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THE EUROPEAN
INFORMATION
SOCIETY GROUP

EURIM



July 2004

Dear Tom,

Thank you very much for sending me a copy of the draft Report of the Digital Inclusion Panel. I have had the opportunity to discuss it informally with other members of EURIM's Social Inclusion Working Group and I thought I should give you a summary of the feedback. Whilst this is not intended as a formal response, it should give you an idea of how the Report was received by our members and the kind of comments they made. Since I know you are very short of time I have kept the comments to an absolute minimum and only extracted those that we felt were particularly important.

We believe that the Digital Inclusion Panel has been a very positive influence in improving cooperation between the different parties and sectors involved in tackling social exclusion and in identifying and analysing some of the underlying issues. We very much welcome the Report and strongly support its recommendations. We feel that it is an important initiative because it examines the issue of digital exclusion across the various departments and sectors and because it bases its analysis on actual patterns of access and use. Within that context, our comments are listed below:

- Whilst we fully support the recommendations we are anxious for the report to state more clearly how they will be implemented in practical terms and, in particular, who will bear ultimate responsibility for doing so. We feel that this is the most important pre-requisite for delivery.
- The report rightly emphasises the cross-cutting nature of exclusion issues. Although this is very welcome the fact that digital exclusion truly cut across many departments and sectors is likely to make it more, not less, difficult to implement the recommendations.
- There is more emphasis in the report on the benefits of digital inclusion than on the means of achieving it, and we would welcome a change in balance.
- I would also like to add my personal observation from investigations carried out by our Social Inclusion Working Group - that in addition to Innovation Pull and Innovation Lift, there is a third, more basic criteria required for digital inclusion: that the technology must work! We found that people who were willing to be digitally engaged were often put off by problems interfacing with user-unfriendly technology at all stages of the process. Whilst improvements in skills and support networks can help, much rests with suppliers and retailers. Problems included poor interfaces with counter-intuitive control settings, systems and software that did not work as expected, inappropriate marketing, sales techniques that use incomprehensible jargon instead of describing basic functionality, hard-to-find access settings and poor or non-existent after-sales service. Any of these factors would discourage all but the most persistent affiliate. Although the situation is improving, we believe that continued dialogue between suppliers and the third sector is essential to tackling these issues.

More generally, we believe that the Digital Inclusion Panel is an important conduit for constructive dialogue between industry, the third sector and government and that this conduit should be maintained in some form for the foreseeable future.

I do hope these comments are helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information or wish me to clarify any of the points above.

Kind regards

Emma Fryer
Rapporteur, EURIM Social Exclusion Working Group