**Communications Consumer Panel Response
to the Digital Inclusion Action Plan**

1. Executive summary

1. The Communications Consumer Panel was established under the Communications Act 2003 as an independent advisory body. Its role is to influence Ofcom, Government, the EU, and service and equipment providers so that the communications interests of consumers and citizens are protected and promoted.

2. Broadband internet access can change people's lives immeasurably, providing new sources of information, new ways of communicating and more convenient access to important services. It is vital that no one misses out. So the Panel supports the Government's co-ordinated action to enhance participation in the digital age through its Digital Inclusion Action Plan. And we welcome the impressive array of initiatives, which taken together will help to achieve the goal of digital inclusion.

3. In developing our response we have considered the evidence on the groups in society that are in particular need of assistance and on the more general barriers to participation. In particular, the Panel has drawn on the deliberative research that it commissioned recently to better understand the needs of consumers and citizens, and what will be required to meet them in the future. We will be publishing this research in February.

4. Drawing on our analysis of the relevant evidence we have developed a set of recommendations. They are summarised at the end of the executive summary and discussed in more detail in the main body of our response. We believe that if the Government were to adopt these recommendations, they would enhance the Action Plan significantly and increase the prospects of achieving digital inclusion in all parts of the UK.

5. The Panel's recommendations flow from its view that in promoting digital inclusion, there are two main challenges – extending the availability of broadband internet access and increasing broadband take-up.

6. In order to participate fully in a digital society, people will need a reliable, always-on broadband connection. Narrowband access is not adequate. Only with an always-on connection do people begin to explore the potential benefits of being online. And website designers now assume that people will have a connection fast enough to download the rich content on offer. Also, we believe that accessing content and services online is such an increasingly important part of

people's lives that limited access at, for example, a public library, is not an effective substitute for access at home.

7. The Government should recognise as well that extending the availability of reliable broadband access is of particular importance for people who live in sparsely populated, rural areas. People in rural areas who do have broadband value it more highly than those in other areas. One reason for this is that they often have poorer access to other communications services – they may suffer, for example, from poor mobile phone coverage. Another reason is that in rural areas there tends to be less access to traditional face-to-face services, making access to information and services online more important. Digital inclusion will not be possible, therefore, until the UK has genuinely universal broadband availability. This will mean extending broadband coverage to include both people who cannot get broadband access at all at the moment and people who have a slow or unreliable connection because of the distance between where they live and the nearest BT exchange.

8. To encourage take-up of broadband, we believe that a dual approach is needed. The Government should take targeted action to encourage take-up among particular social groups and, at the same time, take action to help all consumers and citizens get the most out of being online.

9. Our analysis of the data on the take-up of broadband shows that the social groups that are in particular need of assistance are lower income families, older people and people with a disability.

10. The Panel believes that the Home Access Initiative is a major step towards greater digital inclusion for children from lower income families. There is scope to develop this initiative further, however, in order to maximise the potential benefits. The Panel suggests that using a Wimax cloud to provide broadband access in a local area would help to keep the service simple and so limit the scope for things to go wrong. Also, schools could hold evening classes for parents so that they can learn computer skills and how to protect themselves and their children online. The initiative could also be extended to provide computers and broadband access for children who are outside the traditional educational environment or living in foster or care homes.

11. There is a wide range of outreach programmes run by organisations such as: UK Online; BT Internet Rangers; Age Concern; and Silver Surfers. Such programmes have already helped large numbers of people who were previously excluded and the Digital Mentor Scheme will be able to build usefully on this work. But in the Panel's view, the focus of the Scheme should be mentoring for older people. Older people have by far the lowest level of broadband take-up and research shows that, although many say that they have no need to be connected, many would welcome help in overcoming the things that hold them back, such as a lack of confidence about how to use a computer.

12. The Government should also focus on providing targeted help for people with a disability. At the moment, 66 per cent of people with a disability are not connected to the internet at all. We suggest that the Government should develop an outreach programme that is tailored specifically to the needs of people with a disability. Related to this is the need to encourage equipment providers to supply equipment that meets the needs of people with a disability and so enables them to better access communications services. The Government could also review its

own approach to procuring communications equipment to ensure that the needs of people with a disability are taken into account.

13. As well as targeting specific social groups, the Panel believes that Government should promote take-up generally through a focus on empowering citizens and consumers. People need to be able to choose and use the communications services and equipment that meet their needs. They need to have the ability to protect themselves and their families online. And they need to have the confidence that their personal data will be treated with care by both Government and industry. Promoting communications literacy, or media literacy as it is often called, should be central therefore to the Government's efforts to promote digital inclusion and ensure that all UK citizens and consumers are able to participate fully in the digital age. To this end, we recommend that the Government should build consumer trust and confidence through co-ordinated action to increase media literacy and make information easier to find.

14. The public sector also has a role to play in getting people online by developing compelling online services such as telemedicine. As a prelude to potentially expanding the development of such services, the Government could undertake an impact assessment that in exploring the costs and benefits would take into account the benefits in terms of enhanced digital inclusion. However, it would be important to recognise the need to preserve traditional services for those who still need them.

15. The Government also has an important leadership role and so we welcome its intention to appoint a Digital Inclusion Champion, supported by a Taskforce. This should give the goal of digital inclusion more visibility in Government and lead to improved co-ordination of initiatives at national, regional and local level.

16. We suggest that the Champion should consider whether the Government should set digital inclusion targets, and should look overseas for examples of innovative programmes that the UK could learn from. And it would be advisable for the Taskforce to comprise representatives from industry and the third sector as both groups would bring valuable theoretical and practical knowledge.

17. We also suggest that the Champion should highlight the importance of security and privacy. Consumers recognise the potential benefits of information sharing, but will embrace communications services fully only if they trust Government and industry to treat their personal information with care. The Champion could lead discussions with Government and industry to ensure that this issue is addressed.

18. Finally it is important to recognise that the precise action needed to achieve digital inclusion will vary in different parts of the UK, and that the Devolved Administrations are also taking action in pursuit of this goal. Therefore, the Government should tailor its activities to meet the particular needs of the UK's Nations and Regions and should co-ordinate its activities with other interested parties.

19. The Panel has nine recommendations. We elaborate on them later in our response.

    1. The Government should recognise that there is a particular need to improve broadband availability in rural areas (see paragraph 30).

2. The Home Access Initiative should be expanded in order to maximise the potential benefits for the children and parents of low income families (see paragraphs 38-42).

3. The Digital Mentor Programme should have a particular focus on older people and groups that are considered to be at-risk (see paragraphs 45-47).

4. The Government should develop an outreach programme that is tailored specifically to the needs of people with a disability and should take steps to promote the wider availability of equipment that they find usable (see paragraph 48-52).

5. The Government should build consumer trust and confidence through co-ordinated action to increase media literacy and make information easier to find (see paragraph 57)

6. The Government should assess the impact of moving more public service online and in doing so, take into account the benefits in terms of increased digital inclusion (see paragraph 60).

7. The Government's Digital Inclusion Champion should consider the benefits of setting targets for digital inclusion and should seek to learn from innovative schemes abroad (see paragraphs 64-65).

8. The Digital Inclusion Champion should highlight the need for Government and industry to better protect personal data in order to increase consumer trust and confidence (see paragraph 66).

9. The Digital Inclusion Action Plan should recognise that the needs of different parts of the UK vary and the Government should co-ordinate its activities with those of the Devolved Administrations (see paragraph 67-68).

2. Introduction

20. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Government's Digital Inclusion Action Plan. We believe it is essential that consumers and citizens are able to participate in today's online world and that those who are digitally excluded are increasingly likely to become socially excluded - if they are not already. The UK's take-up of the internet over the past decade has been impressive - 65% of UK households are connected.

21. However, this figure is based on broadband and narrowband (dial-up) internet penetration rates - of which broadband represents about 93% of all connections and narrowband about 5%[1]. Narrowband access is declining year on year and will increasingly be inadequate to meet consumers' needs. Consumers need a broadband connection to access today's visually-rich web sites - including Government's. And importantly, the 'always on' nature of broadband significantly changes the way people use the internet.

22. A substantial number of households - 40% - are not connected to broadband. The policy-challenge is to get this 40% online. Tackling this group involves resolving two linked, but very different challenges: availability and take-up. By availability we mean physical access to a broadband network. We use 'take-up' as a catch-all term that includes a multitude of issues, such as: cost barriers; attitudinal barriers; media literacy and; usability.

23. Take-up of internet access at home varies substantially according to socio-economic group. 84% of AB households have internet access at home compared with 43% of DE households and figure 1 reveals that only 32% of those households with incomes below £11,500 have access to the internet.

Figure 1: Income profile of those who have internet access at home

Source: Ofcom Consumer Experience 2008 research report, 25 November 2008

24. There are significant differences in internet take-up by age. A clear example of this is that 70% of people over the age of 65 have never used the internet[2]. Figure 2 reveals that internet take-up by age falls dramatically (by 28% in the period of 2008) for the age group 65 – 74 year olds in comparison with take-up for the 45-64 year old age range. And take-up for the over 75 age range stands only at 17%.

---

[1] The Consumer Experience 2008, Ofcom
[2] Internet Access 2008 Households and Individuals, Office for National Statistics, 26 August 2008

25. What the research shows is that there are two distinct groups of non-users: older people and those on lower incomes. We note that internet take-up is rising across all socio-economic and age groups, but the increase in take-up starts from such a low base in the DE socio-economic group and over 65 age group that we think these groups provide particular cause for concern. We think connecting them to the internet via broadband should be the priority.
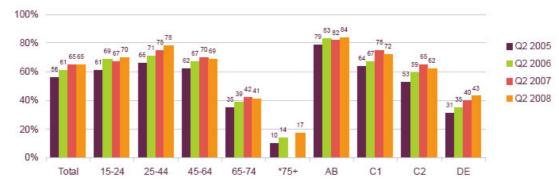
Figure 2: Age and socio-economic profile of those who have internet access at home

Source: Ofcom Consumer Experience 2008 research report, 25 November 2008

26. Taking the above research findings into account, and defining access to the internet as broadband access, this response sets out what we think the Action Plan should do to help close the digital divide for the distinct groups of people that we have identified, and to promote digital inclusion more generally. It covers the following issues:

- Availability
- Take-up
- Digital Mentor Scheme
- People with a disability
- Consumer and citizen empowerment
- Delivery of public sector services
- The Digital Inclusion Champion
- Nations and Regions

3. Availability

Geographical access

27. Without physical availability to a basic broadband service a UK citizen or consumer is automatically digitally excluded - regardless of how good their ICT or media literacy skills are. BT's claim that 99.6% of homes and businesses are connected to an ADSL-enabled exchange is well known, but there are organisations such as the Communications Management Association (CMA) who challenge it. Even if this statistic is correct that still leaves a significant number of households that are not connected to an ADSL-enabled exchange. Plus, being connected to such an exchange does not mean that a person will have a reliable connection. Some people live too far from an exchange to get a reliable fast connection or any connection at all.

28. **We recommend** that Government locates those homes that reside within these 'not spots'. The outcome of such a mapping exercise will enable central, national and local governments to target resources efficiently and close the physical digital divide.

29. Ofcom's data reveal that households in rural areas have a higher take-up of broadband compared to households in urban areas[3]. This is unsurprising to us as research into the communications market continually reveals that rural and sparsely populated areas have poor communications services generally, i.e. poor or non-existent mobile coverage compounded by poor or non existent digital terrestrial television and radio; and have less choice and access to goods and services in traditional 'bricks and mortar' form. Broadband access allows rural citizens equal access to some important parts of the marketplace.

30. **We recommend** that Government ensures there is a rural dimension to its work to promote the geographical availability of broadband. This will help central, national and local government ensure parts of the UK are not stranded on the wrong side of an 'availability' digital divide.

Universal service

31. We have made a number of recommendations to Lord Carter's Digital Britain project that are relevant to the issue of promoting digital inclusion. We thought it would be helpful, therefore, to share these recommendations with you. In particular, we recommended to Digital Britain that broadband should be universally available, although we are technology neutral as to how such a service should be provided.

32. Policy makers need to recognise that the wider availability of a consistent minimum speed across the UK would create more opportunities for the private and perhaps more importantly the public sector (e.g. health and education), to deliver new and innovative services. And that increasingly, content and internet services delivered by the internet are designed on the assumption that users have a fast connection. And yet, we know there are many households in the UK who have access to an unreliable up to 0.5 Mbit/s connection. As time progresses we believe these users will increasingly be unable to access the internet effectively.

33. We recommended to Government that it should assess what would be involved in ensuring that a fast reliable broadband connection is available to everyone in the UK. We take the position that what matters it is not the speed or size of the pipe that is used to deliver services. It is the services themselves. The nature and number of services will change rapidly as consumers, industry, and Government utilise this delivery mechanism. Over time, therefore, the speed of connection that consumers and citizens need to access services will change.

Next Generation Access

34. Taking the issue of a minimum service requirement further, we are starting to notice a range of 'availability' digital divides materialise in the UK as parts of the country gain access to next generation access (NGA) or super-fast broadband. The current divide ranges from those citizens that have various broadband access: of 0.5 to 2 Mbit/s; up to 8Mbit/s; up to 24 Mbit/s (ADSL2+); and up to

---

[3] http://www.ofcom.org.uk/research/cm/cmrnr08/

50Mbit/s. As roll-out of super-fast broadband continues it will focus on densely populated urban areas. According to current projections rural areas will miss out on NGA to a greater extent than with current generation broadband.

35. Research undertaken by Benoit Felton, of the Yankee Group, reveals there is a greater take-up and a 'higher value' placed on super-fast broadband by consumers and citizens in rural areas, due to the poor or non-existent service that they were receiving. We think policy makers should recognise that the roll-out of super-fast broadband to rural areas would lead to strong demand. We think there are lessons to be learned from first generation broadband roll-out and that Government should help support the establishment of a 'trigger' scheme. This would show the level of demand needed to trigger rollout in each area and so provide a focus for community groups to demonstrate the interest in their local areas. In this way the amount of risk involved in rolling out super-fast broadband could be reduce. The delivery of NGA to rural areas would have the added benefit of preventing the emergence of a digital divide between those consumers who have super-fast broadband and those who do not.

4. <u>Take-up</u>

Home Access initiative

36. There is the obvious and strong correlation between pc ownership and internet take-up. 90% of pc owners have the internet at home and the most common environment to access the internet is at home[4]. The lack of access leads to well-documented disadvantages. This point is supported by our research, '*Children and the internet: A research study into the social effects of lack of internet access on socially disadvantaged children and families*'. The following research undertaken by BECTA reveals:

    …Access (also) impacts on educational attainment; on the development of ICT skills, and learning skills more generally; on motivation and engagement; increased access to resources enabling self-directed learning; increased continuity of learning between different learning environments'[5]

37. Part of the solution to close the digital divide is to increase pc take-up across the population and warmly welcome the recent announcement by Jim Knight, Minister of State for Schools and Learners, that the Government will be spending £300 million on the Home Access Initiative, which will provide pc and broadband internet home access to 1 million children between the ages of 5 and 19 who live in households that are in receipt of income support or unemployment benefit. This is a clear commitment by Government to close the digital divide for disadvantaged groups in society.

Ensuring provision

38. We **recommend** the Home Access Initiative should provide low income households with internet access via a wireless cloud in school catchment areas of high socio-economic levels of deprivation. This is to ensure simplicity for the end-user and reduce the need for people to have technological knowledge of

---

[4] Internet Access 2008 Households and Individuals, Office for National Statistics, 26 August 2008
[5] Extending Opportunity, Final Report of the Minister's Taskforce on Home Access to Technology, July 2008

such things as routers or the provision of a support line if a connection fails. Importantly, it overcomes the need for a household to have a fixed line. Ofcom's data reveal a year on year fall on fixed line ownership as people switch to mobile - often due to cost implications.

Those outside of traditional learning environments

39. **We recommend** that the Government ensures its Home Access Initiative includes those that are not part of the traditional schooling environment. For example, Notschool.net provides an easily accessible remote learning education programme to young people who do not attend school due to a variety of reasons. For example, they may have an illness or phobia; be pregnant; be being bullied or disaffected; be part of the travelling community; have a reluctance to learn; be excluded from school; or be in care. Home access to online services is essential to the education of disadvantaged and at-risk groups of children.

40. **We recommend** that all foster and care homes should automatically qualify for free broadband and pc access under the Home Access initiative. Whilst this widens the scope of the initiative it will capture those children who are particularly vulnerable or at risk; and where ICT skills can help with educational attainment to ensure they do not become part of the socially excluded, as is so often the case.

Engage the digitally-disengaged adults in low income households with an outreach programme

41. Digitally dis-engaged adults are also key to the digital inclusion agenda. Our research[6] (and that of others) shows that home access to a pc and internet by a child in the home can have a significant impact in reducing the numbers of digitally dis-engaged adults - especially if there are programmes that reach out to these parents. Digitally including these adults has the added benefit of providing a mechanism for the Government and local authorities to deliver tailored solutions to this section of society.

42. **We recommend** that the Home Access Initiative ensures that those schools that take part in the scheme provide evening classes for digitally disengaged parents so they can learn the ICT and media literacy skills required to get online, and importantly protect their children. These classes will need to specifically tackle, and help people overcome, attitudinal barriers that some adults have towards using a pc and being connected. We identified a particular group of parents that need help to overcome such barriers in our research, '*Children and the Internet*'[7] - the 'fearful' parents. We accept that these evening classes may not be enough to help adults be fully confident about using a pc and being online, or how to protect their children. Later in this paper (at paragraphs 53-56) we set out further thoughts on how the government could help to empower people.

---

[6] http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/young-people-and-communications/young-people-and-communications

[7] http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/young-people-and-communications/young-people-and-communications

Community specific outreach programmes

43. Our Children and the Internet workshop[8], which was attended by Government, industry, and third sector policy makers, revealed that the programmes which are most successful in engaging parents are tailored specifically to the local community – these will be different for rural or urban areas, areas that are ethnically diverse, or localities where, for parents, English is not the first language. There is not a one-size fits all solution, rather a number of solutions will be needed to help children and parents who are in different situations.

5. Digital Mentor Scheme

44. We welcome the Action Plan's Digital Mentor Scheme. It will complement the existing outreach programmes provided by organisations such as: Age Concern; UK Online; BT's Digital Rangers; and Silver Surfers. Much can be learned from these organisations on how to deliver successful programmes.

Those most at risk

45. **We recommend** part of the scheme should help those groups that are most at risk in society. We point to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Digital Inclusion team's work in profiling these groups - young adults not in education, employment or training (NEETs); people with mental health problems; people with a learning disability; and ex-offenders[9] - and recommend that Government should draw on the solutions that have been put forward to help people who fit these profiles be digitally included.

Older people

46. **We recommend** that the priority group for the Digital Mentor Scheme should be older people. All of the available research (including that at paragraphs 23-25) shows that this is the largest unconnected user group and is likely to draw great benefit from online public services such as: online GP services; NHS direct; the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) website; Consumer Direct; the ability to shop online, in particular, the delivery of heavy goods such as groceries; and other services that can help alleviate isolation and help them to keep in touch with friends and family, e.g. email or online video calling.

47. Our own research, *'Older people and communications technology: an attitudinal study into older people and their engagement with communications technology'[10]* shows clearly that non-users are not all rejecters of the internet and that the majority of non-users, who we termed in the research 'the disengaged', can be engaged with the right support and environment. What outreach programmes must do to help these non-users get online is to help them overcome their attitudinal barriers, such as: *"afraid of the unknown, of breaking the computer, or appearing foolish in the eyes of younger tutors and fellow-learners[11]"*. We disagree with the quantitative studies suggests that: older people have 'no need'

---

[8] [8] http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/young-people-and-communications/young-people-and-communications
[9] http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/digitalinclusion/research/
[10] http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/older-people-and-communications/older-people-and-communications
[11] http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/older-people-and-communications/older-people-and-communications

to access the internet and we believe that a tailored support programme will help to close the digital divide for this group.

6. **People with a disability**

A tailored outreach programme for people with a disability

48. A constituency that is central to the inclusion debate but whose needs are often overlooked is people with a disability. Ofcom's tracker survey (2007) revealed that 66% of people with a disability are not connected. This is a large number of people excluded from the digital world. **We recommend** that a specific outreach programme, tailored to the needs of people with a disability, is established to ensure that the number of disabled people who are not online is dramatically reduced.

Usability

49. Part of the solution to closing this digital divide is the widespread availability of usable equipment that delivers equivalent functionality at no additional cost to the end-user. We believe that it is important for people with a disability to be aware of and have access to the full range of ways in which they can communicate, i.e.: two way video for sign language users; captioned telephony for the hard of hearing; and traditional text relay services. Government agencies should be looking to utilise new technology, such as video relay services, to deliver public services to people with a disability, improving the user experience in the process.

50. We think there are two steps that Government can take to improve the usability of services. First: local, central and national governments can place a stronger emphasis on its public procurement of accessible equipment, which is allowed by the EU procurement Directive. The EU Commission study "Measuring the Progress of E-accessibility in Europe"[12] shows there is very limited progress towards e-accessibility across the continent in this respect. To improve the situation **we recommend** that Government change its procurement procedures in favour of accessible equipment which in turn is likely to enable the UK to become a European leader in providing e-accessible solutions.

51. Second, the recent Commission statements on the Electronic Framework Review point to it implementing measures that will ensure equal access to the communications market for people with a disability - involving the provision of special terminal devices to hearing-impaired users, relay services, or other products or services to meet the need of the end user. **We recommend** the Government supports the Commission's proposals in order to reduce digital exclusion for this group of citizens.

52. **We recommend** that the new Digital Champion should facilitate discussions between manufacturers, service providers and disability groups to develop usable products and services that meet the needs of disabled end-users. This is likely to result in quicker solutions than would otherwise be developed if we relied solely on formal regulation.

---

[12]http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=4280, Nov 2007

7. Consumer and citizen empowerment

53. Consumer and citizen empowerment is central to digital inclusion. People must have the skills and ability to choose and use the correct products and services for their needs. They must have access to the necessary information so that they can make the correct choices and importantly, be able to provide protection for themselves and their families from scams and unwanted or harmful content.

54. This is because in today's world, information is now pervasive, non-geographic and difficult to regulate. Fraudulent activity is prevalent, virulent and continually evolving. Consumers are having to understand a new lexicon such as: phishing; pharming; and spearing[13]. In turn, consumer protection is becoming more sophisticated and people will have to take more responsibility for their own protection and not rely solely on the regulator. And it is an on-going challenge to make children safe and confident in online environments.

55. We know that people are concerned about their privacy and the security of their personal data online - how their information is used, by whom and where does it end up. This concern is hindering take-up and use of online services by those who are connected and participation levels overall.

56. New research, which we will publish in February 2009, reveals that people acknowledge that they have a responsibility for protecting themselves, but need help from service providers, Government and regulators in order to do so. The following recommendations are designed to help Government to meet this need.

57. **We recommend** that the Government should build on the recommendations of the Byron Review and take further steps to build consumer trust and confidence. In particular, it should co-ordinate action to increase media literacy, particularly among disadvantaged groups, and make information easier to find by, for example, exploring the idea of a portal or helpline that would provide, or direct consumers to, valuable information, such as help with troubleshooting, news about online scams, or information about how to protect children online.

8. Delivery of public sector services

58. We think that UK society will be significantly enhanced when the public sector provides more services in digital form that are useful and easy to access. We note the trials by the public sector to deliver such innovative services, of which VITAL[14] is only one. This scheme is described in figure 3.

---

[13] Phishing is the criminally fraudulent process of attempting to acquire sensitive information such as usernames, passwords and credit card details by pretending to be a trustworthy entity in an electronic communication. Targeted versions of phishing at individuals have been termed spear phishing. Pharming is a hacker's attack aiming to redirect a website's traffic to another, bogus website.
[14] Delivering Digital Inclusion: An Action Plan for Consultation, October 2008

Figure 3: VITAL

> **Remote assistance for rural older people: VITAL**
> Derwentside District Council's ICT and EU experience is once again being put to good use in a new EU funded research project called VITAL. They are working with a number of European partners to develop a set of technologies, platforms and applications aiming to provide remote assistance to older people using the concept of Total Assistance. Total assistance is assistance anytime, anywhere, through access to domestic terminals for specific services. VITAL targets anyone over 60 who is in reasonably good physical and mental condition, able to operate the most common functions of a TV set using a remote controller and simple applications on a mobile phone. The system will also take into account physical limitations associated with age such as hearing loss, visual impairment, slow responsiveness, and any difficulty in accessing user friendly technologies. By using existing infrastructures and domestic terminals, VITAL is designed to deliver advice, assistance, information, education, entertainment and inter-personal communications to older people using advanced user interfaces over readily available domestic terminals that are specifically designed (ie TV and mobiles) and to offer personalised information and services in an active way using speech understanding technologies.

59. Another example is Onsnet[15], in the Netherlands, which provides a 'user friendly' tele-medicine service via a person's television-set as well as other social and information services.

60. **We recommend** that a cost benefit analysis is undertaken by Government to understand the potential impact of using new technologies to deliver public services that are currently delivered in traditional (analogue) forms, e.g. 'home care'. We think that new delivery mechanisms are likely to help target resources more effectively and provide innovative solutions that will benefit the public.

61. We suggest this work should examine the quality of service implications of delivering such services over current generation broadband and considers whether there are potential cost savings from providing such services using NGA. And if so, what are the implications for delivering NGA to underserved areas. We note that Digital Britain is undertaking the policy work on delivering a UK NGA infrastructure but we mention it as an important cross-cutting issue and one that goes to the heart of the future of public services.

9.   The Digital Champion

62. We welcome the creation of a Digital Champion and Taskforce that can provide cross-departmental leadership in promoting digital inclusion. The Champion and Taskforce will provide the necessary focus for the vast number of policies and projects that the government is undertaking in this space. We look forward to working with the Champion and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Taskforce utilising our expertise in representing the interests of citizens and consumers.

63. **We recommend** the Taskforce should include representatives of industry and the third sector – both sectors will bring valuable theoretical and practical knowledge of what needs to be done to ensure UK digital inclusion is achieved.

---

[15] http://www.onsnetnuenen.nl/

64. **We recommend** that once the Champion is in place and has reviewed all the evidence they should consider whether Government should be set digital inclusion targets. Targets that Government has accepted can provide the necessary focus for Government Departments and other organisations to achieve digital inclusion outcomes.

65. **We recommend** the Champion and Taskforce looks internationally to see what other countries are doing to improve pc and internet take-up, and what lessons can be learned from other schemes and initiatives.

66. We discussed (at paragraph 55) peoples' concerns about their privacy and the security of their personal data online **and recommend** as part of the solution to resolve these concerns, a role for the Champion to highlight and facilitate discussions with Government and industry to better protect personal data in order to increase consumer trust and confidence.

10. <u>Nations and Regions</u>

67. It is important to recognise that the precise action needed to promote digital inclusion will vary in different parts of the UK, and that the Devolved Administrations are also taking action in pursuit of this goal. For example, the Scottish Government launched a Digital Inclusion Strategy "Connecting Scotland's People" in 2001, which was reviewed in 2005/2006 and resulted in a new Digital Inclusion strategy, "Digital Inclusion in Partnership"[16].

68. **We recommend** the Government should tailor its activities to meet the particular needs of the UK's Nations and Regions and should co-ordinate its activities with other interested parties.

11. <u>Conclusion</u>

69. We think digital inclusion will be increasingly central to people's engagement in today's society. As the number and sophistication of online services increases and new forms of public service delivery are rolled-out, those who are digitally excluded will find that their social exclusion is exacerbated.

70. We welcome strongly the Government's Digital Inclusion Action Plan and its commitment to get online those currently not connected. In particular, we welcome the Home Access Initiative's ambition to ensure 1 million of the most disadvantaged children will be connected by 2011.

71. But there is more to do to ensure that those vulnerable groups, such as older people and people with a disability, are able to benefit from the services that new technologies offer. We look forward to working with the Government and the Digital Inclusion Champion to ensure that digital inclusion is achieved for all UK consumers and citizens.

---

[16] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/02/28141134/0

12. <u>Recommendations</u>

Recommendation 1 – The Government should recognise that there is a particular need to improve broadband availability in rural areas

- Government locates those homes that reside within these 'not spots'. The outcome of such a mapping exercise will enable central, national and local governments to target resources efficiently and close the physical digital divide.

- Government ensures there is a rural dimension to its work to promote the geographical availability of broadband. This will help central, national and local government ensure parts of the UK are not stranded on the wrong side of an 'availability' digital divide.

Recommendation 2 – The Home Access Initiative should be expanded in order to maximise the potential benefits for the children and parents of low income families

- The Home Access Initiative should provide low income households with internet access via a wireless cloud in school catchment areas of high socio-economic levels of deprivation. This is to ensure simplicity for the end-user and reduce the need for people to have technological knowledge of such things as routers or the provision of a support line if a connection fails. Importantly, it overcomes the need for a household to have a fixed line. Ofcom's data reveal a year on year fall on fixed line ownership as people switch to mobile - often due to cost implications.

- The Government ensures its Home Access Initiative includes those that are not part of the traditional schooling environment.

- All foster and care homes should automatically qualify for free broadband and pc access under the Home Access initiative to capture those children that are particularly vulnerable or at risk.

- The Home Access initiative should ensure that those schools that take part in the scheme provide evening classes for digitally disengaged parents so they can learn the ICT and media literacy skills required to get online, and importantly protect their children.

Recommendation 3 – The Digital Mentor Programme should have a particular focus on older people and groups considered to be at risk

- The Digital Mentor programme should help to digitally include those groups that are most at risk in society. We point to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Digital Inclusion team's work in profiling these groups.

- The priority group for the Digital Mentor scheme should be older people. All of the available research shows this is the largest unconnected user group and is likely to draw great benefit from online public services such as: online GP services; NHS direct; the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) website; Consumer Direct; the ability to shop online, in particular, the delivery of heavy goods such as groceries; and other services that can help alleviate isolation

and help them keep in touch with friends and family, e.g. email or online video calling.

Recommendation 4 – The Government should develop an outreach programme that is tailored specifically to the needs of people with a disability and should take steps to promote the wider availability of equipment that they find usable

- A specific outreach programme, tailored to the needs of people with a disability, is established to ensure that the number of disabled people who are not online - 66% - is dramatically reduced.

- Government should change its procurement procedures in favour of accessible equipment, to the benefit of disabled end-users, which in turn is likely to enable the UK to become a European leader in providing e-accessible solutions.

- Government should support the Commission's Electronic Framework Review proposals in order to reduce digital exclusion for this group of citizens.

- The new Digital Champion should facilitate discussions between manufacturers, service providers and disability groups to develop usable products and services that meet the needs of disabled end-users. This is likely to result in quicker solutions than would otherwise be developed if we relied solely on formal regulation.

Recommendation 5 – The Government should build consumer trust and confidence through co-ordinated action to increase media literacy and make information easier to find

- The Government should build on the recommendations of the Byron Review by co-ordinating action to increase media literacy, particularly among disadvantaged groups, and making information easier to find by, for example, exploring the idea of a portal or helpline that would provide, or direct consumers to, valuable information, such as help with troubleshooting, news about online scams, or information about how to protect children online.

Recommendation 6 – The Government should assess the impact of moving more public service online and in doing so, take into account the benefits in terms of increased digital inclusion

- A cost benefit analysis is undertaken by Government to understand the potential impact of using new technologies to deliver public services that are currently delivered in traditional (analogue) forms, e.g. 'home care'. We think that new delivery mechanisms are likely to help target resources more effectively and provide innovative solutions that will benefit the public.

Recommendation 7 – The Government's Digital Inclusion Champion should consider the benefits of setting targets for digital inclusion and should seek to learn from innovative schemes abroad

- The Taskforce should include representatives of industry and the third sector – both sectors will bring valuable theoretical and practical knowledge of what needs to be done to ensure UK digital inclusion is achieved.

- Once the Champion is in place and has reviewed all the evidence they should consider whether Government should be set digital inclusion targets. Targets that Government has accepted can provide the necessary focus for Government Departments and other organisations to achieve digital inclusion outcomes.

- the Champion and taskforce looks internationally to see what other countries are doing to improve pc and internet take-up, and what are the schemes, initiatives, or lessons that can be learned, which maybe transferable to the UK.

Recommendation 8 – The Digital Champion should facilitate discussions with Government and industry to better protect personal data in order to increase consumer trust and confidence

- People are concerned about their privacy and security online. Solutions to ameliorate these concerns will help increase take-up and the use of online services.

Recommendation 9 – The Digital Inclusion Action Plan should recognise that the needs of different parts of the UK vary and the Government should co-ordinate its activities with those of the Devolved Administrations

- The Government should tailor its activities to meet the particular needs of the UK's Nations and Regions and should co-ordinate its activities with other interested parties.