



19th December 2005

CERES Response to Digital Inclusion Consultation Policy Review

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Digital Inclusion Policy. Our general response is that this is a positive step forward in addressing the 'digital divide' that currently exists in Scotland. The Government's recognition of the impact of digital exclusion on those who lack either the understanding of the benefits or the resources to adopt Information Technology is a welcome move.

We do, however, wish to make the following observations and comments that we hope will be helpful as the policy is developed.

Marketing/Branding

CERES is an education organisation. With regards the use of branding, this should be symbolic so is easily recognisable without recourse to the ability to read in English. Public Internet Access Points should be sited where they are fully accessible to those with mobility issues and must be in venues that members of minority groups feel confident and comfortable to visit. This is the case particularly for women and those from minority ethnic communities who should feel comfortable and safe when they visit Access Points, free from harassment or discrimination. Many people may have had negative experiences in the past based on their gender, age, race, disability, sexual orientation, faith and beliefs (particularly if these differences are visible) that now mitigate against using public facilities in venues without very positive atmosphere and ethos signals being sent in advance.

Support/Accessibility

We do not see ICT as a subject but as a tool to achieve good outcomes in other subject or life areas which are then simplified, speeded up or made possible through the use of ICT.

In a diverse society such as Scotland, people will have many reasons for initially being attracted to learn to use ICT in their daily lives. It is important to recognise these reasons and highlight the value to individuals and communities of accessing the activities that ICT contributes to these reasons. It is not classes that should be marketed but *outcomes* for participating in classes that should be stressed. Computer technology has moved on rapidly in recent years. ICT activities have gone far beyond word processing as a possible introductory activity and in fact we believe that word processing is a long way down most peoples priorities in learning to use a computer. E-mail and VOIP services for a variety of reasons are uppermost in contemporary usage.

For example:

- to stay in touch with distant friends and relatives
- digital photography and image processing to record families for posterity to pass on electronically to other family members
- computer generated music as a creative activity for all ages
- shopping on the Internet for the elderly and housebound

are some activities that can and will attract people to learn to use ICT.

The standard business applications of word processor, database and spreadsheet while still useful are not the reasons that will attract the non-user to learn in the first instance. The widely promoted ECDL does not achieve our vision as it is focused on office applications and on the operator's inputs to specific applications rather than on the outcomes through learning to use each application. Additionally it is very platform and application specific which is not helpful in the ICT world where there exists a variety of platforms and a multitude of applications, it also carries no academic currency should a learner wish to progress into other areas of learning which require either a knowledge of or a qualification in an ICT subject. We believe that this type of approach should be avoided.

We believe that the design of any courses should reflect this. Clearly there is a need to maintain minimum standards for training and it is probably advantageous if the public can identify providers who meet minimum standards. These should be based on the design and delivery of courses and not the nature of the organisation otherwise some organisations (particularly in the voluntary sector) might be excluded who are actually well placed to offer courses to minority, under-represented or disadvantaged groups. This applies particularly to organisations who are already working with and achieved effective participation with these communities.

We believe that courses should be modular with a core curriculum as an entry point with progression routes to areas that interest individuals. Courses should not always be certificated, the fear of assessment which can lead to failure can be off-putting to those who may have had negative experiences of education in the past. Such individuals might assume that they would simply fail again even though contemporary adult education methods are radically different to school learning. A well designed set of short modular courses could have clearly identified progression routes and exit points for those that wish to progress onto certificated provision for employment or educational reasons. Core elements from the SQA PC Passport might offer a useful starting point for course design (see comments above on ECDL) as it could then offer a smooth progression into certificated provision for those who require or desire it. This implies a need for a national resource bank of suitable materials to ensure consistency along with a database of good practice examples and methodologies. Standardised training materials for tutors should also be included on such a database. The database should be publicly available electronically.

Delivery is as important as content. As already noted, the choice of venue is important to ensure that those targeted are comfortable and confident to attend and feel secure, welcome and valued while there.

Communities

We believe that English should be the medium of instruction as it is the common language for all in Scotland. However, the use of some translated materials for common terms and the use of translators in classes or preferably the use of bi/multilingual tutors who can explain terms and ideas in the language of students would be advantageous. The use of single sex classes is also desirable in order not to exclude some women either for cultural/religious reasons or simply confidence. It is important to ensure that tutors are from a variety of backgrounds and having the ability to speak a community or other language (such as BSL) should be at a desirable quality within the person specification. In all cases there should be at least basic training in anti-discrimination training covering the key equality strands of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith/belief and disability. We believe that the quality assurance process should reflect the tutor's skills in these as well as their technical knowledge and teaching experience. CERES is happy to provide a standards guide for selecting anti-discriminatory trainers.

The use of crèche facilities is also an important addition if parents/carers (particularly women) are to be attracted. This should not necessarily be seen as a daytime element of provision but also be required for twilight and evening classes as well. This recognises that some sections of society have different patterns of living and working and, as a consequence, many people have childcare and other caring commitments in the evenings.

We believe that all providers should have mechanisms in place that allow both students and tutors access to support, advice and intervention quickly and easily to address issues relating to inclusion and to resolve difficulties that may arise. These should be explicit and clear to all at the onset of a course. This should cover both technical areas and more importantly the social aspects of classes which are geared to inclusion, diversity and difference. This relates to organisational structure and the experience, knowledge and training of key staff in diversity issues and anti-discriminatory practice. This is an area that CERES has extensive experience in and would be happy to advise and assist in.

Public Service Delivery

We see a role for local authorities in the development of digital inclusion. They have extensive facilities and equipment that often lie unused in the evenings and weekends. Community Based Adult Learning Teams and more formal evening/day class provision teams have experience in the design, delivery and marketing to disadvantaged groups. They also have extensive experience in networking and partnership working. In Scotland, where minority ethnic learners are dispersed (other than in some central belt cities), a range of delivery points should be considered. A local geographical class would attract minority ethnic individuals confident to join into a class where they maybe the only minority ethnic learner. However for minority ethnic learners who are less confident in speaking English or may benefit from a more ethnically diverse class, a class organised for a wider geographical area may ensure a reasonable uptake from the targeted group provided the classes are within appropriate venues with good transport links.

Local authorities also have links with the voluntary sector which can be used here for both funding and providing access to expertise and training where required. Local authorities are also well placed to ensure quality standards

are maintained in community based learning provision and can act as a hub for partnerships.

The Scottish Executive should retain an overall view of standards, materials and funding. Executive funded marketing would play a large part in supporting the uptake of new initiatives.

Consideration should also be given to making substantial funding available to partnerships set up to deliver Digital Inclusion training and access, this could be similar to the Literacies funding that has taken place over the last few years and would encourage partnerships to be developed between local authorities and the voluntary sector to develop and deliver provision. Significant initial work would however be required to identify specific target groups and set targets for participation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we do not believe that those who are currently 'Digitally Excluded' would desire to change this status simply to participate in e-government. There is a requirement to identify other more immediately interesting and useful ICT activities to act as the lure and accessing e-government services can be a spin-off once confidence and knowledge have increased.

CERES is happy to amplify any of these comments and to assist in the development of this policy in any way it can.

Yours sincerely,

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CERES
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