

PART THREE

Future developments and strategy

3.1 Responsibility for the development of e-government rests with the Delivery and Transformation Group (formerly the e-Government Unit) in the Cabinet Office. It works closely with the Chief Information Officer's Council which has a brief: 'To drive forward the Government's strategy for IT-enabled change in the provision of public services; to review delivery of departments' programmes for making efficiency savings through e-enablement; and to make recommendations as necessary to the Committee on Public Services and Public Expenditure'. The government programme is overseen by the PSX(E) Cabinet sub-committee, chaired by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Departments and agencies would like more practical guidance from the Cabinet Office

3.2 Departments and agencies would like more contact and support from the Cabinet Office in developing their online presence. **Figure 18** shows that the e-Government Unit was seen as effective by departments and agencies in setting government-wide standards for websites but the Unit was seen as having low overall impact. The Cabinet Office now work chiefly with departmental Chief Information Officers (CIOs) on the CIO Council. CIOs are responsible for cascading guidance to the IT Directors of agencies and NDPBs within their departmental group.

18 How government organisations rated the past work of the e-Government Unit (EGU) and the extent to which they viewed these aspects as priorities

Figures are net percentages

	How much impact has EGU had?		How much of a priority should this be for EGU?	
	All	Departments Only	All	Departments Only
Setting government-wide standards for websites	47	46	39	41
Encouraging organisations to grow take-up of online services	-11	-8	6	0
Helping organisations to improve the quality of their websites	-19	-5	49	43
Providing infrastructure for secure online transactions	-38	-18	3	-2

Source: Survey of departments and agencies

NOTE

Figures in blue (All) are for the whole population of organisations responding to the survey (N = 128). Figures in blue bold (Departments only) show Ministerial departments and non-ministerial departments (N = 37). They are calculated by (Percentage of organisations where this factor scores top) minus (Percentage of organisations where this factor scores bottom). Questions asked here are taken from recommendations made by the PAC Report following the NAO study Government on the Web II from 2002.

The government is seeking to radically reduce the number of central government websites

3.3 Current government policy seeks to reduce the number of government websites by: (i) concentrating behind main department domain names and eliminating other less-used domain names; and (ii) moving main service delivery and related information provision functions over time to two government supersites, Directgov orientated to citizens and businesslink.gov.uk orientated to firms and enterprises.

3.4 Focusing domain names on main department sites is a strategy that has worked well in Canada, where many agencies are hosted within their main department's site and where some sites (like the integrated business site) have well-marketed and memorable names. During the autumn of 2006, the Cabinet Office asked departments and agencies to review their 'web-estate' of sites and to identify candidates for closure. In January 2007 it was announced that 450 unneeded government-run websites (out of 951 sites identified) were to be closed. Most of these sites are out of date campaign or information sites. As **Figure 19** shows, nearly half of the sites to be eliminated come from just two departments (Education and Health). Subsequently the websites scheduled for closure has increased to 551.

3.5 As explained in paragraph 17 in the Summary the Directgov and businesslink.gov.uk teams are working with departments to move the majority of the content of their sites over to the planned supersites. Departments will retain their own 'corporate sites' containing chiefly departmental information for professional audiences and policy documents and reports. The process of transition may extend to 2011.

To improve online service provision the government is developing two existing websites, Directgov and businesslink.gov.uk, into supersites

3.6 The final element of the current strategy is the creation of two government supersites. A first step has been the transfer by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency of its web operations to Directgov. As a prelude to this move some operational units previously run by the Cabinet Office have been moved to the Central Office of Information. The Government Gateway, a facility for users to authenticate their identity to government departments and closely related to the planned supersites, has been entrusted to the Electronic Delivery Team (EDT) in the Cabinet Office. The Varney report recommends that

19 How the unneeded websites to be eliminated are distributed across department groups and types of sites

Department	Government sites (.gov.uk)	Other sites (.com, .co.uk, .org etc)	Total sites to be cut
Education and Skills	48	89	137
Health	89 ¹	21	110
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	23	37	60
Communities and Local Government	28	17	45
Cabinet Office	37	0	37
Home Office	15	22	37
Transport	18	18	36
International Development	0	34	34
Defence	15	0	15
Constitutional Affairs	10	4	14
Treasury	11	0	11
HM Revenue & Customs	0	8	8
Work and Pensions	2	2	4
Trade and Industry	3	0	3
Total	299	252	551

Source: Data at http://www.cio.gov.uk/documents/annual_report2006/website_list.pdf

NOTES

1 Includes 35 sites from the .nhs.uk domain.

2 Data from January 2007. Some departments have since added more sites to be eliminated to the list, but we have used the January 2007 data as they are the last systematic reports.

Directgov responsibility should be based with Department for Work and Pensions and that businesslink.gov.uk (up to now run by the Department of Trade and Industry) should move to HM Revenue & Customs.

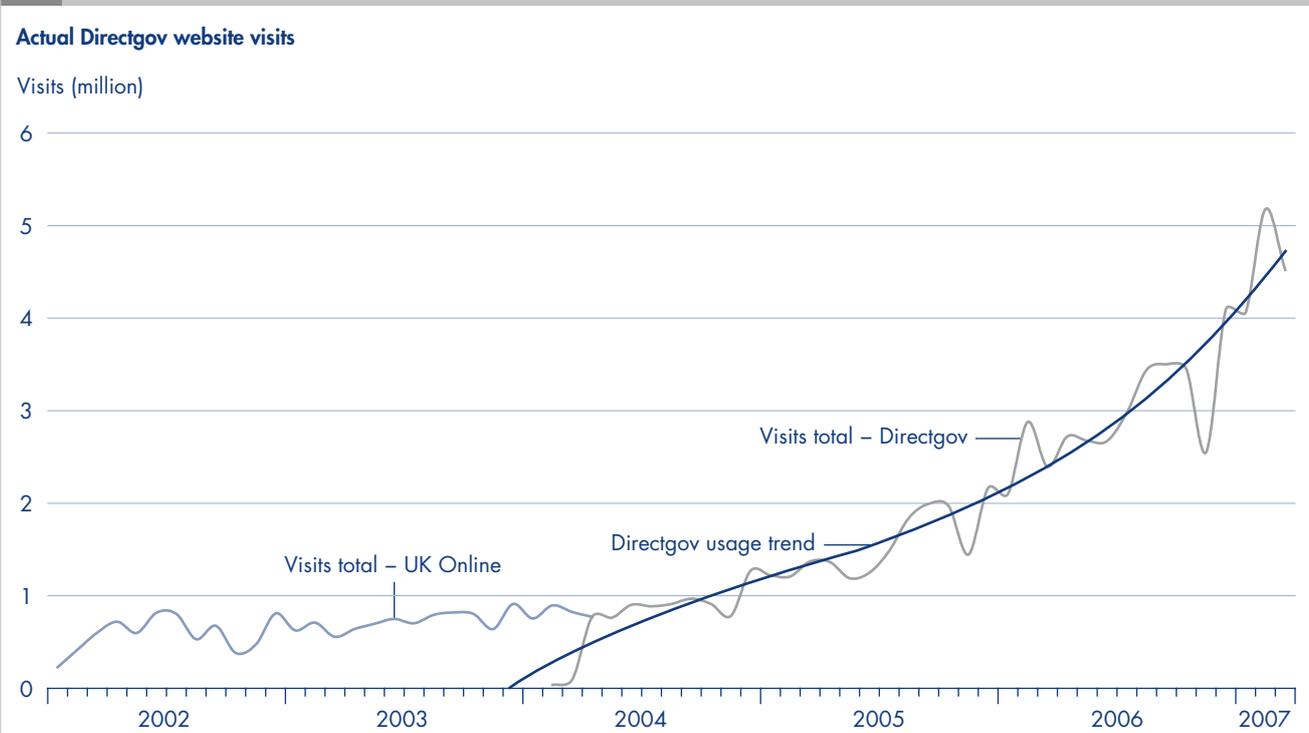
3.7 This strategy involves progressively moving most of the government’s citizen-facing and business-facing web presence to two main sites, whose successful operation will become critical for UK government. **Figure 20** shows that Directgov has shown impressive growth in unique visitor numbers in the last three years, especially since the DVLA operations shifted onto the site during 2006, with visits now reaching five million per month. This is an encouraging trend of development, which marks a sharp break with lagging usage of the previous government portal site, UK Online. There are good prospects for usage to grow further as more transactional services are added to Directgov and businesslink.gov.uk in future. Businesslink.gov.uk is a somewhat smaller site, but is achieving around 700,000 visits a month compared to fewer than 100,000 for its predecessor site, businesslink.org, which closed in 2004.

3.8 The new supersites are planned to conform to high accessibility standards and to be run in a much more market-orientated manner than many government websites. Directgov already meets good accessibility standards. It conducts regular market research on the public’s perception

of their brand and recognition of their website by asking prompted questions, in which the brand or website are named (or sometimes screen shots of the site are shown) and respondents are asked if they have heard of it or visited it. In 2006-07 the numbers responding positively that they had heard of it have fluctuated quite a lot within a range from one quarter to a third of respondents. In our independent survey, carried out in February 2007, 19 per cent of internet users said they had visited the site. However, in the same survey when we asked about the site without prompting respondents, only two per cent of internet users were able to name it. Directgov themselves define a ‘supersite’ as one that is spontaneously visible to, and nominated by, the public (see Glossary).

3.9 In the new intended arrangements, it will be of the utmost importance for the whole of government that the technical operations and continuity of those operations achieved by Directgov and businesslink.gov.uk meets the very highest standards. Overall service availability on the Directgov site in late 2006 and early 2007 was 98 per cent, and it was previously 100 per cent. Some isolated instances of service non-availability occurred in a transition to a new web platform, but have now been resolved. Directgov has strong leadership from experienced IT professionals with private sector experience and its IT infrastructure is intended to provide departments with a

20 The growth of website visits to Directgov since 2004 (compared with the earlier UK Online website)



Source: Directgov data

highly resilient, secure and scalable e-channel infrastructure as part of its core service. Under the Varney proposals the Department for Work and Pensions is taking over department sponsorship of Directgov and has conducted a due diligence review. It identifies the potential benefits for customers and departments and notes that the current IT uses industry-standard products and is robust and scalable. It also points to some risks that will need to be managed, including improvement to the Directgov funding model, providing more detailed plans to departments and agencies about how a phased move of website materials and marketing will be accomplished in the period up to 2011, and adapting the IT infrastructure from the current mainly static content to handle more dynamic e-services.

3.10 Overall service availability on businesslink.gov.uk was 99.98 per cent in 2005, 99.99 per cent in 2006, and 99.99 per cent in early 2007. Businesslink.gov.uk is outsourced to Serco, providing a partnership with BT Global Services to deliver the platform, which already includes a customer registration and profiling system that operates with Government Gateway. Under the Varney proposals HM Revenue & Customs has already taken over department sponsorship of businesslink.gov.uk and has conducted a due diligence review. It identifies the potential benefits for customers and departments and notes that risks similar to Directgov's will need to be managed. A significant difference between the current Directgov and businesslink.gov.uk models is that the latter syndicates its content and services through local Business Link operators and business support organisations in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

3.11 There is no parallel to the UK's planned supersite strategy overseas and interviewees from our comparator countries viewed it as a very radical step. The American government runs a well used finder site which is highly effective at searching and prioritizing information across federal government (and indeed state governments also), but there is no attempt to centralise content. In Canada the Government On-line Initiative running from October 1999 to March 2006, developed at a cost of around Ca\$800 million, delivered better and more responsive services as 130 of the most commonly used services are now available online.

3.12 Figure 21 shows that departments and agencies see Directgov as effective in helping people to find what they are looking for in government and for joining up services. But its search facilities (which search only the Directgov site itself) attracted criticism. And Directgov was not seen as helping departments and agencies to grow their web traffic. A similar level of recognition was achieved by businesslink.gov.uk, which was less well known by, or seen as relevant to, many organisations. Directgov believe that as their site develops, departments will experience an uplift in traffic through cross-selling from service to service.

3.13 Links to the Directgov website are found in fewer than a third of other government sites although Directgov is relevant to the work of most government organisations. We estimate that businesslink.gov.uk is relevant for at least a third of government sites, but in fact there are links to it in only one in 12 sites.

21 How government organisations rated the level of effectiveness of the Directgov website for different aspects

Percentages	Top scoring %		Bottom scoring %		Balance (net positive)	
	All	Departments Only	All	Departments Only	All	Departments Only
Helping people to find what they are looking for in government	49	57	20	23	29	34
Joining up citizen-related services across government	49	40	28	37	21	3
Acting as a first port of call for government-related services	36	47	26	37	10	10
Providing a search engine for government information	29	20	43	60	-14	-40
Helping government organisations to grow take-up of online services	16	17	51	60	-35	-43

Source: Survey of departments and agencies

NOTE

Figures in blue (All) are percentages of total organisations responding to this question (N=87). Figures in blue bold (Departments only) show Ministerial departments and non-ministerial departments (N=37).

The supersites are appreciated by the public, but they need to develop further their brand recognition

3.14 The public appreciate the idea of a site where all government-related information and services might be accessed.²² In our focus groups, participants who found information on the Directgov site liked the way that it was written and presented, commenting that it was ‘laid out clearly’ in comparison to some of the departmental sites. For instance, a feature explaining tax codes was popular because it was easy to understand, whereas participants looking for the same information on the HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) site became lost in complex documentation. One government interviewee also commented to us that businesslink.gov.uk ‘provides businesses with tax info in five minutes, so that they don’t have to wade through thousands of pages on the HMRC site’. HMRC accepts that information is not as well laid out on their site as it could be. Planned improvements will now be taken forward via the cross-government sites, following the Varney agenda, building on the good material HMRC has already contributed to Directgov.

3.15 We noted in paragraph 3.8 that Directgov takes its brand development seriously and that the picture gained of public recognition varies somewhat with the way that questions are posed. In our focus group only around one in ten participants knew about the Directgov site beforehand although some came across it during our practical sessions. Focus group participants also felt that Directgov site was not well marketed and that the name was difficult to remember:

“I don’t think they do advertise it do they? How are you supposed to know about it?”

“I’ve never actually heard of it”.

“I went to Directgov and didn’t realise I was in a government site. And to search the next question I went out of it and back to Google, which just shows you that brand means nothing to me”.

Directgov have not yet run a full public marketing campaign.

3.16 We ran experiments where subjects were allowed to use search engines or the Directgov website to find government information. (The results of these experiments are shown in **Figure 22**). The Figure shows that for most questions, there is no significant difference in the number of pages visited in answering questions, regardless of whether participants used a search engine or whether they used the Directgov website.²³ For three questions, participants using a search engine found information by clicking through significantly less pages than those using the Directgov website. In contrast to search propositions, Directgov aims to join up information and advice across departments and present this as a coherent citizen focused topic. Overall, the results show for many questions Directgov is a good alternative to search engines, and could improve still further considering the intensive programme of content development for the site currently underway.

The supersite strategy is ambitious and will need to be carefully managed

3.17 Directgov and businesslink.gov.uk are set to grow in size significantly over the coming years. The size of their teams are small compared to those managing commercial sites and other large sites such as the BBC. This has raised concerns amongst some departments about moving their business critical processes over to the supersites. Directgov has developed a Comprehensive Spending Review plan that allows for significant scaling of the business to cope with the anticipated growth in content and usage of Directgov. Although funding in financial year 2007-08 is not sufficient to enable such growth to start, from April 2008, funding for both sites will be put on to a secure basis, with central funding provided to cover its operational and development plans. Both look set to grow in size significantly over the coming years. At present the Directgov site operates with around 5,000 pages and it remains to be established in detail how many of around 750,000 pages currently on government websites will move across to the supersite. A rationalization and re-purposing exercise will seek to ensure that both sites grow no larger than strictly needed.

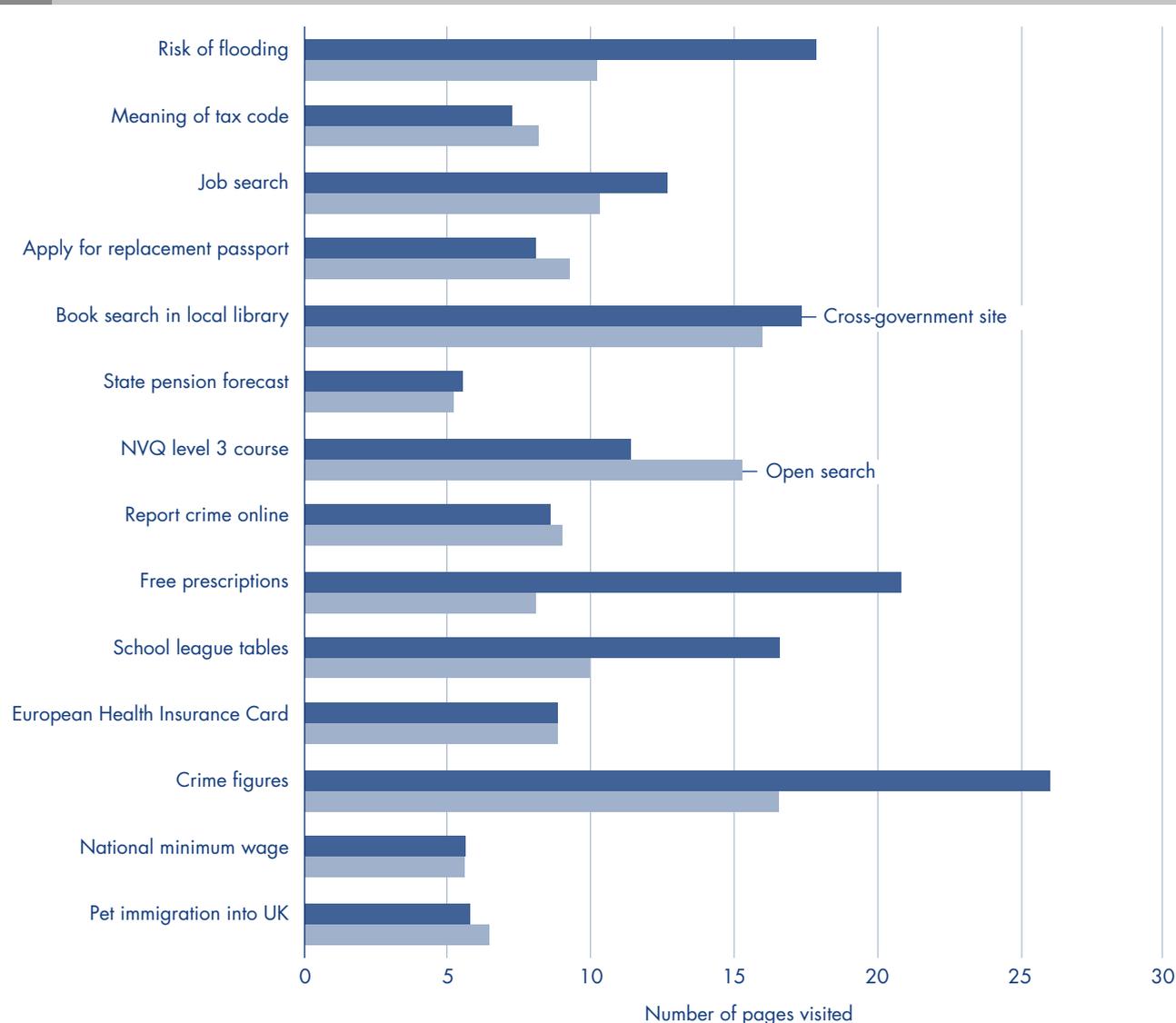
²² Directgov and independent research undertaken by Tickbox in February 2006.

²³ See *Research Report (Section D: Figures 5 to 8)*.

3.18 The content on the Directgov website is to be managed by cross-departmental teams, placed within different departments across government. These teams are structured according to themes on the site such as “Education and Learning” and “Money, Tax and Benefits”. While this presents an innovative and potentially effective model for future cross-government working, the challenge will be to manage the many and competing demands and priorities of different departments, requiring an improved funding and governance model.²⁴

3.19 The content on the businesslink.gov.uk website is currently managed by a central team, working in partnership with a professional publishing company. Businesslink.gov.uk takes a thematic approach to organising information similar to Directgov’s. The challenge for businesslink.gov.uk will be to retain the editorial coherence given by this centrally managed approach alongside a massive expansion of the content and the expectations that departments place on the service.

22 The average number of pages visited to answer questions in the user experiments



Source: Web-based user experiments

NOTE

The full questionnaire for the user experiments can be found in the Research Report.

24 Sir David Varney, *Service Transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer*.