

Bridging the



Digital Divide in Northern Ireland

Consultation Document

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the
Digital Divide
in
Northern Ireland

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August 2002

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Preface

The purpose of this consultation paper is to encourage awareness and thinking about the Digital Divide issue (see section 2), specifically within a Northern Ireland context. In outlining the NI Executive's preliminary ideas on how to address the issue, it also offers the public and other interested parties the opportunity to make their views known on the subject.

The First Minister and Deputy First Minister have agreed the contents of this consultation paper and now wish to invite views on developing an initial strategy for 'Bridging the Digital Divide in Northern Ireland'.

Public consultation will commence on 27 August 2002 and the closing date for receipt of views and comments will be 19 November 2002. During the consultation period CITU(NI) staff will endeavour to meet groups and organisations, who so wish, to discuss the issues inherent in this paper.

Comments and queries relating to this paper should be addressed to the Central Information Technology Unit for Northern Ireland – CITU(NI).

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Additional copies of this consultation paper are also available by writing to or telephoning the above address or by downloading the document from www.consultationni.gov.uk.

Executive Summary

New Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are having a marked influence on every area of life and they are transforming how modern society operates and interacts. To be successful in today's global economy, with its heavy reliance on technology, requires an informed, educated citizenship with access to and a willingness to embrace ICT and its associated opportunities.

However, it is widely recognised that there currently exists a so-called 'Digital Divide' which means that not all citizens are able to easily access or use ICT.

Recent research clearly illustrates that the Digital Divide issue in Northern Ireland is very real - 53% of citizens (16 years old and over) do not have access to the Internet. The data collected in Northern Ireland highlights a number of obstacles to Internet use – these include lack of access to technology, lack of interest and a lack of relevant skills.

The research also shows that age, disability status and socio-economic groupings show significant variations in the level of access to the Internet.

The Executive is fully committed to supporting actions (across the public, private and community and voluntary sectors) which contribute to its aim of a digitally inclusive society.

A number of successful digital inclusion initiatives in Europe and further afield have been identified in this paper and several Northern Ireland projects which encourage Internet access and use have also been noted.

This paper suggests various potential actions to bring about digital inclusion. These include co-ordination of digital inclusion activities, awareness campaigns and support for innovative projects which will provide Internet access and / or training to citizens.

The actions proposed in this paper offer possibilities for bringing about digital inclusion. However, it is recognised that the suggestions made are not exhaustive. Further comments and suggestions on 'Bridging the Digital Divide' are therefore invited and very much welcomed.

*Use of ICT is encouraged in this paper as **one** means of communicating. The need for continued use of traditional channels of communication is implicitly acknowledged.*

Introduction

- 1.1 Today, new Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs) are having a marked influence on how society functions. Almost every area of life - ranging from health and education to employment, the economy and even leisure - is now impacted by ICT. Quite simply, ICT is transforming the way in which society operates and interacts. To be successful in today's global economy, with its heavy reliance on technology, requires an e-enabled business environment and an informed, educated citizenship with access to and a willingness to embrace ICT and its associated opportunities.
- 1.2 Northern Ireland has a well established, e-enabled business environment with 90% of business connected to the Internet and 56% having a Web presence. Consequently the focus of this paper is the citizen.
- 1.3 The Whitehall Government has a clear target of achieving 'universal access' to the Internet by 2005. If this is to be realised across the whole of the UK, then the Digital Divide (see Section 2) which currently exists in society, will need to be bridged through affirmative action by a broad spectrum of interested parties in both the public and private sectors.
- 1.4 Universal access is defined as providing all citizens (who so wish) with convenient, low or 'no cost' access to the ICT needed to interact on the Internet. Such ICTs will include but may not necessarily be limited to - PCs, mobile phones, public kiosks and digital television (DTV).

- 1.5 Delivering a Northern Ireland strategy for bridging the Digital Divide will require strong commitment and co-operation among and across many organisations and groups including:
- Government Departments;
 - Non-Departmental public bodies;
 - Local government;
 - Community and voluntary organisations;
 - Businesses; and
 - Individual citizens.
- 1.6 This consultative paper suggests a number of actions which these various groups could investigate and (where beneficial) implement to bridge the Digital Divide in Northern Ireland.
- 1.7 These actions are consistent with and will further the aims of the Northern Ireland Executive, specifically to work together to “...create a cohesive, inclusive and just society” as outlined in the Programme for Government.
- 1.8 In presenting this paper, which concentrates on encouraging the provision and use of ICT, it is acknowledged that traditional means of interacting, (in person, by phone and/or in writing), will continue. Use of ICT is encouraged in this paper as **one** means of communicating. The need for continued use of traditional channels of communications is implicitly recognised.

Defining the Digital Divide

- 2.1 The Digital Divide is used as a reference to the inequalities of access to modern ICT that exist in today's society.
- 2.2 The Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD) defines the Digital Divide as:

“The gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different social-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access Information & Communication Technologies and their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities”.
- 2.3 While the OECD definition includes reference to business, it should be noted that the focus of this paper is on bridging the Digital Divide amongst citizens in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is already well regarded as an e-enabled business environment with business connectivity to the internet at 90%. This success, in encouraging business exploitation of new technologies has been facilitated by a wide range of initiatives managed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry and Invest NI. An overview of some of these initiatives and of the success of these in transforming NI into an e-enabled business environment is included as annex I to this consultation document.
- 2.4 In respect to citizens the above definition explicitly requires action to tackle the Digital Divide to concentrate on two fundamental themes:
 - i access to ICT; and
 - ii use of ICT.

2.5 It also explicitly identifies geography, socio-economics and ICT “know how” as primary influences on the potential for a Digital Divide to develop and endure.

The Current Position In Northern Ireland

- 3.1 The most recent information illustrating the Digital Divide amongst citizens in Northern Ireland is available through:
- i the Continuous Household Survey 2000-2001 carried out by the Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency (NISRA); and
 - ii an Omnibus Survey carried out in April 2002 also by NISRA.
- 3.2 The Continuous Household Survey 2000-2001 gives some insight into ownership of home computers and access via home computers to the Internet. The survey data showed that:
- 22%** of heads of households (HoH) have computers and access to the Internet;
- 12%** have computers but do not have access to the Internet; and
- 66%** do not have computers or access to the Internet.
- 3.3 In effect the NISRA 2000-2001 survey showed that **78%** of HoH did not have Internet access (at least via a computer). Hence, at least **22%** had the necessary technology to enjoy the benefits of ICT while **up to 78%** could be said to have been *excluded* from the advantages of the Information Age.

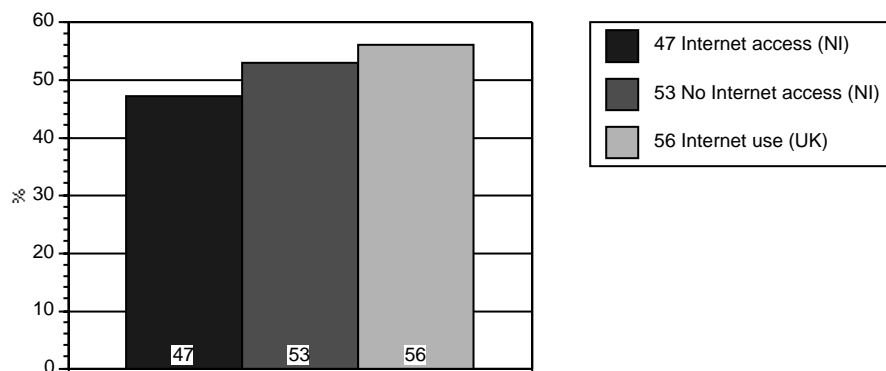
3.4 The Omnibus Survey (April 2002) was commissioned by the Central Information Technology Unit (Northern Ireland), Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to:

- establish a point in time baseline for future benchmarking; and
- make available up to date information on the Digital Divide and other ICT issues for Northern Ireland.

3.5 This survey was based on interviews with a representative sample of 1,178 citizens (16 years of age and over) across Northern Ireland.

3.6 The results of this survey indicate that the percentage of Northern Ireland citizens with access to the Internet at April 2002 stood at 47%; that is, they had potential Internet access from some source such as home, work or school (see Annex 4, figure 1 for a full breakdown of access to ICT by ICT type). In the UK as a whole, as at February 2002, 56%¹ of adults used the Internet. At present a greater percentage of the population of the UK as a whole **use** the Internet than have access to it in Northern Ireland.

Internet Access / Use



¹ February 2002 National Statistics Omnibus Survey

- 3.7 The percentage of Northern Ireland citizens with access at home to the Internet can be determined from the NISRA Omnibus Survey findings as circa 41% (see Annex 4, figure 2 – Internet Access by Source). This is almost 20 percentage points higher than quoted in the Continuous Household Survey 2000 – 2001. However, this increase of approximately 10 percentage points per annum is in line with expectations of the Continuous Household Survey 2001 - 2002 outturn.
- 3.8 As elsewhere in Europe, use of the Internet is growing. However, it is worth noting that the most recent figures for Northern Ireland clearly show that the majority of the population (53%) are not using the Internet and do not have access to it.
- 3.9 The NISRA Omnibus Survey – April 2002 (referred to above) considered 5 variables to ascertain their impact, if any, on access to ICT generally and the Internet specifically. The variables considered were:
- i Gender;
 - ii Age;
 - iii Disability²;
 - iv Socio-economic group; and
 - v Rural v urban location.

² Classified via responses to questions i. Have you a long standing illness, disability or infirmity or ii. Have you ever had a longterm illness that affected your activities.

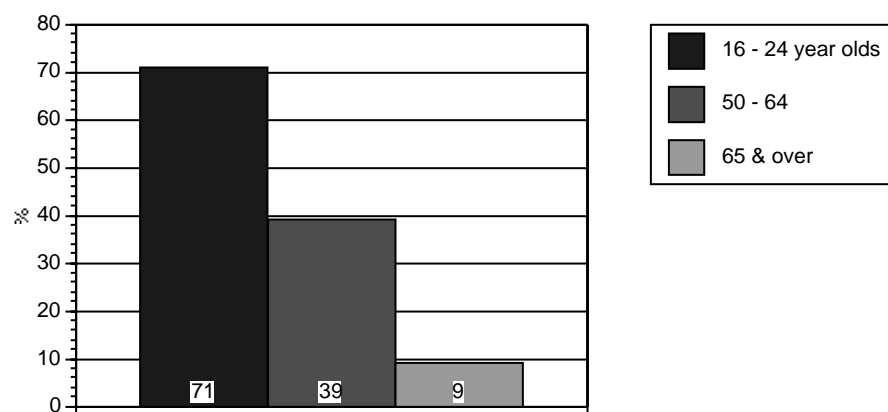
Gender

3.10 The results of the survey showed that gender does not have a significant impact on access to ICT with 50% of males and 44% of females reporting access to the Internet. Mobile phone access was even more balanced (71% Male and 70% female). Access to DTV produced the greatest difference with 38% of males and 31% of females having access. However, it should be borne in mind that access to the Internet via DTV is minimal. Only 2% of households across the UK access the Internet exclusively using technology other than PCs³. The complete findings for access to ICT by gender are displayed in Annex 4, figure 3.

Age

3.11 Age seems to have a major impact on access to ICT, most notably in the use of mobile phones and the Internet. In general, young people are more likely to have access to these technologies. In the case of the Internet, 71% in the 16-24 year old age range have access while only 9% of over 65s and 39% of 50 to 64 year olds have access. The survey findings are detailed in Annex 4, figure 4.

Internet Access by Age



³ Expenditure and Food Survey October to December 2001 (Office of National Statistics)

Disability

3.12 Like age, disability also seems to have a major impact on access to mobile phones and the Internet. The findings of the Omnibus Survey show that an individual without a disability is almost twice as likely (54% to 30%) to access the Internet as an individual with a disability. Likewise those without a disability are more likely to have access to a mobile phone (77% as opposed to 53% of those with a disability). The impact of disability on access to ICT is detailed in Annex 4, figure 5.

Socio-economic Group

3.13 As would be expected, socio-economic grouping has an impact on access to ICT. This is most noticeable in access to the Internet and to DTV. Access to the Internet ranges from 61% in the Managerial and Technical (M&T) socio-economic grouping to 36% in the Skilled Manual group. Access to DTV ranged from 60% in the M&T group to 43% in the Partly Skilled group. The findings on access to ICT by socio-economic group are reproduced at Annex 4, figure 6.

Rural v Urban

3.14 Access to ICT and in particular the Internet is **not** significantly affected by rural or urban location. Access to all forms of ICT is evenly balanced with only access to the Internet showing some minor imbalance with urban access at 49% and rural at 44%. See Annex 4, figure 7 for a break down of ICT access by rural v urban area.

3.15 Overall, the figures from the Omnibus Survey appear to indicate that inequalities currently exist in access to ICT and specifically the Internet in Northern Ireland. Not only are 53% of citizens over the age of 16 potentially *disadvantaged* by not having access but within that, specific groups are more likely to be disadvantaged than others including:

- the disabled;
- those in the lower earning socio-economic groupings; and
- those over 50 years of age.

3.16 It is evident therefore that a Digital Divide does exist at present in Northern Ireland and that action is necessary to eliminate that divide. Those citizens who do not have access to the Internet are potentially disadvantaged when compared to Internet users who are more likely to benefit from, amongst other things:

- on-line job opportunities – for example, access to vacancy details that may not be published in other formats;
- home working opportunities;
- discount and ‘real’ convenience shopping;
- improved distance learning opportunities;
- new business opportunities;
- alternative entertainment and leisure pursuits such as on-line gaming;

- electronic delivery of government services;
- new social structures including on-line clubs and communities of interest; and
- more convenient and speedy communications – through email or instant messaging, for example.

Obstacles to Internet Access in Northern Ireland

4.1 The Omnibus Survey also collected information on the reasons why individuals currently do not access the Internet. As part of the survey, all respondents who do not currently have access to the Internet were asked:

‘Which if any of these are reasons why you don’t use the Internet?’

4.2 The responses are detailed below:

Reasons for not using the Internet Omnibus Survey (April) 2002 – NISRA	Percentage of Respondents
No computer	64
Lack skills	37
Too expensive	18
For younger people/ Too old	19
Not interested	42
Not secure	3
Nowhere to access	5
Virus risk	1
Other	4

Note: figures do not add up to 100 due to multiple responses.

4.3 This implies that the biggest single obstacle to accessing the Internet is access to a computer (69% of respondents stated that ‘no computer’ or ‘nowhere to access’ were reasons for not using the Internet). However, the data does not provide any insight as to why the respondents did not have computers or access to the Internet.

- 4.4 Data from the February 2002 National Statistics Omnibus produced by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) presents a slightly different picture. It shows that only 25% of adults across the UK see 'no computer or no access' as a reason for not using the Internet.
- 4.5 The second main obstacle to accessing the Internet in Northern Ireland is 'lack of interest' (42%) while the third is 'lack of appropriate skills' (37%). Again the survey data does not provide any insight as to why so many people lack interest in the Internet. For example, the data does not determine whether the lack of interest is due to lack of awareness.
- 4.6 Other significant obstacles highlighted by the survey include expense (18%) and age (19%). Reasons grouped under the heading 'Other' (4%) included medical impairments, concern about ease of access to pornography, computer not connected and lack of time.
- 4.7 The survey clearly shows that there are identifiable and tangible reasons for citizens not accessing the Internet.
- 4.8 As shown earlier (paragraphs 3.10 to 3.15) analysis by gender and rural v urban location showed no significant variances from the results of the group as a whole. However, differences did emerge when age, socio-economic group and disability status were considered.
- 4.9 While 52 percent of 35-49 year olds said that not having a computer was an obstacle to Internet access, this figure rose to 61 and 66 percent in the 50-64 age group and over 65s respectively. Similarly 53 and 54 percent in the 50-64 Age group and the over 65s respectively stated lack of interest as an obstacle while only 31 percent did so in the 35-49 group. On the other hand, while 22 percent of

the 35 to 49 year old age group highlighted expense as an obstacle, only 11 percent of over 65s did. Further details of 'Age' as a perceived obstacle to internet access are given in Annex 3 figure 8.

4.10 Analysis by socio-economic group showed some variances from the table at paragraph 4.2. The most significant variance being that only 27 percent of the Managerial and Technical (M&T) classification felt that lack of skills was an obstacle while 45 percent of the 'Partly Skilled' classification highlighted this factor. Another note-worthy variance was related to expense. Only 10 percent of the M&T classification felt that expense was an obstacle while this rose to 21 percent of the 'Partly Skilled' respondents. The complete analysis by socio-economic group can be found at Annex 4, figure 9.

Digital Inclusion: Exemplars

- 5.1 Northern Ireland is not unique in seeking to develop and implement strategies to combat digital exclusion. Many countries worldwide have recognised the importance of ICT within their society and have developed policies to encourage and enable their citizens to access, use and benefit from it.
- 5.2 The commitment and importance attached to exploiting ICT and tackling the Digital Divide can be gleaned from the following extracts.

Hong Kong – Legislative Council Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Note - Hong Kong does not have a significant 'Digital Divide'

“Our focus on addressing the digital divide is therefore on how to avoid its emergence and to strengthen the community for exploitation of opportunities in the digital world.”

Netherlands – The Dutch Digital Delta

“For the Netherlands to succeed in enlarging its prosperity and well-being with the new opportunities offered by ICT, it is necessary to be and remain outstandingly equipped. The Netherlands must have a first-class ICT base.”

Scotland – Connecting Scotland’s People

“Our society is changing. A key driver is information and communication technologies – digital revolution. Some are part of this revolution more than others. We need a digitally inclusive society where all can play their part in new ways to strengthen communities and where each individual can gain the benefits of being on-line.”

Republic of Ireland – Community Application of Information Technology

“This initiative is aimed at throwing open the world of new technology and information systems to those in our society who are unfamiliar with, and who do not use, the new technologies in their everyday lives. “

Source: www.cait.ie

Further details of these initiatives are included in **Annex 2.**

Bridging the Digital Divide In Northern Ireland - Current Work

6.1 While, not necessarily under the heading of 'Bridging the Digital Divide', much work is already being carried out by the Northern Ireland public sector to encourage use of the new technologies. For example, UKonline provides a portal for citizens which acts as a single point of access to government information and services on the web. The UKOnline content can be tailored to Northern Ireland. Other examples include:

- the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has established 19 Farmer Access Points across Northern Ireland;
- the Department of Employment and Learning has sponsored 32 LearnDirect centres throughout Northern Ireland aimed at providing citizens with the skills needed to access the digital world;
- the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure is implementing the "Electronic Libraries for Northern Ireland" project, through which libraries will become information hubs for their communities; and
- the Department of Education is implementing the Classroom 2000 project which aims to place personal computers in every classroom.

6.2 Details of other work currently being carried out within the Northern Ireland Departments are provided at Annex 3. At present, the information in Annex 3 is a representative rather than a comprehensive list of the

digital inclusion work being carried within the wider public, community and voluntary sectors in Northern Ireland. However, the establishment of a comprehensive register should be one of the earliest actions to be undertaken as part of any strategy to bridge the 'Digital Divide'. It could then act as one of the primary sources of relevant information for policy makers and other interested parties.

The Executive's Vision

7.1 The Executive believes that the exploitation of modern ICT is essential to Northern Ireland's prosperity and economic well-being. This is firmly in line with views being articulated by other European Governments.

7.2 The vision therefore is:

“To ensure that every Northern Ireland citizen is fully aware of the opportunities and benefits afforded by ICT, has convenient access to current and emerging technologies and that those whose wish to, will have the appropriate knowledge and skills to use them effectively.”

7.3 The ultimate aim of this vision is to facilitate a digitally inclusive society where **all** citizens, who so wish, can avail of convenient, reliable and cost-effective access to the Internet using modern ICT.

7.4 The vision provides a focus for a 'Bridging the Digital Divide Strategy'. As a result, it will require action in at least 3 areas as outlined below:

- i **Awareness** – to ensure that all citizens are aware of the opportunities and benefits associated with using the Internet and ICT in general;
- ii **Education** – to ensure that all citizens, who so wish, can develop the knowledge and skills necessary to use modern ICT and in particular the Internet; and
- iii **Access** – to ensure that all citizens, who so wish, can avail of no cost or low cost, convenient access to those ICTs that facilitate use of the Internet.

7.5 Given the finding of some negativity towards Internet access highlighted by the Omnibus Survey 2002 it may be wholly unrealistic to expect that any digital inclusion strategy could lead to 100% of citizens availing of electronic services. It is recognised that some proportion of the population may never wish to use electronic services. However, it would be the Executive's aim that, in the longer term, public use of ICT (particularly in connection with the Internet) should as a minimum match the levels attained by those countries regarded as being among the **'information elite'**.

The Way Ahead

- 8.1 It must be recognised that a Digital Divide currently exists in Northern Ireland and that urgent and purposeful action is required to address the issue. In the context of this consultancy paper a number of potentially beneficial actions are suggested, as is an outline model for managing activities designed to bring about digital **inclusion**.
- 8.2 Digital exclusion is a problem, which as the evidence presented earlier shows, primarily affects certain groupings in society. However, the development of a digitally inclusive society would have benefits for all - individuals as well as private and public sector organisations.
- 8.3 The Executive is committed to supporting action which contributes to its aim of a digitally inclusive society and is considering mechanisms for supporting relevant innovative initiatives. However, government on its own cannot bring about digital inclusion. Action will be required from community and voluntary groups, the wider public sector and private sector businesses.
- 8.4 Input from these groups will need to be encouraged and their actions, at least informally, co-ordinated to ensure maximum impact and exposure.

Potential Digital Inclusion Actions

- 8.5 The ordering of these proposed actions is not significant. The list of proposals below is by no means exhaustive and further comments / suggestions are invited.

Management, Awareness & Central Activities

- a Northern Ireland Civil Service personnel may, at least in the first instance, take on the role of encouraging support for and input to, digital inclusion activities from across central and local government, community and voluntary sectors and the private sector. It may also initially take on the role, again in the first instance, of co-ordinator to ensure that the initiatives of interested parties are mutually beneficial and well publicised;
- b A working group comprising representatives from all parties interested in bringing about digital inclusion may be established under the chairmanship of a Minister from the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. Such a group could give direction to and monitor activities designed to eliminate the Digital Divide in Northern Ireland;
- c A scheme may be developed to encourage interested parties to apply for government funding for digital inclusion projects. Funds may be made available for projects which by design will have a positive impact on the use of ICT and the Internet, particularly where that impact affects those groupings in society shown by research to be disadvantaged. Project elements may include but not necessarily be restricted to:
 - provision of Internet access points and / or training for a local community or a Northern Ireland community based on specific common interests;
 - provision of Internet access / training which

- contributes to Targetting Social Need (TSN) objectives;
- provision of Internet access / training to individual citizens who for whatever reason cannot attend public access points; and
 - the development and implementation of electronic services of benefit to local or NI communities of common interest.
- d As suggested earlier, a central register of initiatives, projects and schemes which impact on the use of ICT may be compiled, published and maintained;
- e The Omnibus Survey, April 2002 may be updated on a regular (possibly annual) basis to measure both the extent of the Digital Divide and the progress in eliminating it;
- f Research may also be carried out to determine where, outside of the home, citizens can get access to and / or training on, ICT and the Internet. This could facilitate the development of a Digital Mapping facility, similar to that already being established in Scotland and England, which will indicate the location of all public Internet access points in Northern Ireland;
- g Such a 'Digital Map' facility could be used in conjunction with a free-phone call service to allow citizens to enquire about Internet access and / or training facilities in their geographical area: this could include relevant information such as location (town/post code), opening hours and likely charges (if any);

- h Against a background where 42% of respondents to the Omnibus Survey stated that their lack of interest was an obstacle to greater use of the Internet and a further 19% said that they were too old or that the Internet was for younger people, Northern Ireland-wide awareness campaigns may be conducted to ensure that all citizens are aware of the benefits and opportunities which ICT connected to the Internet can bring;
- i Any awareness campaigns should also inform citizens how to find out about the availability of ICT access and training;
- j Many government, private sector and community and voluntary organisations are already offering services electronically. Such initiatives will continue to be encouraged by the Executive. For its part the Executive is committed to having all key government services available electronically by 2005. The Executive will also regularly publish information about what public services are available electronically and will canvass public opinion in terms of the relevance of the services being offered by the public sector as well as the quality of delivery of such services.

Access & Education

- 8.6 A core element to bridging the Digital Divide is to provide access to ICT and particularly the Internet to those citizens who may not (for whatever reason) be able to provide their own access. 69% of respondents to the Omnibus Survey (April 2002) stated that no computer or nowhere to access were obstacles to Internet use.

8.7 Citizens should have convenient and economical public access to ICT (ideally at low or no cost). Convenient could be defined as being within a public transport commuting time of not more than 20 minutes. The potential digital inclusion project funding suggested earlier could also contribute to the creation of public access points. In addition the Executive will encourage:

- a the placement of Internet access points (whether via Kiosks, PCs or perhaps DTV) in those buildings owned by public bodies and frequented by citizens. This may include, but not be restricted to: Libraries, Job Centres, Social Security Offices, Leisure Centres and Local Government Buildings;
- b schools and other educational establishments with Internet facilities to make such facilities available outside of normal educational hours to parents and the local community;
- c health providers (including Trusts and General Practitioners) to make ICT facilities (such as Kiosks) available to allow patients to access additional (general) medical information about their ailment;
- d community and voluntary groups to set up access sites for the communities they serve. Businesses will be encouraged to support (or even initiate) such local community / voluntary schemes. This support could take a number of forms, from donation of older ICT equipment, to provision of knowledge and / or perhaps some form of financial assistance;
- e businesses including Post Offices and retailers to provide Internet access facilities to the public;

- f larger employers to support work-based access to the Internet and ICT training for employees;
- g entertainment, social and other venues frequented by the public to provide some level of Internet access facility;
- h those, who as a core (or a significant secondary) activity provide public Internet access to make sure that, where possible, there are properly trained staff on site to give assistance, advice and training to those citizens who are inexperienced in, or worried about using, modern ICT and / or the Internet; and
- i those, who as a core (or a significant secondary) activity, provide public Internet access or Internet training to take action to ensure that their premises and at least some of their ICT equipment is accessible and usable by those with disabilities.

Annex 1

Connecting Business

The Work of the Information Age Initiative

Background

The Information Age Initiative (IAI) was established by DETI in September 1999 to help ensure that Northern Ireland enthusiastically grasps the opportunities of the ICT revolution. While its primary focus was on the business community, the IAI sought to ensure access to and application of new technologies by as wide a population as possible in Northern Ireland. Chaired by Professor Fabian Monds, the Initiative's board comprised representatives of the private and wider public sector.

The Initiative's framework and action plan entitled "Leapfrog to the Information Age", had 3 key priorities:

- increasing the use of ICTs by Northern Ireland businesses to survive, compete and grow;
- developing a thriving ICT sector, and
- ensuring there is an environment supportive of the knowledge-based economy, including a world-class telecoms infrastructure.

The NI Executive stated its commitment to the work of the IAI by placing it high on the Agenda for Government and demonstrated this support in tangible way through the provision of some £1.4m in addition to £3.1 m funding from the EUSSPPR (Peace I). This funding was in addition to a range of e-business support schemes which were developed by the Department's former agencies -IDB, LEDU and IRTU.

Within the three key priorities, the IAI outlined 25 key actions to address the weaknesses and build on the strengths identified in the strategic framework.

Annex 1a

Key Achievements

Leapfrog Projects - First Call

The Leapfrog projects have played a valuable role in delivering against the IAI's key aim of ensuring access to and application of new technologies by as wide a population as possible. From the outset it was envisaged that the Leapfrog projects should encompass all aspects of Information Age activity in Northern Ireland, -and that the 'first call for projects' should not be restricted to the business community. In particular, the IAI recognised the valuable role played by the Northern Ireland's Universities and Colleges, and by voluntary and community organisations.

In April 2000 the IAI made a call for Leapfrog funded projects under Peace I From 94 applications. 31 projects were selected to receive financial assistance totalling in the region of £3.4 million - £2 million from Peace I funds and £1.4 million from the Agenda for Government fund.

The Leapfrog projects have a good geographical spread across Northern Ireland and benefit a broad spectrum of sectors, from training to food processing and from the aircraft industry to the creative industries. General business projects account for 60% of the total projects, with 30% representing the education sector and 10% representing the voluntary and community sectors.

Some of the Leapfrog projects have completed their objectives and have concluded, while others have a longer life span. The common theme which runs through all the projects is the very positive impact they have had in delivering against the objectives

Annex 1a

of the IAI and of Peace I. For example, to date the first tranche of Leapfrog projects have:

- created 171 jobs (135 full time jobs and 36 part time jobs);
- had a substantial and direct impact upon more than 800 companies/organisations through participation in ICT clusters, direct provision of ICT advice and mentoring etc;
- improved the position of many organisations on the Connectivity Chain. Prior to being assisted by the Leapfrog projects, 56% of the 800 companies/organisations directly impacted were at the awareness stage of the Connectivity Chain. 97% of these companies/organisations are now at the access, presence, trading or e-business stages.
- had an impact upon more than 2,000 companies/organisations through participation in ICT awareness seminars etc;
- directly benefited more than 3,800 people through the provision of ICT training etc;
- benefited areas of New Targeting Social Need (TSN). 70% of projects are located within New TSN areas and all have impacted on people from within such areas.

Leapfrog Projects - Second Call

In September 2001 the IAI made a second call for Leapfrog funded projects under Peace II. 98 projects were submitted and then shortlisted by a selection panel. Economic appraisals for the projects have now been completed and Letters of Offer will issue shortly totalling around £6m of grant assistance.

Responsibility for taking forward the second call projects has transferred to Invest Northern Ireland.

Annex 1a

Leapfrog Projects - Leapfrog Club

Each project was allocated an IAI Board Member as Project Champion. It was the role of the Project Champions to provide advice and guidance and to act as mentor to their projects.

The IAI also established the 'Leapfrog Club' to provide a forum for representatives from the Leapfrog projects to discuss issues of common concern as well as best practice in the use of ICTs with each other and with IAI board members.

Benchmarking

In the annual DTI International ICT Benchmarking study in 1999, some 40% of Northern Ireland business had access to the Internet and online technologies. The headline results for 1999 placed Northern Ireland at the bottom of the UK regional business connectivity.

One of key targets which the Information Age Initiative set out in its strategy document, "Leapfrog to the Information Age" was to achieve a step change in Northern Ireland's performance. The 2000 survey results were very encouraging showing that NI was the fastest growing region in the UK and that its position in terms of connectivity had improved to 75% which placed us in joint 6th place in the UK regional league.

The 2001 DTI Survey, published in October 2001 gives a positive picture of the UK's position with an overall improvement against other countries, although there has been a slower than expected growth in trading online. The results indicate a more complex pattern of ICT take up and use than before and further work and analysis will be needed to

Annex 1a

understand the reasons behind this. Northern Ireland's results are similarly complex and show a slower rate of increase than the previous year.

However it is clear that NI businesses are moving up the Connectivity Chain as detailed in the NI Business ICT Benchmarking Report 2000 (published by the IAI):

- 10% NI businesses using the technology;
- 24% NI businesses trading online;
- 46% NI businesses have a web presence; and
- 85% NI businesses access to the Internet.

The DTI ICT Benchmarking Study 2001 shows that

- 90% of NI business now connected;
- presence on the net (website) is up by 23% to 56% and over half the businesses with a website evaluate its effectiveness;
- e-trading (buying and selling) has increased by 6% to 30% and a fifth of NI businesses provide online information on delivery times and costs (both results just above UK average). A higher proportion of NI businesses provide information on purchasing requirements online than any other UK region;
- 67% of NI businesses believe that ICT's are relevant (the highest percentage of any UK region).

Other Achievements

A DETI e-commerce strategy group was set up to co-ordinate and maximise the impact of the Department and its agencies. For example, all the agencies included a precondition in their Letters of Offers stating a minimum requirement for clients to demonstrate access to and use of email and a commitment to developing an e-business strategy.

Annex 1a

To facilitate cross-Departmental activity, an Inter-Departmental e-government Project Board was set up to plan and develop activities across the range of government services.

A comprehensive report of NI's position in relation to telecoms was commissioned from Mason Communications and a Telecommunications Strategy for NI was subsequently developed by IRTU.

Way Forward

The Information Age Initiative worked for over 2 years with DETI and its agencies to deliver on the Leapfrog Action Plan published in April 2000. The IAI board set the strategic direction for the Department's e-business support activities in an immature market and, having established a clear brand in Leapfrog, raised awareness, coordinated activity and stimulated the local market.

The work of the IAI came to an end with the establishment in April 2002 of Invest NI. The new agency will now take forward the information age agenda as part of an integrated strategy which focuses on innovation and entrepreneurship.

In reviewing the information age priorities for NI, the IAI Board noted that considerable progress has been made. For example, the private sector is now much more involved in promoting awareness and facilitating access and Internet presence with business access to Internet and email almost ubiquitous (although issues of cost remain). Surveys indicate that NI could make fuller and more effective use of ICTs to improve business competitiveness. Barriers to e-commerce and e-business remain and skills issues also still exist.

Annex 1a

Affordable accessible broadband is now high on the political agenda as the way forward for knowledge based economic growth and competitiveness as such telecoms is a prime focus for both DETI and Invest NI.

Annex 1b

Telecommunications

Background

Following from the recognition within the Leapfrog report that the availability of a world-class telecommunications infrastructure is a prerequisite for the development of a knowledge-based economy, Telecommunications Policy Unit has been working vigorously with both the public and private sectors to ensure Northern Ireland can benefit from the opportunities emerging from broadband communications.

Demand Stimulation

Key amongst the actions being taken forward has been the stimulation of demand from industry for broadband services. In March 2002, in conjunction with Invest NI's eSolutions Centre and ICT Advisors, Telecommunications Policy Unit launched the "Broadband for Business Campaign" under the Leapfrog banner and carried out a number of regional roadshow events. The Broadband for Business campaign is demonstrating to companies, particularly SMES, the appropriateness of the various broadband technologies, how these can contribute to their business, and the associated costs. An extensive province-wide poster campaign, and a range of press advertorials have supported the campaign.

SME Broadband Satellite Programme

Following its launch in mid-January, the SME Broadband Satellite Programme, which is now operated by Invest NI, has attracted substantial interest with requests for application forms now reaching approximately 200, and 50 letters of offer issued to date. The SME Broadband Satellite Programme provides each SME with up to 50% support for both the set-up and first year running costs of satellite connections.

Annex 1b

Telecommunications Policy Unit is also working with Invest NI's North Western Regional Office to encourage a cluster of approximately 40 companies, potential suppliers and subcontractors to the recent gas pipeline contract, to seek satellite broadband access to a central tendering web site. Broadband access will enable the easy transfer of CAD and design files submitted as part of bids associated with future work on the pipeline.

An additional benefit of the broadband satellite programme has been the stimulation of the satellite market in Northern Ireland, with four satellite providers, new to our region, indicating their intention to actively pursue satellite broadband services with local industry.

DTI Broadband Stakeholders Fund

In October 2001 Northern Ireland secured £1.5m from DTI as its share of the £30m Stakeholders Fund. This allocation, which was confirmed in a joint press release issued by Douglas Alexander and Sir Reg Empey on 19th March, has been used for a call for proposals seeking innovative feasibility schemes and pilot actions exploring various ways of extending broadband technologies to a wider range of users than is currently commercially viable.

The call, which closed on 14 June, resulted in a very positive response from both the private and public sectors, including a number of Local Councils.

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Invitation for Expressions of Interest in Flagship projects

On 24 June an invitation was issued through the European Journal seeking Expressions of Interest in possible telecommunication Flagship projects for Northern Ireland. The invitation, valued at £2m, is extended to local and international companies and organisations to come forward with sustainable leading edge applications, content or services that showcase broadband service design and innovation.

Call for Proposals Addressing Local Access to Broadband

Telecommunications Policy Unit is focusing future activities on one of the key telecommunications issues for Northern Ireland, namely local access to affordable broadband telecommunications. Work over the next months will examine ways to stimulate commercial business cases that encourage “last mile” broadband rollout by the private sector, and which might be supported under a Call for Proposals.

It is recognised that this is an important area in which the local councils, and other public bodies, such as Chambers of Commerce and Enterprise Agencies, can play significant roles in stimulating demand. Telecommunications Policy has met with a number of Councils and their Economic Development Consortia and has agreed to support a number of short consultancy studies to help councils identify the priorities for broadband services within their areas. Telecommunications Policy Unit is actively pursuing state aid and legislative matters in preparation for the issue of the Call, which is expected to be towards the end of 2002.

Broadband Aggregation

Telecommunications Policy Unit is also to undertake a feasibility study into the viability of aggregating demand for broadband services across the wider public service in Northern Ireland, as a means of stimulating the rollout of broadband particularly to rural areas.

As well as generating efficiency savings, it is expected that such an initiative will provide wider economic and social benefits, bringing affordable broadband services to SMES, and contributing to digital and social inclusion issues.

Telecommunications Policy Unit has been working closely with the Office of the Government Commerce (OGC) who have recently undertaken a feasibility study to examine how such an initiative might be taken forward on a UK-wide basis. Part of the Northern Ireland feasibility exercise will examine whether any local initiative should sit under or outside OGC proposals. During August a cross-Departmental Project Board, chaired by DETI, will be established to take this matter forward.

Interreg III

Telecommunications Policy Unit has been liaising with ROI counterparts in the Dept of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (formally the Dept of Public Enterprise) to take forward cross-border initiatives on telecommunications infrastructure under Interreg III. It has been agreed that an Information Day should be held seeking ideas in line with Interreg III's Programme Complement from public and private organisations from the North and South. This will be followed with an invitation to submit Expressions of Interest for project proposals. It is likely to be early 2003 before funding will be allocated under Interreg III for cross-border telecommunications infrastructure.

Annex 1c

Invest NI E-Business Services

Background

UK Online for Business

UK Online for Business is a nation-wide initiative which is designed to create a base which puts the UK at the forefront of e-business. Invest NI is responsible for delivering national programmes at a regional level.

Invest Northern Ireland

Invest Northern Ireland offers a range of e-business services which seek to further the aim of ensuring that Northern Ireland has a balanced, competitive, innovative, knowledge-based and fast growing economy where there are plentiful opportunities for all. e-Business support extends to both start up and established businesses and offers a wide range of assistance including development workshops, advice on technology and financial support for ICT improvements.

Specific examples include:

Advice

Freephone Telephone Helpline

The freephone telephone helpline provides independent impartial advice on technology issues associated with e-commerce, e-business and e-technologies.

Tel: 0800 515319

e-Solutions Centre

The e-Solutions Centre offers free impartial advice on e-business processes and provides personalised demonstrations of the associated technologies. Demonstrations include Internet, Intranet & Extranets, computer networking, portable computing and wireless communications, broadband services, e-security systems and videoconferencing capabilities.

ICT Regional Advisers

The focus of this programme is to help companies exploit the correct technologies to increase their business competitiveness. This could involve for example:

- Better use of office suites for internal systems;
- Advice regarding purchase and implementation of computer systems;
- Sourcing information/providing advice about bespoke packages;
- Advising on project management of system implementation;
- Internet/e-mail/website design/e-commerce;
- Sourcing third party suppliers/reviewing quotes for services; and
- General review of IT systems.

Finance

Fast Forward Finance

A new approach to high technology start-up businesses which aims to accelerate the growth of these businesses at the early pre-venture capital stage. The scheme offers early venture type assistance to help get businesses to the starting blocks ahead of the field.

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Enterprise Excellence

Enterprise Excellence aims to overcome the barriers to successful technology transfer and to accelerate the business formation rate by providing focused and expert support. A specific aim of the programme is to facilitate and encourage commercialisation of ideas from academic and research institutions.

Fast Track for Innovation

Fast Track is a new pilot appraisal system within the Compete Programme. It is an accelerated appraisal process for near market ICT research & development projects.

Broadband satellite Programme

The Broadband Satellite Programme creates an opportunity for small and medium sized enterprises in regions where ADSL is currently not available to take advantage of high-speed Internet connections that are not constrained by physical, geographical or terrestrial restrictions.

e-Business Consultancy Service (including MIS)

Invest Northern Ireland offers up to 50 days of consultancy help to companies or groups of companies to introduce e-business processes. The projects produce business cases and pilot projects supported by demonstrators/prototypes showing how e-business can build the companies profitability and growth.

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Digital Inclusion - Examples of Policy Initiatives

Digital Inclusion – Examples of Policy Initiatives

Scotland

The Scottish Executive's plans for bridging the Digital Divide have been published in Scotland: A Devolved Administration's initial push towards getting its population 'online'.

The proposed initiatives in Scotland can be categorised under the following headings:

- Awareness and promotion;
- Access;
- Support;
- Skills;
- Content; and
- Community involvement

The main thrust of the Scottish Executive's plans included:

- Increasing the awareness of the benefits of getting online;
- Increasing the awareness of public access to the Internet by mapping and publishing the locations of all facilities providing public access to the Internet in Scotland;
- Increasing the number of venues offering public access; and
- Developing two pilot 'digital communities' in disadvantaged areas.

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These broad themes are supported by a range of schemes including:

- i The New Opportunities Fund (which distributes National Lottery funds to health, education and environment projects across the UK) is being used to:-
 - support the People's Network – linking every public library to the Internet, community websites and the National Grid for Learning (NGfL);
 - create websites and services providing local information for adult learners; and
 - improve access to lifelong learning for adults through the use of ICT in a range of learning centres across Scotland with the focus being on socially excluded adults and communities.
- ii *Learndirect Scotland* aims to help and encourage individuals to take direct action to improve skills and employment prospects. Services include a free phone help line, a website and a network of branded learning centres. The Scottish University for Industry (SUfi) is developing an information resource of over 60,000 learning opportunities ranging from basic skills to continuing development for professionals.
- iii The *Training for Work* (TfW) programme targets unemployed adults aged over 25 and aims to assist in improving work-related skills through appropriate training. On the ICT front, the aim is to provide basic ICT training to all TfW clients who wish to avail of it.
- iv *The 21st Century Government Initiative* is about joining services and providing better services designed to meet

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user needs. The Scottish Executive and other public bodies such as the NHS and local authorities have made a variety of services available online ranging from genealogical searches to travel booking with a local ferry operator.

- v *Digital Champions* is a £1.5m programme to provide a network of eight 'champions' to cover all Social Inclusion Partnership areas in Scotland. The champions work to improve ICT provision by initiating new projects, spreading best practice and increasing local involvement in the creation of Internet content.
- vi *NGfL for Communities* is a portal website which has been designed to meet the needs of the UK's education and lifelong learning sector. A distinct access portal, the National Grid for Learning Scotland, has been created which provides information and resources directly to meet the needs of local users.
- vii *Uplift* is a scheme supported by Scottish Enterprise and others to provide initial computer training for small groups of people who in turn will be able to pass on their skills to others in the community.
- viii *Two Cyber Cafés* are being piloted in the Gorbals and Pollok areas of Glasgow aimed at encouraging those from disadvantaged areas to take an initial step into ICT and experience how the Internet can have a positive impact on the quality of life.
- ix *Voluntary Sector*: some £1.5m has been made available by the Scottish Executive for IT development in this sector, with emphasis on developing Internet access, improving connectivity and developing websites. A portal to

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provide one-stop access to information about the voluntary sector and services in Scotland is under development, which will also provide a communications medium for like-minded organisations to interact with each other.

Netherlands

Holland has a firm commitment to exploit ICT for the good of the country and creating / maintaining a digitally inclusive society. This can be best appreciated through two of its Government's publications – 'The Dutch Digital Delta – The Netherlands oN-Line' and 'Contract with the future – A vision on the electronic relationship between government and citizen'.

One of the main concepts of the latter document is government relationships with citizens based on 'Freedom through connectedness'. Freedom indicates that citizens should have the choice as to how they interact or connect with government. Connectedness refers to virtual networks through which connections between government and citizens (amongst others) can be made. It also refers to the idea of a contract through which citizens will be able to hold government accountable for performance in facilitating interaction.

The 'freedom through connectedness vision' places obligations on government including:

- to afford equal opportunities for every citizen to gain access to electronic government and accessible government information;
- to provide clarity to citizens about their rights in relation to electronic government; and

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- to provide clarity to citizens about the scope for electronic participation in government.

The Dutch Digital Delta document is concerned about ensuring a coherent and streamlined approach to maintain Holland's position as a member of the 'information elite' group of countries.

The Dutch Cabinet has distinguished 5 'Pillars' that together determine the strength of the Dutch national ICT base. The pillars are:

- A The telecommunications infrastructure;
- B Know how and innovation;
- C Access and skills;
- D Regulatory aspects; and
- E The use of ICT in the public sector.

Examples of actions to support Pillar C include:

- fiscal incentives, for example to purchase PCs and encourage "PC donation" of surplus equipment from firms and organisations to schools, welfare and care organisations, prisons, etc;
- the Government Citizen Communication Project whereby visitors to a library are encouraged to get to know the Internet and gain experience with it;
- improved integration of ICT in secondary and higher education; and
- the 'Remove the Thresholds' project to put the theme of Website accessibility firmly on the public agenda.

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Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

The Hong Kong Government is aiming to capitalise on its world-class information economy environment.

Since the introduction of their *2001 Digital 21 Strategy* in 1998, the Hong Kong Government has been focusing on improving overall wealth and economic and social prosperity.

Part of that strategy identified a need to strengthen the Hong Kong community for digital exploitation by improving accessibility, especially for those who have fewer opportunities to use IT in their daily lives. As a direct result, the Hong Kong Government has established a network of Internet-enabled computers at selected District Offices, community centres, public libraries and post offices. Over 200 *Cyber Points* have been created throughout the region, providing no-charge Internet and e-mail access to members of the public.

In addition to the Cyber Points, a Super Cyber Centre with over 100 computers was also established centrally to promote IT knowledge and to enhance the use of information technology within the Hong Kong community. All Cyber site locations offer a site officer who can deal with basic software or hardware problems as they arise.

Republic of Ireland

The Community Application of Information Technology (CAIT) initiative was launched in December 2000. The initiative aims to harness the experience, local knowledge and relationships of the community and voluntary sector to implement projects which will make both the Internet and Information and Communication Technologies more inclusive.

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CAIT is primarily aimed at voluntary and community groups who are encouraged to identify and implement projects which promote the use of ICTs amongst those groups who do not use and are not familiar with the technology. Funding from the Irish Government is available upon successful application to the CAIT fund. From July 2001 to December 2001, 71 projects (out of 450 applications) were funded.

The level of funding is dependent on individual projects and in the period March 2002 to December 2002 financial assistance ranging from € 1,500 (UK£1,000) to € 125,000 (UK£84,000) will be available to any one project. The CAIT budget for this period totals some € 3m (UK£2m).

Canada

While Canadian initiatives are not detailed in this paper, it is useful to be aware of 'Canada On-Line' whereby the Government has already connected all schools and libraries to the Internet.

The current focus of the Canada On-Line initiative is to complete the provision of public Internet access in 5000 rural and remote communities and 5000 sites in urban neighbourhoods. The overall objective being to extend Internet connectivity to the equivalent of one Internet computer per classroom.

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Current Initiatives

Northern Ireland

Current Initiatives – Northern Ireland

A number of NICS Departments are already implementing policies that contribute towards bridging the Digital Divide in Northern Ireland. These policy initiatives aim to increase awareness in ICT or to encourage specific groups of citizens to use electronic services offered by Government.

This Annex provides brief details of a number of those initiatives which are directed towards individual citizen or citizen groups (rather than businesses). The details outlined are those which the Central Information Technology Unit (Northern Ireland) was advised of at the time of writing and may not be exhaustive.

For the most part, the information on the initiatives is provided in the form of tables grouped by Department.

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Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)

DARD is using funding from the 'Programme for Government' budget and the 'Peace II' project in a number of initiatives to provide better access to ICT resources for farmers and growers in Northern Ireland under three key areas - access, competence to use computers and electronic services.

Project	Background	Further information
Farmer Access Points	19 Computers have been installed in locations throughout NI. All are Internet enabled with ISDN connections to the Internet.	
Computer training suites	Together with qualified and competent staff at each location, these facilities provide an excellent resource across Northern Ireland to meet training needs of the agriculture community.	Available at Enniskillen College, Loughry College and Greenmount College
Provision of ICT training and funding to farmers and growers	Being taken forward as part of the Peace II project currently being developed by the Agrifood Development Service.	
The Rural Portal project	Will provide Internet based information and services including the Animal and Public Health Information System allowing farmers to register births and deaths of bovine animals via the Internet.	Live in pilot form at end of September 2001

Department of Education

The education service within Northern Ireland has experienced a period of significant change in recent years as a result of the demands of the information age. Investment in information communications technology (ICT) has been given a high priority by the Department of Education in order to provide the infrastructure needed to ensure that the young people in schools acquire the knowledge and skills they need for the emerging “Information Society”.

There are a number of projects aimed at providing the skills needed for the effective and efficient use of ICT currently ongoing throughout schools in Northern Ireland. However “Classroom 2000” is the key project for addressing the issue of the Digital Divide and further details of this project are contained in the table overleaf.

Classroom 2000 is part of the Strategy for Education Technology in Northern Ireland (ETNI), which explicitly commits the education service to ensuring that full advantage is taken of the educational benefits of both current and future developments in ICT.

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Project	Background	Further information
Classroom 2000	<p>The Classroom 2000 Project is part of a coordinated strategy to provide the infrastructure, software and services needed to prepare young people for a society in which technology will be pervasive.</p> <p>Classroom 2000 aims to provide a range of managed computer services to every primary, post-primary and special school in NI at no cost to their delegated budgets.</p> <p>Through the service, all schools will be provided with networked computers, together with educational software plus connection to a wide range of on-line services. These will be provided as an integrated and supported package; installed, maintained and upgraded by specialist providers.</p> <p>Rollout is well under way to the primary school sector and it is currently expected that the complete service will be in place by December 2003 and will provide 40,000 Internet ready computers to 350,000 and 20,000 teachers in Northern Ireland schools.</p> <p>The regional software licensing approach agreed with suppliers' means that the Classroom 2000 curricular software is also available for use on public library systems, further addressing the issue of wider accessibility.</p>	<p>For further information contact James Murdock on 028 9127 9400 or email james.murdock@deni.gov.uk</p>

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)

DETI and its Agencies provide several key e-business services in Northern Ireland. These include the e-Solutions Centre, the UK Online for Business Regional Office, multi-media training and 'Web Winners', a series of five brochures relating to businesses developing and using websites.

The main projects addressing the 'Digital Divide' issue (in respect of citizens or citizen groups) are being taken forward under the 'Leapfrog' banner and include:

Project	Background	Further information
Community	This project aims to encourage business in supporting the general community's use of information and communication technologies and to encourage businesses to help bridge the 'Digital Divide'.	For further information contact Kieran Harding on 028 9041 0410 or email kieran.harding@bitc.org.uk .
countryserve.com	This is a portal type project which aims to provide "one stop shop" access to a leading range of information, education, professional and commercial services for farming and rural communities.	For further information contact Glenn Speer on 028 9037 0222 or email gspeer@ufuhq.com .
North West learndirect	Based at the Central Library, Londonderry, the project aims to provide a range of learning opportunities for people in the North West including a public access point to learndirect services and products.	For further information contact Galvin Dobson on 028 7127 6188 or email galvin.dobson@nwifhe.ac.uk .

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Project	Background	Further information
Virtual Software Development Company	Disadvantaged people are provided with a training and work-based simulated environment to allow them to make the most of their potential by providing flexible training/work placement and online/direct support from a network of large IT providers throughout Ireland and the UK.	For further information contact Hugo Sweeney on 028 8224 9494 or email tyrone.donegal@virgin.net .
Active Relevant Content	This project aims to increase the connectivity of voluntary sector organisations and promote fully, joined up information solutions for areas where there is a risk that the community will be left behind by the ICT revolution.	For further information contact Frank Tipping at 028 9096 1111 or email frank.tipping@burc.org .
Omagh Knowledge Works	Offers an opportunity for all citizens to experience the opportunities afforded by new information age technologies through a dedicated ICT facility for the Omagh community.	For further information contact Damien Wilson on 028 7137 9106 or email dwilson@westernconnect.com .
The Online Learning Centre	Plans to develop an online learning centre in Newry along with a network of learning access points throughout the Newry & Mourne region targeted at enhancing the IT skill base of individuals and the utilisation of IT by SMEs.	For further information contact Brian Doran on 028 3025 9655 or email doranb@nkifhe.ac.uk .

Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)

In June 1999 the then Department of Education (Northern Ireland) published its ICT strategy, 'ICT for All - The Way Forward in the Further Education Sector' as the basis for consultation with the FE sector. The central theme of the strategy is the need to ensure that all FE students will be equipped to meet the career and lifestyle demands of the future brought about by the technological revolution.

The recent Comprehensive Spending Review has provided significant resources - some £10 Million over the 3 years from 1999 - to take the strategy forward within the FE sector.

The implementation phase of the ICT Strategy for the FE sector has seen significant developments recently across four key areas: -

Infrastructure – providing up to date computers with Internet access to students and staff. Colleges have signed up to a ratio of 1 networked PC to 5 full-time equivalent students by September 2002;

Staff Development – all full-time lecturers to undertake appropriate ICT qualifications at Level 2 by September 2002 with further progression routes available;

Curriculum development – the membership of the FE National Consortium (FENC) for all 17 colleges has been part funded by DEL for the forthcoming academic year. Northern Ireland access to £5.5m of ICT based materials currently under development for the National Learning Network has also been agreed;

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Networking – all FE colleges have been connected to the joint academic network (JANET). This high bandwidth network encompasses both FE and Higher Education institutions and will allow for collaboration and exchange within and between the two sectors. A Tertiary Education Sector Consortium is considering options for the establishment of a Northern Ireland Metropolitan Area Network (NI MAN). A consultancy exercise is currently under way using financial support from the Department and a feasibility report is expected in the autumn.

Although access is only available via Further Education Colleges and not directly to the general public it can be used in a variety of ways. For example all colleges offer extensive ICT provision for local community groups and several provide sponsored connections to the JANET for open learning.

Details of specific initiatives are given in the table below.

Project	Background	Further information
Learndirect	<p>learndirect, the brand name of the flagship Lifelong Learning Initiative University for Industry, aims to harness the power of ICT to provide an on-line learning experience for all who wish to avail of it. Ufi Ltd, the educational charity set up to drive the initiative across the UK on behalf of the Department for Education & Skills has invested heavily in commissioning on-line learning materials. Access to these materials and the managed learning environment for learndirect Learners – both individuals and business based, necessitated major investment in server technology and Ufi has created its own virtual ISP (Internet Service Provision) for learners.</p>	<p>32 locations throughout Northern Ireland</p> <p>Information available from Lifelong Learning & Qualifications Unit, Department for Employment & Learning (Tel: 028 90257411)</p>

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Project	Background	Further information
The introduction of Foundation Degrees into Northern Ireland	Foundation Degrees are a brand new vocational-academic qualification covering a range of ICT subjects including Multimedia, Telecommunications, Computer Networking, Computer Technologies and Software Development / Engineering disciplines.	<p>The University of Ulster has developed 6 pilots with Newry & Kilkeel Institute, East Antrim Institute, North West Institute, the Belfast Institute, North East Institute and Upper Bann Institute.</p> <p>Queens University Belfast has developed 2 pilots with Omagh FE College (web technology) and North Down & Ards Institute (creative multi-media)</p>
The development of an institutional ODL support and access infrastructure	Establishes infrastructure to support an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) initiative and provides students and staff with a complete learning environment with personalised on-line access to course material, learning resources, student support programmes and electronic communication tools.	The University of Ulster project offers a network of computers located at a number of ODL Centres including the university's existing 4 campuses and 12 regional ODL Centres based in FE colleges and Health Trusts.
Elmwood Learning and Teaching Centre	This Queens University project proposes the construction of a new technology based centre to serve the Health and Physical Science Department. The new centre will promote greater open access learning, greater integration of ICT into courses and the availability of course materials on-line.	

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Project	Background	Further information
NI Communications and Information Technology in University of Ulster – Basic IT Skills Project	The Basic IT Skills Project is a university-wide initiative to develop Information Technology skills within the student community	
Queens University – Staff, Student and Management Development in C&IT Use	Provides a Training & Assessment Centre, a Support Environment, a Learning Resource Centre for academic staff and Student On-line Learning and Resources Network including the development of a student Virtual Learning environment.	Further information on ICT in the Higher Education Sector can be obtained from Higher Education Branch, Department for Employment and Learning (Tel: 028 9025 7754).

Other Initiatives

In January 2001 the Employment Service of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in Northern Ireland launched an Internet site (**JobCentre Online**) to publish all job vacancies notified to it by employers. The information is automatically updated every 15 minutes thereby ensuring that vacancy information on the site is always current.

At the same time, the provision of vacancy information through touch screen kiosks was also piloted in 6 JobCentre locations.

Both of these projects have proven to be very popular with the Department's customers, and plans to extend the services are under way. JobCentre Online is being enhanced to become a more interactive Internet site, and there are plans to roll-out kiosk technology to all 35 Job Centres in Northern Ireland.

The Electronic Libraries for Northern Ireland (ELFNI) Project will introduce significant business change into the public library services in Northern Ireland, by introducing new electronic systems and services and by rationalising functions across the five Education and Library Boards. It will enable libraries to function as community information hubs, to open up new ways of lifelong learning using the new technologies and ensure that those from the most socially disadvantaged backgrounds do not lose out in the Information Age.

The ELFNI project is also the vehicle for implementing the "People's Network" in Northern Ireland libraries, providing public Internet access and a range of electronic information services to all library users.

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To the end of June 2002, 23 public libraries have gone on line, providing 421 public access terminals. All public libraries should be online by the end of November 2002, providing free access to the Internet for all library users through 1153 public access terminals.

Annex 4

Figures - graphical representation of
reference data

Figure 1

Access to ICT in Northern Ireland by ICT type

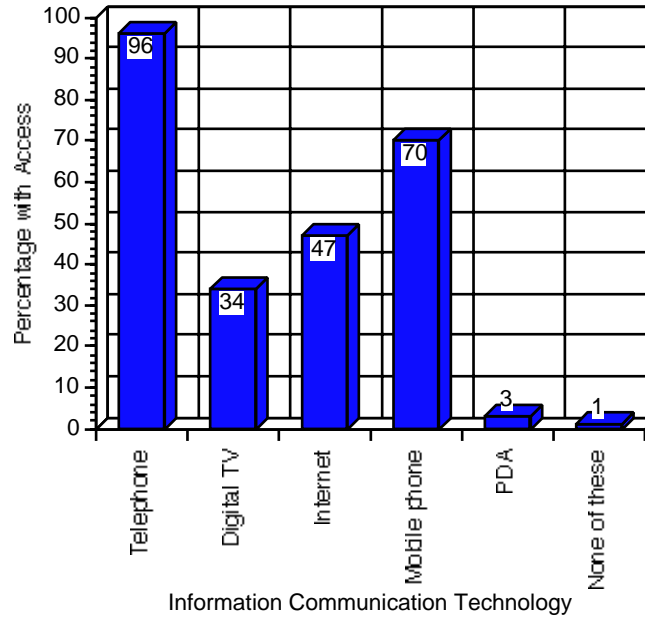
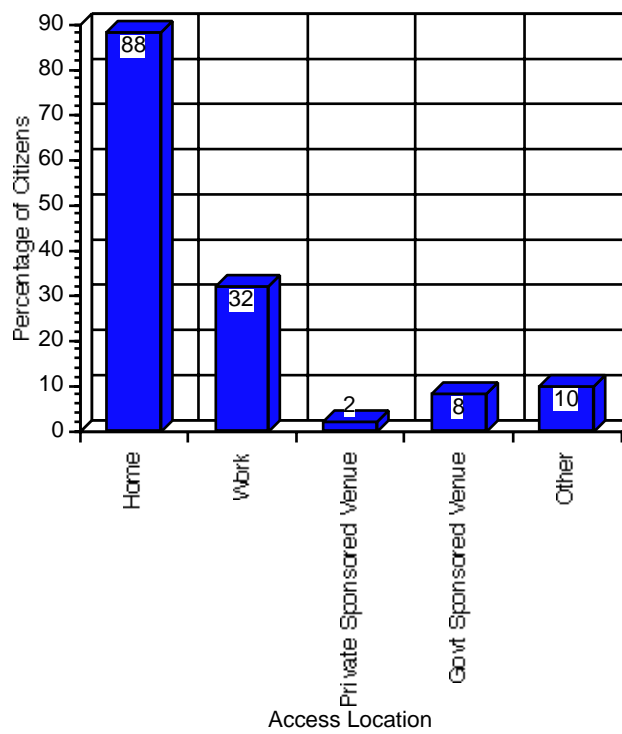


Figure 2

Internet Access by Source



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Figure 3
Access to ICT

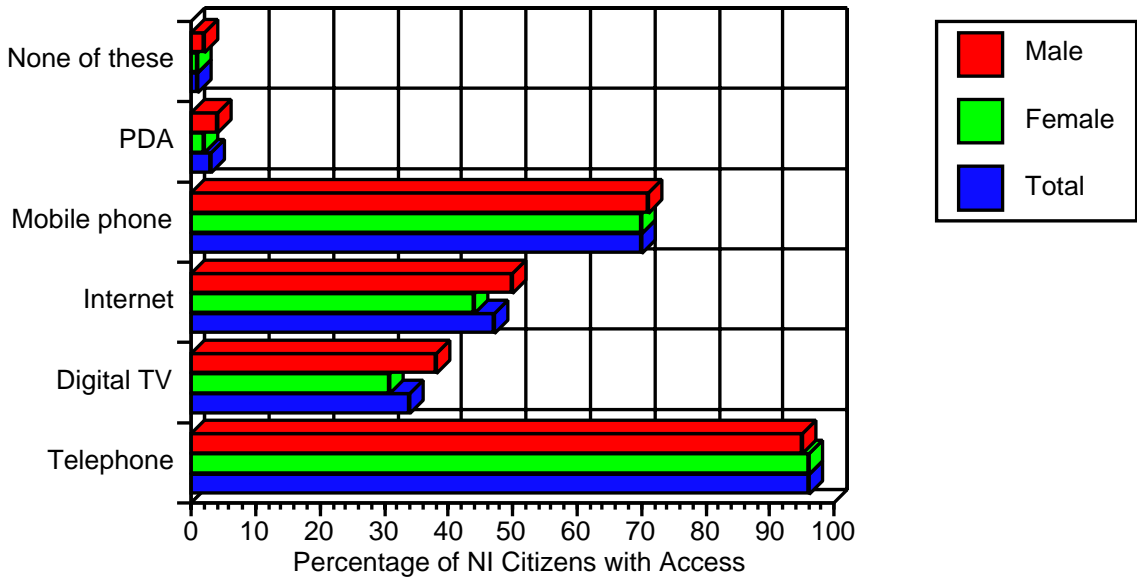


Figure 4
Access to ICT by Age Group

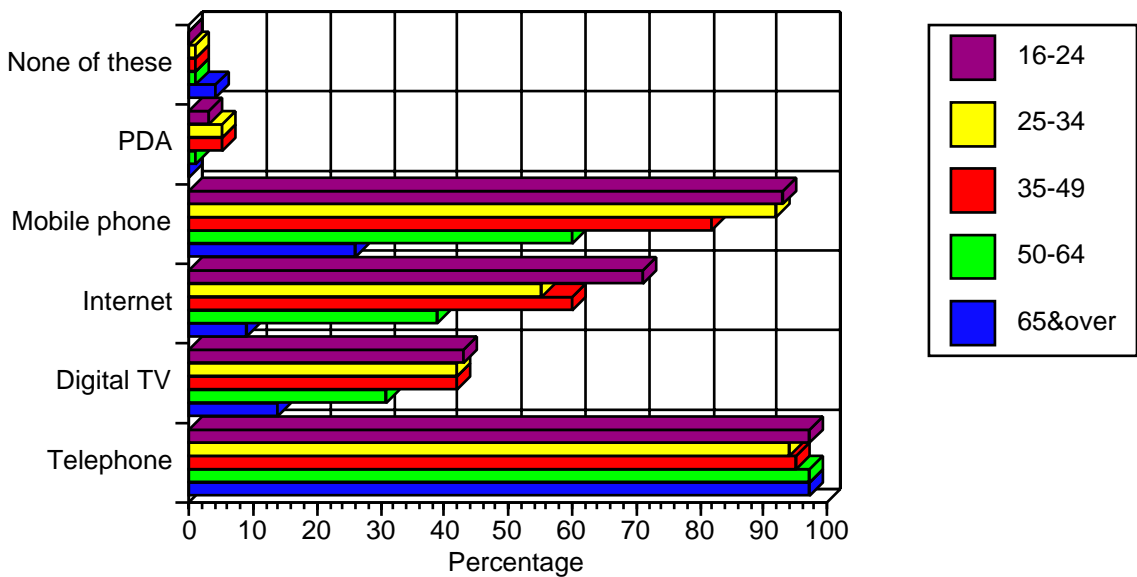


Figure 5
Access to ICT by Disability Status

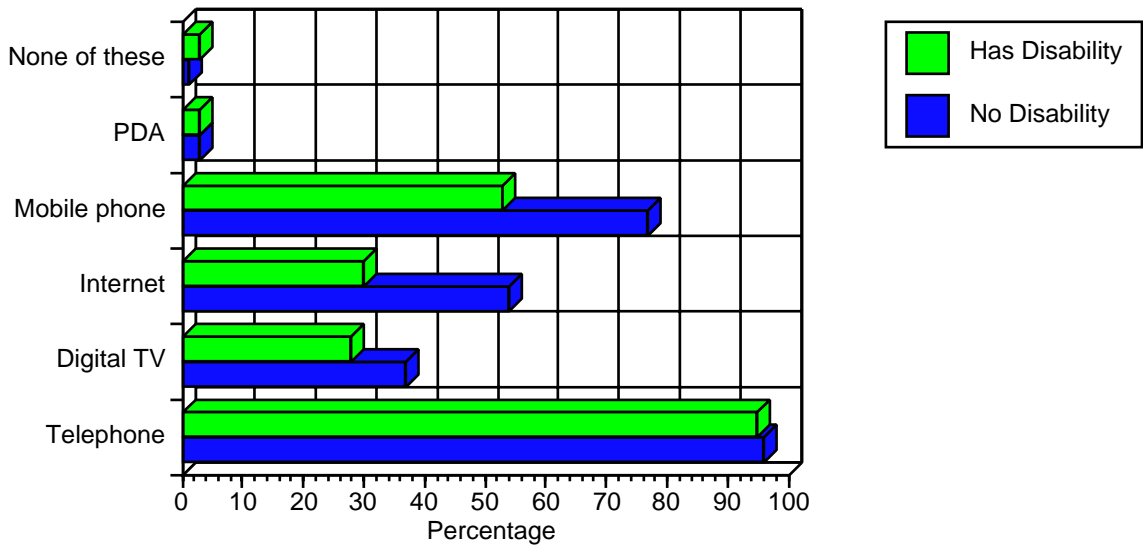
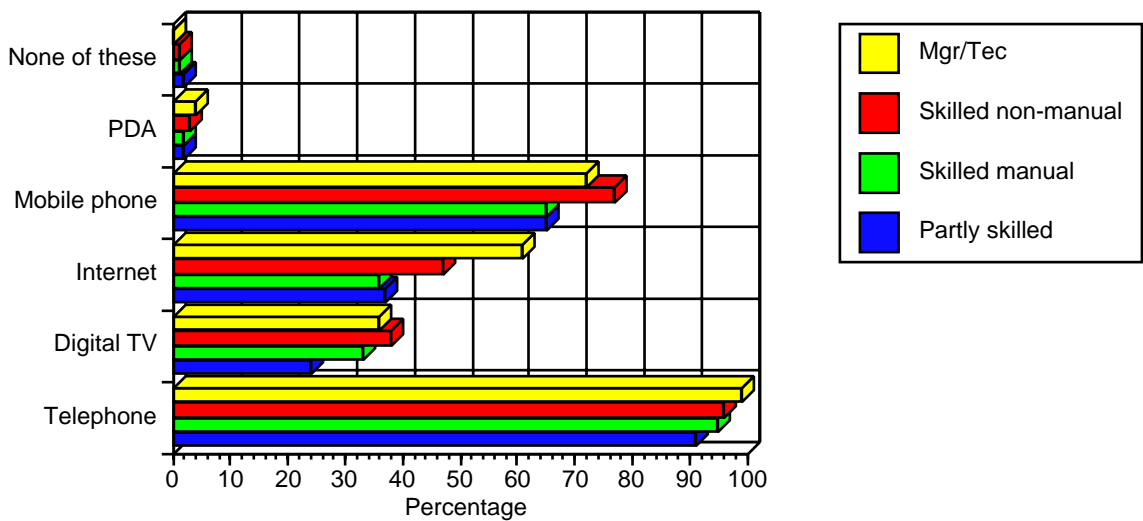


Figure 6
Access to ICT by Socio Economic group



Annex 4

Figure 7
Access by Rural/Urban Location

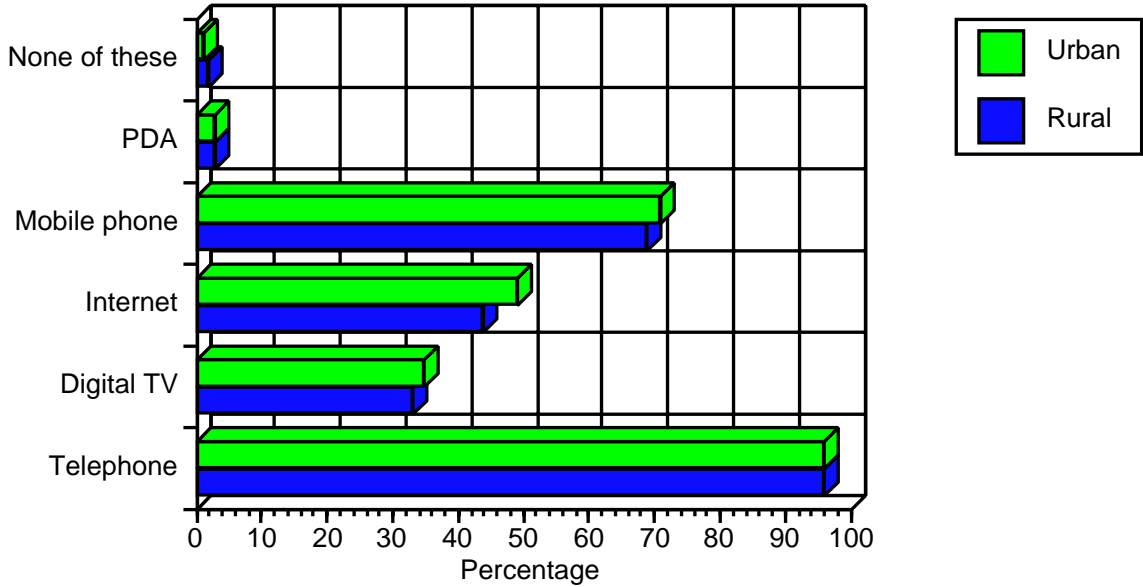


Figure 8
Obstacles to Internet Access by Age

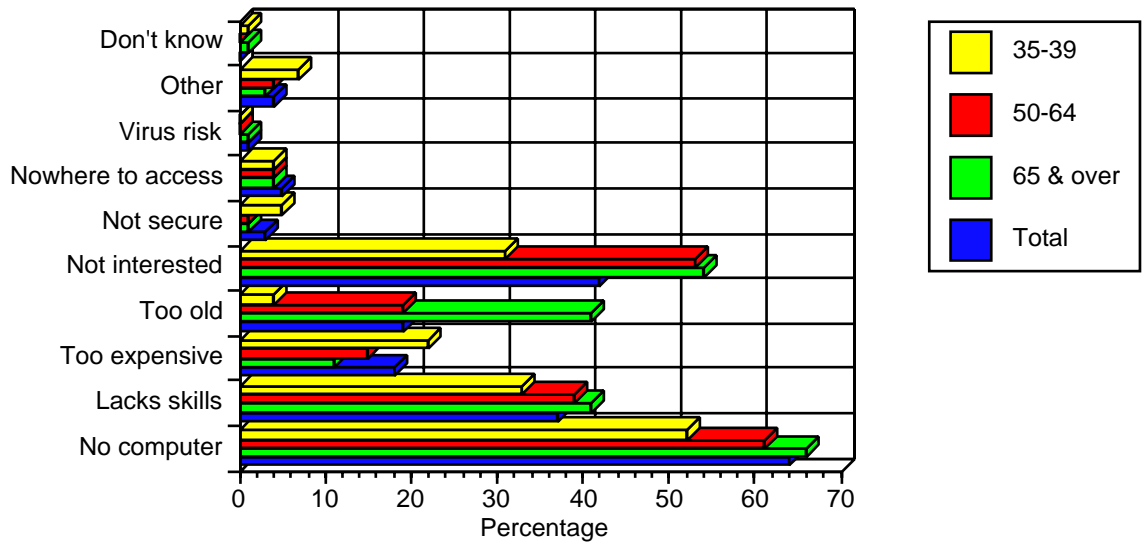


Figure 9
Obstacles to Internet Access by Socio-Economic Group

