



16<sup>th</sup> January 2006

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## **Scottish Accessible Information Forum Response to Digital Inclusion Consultation**

### **Background to SAIF**

The Scottish Accessible Information Forum (SAIF) was set up to take forward the recommendations of the Scottish Working Group on Information Services for Disabled People and Carers in its final report *Enabling Information (1995)*.

### **Aims and objectives**

SAIF supports the rights of disabled people and carers to have access to timely and accurate information to meet their needs. SAIF aims to improve the provision of information to disabled people and carers and make information more accessible to everyone who needs it. Rather than being forced to rely on others, disabled people should receive information directly and in their preferred format, enabling them to make informed choices and live independent lives as equal members of society.

## **Advisory body**

SAIF acts as an advisory body to the Scottish Executive on issues relating to the accessibility of information for disabled people and carers.

## **Members**

SAIF is made up of 21 people representing providers of information and advice and organisations of and for disabled people and carers. Over half of the members of SAIF are disabled people or carers themselves.

## **Remit**

The key elements of the remit of SAIF are:

- to develop and promote quality standards in information provision to disabled people and carers
- to represent and promote the interests of disabled people in having access to information services
- to promote communication between national and local information providers
- to advise the Scottish Executive on policy relating to accessible information
- to improve disabled people's access to information.

## **Digital Inclusion Consultation Response**

SAIF welcomes the increased use of technology as a means of improving the accessibility of information for everyone. However, practitioners will need not only general training in using computers and the internet in order to support public users effectively, but also specialist training in assistive technology in order to support disabled people who wish to use publicly available ICT.

It is particularly important that there is a consistency to public internet access, support and ICT which includes the provision of assistive technology and support with its use. Disabled people who cannot access computers using standard equipment such as the mouse,

keyboard or monitor, are often excluded from making use of publicly available ICT.

The way in which public services are currently delivered does not adequately support groups which are disadvantaged and more effective use of technology should be made to improve the delivery of services to those groups. Some examples of this working well are the website of the Glasgow Learning Disability Partnership at [www.ixseed.org.uk](http://www.ixseed.org.uk) and the Common Knowledge Project in Glasgow at [www.ckglasgow.or.uk](http://www.ckglasgow.or.uk)

Underpinning the digital inclusion policy should be the importance of recognising that ICT is a tool and not an end in itself. Topic-based projects that use computers and the internet as a means of obtaining information, learning and producing an end product are more likely to be successful than starting from the premise that ICT is inherently a good thing. For example, promoting the internet for activities that may be irrelevant, such as shopping or paying bills online, when many disadvantaged people do not have credit or debit facilities and therefore would be excluded will not do much to increase take-up. There is often a need to provide people with a good reason for using ICT. It is not intuitive and most people, disadvantaged or not, need support to use it well. The fact that many PIAPs are under-used is evidence of this.

### **The Role of the Scottish Executive and Local Authorities in Digital Inclusion**

The Scottish Executive should support community-based work, encouraging the roll-out of initiatives that work well and encouraging companies across all sectors to embed accessible information practices into all their material including websites. For more information see SAIF publication *Making Websites Accessible*.

Local Authorities should provide training and support to practitioners to ensure that they can provide good quality support to users. In particular, to ensure that access for everyone is embedded in services through the adoption of an accessible information strategy.

As well as Making Websites Accessible, referred to above, SAIF has produced a range of publications which can assist service providers and they can be downloaded from the SAIF website:

<http://www.saifscotland.org.uk/publications/publicat.htm>.

Yours sincerely

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