

## INCLUSION THROUGH INNOVATION

### SUMMARY OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

#### Introduction to the project

The Inclusion through Innovation project was launched in September 2004. The overall objective of the project is to assess how the innovative use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can be used to promote equality of opportunity and improve service delivery and outcomes for society's most disadvantaged groups as well as those who live in deprived areas.

The specific aims of the Inclusion through Innovation project are to:

- Identify future trends in ICT and innovations which will address social exclusion;
- Investigate the need for new and innovative models of service delivery for excluded groups, and how ICT could support these;
- Review how better links could be made between existing information held in different places about vulnerable and excluded people, to ensure that best use is made of what we know already;
- Explore how cultural and legal issues such as data protection should be taken forward to enable delivery of the above;
- Investigate how trends in ICT provision can be influenced to prevent further growth of the 'digital divide'; and,
- Address the ethical concerns arising from the operation of some technological solutions and the risks that ICT can pose as a driver of exclusion.

This project forms part of the Unit's current work programme, which aims to ensure that public services are delivered effectively to the most excluded groups in society.

#### The questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed by the SEU, and ran between October 2004 and February 2005. It consisted of both open ended and closed questions and was split into four sections according to theme. The four themes were 'Trends and inequality', 'Narrowing the digital divide', 'Improving service delivery', and 'Sharing information on service users'. The questionnaire was distributed to a wide range of individuals and organisations that were considered to have a particular interest and expertise in this subject area. An online version of the questionnaire was also available on the SEU website. The analysis of questionnaire responses was conducted by MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of the SEU.

## Who responded?

A total of **261** responses were received within the fieldwork period between October 2004 and February 2005<sup>1</sup>, from a range of organisations across a variety of sectors. The main demographic breakdown of the respondents is set out in the table below.

<b>Breakdown of those who replied to the questionnaire</b>		
	<b>Number who completed questionnaires</b>	<b>Percentage of completed questionnaires</b>
<i>Base: All respondents answering (230)</i>	<i>(N)</i>	<i>(%)</i>
<b>Local service providers</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>57</b>
Voluntary sector/charity	26	11
Public sector	99	43
Private sector	5	2
Other	3	1
<b>Regional organisations</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>
Voluntary sector/charity	14	6
Public sector	17	7
Private sector	1	*
Other	0	0
<b>National organisations</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>30</b>
Voluntary sector/charity	43	19
Public sector	17	7
Private sector	7	3
Other	3	1
<b>Voluntary sector/charity</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Public sector</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Private sector</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Service user</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>

<sup>1</sup> An additional five responses were received after the questionnaire deadline. These were not included in the tables, but have been included as part of the overall analysis.

## Key Findings

Respondents to the Inclusion through innovation questionnaire raised a number of key issues, which are summarised below.

### A widening digital divide

The majority of respondents (77%) agreed that current trends in ICT are likely to widen the digital divide and increase levels of inequality faced by socially excluded groups. However, despite this view, one in five respondents felt that there are currently initiatives in place that aim to address the digital divide through, for example, providing socially excluded groups with ICT training. The main reasons for the view that the digital divide is widening primarily relate to:

- **The costs of ICT equipment:** ICT equipment (both hardware and software) is thought to be prohibitively expensive for many socially excluded people who are often on low incomes. There is a need for financial support to increase people's access to technology, and for a reduction in the cost of internet connection.
- **Lack of access to ICT:** A lack of physical access to ICT facilities such as personal computers (PCs), the internet, and broadband poses a further barrier. Certain groups, such as elderly or disabled people, are thought to have a particularly strong need for increased in-home access to technology.
- **Lack of training in the use of technology:** Lack of training and poor basic skills often prevent socially excluded people from utilizing technology. Many disadvantaged people are unaware of or uncomfortable taking part in training courses, and lack confidence in the use of technology, which acts as an additional barrier. There is thought to be a strong need for increased training and support, particularly in schools.
- **Market issues:** Market issues, such as the tendency for ICT developers to focus more on more profitable mainstream markets than disadvantaged groups is another key cause of the widening digital divide. There is a view that developers do not often target their services or products to meet the particular needs of socially excluded people which therefore contributes to low demand or uptake.

### ICT is - and will continue to - improve service delivery

Despite these concerns, respondents expressed a strong belief that ICT has an important role to play in improving service delivery to socially excluded groups. The main forms of technology currently used to do this are:

- **The internet:** the internet is seen as providing access to an increasing number of services, such as service information, online training, and hosting online forums. People with few or no qualifications and unemployed people are seen as key audiences for development in this area.
- **Mobile technology:** mobile technologies (mobile phones in particular) are also commonly used to deliver services to disadvantaged groups, largely due to their relative low cost, and widespread use, particularly among younger people. Some

respondents felt that mobile technologies provide an important point of contact for vulnerable people or those without stable accommodation.

However, most respondents felt that ICT is not currently being used effectively in service provision and feel that there is scope for development in this area. In particular, increased investment in and development of the internet, online learning and mobile phones are key areas that respondents believe could significantly improve the services that socially excluded people currently receive. Specific suggestions to do this include effectively targeting services to individual needs, increasing the efficient access to information, and facilitating greater mobility amongst front-line staff.

### **Sharing information is a concern**

The majority of participants believe that information sharing is essential to improving service delivery and that their service users would give consent to having their personal information shared between agencies. The key advantages to information sharing were seen to be increased efficiency and tailored service provision, as well as a greater co-ordination between different organisations.

Less than a third of the organisations that responded to the questionnaire reported that they currently share information. Of those who do not, concerns about protecting the confidentiality of their clients was the main barrier, followed by a lack of understanding about the Data Protection Act (DPA). Although most claimed to have at least a moderate understanding of the legal and technical issues surrounding the sharing of information, many believed that it is 'easier to do nothing' than to risk violating the DPA. Many asserted that a lack of compatible systems and a lack of established protocol exacerbate these barriers and make it difficult for organisations to share information. Others believe that high costs involved in investing in new systems and training staff (who may sometimes be resistant to new systems and procedures) to use them are another prohibitive factor.

### **Policy Development**

The issues raised by respondents to the Inclusion through innovation questionnaire have fed into the wider work of the project in a number of ways.

- **Information sharing:** issues raised in the consultation are being explored with Department of Constitutional Affairs.
- **Digital divide:** issues raised have already influenced government policy. They have been fed into The Digital Strategy which was launched in April 2005.
- **Dissemination of good practice:** respondents outlined a range of impressive initiatives that utilise ICT to address the needs of socially excluded groups. The Inclusion through Innovation project will champion this good practice and will work to mainstream the benefits in national programmes.

## **Next Steps**

The Unit will publish an action plan from this project in Autumn 2005, which will reflect the findings of our consultative work.

This report forms part of an integrated programme, including action plans on excluded older people, young adults with troubled lives and disadvantaged people who move frequently.

This Autumn the Social Exclusion Unit is also publishing an interim report on service delivery for disadvantaged adults which will set out the key themes emerging from the work programme of the Social Exclusion Unit as a whole. Final actions from across Government will be published in 2006.

All reports will be available at [www.socialexclusion.gov.uk](http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk)

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The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
LONDON SW1E 5DU  
Telephone: 020 7944 4400  
Website [www.socialexclusion.gov.uk](http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk)

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