



# Digital Exclusion and the Social Work Agenda

Sue Watling [swatling@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:swatling@lincoln.ac.uk)

Karin Crawford [kcrawford@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:kcrawford@lincoln.ac.uk)

University of Lincoln, United Kingdom

2010 Joint World Conference on Social Work and  
Social Development: The Agenda

# Digital Divide: definitions

- Digital participation is *'...moving from conferring advantage on those that have it to conferring active disadvantage on those who are without it.'*

UK National Plan for Digital Participation  
(2010:5)

- 'Digital exclusion has become a new form of social exclusion.'

Cheung Wong et al. (2009:755)

# Digital Exclusion

- In the U.K. and East Asia this may include
  - older people,
  - low income households,
  - people with no formal qualifications,
  - single parents,
  - disabled people,
  - new immigrants,
  - geographically remote communities.

UK National plan for digital participation (2010:13)

Cheung Wong et al. (2009:756)

# Digital Inclusion: benefits

- financial savings,
  - access to formal and informal learning opportunities,
  - employment potential,
  - improved salary prospects,
  - many other economic, social and cultural advantages...
- *‘The vision is an ultimate information society, under which everyone can create, access, utilise and share information and knowledge thereby empowering individuals and enterprises to achieve their full potential and improve their quality of life.’*

UK National Plan for Digital Participation (2010:5)

OGCIO Digital Strategy (2007:7)

# Digital Exclusion: realities

- non-participation,
- disempowerment,
- disfranchisement,
- *‘Many socially excluded people and communities are shut out from the digital technologies which are starting to form the backbone of the modern knowledge economy.’*

UK Digital Britain Report (2009:12)

# Digital Exclusion: implications

- Anti Oppressive Practices,
- Digital Equity = Social Equity,
- Social Model of Disability,
- Do service users have a right to:
  - affordable Internet access?
  - appropriate assistive technologies?
  - essential digital confidence and competencies?

# Digital Exclusion: evidence

Example from social work practice in the UK

- increasing moves toward personalised, user-controlled services (DoH 2007),
- drives to improve information sharing across disciplines and with users,
- pilot projects in adult services include a range of technological solutions aimed at increasing user participation...but...

# Digital Access

The value base of professional social work practice encompasses:

*'a global concern for the achievement of greater equality in the allocation of social goods between nations, communities and individuals'*

Banks (2008:34)



# Future research plans...

- qualitative research investigating the reality of digital exclusion,
- identified areas include:
  - assistive technology and inclusive practice,
  - access issues for the visually impaired,
  - narratives of exclusion,
  - implications for the social work agenda.
- **How does this sound in your context?**

# Conclusion

- ‘Gutenberg to Google; access denied,’
- increasing digital landscapes,
- barriers to participation socially created,
- social model of ‘digital’ disability,
- research into reality of digital exclusion,
- implications for the Social Work Agenda in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- Banks, S. (2008) 'The Social Work Value Base: Human Rights and Social Justice in Talk and Action' in A. Barnard, N. Horner, and J. Wild Eds) (2008) *The Value Base of Social Work and Social Care* Berkshire: OU Press, UK.
- B.I.S. 2010 *National Plan for Digital Participation*. Retrieved 1 May 2010. Business, Industry and Skills. UK.  
([http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference\\_library/publications/6708.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/6708.aspx))
- D.C.M.S. 2009. *Government Response to Delivering Digital Inclusion: an action plan*. Communities and Local Government Publications. UK.  
[http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference\\_library/publications/6442.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/6442.aspx))
- Yu Cheung Wong, John Yat Chu Fung, Chi Kwong Law, Jolie Chi Yee Lam and Vincent Wan Ping Lee. 2009. *Tackling the Digital Divide*. British Journal of Social Work, 2009; 1–14
- O.G.C.I.O. 2007. *Digital Strategy*.  
[www.info.gov.hk/digital21/download/2008D21s-booklet-en.pdf](http://www.info.gov.hk/digital21/download/2008D21s-booklet-en.pdf)
- DoH. 2007. *Putting people first: a shared vision and commitment to the transformation of adult social care*. Department of Health. UK.  
[http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_081119.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_081119.pdf)

For further information, or to discuss potential collaborative research opportunities, please contact:

**Sue Watling**

[swatling@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:swatling@lincoln.ac.uk)

**Karin Crawford**

[kcrawford@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:kcrawford@lincoln.ac.uk)

University of Lincoln  
Brayford Pool  
Lincoln  
LN6 7TS  
United Kingdom



UNIVERSITY OF  
LINCOLN