

## Webcast

### PS7 Inclusive eGovernment: Public Services for All Session outline, presentations and speakers

The chairman John Gatt opened the session by highlighting how attention has now shifted from simply making eGovernment services available online, to increasing their use by citizens – especially by disadvantaged or marginalised citizens - and reaping the benefits in social and economic terms. There is also scope for innovative use of ICT in new policies and practices to actively increase inclusion and engagement by citizens in society and increase the contribution of public administrations [in public life]

Paul Waller, Director, Digital Inclusion Team, UK Government described the process of policy development, over one full year. He stressed that the work did not start specifically with eGovernment or with a focus on the digital divide. Research conducted by the UK government's social exclusion unit into various forms of exclusion looked, for example, at homeless young people, migrant workers, unemployed people, children in impoverished families, families that move around a lot, people who live in institutions, people living outside the law or in prison. By definition, these are groups of people who have a wide range of needs, requiring a high level of care, support and other interventions, provided by a wide range of public administrations.

The policy that developed from the research offers an interesting case study connected to the Commission's second definition of inclusive eGovernment: "Inclusion by Design", a pro-active improvement of inclusion with the help of ICT in public services. For example, ICT tools can be used to profile the distribution of needs at a level of granularity (eg four people each with one need, or one person with four needs?) that enables early intervention with consequent social and economic benefits. ICT tools can also increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the workflow in and between public administrations, each holds some information about the citizen's life and needs, but none has access to the comprehensive picture.

Some of the research results were surprising. 95% of homeless people have a mobile phone, for receiving calls more than making them. They tended to have positive expectations of technology and were generally relaxed about data privacy, being willing to have administrations and support workers share data about them in order to better help them. They used ICTs willingly, for example, for automated notification of appointments, or to access information about hostel places, or to store key documents in webspace.

The research revealed a staircase of barriers en route to full eEngagement: no ICT interest; no ICT access; no ICT skills; no broadband; lack of content. The

final hurdle – and one that has received very little attention so far – is the complexity of the content. Most content is written by graduates – even the content aimed at people with no secondary education. Socially excluded people are not all the same; consider for example an elderly housebound former civil servant and a teenage mother. Until now, ICT installations have been supplier-led, yet this research suggested that innovation comes from users.

The implementation plan is at an early stage. There will be a Cabinet committee looking at lawful data sharing, a programme to try to bridge the gap between people working on the front line, who understand the problems, and technologists who understand the solutions. There will be a number of pathfinder projects to establish, demonstrate and share best practice as well as research to into evaluation methodologies.

Ivar Tallo, Director of e-Governance Academy, Estonia proposed a critical approach to the kind of statistics that are used to appraise, justify or disparage the success of eGovernment actions. Estonia boasts of holding country wide local elections with on-line voting in October 2005. Actually, only 9317 eVotes were cast in that election, 1.8% of total votes cast, at a cost of €300 per vote cast. Is this success or failure?

In 2004, 82% of personal income tax declarations were made on line – clearly a success. Yet when the service was first offered, 5 years ago, eDeclarations were only 2%. The message is that take-up takes time.

As another case study, he cited the story of the young mother who was eLiterate enough to write a blog on her pregnancy and the birth of her child, yet was unaware of the new e-enabled process for claiming her parental-leave benefit. In 2004, out of 22,000 applications, only 7% chose to avoid the queues involved in presenting 18 different sets of information in person at 5 different public administrations. The barrier doesn't seem to be e-literacy, which is quite high, especially in the age group 19 to 40 yrs – which is the population having babies.

He concluded that, policy in this area needs to take account of the natural conservatism of citizens. People are much less well informed than we like to think. Although time will change a lot of these issues, if ICT is to be part of public life, education will be needed, perhaps as part of citizenship training for children.

Pierre Pécastaigns presented the user view on policy formulation & improving ICT services, from the perspective of the government department in charge of designing & monitoring his country's e-Government programme 2006-2010. Out of 370 e-government services, 50% are now on line and all will have to meet accessibility criteria within three years – once the e-accessibility criteria are agreed later this year.

The reference criteria, which are being designed in coordination with disabled users' representatives will be based on international norms (WAI,WCAG) and will include tools for auto evaluation of the extent to which the information and the service meets the users needs for interoperability, accessibility and security. A service-wide information and training programme will target top-management down to the webmaster.

His service is also auditing departments with a view to identifying opportunities for modernising through the use of ICT.

M Pécastaings then described a number of initiatives where ICT tools are being used to increase usability, such as the *Signes en ligne* trial that allows users at public service desks to communicate with on-line sign language interpreters. The sub-contractors are expensive and so far, the take up has been low, raising questions about cost-effectiveness. A larger scale extension will offer the service in homes, using trained civil servants not subcontractors.

“Charte Marianne” specifies accessibility requirements for public services, adopting a multi-channel approach. There are guidelines for public interactive terminals; multiservice counters where a clerk uses ICT to facilitate access to different public services. Another portal offers information on location and opening time of public offices, and a learning programme aims to increase knowledge sharing between generations & reduce risks of digital divide. The department also works with other organisations and associations fighting social exclusion – for example recycling computers to excluded people. The main message in the charter is to avoid technology push – always be clear about the goal and don't add a feature unless it serves those goals.

Public internet access points: terminals and assistant 3.5k

Evaluation methodologies include focus groups, user representative groups and a twice yearly qualitative survey of eGovernment provision, which also address non users.

Agustin Elizegi Etxeberria, described a case study in the Pays Basque, to help citizens, companies, and government departments connect to the Internet. Phase one offered assistance to buy computers and achieved penetration of 23% of households. Phase 2 aimed to encourage use and exploitation. A publicly funded broadband network was installed to connect the whole Basque country. The network served individual citizens and businesses - including SMEs - and promoted co-operation between different levels of the public administrations in the region. It was achieved through collaboration agreements with local authorities who run network centres using diverse means of connectivity as appropriate, including satellite.

The project was aimed to promote an Internet culture throughout the region and avoid a digital divide which otherwise threatened isolated parts and socially excluded citizens of the region. The needs of excluded groups, women at home, immigrants, people with disabilities or users of assistive technologies were especially targeted. Customised training was offered with a wide catalogue of courses available, such as the courses aimed at immigrants and at small businesses. An eHealth card operates on the network. All the sites and services conform to AAA accessibility guidelines.

Take-up targets were set to reach 10% of under 15s and 4% of people older than 15. 100% of municipalities are now connected. 4,000 people per day use it. 60% of women are users. The web site receives 50k visitors per month.

Challenges for the future include more training for citizens to extend takeup and use of the services and training for civil servants in the new relationships with citizens.

Finally Antti Holmroos, IBM Government Industry Leader for the Northeast Europe reminded delegates that the ICT industry serves 500m people, including people with disabilities and other kinds of accessibility barriers. The sector is characterised by change. He invited delegates to emulate the example of IBM which went through a dramatic transformation and “made the elephants dance”.

Discussion from the floor emphasised the need for top down initiatives as well: setting standards, providing leadership, promoting best practice, proposing evaluation methodologies. An example was offered of cost-benefit analysis: a computer game was used to educate prisoners to adapt to life challenges after prison. There is good data on the rates of re-offending and good knowledge of the costs of re-offending which can be compared with the cost of developing a computer game.

Another contribution from the floor stressed the need for standards for interoperability.

The conclusion of the session was that eGovernment has so far focussed on providing existing services on line, hoping that citizens will use it. There is now an opportunity to design policy to solve problems by using ICT innovations.