by a workshop to explore digital exclusion issues in the light of some new statistics on digital engagement from the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

EURIM's Involvement

You may recall the EURIM's Social Exclusion Working Party submitted a note to the Office of the e-Envoy earlier this year to ask whether there were any areas of study that the EURIM group could assist with in terms of the relationship – both positive and negative – between ICT and social exclusion. The group had looked briefly at the ways in which ICT could help address social exclusion and the ways in which ICT could exacerbate or even create new forms of exclusion. As a result the eGU invited us to sit in on their Digital Inclusion Panel Workshop on June 18th, and this is a brief report of that session.

Objectives of the Meeting

This meeting had a two-fold purpose:

- To present the results on internet access and use conducted by the (ONS)
- To explore the key issues surrounding digital engagement in the UK in the light of these statistics.

ONS Survey Results

The ONS research looked at two sets of statistics for about 7,000 individuals:

- levels of access to the internet where respondees were categorised as having low, medium, high or very high levels of access.
- levels of uptake and engagement, with categories ranging from not engaged at all to fully engaged in online transactions and communications.

The two sets were then cross referenced to each other and the result was a "grid" which showed the relationship between access and engagement for the sample. Engagement increases from left to right and level of access increases from bottom to top. Therefore disengaged individuals with low access are bottom left and those who are fully engaged with high levels of access are top right in the grid. This was described as a Digital Climbing Frame. The statistics were then broken down further to reflect age, social class and gender. Whilst the detailed ONS statistical results are embargoed and cannot be released outside the workshop because of the low sample sizes the broad elements of the grid are reproduced below using darker areas of shading to show where the high numbers are. This does not give any hard figures but it does show relative group sizes that seem to be emerging.

Level of Engagement → Level of Access ↓	Not Engaged – have not accessed the Internet or sent email in the last 3 months	Digital Communicators (send email)	Digital Harvesters (Using the internet for more than just email)	Digital Transactors (buying and transacting online)
Very high access (Home and community internet access via PC, 2-way DTV and mobile)				Second largest group
High Access (Home and community internet access via PC or 2-way DTV or mobile)				
Moderate Access (Community Internet access only. Home access to either PC, DTV or mobile without internet access)	Largest group			
Low Access – (Community internet access only. No home access to either PC, 2-way DTV or mobile)				

Digital Climbing Frame

By looking at this grid as a “Digital Climbing Frame” the objective is to migrate people from the “disengaged” column on the left to the “fully engaged” column on the right. Within the distribution there is an obvious – and expected – correlation between access and engagement, which means in effect that the objective is to migrate from the bottom left corner up to the top right. It is evident from the data that the largest group of all comprises individuals who are completely digitally disengaged despite having moderate levels of digital access. Interestingly, very few people stay in the second column as communicators, which suggests that they are either migrating to become fully engaged very quickly, or that they are disengaging again.

Exploring issues around digital engagement

The meeting focused on the data sets within the “digitally disengaged” column (the left hand column) and split into three working parties so that each could focus on a particular data set within those groups. One looked at the group with high access, the second took those with moderate access and the third took those with low access. The working parties had three tasks:

- To identify and rank the principal barriers to digital engagement for their respective group
- To identify compelling propositions for that group that would assist in engaging them
- To identify current and future solutions that could enable users to migrate across the digital climbing frame towards high-level engagement.

Results of Investigation and discussion

The working party exploring the largest group – those who had moderate access but were completely disengaged – had the following findings:

They identified two main constituents to the sample group under scrutiny. These were:

- those over 55 and
- those from lower socio-economic groups

Barriers

The working party then looked at the barriers for each of these constituent sub-groups, and found that for the older age groups these were primarily: lack of knowledge about the technology and what it could do, lack of relevance of it to their lives, poor marketing and selling techniques by suppliers which stressed aspects that were not relevant and were user-unfriendly to buyers with no experience wanting a basic, low cost product, and the lack of ongoing support and training which undermined confidence. For those in lower socio-economic groups the lack of knowledge, lack of ongoing support and training and inappropriate marketing and selling were also important barriers, but this group was also more price sensitive and often failed to see benefits that justified the outlay. See Appendix 1 for the results in more detail.

Compelling propositions

The working party tried to identify some compelling propositions for each group. For the older age group these focused on maintaining independence, for instance online access to health services or monitoring. Communicating with friends and relatives, (exchanging photographs online for instance) could also be very attractive, particularly if they were very distant. Older people value human contact, and so if the internet could be used to improve their levels of human contact rather than replace them, this could be an attractive proposition. For those in lower socio-economic groups the compelling propositions focused more on entertainment, scope for saving money and opportunities for generating income. See Appendix 1 for the results in more detail.

Follow-Up

Each working group presented their findings to the workshop. The eGU will collate the findings and incorporate them into their report to Government, which will be published shortly as the Digital Inclusion Panel Report. Once this report is available it will be circulated to the group for feedback.

Note:

The draft report was circulated in early July and we submitted some comments informally to the eGU. As of 30 September the final Digital Inclusion Panel Report is still awaiting final publication. We will forward details to group members as soon as it is available.

* The eGovernment Unit has replaced the Office of the eEnvoy

Appendix 1

Results of Working Group Investigation into the sample set: Disengaged with Medium Access

Barriers for those over 55:

1. Lack of knowledge about the technology and its capabilities – people have little or no understanding of the technology, which is off-putting, and find it hard to see how it can be useful to them.
2. Lack of relevance in terms of what the technology can offer – or appears to offer – them. Why would they want to download pop music or have video on demand?
3. Poor marketing and sales by suppliers – marketing often stresses aspects that are irrelevant and selling techniques are very unfriendly to the buyer with no experience who needs a basic product and a lot of explanation.
4. Lack of ongoing support and training – getting set up is all very well, but what happens when something goes wrong.

Barriers for those in lower socio-economic groups:

1. Fear of failure / lack of knowledge – why repeat my humiliation at the hands of the education system?
2. Cost vs perceived benefits – I pay for Sky but then I can see the benefits
3. Ongoing support and training – what happens when I have spent all this money and then it goes wrong? If my mobile phone goes wrong I can take it straight back.
4. Poor marketing and sales by suppliers – marketing often stresses aspects that are irrelevant and selling techniques are very unfriendly to the buyer with no experience and very limited budget.

Compelling propositions for those over 55

1. Maintaining Independence
2. Communicating – with friends and relatives
3. Human contact

Compelling propositions for lower socio-economic groups

1. Entertainment
2. Saving money / income opportunity – buying things more cheaply and selling things online
3. Employment /jobs
4. Access to services