



Press release – for immediate release

4 December 2013

Digital exclusion exacerbates existing divides.

Over a million Scots, and most of our small businesses, do not have the access and skills they need to share in the benefits of a Digital Scotland.

- The Scottish Government must recognise that every individual in Scotland has an undeniable right to digital inclusion and assume accountability for ensuring that everyone can share in the benefits of a Digital Scotland.
- The Scottish Government and local authorities must act now, and work together with private and voluntary sector partners to bridge a growing digital divide.

A Royal Society of Edinburgh major inquiry has been collecting evidence of digital exclusion across Scotland. These are the key messages of its interim report, *“spreading the benefits of digital participation”*, published today.

Professor Michael Fourman, chair of the inquiry, said *“The internet is fundamentally changing society. Being online opens the door to opportunities in learning, healthcare, employment and business. For well over a million people in Scotland, these opportunities are out of reach. Until everyone can go online, confidently and safely, we will not reap the full benefits of a Digital Scotland.”*

Those excluded from the online world are increasingly excluded from opportunities for employment, education and social interaction. Many hard-pressed families cannot afford to go online. Even in Scotland’s most affluent neighbourhoods, one in every seven homes is not connected. Many isolated, elderly or disabled people are excluded from our digital society. Digital exclusion exacerbates existing social divides.

Chris Yiu, Director of Digital Participation at the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), said *“Everybody deserves a chance to benefit from the opportunities the internet brings. Digital participation is not an end in itself; it is about empowering people and communities to pursue the things that matter most to them. This is a vital ingredient in building a more inclusive society, and why SCVO is stepping up its activity on digital participation, working across the public, private and third sectors. We welcome today’s report and look forward to contributing to the next phase of the inquiry.”*

Businesses also face digital exclusion. Scotland has more than a hundred thousand small and micro-businesses. Most of these are either not online or not yet making the most of digital tools.

Whole communities are missing out. People are motivated to go online when their friends are online, so they can connect with people who share their interests, or, for businesses, if their customers are online. But, in Scotland there are neighbourhoods where no one is online.

Scotland must raise its ambition: in Iceland, Norway and Sweden, over 90% of citizens are already online and regularly use the internet. Scotland's ambition should be to join this group.

Government must sow the seeds of participation in every community. It must offer affordable access to the internet and show people how digital tools can help them live their lives.

- Everyone needs digital literacy. The Government must give individuals and businesses the skills they need, so that they can use the internet confidently and safely, and help others to do the same.
- Everyone needs affordable access to the internet, particularly those in hard-pressed communities. Housing associations should ensure that affordable access is available in all of their premises. Local government should open public access to public assets; assets such as IT suites and wifi in schools, that often lie idle out of school hours.
- Everyone, everywhere, needs the internet. BT has been funded to extend Scotland's internet infrastructure across almost all of the country; but some communities will still not have access to super fast broadband. Government must ensure that every community can access an affordable high-speed connection, even if they have to build the local network for themselves.

The RSE's report presents its interim findings for consultation. Feedback on the emerging conclusions and recommendations is welcome by 8 February 2014 ahead of the publication of the final report in Spring 2014. Further details can be found at www.digiscot.net.

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The RSE is Scottish Charity SC000470

Notes:

Scottish Government's ambition for digital inclusion

The Scottish Government's current ambition for digital participation is that "the rate of broadband uptake by people in Scotland should be at or above the UK average by 2013, and should be highest among the UK nations by 2015."

The latest figures show that the 2013 target has not been reached.

	Regular internet users	Home Internet	Population 1000s	Land area 1000 km ²	density pop/km ²	GDP \$1000 per capita
Korea	84%	97.4%	50,000	100	500	22
Iceland	96%	95%	300	100	3	35
Norway	95%	93%	5,019	385	13	57
Luxembourg	93%	93%	530	2.5	212	108
Sweden	94%	92%	9,517	500	19	39
Denmark	93%	92%	5,590	43	130	40
Netherlands	93%	94%	16,770	42	399	42
UK	88%	80%	63,230	244	259	39
Scotland	77%	70%	5,295	78	68	41

Correction

Appendix C of our interim report says, "Initial modelling found 1,392,322 premises in Scotland (approximately 800,000 HIE and 600,000 RoS) eligible for public subsidy." We are grateful to Brendan Dick (BT) for pointing out that the 800,000 figure is not correct: there are only 300,000 premises in the HIE enterprise area. HIE have confirmed that there are 195,670 premises in the H&I next gen broadband intervention area. The RoS contract covers 604,000 premises. We will revisit this in the final report.

RSE Inquiry: Spreading the benefits of digital participation

The Royal Society of Edinburgh launched its major inquiry into digital participation in February 2013. Undertaken by a multi-disciplinary Committee, the inquiry has been gathering evidence on the use of digital technologies and barriers to inclusion from people, organisations and businesses across Scotland. The interim report sets out the Inquiry's emerging conclusions and recommendations for feedback, ahead of the publication of its final report in Spring 2014.