For information on
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Legislative Council Panel
on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Progress Report on Digital Inclusion

Purpose

   This paper updates Members on the latest progress on the digital inclusion initiatives.

Background

2. Published in 2008, the latest Digital 21 Strategy identifies building an inclusive, knowledge-based society as one of its five key action areas. Under this action area, bringing the benefit of information and communication technology (ICT) to underprivileged groups of the community to strengthen their capacity to engage with information is a priority work focus.

3. A Digital Inclusion Task Force (the Task Force) under the Digital 21 Strategy Advisory Committee was set up in mid 2008 to advise the Government on the strategies and priorities for addressing the digital inclusion issues in a holistic approach, and to enable all sectors of the community to benefit from the advancement of ICT, which plays a key role in enhancing the quality of life of the people in Hong Kong. The Task Force comprises representatives from relevant government bureaux and departments as well as industry and community stakeholders.

Statement of Desired Outcomes

4. To give a more concrete picture of how success can be defined in this action area, we have developed a Statement of Desired Outcomes (SDO) to set out qualitatively what we are seeking to achieve. The SDO also serves as a guide for the selection of meaningful key performance indicators (KPIs).

5. In consultation with the Task Force, the following SDO and corresponding KPIs have been adopted in respect of digital inclusion –

(a)   SDO

"Residents, businesses, and voluntary organisations in Hong Kong are all able to take advantage of ICT to create, access, utilise and share information and knowledge as well as for leisure and entertainment, so that they can achieve their full potential in improving their quality of life. There is a culture of healthy and ethical use of ICT, promoted and protected by knowledgeable users and by the justice system."

(b)   KPIs

(i)   Overall ICT adoption in the community, in terms of accessibility, knowledge and usage of ICT; and

(ii)   ICT adoption in the underprivileged groups, in terms of accessibility, knowledge and usage of ICT.

6.   The Task Force has further recommended that priority be given to three underprivileged groups, namely "elderly", "children in low income families" and "people with physical disabilities".   A number of targeted initiatives were commenced with the advice and support of the Task Force.

Key Performance Indicators

7.   According to report on "Usage of Personal Computers and Internet Services by Hong Kong Residents, 2000 to 2009" published by the Census and Statistics Department, both PCs and Internet connections are becoming common among the community at large.   Both the percentages of households with PCs at home and those with their PCs connected to the Internet has increased significantly over the past decade.   The corresponding percentages surged from 49.7% and 36.4% in 2000 to 75.8% and 73.3% in 2009 respectively.

8.   In 2005, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) commissioned the University of Hong Kong (HKU) to conduct an impact analysis study with a view to developing a framework for assessing the degree of digital inclusiveness of different underprivileged groups in Hong Kong.   The study measured the extent of usage, accessibility, knowledge and affordability of ICT of the underprivileged groups when compared with the mainstream community.   A follow-up study was conducted in 2008 to update the relevant measures.   The respective study findings of the three identified groups are highlighted below –

	Children in Low Income Families		Elderly		People with Physical Disabilities		The Mainstream Community	
	2005	2008	2005	2008	2005	2008	2005	2008
Usage								
● % having used a computer	84.8	96.7	6.7	7.8	16.4	16.4	78.6	78.6
● % having used the Internet	81.9	94.6	5.7	6.7	14.8	15.1	77.8	78.0
Accessibility								
● % having a computer at home	70.4	93.9	46.4	46.8	50.6	50.0	91.1	93.3
● % having a computer connected to the Internet	66.8	92.8	43.1	43.2	46.8	46.7	89.2	92.5
Knowledge								
● % having knowledge in using the computer	78.7	89.0	6.1	5.8	14.6	12.4	75.9	74.1
● % having knowledge in using the Internet	78.7	86.9	5.4	5.7	13.6	12.5	75.8	74.0

9.   The findings of the 2008 study show that there has been significant improvement of the capacity to engage with information among the children in low income families since 2005. Relevant initiatives such as the IT in Education Strategy, ICT facilities, educations and training courses provided by schools and community organisations, etc., effectively improves the accessibility, knowledge and usage of ICT among the younger generation as a whole. On the other hand, not much progress had been made among the elderly and people with physical disabilities.

Initiatives for the Underprivileged Groups

10.   Summarised below are some major initiatives that support the digital inclusion of the underprivileged groups as a whole with regard to their accessibility, knowledge and usage of ICT.

Public Computer

11.   In order to increase the opportunities for the community to benefit from ICT and the Internet, the Government has provided free public access to about 6,000 PCs, the majority of which with Internet connection, in public libraries and various youth and social centres in around 1,100 locations across the territory.

Digital Solidarity Fund

12.   The Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) under the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) is a funding scheme to support community organisations to organise digital inclusion programmes.   The Government has provided annual sponsorship to the DSF since its establishment in 2004.   A total of HK$8 million was injected to the DSF as of 2009.   At the same time the DSF has also received about HK$2.7 million of commercial sponsorship. Over the years, 42 digital inclusion projects initiated by community organisations were funded by the DSF supporting different needy groups in the community.

District Cyber Centres

13.   The pilot scheme on District Cyber Centres (DCC) was announced by the Financial Secretary in the 2008-09 Budget.   A DCC Alliance, comprising the Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited, Hong Kong Council of Social Service and the Internet Professional Association, was formed to implement the DCC pilot scheme.   The Alliance aims to enhance the capacity and sustainable development of district based cyber centres operated by different community organisations by forming an allied support network amongst them.

14.   Since the launch of the two-phase pilot in February 2009, the DCC scheme has received very encouraging response from the community.   The services provided by the Alliance have proved to be very popular.   While the target number of centres to be supported was 10 for the first phase and an additional 15 in the second phase of the pilot, the Alliance was able to recruit 14 centres in the first phase, and an additional 19 in the second phase, exceeding targets by 40% and 27% respectively.   Participating centres regard the services as effective in enabling them to sustain their operations and develop their services.

15.   Commercial donors have also welcomed the DCC scheme because it is much easier for them to provide support to the DCC movement as a whole,

rather than having to consider requests from individual centre operators. Under the tripartite partnership arrangement, the Government has provided sponsorship of HK$14.4 million while the Alliance has also secured commercial sponsorship of some HK$20.3 million, both in cash and in kind, including professional support, hardware, software, service donation etc., to facilitate the implementation and operation of the DCC scheme.

16.	So far the Alliance has subsidized the purchase of some 430 desktop computers and 460 laptop computers for the affiliated centres to support their provision of computer facilitates and trainings for different needy communities in various districts. A mobile truck equipped with laptop computers also travels round the territories both to promote the scheme and also to support the outreach trainings and other related outdoor activities organised by affiliated centres. The Alliance also organises an annual cyber community award programme to recognise the achievement of affiliated centres and their users in supporting the DCC scheme and to encourage life-long education and application of ICT skills. Over 1,700 members from the 33 affiliated centres enrolled to the programme and over 700 of them received awards in recognition of their achievement in learning and application of ICT skills.

17.	In 2010/11, the DCC Alliance will continue to develop its services and expand the support network to more affiliated centres in different districts.

Targeted Initiatives for Youth and Children in Low Income Families

18.	There has been significant improvement in accessibility, knowledge and usage of ICT among children in low income families in recent years. In collaboration with community organisations, industry and professional associations, the Government has initiated a series of targeted measures to assist children and youth to make use of computers and access to the Internet to facilitate their learning and development.

School Facilities

19.	Since 1999/2000, the Government has provided recurrent funding for all public sector schools to extend the opening hours of their computer rooms for use by students after school.

Computer Recycling

20.	In 2008/09 and 2009/2010 school years, the Education Bureau launched a "Computer Recycling Programme" in partnership with the

Environmental Protection Department. Under the programme, refurbished computers were provided to students of low income families together with one year free Internet access service. So far, some 22,000 needy students have benefited from the programme.

"Be NetWise" Internet Education Campaign

21. In order that youngsters can make good use of the Internet to realise their full potential, improve quality of life and promote the development of the information society, the Government injected HK$63 million in the 2009-10 Budget to conduct a one-year Internet education campaign, called the "Be NetWise", to promote the safe and healthy use of the Internet among young students, their parents and teachers.

22. Some 500 temporary jobs were created to support the execution of the campaign. A large scale recruitment expo was held in July 2009 attracting over 9,000 applications.

23. The campaign was launched in September 2009. Activities including large-scale promotion events, roving exhibitions and training in districts, school talks, inter-school activities, telephone hotline support, home visit technical assistance, family counselling service, etc., are being organised at territory-wide, district and school level throughout the one year period.

24. As of February 2010, some 100,000 copies of a handbook for parents on Internet usage has been produced to provide parents handy tips and guidance on Internet usage, over 400 talks attracting some 76,000 participants including students, parents, teachers and social workers, and over 27,000 home visits have been conducted. Family counselling services are also provided through the "Be NetWise" Family Support Centre specialised in Internet behaviour set up under the campaign. Over 20,000 counselling sessions have been provided.

25. An exhibition bus was also set up to tour the territory, in particular school areas during lunch hours and after school. Parents and students can play specially developed educational games, watch promotion videos, receive briefings and collect educational materials. So far, the bus has already visited over 80 schools and public locations, receiving some 7,700 parents and students.

26. In the coming months, we will continue our efforts in various territory-wide promotions and a wide range of district and school activities for the campaign.

Facilitating Internet Learning

27.   The Government recognises the importance of providing convenient and suitable Internet learning opportunities for students in need. A two-pronged approach is proposed in the 2010-11 Budget. We will grant a subsidy for Internet access charges to primary and secondary school students from low income families as well as encourage the market to provide economical Internet services to them.

28.   The OGCIO is making preparation to facilitate the setting up of a non-profit making organisation to collaborate with private service providers and community organisations to provide Internet learning opportunities to students of low income families in need. Apart from economical Internet services and computer hardware and software to meet the learning need of students, the organisation will also provide complementary services such as parent education and technical support.

29.   We are scheduled to brief Members on details of the initiative at the Education Panel meeting on 12 April 2010.

Targeted Initiatives for the Elderly

30.   With reference to the study above, very little progress has been made in previous years to empower the elderly to engage in the information society. The Task Force recommended that priorities should be directed to remove the barriers for older people to use ICT, such as providing better supports in learning and using the technology, and the development of relevant contents and applications to raise their incentive in ICT usage.

31.   With regard to training and technical support to the elderly, under the DCC pilot scheme mentioned above, 17 out of the 33 affiliated centres are providing targeted service to the elderly in supporting their learning and using of ICT.

Elderly Portal

32.   To provide the elderly with more convenient access to the relevant contents and services on the Internet, the Government announced in the 2009-10 Budget that we would co-ordinate the setting up of a dedicated portal for the elderly to provide one-stop information service on elderly services and the silver hair market.

33.   The portal aims to serve as the entry portal for the elderly, integrating information around their interests, such as those related to their daily lives, medical and health, housing and care, lifelong learning, social and recreational activities, as well as the silver hair market information.   Through this portal and various computer courses offered by the Elder Academies, the elderly will enhance their computer knowledge and their ability to use digital services, expanding their circles of life through the Internet.   The portal also helps to engage the elderly in the development of the information society and to promote active ageing and inter-generational integration.

34.   The portal will be launched for pilot operation in June 2010.   Close collaboration with the DCC scheme will also be explored in promoting the portal and related ICT training and support for the elderly among the elderly-based cyber centres in different districts.

Targeted Initiatives for People with Disabilities

35.   People with disabilities (PwD) follows the elderly group as a major underprivileged group that lags behind in terms of accessibility, knowledge and usage of ICT.

Computer Facilities for PwD

36.   Over the years, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has been providing IT support to the rehabilitation sector.   Some 710 PCs with Internet access have been installed at various rehabilitation service units.   Since 2000, around 19,200 persons with disabilities have attended IT awareness programmes.

37.   A Central Fund for Personal Computers was set up by SWD since 1997 to assist PwD in acquiring computers for self-employment or receiving supported employment service at home.   So far, a total of 20 batches of applications have been processed and a total of around HK$4 million granted to 313 applicants.

Web Accessibility

38.   We have also been actively supporting various community activities through the DSF and programmes of ICT professional associations, to promote awareness among public and private websites of design and presentation needs to address the accessibility requirements of PwD, in particular for the visually impaired persons.

39.   Back in 1999, the Government started the development of a set of accessibility guidelines and best practices in design of web pages and electronic services with reference to international standards and input from the industry and disabled groups.   Since 2003, we have mandated all government websites to fully comply with our web accessibility guidelines.   To keep pace with international standards and the latest web technology developments, the latest update of the guidelines was released in July 2009.

Understand the Needs of Different PwD Sub-groups

40.   The Task Force acknowledges there are special needs among the different sub-groups of the PwD, in terms of access to information and service. Within the PwD group, the Task Force advised that higher priority should be given to the sub-groups of persons with restrictions in body movement, seeing and hearing difficulties, in view of the relatively larger population size and the potential benefits brought about by ICT in enhancing their daily life and social inclusion.   The Task Force also recommended closer collaboration with the Sub-committee on Access of the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee in this area.

41.   Three workshops were recently organised by the Task Force with community organisations and representatives of the three sub-groups to better understand their specific barriers and needs in ICT adoption.   Comments and views collected are being analysed by the Task Force with a view to exploring relevant plans and initiatives to address the specific needs of these PwD sub-groups.

Way forward

42.   We will continue to consult the Digital Inclusion Task Force and to work with the industry, professional, academia and the wider community to formulate and undertake initiatives to ensure that the underprivileged groups can embrace and benefit from the use of ICT and the development of the information society.   We will provide regular update to the Panel on the development in this area.

Advice Sought

43.   Members are invited to note the above progress update on the digital inclusion initiatives.

Office of the Government Chief Information Officer
Commerce and Economic Development Bureau
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