



**DCLG Consultation on
Delivering Digital Inclusion – an action plan**

BT's response

January 2009

Delivering Digital Inclusion, An action plan for consultation - comments from BT

Introduction

1. BT is one of the world's leading communications service companies. Our vision is to help customers thrive in a changing world. BT has transformed itself in recent years and has grown and prospered through being competitive, customer focused and innovative. We have learned to compete and win against some of the world's biggest companies to become a truly global operation. Our base and roots are, of course, here in the UK, where we have more than 16 million business and residential customers. We also provide network services to other operators to enable the thriving and very competitive UK communications industry.
2. Our 100,000 employees in the UK are drawn from a diverse age, ethnic and social background and many of them are very active within the communities in which they live and work in pursuit of an inclusive society.
3. BT itself is committed to delivering on its corporate social responsibilities to bridge any barriers to an inclusive society. For example;-
 - over 99% broadband coverage in the UK means everybody can benefit from the opportunities of fast communication;
 - we communicate with customers in ways that suit them, with available alternative formats including Audio CD, Data CD, Braille, E-Information and Large Print;
 - our inclusive design toolkit encourages product designers to develop products that are accessible to as many people as possible;
 - the BT Internet Rangers website provides tools for young people to teach older relatives how to use the internet;
 - we are working with Age Concern to help transform their nationwide computer drop-in centres and access points into a network of Silver Surfer clubs;
 - we are similarly active outside the UK. For example, BT is working with Unicef on "Inspiring Young Minds", a three year strategic programme in which BT is investing £1.5 million into projects that focus on bringing education, ICT and communications skills to disadvantaged children in South Africa(2007/8), Brazil (2008/9) and China (2009/2010).

Responses to consultation questions

Question 1: How far do you agree with the definition of digital inclusion and the nature of the problem set out in Chapter One?

4. The first chapter provides a good overview of the current evidence base which demonstrates a strong correlation between social and digital exclusion.
5. The action plan is about reducing the potentially widening divide between the "haves" and the "have nots". The measurement of success of the Digital Inclusion action plan is the extent to which the number/depth of missed opportunities to improve the quality of life and life chances are reduced over time. We believe that the definition should focus on the "have nots".
6. We support the definition from "The Digital Inclusion Landscape in England: Delivering Social Impact through Information and Communication Technology" Digital Inclusion Team, March 2007:-

"The best use of technology, either directly or indirectly, to improve the lives and life chances of disadvantaged people and the places in which they live."

Question 2: How far do you agree with the analysis set out in Chapter Two? Is there other evidence we should consider as to why digital inclusion is an important social issue?

7. The analysis set out in Chapter Two provides clear and compelling evidence as to why digital inclusion is an important social issue.
8. For more than 10 years, BT has embraced flexible working for its employees through the use of communications technologies with startling results. Around 70,000 of our people work flexibly and more than 11,000 regularly work from home. Last year we eliminated over 800,000 meetings and saved at least 97,000 tonnes of CO2 on business travel through our employees' use of audio, video and web conferencing/collaboration services from the workplace or home.
9. Since 1996, we have reduced our carbon emissions by 58% and have set ourselves a challenging target of an 80% reduction by 2020, worldwide. Enabling our people to harness digital technologies to carry out their day-to-day work is a key strand in our strategy to reach this target.
10. In relation to the section on Sustainable communities, BT has been an active member of the Global e-Sustainability Initiative since it was formed in 2001. If more information is needed on the steps being taken by the ICT sector to improve sustainability performance, go to www.gesi.org. Whilst it is understandable that the focus of the digital inclusion action plan is on improving social outcomes, there are other longer term positive impacts from this work. For example, the increasing use of digital technologies will make a substantial contribution to the reduction in emissions of greenhouse gasses.
11. It is worth noting that in chapter 2, section 2, it says that *“Contrary to the view that all young people are connected, or will be over the next few years, it is estimated that by 2025, there will still be 10 per cent of all 15-24 year olds not using the Internet”*. Unfortunately, this statement is wrong. It is based on the UK Online commissioned report, Digital Inclusion: A Discussion of the Evidence Base. This report assumes a steady 11% exclusion rate for 16 – 24 year olds in order to make predictions about changes in internet use in other age groups as a result of demographic changes only. However, according to ONS data, published in August 2008, the percentage of 16 – 24 year olds who had not accessed the internet in the last three months, was down to 7%, from 10% the previous year.
12. As to other issues that might be considered, it might be worth the Government considering gender differences. On page 24 of the consultation document it says that 58% of women do not have internet access and home or elsewhere. It may be worth examining whether there differences in skills levels, competence and confidence in using digital technology, and in the uses men and women make of digital technology. If there are differences, are these significant?

Question 3: How far do you agree with the analysis in Chapter Three of the main barriers which prevent individuals and communities from engaging in digital technologies?

13. We agree with the analysis which builds on the research report commissioned by UK Online Centres: “Digital Inclusion, A discussion of the Evidence Base”, which identified the main barriers as:

Access – whether an individual has some means to access digital technologies

Motivation – whether the individual sees some benefit from or has interest in accessing these technologies

Skills and confidence – whether the individual is able to, and feels able to, make effective use of technologies

14. As part of BT support for the Everybody Online projects, we have commissioned independent research to measure the impact of these projects. For people who were non users of the internet, the main reasons identified were:

- Lack of interest.
- Not having the equipment
- Lacking the skills or confidence
- Feeling too old (predominantly amongst the 55+ age group)
- Concerns about the running costs
- Not having sufficient time

[Extract from RSM Annual Research review of Everybody Online projects for 2007/08]

15. BT has also contributed to the evidence base through the Crossing the Divide project where non users from a variety of different backgrounds were helped to develop computer and internet skills. As part of the project, cognitive neuropsychologist, Dr David Lewis, investigated the impact of going online on the brain and nervous system. For first time users, he found that going online can create the same level of anxiety as that found in a learner driver taking the wheel for the first time. In some cases the levels of fear were as high as those found on someone taking their first bungee jump.

16. Chapter 3 does a good job in analysing the types of people who are excluded (older people/those with disabilities) but we would also like to see some focus on *geographical communities*. There is a passing reference to Project Access in Cumbria (in Chapter 4 on page 31). The document also refers to stats from the ONS in the North East England. It would be interesting to know the picture in other areas. For example, there is a similar picture in the South Wales valleys, which are characterised by social deprivation – high levels of sickness/higher than average unemployment/low educational and skills levels/highest teenage pregnancy rates/high sickness levels. Access to broadband is high but take-up is very low – hovering above 30%. Focussing on geographic areas might provide a more rounded picture alongside the existing demographics information.

17. In addressing those people who have no current interest in taking up broadband/the internet and/or are put off by the need to own and use a computer, initiatives such as Project Canvas, BT's recently announced partnership with the BBC and other broadcasters, are important in introducing people to broadband via their television set. This will be enabled by a new generation of broadband-ready TV and Freeview boxes.

Question 4: What are the most effective ways to remove these barriers and ensure that all individuals can exercise an empowered choice about their use of digital technologies?

18. We agree with the comment in the paper that to be most successful: *“engagement programmes (must) focus on the individual needs of participants; the actual applications and their benefits rather than the ICT itself. Focus must lie on specific targeted benefits”*

19. The third sector has an important role to play as independent trusted organisations. For example, it makes sense for Age Concern and Help the Aged to play a leading role and be involved in silver surfer type activities to help older people realise the benefits of digital technologies.

20. People who have taken part in BT's *Crossing the Divide* project, starting as non users, have been surprised how easy it is to use digital technologies, and wonder

why they hadn't made use of it before. With equipment, internet access and support, all participants quickly gained the skills and confidence to benefit from the experience. People who have made the transition from non users to users, make good ambassadors/role models to encourage others to take the first steps.

21. There are groups of vulnerable people which can be identified as needing direct support to gain access to digital technologies. For example, BT runs a scheme in Wales partnership with some local authorities to provide computers, broadband access and printers to Looked After Children. Statistically, such children have extremely poor life chances, and the purpose of the Computers for the Looked After Children programme is to provide these children with access to digital technologies in their home environment, to enable them to do research for school work on the internet and social networking. In this case, it is usually not the lack of skills and confidence in using digital technologies that excludes the children, but rather the lack of direct and easy access.

Question 5: What are the risk factors and benefits for different communities associated with current and next generation access?

22. These important issues are being considered now by all industry players, not just because of potential digital exclusion implications, but because of the need to fully understand the potential market for Next Generation Access. Targeting digital inclusion should be integral to plans for the roll out of NGA. The Digital Britain work led by BERR is the right forum for immediate consideration of these issues.

Question 6: What should be done to empower communities and local partnerships to address these risks and benefits?

23. The consultation paper correctly says that there are a very large number of initiatives and organisations engaged in efforts to reduce the digital divide. Through BT's funding of *Everybody Online* projects, we target support for disadvantaged communities. We also sponsor the Age Concern *Digital Inclusion Network* and through BT Internet Rangers, we also support and recognise young people who help older people go online. We have recently launched an initiative in partnership with the Football Foundation called "*Communicating for Success*" which mainly focuses on disadvantaged youngsters.
24. BT welcomes Government funding for initiatives such as the Local Authority, Digital Challenge. Grant schemes, channelled through third sector organisations can be very effective. Many examples are featured in UK Online Centre's "*Digital Inclusion, Social Impact*" research report, published September 2008.

Question 7: How far do you agree with the summary of issues around the direct use of technology presented in Chapter Three? Are there any other important issues we have not mentioned?

25. We agree with the summary of issues around the direct use of technology. There are no obvious omissions, although it might usefully have reinforced the importance of engagement programmes focusing on the individual needs of participants, which will vary greatly between different disadvantaged groups.

Question 8: How far do you agree with the assessment of risks and opportunities around the indirect benefits of technology presented in Chapter Four?

26. We agree that better use of technology can make an important contribution in delivering real benefits, particularly to communities and people who are disadvantaged. As an example, BT is currently working with North Lincolnshire to develop a homeshoring element of an e-clinics trial which aims to improve the effectiveness of mental health support.

Question 9: How can we raise awareness of the indirect benefits of technology for service design, planning and delivery across all sectors?

27. Information sharing networks, such as DC10 plus, the Alliance for Digital Inclusion and the National Digital Inclusion team, play a very important role in raising awareness of the indirect benefits of technology. Award schemes also make a valuable contribution in recognising and promoting best practice.

Question 10: Does the way in which services, particularly public services, are currently delivered adequately support individuals and groups who are socially disadvantaged? What more could be done to ensure they do?

28. BT has a number of arrangements to work with others to deliver services to the socially disadvantaged. In addition to things mentioned elsewhere in this input, for example, BT has 80% ownership of Liverpool Direct Ltd, the largest public/private partnership of its kind in the UK, providing services to and with Liverpool City Council.

29. Of course, some public services deliver adequately but there is more that could be done, particularly in joining up the programmes; or at least better co-ordination between them, ensuring they deliver outcomes, that there is follow through, and that they utilise the full skills and capabilities - and leverage the integrated resources - of the public, private and third sectors.

30. There is a shift in education at the moment, with a desire to build learning communities such as the planned Manchester Community Academy which BT is supporting, including providing innovative thought-leadership. The trend is towards greater use of technology in taking down the walls of the school and encouraging all ages to learn (anywhere, anytime, any device) which could potentially increase the digital divide without consideration of equality of access. The capability to connect home to school, school to school, library to school etc will be essential and this is our vision in partnership for Manchester. Avoiding "silo thinking" is key to joining up public/private resources, so as to offer real opportunity to drive up skills and improve access to and efficiency of public services.

31. Whilst parts of local government are doing a good job in engaging in private partnerships with companies like BT to provide more modern and effective services to citizens using digital technologies, this is not the norm and perhaps government needs to provide a stronger steer in this regard. For example, the Agile Working/Workstyle Transformation partnership we have with Aberdeenshire Council not only has the benefit of providing the Council with substantial cost savings over the medium to long term, but will also contain elements of digital inclusion – for example, the role of digital technologies in enabling disabled people to work, widening the talent pool, etc.

Question 11: Are you aware of any other examples of good practice not mentioned in Chapter Five?

32. We are pleased that BT supported activities: BT Internet Rangers, Everybody Online projects and the Age Concern Digital Inclusion Network have been identified as examples of good practice in Chapter 5.

33. We believe that these approaches will be very effective in engaging with specific groups who are digitally excluded.

34. But there are many other activities that deal with digital inclusion in one way or another. For example, as mentioned earlier, BT has recently launched an initiative in partnership with the Football Foundation called "*Communicating for Success*", and in Wales we operate the "*Computers for Looked After Children*" programme.

35. Other examples include the successful Liverpool Kensington Vision & Liverpool Alt Valley Vision projects, which have harnessed local talent in creating community portals and digital content to give people a voice and foster community cohesion. Liverpool 8 EverybodyOnline has improved ICT skills and access through inter-generational programmes with schools and community organisations, providing the local community with the means to take full advantage of skills, employment, and personal and neighbourhood empowerment opportunities. BT is pleased to have been instrumental in creating and supporting these exemplar digital inclusion projects, which have been visited and applauded by Ministers. For example, Digital Inclusion Minister Huw Irranca-Davies visited the BT Liverpool 8 EverybodyOnline project in June 2008.
36. Many parents have purchased a computer and have Internet access at home available to their children for learning. However, over 1m school age children in the UK lack access to a computer at home for their formal and informal learning, and over 2m school age children cannot go on-line at home. The Universal Home Access Programme aims to ensure every learner in England (5 to 19 years old and in maintained education) has access to increased educational opportunities via ICT resources at home. The programme is led by the Home Access Taskforce and aims to consider and advise on ways in which home access to learning via technology can be delivered for all school-aged children in England; and to ensure that any plans are sustainable, offer value for money, and include and promote safe and responsible use. The aim is to raise educational standards, narrowing the achievement gap between learners, and increasing participation of pupils and their parents/carers.
37. Although the key target for Universal Home Access is children and improving their educational attainment, there are associated benefits for families as a whole, including parents who might otherwise be excluded because of the lack of IT skills and experience. This, of course, implies that there is more to be done than just provide access – there needs to be help with skills and training as well. If this happens then individuals who are currently disadvantaged will be able to play a greater role in society and contribute more to the economy.
38. BT has contributed to the work of the Task Force, providing deeper understanding of the underlying causes and impact of digital inclusion. Equally, BT has contributed to the group's understanding of the opportunity that universal access offers for improving life chances for individuals and for their contribution to their communities. The group's main task is to develop a sustainable business model, which, addresses all eligible children beyond 2011, and represents value for money with the best educational and social returns possible. The group has developed a set of feasible alternatives for determining eligibility criteria, and developing functional, delivery and funding models.
39. It would perhaps have been worthwhile for this chapter to include examples of good practice from outside of the UK.

Question 12: What aspects of previous or current digital initiatives and strategies have been most successful in tackling digital exclusion?

40. The competitive communications marketplace in the UK has been a key factor in the rapid take up of broadband. BT is the leading private sector investor in broadband Britain and we are proud of our role in ensuring that access to, and take up of broadband in the UK is amongst the best in the world. Broadband is available to over 99% of UK homes, the best availability of broadband access of any major nation. BT has announced plans to invest up to £1.5bn in superfast broadband, to up to 10 million homes by 2012, subject to the right regulatory conditions providing a reasonable expectation of making a proper return on that investment. Current take

up levels for broadband are just over 60%, which puts the UK second in the G7 and on the fastest improvement trajectory.

41. In situations where a commercial approach would have left gaps, the targeting of EU and/or Government funds, for example Actnow Cornwall, has proved very successful. The development of UK Online Centres has been particularly successful in helping to tackle digital exclusion.
42. However, there are still some customers - fewer than 1% - who live in locations current BT broadband cannot reach. We continue to search for cost effective ways to minimise this problem. Where policy makers decide to use public funds to address this issue BT considers on a case by case basis whether it can craft a solution using the funding available. Our general expectation is that in the majority of cases the most efficient use of public funds would result in local and bespoke solutions based on satellite or radio technologies rather than BT's portfolio. For those who do not have broadband for other reasons, the economic impact of addressing digital exclusion – for example for geographic communities that are economically deprived such as the South Wales Valleys – may have tangible benefits that meet public policy objectives.
43. The Digital Britain work has, amongst many other things, raised the question of a universal service commitment for broadband. BT is keen to explore this issue fully and believes that a proper, and widely-drawn, funding mechanism would be needed, including contributions from all fixed and mobile operators, broadcasters and content/application owners.

Question 13: What actions need to be taken to support better partnership approaches?

44. From the outset of BT's Digital Inclusion programme, we have recognised the importance of working with other organisations to achieve maximum impact. We were a founder member of the Alliance for Digital Inclusion which acts as a forum for Government, Local Authorities, Third sector and businesses to work together.
45. The Digital Inclusion Champion may have a role in promoting better partnership working.

Question 14: What should be the extent of Government's intervention in tackling digital exclusion?

46. Aside from issues captured elsewhere in this response (para above) relating to Digital Britain, Government has a key role in deciding national priorities, setting targets and funding programmes. Both central and local government should act as a Digital Inclusion role model for other organisations to follow. Intervention should be limited to circumstances where the normal operation of the competitive market would lead to inequalities.

Question 15: How else can the impact of current activity be maximised?

47. Clear national targets are needed for specific disadvantaged groups, such as the e-Inclusion commitments made by EU ministers. There also needs to be clear leadership with either individuals or organisations taking responsibility for delivering the improvements which would enable the UK to meet these targets.
48. Because of the rapid rate of technology development and its widespread use in all areas of society, it is inevitable and important that a diverse range and large number of initiatives/projects are sustained at any one time. To maximise impact, collaboration and knowledge sharing needs to be encouraged.

Question 16: How far do you agree with the proposed principles outlined in the Charter? Are there others we should consider?

49. Whilst the proposed principles are helpful in defining the key focus areas, BT is not convinced that these need to be enshrined in a Charter. However, if there is a wider consensus that it is important to have a Charter, more detailed commitments are needed and there needs to be greater clarity in which organisation or organisations will be approached to sign the Charter.

Question 17: How far do you support the actions which underpin the principles? Are there others we should consider?

50. We support the identified actions.

Question 18: What issues need to be considered in determining a baseline measure for digital inclusion?

51. The headline figure in the executive summary: "17 million people in the UK still do not use computers and the internet" is a good baseline measure for digital inclusion.

52. The UK Online commissioned report, *Digital Inclusion: A Discussion of the Evidence Base*, highlighted the need not only to consider the number of excluded people but also the depth of exclusion. As technology continues to develop, the range of services and benefits from the use of digital technologies will also grow. Further work is required to develop a measure which takes into account depth of exclusion. The measure of depth also has to take into account that benefits achieved by the "average user" will change over time.

Question 19: What should be the brief of the Digital Champion role?

53. The role may be better described as the Champion for the Digitally Excluded. Precise details of the role and responsibilities need to be considered in the light of market and social developments and we look forward to contributing to this debate in the future.

Question 20: What would be the single most effective thing government could do to drive its digital inclusion agenda?

54. The clear assignment of responsibility and sufficient budget for delivery of agreed, desired and timetabled outcomes, with regular (perhaps annual) reports against targets.

Question 21: Are there any other issues you would like to raise in relation to this consultation?

55. The decision to cut back funding for adult education, non accredited learning should be reviewed as this provides a stepping stone for digitally excluded people to gain sufficient confidence to move on to more formal types of training course.

British Telecommunications plc
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