立法會
Legislative Council

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**Legislative Council
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting**

**Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 May 2001, at 2:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Hon SIN Chung-kai (Chairman)
Hon Howard YOUNG, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Kenneth TING Woo-shou, JP
Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP

Members absent : Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, SBS, JP

**Public officers
   attending** : Mrs Carrie YAU
Secretary for Information Technology and Broadcasting

Mr Alan SIU
Deputy Secretary for Information Technology and Broadcasting

Mr Rex CHANG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Information Technology and Broadcasting

Mr NG Hon-wah
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs

Ms Winnie SO
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower

Miss Ophelia CHAN
Assistant Director of Social Welfare

Mr Y K HA
Assistant Director of Telecommunications

Mr Simon YAN
Assistant Director of Information Technology Services

Mr Philip LAM
Acting Assistant Director of Home Affairs

Mr SHE Mang
Principal Inspector of Education Department

Attendance by invitation : <u>Breakthrough</u>

Mr LEUNG Wing-tai
Associate General Secretary

Mr Derek YAM
Director of Audio-Visual Centre

<u>Equal Opportunities Commission</u>

Mr Frederick TONG
Director

Mr Joseph LI
Chief Equal Opportunities Officer

<u>Hong Kong Blind Union</u>

Mr CHONG Chan-yan
President

Miss Judy FONG
Executive Secretary

<u>Hong Kong Computer Society</u>

Mr Joseph LEUNG
Director of Community Services

Hong Kong Council of Social Services

Ms Kay KU
Assistant Director (Development)

Mr John FUNG
Research & Development Officer

Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres

Miss CHAN YU
Director

Ms LAU Chuen-ho
Homemaker

Hong Kong Retinitis Pigmentosa Society

Mr TSANG Kin-ping
President

Ms LIN Cheen
Member

Hong Kong Seniors IT Advocates

Mr Lucas NG
Chairman

Mr LEUNG King-man
Director

Hong Kong Society for the Blind

Mrs Grace CHAN, JP
Director

Mr Fred LEUNG
Division Head (Rehabilitation)

Hong Kong Society for the Deaf

Mr WANG Kai-fung
Chairman of Deaf Committee

Mr KO Kam-yuen, Michael
Member of Deaf Committee

Ms Vincie LAI
Sign-language Interpreter

Innovation and Technology Association

Mr Spencer LI
President

Mr Johnny NG
Vice President

Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong

Dr TSE Tsun-him
Vice-Chairperson

Mr WU Wing-kuen
General Secretary

The Spastics Association of Hong Kong

Miss YIU Pui-ling
Trainee Representative

Ms SY Pui-lam
Physiotherapist

WebMasters (Hong Kong) Association

Mr William TANG
Chairman of Web Care Committee

Mr Martin S.J. OEI
Leader of Policy Group

Clerk in attendance : Miss Polly YEUNG
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)3

Staff in attendance : Ms Anita SIT
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)8

I   Confirmation of minutes of meeting and matters arising
        (LC Paper No. CB(1)852/00-01)

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2001 were confirmed.

II   Information paper issued since last meeting
        (LC Paper Nos. CB(1)859 and 913/00-01)

2.   Members noted that the consultation paper on the creation of class licence for terminal equipment under section 7B(2) of the Telecommunications Ordinance issued vide the above papers.

III   Date and items for discussion for next meeting

3.   Members did not propose any item for discussion for the next meeting.   The Chairman asked the Clerk to invite members to propose discussion items after the meeting and to liaise with the Administration in this regard.

IV   Issues relating to digital divide in certain sectors of the community such as the disabled, elderly and low-income groups etc.

Meeting with deputations

4.   The Chairman welcomed the deputations and invited them to present their views on issues relating to "digital divide".

Breakthrough
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1143/00-01(03)

5.   Mr LEUNG Wing-tai briefly outlined the various factors leading to the digital divide in the community and highlighted the following measures recommended by Breakthrough to tackle the problem -

        (a)   to make available to students computer facilities with Internet connections in schools outside school hours and during school holidays;

        (b)   to provide education for students and citizens on the intelligent use of search engines, research basics, networking, creation and expression of ideas through the Internet;

        (c)   to employ youngsters as short-term tutors of information technology and communication courses for the elderly and other disadvantaged groups;

(d)   to provide funding for the development of digital information and literacy on arts, humanities, culture, creativity, and critical thinking;

(e)   to provide incentives for the generation of bilingual website contents;

(f)   to initiate awards and funding for development of educational software that were entertaining and interactive; and

(g)   to educate the community on information and media ethics to foster a healthy and balanced digital development.

Equal Opportunities Commission
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1204/00-01(01))

6.   Mr Joseph LI outlined the following strategies recommended by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) for adoption by the Government to achieve "full digital inclusion" in society.   The strategies covered the following areas -

(a)   compilation of information and statistics on digital divide to identify needs and shortfalls;

(b)   detailed budgeting on information and communication technology (ICT) development with due regard to disadvantaged groups;

(c)   improving the accessibility of ICT products, websites and support network for disadvantaged groups;

(d)   ensuring accessibility of services provided through E-business and E-government for disadvantaged groups;

(e)   improving ICT awareness among disadvantaged groups through education and training; and

(f)   fostering partnership with ICT users, the private sector and non-government organizations in the formulation and implementation of ICT policies.

7.   To supplement, Mr Frederick TONG made the following points -

(a)   EOC suggested that the Government should establish an ICT resource centre or network to provide assistance and advice for disadvantaged groups in the acquisition and use of ICT products.

(b)   To facilitate monitoring, the Government should specify the financial provisions in its annual budget for ICT programmes targeted at disadvantaged groups.

(c)   The Government should facilitate as far as practicable the participation of disadvantaged groups in mainstream ICT education and training.

Hong Kong Computer Society
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1143/00-01(05))

8.   Mr Joseph LEUNG highlighted the following suggestions of the Hong Kong Computer Society to address the problem of "digital divide" -

(a)   to provide financial assistance for disadvantaged groups to purchase personal computers for use at home;

(b)   to facilitate access of disadvantaged groups to the Internet through various initiatives such as setting up more "Cyberpoints" and providing financial incentives for Internet and telecommunications service providers to offer more economical service packages for disadvantaged groups;

(c)   to extend ICT education to disadvantaged groups through various means including "on-line learning"; and

(d)   to provide more ICT literacy training for service workers of non-government organizations so as to enlarge the pool of ICT trainers.

Hong Kong Council of Social Service
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1143/00-01(06))

9.   Ms Kay KU highlighted the following recommendations of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service -

(a)   The Government should acknowledge the urgent need to narrow the digital divide and work on promoting "universal barrier-free access" to the Internet and to other ICT facilities and services.   Priority should be given to disadvantaged groups in the provision of assistance in attaining the objective.

(b)   The Government should set up a task force to tackle the "digital divide" and the task force should comprise ICT users, professional bodies, services providers, relevant non-government organizations and Government bureaux/departments.

(c)   Various programmes in the categories of infrastructure building, skill/capacity building, proper web content design should be conducted in a balanced and synchronized manner.

(d)   Indicators to measure the magnitude of "digital divide" should be drawn up in order to monitor the progress and effectiveness of these

programmes.

Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1204/00-01(02))

10.　　Miss CHAN Yu highlighted the following concerns of the Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres -

(a)　　It had been recognized by the international community that gender was a factor in determining the level of participation in ICT. The Government should take the gender factor into account in formulating ICT policies. The Women's Commission should play an active part in this regard.

(b)　　The specific needs and constraints of women of the low-income sector were overlooked by the Government and non-profit making organizations in designing and operating ICT education and training programmes.

(c)　　Most Internet service providers only accepted credit card payment for subscription of their services. Hence, many housewives who did not possess credit cards were deprived of the opportunities to subscribe for Internet services.

(d)　　Owing to the lack of the necessary knowledge and technique, women of the low-income sector could not make use of the Government's electronic services, such as those provided under the Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) Scheme.

11.　　Ms LAU Chuen-ho highlighted the difficulties faced by housewives in their attempt to obtain ICT education and training and to access ICT services. Such difficulties were related to the financial constraints, time availability and academic level of housewives. She also requested the Government to liaise with Internet service providers on the feasibility of accepting cash payment for subscription of Internet services.

Hong Kong Retinitis Pigmentosa Society
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1143/00-01(07))

12.　　Ms LIN Cheen highlighted the following views of the Hong Kong Retinitis Pigmentosa Society regarding "digital divide" -

(a)　　The Internet provided an important source of information and means of communication for the visually-impaired.

(b)　　The society appreciated the efforts of the Administration on facilitating access of the visually-impaired to government websites.

(c)   The Government should provide financial assistance for those visually-impaired who could not afford the necessary assistive computer hardware and software and sponsor ICT courses specially designed for the visually-impaired.   The Government might consider offering additional tax concessions for the disabled to encourage them to acquire ICT knowledge and skills.

(d)   The society concurred with other deputations that there was a strong demand for "Cyberpoint" facilities.

(e)   The Government should provide support for the development of Cantonese voice synthesizer software and other types of software that would assist the visually-impaired in accessing the Internet.

(f)   In issuing consultation papers and promulgating important information, the Government should be mindful of the need of the disabled and provide both written and oral versions of the documents concerned.

Hong Kong Senior IT Advocates
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1143/00-01(08))

13.   Mr Lucas NG and Mr LEUNG King-man briefly introduced the Hong Kong Senior IT Advocates (the Advocates) and highlighted the following suggestions of the organization -

(a)   The Government should establish a committee with representatives from the Government, non-governmental organizations, the information technology sector, and disadvantaged groups to formulate strategies to promote a digital inclusive society and to administer the allocation of funds for activities pursuant to the objective.

(b)   The Government should provide various types of assistance to disadvantaged groups to help raise their ICT awareness and capacity.

(c)   The Government should consider providing suitable accommodation and other resource support for the Advocates to enable more elderly people to benefit from the ICT development.

Hong Kong Society for the Blind
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1143/00-01(09))

14.   Mr Fred LEUNG and Mrs Grace CHAN expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Social Welfare Department and Information Technology and Services Department (ITSD) on organizing ICT programmes for disadvantaged groups.   They highlighted the following concerns and recommendations of the Hong Kong Society for the Blind to tackle the "digital divide" -

    (a)   When providing funds for procurement of computer systems for non-government organizations, sufficient funds should be provided for purchasing additional adaptive equipment for the visually-impaired such as screen-reading software products, braille displays and magnifying systems.

    (b)   The Government should consider providing tax rebates for the visually-impaired for purchasing necessary adaptive devices for access to the Internet.

    (c)   The Government should set up a dedicated working group within the Information Technology Services Department to tackle the problems encountered by the disabled in accessing the Internet and other ICT facilities and services.

    (d)   The Government should consider setting up additional charitable funds or make use of existing ones to sponsor research and development of Chinese adaptive devices for the disabled.

    (e)   It was important to build in adaptive applications for the visually impaired in designing websites. ITSD should play a more active role in enabling the technology transfer in this regard from overseas countries.

Hong Kong Society for the Deaf
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1233/00-01(02))

15.   <u>Mr WONG Kai-fung</u> and <u>Mr KO Kam-yuen</u> highlighted the following concerns of the Hong Kong Society for the Deaf regarding the use of ICT facilities and services by people with impaired hearing -

    (a)   Currently, the Short Messages Services (SMS) provided by various local mobile phone network operators could only be used among respective customers subscribing to the same operator's network. Although the relevant technology was available, inter-network SMS was not available to local consumers of mobile phone services.

    (b)   There was a general lack of assistive equipment for people with impaired hearing in most meeting venues of the Government and other public bodies, thus restricting the participation of people with impaired hearing in public activities.

    (c)   Provision of fax enquiry hotlines was not yet a standard practice among Government departments, non-governmental organizations and commercial organizations.

    (d)   TV broadcasters should provide Chinese subtitles for their news

programmes.

(e) In many overseas countries, TTY text phones were provided sparingly in public areas for use by people with impaired hearing. The system enabled instant two-way communication similar to voice phone systems. Hong Kong should bring in the technology and develop a Chinese-based TTY system.

Innovation and Technology Association
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1204/00-01(03))

16.   Mr Spencer LI said that the Innovation and Technology Association was dedicated to providing global information about the digital divide, establishing links to resource people and organizations that could contribute to bridge the digital divide, organizing IT training and awareness programmes and generating ideas on fund-sourcing for such programmes.   He also highlighted the following suggestions of the association to tackle the digital divide -

(a) there should be systematic and objective studies on the digital divide in the community;

(b) a long-term strategy and development programme that would provide sufficient commercial incentives should be worked out;

(c) the community should work towards universal barrier-free access to the Internet; and

(d) manpower and financial resources should be well co-ordinated and efficiently utilized to bridge the digital divide.

Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1143/00-01(10))

17.   Dr TSE Tsun-him highlighted the following concerns of Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong -

(a) Some E-Government services, such as the ESD, were not fully accessible for the disabled.

(b) The emphasis placed by the Government on providing computer facilities for the disabled at designated service centres was an ill-conceived approach as these service centres might not be frequently visited by the disabled in their daily life. Instead, the Government should focus on facilitating access of the disabled to Government electronic services and ESD kiosks as far as practicable.   One example of the latter approach was to provide an alternative keyboard version of websites and public telephones of touch-screen design.

> (c) Designing websites accessible to the blind and visually-impaired did not involve complicated programming techniques. The relevant techniques and standards should be widely promoted among non-government organizations and commercial bodies.

The Spastics Association of Hong Kong
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1204/00-01(04))

18.   On behalf of <u>Miss YIU Pui-ling</u>, <u>Ms SY Pui-lam</u> read out Miss YIU's concerns about the sources of up-to-date information on rehabilitative facilities for the disabled, and the difficulties in terms of affordability and physical mobility encountered by the disabled in acquiring ICT equipment, education and training. <u>Miss YIU</u> suggested that the Government should set up an ICT resource centre to provide one-stop ICT information and other support services for the disabled. There should also be a designated organization responsible for testing new facilities and equipment for the disabled and releasing relevant information to the disabled.

Webmasters (Hong Kong) Association
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1204/00-01(05))

19.   <u>Mr William TANG</u> and <u>Mr Martin S. J. OEI</u> stated that the Association was committed to bridging the digital divide in the community and believed that all in the community had a part to play in narrowing the divide. They then briefly outlined the problems faced by the low-income groups, people with disabilities, the elderly, new immigrants and women in sharing the benefits brought about by the Internet and made the following points -

> (a) The IT sector, in developing web production guidelines and codes, and IT corporations, in developing their products and services, should take into account the needs of the disadvantaged groups.

> (b) The Government should incorporate the "digital divide" concerns in formulating policies, and where appropriate, legislate to prohibit discriminatory practices in the provision of IT services and products.

> (c) It was necessary for the Government to sponsor research on assistive/adaptive software products for people with disabilities.

> (d) The Government should consider providing tax incentives for Internet service providers to encourage the latter to provide concessionary service packages for low-income groups.

> (e) The Webmaster would take the lead in launching the WebCare campaign (details of which were set out in the Webmaster's submission) and was willing to participate in any task force to be set up by the Government for tackling digital divide.

Hong Kong Blind Union
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1143/00-01(04))

20.   Mr CHONG Chan-yau presented the suggestions of the Hong Kong Blind Union and highlighted the initiatives which should be undertaken by the Government to address the problem of digital divide -

(a)   to formulate a comprehensive strategy to achieve barrier-free access to the Internet for the entire community;

(b)   to include relevant requirements in the procurement contracts for Government electronic services;

(c)   to set up funds and provide resources for development of software products, in particular Chinese software products for the disabled; and

(d)   to provide financial support for the blind and visually impaired for setting up a personal computer (PC) workstation at home.

21.   Mr CHONG also stressed the importance of the commercial sector in adopting barrier-free standards in website design.

22.   The Chairman thanked the deputations for their views and suggestions on tackling the digital divide in the community.   He informed the meeting that being the representative of the IT sector in the Legislative Council, he had prepared a paper entitled "Bridging the Digital Divide - A vision for a digital inclusive society", which was tabled at the meeting.   (The paper was issued vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1233/00-01(01) after the meeting.)

Discussion with deputations

23.   Referring to the submission of the Hong Kong Retinitis Pigmentosa Society (HKRPS), Mr Howard YOUNG enquired whether it would be more economical and practical to provide low vision users with assistive devices to facilitate access to websites than to require webmasters to incorporate special features in designing websites for low vision users.

24.   In reply, Mr TSANG Kin-ping and Ms LIN Cheen of HKRPS advised that generally speaking, low vision users could access visual information on websites with the provision of screen enlarging and/or screen reading applications.   These tools had magnifying and background inverting functions but might not be fully compatible with normal computer hardware and the features of individual websites.   On the other hand, the access problem for low vision users could be significantly alleviated by means of suitable visual elements such as colour contrast and font size in designing websites.   They added that HKRPS recognized the need to strike a balance between facilitating access by low vision users and other website design considerations.   HKRPS would continue to discuss with ITSD to identify

economical and practical ways to facilitate web access of low vision users.

25.   Mrs Grace CHAN of the Hong Kong Society for the Blind (HKSB) said that as the extent of visual problem for low vision users varied considerably, it might not be possible to provide a single design which would cater for all different needs.   Instead, HKSB considered it more practical to provide low vision users with assistive devices for browsing websites.   An alternative solution was to provide web pages specially designed for the visually impaired on individual websites.   Mrs CHAN added that it would be helpful for Hong Kong to draw on the experience of some overseas organizations which were specialized in designing web pages for the visually impaired.

26.   In this connection, Dr TSE Chun-him of the Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong informed the meeting that the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), an international organization developing interoperable web technologies, had developed web content accessibility guidelines.   ITSD had also developed internal guidelines for use within the Government based on the W3C guidelines.   He therefore suggested that ITSD and EOC should take the lead to promote the awareness and wide adoption of these established guidelines among non-government organizations.

27.   Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung enquired about the suggestion made by the Hong Kong Council of Social Services (HKCSS) of running a training coupon programme for disadvantaged groups to acquire suitable computer training.   Ms Kay KU and Mr John FUNG of HKCSS explained that the key concept was to provide greater flexibility and a wider choice of training programmes for disadvantaged groups. Individuals of disadvantaged groups would receive training coupons issued by the Government or a recognized public body for attending training courses available in the market.   They nevertheless added that the implementation details for such a programme would need to be worked out.

28.   Mr Kenneth TING expressed appreciation for the enthusiasm and efforts made by the deputations in narrowing the digital divide.   He enquired about the target membership size and resource requirements of the Hong Kong Senior IT Advocates (the Advocates).   In reply, Mr Lucas NG of the Advocates said that currently, the Advocates had about 600 members and it was anticipated that by the end of 2001, the membership size would increase to 2 000.   He remarked that the work of the Advocates was a demonstration of the successful promotion of IT among the elderly through mutual assistance and he urged the Government to consider providing greater support for the Advocates, including its accommodation needs.

Meeting with the Administration

29.   The Secretary for Information Technology and Broadcasting (SITB) also thanked the deputations for presenting their views and suggestions on the subject of digital divide.   She explained that in order to address the question of digital divide, the Government had formulated relevant policies and implemented measures in collaboration with concerned groups and organizations.   At the Chairman's request,

SITB agreed to provide her speaking note outlining the said policies and measures after the meeting for uploading onto the Legislative Council's website.

(*Post-meeting note*: The speaking note has been issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1286/00-01(01) and uploaded onto LegCo's website.)

30.   At the Chairman's invitation, SITB outlined the Administration's initial response to the deputations' views.   The salient points are as follows -

(a)   The Administration noted a majority view among deputations that there was a need to improve the availability of computer facilities with Internet connection for disadvantaged groups.   The Administration would consider the suggestions of enhancing the provision of computer facilities for free use by the public at cyberpoints and examine whether some form of financial assistance should be provided to those who could not afford to set up a PC workstation at home.

(b)   The Administration shared some deputations' view that bridging the digital divide required concerted efforts of different sectors of the community and the Administration would identify ways to make efficient use of limited resources to cater for the needs of different groups.   The Administration would continue to collaborate with concerned organizations and groups to run/sponsor ICT awareness and knowledge programmes for different sectors of the community.

(c)   In tackling the problem of digital divide, the needs of some community groups might best be addressed through subvented bodies and voluntary agencies which had been providing services for these groups and thus were able to understand their needs best.   Promotion of ICT awareness and application skills among some community groups with similar demographic characteristics such the senior citizens, the youngsters and housewives, could be effectively implemented through mutual assistance within and among these groups.

(d)   The suggestions of providing tax rebates and tax concessions would require careful examination as they would have implications on Hong Kong's taxation policy and system.

(e)   The Administration would welcome further suggestions and information on specific measures, in particular those relating to technologies and standards developed in overseas countries.   The Administration would continue to keep abreast of these developments.   It would also follow up concerns about the provision of fax enquiry hotlines by Government departments and Chinese subtitles for television programmes.

Admin

(f)   Regarding suggestions on the institutional arrangements to co-ordinate the work on tackling digital divide, the Administration took the

preliminary view that instead of setting up a separate framework which might entail considerable administrative work and redtapes, a more effective approach might be to make the best use of the existing institutional framework and focus efforts on practical work.   The Social Welfare Department had recently set up a Joint Committee on Information Technology for the Welfare Sector, and the Information Infrastructure Advisory Committee was a committee set up under the Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau (ITBB) to advise on Government ICT policies and strategies.   Moreover, individual departments had set up their own working group/task force for programmes under their purview.

31.   Mr LAW Chi-kwong referred to the problem of inter-network Short Messages Services not being provided by local mobile phone network operators and opined that the Administration should address this interconnectivity issue of the telecommunications sector.   SITB agreed to follow up and provide a written reply after the meeting.

Admin   32.   The Assistant Director of Social Welfare informed the meeting that the Lotteries Fund had recently decided to allocate funds to increase the provision of computer facilities with assistive devices (where appropriate) at elderly centres and centres for the disabled.

33.   Pointing out that digital divide was a broad issue straddling a number of policy areas, Mr LAW Chi-kwong enquired whether ITBB was the policy bureau responsible for overseeing the formulation of policies and implementation of measures to tackle the issue.   He also enquired about the mechanism for collation and dissemination of statistical information on digital divide.   In response, SITB confirmed that ITBB was responsible for the overall co-ordination of policies and strategies to tackle digital divide.   However, at the implementation level, individual Government departments, which had direct contact with the respective community groups served by them, would be responsible for implementing measures targeted at different community groups.   As regards collection of statistical information on digital divide, ITBB was working closely with the Census and Statistics Department in this regard.

34.   The Chairman said that this meeting served to trigger community-wide discussion on issues relating to digital divide and the subject would likely be further examined.   He thanked the Administration for its preliminary response to deputation views.   As a number of issues required further examination and follow-up actions, he requested and SITB agreed to provide a detailed response to deputations' views for further consideration by the Panel in around July 2001.

Admin

35.   There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:30 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat
29 June 2001