

**For discussion
on 10 November 2003**

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

Building a Digitally Inclusive Society

Introduction

This paper briefs Members on the progress of the Government's measures and its plans to build a digitally inclusive society in Hong Kong, as well as its participation in the World Summit on the Information Society.

Present Position

2. There has been a steady increase in information technology (IT) penetration and adoption in Hong Kong in recent years. According to the results of the annual thematic household survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department in May-July 2002, the personal computer (PC) and Internet penetration rates in households were 62.1% (60.6% in 2001) and 52.5% (48.7% in 2001) respectively. Our PC and Internet penetration rates are comparable to other advanced economies (a comparison of Hong Kong's situation with other economies is at Annex A). In particular, PC and Internet usage rates recorded significant increases among teenagers and young adults, up to 96% and 90% respectively for the 10-14 age group, and 92% and 89% respectively for the 15-24 age group in 2002 (please see Annex B for details). The results indicate a high level of IT awareness and readiness of our younger generation. On the other hand, PC and Internet usage rates, though increasing significantly in percentage terms, were still relatively low among the low-income households, less educated persons and the elderly. Continued and targeted efforts will be made to boost the penetration rates among these groups.

Policy Objectives

3. The Government is committed to building a digitally inclusive society in Hong Kong so that different sectors of the community can enjoy the

benefits brought about by the advancement in information and communication technologies (ICT). We aim to help citizens equip themselves with the necessary IT skills and provide them with the necessary facilities so that they can participate in today's information economy.

4. Our policy objective is three-fold:

- (a) to raise the IT awareness of and promote the wider use of IT in the community;
- (b) to enhance the IT readiness of our students and workforce; and
- (c) to improve the accessibility of computer facilities and online services, particularly by the under-privileged groups.

5. On (a), we have implemented a host of measures to raise the IT awareness of a broad spectrum of our community and to promote the wider use of IT in the community, targeting at women, new arrivals, elders and people with disabilities. On (b), a comprehensive programme is being implemented to enhance our teachers' ability in applying IT in education and our students' readiness in using IT and obtaining relevant professional qualifications. On (c), we provide computer facilities with Internet connection for free use by the public, enhance web accessibility and launch various initiatives for the disadvantaged persons to encourage and assist them to use IT. These include, for example, provision of technology-assisted devices to increase the accessibility of computer facilities and Internet for people with disabilities so that they can make use of IT to enhance their employability and enrich their lives.

6. The progress of the measures to achieve the above-mentioned objectives and the planned initiatives are elaborated in the ensuing paragraphs.

On-going Measures

(a) Raising IT Awareness and Promoting Wider Use of IT

IT Hong Kong Campaign

7. The "IT Hong Kong" campaign, launched in September 2000, aims to promote IT awareness of and wider use of IT in the community. The campaign includes the provision of free IT awareness courses to different sectors of the

community, organization of district IT promotion activities, establishment of an “IT Hong Kong” website to disseminate relevant information, and recruitment of IT pioneers.

8. So far, 26 771 people have attended the free IT awareness courses provided to housewives, new arrivals and the general public. The Government has also organized IT appreciation programmes for parents to improve their communication with their children on IT matters. 848 IT appreciation classes have been arranged for 16 610 parents and students.

9 IT awareness courses for elders and people with disabilities have been conducted since 2000. At the end of February 2003, there had been 17 154 participants in the courses for elders. At the end of September 2003, there had been 13 434 participants in the courses for people with disabilities.

10. The “IT Hong Kong” campaign will continue in 2003-04 to provide free IT awareness programmes to housewives, new arrivals, parents and the general public.

Radio Programmes

11. A series of short radio episodes were broadcast thrice daily from December 2002 to September 2003 to promote IT awareness among elders, people with disabilities and the general public.

Computer Talk in Public Libraries

12. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) organizes regular talks on computer awareness in public libraries. A total of 41 sessions of Computer Talk/Workshop and 578 sessions of the IT-Education-Computer Talk have been conducted in 23 libraries in 2002-03. We will continue to organize such talks in 2003-04.

IT Easy Link

13. A free public enquiry service, IT Easy Link, was launched in June 2002 to provide helpdesk support to members of the community on the use of basic IT applications.

(b) Enhancing IT Readiness

Information Technology for Learning in a New Era

14. The five-year “Information Technology for Learning in a New Era” strategy promulgated in 1998 heralded the beginning of our efforts in integrating IT into education. All schools have now been provided with the required infrastructure and connected to the Internet. All teachers have been trained on the use of IT in education, and they are increasingly adept in using IT for enhancing the effectiveness of learning and teaching. The Government will continue the momentum in supporting the application of IT in teaching and learning.

Improving Computer Access for the Under-Privileged Group

15. In 2001, the Quality Education Fund allocated \$200 million to secondary schools for purchase of notebook computers for loan to needy students. The Government has also provided an incentive grant to encourage schools to make their computer facilities available to students after normal school hours so that those who do not have PCs at home can also complete their assignments with the help of IT. In 2002-03, 1 029 schools in the public sector made use of this incentive grant. The Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) will encourage more schools to implement the initiative through the provision of incentive grants.

Professional IT Training for Secondary Students

16. We have collaborated with IT vendors to provide professional IT training to secondary students. These training programmes can help students gain early exposure to the use of IT and prepare themselves for acquiring the relevant professional qualifications. In 2002-03, 1 636 students received such training. A “train-the-trainer” approach was adopted, and 519 teachers, who would in turn train up their students, received professional IT training in 2002-03. Since 2001, about 5 560 students had been trained.

Vocational Education/Training and Employees Retraining

17. In 2002-03, some 8 720 students enrolled on the IT-related training programmes provided by the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) of the Vocational Training Council (VTC). Moreover, some 8 680 trainees attended the “upgrading” courses for in-service personnel offered by the Information Technology Training and Development Centre (ITTDC) of VTC. Besides, some 60 non-IT university graduates enrolled on IT conversion courses in the same period. VTC will continue to monitor market demand for IT manpower, review its programmes regularly and propose new ones in consultation with the relevant industry bodies.

18. Apart from the courses provided by the VTC, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) provided a total of 7 classes of Information Technology Technical Assistant courses (full time) with 116 graduates in 2002-03. Another 2 070 classes of basic IT courses (part-time) were completed with 41 091 graduates.

(c) Improving IT/Internet Accessibility

Free Access to IT Facilities

19. Over 5 300 PCs with Internet connection for free use by the public have been installed at convenient locations including community halls/centres, District Offices, public libraries, post offices, subvented organizations and other non-government organizations (NGOs).

20. The Super Cyber Centre in Yaumatei, equipped with 121 PCs, has proved to be a popular place for people to access IT facilities. This Centre also provides resource materials and IT learning facilities to users. As of September 2003, the Centre has over 19 900 registered members and over 2 000 training classes have been organised since its opening in June 2001. As the premises of the Centre will undergo redevelopment shortly, we are considering a longer term arrangement for the Centre. Separately, to address similar demands at the district level, a District Cyber Centre (Yuen Long Pok Oi Community Cyber Centre) equipped with 19 PCs was open for public use in December 2002.

21. As at March 2003, a total of 717 PCs with Internet access had been installed at 462 rehabilitation service units run by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and 69 NGOs. In 2001-02, a total of 261 PCs were installed in 226 social centres and multi-services centres for the elderly. The SWD also provided two years' Internet subscription fee for these centres. We will continue to provide free Internet access at these centres with funding support from the Lotteries Fund.

22. New technologies are being introduced to address the specific needs of certain groups such as the visually impaired and elders. For example, Putonghua text-to-speech software has been installed in the computers at 4 NGOs for pilot run. The Government will explore with the NGOs and software vendors the possibility of developing a Cantonese version.

23. Smart card readers have been installed in 540 public computers at 180 locations to support the use of the digital certificates embedded on smart identity cards for e-business transactions and online government services. All PCs at Community Cyber Points have been upgraded to provide broadband Internet access.

Personal Computers for the Needy

24. A government-wide PC donation programme was carried out in 2002-03. Some 1 000 used PCs and accessories from various Government departments and bureaux were donated to the CompuAid Project organised by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS), and 205 used PCs and accessories were given to the itHome Project of the Hong Kong PHAB Association. The Government has also sponsored the HKCSS to recycle another 400 PCs donated by the private sector for the needy.

25. SWD has established a Central Fund to assist people with disabilities to set up PC workstations at home to help them gain a competitive edge in finding and sustaining an income-generating job. A total of 39 out of 43 applications were approved in 2002-03 with a total grant of \$0.51M. We will continue to make use of the Central Fund for this purpose.

Access to Online Services

26. SWD has launched a portal (www.CyberAble.net) for people with disabilities in December 2002. This website provides information on support services, discussion forum facilities and on-line registration of computer courses.

27. By December 2002, all Government websites have been upgraded to comply with the web accessibility guidelines. The guidelines were developed on the basis of the internationally recognized “Web Content Accessibility Guidelines” with input from the Hong Kong Blind Union.

28. In 2002, a simplified Chinese character version of Government web pages was launched to facilitate browsing by new arrivals from the Mainland as well as Chinese communities in other parts of the world.

New/Planned Initiatives

29. In 2003-04, we plan to spend some \$605.7 million to further promote IT awareness and encourage the wider use of IT in the community. The measures and initiatives are outlined in subsequent paragraphs and a summary of the expenditure involved is at Annex C.

(a) Awareness and Knowledge

30. We will continue to monitor the adoption of IT in Hong Kong through annual surveys. The 2003 annual survey on IT penetration and usage in households was conducted in May to July this year and the results are expected to be available in December 2003.

31. Academic quiz and district IT promotion activities will be organized to promote IT in the community. We will maintain up-to-date information on our IT Hong Kong web site to promote the wider use of IT. We will produce radio programmes to introduce e-government services, the web accessibility concept, and the applications enabled by the multi-application smart identity card, with the aim of promoting wider use of IT by citizens.

32. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and NGOs will be enlisted to conduct the second phase of the IT Thematic Training Programme for people with disabilities and train-the-trainers programme.

33. The free public enquiry service, IT Easy Link, has been extended for one year from July 2003 to June 2004 to provide helpdesk support to members of the public as well as businesses on the use of basic IT applications.

(b) Education and Training

34. EMB is formulating the strategic direction on the further development of IT in education in light of the Government's vision for education and the experience gained.

35. In 2003-04, the IVE of VTC will spend some \$418.4M to organize IT vocational training programmes. In addition, the ITTDC of VTC will spend some \$51.7M to organize IT training courses. Some \$27.4M will be spent on the project titled "Enhancement of Information Technology Infrastructure and Services".

36. In 2003-04, ERB will spend some \$59M to organize IT retraining programmes.

(c) IT Facilities and Internet Access

37. Over 150 additional PCs are being installed in public libraries to enhance public access to the Internet and the multimedia materials of the Multimedia Information System of the libraries.

38. We will continue to provide PCs for use by elders in new elderly centres coming on stream and to encourage the elderly centres to provide further Internet access payment from the centres' own resources.

39. Four government departments, namely the Information Services Department, LCSD, SWD and Department of Health, will launch in the first half of 2004 a pilot sound version of selected information on their websites to enhance accessibility for the elderly and the visually impaired.

World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

40. With a view to bridging the digital divide and harnessing the benefit of ICT to all, the United Nations has instructed the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to organize the WSIS. The WSIS aims at providing a high-level platform for Heads of State (or heads of delegation), Executive Heads of United Nations agencies, industry leaders, NGOs, media representatives and civil societies to develop a better understanding of the issues related to digital divide and their impact to the international community, and in particular, identify ways to close the gap between the “have” and “have nots” of access to the global information and communication network.

41. The WSIS will be conducted in two phases. The first phase will be held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 10-12 December 2003, and the second phase on 16-18 November 2005 in Tunis, Tunisia. Three Preparatory Committee meetings and a series of regional conferences have been held in various cities to prepare and solicit inputs to the draft Declaration of Principles and the draft Plan of Action, which are expected to be endorsed at the December 2003 WSIS for implementation. The second phase would assess the progress made and adopt further Action Plan.

42. Representatives of the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau, Information Technology Services Department and Office of the Telecommunications Authority will participate in the first phase of the WSIS to be held in December 2003 as members of the delegation of the Government of the People’s Republic of China to exchange views and share our experience in building a digitally inclusive society with other participants.

43. The Government has also provided inputs to the WSIS through participation in regional conference. The Director-General of Telecommunications chaired a panel discussion on “Connectivity and the Information Society in Asia” at the Tokyo Preparatory Conference for WSIS organized by the ITU in January 2003. He shared views and recommendations on the role of governments in enhancing connectivity. Other panelists included the coordinator for the Youth Caucus of the WSIS and representatives from governments and the private sector in Asia.

Conclusion

44. Digital divide is an economic and social issue faced by many economies around the world. Through awareness building and provision of the necessary infrastructure and support, we have witnessed an increasing trend in IT adoption in the community in the last few years. Citizens now enjoy more affordable ICT facilities and are more receptive to e-transactions. We will continue with our programme of activities and explore further measures to bridge the divide.

Information Technology Services Department
November 2003

IT Penetration in Hong Kong and Other Economies

	Survey Period	PC Penetration Rate (%)#	Internet Penetration Rate (%)#	Source
Hong Kong	May-July 2002	62.1%	52.5%	Census & Statistics Department
Republic of Korea	July 2002	78.6%	58.0%	Korea Network Information Center
Singapore	November 2002 - January 2003	68.4%	59.4%	Infocomm Development Authority
Taiwan	July-August 2002	72.0%	53.0%	Focus on Internet News and Data of e-Commerce Resources Center
Japan	January-March 2002	58.0%	35.1%	Statistics Bureau & Statistics Center in Japan
US	September 2001	56.5%	50.5%	National Telecommunications & Information Administration
UK	August 2002	53.0%	42.0%	The Office of Telecommunications

As a percentage of all households in the respective economies.

Annex B

PC and Internet Penetration/Usage in Hong Kong

A. By Household Income

Monthly household income (HK\$)	PC Penetration Rate (%)			Internet Penetration Rate (%)		
	2002	2001	2000	2002	2001	2000
Below 10,000	27.1	22.8	15.3	19.0	14.5	7.7
\$10,000 - \$19,999	66.4	58.3	45.9	53.6	42.9	29.5
\$20,000 - \$29,999	79.5	76.2	62.8	68.6	61.3	46.7
\$30,000 - \$39,999	86.8	82.9	70.7	78.1	69.5	55.9
\$40,000 - \$49,999	89.5	86.1	74.2	83.9	76.8	60.2
50,000 or above	92.2	89.5	82.8	87.0	82.7	71.5
Overall	62.1	60.6	49.7	52.5	48.7	36.4

B. By Age Group

Age Group	PC Usage Rate (%)			Internet Usage Rate (%)		
	2002	2001	2000	2002	2001	2000
10-14	96.2	90.8	72.8	89.9	79.4	43.1
15-24	92.3	88.0	78.9	89.2	81.1	64.5
25-34	76.2	73.6	65.0	69.1	65.1	48.1
35-44	58.4	52.0	44.5	48.6	42.3	28.3
45-44	31.2	26.2	20.2	25.0	19.6	11.5
55-64	13.8	8.8	6.6	10.5	6.0	3.2
65 or above	2.8	1.2	0.6	1.9	0.8	0.2
Overall	54.0	50.3	43.1	48.2	43.3	30.3

C. By Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	PC Usage Rate (%)			Internet Usage Rate (%)		
	2002	2001	2000	2002	2001	2000
No Schooling / Kindergarten / Primary	17.0	14.3	8.4	14.4	11.1	3.3
Secondary / Matriculation	62.6	60.0	52.3	54.3	50.1	34.4
Tertiary	92.8	91.1	89.5	89.0	86.9	78.5
Overall	54.0	50.3	43.1	48.2	43.3	30.3

Annex C

Digital Divide Programme Spending Plan in 2003-04

Items	Responsible bureaux/ departments/agencies	Estimated expenditure in 2003-04 (\$ Million)
<i>Awareness and knowledge</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ITHK campaign<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Academic quiz- ITHK website- District IT promotion activities- IT awareness course for parents- IT awareness courses	HAD, ITSD	2.8
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To provide IT awareness courses for people with disabilities and train the trainers	SWD	2.3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To organize talks on computer awareness in public libraries	LCSD	0.9
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extension of IT Easy Link service from July 2003 to June 2004	CITB, ITSD, Hong Kong Computer Society	4.7
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Radio programmes on IT appreciation for the public and disadvantaged groups	ITSD	0.5

Items	Responsible bureaux/ departments/agencies	Estimated expenditure in 2003-04 (\$ Million)
<i>Education and training</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To encourage schools to make their computer facilities available to students after normal school hours by the provision of grants 	EMB	17.4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To organize IT vocational training programmes 	VTC	497.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To organize IT retraining programmes 	ERB	59.0
<i>IT facilities and Internet access</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide financial assistance from the Central Fund for Personal Computers to people with disabilities for purchasing computer facilities so that they can work independently 	SWD	1.0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide free Internet access for elderly service units 	SWD	1.9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To continue the operation of the Super Cyber Centre from April 2003 to March 2004 	ITSD, HAD	2.0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Cyber Points 	ITSD, HAD	3.1

Items	Responsible bureaux/ departments/agencies	Estimated expenditure in 2003-04 (\$ Million)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To purchase additional assistive software at Community Cyber Points designed for use by the visually impaired 	ITSD, HAD	1.0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District Cyber Centre at Yuen Long 	HAD	0.6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To enhance public computer facilities to support use of digital certificate on smart identity card for e-business transactions and online government services 	CITB, ITSD, LCSD, SWD, HKPost	0.6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the number of public workstations in accessing the Multimedia Information System and Internet service in branch libraries 	LCSD	8.0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot project on sound version of Government websites 	CITB, ITSD, ISD, LCSD, SWD, D of Health	1.9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sponsorship for professional body to promote barrier-free web design 	ITSD	0.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sponsorship for professional body to promote web accessibility 	ITSD	0.3
	Total:	605.7