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17 October 2003

Clerk to Panel on
Information Technology and Broadcasting
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road, Central
Hong Kong
(Ms Debbie YAU)

Dear Ms Yau,

Meeting on 10 November 2003

Building a digitally inclusive information society and related issues

The Equal Opportunities Commission will not send representatives to attend the captioned meeting.

The Commission fully supports the building of a digitally inclusive information society. Our views on full digital inclusion, as stated in our previous submission to the Panel (CB(1)1204/00-01(01)), remain valid. We recommend that strategies to achieve full digital inclusion should tackle the root causes of digital divide including the socio-economic factors and the technical aspects.

Yours sincerely

(LI Siu Kwai)
for Chairman

Equal Opportunities Commission

平等機會委員會
呈交與
立法會資訊科技及廣播事務委員會
意見書
2001年5月14日

前言

1. 平等機會委員會（下稱「委員會」）於2001年3月12日向資訊科技及廣播事務委員會呈交一份意見書，指出資訊科技為殘疾人士帶來的好處和存在的障礙，同時亦向政府提出拉近數碼隔閡的建議。委員會重申，這些意見和建議與今日所討論的問題息息相關。

2. 資訊科技是達致經濟、社會與文化發展的有效工具，弱勢群體利用資訊科技獲取知識，從而提升本身的能力。委員會在本意見書內建議政府應制定策略，促使香港社會邁向「數碼兼容」(Digital Inclusion)。要定出這樣的策略，宜從根本入手，處理造成數碼隔閡的社經因素和技術問題。

社經地位與數碼隔閡

3. 美國最近有一份關於資訊科技差距的報告指出，弱勢的社經地位（即教育程度和收入較低），是引致低互聯網使用率的因素¹。在香港，政府統計處的統計數字也反映出類似的情況。例如，個人電腦及互聯網在高收入家庭中的普及程度較高；而使用個人電腦和互聯網服務的，亦以有大專教育程度的較為普遍²。

¹ Smolenski, M. (2000) *The Digital Divide and American Society: A Report on the Digital Divide and its Social And Economic Implication for our Nation and its Citizens*. USA: Gartner.

² 政府統計處 (2000年11月) 主題性住戶統計調查第二號報告書 – 資訊科技的使用情況和普及程度。

4. 由於所身處的社經地位，婦女和殘疾人士較容易在使用資訊科技方面處於不利位置。因此，政府任何資訊科技的策略，都應以他們為對象，使他們不致在數碼社會的發展過程中被邊緣化。在政府最近發表的《2001年數碼 21 資訊科技策略》中，政府認定加強香港社群掌握數碼科技的能力，是整體策略的主要範疇之一。委員會對此表示歡迎，並期望見到這項工作的落實，能惠及弱勢群體。

技術的通用性與數碼隔閡

5. 資訊科技產品的設計，無論是硬件或軟件方面，都會影響殘疾人士參與數碼世界的程度。政府作為服務提供者和規管者，應制定政策以確保這些產品和相關服務的設計，可讓殘疾人士使用的。

6. 具體方面，委員會希望提出幾項行動範疇，來確保達致「數碼兼容」。

統計資料

7. 為弱勢群體制定政策的過程中，必需要有統計資料去評估需要和現有服務的不足。委員會建議政府，特別收集有關目前婦女和殘疾人士使用資訊科技的現況的統計數據。為此，政府統計處應擴大上述有關資訊科技使用的調查範圍。

政府財政預算

8. 在 2001/02 年度財政預算案中，資訊科技發展被視為優先項目之一。然而其中並無詳細資料交代如何在資源的分配上，讓弱勢群體得以納入資訊科技的發展中³。

³ 例如，2001-02 財政年度「社區資訊科技」計劃的預算，由上財政年度的 3,100 萬元減至 2,860 萬元，減少 7.7%。但無資料顯示政府如何從其他方面投入資源以加強社區的參與。

9. 政府在制定資訊科技工作的財政預算時，必須研究有關的工作項目可能為殘疾人士和婦女帶來的影響和益處。

個人電腦及互聯網的普及程度

10. 與資訊科技有關的公共政策應務使市民能在家裏、在學校、在工作或在社區內使用個人電腦和互聯網。政府在《2000年施政報告》中承諾撥出2億元予中學購買手提電腦，用來借出給學生使用。這種做法可以幫助一些因經濟緣故而未能使用科技的學生。

11. 政府已為殘疾人士在幾間復康中心和學校設立數碼站。是項為社區提供接觸資訊科技的渠道的做法，應擴展至婦女中心以及其他殘疾人士使用的中心。

12. 為確保資訊科技產品的設計適合殘疾人士使用，政府須採取措施，以鼓勵研究和開發新的、價格合宜的輔助科技。與此同時，政府應訂定標準，確保網頁的設計，符合不同人士的需要。

13. 政府應為殘疾人士及婦女設立方便的支援網絡，為他們提供在應用資訊科技時所需要的培訓和參考意見。為此，委員會建議由政府設立資訊科技資源中心或資訊網絡，為殘疾人士在使用輔助科技方面，以及需要有其他方面協助（如技術上及/或軟件應用問題上）的人士，提供資料和意見。

電子商業與電子政府

14. 政府已表明要在香港創造一個有利電子商業的環境。順理成章，它需要確保社會各界的參與，並因而得益。

15. 網上購物在電子商業中已日漸普及。政府也計劃在2001年內開始透過「公共服務電子化計劃」在網上銷售政府刊物。這些電子交易一般需要以電子方式（通常是信用卡帳戶）付款。政

府需要考慮在過程中，如何方便低收入或無收入人士（如家庭主婦）選擇，提供不同的付款方式。

16. 政府應確保在資訊科技方面所購用的設施和服務⁴，是殘疾人士可以使用的。「公共服務電子化計劃」是以電子方式向社區提供公共服務。不過，正如不少殘疾人士團體所指出，該計劃自 2000 年 12 月啓用以來，仍有不少障礙令殘疾人士未能使用。這是一個典型例子，顯示政府在發展有關計劃時，未在政策制定的過程中，把弱勢群體的需要作充分的考慮。

態度與認知訓練

17. 培養對資訊科技發展的正面態度和認識它的重要性，是達到「數碼兼容」的主要元素。根據上述政府統計處的調查，香港市民大部份都體會到資訊科技在日常生活與經濟發展中所扮演的重要角色。不過至於市民是否已準備好開始接受任何訓練計劃，以及他們有否資源（包括財力物力、時間和支援等等）去進行有關計劃，調查就沒有提供有關資料。

18. 學校教育對培養下一代資訊科技的技能和知識是非常重要的。現時女生在修讀與資訊科技及科學有關的學科方面，數目仍屬偏低。政府需要進行定質研究，以瞭解性別角色如何影響男女學生在資訊科技學科方面的發展，釐訂消除這些障礙的策略。對殘疾人士而言，學校需要有足夠的專才以支援殘疾人士學習和應用資訊科技。

19. 委員會知道社會福利署（下稱「社署」）已與其他政府部門及非政府組織合辦活動，提高長者及殘疾人士對資訊科技的認識⁵。據社署資料，共有 2,600 名殘疾人士參與今年較早時舉行的

⁴ 根據政府所發表的《2001 年數碼 21 資訊科技策略》，自 1998 年開始，政府內部的資訊科技服務便已積極進行外發計劃，同時亦會繼續每年把政府三分之二的新資訊科技項目交由外間機構承辦。

⁵ 社會福利署於 2001 年 2 月 12 日向立法會福利事務委員會提交的「在社會福利界別使用資訊科技」的文件。

「資訊科技香港運動」；另外估計約有 5,000 名長者會於 2001-02 年度參加資訊科技認知培訓課程。然而與殘疾人士和長者的人口相比，受惠者的數字仍少。

20. 更重要的是，政府似乎未為婦女定出類似的具體培訓課程。對於未有機會受基礎教育的婦女或必須全職做家庭主婦的，資訊科技培訓課程尤其可以協助他們重新投入就業市場。無論培訓課程抑或是支援服務，都必須為她們度身設計，以切合她們個人需要和在料理家務方面的日程。

與使用者、私營機構及非政府組織夥伴關係

21. 香港要實現「數碼兼容」，視乎政府在這方面所訂定的政策和採取的策略。政府需要與使用者、私營機構和非政府組織結成夥伴，協力推行。私營機構在硬件及軟件等產品的設計和開發上，扮演重要角色；而非政府組織透過接觸對象群體，在培訓和提高對資訊科技的認識上，舉足輕重。與此同時，政府是需要在香港邁向「數碼兼容」的過程中，研究如何促使所有有關人士及群體的參與和支持。

平等機會委員會
二零零一年五月

Submission to
LegCo Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

14 May 2001

Introduction

1. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) submitted a paper to this Panel on 12 March 2001. The paper outlined the benefits and barriers of Information Technology (IT) for people with disabilities (PWDs). In the paper, we recommended actions to be taken to narrow the digital divide and we reiterate their relevance to the issues discussed today.
2. IT is an effective tool to achieve economic, social and cultural development. It empowers disadvantaged groups through access to knowledge. For this submission, we recommend that the Government should develop strategies to achieve **full digital inclusion** in Hong Kong. Such strategies should tackle the root causes of digital divide including the socio-economic factor and technical aspect.

Socio-economic status and digital divide

3. A recent report on digital divide in US observed that socio-economic disadvantages, i.e. lower education levels and incomes, are reasons for lower Internet access⁶. The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) statistics reflects similar situation in Hong Kong. For instance, the penetration rates of personal computer and Internet usage are higher for high-income households; usages of personal computer and Internet service are more common among those with tertiary educational attainment⁷, etc.

⁶ Smolenski, M. (2000) *The Digital Divide and American Society: A Report on the Digital Divide and its Social And Economic Implication for our Nation and its Citizens*. USA: Gartner.

⁷ Census and Statistics Department. (November 2000) *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 2 – Information Technology Usage and Penetration*.

4. Women and PWDs are most likely to be disadvantaged in accessing IT due to their socio-economic status. Thus, any Government strategies in IT development should seek to target these groups so that they are not marginalized in the development of a digital society. In the recent released Digital 21 Strategy 2001, to strengthen the Hong Kong Community for digital exploitation is identified as one of the key result areas. We welcome the initiative and look forward to seeing its benefit to the disadvantaged groups.

Technical accessibility and digital divide

5. Technical designs of IT products, both hardware and software, affect PWDs in joining the digital world. The Government, as service provider and regulator, should formulate IT policies that ensure IT products and service provision are technically accessible by PWDs.

6. Specifically, we would like to highlight following areas for which actions should be taken to ensure full digital inclusion.

Statistical information

7. Statistical information is necessary for assessing the needs and service shortfall in the process of formulating policies for the disadvantaged groups. We suggest that the Government collect information and statistical data specifically on the present situation of how women and PWDs accessing IT. The survey conducted by C&SD should be expanded to cater for this purpose.

Government Budgeting

8. IT development was stated as a priority area in the 2001/02 Annual Budget. However, there is no detail information showing how resources are designated to facilitate the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in IT developments.⁸

⁸ For example, the budget for “IT in the Community” for the financial year of 2001-02 is decreased by 7.7% from \$31 million to \$28.6 million compared with the previous financial year but there is no information to show how other resources are pulled together to enable community’s participation.

9. When budgeting for IT tasks, it is necessary that the implications for PWDs and women – how they will be affected or benefited – should be examined.

Access to personal computer (PC) and Internet

10. Public policy in IT should aim at bringing access of PC and Internet to people in home, at school, at work and in the community. In the 2000 Policy Address, the Government was committed to give \$200 million to secondary schools to buy notebook computers for loaning to students who would otherwise be deprived of the development opportunity for lack of financial means.
11. The Government has set up Cyberpoints at a few centers and schools for PWDs easy access. This initiative to bring access of IT in the community should be extended to cover women centers and more centers accessible for PWDs as well.
12. To ensure technical accessibility of IT products for PWDs, measures should be taken to encourage research and development of new and affordable assistive technology. At the same time, standards should be set to ensure websites are designed to be universally accessible.
13. Support network should be made available and easily accessible for both PWDs and women who would require training and advice in using IT. In this regard, we suggest that the Government establish an IT resource center or information network to provide assistance and advice to PWDs in using assistive technology, and to those who require other forms of assistance such as technical and/or software applications problems, etc.

E-business and E-government

14. The Government has stated its commitment to creating a favourable environment for e-business in Hong Kong. Logically, it needs to ensure that all sectors can participate and be benefited from its initiatives.

15. Online purchasing is becoming more popular in e-business. Online sale of Government publications via the Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) is to be launched within 2001. Those e-transactions generally require payments to be settled electronically, usually via credit card accounts. The Government needs to consider how to facilitate the low-incomes or dependents (for example, homemakers, most of whom are women) in this process by having choices of other means of payment.
16. In the process of procuring IT facilities and services⁹, the Government should ensure that acquired are accessible to PWDs. The Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) Scheme is implemented to deliver public services to the community via digital means. However, since its operation in December 2000, it is still inaccessible to PWDs in many ways as already stated by many disability groups. This is a typical example where the needs of disadvantaged groups has not been adequately mainstreamed in the project development.

Attitude and awareness training

17. A key element to full digital inclusion is to cultivate a positive attitude towards IT development and an awareness of its importance. According to the aforesaid C&SD survey, people in Hong Kong were generally aware of the significant role of IT in daily life and economic development. However, the survey did not provide much information on the readiness of people to embark on any IT training plan and if so, whether they have the resources (including financial resources, times and human support etc.) to do so.
18. School education is crucial stage in teaching the next generation's IT skills and knowledge. For the moment, girls are still under-represented in IT and science related subjects. The Government needs to conduct qualitative studies to understand how gender role affects girls' and boys in pursuing IT studies so as to identify strategies to remove barriers. As for PWDs, it is necessary that there are adequate IT expertises at schools to support their learning of and with IT.

⁹ As stated in the Digital 21 Strategy 2001, since 1998 the Government have adopted an active

19. We understand that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has worked with other government departments and NGOs on providing IT awareness programmes for the elderly and PWDs.¹⁰ According to the SWD, there were 2,600 PWDs involved in the IT Hong Kong Campaign earlier this year. It is estimated that 5,000 elderly will be provided with IT awareness training in 2001-02. The number is small comparing with the relevant population size.
20. More important, there does not appear to have any specific plan for similar training programs for women. For women who have missed basic education, or have been forced to stay back as homemakers, IT training programs is particularly important to help them re-enter the workforce. Tailor-made training programs and support services are required to suit their needs and fit into their home-keeping schedule.

Partnership with users, private sector and NGOs

21. The realization of full digital inclusion in Hong Kong depends largely on Government's policy and strategies. The Government needs to have partnership with users, the private sector and the NGOs in launching its initiatives. Private sector plays a major role in products (both hardware and software) design and development, and NGOs play an important role in training and raising awareness of IT by outreaching to the target groups. The Government needs to consider how to facilitate and, at the same time, enlist all stakeholders in the process of digital inclusion in Hong Kong.

Equal Opportunities Commission
May 2001

outsourcing strategy for the provision of IT services within the Government and it will continue to outsource two-third of new Government IT projects each year.

¹⁰ Social Welfare Department's discussion paper dated 12 February 2001 to LegCo Panel on Welfare Service titled "*Information Technology in the Social Welfare Sector*".