Section F: National Survey Report

F1. In February 2007, we designed and ran a national survey as part of the *Government on the Internet* study. We designed a set of questions, formulated from the experiences of our four focus groups. National surveys are a quick way to provide an indication of the wider distribution of citizen views and experiences in the population as whole, information that can complement other more focused methodologies (such as our user experiments and focus groups). The national omnibus survey was run by ICM Research, with 1,006 adult respondents across the UK interviewed by phone. Respondents are also asked various demographic questions and were thus representative of the UK population as a whole in terms of their spatial locations, age range, gender and other parameters.

F2. The survey began by asking respondents to categorise their level of internet skill using the following question: *Which of these statements best describe you?*

- *I use the internet regularly* (GROUP A).
- *I don't use the internet myself, but I can find someone else to help me to use it when I need to, like friends, family, neighbours or an advice or community centre* (GROUP B).
- *I don't use the internet* (GROUP C).

We used this question to categorise respondents in order to tailor the questions that followed more exactly to their knowledge and experience level. Depending on the answer respondents gave to this first question, they were then asked between seven and nine additional questions. For ease of description here, we will refer to them as Group A, B or C respondents.

F3. Sixty-one per cent of respondents answered that they used the internet regularly, with 12 per cent using an intermediary and 27 per cent not using the internet at all. The largest grouping of those using the internet regularly was between 25 and 44 years of age. In our sample as a whole, two thirds (66 per cent) of those aged 65 and over said they did not use the internet.

Finding government information online

F4. We asked the first two Groups of respondents: *If you want to find some information about government or public services on the internet, would you:*

- *mainly look at specific pages (by using favourites or bookmarks or typing in a web site address);*
- *or mainly use a search engine;*
- *or do a bit of both.*

The majority from each Group said they would either mainly use a search engine (45 per cent from Group A) or they would do a bit of both (again 45 per cent from Group A rising to 50 per cent from Group B). From Group A, only 6 per cent said they would look at specific pages whereas this figure was 10 per cent in Group

B. We found that a majority of Group A respondents had used a government site in the last year, 66 per cent of these to find information, 41 per cent to register for a service or fill out a form and 30 per cent had completed an online transaction like paying a bill. For those who needed help to use the internet, 67 per cent had not used a government website in the last year. Of those who did, 9 per cent had completed an online transaction.

Cross-government sites

F5. We next asked respondents about the main cross-government site for citizens: *The UK government has a main site (a portal) where all government information and services are available online. Can you tell me the name of it?* We did not prompt respondents with the name, and the interviewers recorded whether respondents answered correctly or not, or if they didn't know. Over all our respondents, 81 per cent did not know the name of the website. This dropped slightly to 79 per cent for Group A respondents but rose to 93 per cent for Group B. Two per cent of both Group A and B correctly identified the correct name as direct.gov.uk. For those who had not identified Directgov, they were then given the name and asked: *Have you ever:*

- *heard of it;*
- *used it;*
- *neither.*

When prompted in this way, 57 per cent of regular internet users said they had heard of Directgov and 21 per cent said they had used it. In Group B, 32 per cent said that they had heard of it and 6 per cent had used it.

F6. We also asked about one other cross-government site: *Have you ever heard of or used another government web facility called the Government Gateway?*

- *heard of it?*
- *tried to register and use it but did not succeed?*
- *used it OK.*

Eighty-seven per cent of all respondents had not heard of the Government Gateway. This rose to 92 per cent of those who needed help to access the internet. Of those that had heard of it, from Group A 39 per cent had used it successfully whereas 5 per cent of Group B respondents had done so.

Characteristics of government sites

F7. We asked: *Thinking about government websites, could you give them marks out of 10 on the following (where 10 is excellent, 5 is average and 1 is very poor).* **Figure 1** below shows what these statements were (they were all positive statements) and also shows how many respondents gave high marks to the statement in comparison with those that gave low marks. With many scales there is a tendency for people's responses to bunch around the middle, so that the balance on high relative to low marks is the most important thing to pay attention to. On balance the most respondents agreed with the statement that government websites are up to date. This was also a finding from our focus groups that people believed that the information provided by

government was up to date and accurate. The second most supported statement shows that people see information delivery as a key aspect of government online services. Respondents were least likely to agree with the statement that they had recommended government sites to their friends and family.

Figure 1: How all respondents using the internet rated government websites on ten criteria in our national sample survey

Criterion	Per cent assigning top marks (i.e. 8, 9 or 10)	Per cent assigning low marks (i.e. 1, 2 or 3)	Balance
Up to date	35	6	+29
Designed to help you find out information	30	7	+23
Easy to use and clearly written	25	5	+20
Designed for all kinds of people	24	9	+15
As good as private sector sites	20	12	+8
Designed to help you get things done quickly	18	12	+6
I can trust what they say	24	19	+5
Use icons, video and audio	12	10	+2
Help you find out what other users of government services think	12	15	-3
I have recommended them to friends and family	11	41	-30

F8. We then asked: *To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding government websites?* Again we gave respondents a scale, but this time with only five points ranging from strongly agree at one end to strongly disagree at the other. **Figure 2** shows the proportion of all respondents that agreed or disagreed with the statements they were given on government websites. Again, we look at the balance between the positive and negative responses to see which statements our respondents feel most strongly about. The statement most people agreed with concerned government organisations providing full information on their websites, and not just press-released information. Respondents also supported the statement that government sites need to be made simpler to use. There was least support for the statement that government sites were easy to search inside. This adds further evidence to the issue (highlighted in the Main Report) that internal search is a vital tool for government sites.

Figure 2: Whether all respondents using the internet agreed with seven statements about government websites in our national sample survey

Criterion	Per cent that Agree	Per cent that Disagree	Balance
They should give you all the facts, not just the good news bits	93	1	+92
They should be made much simpler to use	75	8	+67
They should not try to be flashy or trendy	75	11	+64
Users of government services should be able to post their comments for others to read	71	14	+57
They should have more features of good private sector sites	49	14	+35
There are too many documents and too much text on them	42	18	+24
It is easy to search inside government sites	38	24	+14

Help with accessing government websites

F9. We asked some slightly different questions to those who said they needed help to use the internet (Group B) and those who did not use the internet (Group C). We asked Group B respondents: *Who do you get to help you most often to access the internet?*

- *Friends;*
- *Family;*
- *Neighbours;*
- *People at work/school;*
- *Community centre;*
- *Advice Centre;*
- *Other.*

The largest group was family at 63 per cent followed by friends at 19 per cent.

F10. We then asked both Group B and Group C respondents: *If someone could you show how to access government websites via the internet at the following locations would you use it?* There are a number of locations where citizens can get help with the internet, for example UK online centres. However we wanted to see what other locations respondents would consider useful to have extra help for those users who need additional support. **Figure 3** shows the breakdown for the three locations we specified for Group B. The most strongly supported location was libraries, a finding that we also found with our focus groups. The location that was least supported was internet cafes – perhaps because they are seen as expensive, or because respondents did not feel that support would be obtainable in internet cafes, whereas it might be more readily available in libraries.

Figure 3: How much support Group B and C respondents gave to three specified locations where additional help could be provided to access government websites

Location	I might use it (per cent)	I would never use it (per cent)	Balance
Library	59	39	+20
Citizens Advice Bureau	55	44	+10
Internet café	25	73	-48

The majority of Group C respondents answered that they 'would never use' any of the three locations (72 per cent, 55 per cent and 85 per cent respectively). They were most positive about the Citizens Advice Bureau option with 44 per cent of respondents saying they might use it to access government websites.

People who do not use the internet

F11. For those respondents who do not use the internet, 27 per cent of our sample, we asked: *Here are some common reasons why people don't use the internet. Which, if any applies to you?*

- *Don't know how to use a computer.*

- *Too slow/ can't get broadband.*

- *It's too expensive.*

- *The internet is too difficult to use.*

- *I can do everything I need some other way.*

Seventy one per cent of respondents said they could do everything they needed in some other way. The second most recorded response, at 55 per cent, was *'Don't know how to use a computer'*. The statement with the least support is that the internet is too slow, or that respondents could not get broadband in their area, at 16 per cent.

F12. Given that such a high percentage of non-connected respondents felt that they did not need to use the internet as they were able to do things in another way, we then asked: *How would you typically contact the government to find out about the following?:*

- *about a tax;*

- *a government service like a Passport;*

- *a benefit (like Job Seekers Allowance or Disability Allowance).*

Most Group C respondents felt that the first thing they would do in each of these three situations was to ring up the department or agency involved. As a second choice, for both the tax and the service question, they would visit their local Citizens Advice Bureau. About a benefit, the second most recorded choice was to visit a physical location like a library or government office. Asking friends and relatives was also seen as a good option relating to tax or a government service. However, it was seen as less useful when the question was about a benefit.

Figure 4: What actions respondents who do not use the internet would take to contact government about three situations

Action *All figures percentages*	About a tax	About a government service like a passport	About a benefit (like Job Seekers Allowance)
Ring up	23	32	29
Ask the local Citizens Advice Bureau	22	15	14
Ask a friend or relative	17	14	7
Visit a physical location, like a library, a government office or an advice centre	10	14	18
Ask a local authority or other public sector person to help me	10	7	10
Use a book, such as a directory	5	5	2
Ask someone from a charity or organisation you know	3	2	3

F13. Lastly, we asked those respondents who do not use the internet: *Have you ever had a problem with any government services or finding information because you don't use the internet?* The vast majority, 95 per cent, felt that they had not had a problem with government services because they do not use the internet, compared with only 2-3 per cent who said they had had a problem or difficulty.