

Digital Inclusion: A Strategic Framework for Wales

Chwarae Teg Consultation Response

13th September 2010

Introduction

Chwarae Teg promotes, supports and develops the role of women in the Welsh economy. Established in 1992, we do this by raising awareness of the positive contribution women make to economy and society and sensitising Welsh Assembly Government strategy and policy to the barriers confronting women who wish to fully participate in the labour market.

The persistency of occupational segregation, the over representation of women amongst the working poor, the under-utilisation of women's skills, the gender pay gap, the lack of women in senior and management level positions and the limited number of women in decision making roles presents a challenge to Welsh policy and practice.

Funded by the **Welsh Assembly Government** to provide expert advice to Ministers and policy-makers on these matters, Chwarae Teg also designs and manages significant projects that support women's participation in, and the development of, the Welsh economy. This has included working with women entrepreneurs and encouraging early stage enterprises in addition to providing pre-employment training for economically inactive women in their communities.

Our current project, **AGILE NATION: New ways of working in the 21st century**¹ provides bespoke, accredited management training to equip women with the skills they need to progress into leadership roles. We also work directly with employers, referral agencies and training providers to support the design of gender sensitive employment and training programmes. Chwarae Teg is a partnership organisation and we work with organisations from all sectors.

¹ Funded by European Social Fund and Welsh Assembly Government 2008 - 2014

Consultation Response

Chwarae Teg welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Welsh Assembly Government's proposals for delivering digital inclusion in Wales. The development of digital technologies over the past decade has allowed processes to become more efficient and people to become more connected.

The *Digital Britain* report tells us that broadband is 'an essential facility for citizens and consumers in a modern society'.² Today, 90% of all high street purchases are paid for by card and £50bn of consumer purchases and sales take place wholly online.³ However, there are a significant number of people who are unable to benefit from these new technologies and processes.

"Those without internet access are typically those who are socially disadvantaged"

(Communities and Local Government, October 2008)

There are many barriers facing those who are digitally excluded. **These include fear, lack of confidence, financial restraints or poor skills.** It is important that we find a way to help individuals to address these barriers as these people are disadvantaged in society and miss out on opportunities. In many cases it is the people in most need of the benefits that digital technologies can bring that are most excluded.

It is estimated that around 900,000 people in Wales are digitally excluded.⁴ Much attention is given to those who are excluded due to a lack of service provision in rural areas. However, evidence suggests that take-up is actually lower in the south Wales Valleys, in larger urban areas and in disadvantaged communities.⁵ In fact, rural Wales has the highest levels of take up in the UK.⁶ Overall in Wales, 99% of households have access to broadband but only 60% take it up.⁷

"A greater proportion of households in rural areas have the internet than in urban areas"

(The Bevan Foundation, 2009)

Studies show that there are definite differences in internet take-up by socio-economic group. Those without internet access are typically those who

² Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2009) *Digital Britain, Final Report*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm76/7650/7650.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Delivering Digital Inclusion: A Strategic Framework for Wales* (Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government)

⁵ Winkler, V. (2009) *Digital Wales: Divided Wales* (The Bevan Foundation: Ebbw Vale)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

are socially disadvantaged i.e. elderly, DE social class⁸, live alone, have low qualifications.⁹ The higher the individual's income and qualification level, the more likely they are to have access to the internet at home. For example, more than twice as many managerial and professional households have broadband than routine and manual workers (82% compared with 38%).¹⁰

There are also marked differences between men and women. Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that **women are less likely to use the internet than men** (80% compared with 72%).¹¹ Research suggests that women can gain a great deal from access and use of technology.¹² 63% of those over 65 and in socio-economic group DE without internet access are female and 99% have no children under the age of 18.¹³ They are also more likely to be widowed, single or divorced and therefore are likely to live alone.¹⁴

Consultation Questions

1. Do you agree with this description of why digital inclusion is important?

Digital inclusion is important as the world is becoming increasingly dependant on technology. More and more services are only available online and it is important that all individuals are able to access these services. Businesses are increasingly taking their services online as this allows them to reduce staffing and administration costs. Pressure on public finance is likely to speed up the shift of public service delivery to online provision. This will allow the public sector to make huge efficiency savings. Almost half of the UK population already use internet to access information on Government or local council services. Direct Gov receives 14m visits each month. Providing services online allows significant savings.¹⁵

Financial savings

58% of UK adults buy goods and services online.¹⁶

"Households off-line miss out on savings of £560 per year from shopping and paying bills online"

(Welsh Assembly Government, 2010)

⁸ Socio-economic group DE - Unskilled working class

⁹ Department of Communities and Local Government (2008) *Understanding Digital Inclusion* (Communities and Local Government Publications: West Yorkshire)

¹⁰ Winkler, V. (2009) *Digital Wales: Divided Wales* (The Bevan Foundation: Ebbw Vale)

¹¹ Office of National Statistics (2009)

¹² BCS (2010) *The Information Dividend: Can IT make you happy?* [Online]. Available at:

http://www.bcs.org/upload/pdf/info-dividend_1.pdf

¹³ Department of Communities and Local Government (2008) *Understanding Digital Inclusion* (Communities and Local Government Publications: West Yorkshire)

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2009) *Digital Britain, Final*

Report. [Online]. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm76/7650/7650.pdf>

¹⁶ Fox, M. (2010) *Manifesto for a Networked Nation*. [Online] Available at:

http://raceonline2012.org/sites/default/files/resources/manifesto_for_a_networked_nation_-_race_online_2012.pdf

Individuals can often save money when they make purchases this way or if they pay their bills by direct debit. Many companies only offer these discounts to online customers and so those without access to the internet lose out. In addition, price comparison websites allow consumers to search for the best prices while completing forms online saves time. In many cases, it is the people that are in most need of the opportunity to save money who are unable to access these discounts. Research shows that “3.6 million low-income households are missing out on total savings of over £1bn a year from shopping and paying bills online”.¹⁷

Broadband access

In a digital economy, it is vital that everyone can access broadband services regardless of where they live. Research shows that “within some rural local authorities in Wales, more than 4 in 10 households are unable to access broadband at speeds greater than 2Mbps”.¹⁸ Good broadband services can reduce isolation and increase an individual’s chances of getting a job. Recruitment processes are increasingly going online. Last year, “7 million job adverts [were] placed online”.¹⁹ Furthermore, high quality broadband allows individuals to work remotely. This increases opportunities for those with caring responsibilities or those living in remote areas. For businesses fast, reliable broadband is vital for participation in a global economy.

“The quality of the services available between urban and rural areas can vary greatly”

(WLGA, 2009)

Social exclusion

Digital technologies allow free communication across the globe through email, VoIP services (e.g. Skype), instant messaging or social networking. Research suggests that women benefit more than men from these innovations as they are able to keep in touch with family members anywhere in the world. A report on IT and happiness, by the British Computer Society (BCS), shows that “women benefit more than men from access to and usage of technology”.²⁰

“47% of those living in households earning less than £11.5k do not use the internet compared to only 4% with an income of over 30k”

(Fox, 2009)

Analysts believe that this is a result of the “social networking role of women around the world”.²¹ 75.8% of women use social networking sites

¹⁷ Fox, M. (2010) *Manifesto for a Networked Nation*. [Online] Available at: http://raceonline2012.org/sites/default/files/resources/manifesto_for_a_networked_nation_-_race_online_2012.pdf

¹⁸ WLGA (2009) *Broadband in Rural Wales* (WLGA: Cardiff)

¹⁹ Fox, M. (2010) *Manifesto for a Networked Nation*. [Online] Available at: http://raceonline2012.org/sites/default/files/resources/manifesto_for_a_networked_nation_-_race_online_2012.pdf

²⁰ BCS (2010) *The Information Dividend: Can IT make you happy?* [Online] Available at: http://www.bcs.org/upload/pdf/info-dividend_1.pdf

²¹ Ibid.

compared with 69.7% of men.²² New technologies make communication easier and women benefit from increased contact with friends and loved ones.

Evidence shows that women who live alone such as single women, widows and lone parents are more likely to be digitally excluded. These days, digital exclusion enhances social exclusion and so these women are doubly disadvantaged. The UK Government's *Manifesto for a Networked Nation* argues that digital technologies "provide a lifeline from social isolation for the 3.1m people in the UK aged over 65 who go longer than a week without seeing a friend, neighbour or family member".²³

The gender perspective

The strategy does not identify gender differences but evidence suggests that digital exclusion affects more women than men. Overall, women are less likely to use the internet than men. The latest figures show that 80% of men use the internet compared with 72% of women.²⁴ Only 20% of internet users over 65 are female.²⁵ Given that women have a longer life-expectancy than men; older women are more likely than older men to be digitally excluded and more vulnerable as a result.

Lone parents are another group that is predominantly female and likely to be digitally

"80% of men use the internet compared with 72% of women"

(ONS, 2008)

excluded. 90% of lone parents in Wales are female. Evidence shows that single parent families are more likely to be living in poverty. For many lone parent households, lack of finance is the barrier to digital inclusion. Digital exclusion enhances social exclusion for this group and also has an impact on the educational attainment of children. Experts claim that "home access to the internet can mean the difference between a child getting an 'A' and a 'C' at GCSE".²⁶ The internet can also help parents to engage with the school and there are plans for school reports to become electronic also. Having access to the internet at home has a number of additional benefits for lone parents as it can:

- Reduce isolation;
- allow greater access to the labour market through being able to complete online job applications or work from home; and
- increase opportunities for enterprise.

²² Corporate Eye (2010) 'Women Spend 30% More Time on Social Network Sites than Men Worldwide', July 30th. [Online] Available at: <http://www.corporate-eye.com/blog/2010/07/women-spend-30-more-time-on-social-network-sites-than-men-worldwide/>

²³ Fox, M. (2010) *Manifesto for a Networked Nation*. [Online] Available at: http://raceonline2012.org/sites/default/files/resources/manifesto_for_a_networked_nation_-_race_online_2012.pdf

²⁴ Office of National Statistics (2009)

²⁵ d'Arbeloff, N. (2008) 'Where are all the Female Geeks?' *The Guardian*, 13th June [Online]. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/jun/13/women.blogging>

²⁶ Fox, M. (2010) *Manifesto for a Networked Nation*. [Online]. Available at: http://raceonline2012.org/sites/default/files/resources/manifesto_for_a_networked_nation_-_race_online_2012.pdf

Opportunity for enterprise

Access to digital technologies such as internet and mobile phones allows women with caring responsibilities to work remotely. It can also facilitate entrepreneurship, whether this is trading on ebay or providing a service. Of those in the UK who are digitally enabled, seven million have sold an item on ebay.²⁷ This clearly demonstrates the benefit, for some, of internet trading. There are economic imperatives for increasing the digitalisation of Wales and the slower broadband connections and lack of infrastructure is a major disadvantage particularly rural businesses.

Impact on the economy

With a rising unemployment rate, the Welsh Assembly Government must find ways to keep Wales working. Promoting digital inclusion among those out of work will increase the opportunities for finding employment. Research shows that “people who are not working are least likely to use the internet”²⁸ despite the fact that, increasingly, recruitment processes are only available online. The fact is that the world economy is going digital. If Wales wants to be part of economic growth, all residents must be able to participate. Research from PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates that “the total economic benefit of getting everyone in the UK online is in excess of £22bn”.²⁹ Digital inclusion is vital for a ‘vibrant’ Welsh economy.

2. Do you agree with the nature of the problem as set out above? What other factors should be considered?

Chwarae Teg believes that a detailed examination and a policy Equality Impact Assessment of the 900,000 digitally excluded must be carried out. Before the Welsh Assembly Government can find solutions, they first need to be clear about **who** the individuals are and **where** to find them. Then they need find out **why** these people are excluded. Is it a lack of finance? Is it a lack of skills? Is it a lack of interest? Or is it something else? **It is only when the barriers and needs of these individuals are understood that a successful strategy can be developed.**

Research shows that **the main reason people do not have the internet is because they do not want it.** A survey by Consumer Focus Wales showed that 41% of those not using the internet just do not want to use it. A further 19% believe they do not need to use it. For 21%, the barrier relates to equipment or cost and 38% lack skills or say it is ‘too complicated’.³⁰ While there is a need to develop the skills of excluded groups, there is an even greater need to teach people the benefits of going digital. This will help people to understand why it is essential that they are able to use new technologies.

We also believe that the Welsh Assembly Government must recognise that **there are clear gender differences in groups which are digitally excluded.** Gender has not been

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Richards, S. (2009) *Logged In or Locked Out?* (Consumer Focus Wales: Cardiff)

²⁹ PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2009) *Champion for Digital Inclusion: The Economic Case for Digital Inclusion* (PWC: London)

³⁰ Richards, S. (2009) *Logged In or Locked Out?* (Consumer Focus Wales: Cardiff)

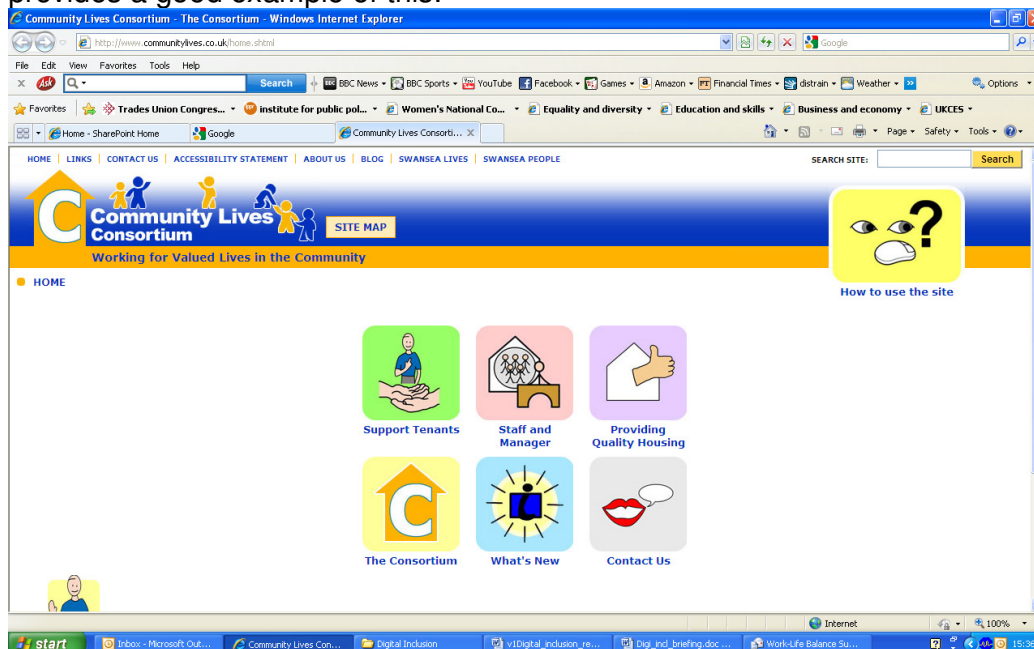
identified in the strategy as a factor contributing to digital exclusion. However, figures show that women are less likely to use the internet than men overall and that single women, older women and lone parents are particularly likely to be disadvantaged as a result of digital exclusion.

Cohesive service provision is vital. Services should be contracted out to the most appropriate provider for each target group but delivery should be co-ordinated centrally to ensure standards are consistent. Finally, the strategy must recognise that the digital world is forever changing. **Success will require a degree of flexibility.** It should be possible for the strategy to be amended over time to meet the changing needs of the audience.

3. To what extent do you agree with the approaches and actions outlined here? What else should be considered? What does not need to be included? What is the most important priority?

Chwarae Teg believes that the initiatives run by groups so far have gone some way to reducing digital exclusion but there is much more that needs to be done. We make recommendations below for the delivery of training and information in the community. We also believe that work should be carried out to create more accessible websites and better service support.

Organisations need to improve the way services are delivered online. If services are easy to use then they will be promoted via word of mouth. For example, road tax is so quick and easy to buy online that users tell other people and then they try it as well. **Websites should be designed with the end user in mind.** The Community Lives Consortium provides a good example of this:



This site uses clear images and symbols alongside simple language to make the site accessible. Any websites or online services also need to be advertised in a clear manner.

We believe that the best place to deliver digital inclusion is in the community. Chwarae Teg suggests the development of a **'digital angels'** network. Angels would be members of the local community who appreciate the barriers and benefits of digital inclusion. They would then promote digital technologies and deliver training or advice to others. Having local people delivering the message addresses any issues of trust.

We believe that another good way to reach people is to create a **mobile facility** that can provide use of equipment, information and training. This would allow for outreach in rural and urban areas. A **fully funded 'using the internet' course** should be an ongoing provision. Apart from building capacity, this type of course could also result in the participant gaining a qualification and increasing competency in digital use.

Other modules may include:

- Flexible working & technology
- Save money using the internet
- Using the internet to communicate with family and friends
- Using the internet to make money
- Keeping safe on the internet
- All about emails
- All about browser

There may be other modules that address the specific needs of the identified groups. Other organisations could help develop modules to address these.

A successful strategy will look at new ways to deliver information. For example, the television 'red button' is a good way of communicating information but this is not used to its full potential.

4. How are you/your organisation going to contribute to this agenda through your policy and practice?

Chwarae Teg has extensive links with women's networks all over Wales and across all socio-economic groups. In view of our raison d'être, we have an understanding and empathy with women and this could be used to reach women and find out what the barriers are for them when it comes to digital technology. This may be carried by running focus groups, surveys, etc

When the focus of digital inclusion moves toward the workplace, Chwarae Teg can promote and support flexible or remote working. SMEs account for 99 per cent of businesses in the UK. They are responsible for more than half of all UK employment and more than half of



the UK's estimated business turnover.³¹ Evidence suggests that SMEs recognise the benefits of digital technology but often do not have the resources to implement an effective strategy. Digital Inclusion is vital for business as it supports flexible and remote working, allowing employers to tap into the widest talent pool.

Digitally enabled businesses and individuals are open to new working methods and new opportunities. Chwarae Teg could work with non-digital companies to help them take their processes online and use technology to facilitate remote working. Chwarae Teg's Agile Nation project can provide support for SMEs in convergence areas who want to implement flexible and remote working. Consultancy services are available through this project and can be accessed by contacting a project office. Details can be found on our website www.agile.nation.co.uk.

Finally, Chwarae Teg has suggested the development of a 'digital angels' network. We could develop and manage this network. The 'angels' would be members of the local community who could deliver training and information to help others become digitally able – become the amateur for digitalisation.

5. We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not addressed, please tell us what they are.

It is important to remember that digital exclusion is not just about computers. There are also people who cannot use or do not have access to mobile phones or digital television.

To be successful, the strategy needs to provide targeted solutions for targeted groups. Campaigns may be delivered using a variety of means (e.g. television, mobile phones). The Welsh Assembly Government provides over 2,600 PCs for public use in 330 libraries across Wales and an increasing number of libraries are providing free Wi-Fi access.³² It may be worthwhile considering other venues for this provision. For example, Working men's clubs or community centres may be better placed to deliver this provision. It is also important to realise that "people from the lower socio-economic groups (DE) and people from the over 65 age group are least likely to use a public access computer".³³

Online security and safety is very important and fear of this can prevent individuals from accessing services. A possible solution is to provide a 'walled garden' service so that exclusive services are available for this group of users.

The provision of training and information is the key to reducing the amount of people in Wales who are digitally excluded. We have already suggested utilising the skills of those in the community who are digitally enabled to teach and support those who are not. We believe that basic training is required to provide an 'introduction to technology'. It is also

³¹ Department of Communities and Local Government (2008) *Community Perspectives on Digital Inclusion* (Communities and Local Government Publishing: West Yorkshire)

³² Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Delivering Digital Inclusion: A Strategic Framework for Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government: Cardiff)

³³ Richards, S. (2009) *Logged In or Locked Out?* (Consumer Focus Wales: Cardiff)

important to teach individuals about the pitfalls of technology to reduce fear and make sure people know how to keep their information secure.

Support services such as telephone call centres could also be improved so that users receive a speedy and reliable service. Research shows that “broadband customers who phone technical support lines are spending millions of pounds annually by being kept on hold”.³⁴ Price comparison site, USwitch, claims that more than 15 million calls are made annually by consumers looking for technical advice. These calls cost an average of £1.75 each time.³⁵

Final Comment

Chwarae Teg commends the Welsh Assembly Government in recognising the importance and value to all communities and businesses of the value of digitalisation as one of the interventions of social and community cohesion.

Through our work with women, both in rural and urban environments, Chwarae Teg can be a conduit to progress this strategy further and would welcome the opportunity of developing initiatives and interventions to ensure inclusivity.

For further information from Chwarae Teg, please contact:

- Beverley Pold – bev.pold@chwaraeteg.com
- Christine O’Byrne – christine.o’byrne@chwaraeteg.com
- www.chwaraeteg.com

Or,

Chwarae Teg
Anchor Court
Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW

02920 478900

³⁴ Richards, S. (2009) *Logged In or Locked Out?* (Consumer Focus Wales: Cardiff)

³⁵ Ibid.