



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

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Wahine O Aotearoa

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**Submission to the Ministry of Economic Development on the
Draft Digital Strategy Feedback**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 41 nationally organised societies. It has 33 branches spread throughout the country to which women from 150 societies are affiliated. The Council's function is to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action. Specialist standing committees study and comment on particular matters.

This response is composed from responses from 15 branches, several affiliated societies and 8 individuals. NCWNZ commends the Government for its willingness to consult so widely on this important topic, for the presentation of the document in three booklets to aid the consultative process, for the depth of information provided and for the provision of seminars. However, some Branches considered the document very difficult on account of its length and apparent repetitiveness. NCWNZ would have preferred a more manageable and therefore more useful process, whereby New Zealand citizens could express their concerns and leave the relevant Government Ministries to incorporate these concerns into the final document. This comment is based on the fact that the Strategy Feedback document cannot properly be completed without in-depth study of the main document, an impossible task for most NCWNZ members, and that the sections in the Feedback Booklet do not altogether match the main document sections.

1. VISION AND FRAMEWORK

1.1 Do you agree with the vision? Yes/No? Why/Why not?

In general NCWNZ members agreed with the vision as stated in the document because of the benefits of digital technology and because digital technology is already having an impact on society in all aspects. Having a Government-led vision would seem to be imperative because of the nature of digital technology and the potential problems associated with it. These include the following:

- The need for Government to provide adequate funding especially in the education sector to ensure sound foundational learning for all students and training for teachers.
- The need for the Government to support and possibly legislate more for security and cyber-safety.
- The dangerous side-effects of exclusion which the technology could have for some geographic areas, some socio-economic groups, some ethnic groups and some communities in ways which would necessitate Government intervention.

1.2 Are the focus areas raised in this strategy appropriate to achieve this vision? Do you have alternatives?

The focus areas arise logically from the principles and are all appropriate for the vision. Content, confidence and connection are relevant and practical. They are sufficiently broad in scope to encompass accessibility, affordability, availability and application. By showing interaction between communities, business and government there is by inference, co-operation, which will be an essential requirement for attaining the vision.





One of the greatest social benefits of ICT is its potential to reduce isolation and expand opportunities for the disabled and those who live in remote areas. Although these issues are included in the discussion document, NCWNZ would like to see greater emphasis on this angle.

NCWNZ believes that another focus area that should be highlighted more is sustainability and maintenance. There are a number of issues that cover all sectors; in particular cost effectiveness and recycling of waste products, storage and validation.

1.3 Does this Strategy address the key opportunities and challenges that New Zealand faces in becoming a world leader at using information and technology?

The Strategy is a good starting point but it will need to be monitored and reviewed. The New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE) should be asked and resourced to research progress.

2 CONTENT

2.1 To what extent will the draft outcome statement contribute to achieving the vision?

The draft Content Outcome will contribute to achieving the vision to the extent that content development is of high quality, is user-friendly, is available to all ethnic, age and geographically situated groups as well as urban communities, and is supported by a well-resourced infrastructure.

Our concerns included the following:

- accessibility to all the content required in view of copyright
- access restrictions on account of the technical difficulty of retrieval
- accessibility restricted by inadequate training and numbers of trained people
- costs and pricing

2.2 Are there other issues in this focus area you would like to see considered?

One area of concern, from the point of view of sustainability, is the commercially-driven rapid development of hardware. Will people with earlier model computers always be able to access content or will access be available increasingly only through late model hardware?

2.3 Of the actions proposed, which do you see as most important to achieving the outcome statement?

All are important. Our priorities are:

- Content development especially of NZ content and Government services,
- Provision of trained infomediaries
- Content discovery and access.

2.4 Are there other specific actions that you think should be considered?

Some extension of the actions proposed should be:

- A cost-benefit analysis of the location of the terminals (public libraries, CABs, marae, or elsewhere). Limited tax-payer resources need to be used carefully for greatest benefit.
- Training of infomediaries in other languages.
- Local content including at community level provided by local providers.
- Policy developed on public access to information developed by publicly funded research.



3 CONFIDENCE AND CAPABILITY

3.1 To what extent will the draft outcome statement contribute to achieving the vision

The draft outcome statement will ensure the success of the strategy but is it too ambitious? The implications are huge for Government funding and on-going support. The inclusiveness of the statement is commendable.

3.2 Are there other key issues in this focus area you would like to see considered?

To judge the success of the digital strategy, there need to be ways of evaluating success. The Outcome (p. 31) is worded discretely but this section would be more effective if some evaluative measures of success were included, or if monitoring the progress of the more disadvantaged groups in society and those for whom English is a second language were included in the Challenges. The Strategy needs to be researched from the beginning by NZARE as the Educational Reforms of the 1990s were researched.

3.3 Of the actions proposed, which do you see as most important to achieving the outcome statement?

While all are important, NCWNZ priorities are:

- Raising awareness through a national campaign
- Training at all levels, all ages, all skill areas and providing practical assistance at ground level.
- Cyber-safety
- Expanding regional partnerships

3.4 Are there other specific actions that you think should be considered? By whom and by when?

Of all the issues of concern to NCWNZ members, health and cyber-safety featured most strongly. The latter is already being addressed through legislation and publicity. These issues should be monitored by Government to ensure that the protections are effective and affordable for all users of the internet and that people are aware of the dangers. NCWNZ members are concerned about the possible adverse social effects of increased use of digital technology on increased isolation, obesity, stress, work pressure, Repetitive Strain Injury and unemployment.

As indicated in 3.2, monitoring, evaluation and research should be built into the actions and should be on-going.

NCWNZ is particularly pleased to note the actions already being taken to deal with waste (p.40) which is a major problem because of the in-built obsolescence of hardware in the commercially driven world of digital technology.

4 CONNECTION

4.1 To what extent will the draft outcome statement contribute to achieving the vision

The outcome statement is excellent and if followed through successfully would meet the concerns of NCWNZ members. NCWNZ members are particularly concerned that the infrastructure will be accessible and affordable to all New Zealanders. They fear a widening of societal divisions if some are excluded because of rural location, poverty or lack of education. The more Government relies on digital technology to communicate, the more essential it is that Government ensure that facilities are easily accessible and affordable.



4.2 Are there other key issues in this focus area you would like to see considered?

NCWNZ members would like to see more detail about the role of the individual person-to-person interface in the brave new world of ITC.

4.3 Of the actions proposed, which do you see as most important to achieving the outcome statement?

NCWNZ members indicated the following priorities:

- Broadband access for schools and rural areas
- Pricing and on-going cost structures. Pricing of mobile calls is a particular concern.
- Availability of information.

4.4 Are there other specific actions that you think should be considered? By whom and by when?

Government should monitor connectivity development to ensure a healthy balance between commercial enterprise and public good. The Strategy indicates that public and commercial good requires an ICT-literate populace. Only Government can ensure a fair balance which would indicate a fair cost structure especially where some e-industries, such as the telecommunication industry, have monopolies. This should be on-going. Some NCWNZ members commented that power shortages could have disastrous effects over a wide range. Perhaps the Strategy should include a risk analysis and rapid response team

One of the complexities is that there should be Government supervision but also flexibility, variety and choice at personal and national level.

5 COMMUNITIES

5.1 To what extent will the draft outcome statement contribute to achieving the vision.

The outcome statement is another important statement indicating the priority given social and cultural as well as economic well-being. The strategy must support healthy, happy and thriving communities. While there are many, particularly in the older age group, who have resisted becoming ICT-literate, there are increasing numbers of this group who use email and cell-phones to communicate with family. Often this is initiated through younger family members. One could expect that familiarity with digital technology for social and cultural matters would lead on to greater familiarity with economic use.

5.2 Are there other key issues in this focus area you would like to see considered?

Concern has been expressed about the way digital technology is being used in adverse ways. For example, the increase in the use of the technology for bullying at school and for cheating. In addition, reliance on the technology for providing information could disadvantage those without ready access to home computers. Again concern was expressed for those living in rural areas for whom access by digital technology could be impaired by technical weaknesses and commercial decisions despite the fact that the technology would be particularly important to these communities to reduce isolation.

One issue which should be considered is monitoring the harmful side effects on communities.

5.3 Of the actions proposed, which do you see as most important to achieving the outcome statement?

The priorities identified by NCWNZ are as follows:

- Access to ICT for all especially for those in remote areas
- ICT training
- Tools for community development
- The ICT partnership fund.



The emphasis on effective use of ICT by groups within communities was indicative of a desire to see stronger communities and the best value for the ICT dollar. Community groups sharing technology, training and IT information was considered helpful in developing stronger communities and aiding IT learning for access to general information

5.4 Are there other specific actions that you think should be considered? By whom and by when?

An increase in the use of digital technology could make the worker more accessible and therefore, make it more difficult for the work/life balance to be attained or maintained. Family life could be adversely affected. This should be monitored carefully from the outset by Government Departments concerned with family, welfare and health perhaps through the provision of scholarships for research within universities.

Voluntary organizations should be encouraged to provide local services, support and training.

6 BUSINESSES

6.1 To what extent will the draft outcome statement contribute to achieving the vision

The outcome statement will promote the vision provided that assistance is given through training and other incentives such as taxation incentives and so on.

6.2 Are there other key issues in this focus area you would like to see considered?

The key issue is security of supply of power. This can only be secured by Government policy and control of provision of infrastructure.

Security and safety of data, hacking by competitors all contribute to small businesses fear of involvement in too much digital technology. Fear of human error is also a huge barrier to achieving the outcome and increasing GDP to the extent stated in the outcome. Human error includes the making of errors in recording data, mixing up client data, inadvertent erasure, incorrect storage and so on. Business firms using both email and hardcopy then have the problems of double storage

6.3 Of the actions proposed, which do you see as most important to achieving the outcome statement?

NCWNZ considered the key actions to be

- Promoting Youth Enterprise
- Developing an integrated ICT awareness and capability programme especially for small and medium businesses.
- Addressing the barriers.

6.4 Are there other specific actions that you think should be considered? By whom and by when?

The sponsoring of local conferences by Government, tertiary institutions or ITOs to develop networks and raise confidence would be constructive, as would sponsoring research into ways of removing the frustration which businesses have with access, whether it is connectivity or slow response time. This should be on-going.

If Government wants to promote the Digital Strategy, they could start by providing incentives for businesses to produce user-friendly systems. Many NCWNZ members mentioned the frustration they have with business use of the electronic voice mail. Maybe business should be encouraged to be more restrained or more inventive in their use of pre-recorded messages. The impersonal and not very efficient use of digital technology for business telephone contact is a major blemish on the ICT public image.



7 THE GOVERNMENT

7.1 To what extent will the draft outcome statement contribute to achieving the vision

Improvement in the integration of Government information, service delivery and processes could help New Zealand operate more effectively in some business, health and education areas through the quicker dissemination of information. Success would depend on the success of the integration and the skills of the citizens.

7.2 Are there other key issues in this focus area you would like to see considered?

The boundary between local and central government needs to be more clearly delineated.

7.3 Of the actions proposed, which do you see as most important to achieving the outcome statement?

NCWNZ considered the priorities should be as follows:

- Common standards. These are essential to the inter-operability of different government Departments
- Benchmarking e-Government – especially against other OECD countries
- Collaboration. There should be no barriers between central and local government.

7.4 Are there other specific actions that you think should be considered? By whom and by when?

NCWNZ considered the issue of funding for health and education to be a matter of grave concern. If digital technology can free-up more resources for these two areas that is to be greatly applauded. Insufficient detail has been provided in the draft document to clarify how the use of digital technology will actually bring this about. Maybe the Minister of Finance should promote this angle.

Another matter raised by some NCWNZ members is the need to encourage wider participation in decision-making at local and central Government level and digital technology should help to do this. This would have to be a local and central Government sponsored effort.

CONCLUSION

NCWNZ thanks the Honorable David Cunliffe for the opportunity to reflect upon and respond to this important issue. There is no doubt that the future of our world is now, and will continue to be, greatly affected by digital technology. The document provided NCWNZ members with an opportunity to raise their concerns about the issues of access, affordability, misuse and costs, all of which affect women and families. The document also provided an opportunity for members to become more aware of the future possibilities provided by the proposed strategy for all New Zealanders.

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