Thematic Update: Theme F (ICT)

Adaptability

Adaptability of firms and employees

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1.0 Introduction

This paper gives an overview of policy developments in relation to Theme F of EQUAL. It sets out the key developments at European, national and regional levels on the theme of adaptability, and particularly Information Communication and Technology (ICTs). DPs funded under Theme F should also consult the Theme F Briefing paper on Work/life balance and may also wish to consult the briefing updates for Theme E and Theme H. A list of references and sources of further information are listed at the end of the paper.

1.1 Recap

The strategic objective of Theme F is 'to promote inclusive working practices and adaptability including: work/life balance, use of ICT.' The EQUAL Community Initiative Programme (CIP) describes how the IT Electronics and Communications (ITEC) skills strategy aims to make the UK the number one country for the supply of these specialist skills. The CIP outlines how EQUAL should focus both on innovative approaches to help develop higher level skills and to ensure that the IT strategy is able to engage those with lower level skills to ensure they are not doubly disadvantaged in the world of work.

A further key issue to be addressed through EQUAL (both within Theme F and H) is to encourage more women into skilled ITEC occupations, an area in which they are currently under-represented. The CIP describes how the gender issue can be tackled in two ways. Firstly by promoting a more positive image of jobs in ITEC to women to encourage more to study ITEC related qualifications and pursue careers in ITEC. Secondly to get employers to recruit from non-traditional labour pools, and put in place employment practices that support the needs and interests of women and allow them to pursue career goals while balancing work/life responsibilities.

1.2 Thematic Networking Group

The Thematic Networking Group (TNG) for Theme F has a key role in ensuring activities are relevant to the changing policy context of adaptability and ICTs. Members from the following organisations are part of the TNG:

- National Institute of Adults Continuing Education (NIACE)
- Department for Trade and Industry
- Confederation of British Industry
- East Midlands Development Agency
- National Assembly for Wales
- Scottish Executive
- Trades Union Congress
- **learndirect**/Ufi

2.0 European Policy Context

At the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, Europe's leaders committed themselves to an ambitious strategy for economic reform. The vision agreed at Lisbon was of a dynamic job-creating Europe that delivers on both economic and social objectives to become the leading knowledge-based economy in the world. The move towards a knowledge-based society underpinned the whole Lisbon strategy, and was also reflected in many aspects of the National Action Plans of each of the Member States. The European e-Skills Summit[1] Declaration re-stated the ambitions set out at Lisbon. The declaration included the need to widen participation and increase training programmes in ICT especially for disadvantaged groups such as women, the unemployed, those with disabilities and minority groups. The declaration has been followed up by the launch of the European e-Skills Forum[2] in March 2003, which is designed to foster an open dialogue between all stakeholders and to catalyse actions contributing to implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, the Skills and Mobility Action Plan and eEurope 2005, a strategy followed by the strategy i2010 European Information Society 2010 in 2005.

The Employment Strategy set by the Council acknowledges the new opportunities that are being created by the knowledge-based economy, but also warns that taking advantage of these opportunities requires an adaptation of work organisation and a contribution to lifelong learning by everyone. The European Employment Guidelines[3] state that *"Member States will implement lifelong learning strategies…to equip all individuals with the skills required for a modern workforce in a knowledge-based society"*. The conditions for giving every worker the opportunity to achieve 'information society literacy' would be established in this context.

The European Council of 2004 underlined the urgency for progress towards achieving the Employment Strategy objectives. EU progress towards the Lisbon Strategy 2010 target of a 70% overall employment rate has come to a standstill and it has become clear that the EU will also miss its interim target for 2005 of 67%. With this in mind, the Council set up an 'Employment Task Force', which reported in 2004; and agreed a new set of sharper, country-specific Recommendations for 2004 which build upon the recommendations of the Task Force. The 2004 Recommendations feed into the mid-term review of the EES in 2005. Investing in human capital and lifelong learning forms a key strand of the new recommendations requiring member states to *"Develop innovative learning and training methods (such as e-learning) ands invest in skills related to new information technologies"*[4]

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[1] The European e-Skills Summit 16-18th October 2002, Copenhagen, Denmark http://www.e-skills-summit.org/

[2] The European e-Skills Forum http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/esf

[3] Council Decision of 22 July 2003 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (COM 2003/578/EC). Guidelines available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/employment_strategy/guidelines_en.htm

[4] Recommendations for 2004 available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/employment_strategy/recomm_en.htm

The European Council of March 2005 highlighted the focus on growth and employment, simplification and national ownership of national action plans to relaunch the Lisbon reform agenda. The annual progress report on growth and jobs of January 2006[5] recommends that member states make a stronger investment in R& D and in development and spend more of the Structural funds on ICT to foster competitiveness, regional cohesion to the benefit of SMEs in particular. Similarly the new employment guidelines of 2005 highlight that the EU needs more effective investment in human capital and lifelong learning for the benefit of individuals, enterprises, the economy and society. The guidelines highlight that "*ICT can be used to improve access to learning and better tailor it [education and training systems] to the needs of employers and employees."*

The UK National Reform Programme of 2005 highlights some of the actions the UK is taking forward in meeting the European employment guidelines. The Budget 2005 announced continued investment in ICT in education. IT spend levels, for example, were around £14 billion across the UK public sector directly supporting electronically enabled frontline services. The Government is working with business to improve regulation in the UK and throughout Europe to stimulate competition between providers of electronic communications; stimulating the development of a competitive broadband infrastructure; encourage investment in innovation through the DTI's Technology Programme; promoting the confidence and security of Internet users; implement the Digital Strategy to ensure everyone has the opportunity to benefit fully from ICT; and promote a new degree-level qualification, Information Technology Management for Business, combining professional IT with broader management skills. Improving ICT skills at all levels is another key element. The Government's e-learning strategy will deliver integrated online content and services to support basic skills for adult learners, enhance leadership and staff development in ICT, and build a common digital infrastructure for the education, training and work-based sectors.

In the autumn of 2005 the Government has launched a new strategic approach to delivering services making optimal use of new technologies so as to make a real difference to businesses and citizens. Through the www.businesslink.gov.uk website, the Government provides information on a wide range of ICT issues, specifically to SMEs who can suffer from a lack of access to high quality and impartial information on how to use and manage ICT within their businesses. The RDAs, through the regional and local Business Link network, lead the way in front line delivery of support to SMEs on e-business. The ICT agenda also features strongly in regional economic strategies.

The 2004 Recommendations from the Commission to the UK outlined country-specific priorities; for the UK the focus is on implementing national and regional skills strategies to provide better incentives for lifelong learning. The 2005 recommendations do not address ICT as such but do recommend that the UK take efforts to address skills challenges to improve employment prospects for the most disadvantaged.

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[5] *Time to Move Up A Gear-The European Commission's 2006 Annual Progress Report on Growth and Jobs* http://europa.eu.int/growthandjobs/annual-report_en.htm

Central elements of the strategy to transform the European economy were the eEurope 2005 Action Plan[6] – endorsed in January 2003 – objective by 2005 was for Europe tohave modern online public services (e-government, e-learning services, e-health services) and a dynamic e-business environment and, as an enabler for these, widespread availability of broadband access at competitive prices and a secure information infrastructure. Since then, in June 2005, the Commission has launched a new 5-year strategy building on the eEurope 2005 action plan, to boost the digital economy. The initiative 'i2010: European Information Society 2010' aims at modernising and deploying all EU instruments to encourage the development of the digital economy. In particular, high-speed and secure broadband networks will be promoted. The i2010 has three policy priorities: creating an open and competitive single market for information society and media services within the EU, increasing investment in research on information and communication technologies by 80% and promoting an inclusive European information society. In order to do this the Commission will propose and Action Plan on e-government for citizen-centred services in 2006, quality of life ICT flagship initiatives in 2007 as well as actions to overcome geographic and social digital divide, culminating in a European initiative on e-inclusion in 2008.

A benchmarking report from 2002[7] highlighted that some countries in Europe are significantly behind the leading member states in terms of internet penetration. It concluded that although more people were using computers in their jobs, many of them were not formally trained, with socially disadvantaged people in particular still falling behind in computer access and training. Accessibility to information and communication systems for people with disabilities was a particular concern during the Year of People with Disabilities in 2003. The report suggested that although eEurope had been a success in terms of getting more people and companies online, much more work is needed to develop effective usage and availability of the internet.

The more recent Benchmarking report from 2005 outlines that broadband roll out is available to nearly all EU citizens, with the exception of new member states and sparsely populated regions. Disparities between member states are still an issue and have not reduced between start of eEurope and 2004. Connectivity of enterprises is high and there is some catch up by SMEs, however, ICT business has grown slowly. Online public services have continued to grow and their use has also grown. In 2004, across the EU25 one fifths of the population looked for government information on the web, rising to two-fifths in EU15.[8] The report concludes that all member states need more policy support with extending the information

[6] eEurope Action Plan 2005 http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/2005/index_en.htm

[7] eEurope benchmarking report COM (2002) 62 Final, Brussels 5 February 2002. Available at http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/2002/benchmarking/index_en.htm

[8] Information society benchmarking report, 2005 http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/i2010/docs/benchmarking/051222%20Final%20Benchmarking%20Report.pdf

society to people with little or no formal education, those not in employment and older people.[9]

In 2001, EU candidate countries launched the eEurope+ initiative.[10] This is a commitment to embrace the challenges of a knowledge economy by developing strategies for the information society in each country to accelerate the reform and modernisation of their economies. It mirrors the EU's eEurope Action Plan, but with additions and changes to the objectives and timetable to reflect the economic and social situation in candidate countries. Thus eEurope+ aims to ensure that an enlarged EU will not suffer from a digital divide between old and new member states.

The final eEurope+ Progress Report was presented in 2004[11]. It states that despite good progress towards targets, the majority of Acceding and Candidate countries still have some way to go before they reach the levels of IT availability and usage seen in current EU member states and before Europe can be regarded as making satisfactory progress towards the Lisbon goals. This is also highlighted in the Benchmarking report from 2005.

The Commission has recently outlined the strategy going beyond 2005 up to 2010 in a communication on “Challenges for Europe’s Information Society beyond 2005: Starting point for a new EU strategy” – adopted in November 2004.[12] This communication highlights the need to step up research and investment in ICT’s and focuses on ICT as a key industry sector; ICT for business processes and the role of ICT in skills and work. The Commission has launched a public consultation to stimulate broad policy debate on the future strategy to which email contributions are being accepted until January 2005[13]. An eEurope Advisory Group has also been set up to provide strategic advice on the future of eEurope plans.[14]

[9] Information society benchmarking report, 2005
http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/i2010/docs/benchmarking/051222%20Final%20Benchmarking%20Report.pdf

[10] http://europa.eu.int/information_society/international/candidate_countries/index_en.htm

[11] eEurope 2004 Progress Report. Available at
http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/2005/doc/all_about/benchmarking/eeuropeplus_progress_report.pdf

[12] “Challenges for Europe’s Information Society beyond 2005: Starting point for a new EU strategy” 19 November 2004
available at http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/2005/all_about/2010_challenges/index_en.htm

[13] Submissions for the consultation can be made by email to: infso-eeurope@cec.eu.int

[14] Details of the eEurope working group available at:
http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/2005/all_about/advisory_group/index_en.htm

3.0 UK Policy Context

There are several key national policy areas of relevance to the ICT theme of the EQUAL programme, namely; national ICT skills initiatives; community ICT initiatives; e-Learning strategy and small business initiatives.

The UK National Reform Programme of October 2005 recognises the inter-linkages between the effective deployment of information and communications technology (ICT) and beneficial impacts on UK productivity growth. SME access to ICT is highlighted as an issue. The Government provides information on a wide range of ICT issues, constantly updated in response to a rapidly changing environment. The ICT agenda also features strongly in regional economic strategies as well as in the RDA local and regional Business Link network, which deliver support to SMEs on e-business.

National ICT skills initiatives

The Department of Trade and Industry published 'Opportunity for all in a world of change' - a White Paper on Enterprise, Skills and Innovation, in February 2001[15]. The paper sets out the next steps for Government in helping individuals, communities and businesses to prosper in a fast changing world.

The White Paper addresses five key challenges:

- closing the skills gap, particularly in basic skills, ICT skills and intermediate and technical skills.
- building strong regions and communities through a new regional policy.
- investing in innovation.
- fostering enterprise by continuing to improve the regulatory and financial environment.
- strengthening European and global connections.

The paper identifies a number of skills shortages which need to be addressed in order for individuals and businesses to succeed within a knowledge-driven economy. The paper highlights that today's knowledge based economy increasingly demands people with high level skills and the ability to adapt quickly to changing requirements. In particular, the paper identifies a shortage of technicians and ICT professionals. The paper also comments on the need to bring people who are disadvantaged in the labour market, including women and disabled people, into skilled ICT employment. The Government proposes to work with business to encourage recruitment and retention practices, which meet the needs of these groups.

The paper sets out a strategy for:

- driving up the skills of the workforce by building on the recommendations of the National Skills Taskforce.
- fostering links between education and business, ensuring that all employers invest in the skills of their employees.

[15] White paper available at: http://www.dti.gov.uk/opportunityforall/

- developing a workforce with advanced ICT skills and 'know-how'.
- developing a workforce with world-beating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills.

The paper outlines a number of measures to enable the Government to meet the above objectives. As part of this strategy, eighteen New Technology Institutes (NTIs)[16] have been set up throughout England, across the nine regions. They aim to boost the regional supply of information technology and other high-tech skills, and the transfer of technical knowledge to local businesses. NTIs are consortia of higher education institutions, further education colleges and private sector partners. They have been designed to increase the number of students receiving high quality teaching in ICT and advanced technology skills. They provide a range of courses from NVQ level 3, to degree level qualifications and advise and support SMEs on the effective adoption of new technology and business practices. They also collaborate with local employers, and regional and national organisations, such as the Small Business Service and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), to identify skills gaps.

The White Paper 2005 Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on in work

In 2004 the DTI launched its "Technology Strategy" as part of the government's 10 year science and innovation strategy (2004-2014). The Technology Strategy gives grants to companies investing in new and emerging technologies. The competition for funding opened in November 2004[17].

The National Skills Strategy White Paper, "21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential" was launched by the DfES in July 2003[18]. Its goal is to maximise the contribution of skills to raising productivity, economic competitiveness and sustainable employment in the UK. The Strategy aims to strengthen the UK's position as one of the world's leading economies by ensuring that employers have the skills to support the success of their business, and that employees have the necessary skills to be both employable and personally fulfilled. The Skills Strategy is primarily a strategy for England, reflecting the devolution of responsibility for education and training to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but it has been developed in consultation with the Devolved Administrations, and is consistent with their policies for skills. For individual learners the Skills Strategy aims to develop opportunities to gain skills in using ICT. Basic ICT skills will become a third area of adult basic skills, alongside literacy and numeracy within the "Skills for Life" programme. As part of the strategy, a "Skills Alliance" was established, bringing together 4 government departments (DfES, DTi, DWP and Treasury) plus key industry partners such as the CBI, TUC and Small Business Council, as well as Learning and Skills Council delivery organisations.

[16] http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Reachout/NTIs

[17] See www.dti.gov.uk/technologyprogramme/about.htm

[18] http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy

'Skills for Life' is the DfES' national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills[19], prioritising the unemployed and benefit claimants, prisoners and others supervised in the community, public sector employees, workers in low-skilled jobs and other groups at risk of exclusion. Underpinning the drive to improve the ICT competence of the population, is the estimation that by 2006, 90% of all jobs will require a basic competence in keyboard and ICT skills[20]. The DfES' 'ReadWritePlus' website is the online delivery arm for the strategy.[21]

One year on, the government has published the "Skills Strategy Progress Report" (July 2004)[22] which reports on the Skills Alliance's progress under the strategy. The report states that good progress has been made, for example 200,000 learners achieved at least one Skills for Life qualification this year. However at this stage the groundwork has only just begun and there is more to be achieved.

The new white paper, "*Skills: Getting on in business, getting on in work*"[23] of March 2005 outlines that better ICT skills will be a common thread across all levels: young people will develop ICT skills across the curriculum and for adults a range of occupational standards, curricula and assessment materials in ICT will be provided as part of the Skills for Life programme. Some of the actions outlined are: a review of GCSE in ICT to identify a functional skills element which can be available as a qualification in its own right for those not taking the full ICT GCSE; a core curriculum in ICT; progression in ICT and use of e-learning will be supported through a new Teaching and Learning Framework for ICT; ITQ, the new National Vocational Qualification for IT at Levels 2 and 3 has been piloted and will become a qualification for adults in the workplace.

The government has also set out to increase the number of unemployed people who have acquired a basic ICT qualification. Through the DWP's New Deal programme, the government hopes to enable unemployed people to improve their skills and employability and to meet the skills needs of the IT sector. *Ambition: IT* was launched in March 2001. It is a Government-business partnership that enables unemployed people and lone parents on New Deal to gain ICT skills and experience, with the aim of improving long-term career prospects. *Ambition: IT* aims to prepare participants for jobs as customer support technician/service engineers, software support technicians, help-desk operators, software

[19] Skills for Life strategy available at:
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/bank/ABS_strategy_doc_w6_version.doc

[20] UK Employment Action Plan 2002 page 51

[21] See http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/

[22] Skills Strategy Progress Report available at :
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/_pdfs/whitePaper_PDFID46.pdf

[23] *Skills: Getting on in business, getting on in work*, DfES, 2005
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/skillsgettingon/

programmers and web developers.[24] The consultancy GHK has undertaken study about employer engagement within this programme.[25]

Community ICT initiatives

Work in individual communities will also help to promote ICT skills. *UK online*[26] has been set up to assist in achieving the government's vision that all people will have the skills to play a full part in the Information Age. The purpose of UK online is to bridge the gap between those in society who have access to ICT and are able to use it competently and confidently and those who do not. Currently, some 6,000 centres are available, some of which are based in the most disadvantaged urban and rural communities. UK online centres are designed to meet the needs of people who have low or no ICT skills or access to ICT. They are based in accessible locations in communities and aim to enable everyone in England to access the internet and e-mail near to where they live. So far, UK Online Centres have helped over a million people gain access to the internet.[27] UK online centres also act as stepping-stones to **learndirect** provision by providing basic ICT skills, confidence and motivation to progress to further learning. As well as providing access to the Internet and e-mail, support from staff in the centres can help people to explore opportunities for further learning through ICT.

The Wired Up Community Initiative[28] (2000-2002) aimed to close the digital divide, which hinders economic regeneration in disadvantaged areas by connecting around 14,000 households to local community websites, the Internet and government services. The initiative was implemented in two phases, one project in Liverpool in Phase 1 and six pilot projects in Phase 2, funded from July 2001 to December 2002. Phase 2 projects were based in disadvantaged inner city, rural and coalfield communities in Suffolk, South Yorkshire, London, East Manchester, Blackburn and Cumbria. Some 13,300 residents benefited from the seven projects. The initiative tested a variety of technologies (e.g. broadband and narrowband access, satellite communications and digital television) to link households to the internet and school children in the communities were provided with laptops for use in schools and at home.

The initiative was developed because research has highlighted the potential dangers of excluding people from information available via the Internet. The initiative was part of the government's commitment to provide all those who want it, by 2005, with the opportunity to access the Internet. Pilot projects assessed how individual access to the Internet can transform opportunities for people living in disadvantaged communities through the development of new ways to access learning, work and leisure services. The initiative allowed a considerable degree of freedom for partnerships to develop their own approaches

[24] For an example of an Ambition IT project see case studies at: http://www.ambitionit.org.uk/index.html and http://www.communitytraining.co.uk/ people_ambitionit.html

[25] *Ambition: Identifying best practice for demand led approaches*, GHK Consulting for DWP, 2005 http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep264.pdf

[26] See http://www.ufi.com/ukol/

[27] Press Release 10 February 2004 available at: http://www.ufi.com/ukol/news_index.asp

[28] http://www.dfes.gov.uk/wired/over.shtml

to Wired Up Communities and results have provided valuable lessons concerning the practicalities of "wiring-up" entire communities[29].

e-Learning strategy

In July 2004 the Department of Education and Skills published its analysis of responses to their consultation on an e- learning strategy for the UK "Towards a Unified e-learning Strategy."[30] The consultation was based on the premise that e-learning is already making a positive difference to learning in many British schools, educational institutions, homes and workplaces and can also contribute to the governments objectives for education of; raising standards and quality, removing barriers to learning, preparing individuals for employment, and up skilling the workforce. However the government believes that for the UK to maximise its potential, e-learning must become embedded in teaching and learning at all levels for everyone. To do this the government has developed a vision of what e-learning can contribute to education and skills this includes; empowering learners, increasing creativity and innovation in education, increasing flexibility, better value for money and a more professional workplace. The government's proposals focus on a number of key groups that can contribute to the process of change these are; learners, teachers, educational leaders and commercial suppliers of ICT supplies. The consultation paper outlines seven potential action areas described below.

Seven Action Areas are proposed in "Toward a Unified e-Learning Strategy":[31]

- Help education leaders tackle the funding models that restrict innovation (Leading
- sustainable e-learning implementation).
- Support people who want to be innovative in the way they teach (Supporting innovation in teaching and learning).
- Give teachers and lecturers career incentives and training for e-learning (Developing the education workforce).
- Give learners better e-learning support for meeting their personal learning goals (Unifying learner support).
- Make assessment a driver of innovation, not a barrier (Aligning assessment).
- Build a better market for quality assured e-learning resources (Building a better
- e-learning market).
- Work out the technical standards we should all adopt for e-learning (Assuring technical and quality standards).

The analysis of consultation responses shows wholehearted support for the government's proposals; along with the desire for a balanced focus on e-learning in the workplace as well

[29] Final evaluation report for Wired up Communities available at:
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/wired/docs/WUCFinalReport-final.doc

[30] http://www.dfes.gov.uk/elearningstrategy/ and Consultation summary available at:
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/elearningstrategy/ uploads/Analysis%20Document.pdf

[31] p 5-6 " Towards a Unified e-learning Strategy", Department of Education and Skills, 2003,
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/elearningstrategy/

as in education and the need to convince education and industry leaders of the benefits of e-learning.

In March 2005, the DfES published the e-strategy, '*Harnessing Technology – Transforming Learning and Children's Services*,' describing the use of digital and interactive technologies to achieve a more personalised approach within all areas of education and children's services. The objetcives are to tranform teaching and learning, connect with 'hard-to-reach' groups in new ways, Open up education to partnerships and deliver this more efficiently and efffectively. Through the strategy ICT will be built into all aspects of delivery: IAG, management of records and teaching methods.

DfES has been working with partners to develop an ICT user skills strategy intended to equip people, over time, with the skills they need to function effectively in an increasingly ICT-dependent society. The aim of the strategy is to ensure coherence and progression, so that learners' successes can also contribute towards achievement of the ITQ – the National Vocational Qualification in IT.

ICT *Skill for Life* Standards have now have been published and are developed from the ICT user skills National Occupational Standards. These can be viewed on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) website and on the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) website.

An ICT *Skill for Life* Pathfinder project in England will run until Autumn 2007. KPMG LLP is leading the project on behalf of the DfES with Cambridge Training and Development (CTAD) and e-skills UK. The project will develop and pilot approaches to delivering the ICT *Skill for Life* curriculum; pilot the ICT Entry Level qualifications; and trial interactive approaches to assessment for ICT at levels 1 and 2. CTAD will lead on developing materials and staff training. The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) will externally evaluate the project.

Small business initiatives

Finally, many EQUAL DPs are working in partnership with small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Therefore it is worth reporting that the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) offers SMEs an opportunity to exchange information and examples of best practice with each other whilst simultaneously engaging with the DfES on issues to do with skills and learning, via an online discussion forum[32]. The skills for employers portal is also a gateway to a range of information specific to employers' needs including DfES policies & initiatives and links to other government departments and useful organisations.

3.1 Ufi Ltd

Behind **learndirect** and UK Online lies Ufi Ltd, one of the government's key partners in delivering the workforce development and lifelong learning agendas. Ufi is bringing about a revolution in learning by taking forward the government's concept of a 'university for

[32] http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsforemployers/

industry.' It aims to drive up demand for learning, help adults improve their employability by acquiring new knowledge and skills, and help businesses become more competitive[33]. In 2004-05 the focus will be on the following three priority areas, in line with the Skills Strategy White Paper, Ufi's Strategic Plan 2004-2007, and the Secretary of State's Remit Letter:

- Widening Participation.
- Workforce Development.
- Exploitation of new technologies, including e-government services.

By using Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Ufi is changing how people and businesses learn. It is developing learning materials which allow people to learn in 'bite-sized chunks', and has courses covering business and management, ICT and the 'Skills for Life' of literacy and numeracy. More than 75 per cent of **learndirect** courses can be taken online at a time and pace to suit the individual, anywhere they have access to the internet – at home, work or at one of 2,000 **learndirect** centres across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

One of Ufi's priorities is meeting the training needs of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), and **learndirect** *business* has many courses written with SMEs in mind During the 12 months to July 2004 Ufi supplied 197,000 courses to 50,000 SMEs. Much of this activity was conducted through **learndirect**'s nationwide network of centres which specialise in selling to business.

In April 2003, Ufi was also given responsibility for the administration and development of the UK Online centre network, now 6,000 strong. It is planned that UK Online centres will extend access to government e-services to many more people nationwide, encouraging them to use the internet to find information and advice, to access a range of services and employment opportunities, to take part in and progress their learning, and to develop their skills.

UfI publishes policy papers and responds to a number of consultations[34] and is currently seeking comments from partners, stakeholders and policy-makers in the field of adult learning and vocational learning on its plans for the development of **learndirect** services in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in the 'UK online' centre network in England, for the five-year period 2005-2010 via an online consultation,[35] closing in December 2004.

As a result of the consultation the learndirect network has been reviewed. The review of the learndirect network designed to improve quality for learners, simplify administration for providers and refocus the scale and reach of the learndirect centres. Ufi will contract directly

[33] Ufi Strategic Plan available at: http://www.ufi.com/home/section5/stratplan/english/home.htm

[34] See Policy Briefings at: http://www.ufi.com/home/section1/4_policy/briefings/policybriefing.asp and Consultation Responses at: http://www.ufi.com/home/section1/4_policy/consulresponse/ consultation.asp

[35] Ufi consultation available at: http://mmhosting.co.uk/strategic/

with learndirect providers, taking sole responsibility for audit, training and systems. This will result in a further saving of 20% to Ufi annually (10 million).

3.2 Sector Skills Councils

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are independent, UK-wide organisations developed by groups of influential employers in industry or business sectors of economic or strategic significance. SSCs are employer-led and actively involve trade unions, professional bodies and other stakeholders in the sector. SSCs are licensed by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, in consultation with Ministers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to tackle the skills and productivity needs of their sector throughout the UK.

SSCs give responsibility to employers to provide leadership for strategic action to meet their sector's skills and business needs. In return they receive substantial public investment and greater dialogue with government departments across the UK. This enables sector employers to have a far greater impact on policies affecting skills and productivity, and increased influence with education and training partners.

The Sector Skills Council (SSC) network gives employers greater investment – up to £2 million over two years - and influence with government UK-wide. The remit of the SSCs extends far beyond education and training issues and encompasses all aspects of the skills and productivity agenda.

The SSC for ICT is e-skills UK,[36] which is responsible for the areas of Information Technology, telecommunications and contact centres. e-skills UK also has a remit to improve general skills in IT in the UK. e-skills UK and major employers reached a sector skills agreement for the IT sector in July 2005 launching a 3-year actions plan for IT skills. As part of the agreement, employers will offer resources including employee hours, work placements, 'business guru' advisors in support of undergraduate programmes and development, design and delivery of programmes such as Computer Club for Girls (CC4G) and vocational qualifications like ITQ linked to the e-skills Passport.[37] The action plan was developed as an xxxx to research which demonstrated that one-quarter of British businesses lack employees with the everyday IT skills to do their jobs. A key feature of the action plan is the national programme Computer Clubs for Girls rolled out to 3,600 schools which aims to encourage girls into careers in technology. The Club gives girls of 1-14 years of age the opportunity to take part in a wide range of activities from designing their own celebrity posters or magazine covers, creating a fashion show or mixing music.

Following the agreement, e-Skills UK, QCA and the LSC have agreed to streamline It qualifications provision. A new IT qualification is also being redesigned from September

[36] http://www.e-skills.com

[37] http://www.e-skills.com/cgi-bin/go.pl/%7Breferer%3D1036%7D/newscentre/news/news.html?uid=444

2006. An e-skills passport will be a key mechanism to record achievements towards the ITQ (qualification), allowing employers and learners to track progress quickly and simply.

3.3 Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is responsible for funding and planning education and training for over 16-year-olds in England. The LSC has produced a discussion paper[38] which examines how to meet sector skills needs, including those of the IT sector. The paper points out that although three quarters of the workforce use IT regularly in their work, fewer people in the UK, than in some other countries, achieve generic training or qualifications in the use of IT. The LSC's Skills in England 2001: Key Messages report highlights ICT as a "skills hotspot", pointing out that evidence from the Skills Survey demonstrates continued significant increases in the demand for, and use of computing skills.

The Skills in England 2004 report also highlights the continuing importance of ICT skills and highlights that the despite this only 1 in 10 people in England have a Level 2 in ICT skills, the minimum standard of practical IT skills demanded by employers. It is argued that there is growing evidence that IT-related skills are fundamentally linked to organisational changes and makes significant contributions to improvements in enterprise performance. ICT professionals are also expected to be one of the professional groups experiencing the most rapid growth. Some of the changes highlighted are the introduction of ICT based technologies in manufacturing, ICT opening up new areas in the service sector and creating new jobs of a professional and associate professional level. The need to increase IT-related training across all employees is highlighted.

E-Learning is also an important component of *Success for All,* which, in November 2002, set out the Government's agenda for reforming further education and training in England and establishing a new framework for quality and success. For example, Strand 2 of Success for All will set out a coherent national e-learning strategy and best practice in delivery[39].

In March 2004 the LSC completed a consultation on their "National Equality and Diversity Strategy 2004-2007"[40] which looks at the LSC's role in promoting equality and diversity. The document set out six issues (or strands) that need to be addressed these are:

1. Making more positive use of strategic levers (leadership).
2. Widening participation.
3. Highlighting new responsibilities in line with changing legislation.
4. Responding better to the needs of individual learners.
5. Meeting the needs of employers.
6. Monitoring progress without increasing bureaucracy.

Although all of these strands could be of interest to Development Partnerships strand 2, 4, 3, and 5 will be particularly relevant. These strands include proposals to; promote inter-community work, research into barriers to learning, develop tools for inclusive learning and

[38] Learning and Skills Council, 2001, Meeting Sector Skills Needs: Some Emerging LSC Approaches: An LSC Discussion paper: http://www.lsc.gov.uk

[39] See http://www.successforall.gov.uk/

[40] http://www.lsc.gov.uk

use workforce diversity advocates within the framework of their Employer Training Pilot. The new Equality and Diversity strategy was published in November 2004.

The LSC has also published a review, which examines the current range of ICT provision across education sector including further education (FE), adult and community learning (ACL), school sixth forms and work-based learning (WBL).[41]

3.4 Small Business Service (SBS)

The SBS is the government agency responsible for championing the interests of small businesses. In January 2004 the government launched its Action Plan for Small Businesses[42] and the SBS is instrumental in taking this forward. In 2002, the SBS commissioned research on the use of ICTs in SME's.[43] SBS manages the 'Business Link' network in England, which provides a range of services for small businesses, including support in exploiting new technologies. The website provides further details about the support available for small businesses.[44]

3.5 NIACE (National Institute for Adults In Continuing Education)

NIACE offers DP's a good opportunity to mainstream their outcomes. NIACE[45] represents the interests of the UK's adult learners locally, nationally and internationally. This involves maintaining good working relationships with education providers, broadcasters, the press, government and politicians. Part of the Institute's advocacy work involves responses to documents and papers issued by government and other organisations, and calls for evidence by various committees, commissions and enquiries.

Recent examples of NIACE responding to relevant proposals in the adaptability pillar include:

- November 2004: A NIACE response to the Ofcom review of public service television broadcasting, with particular comment on lifelong learning aspects of public service broadcasting.
- September 2003: A NIACE review of Learning Partnerships, with recommendations to the LSC.
- October 2003: A NIACE response to the Skills Strategy White Paper: 21st Century Skills, Realising Our Potential.
- March 2005: A NIACE response to the white paper Skills: Getting on in Business Getting on at Work
- January 2005: A NIACE response to Social Exclusion Unit's strategy on Inclusion through Innovation, tackling social exclusion through new technologies

[41] http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/LSC/2006/funding/streams/nat-reviewofictpwf-re-feb2006.pdf

[42] SBS Action Plan available at: http://www.sbs.gov.uk/content/7-strategies/ActionPlan.pdf

[43] Reports available at: http://www.sbs.gov.uk/content/analytical/research/value_of_ICT_for_SMEs_UK.pdf

[44] http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/

[45] http://www.niace.org.uk

- August 2000: Treasury's Leitch Review on Future skills needs of the UK economy over the next 20 years

NIACE has been involved in developing ICT *Skill for Life* Standards, which now have been published from the ICT user skills National Occupational Standards. These can be viewed on the NIACE website.

On behalf of the DfES, NIACE has also carried out a consultation exercise and Action Research to look at the implications and issues involved in implementing the ICT *Skill for Life* Standards. NIACE's report and details of other projects can be viewed on http://www.niace.org.uk/Research/ICT/Default.htm.

3.6 The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA)

At the end of March 2006, LSDA will evolve into two separate organisations. Its policy and strategic work will develop into the Quality Improvement Agency for Lifelong Learning (QIA). The existing LSDA programmes, research, training and consultancy work will continue as normal via the Learning and Skills Network (LSN).

The LSDA[46] is a strategic national resource for the development of policy and practice in post-16 education and training. It provides a comprehensive training and conference programme for education practitioners as well as managing a wide range of research and development projects and activities, working closely with the Further Education and Learning and Skills sectors. The LSDA offers services and products through national and regional staff, operating within key business areas. It also produces publications, including newsletters, journals, and research reports and training manuals.

The LSDA's Policy and Communications Unit monitors and analyses policy developments emerging from the range of government departments, national bodies and agencies that will have an impact on education and training. This includes cross-government initiatives that are not exclusively concerned with education, but which will create the policy context for longer-term developments in the area of public service. It also ensures, through appropriate communication strategies that key messages from LSDA's activities are disseminated to inform policy-makers, public and professional opinion and practice. The aim of the Unit is to ensure that the LSDA and the bodies with which it works, are aware of and able to influence the developing policy initiatives that will shape education and training. Its work enables the LSDA to be aware of, and be prepared to address, the issues that will shape future agendas as well as responding to the immediate needs of colleges and training providers. The LSDA supports the use of ILT (Information and Learning Technology) through the work of its Learning Technologies team.

LSDA is currently undertaking a consultation on development of a framework of units for e-learning professional development, which ends on 14th February 2006.

[46] The Learning and Skills Development Agency, Regent Arcade House, 19-25 Argyll Street, London W1F 7LS Tel: 0207 297 9000 E-mail: enquiries@LSDA.org.uk URL: www.lsda.org.uk

3.7 Trade Unions

The TUC has positively welcomed the Skills Strategy White Paper and the establishment of the Skills Alliance as a significant step forward in developing an effective policy framework to raise the skill levels of the UK workforce. The TUC's detailed response can be seen on the TUC website.[47]

The Union Learning Fund (ULF) has enabled unions to work with employers, Sector Skills Councils and providers to increase employee demand for learning and to raise skills levels. Also, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), together with partner colleges, runs an extensive programme of ICT training for members under the umbrella of UfI/ **learndirect.** Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) have been created to encourage workforce development, particularly among workers with the lowest levels of skills in companies. The TUC also ran a Learning reps online project from April 2004-July 2005. [48]

Any trade union based in England, or national organisation representing trade unions based in England, whether or not it is affiliated to the TUC, can apply for funding via the ULF.[49]

The TUC, together with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), published a joint report in October 2001 titled 'Productivity Challenge'. The report focussed on the need to raise the skills of the UK workforce. Their work since the report has highlighted the following priorities:

- tackling the basic skills problems of individuals.
- introducing targeted incentives to help raise skills levels amongst those with low or no qualifications.
- increasing the proportion of the adult workforce qualified to a level equivalent to either 5 GCSEs at grade A-C, NVQ level 2, intermediate GNVQ or the equivalent.
- increasing the number of small organisations who meet the Investors in People (IiP) standard.

[47] http://www.tuc.org.uk/skills

[48] http://www.tuc.org.uk/learning/tuc-10845-f0.cfm

[49] See http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/socialinclusion/adults/ULF.html#ulfsupport

4.0 Scotland

The Scottish Executive published its digital inclusion strategy, "Connecting Scotland's People", in September 2001.[50] The report outlines the vision of the Scottish Executive of a digital Scotland. It outlines how the Scottish Executive aims to ensure that Scotland exploits the full potential of the world-wide digital communications revolution and one of its six main themes is developing the basic computer and technological skills that will instil individuals with the confidence to use the web and ICTs.

The Executive has already put in place several initiatives to help overcome the digital divide. The initiatives, which are outlined below, address the barriers of lack of access, skills and community involvement.

Community Access: Digital Communities have been set up in two remote locations; £4 million of funding has been committed; 90% of homes have been given IT equipment, and support and IT training has been provided. The July 2004 evaluation of the scheme concluded that computer literacy and IT skills had been improved[51].

Access: £4.5 million has been invested in providing Public Internet Access Points (PIAPS) across Scotland. 780 new PIAPS have been created since 2002. The Executive has evaluated the scheme and the outcomes will be used to review future digital inclusion policy [52]. All libraries are now connected to the internet. Over three years, the New Opportunities Fund will allocate £23 million across Scotland through its Community Access to Lifelong Learning (CALL) programme. The funds will go towards linking libraries and community websites electronically to the national grid for learning, and improving access to lifelong learning for socially excluded adults.

Learning: Scotland launched its 5-year Lifelong Learning strategy in February 2003. The strategy recognises the increasing pace of technological change, which demands a flexible and adaptable workforce that is ready to re-skill and retrain to keep pace with the economy's skills needs.

Skills: **learndirect** Scotland[53] aims to help individuals to improve their own skills and employment prospects. Its services include access to more than 70,000 learning opportunities and the national network of branded learning centres.

The ICT element is an important element of "Training for Work" (TfW) (the Scottish Executive's training programme targeted at unemployed adults aged 25 and over). The Executive allocated around £30 million to the programme in 2003. By the end of 2004 all 'TfW' participants will have access to IT based learning. Activity has focussed on funding places on ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) courses.

[50] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/Open-scotland/17820/10759
[51] The Evaluation is available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/finance/dcfr-00.asp
[52] The Evaluation is available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/finance/epiapi.pdf
[53] http://www.learndirectscotland.com/

Community Involvement: The £1.5 million Digital Champions programme is providing a network of eight digital "champions", based in Local Enterprise Companies (LECs), to cover all Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP) areas in Scotland. The Digital Champions team's task is to ensure a joined-up approach to community ICT projects and provision of a high quality of service in all ICT facilities in SIP areas. The Champions achieve this by engaging and co-ordinating the activities of a broad range of local partners, including local authorities, community and voluntary organisations, neighbourhood projects and other local service agencies. Digital Champions has supported some 60 community ICT projects and 90 learning/employment projects.[54]

The Executive is also increasing awareness of the benefits of getting online through publicity campaigns and by increasing awareness of existing public access to the Web.[55]

Openscotland[56] is the brand identifying Scottish Executive activities that aim to provide people in Scotland with better access to public services, help improve the delivery of these services, and ensure people have the access, skills and awareness to enable them to make beneficial use of computers and the web in their day to day lives. *Openscotland* aims to put individuals and communities at the forefront of public service delivery, and to deliver on the Executive's commitment to open up access to government and public services. Another of its aims is to achieve universal access to the web and give people the opportunity to make the best use of new technologies and get more out of commercial and public services.

The Executive is also committed to ensuring that businesses take full advantage of modern technologies and that e-business support programmes meet business needs.[57] The report 'Connecting Scotland: our broadband future'[58] contains further details on the strategy for supporting businesses in developing an e-business strategy.

The aim of the Executive's broadband strategy is to make affordable pervasive broadband connections available to citizens and businesses across Scotland. As a part of the strategy, the Scottish programme under the DTI Fund for Innovative uses of Broadband is funding projects worth a total of £4.4 million with the aim of stimulating demand for broadband as well as testing innovative delivery technologies. Projects are receiving funding for a total of three years.

Pathfinder projects aim to widen and improve the provision of broadband services in the Highlands and Islands and the South of Scotland, through the aggregation of public sector demand. This in turn should stimulate investment by suppliers to improve the telecoms

[54] The following page outlines current actions on digital inclusion:
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/enterprise/dics-06.asp

[55] www.scotland.gov.uk/digitalscotland/webaccess

[56] http://www.openscotland.gov.uk

[57] Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee 6th Report 2001, Report on the Inquiry into the Impact of the New Economy

[58] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/government/csbc-00.asp

infrastructure in these rural areas. Although this project is specifically aimed at the provision of services to the public sector, it is hoped that the improvements in infrastructure which are generated will also benefit businesses and the wider community.

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/Open-scotland

5.0 Wales

The National Assembly for Wales' Information Age Strategy Framework for Wales was launched in November 2001 by the e-Minister for Wales. Cymru Ar Lein – Online for a Better Wales[59] sets out the vision for how ICTs and the Internet can transform the economy of Wales and highlights the dangers of not taking advantage of the social and economical benefits offered by ICT.

The report outlines the steps needed in Wales to transform the economy:

- Increase the availability of skilled people, to help tackle the significant problems many organisations experience recruiting and retaining good ICT staff.
- Help the public and business sectors to fully understand the potential of ICT to improve business efficiency and communications.
- Speed up the take-up and effective use of Internet and e-commerce, particularly in small businesses.
- Reduce variation in public service investment in and use of ICT.
- Increase and improve the services and tools available through the medium of Welsh.
- Ensure the ability of individuals to access electronic services increases to above the UK average. The report recognises the need to minimise the effect of any digital divide, using technology to tackle rather than exacerbate social exclusion.

A number of key commitments are outlined in the Framework to develop the use of ICTs in communities, businesses and public services, and to enable everyone in Wales to develop ICT skills.[60]

The Welsh Assembly Government has a vision with regard to ICT skills "…*of a Wales whose citizens feel comfortable using ICT in their daily lives and have access to training and education to support them, whenever they need it".* They have therefore made key commitment to ensure everyone in Wales can acquire the skills and understanding to participate in and benefit from the Information Age. The objectives are to:

- Improve ICT facilities in all training and education establishments and enable effective use of these facilities.
- Encourage the development of essential ICT skills throughout local communities.
- Encourage the development of a coherent framework for ICT qualifications in Wales.
- Encourage the development of bilingual educational and training materials that are relevant to needs in Wales to enable life long learning and support the Welsh National Curriculum.

[59] ICT Strategy for Wales: http://www.cymruarlein.wales.gov.uk

[60] Commitments are listed in full at:
http://www.cymruarlein.wales.gov.uk/fe_actionlist/actionlist_commitment_list.asp

The Welsh Development Agency (WDA)[61] has an initiative called 'Wales Information Society' (WIS). Since its inception in 1997, WIS established a clear strategy and action plan that resulted in the funding and management of over 40 programmes, during its pilot and development phases. These programmes laid out a clear path for the delivery of an Information Society. Building on these successes, and in conjunction with the subsequent establishment of the Welsh Assembly Governments' Cymru Ar Lein framework, WIS now focuses on four key areas namely*:* E-business support, telecommunications infrastructure, e-Communities and structural funding.

The Information Society Regional Partnership was set up to increase the usage and application of the broadest range of ICT to businesses and communities. Its aim is stimulate the demand and the effective take-up of ICT's. This will contribute to the development of a successful knowledge-driven economy in which ICT's are exploited creatively to improve the competitiveness of businesses, and the skills of the workforce. It is funded through structural funding from the EU.

The e-Communities Programme is an all-Wales project designed to stimulate community regeneration through the application of ICT. To this end the Programme will work with over 100 communities across Wales, creating a network of 60 Community Portals and Information Age Community Support Centres (IACS). It will engage with communities and groups by raising awareness and increasing the use of information and communications technology (ICT) and the Internet by communities. The Programme will also assist communities to develop the ICT (formal and informal) skills of individuals within communities through the development and use, by the communities, of new and relevant Community portals and content.

The Broadband Wales[62] programme was announced by the Welsh Assembly Government in July 2002. The programme will ensure that the whole of Wales will benefit from access to affordable broadband services. The programme is now aimed at delivering broadband to areas of Wales previously described as black spots, including the 35 exchange areas that were considered commercially unviable by telecommunication companies. New initiatives, such as Broadband Wales School packs were launched in January 2006, to facilitate use of broadband within schools. The packs will be sent to 1,500 schools in Wales.

Recent studies indicate that broadband uptake in Wales has grown by 14% in the last year according to a survey undertaken by the Welsh Assembly; 39% of Welsh residents now have broadband and this uptake is expected to grow. Computer ownership and Internet access at home have also increased to 71% and 63% respectively.[63]

[61] Welsh Development Agency: www.wda.co.uk

[62] http://www.cymruarlein.wales.gov.uk/index_bb.asp

[63] http://www.broadband.wales.gov.uk/fe_irc/details.asp?ircid=122

6.0 Regional Level in England

In the White Paper, Opportunity for all in a world of change, A White Paper on Enterprise, Skills and Innovation, the Government outlined plans to meet the demand for *specialist high level skills.* It proposed to train up to 10,000 more people per year in advanced ICT learning programmes through "New Technology Institutes" based in the regions. Eighteen NTIs were established, two in each region.[64] NTIs provided specialist ICT and other 'high-tech' learning programmes and worked closely with local companies to ensure they have the 'know-how' to apply advanced technology practices. Funding for NITs finished in 2004.

As well as the two NTIs each region will have a new network to boost the level of research and development, innovation and technology transfer and provide regions with the skills they need in ICT and high technology. The network will be driven forward by a partnership involving small businesses, education institutions and business partners. Further links will be made with Centres of Vocational Excellence, University Innovation Centres, the Small Business Service, the Manufacturing Advisory Service and Regional Development Agencies.

Projects such as the eStart for business in Greater London are specifically aimed at minority group owned SMEs in regeneration areas in London. The project ensures widespread diffusion of ICT within the regional economy and stimulates productivity growth. eStart for business provides training and advice to SMEs in the form of seminars, workshops and computer-based training. The training offers briefing events to explain the benefits of Broadband to business, training and advice to business-owners on implementing Broadband and transforming the way they work as well as expert technical advice. The project enables businesses to use broadband technology, increasing their sales and productivity due to for example improved marketing, cost-effective administration and improved customer feedback.

[64] http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Reachout/NTIs/summary.htm

7.0 Other Developments and Research Findings

Recent research indicates that women are under-represented in ICT employment, especially at higher skills levels. Little progress appears to have been made in terms of increasing the participation of women in ICT in recent years.[65] The 'Women in ITEC Courses and Careers' report[66] compared the participation of women in Information Technology, Electronics and Communications (ITEC) related courses and careers internationally. The research showed that there was a disparity between the participation of men and women across six countries. To encourage greater participation the report recommended:

- Counteracting the negative attitudes to ITEC which are formed by women early in life and changing the 'masculine' image of ITEC to reflect the diversity of ITEC work.
- Providing more information to women about routes into ITEC careers and the job requirements.
- Ensuring women have the opportunity to upgrade their initial skills because so many leave education with few ITEC related skills.
- Widening opportunities for women to access ITEC technologies in the home and elsewhere in the community to enable them to upgrade skills and access employment opportunities.

The UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology was launched in 2004 and supports women at all levels in their SET career as well as encouraging more women graduates to choose the sector as a career option.

Development Partnerships under Theme H are developing activities in these areas, and the Theme H briefing note provides more detailed information on this area.

In 2004 the second world eLearning conference, "eLearninternational World Summit 2004", was held in Edinburgh, bringing together expert academics, business leaders, practitioners and government officials to discuss the future of eLearning skills development and to share worldwide best practice. Networking and partnership building opportunities are an important element of the conference.[67] The most recent conference was held in December 2005 in Berlin.

[65] An Assessment of Skill Needs in Information and Communication Technology 31/1/02 DfES, Skills Dialogue 5. Available at: www.dfes.gov.uk

[66] Women in ITEC Courses and Careers – Final Report – Executive Summary, Women and Equality Unit , DTI Available at: http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/publications/women_itec_report.pdf

[67] www.elearninternational.co.uk

8.0 Conclusion

Both UK government and European employment policy focuses on the need to adapt to the new knowledge-driven economy. Developing the ICT skills of the workforce is central to achieving this aim. Despite the current economic downturn in the ICT sector, the demand for specialised ICT skills is still growing faster than the supply.

There are a number of initiatives at regional, national and European level in place to develop ICT skills in the workforce. These initiatives address the need for high-level ICT skills in the workforce and seek to ensure that those who are disadvantaged in the labour market do not become further disadvantaged because they lack appropriate ICT and basic skills or access to learning opportunities. There are many opportunities for DPs to link with government initiatives and to feed into new policy areas.

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10.0 Useful weblinks

- A Winning Wales: The National Economic Development Strategy of the Welsh Assembly Government www.wales.gov.uk/themesbudgetandstrategic/content/neds/awinningwales_0102-e.pdf
- Business Link: Practical advice for businesses from government http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/home
- Intellect: the trade body for UK based information technology, telecommunications and electronics industry, 1,000 members: www.cssa.co.uk/links/latest.htm
- e-skills UK is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for IT, telecommunications and contact centres: http://www.e-skills.com
- The Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit/'readwriteplus': http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/teachingandlearning
- Department for Education & Skills: www.dfes.gov.uk
- Department of Trade and Industry and Department for Education & Skills: 'Opportunity for all in a world of change, A White Paper on Enterprise, Skills and Innovation': http://www.dti.gov.uk/opportunityforall
- Department for Education & Skills latest publications: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/programmeofresearch/index.cfm?type=5
- Department for Trade and Industry: www.dti.gov.uk
- E-Learning Alliance Scotland – not for profit e-learning organisation: http://www.elearningalliance.org/
- European Commission Directorate General Education & Training: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/index_en.html
- European Commission Directorate General Information Society: http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/information_society/index_en.htm
- GB European Employment Strategy Guidelines for 2004: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/employment_strategy/recomm_en.htm
- Learndirect: www.learndirect.co.uk
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- Learning and Skills Development Agency: www.lsda.org.uk
- Welsh Assembly Government Cymru Ar-lein/ Online for a Better Wales: http://www.cymruarlein.wales.gov.uk
- New Deal: www.newdeal.gov.uk
- NIACE: www.niace.org.uk
- NRDC National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy: http://www.nrdc.org.uk/
- Scottish Executive Digital Scotland: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/digitalscotland/Default.htm
- Sector Skills Development Agency: www.ssda.org.uk
- Sector Skills Matrix – economic, employment and skills data, by sector for employers: http://www.ssdamatrix.org.uk/
- Skills for Employers (DfES portal): http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsforemployers/
- Small Business Service: www.sbs.gov.uk

- Success for All http://www.successforall.gov.uk/
- Trades Union Congress: www.tuc.org.uk
- Ufi Ltd : www.ufi.com
- Wired Up Communities: www.dfes.gov.uk/wired/news4.shtml
- Women and Equality Unit: www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk