



# EFFICIENCY UNIT

## VISION AND MISSION

### **Vision Statement**

To be the preferred consulting partner for all government bureaux and departments and to advance the delivery of world-class public services to the people of Hong Kong.

### **Mission Statement**

To provide strategic and implementable solutions to all our clients as they seek to deliver people-based government services. We do this by combining our extensive understanding of policies, our specialised knowledge and our broad contacts and linkages throughout the Government and the private sector. In doing this, we join our clients in contributing to the advancement of the community while also providing a fulfilling career for all members of our team.

This Brief was researched and authored by the Serco Institute, led by Gary L. Sturgess ([www.serco.com/institute](http://www.serco.com/institute)). The Serco Institute was established 13 years ago to study the role that competition and contracting can play in the provision of public services, and the conditions and practices that deliver the best outcomes. It acts as a practical source of ideas and information, drawn from a continuing dialogue with public officials, think tanks and academic researchers. It also draws on the extensive operational experience of Serco Group, embracing more than 600 contracts, in over 30 countries, with a history of more than 40 years in the public sector.

### **Other Efficiency Unit Documents**

The Efficiency Unit has produced a number of detailed guides including on outsourcing and Public Private Partnerships (PPP). These may be found on the Efficiency Unit website at [www.eu.gov.hk](http://www.eu.gov.hk).

# Foreword

Hong Kong boasts one of the most services-oriented economies in the world. To attain and retain this position Hong Kong's private sector must constantly innovate to attract and keep its customers, both local and international. One fundamental pre-requisite for success is the commitment to constantly monitor and improve the quality of service offered to consumers.

Growing numbers of the Hong Kong community now compare the quality of services delivered by the Government to the private sector, and expect us to match its customer care, flexibility and personalisation. The constant improvement and upgrading that the private sector must undertake in order to remain competitive means that our goalposts are a forever receding target!

This report demonstrates how different developed countries are tackling similar problems by employing a wide range of approaches and technologies to suit their particular circumstances. Whilst Hong Kong is also well-advanced in some areas, there are others where we need to do more to catch up.

One key element required for us to succeed is a greater willingness to explore and implement more joined-up services. This does not require major organisational change, but it does need a willingness and a determination to adopt the customers' perspective.

Head, Efficiency Unit  
March 2008

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## Executive Summary

### What Today's Citizens Want

Today's citizens expect many of the same services from the public sector as the private sector.

### Joining-Up Services

Joined-up service benefits citizens in improved accessibility and faster transactions. It also delivers efficiency gains and offers performance benefits for service providers.

Governments today face a demanding level of expectation when it comes to public service provision. This report explores some of the ways that different governments around the world have responded to this challenge.

### What Today's Citizens Expect

Citizens' expectations of public services have risen. The collective culture of the nineteen-fifties when individuals accepted without question the public services available has been replaced by a market driven culture of citizens with varied lifestyles and needs. Today's citizens expect many of the same services from the public sector as the private sector – choice, convenience and the capacity for services to adapt over time to meet changing requirements.

Public service markets are different from consumer markets. Customers do not always choose to access public services – medical services are usually used by necessity, while education is compulsory. Public services often have a complex customer base – in custodial markets, both prisoners and the public are stakeholders in the service. Moreover, while consumers will pay more for better quality goods and services, the funding for public services is limited by government budget constraints, so service improvements often have to be achieved without additional funding.

Some key characteristics of citizen-centric public services include:

*Choice* – of service provider, service type or method of accessing a service. Choices can be made by individuals, representatives (e.g. carers or professionals) or organisations

(departments or authorities choosing on behalf of their citizens).

*Information* – about available services and how to access them. Technology has enabled new information channels, but some users continue to need or prefer traditional methods of information provision.

*Voice* – allowing citizens to communicate with service providers, either individually or collectively. To capture a wider range of user views, governments usually combine user-led systems such as feedback channels with focus groups and surveys that capture a broader section of society.

*Responsiveness* – governments need to acknowledge or respond to citizen feedback. Responsiveness is also about successful customer-provider interface.

*Accessibility* – citizens need to be able to access services in different ways, both for convenience, and to ensure that services are available to all citizens.

Consumer research suggests that citizens rate the private sector more highly than government when it comes to customer service. However, they rank government more highly for ensuring that services reach the people who need them. Both factors are important to citizens, so the specific challenge for governments is to successfully serve individual needs while offering universal provision.

### New Initiatives for Joining-Up Services

Public services are traditionally delivered through direct one-off transactions between a department, agency or authority and the individual. However, recent technological

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developments have made it easier for governments to join-up service provision across organisational, transactional and geographical boundaries.

Joining-up can be horizontal (across departments or organisations) or vertical (between local, regional and national levels). It can involve the physical joining of assets or the pooling of data or resources across multiple sites. Back office functions can be combined for increased efficiency and effectiveness, while maintaining multiple front-office channels. Or, multiple services can be channelled through a single access point for user convenience and better data management.

Benefits for citizens from joined-up services include improved accessibility, faster transactions and more integrated data management. For service providers, the creation of economies of scale delivers efficiency gains, whilst the sharing of data and resources offers performance benefits. Joining-up can also be a way to streamline specific services or to connect with hard to reach user groups.

## Making Public Services More Personal

Personalisation of public services can mean various things. At one end of the scale, providing a more friendly service, or collecting and responding to feedback. At the other end of the scale, personalisation can extend to the active involvement of service users in decisions about service delivery, such as allowing individuals to decide how money allocated to them is spent. Or, it may involve giving users opportunities to influence the actual design of a service, for example, through management of a personal budget or a

service package.

The involvement of users in directing and designing their services often occurs in complex human services such as education, health and social care. However, these are sectors where choice based policies can be controversial due to issues of equity and inclusiveness. For this reason, governments often opt for systems of choice within defined boundaries, which allow services to be managed and targeted as appropriate. Examples are school voucher systems or choice based lettings in social housing. Many of the best examples occur in social care, where users are engaged more actively as co-designers of their services, usually through some form of personal budgeting.

Personalisation can also be collective – services tailored to suit user groups, decisions made by professionals representing a group of service users (health practices managing budgets on behalf of their patients) or localised service approaches to suit the needs of a specific community.

## New Ways of Serving Users through New Technologies

New technologies are having a significant impact on the way in which citizens access and experience public services. On the one hand, technology is facilitating the development of existing services to improve access and outcomes for citizens. Benefits include more inclusive, accessible services, more efficient use of data, increased convenience for users, more efficient transaction processes, and, in some cases, the delivery of high-level social benefits such as improvements in educational outcomes. On the other hand, technological

## Personalised Public Services

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## New Technologies to Serve Users

**New technologies are having a significant impact on the way in which citizens access and experience public services.**

## User's Experience of Public Service Delivery

**Citizens care not just about the outcomes that are delivered by public service providers, but also the way in which those services are delivered.**

## Executive Summary

developments are enabling the creation and development of wholly new services, ranging from multi-media health services to computer-based education and skills initiatives.

### **The User's Experience of Public Service Delivery**

Attitudinal research tells us that citizens care not just about the outcomes that are delivered by public service providers, but also about the way in which those services are delivered. One aspect of user experience relates to the quality of service received. This includes issues relating to accountability and assessment – performance management, gathering and responding to feedback – as well the existence of an appropriate point of contact to ensure effective delivery and to manage any problems that might arise. Another aspect of user experience is the softer side of delivery – the nature of the user-provider interface and how it feels from the user's perspective. This includes practical issues such as the provision of information to meet user needs, but also more personal elements – how the user's personal needs are met and how they are treated during the transaction.

# 1. What Today's Citizens Expect

Citizens' expectations of public services have risen. Individuals today expect many of the same kinds of services from the public sector as they do from the private sector – choice, convenience and service offerings that respond and adapt to individual needs over time.

When the US political thinkers Osborne and Gaebler published *Reinventing Government* in 1992, they commented that 'few people in government ever use the word customer'. But they added that contemporary citizens wanted to be treated as customers. As they saw it, a fundamental shift had occurred since the industrial era of the post-war years. US society had come to be dominated not by blue-collar workers, but by white-collar or knowledge workers. The collective culture of the nineteen-fifties, where citizens were happy to accept without question the public services available, had given way to a diverse market-driven society made up of individuals with varied tastes, values and life-styles. These individuals expected to be able to access products and services to suit their personal needs and wants. Increasingly, they expected these attributes from public services as well as from the private sector.<sup>1</sup>

This shift has become increasingly apparent across the developed world over the past decade. Several factors have contributed to this. Increased choice in consumer markets has encouraged people to expect the same across all the services they access. The communications revolution, in particular the rise of the Internet, has increased the amount of accessible information about available service options. More broadly, citizens of a stable and prosperous society whose basic, collective needs of economic and physical security have largely been met, have the luxury of expecting more from their public services.

In response to this change in public attitudes, governments and public agencies have pursued a

range of initiatives that aim to raise the standards of public services to meet contemporary expectations, whilst maintaining or improving their efficiency. This report presents some of the latest international examples of customer service in the provision of public services, as well as some analysis of how service providers have addressed the delivery challenges.

This chapter contains a brief discussion about citizens as public service customers. Chapter 2 explores how governments are joining-up services to make delivery more efficient and effective. Chapter 3 discusses the personalisation of service delivery. Chapter 4 examines how new technology is opening up new ways of serving users. Finally, Chapter 5 examines the user experience of public services, from accountability and responsiveness to softer aspects of customer-provider interface.

## Citizens as Customers

The public sector often looks to the private sector for ideas about the best ways to meet customer service needs. This has proved a rich source of inspiration. Yet, the way citizens access and receive public services is much more complex than the way they purchase products and services in consumer markets.

### *Supply and Demand*

Citizens do not necessarily choose to receive public services. Individuals may decide to travel by public transport, but children are usually required to go to school (and parents to ensure that they do). Patients typically need to access medical care, but probably wish that they did not.

Identifying the 'customer' base for public services and understanding service needs can be complex. Customers of custodial services include both

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prisoners and the wider public. Prisoners have only a limited say in the service that they are provided, whilst the public has no direct interaction with the service itself, but has a real interest in the outcomes that it delivers. The two groups have very different needs.

Another distinct characteristic of public service markets is the way that market development is financed. Consumer markets are built on the principle that individuals will pay more to receive better quality goods or services, and that this funding will enable suppliers to reinvest in developing their offerings. By contrast, public service markets are limited by government spending constraints, so if citizens demand more of public services, this frequently has to be achieved without a corresponding rise in funding. This poses a fundamental challenge to governments as service providers.

## What Citizens Want

What does customer service look like when it comes to public services? Given the constraints, what are the characteristics of citizen-centric service in government?

### *Choice*

Central to customer-focused service delivery is the concept of choice. Not all public services are accessed through an act of choice, but elements of choice can occur at various levels – choice of service provider (e.g. between different schools or hospitals, private or public), service type (e.g. different medical treatments or educational options) or access (what channel and when).

Choice can be exercised by service users themselves, or by relatives, carers or professional representatives on their behalf (e.g. doctors on behalf of patients).

Choices are also made at organisational level, for example, when a government department or local authority chooses on behalf of its citizens to award a service contract to a particular provider.

### *UK Choice Policies Under The New Labour Government*

The UK Labour Government has been a keen advocate of choice in public services since its election in 1997, so the subject has been much debated. The UK Parliament's Public Administration Select Committee conducted an inquiry on Choice and Voice in Public Services in 2005, which addressed such questions as whether the public really wants choice, whether there is enough capacity in the public sector to make it work effectively, choice and equity, choice and marketisation, choice and performance and choice and efficiency. The Committee concluded that, whilst service users do not necessarily rank choice as their highest priority from public services (elements such as quality and access are also important), they do place value in the opportunity to exercise choice and to take control of certain decisions about the services that they receive. This applies particularly where the choices have a direct impact on their lives. The Select Committee report can be accessed at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cm Pubadm/49/4902.htm>.<sup>2</sup>

### *Information*

Unless citizens know what services are available, how they are evolving and how they can be accessed, then those services cannot fulfil their potential and effective choices cannot be made.

Technological advances, including the development of the Internet, have opened new communication channels between governments and citizens. However, traditional interaction – face-to-face,

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telephone or writing – continues to be important for many people. Different user groups have different needs and preferences about how to access service information, so governments use a variety of approaches to keep their citizens informed.

## *Voice*

It is equally important for citizens to be able to communicate with their service providers. Customer voice can be exercised in various ways, collectively, or individually – for example, through formal consultation or in the form of direct feedback (face-to-face or through comment and complaint channels). Again, new technologies have increased the voice channels available, although to reach the widest possible range of service users, traditional channels also have to be made available.

It has sometimes been argued that voice as a tool for user-driven service delivery favours the educated middle-classes, who are typically better informed about their rights and options, more articulate and more inclined to speak out to secure effective outcomes for themselves and their families. To ensure that service provision is effective and inclusive, governments may choose to supplement user-led channels with voice-based policies that include focus groups, surveys and other methods that deliberately target a wider cross-section of society.

## *Responsiveness*

Citizens expect to be heard and service users expect to be told how their input has been used. Responsiveness might mean a simple acknowledgement. It might mean adapting or changing services following feedback. Taken further, it might mean tailoring services to suit the individual, through choice, personalisation or other user-specific approaches.

Responsiveness is not just a mechanical process of providing feedback. If done well, it will also address the citizen's experience of service delivery – how they feel they are treated and the nature of the customer-provider interface.

## *Accessibility*

Different citizen groups may need to access public services in different ways. On the one hand, accessibility is a matter of convenience – today's consumers expect to be able to access services at a time and place, and in a manner that suits them. On the other hand, there is the question of equity – public services need to be accessible to all those citizens that require them, which means that a range of approaches may be necessary to reach out across all groups.

## **Meeting Public Expectations**

Despite the differences between public service markets and consumer markets, research has shown that when citizens are asked what they want from their public services, consumer services are commonly used as the basis for comparison. So how does government measure up?

Consumer research from the UK suggests citizens feel businesses, especially supermarkets, are better than public services at responding to their needs. They understand that this is because companies have an incentive to deliver a good service in order to retain their customers. By contrast, while individuals experience pockets of responsiveness from public services, they tend to regard this as luck, rather than being the normal situation.<sup>3</sup>

When respondents to the British Attitudes Survey 2005 were asked 'Who is best at providing a good quality service?', 51% answered 'private companies' and 41% answered 'government'.<sup>4</sup> Similar surveys

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in other areas indicated that although overall satisfaction levels were more or less the same for public and private sector services, the private sector rated higher across all areas relating to customer service.

On the other hand, while citizens increasingly expect services to be tailored to their individual needs, one area where their attitude to public services differs noticeably from their behaviour in consumer markets is the importance they place on equality of access. Respondents to a 2005 UK National Consumer Council study of public expectations of government services said that they 'wanted everyone to have the assurance of a good service'.<sup>5</sup> In this regard citizens clearly place government ahead of business. Three-quarters of respondents to the British Attitudes Survey ranked the public sector more highly than business on 'ensuring that services reach those who need them', compared to one in five who felt business had the edge.

For governments then, good customer service is also about ensuring that services are accessible and responsive to the needs of each and every citizen. This is a demanding level of expectation and one that is not applied to the same extent to private sector providers. The remaining sections of this report consider some of the ways governments around the world are seeking to cope with this challenge.

## 2. New Initiatives for Joining-Up Services

Public services have traditionally been delivered directly by a department, agency or local authority. Under this model, the individual is typically dealt with each time on a one-off basis, in much the same way that customers purchase goods from a shop. However, technological developments in recent decades have made it increasingly easy to join-up services across organisational, transactional and geographical boundaries to provide a more integrated service.

The benefits to the customer of joined-up service initiatives include easier management of data, faster transactions and increased accessibility. For service providers, benefits include efficiency gains from the pooling of back office services to create economies of scale, and performance benefits from shared data and resources.

Despite these advantages, the public sector faces significant challenges in moving to joined-up service provision. A recent UK National Audit Office report found that public sector organisations were discouraged from sharing services by a lack of financial incentives to buy services from and sell to other organisations, poor quality performance data making it hard to quantify the benefits, taxation issues and problems of perception.<sup>6</sup> To embrace the full potential of collaboration, governments need to address these barriers, and raise awareness amongst departments and agencies of the benefits of joined-up delivery.

Services can be joined up both horizontally and vertically – across different departments or organisations, and between local, regional and national levels. It can also be done in different ways, from the physical amalgamation of assets, to the sharing of information across multiple sites. It can involve the integration of back office functions whilst maintaining multiple front office channels; but it can also involve channelling multiple services

through a single access point.

### Cross-Government Collaboration

Technology is a powerful enabler for joining-up disparate activities, and it will continue to play a major role in the transformation of public services. However, governments have employed it in different ways.

#### Contact Centres

Contact centres are widely used by both the public and private sector for joining-up services. Contact centres are single entry points to a service, usually accessed by telephone, but sometimes by post, email, Internet (and, more recently, instant messaging). Through a contact centre, citizens can obtain advice, assistance, information or other forms of support without having to understand the detailed workings of the system.

Contact centres are not new, but historically they have had a fairly narrow remit – calling 999 in the UK accesses the emergency services, but nothing else. However, to better serve users and to increase efficiency, single access points are increasingly being used across a much broader range of services. New York City's 311 telephone call centre replaces 40 separate centres and 14 pages of telephone numbers, and offers 24-hour access to information about almost any public service in the city. France's 'Allô, Service Public' telephone channel is a similar service.

In Finland, the Population Register Centre and TeliaSonera Finland have introduced an alternative to the traditional contact centre – a State Citizen Certificate which is built into a mobile phone SIM card and can be used to identify the user with a single code for easier access to both public and private sector services. (<http://e.finland.fi/netcomm/news/>)

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[showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=30340](#))

### *Pos Malaysia – Cross-Government Service Delivery through a Third Party Agent*

An interesting cross-government initiative in Malaysia involves a third party business organisation, the Malaysia Postal Service, Pos Malaysia ([www.pos.com.my](http://www.pos.com.my)), acting as a single access point for citizens to services across various government departments, statutory bodies and other private companies. As trusted agent to these organisations, Pos Malaysia conducts a wide range of transactions on their behalf.

The Pos Malaysia service is a one-stop shop for a range of government-related business, from bill or tax payments, to driving licence renewals, to voter registration. It also offers non-governmental services, from booking flights and hotels to shopping for products and appliances. The service incorporates various customer-focussed enhancements to increase accessibility and convenience for citizens, such as drive-thru counters at some locations and extended operating hours.

### *e-Government Initiatives*

The Scandinavian countries seem to be leaders in cross-government collaboration, and both Sweden and Denmark have embraced the Internet to link services across departmental boundaries.

Sweden has prioritised the development of networked public agencies, with the intention that citizens and businesses should not have to contact more than one place about any issue. For example, citizens wanting to register a company are able to access and file the necessary documents on a dedicated website, which can be accessed either from the Tax Board website or the Companies

Registration Office website.

To encourage cross-agency collaboration, the Swedish government used certain structural tools. A framework procurement agreement on e-infrastructure services ('Infra Services'), introduced in 2004, serves to connect multiple functions and suppliers of infrastructure, support, case management, design and implementation services to a number of subscribers (e.g. several agencies) under a contract-based arrangement. The aim is to incentivise joint working and facilitate the introduction of e-services into public administration by offering an alternative to the more costly option of agencies building their own online services. The framework also helps drive common approaches and standards across agencies.<sup>7</sup>

The Danish government has created specific crosscutting bodies to help implement a client-centered, cross-government approach to service delivery. For example, the Board of eGovernment, which has primary responsibility for the development of the eGovernment program, is a multi-jurisdictional committee with representatives from the Danish government, regions, local government, Copenhagen municipality and Frederiksberg municipality. ([http://isb.oio.dk/Info/About/eGovernment+in+Denmark.htm?wbc\\_purpose=Basic&WBCMODE=PresentationUnpublished](http://isb.oio.dk/Info/About/eGovernment+in+Denmark.htm?wbc_purpose=Basic&WBCMODE=PresentationUnpublished))

### **Service Specific Initiatives**

Service-specific hubs are also emerging, bringing together all transactions relating to a particular activity for convenience and efficiency. In Denmark, the National Agency for Enterprise and Construction has introduced a Public Information Server that offers public authorities, businesses and citizens access to national property data through a

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single portal (Offentlige Informations Server: [www.ois.dk](http://www.ois.dk)). Using a digital signature or government-issued 'Centrale Person Register' number and pin code, users can access information about a property, send change requests to the relevant municipality and print information from the Danish Building and Housing Register.

Australia's Business Entry Point transaction manager ([www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au)), provides a fast and easy way for businesses to manage government administration and transactions online without having to understand how individual organisations or agencies work. From a single website, users can access more than 5,500 transactions with agencies across all three levels of government (federal, state and local). For small businesses in particular, this has significant advantages.

In Finland, a joint service between pension funds and the Finnish Centre for Pensions provides a single personal employment record for every individual insured under Finnish earnings-related pension schemes. Through a front-of-house portal, fund-holders can check the accuracy of their personal employment information, identify the company that manages their pension and calculate pensions estimates online. ([www.tyoelake.fi](http://www.tyoelake.fi))

### Local and Regional Collaboration

Joining-up has also been introduced successfully at local and regional levels. A UK example is the Worcestershire Hub, a partnership between six district councils and Worcestershire county council to streamline local services provided by the councils and a number of partner organisations. It provides a Web portal and network of customer service centres. (<http://hub.whub.org.uk/home/hubindex.htm?partner=hub>)

In Sweden, a number of municipalities have

come together in an initiative called the Municipal Platform to identify common services and processes, which are listed on an inventory. The Platform aims to raise awareness of the potential for economies of scale through collaboration, and to facilitate the development of e-services.<sup>8</sup>

### *Co-Location of Service Provision in Bury St Edmunds Public Service Village*

Bury St Edmunds Public Service Village (PSV) in the UK brings together different services horizontally, and also links the local borough council and county departments. At its most basic, the PSV concept is a public service accommodation initiative, replacing a number of geographically dispersed buildings with a more effective arrangement on a single site. Customers need no longer be confused and inconvenienced by having to go from building to building. However, by joining up front-of-office services in one place, the council aims to deliver improved, joined-up services in which integration of council activity is encouraged.

Staff will work together across organisational boundaries to deliver consistent services, and service users do not need to be concerned about who employs which staff. The eco-friendly new building is furnished on a ratio of approximately seven desks to ten employees, who are encouraged to work flexibly or from home, as appropriate. The building itself is designed to be flexible if service requirements change: <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/6441770>.

### Local, Regional and National Collaboration

The UK's Directgov portal provides a wide range of information and services from across central, local and regional government. The site, managed by the Central Office of Information, covers issues from

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travel safety and parental leave advice, to special educational needs and local health services. It also provides access to government directories and links to trusted third party service providers such as advice and support organisations for those in need. Citizens can also carry out a variety of online transactions, including booking driving tests, paying car tax, renewing passports and applying for student loans. (<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/index.htm>)

### *Norway's Mypage Citizen Self-Service Portal*

Norway's Mypage portal provides a 'one-stop shop' for citizens across a range of public services (<http://www.norge.no/minside>). It is particularly ambitious in scale and scope, covering local, regional and national levels, and has had significant take-up across the country. According to the European Union's eGovernment awards, Mypage exceeded 200,000 registered users in less than 4 months following its launch in 2006 – approximately 5% of the Norwegian population.

When Mypage won the eGovernment award for participation and transparency in 2007, epractice.eu described the site as a triumph for putting citizens' needs at the centre of service planning (<http://www.epractice.eu/cases/mypage>). A notable feature of Mypage is that it enables citizens to manage the information that the public sector holds about them. This has positive benefits for the accuracy and effectiveness of government record-keeping. For example, some users have discovered anomalies, such as being registered for properties or vehicles they did not own.

Similar services are available elsewhere, for example, France (<http://www.service-public.fr/etranger/english.html>), Singapore (<http://www.ecitizen.gov.sg/>) and India (<http://www.india.gov.in>). The Indian

national portal also extends to offer information on Indian culture and heritage, national events and various activities, governmental and national affairs, academic information and services for Indian and overseas students, employment, travel or business services.

Singapore's eCitizen portal also stands out in terms of what it has achieved in front and back office integration in both business and citizen services. In 2007, Singapore was ranked the world's leading nation in citizen-centricity of public service provision.<sup>9</sup> The key front office innovation on the citizen side is MyeCitizen, a subsite of the main eCitizen portal (<http://www.myecitizen.sg/ec/index.jsp>), where users can login for more personalised interaction. The site offers both private and public sector services and content, organised under a series of 'channels', such as family, home, travel and money. On the business side, EnterpriseOne (<http://www.business.gov.sg>) provides information and services from across 30 government agencies, as well as information from partnerships with business associations and chambers of commerce.

### **Connecting with Remote or Hard to Reach User Communities**

One of the difficulties with joining up government services using ICT is that some communities are better served than others, with the result that service provision becomes unequal. For government this is an important consideration. However, if done well, such services can serve as a tool for reaching out to remote or less well-served groups and communities.

## 2. New Initiatives for Joining-Up Services

### *Joining-up local and national services in Estonia*

The government of Estonia has developed a scheme to help connect rural areas to wider public sector activities using the Internet. The Village Road project links local government and public libraries to the Internet. To encourage residents of rural communities to access these sites, a scheme has been introduced to encourage teachers and agricultural workers to buy PCs, with the aim of making the Internet accessible to everyone. The inhabitants of every village are also entitled to free Internet access.

At national level, Cabinet decisions are published online just minutes after being taken, using a service called eCabinet. Under a separate initiative called X-Road, all government databases have been joined-up to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Different systems are linked through the government intranet, and quality is managed through a national Database Registry – only data systems that meet prescribed criteria can access X-Road and the information that it holds. As with Mypage in Norway, citizens are also permitted to access the information that government holds about them, after authentication of their identity using their national ID card. The online environment can be personalised to suit the individual user, for example by selecting connections to local services relevant to them.

Official website (in Estonian): <https://www.eesti.ee/tom/ideas.py/avaleht>

Article about the initiatives in English: <http://www.pstm.net/article/index.php?articleid=802>

In Singapore, a dedicated organisation, the Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) was set up, with responsibility not only for strategic leadership in design and implementation of an e-Revolution, but also for managing barriers to digital development. Target areas include mindset,

income and language barriers. In response, they are developing ePedoman, a bilingual, bidirectional search and directory function that allows users to browse both English and Malay websites, regardless of their own mother tongue. In Japan, an e-Ambassador has also been set up to encourage citizens to volunteer to help members of their community unfamiliar with ICT: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/asem/seminar/asem1/session/p17.html>.

Raising awareness is a key success factor for any front-facing joined-up service initiative. The Canadian government, consistently voted among the highest performers in e-government and citizen-focussed innovation, publicised its national portal through traditional marketing channels, including television, radio and print media ([www.canada.gc.ca](http://www.canada.gc.ca)). Similarly, the Singaporean government used various publicity and promotional channels to improve take-up of its initiatives, including broadcast and print media.

## 3. Making Public Services More Personal

Personalisation of public services can mean various things. At one end of the scale, this might involve a more friendly service, with staff being more respectful in their interaction with customers, and increased opportunities for users to provide feedback once they have accessed a service. At the other end of the scale, personalisation might involve opportunities for more active user involvement in decisions about service delivery, such as allowing individuals to decide where money allocated to them is spent. Or it may involve users becoming involved in the actual design of a service, managing a personal budget or a service package.

Issues of user interface, including the provision and receipt of feedback, are dealt with elsewhere in this report. Therefore, this chapter focuses on two specific types of personalisation: firstly, examples of initiatives that give users more direct say over the service that they receive; and secondly, the involvement of users as co-designers of their services. (There are some overlaps between these forms of personalisation.)

### Giving Users a Direct Say Over the Service

Around the world, personalisation in the form of user direction and design has often been applied in complex human services such as education, health and social care. However, these are also the areas where choice-based policies are the most controversial and where issues of equity and inclusiveness are most likely to arise.

One way for governments to provide citizens with greater influence over their public services, whilst maintaining a level of control over provision, is through systems that allow choice within defined boundaries. In this way, services can be managed as required and targeted at specific user groups as deemed appropriate.

### *School Choice*

Different models of school choice have emerged around the world. The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Chile have universal choice: parents are free to choose any government or independent school in any location. Australia also has an education system that involves extensive choice. In the United States choice has been targeted at specific client groups – typically those on low incomes. The United Kingdom, Belgium and New Zealand are among the nations that have introduced some level of choice.

### *Universal School Choice – Sweden*

Sweden is the global leader in school choice, having introduced a universal voucher scheme in the early 1990s. Each child is allocated a voucher equivalent to the cost of state education and parents may use this voucher at the school of their choice in the independent or state sectors. These vouchers cannot be topped up (schools accepting vouchers may not charge more than the value of the voucher) and admission is on a first-come, first-served basis: in other words schools cannot claim the brightest or wealthiest pupils; parental choice is the deciding factor.

In tandem with their demand-side reforms, Sweden's government encourages new entrants to the supply market. Independent schools must meet a handful of straightforward requirements to qualify as eligible for government vouchers. The result is that a wide diversity of suppliers, including many private for-profit companies, build and operate schools in the independent sector.

These expansive reforms have brought significant improvements. Sweden's National Agency for Education has reported, 'On average pupils in independent schools have higher merit ratings than

### 3. Making Public Services More Personal

pupils in municipal schools'.<sup>10</sup> They have also been found to increase social integration, while municipal schools exposed to competition have been found to increase in efficiency and performance.

Universal choice is also available in the Netherlands and Denmark, each having the right to educational choice enshrined in their constitutions. This empowers parents to set up schools, define the principles and ethos, and lead curricula and teaching. In the Netherlands to establish a school only 50 parents are needed in towns with a population of fewer than 25,000 and only 125 parents in towns over 100,000. This freedom means that 70% of Dutch students attend an independent school.

#### *Targeted School Choice – United States*

Local governments at state and city level enjoy significant autonomy in setting education policy, and systems vary considerably across the nation (although devolution of this kind may not, of itself, result in significant choice). The reasons for adopting choice in education also vary: for example, in Vermont and Maine the state government has historically paid for students from isolated small towns and rural areas to attend either government or independent schools elsewhere in the state.

In the main, however, US authorities have targeted choice at those on low incomes. The best known scheme is operated in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), which began in 1990, enables students to attend private schools in the city, paid for by state aid (in 2007/08 the maximum MPCP state aid for a student was \$6,501). Eligibility is based on residency in the city and, for first-time applicants, a household income that does not exceed 175% of the Federal Poverty Level.

In the early days of MPCP, little difference was

observed in outcomes between those students accepted to the scheme and those rejected. But as the scheme has evolved, students participating in the scheme have achieved significantly better educational outcomes than comparable groups not participating.

Similar results have been observed in similar schemes in Michigan and Arizona, and the success of these has encouraged implementation of choice elsewhere. In the District of Columbia, the Choice Incentive Program issues grants of up to \$7,500 to the students of parents whose income does not exceed 200% of the poverty line; these grants may be used to attend any school of their choice. Colorado, Florida and Cleveland, Ohio are among the authorities to operate similar schemes targeted at those on low incomes and in low-performing districts.

#### *Personalisation in Health Services*

One commonly cited problem with choice and personalisation in health services is that citizens may not know how to identify their best treatment. In the UK, several approaches have been adopted to ensure that patients make informed decisions. Patient Care Advisers are used to help patients access and understand information and to make choices about their care. They provide a first point of contact for advice on service selection and then throughout the treatment process.

Similarly, the Expert Patients Programme (EPP) provides training for people with chronic conditions, to help them develop the skills they need to take effective control of their lives and care. Courses are designed to cater for individual needs, including for those in marginalised social groups. The EPP is broader in focus than the Patient Care Advisers Scheme in helping individuals to make broader lifestyle choices, rather than simply providing advice

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on available healthcare options. As such, it should work well alongside self-directed service initiatives of the type discussed later in this chapter, and is part of a wider government drive to introduce more user control in health services.

### *Choice Based Lettings in Social Housing*

In the social housing sector, the UK government has implemented a housing policy adapted from the Netherlands, known as Choice Based Lettings (CBL), which offers increased control of outcomes for public housing applicants. Unlike traditional ways of managing waiting lists for social housing, CBL enables applicants (and existing tenants seeking transfers) to apply for vacancies from the full range of properties available, which are advertised locally (in local newspapers or websites), provided that it is a property for which they are eligible – a single person would not be allocated a 3-bedroom house. Urgent cases receive priority, but otherwise allocations are made on a first-come, first-served basis. Unsuccessful applicants receive feedback to help them assess their chance of success in future applications. Because the system transfers a significant degree of control to citizens, it should offer important flexibility benefits, but much depends on the supply market. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingmanagementcare/choicebasedlettings/>

### *Personalised Benefits Schemes*

In 2001 the Government of Singapore instituted New Singapore Shares (NSS), a non-transferable, non-tradable, interest-earning asset distributed among the poorest in society according to need. The NSS system (which finished in late 2007) was accessible online, allowing eligible citizens to monitor their NSS endowment and request that the Central Provident Fund Board (CPF Board) exchange their shares for cash. The service has now closed,

but an overview remains available online: [http://www.ers.org.sg/nss\\_ovw.htm](http://www.ers.org.sg/nss_ovw.htm).

The UK government has introduced a Child Trust Fund (CTF) scheme whereby the parents of any child born after September 2002 are allocated a £250 voucher (£500 for lower income households or vulnerable children) to invest in a CTF account of their choice. A wide variety of such accounts are provided, by both retail finance providers and government, and accounts carry different levels of risk. Once the investment is made, the account can be topped up as desired by family or friends, up to a maximum annual allowance. However, the fund cannot be drawn upon until the child is 18 years old. If no investment is made within a required time period, the government invests the money on the child's behalf. <http://www.childtrustfund.gov.uk/>.

### **Engaging Users as Co-Designers of Services**

Governments are also involving individuals more actively in the design of their services, enabling them to develop a solution that is tailored to their particular needs. Many of the best examples of this are to be found in the field of social care.

### *Personalised Budgets*

Personalised budgeting involves the allocation of a cash budget to individuals, enabling them to buy their own bundle of public services. This enables them to shape production to meet their own personal requirements. Under a personalised budgeting system, the individual's cash budget varies according to social need.

To date, personalised budgets have been used primarily for specific client groups in social care. However, there is a general belief that the idea has much wider applicability. Evidence from both the UK and the US suggests that services become

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more responsive and user-satisfaction rises when personalised budgeting is introduced. Some commentators have also reported reduced costs associated with this approach.

It has been claimed that the principles of equity are best met within a traditional producer-driven model, but steps can be taken to address these concerns, including the provision of support for budget holders that need it.

The UK social care sector introduced a personalised budgeting policy known as Direct Payments in 1997, initially for specific client groups. The success and popularity of this scheme has led to an expansion of the policy and since 2003 local authorities have offered the scheme to all adult social care users.

Under a Direct Payments scheme, local authorities pay cash directly to those who qualify for care rather than providing the social care service themselves. Recipients then use the cash allocation to meet their individual needs from the wider community.

#### *Direct Payments in Social Care – London Borough of Tower Hamlets*

A 2006 study of recipients of Direct Payments for social care in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets provided some insights on the policy. Drawing on interviews with 30 service users and 15 personal assistants, the study explored why service users chose to use Direct Payments rather than traditional local authority procurement, and the influence that this had on the service they received.

#### *Advantages*

Respondents to the study highlighted choice as an advantage of Direct Payments: users enjoy greater choice over the type of service they received and over the service provider. They also had the

choice of a personal assistant compatible with their personal needs and interests rather than one allocated by the local authority. Empowering users to procure their own services resulted in better service outcomes.

Additionally, respondents reported increased control. Under traditional provision, users' routines were built around when their services were available. Under self-direction, users integrated services into their routine. They could also control who came into their house rather than passively waiting for a stranger.

A third key advantage highlighted by Direct Payment recipients was flexibility. Users were able to influence more readily the time of assistance and the nature of tasks carried out, which could change at short notice.

Finally, there was the advantage of opportunity. Half of users reported that employing their personal assistant themselves created social opportunities and so increased their personal well-being. They also reported greater scope to take opportunities inside the workplace, as a result of the greater control and flexibility of the scheme.

#### *Challenges*

The biggest challenge presented by Direct Payments occurred in the initial start-up period. Burdensome accounts and paperwork proved demanding to users and this contributed to a lengthy initial start-up period, between six weeks and four months from the needs assessment to receipt of the first Direct Payment. These problems were essentially procedural, and thus should be subject to improvement, but Direct Payment assessment and allocation was initially a complicated process meaning that the challenge of start-up delays is unlikely to be eliminated entirely.

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A further challenge reported was that of relief workers. Personal assistants were recruited from a diversity of sources but with the exception of agency workers did not typically come from a large organisation. As such, users often faced difficulties with recruiting relief workers – and with paying them from Direct Payment dedicated bank accounts.<sup>11</sup>

Other countries have systems similar to the UK Direct Payments scheme. For example, Sweden and Denmark have municipal level systems of direct payments in personal care for the elderly and physically disabled.

A well-known US example of personalised budgeting is the Medicaid Cash and Counselling programme, under which eligible recipients receive a monthly voucher to buy disability-related goods and services that suit their needs (including hiring a carer of their choice). The scheme also offers counselling and financial assistance, and users have the option of designating a representative to make decisions on their behalf. Medicaid specifically targets less well-educated and lower income groups that are typically less well served by other parts of the US healthcare system.

#### *Case Management*

In some cases, particularly with social welfare services where users may have difficulty in understanding the complexity of different public and private programmes and protecting their interests, government may need to support the extension of choice through the provision of case managers.

In the US, the Empowerment Initiatives Brokerage, which operates in several counties in Oregon provides a personal budget to individuals with serious and persistent mental illness to support their recovery. The objective of the scheme is to start the recovery process and within a year to move people

to a level of independence that can be sustained. The budgets have to be spent on goods and services that improve an individual's mental health, but there is a reasonable degree of flexibility – the brokerage recognises that, for some individuals, alternative therapies can be as effective as medication.

Users of the Empowerment Initiatives Brokerage are assigned a resource broker who works with them to identify recovery goals and to plan how best to use their budget. Brokers help them to navigate the public system to access other sources of financial and community support, thereby increasing the impact of the scheme. The support of the brokers alongside the budget is considered a vital element in the success of the programme. (<http://www.chooseempowerment.com/>)

#### *Personalised Support for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities in Four US States*

In the United States, there is growing adoption of person-centred services for people with developmental disabilities. These empower individuals and families to shape services, but within a support framework of planning teams, with trained case managers.

The services are organised in different ways according to individual state legislation, ranging from a heavily centralised system administered at state-level, to regional-level distribution, to highly decentralised services administered by individual communities. No one approach is considered superior, but a recent study of four states (Connecticut, Kansas, Wisconsin and Wyoming), each with a different delivery approach, identified a series of common success factors:

- Clear, specific allocation of funds to each individual, to enable planning teams and individuals to make clear, sustainable decisions on support and

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services;

- Open and competitive supply markets that ensure funding is portable where service users want to exercise choice;
- Autonomy for users and families to make choices among qualified options: each individual is free to pick their own service worker and, once the budget has been allocated, to determine what and how service and support are provided;
- Flexibility for users and families to initiate services with minimal constraints;
- Quality assurance and improvement through monitoring and support from the state authority, with high levels of co-ordination and resource for case managers.

Implications for authorities considering implementation of person-centred services are that it requires a clear focus on person-centred services through strategic planning and/or legislation. Effective collaboration and a shared vision among all stakeholders are also essential. Case management needs to be effectively structured, through training and funding, and quality management should focus on the user, within a framework of self-advocacy. In each of the four states there was a tipping point where a sufficient number of people were receiving person-centred supports to create momentum for change throughout the system.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Self-Directed Services*

Medicaid and the Empowerment Initiatives Brokerage (discussed above), venture further towards the cutting-edge of personalisation, in offering self-directed services. Self-direction moves a step further than personalised budgeting, in that greater control and choice are transferred to

the service recipient. A UK-based scheme that follows this model is the In Control partnership. In Control enables individuals to design their own care plan and manage the budget to pay for it, to commission services and subsequently to alter the plan as required. However, risk is spread between the individual and the authority, and where the user is unwilling or able to perform these tasks then peer and professional support networks are available to provide support (<http://www.in-control.org.uk>).

Based on the experience with In Control, the UK government introduced a new pilot scheme for social care to run alongside Direct Payments – the ‘Individual Budgets Programme’ (<http://individualbudgets.csip.org.uk/index.jsp>). Whereas Direct Payments only cover local authority social care budgets, Individual Budgets bring together funds from various agencies, including local authority social services, community equipment, independent living funds, disabled facilities grants and other specific programmes, to deliver a more joined-up care package and to make the service more adaptable to individual needs.

Individual Budgets involve the allocation of a single transparent sum and held on their behalf. Individuals can choose to take this money out as a direct cash payment, as services, or as a mixture of both cash and services, up to the value of their total budget. Budgets can be spent on any combination of services from across the funding sources, or on the purchase of equipment. This approach aims to provide more flexibility for individuals to choose services tailored to their specific needs. As with In Control, the ability to decide whether to take the money as cash or services also caters for individuals who do not wish to take on the direct responsibility of managing their budget and employing their own care staff.

A more localised UK example of self-directed

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services is the Kingston Centre for Independent Living – disabled and older people catered for by the Centre can arrange and manage their own support systems. Rather than the council directly providing the service, recipients choose their own carers, means of travel and equipment. They also choose what proportion of their budget goes on each of these three areas (<http://www.kcil.org.uk/>).

### Collective Personalisation

One form of personalisation that overlaps both of the categories discussed above, is to be found in ‘collective personalisation’, where communities or specific user groups play a communal role in adapting and even designing the services that they receive.

One such example is Practice Based Commissioning (PBC), a UK Department of Health scheme that has been described as the equivalent of Individual Budgets in social care. In this case, the decision makers are health care practices acting as agents for their patients (individually or as a group). Under PBC, health care practices have more control over resources. They receive indicative budgets and can see what proportion of their secondary care budget is spent where, allowing them to make changes to free up money for user groups that they consider to have particular needs.

A cutting-edge example of collective personalisation, also from the UK, is School Works, an independent, not-for-profit company that works in partnership with the Department for Children, Schools and Families and a variety of construction and design firms to improve school and educational performance through innovative design and consultation practices. Based on the principle that built environment is highly influential on behaviours and outcomes, School Works attempts to tailor the school surroundings to the specific needs and wants of individual schools’ pupils and teachers ([http://](http://www.school-works.org)

[www.school-works.org](http://www.school-works.org)).

As part of a range of police reforms in recent years, the UK government has endeavoured to localise police management and address local priorities and concerns through public consultation. In February 2008, a new scheme was announced under which every household in England and Wales to be given a mobile phone number to call new Neighbourhood Police teams. This is primarily a case of localisation, but for collectively consumed goods such as law and order, localisation may deliver personalisation in delivering services more tailored to specific needs ([http://www.policeoracle.com/news/325m-Neighbourhood-Policing-Plan\\_15665.html](http://www.policeoracle.com/news/325m-Neighbourhood-Policing-Plan_15665.html)).

At the extreme end of collective personalisation is a scenario where certain user-initiated services become mainstreamed in public life. A recent review undertaken for the UK Cabinet Office (The Power of Information: [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/upload/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/power\\_information.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/upload/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/power_information.pdf)) suggested that before creating new websites to inform citizens about areas of public service provision, government departments might consult with the operators of existing user-generated sites covering the same issues and consider options for forming partnerships with them. Whilst well received, the ideas from this report were still being debated at the time of the publication of this report and were not yet government policy.

## 4. New Ways of Serving Users through New Technologies

As demonstrated throughout this report, new technologies are having a significant impact on the way in which citizens access and experience public services. This chapter considers the role that technological developments are playing, on the one hand, in facilitating the development of existing services to improve access and outcomes for citizens, and on the other hand, in enabling the creation and development of wholly new services.

### Facilitating Existing Service Provision Using Technology

#### *Inclusion and Access*

A key driver for governments to embrace new technology in public service delivery is the desire to improve interaction with groups that are hard to reach – for example, those whose access to services is constrained by location or other factors. Of course, technology does not always provide the best means of improving inclusiveness. Some users do not have access to the latest technologies, or are uncomfortable using it. But there are examples where technology has been used successfully to improve services for such users.

#### *Paymaster to the Nation, South Africa*

The South African Post Office launched an award-winning scheme, Paymaster to the Nation, which aims to reduce fraud and hardship, and improve access to pensions and welfare payments for the elderly and infirm, particularly those in remote areas. The scheme has been piloted in the country's North West Province, with plans to roll it out elsewhere. The Post Office also plans to franchise the service to other African countries.

Under the scheme, individuals use a 'smartcard' to access welfare grants and pensions that are deposited directly into a personal Postbank account.

The smartcard is pre-loaded with details of the beneficiary's fingerprints and with a photograph, in order to prevent fraudulent use. The great advantage of the system is that it ensures that these benefits reach some of the most needy members of the community, who would otherwise slip through the net because they do not meet the requirements needed to open an account with a commercial bank. The scheme enables them to enjoy the benefits of a bank account, to earn interest on their money and to make cash withdrawals at any time from automatic teller machines or post office branches. North West Province pays out more than R800 million per month in payments, little of which previously reached interest-earning accounts. Under this scheme, if just 6% of the total sum earns interest, the recipients receive an additional R11.5 million a year in income. Those who live in remote communities are also saved the time and cost of travelling long distances to queue at a traditional payout point to access their benefits.

An innovative application of technology to improve accessibility to welfare provision is Italy's 'Vicky' system – a 'virtual assistant' for social security, accessible online and via mobile phones, which can answer complex questions, learn from user input and, crucially from an accessibility point of view, understand the user's native language (<http://vicky.inps.it/>). Many countries now offer some form of online access to government benefits services – see Centrelink for Australia (<http://www.centrelink.gov.au>) and the US 'govbenefits' site ([www.govbenefits.gov](http://www.govbenefits.gov)).

A different way that technology can enhance access to services is where it is used to facilitate provision for user groups with special requirements. For example, the Danish National Library for the Blind has developed a digital library service for visually impaired and dyslexic citizens, which offers e-books,

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digital talking books and Braille materials. The service is offered through a 24-hour Internet portal, and physical materials can be ordered for delivery (<http://www.dbb.dk>).

### *More Efficient Use of Data*

The collection of information in one place has benefits in ease of access, the ability to cross-reference and increased efficiency: among other things, technological development has resulted in improved convenience, time saving, enhanced access and a wider range of delivery options.

Either providers or recipients can engage in data management. Under the most advanced models, mechanisms have been introduced for users to access and manage their own personal data and transactions, without the need for face-to-face contact or telephone interaction. However, not all users are willing or able to take on these tasks, so governments often provide more than one channel for individuals to engage with a service.

Back-of-house data management also offers benefits. For example, Singapore's Ministry of Health has plans to partner with two private companies, Singhealth Services and National Healthcare Group, to develop an Electronic Medical Records System Exchange (EMRX) as a single access portal for patients' medical information and health care records for public hospitals and clinics across the country. The aim is to integrate services across multiple facilities by making data available immediately through a single source, which should improve patient outcomes ranging from the user experience to the quality of care ([http://www2.egov.gov.sg/online\\_newsletter/issue15/Electronic%20Medical%20Record.htm](http://www2.egov.gov.sg/online_newsletter/issue15/Electronic%20Medical%20Record.htm)).

On the service side, the UK Department for

Transport has introduced a self-service facility whereby individuals can apply online for provisional driving licences, supported by identity data from the Identity and Passport Service. This is a simpler and faster process than the previous system of paper applications through the Post Office, which required support in the form of appropriate documentary evidence and could take several weeks to process. The cross-referencing of data between departments is an example of the move towards joined-up government.

### *Mobility and Convenience*

A number of municipal and state agencies allow citizens to pay for services (such as parking and road use charges) using their mobile phones. In Finland, the PARKIT parking payment system operates in multiple cities, including public and some private parking facilities. The system enables users to start, end or extend parking time with a simple phone call, paying via either card or billing system, without the need to return to their vehicle. So users need only ever pay for the parking time that they actually use. Certain locations in Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, the UK and other countries offer similar systems.

In some Australian cities, users can be sent an SMS warning if the parking meter is about to expire. One jurisdiction is piloting a system of 'virtual parking meters' where users can register their mobile phone and vehicle details online and prepay for their parking. Account balance and parking history can be checked online and account holder details updated. Parking wardens use WAP (wireless application protocol) phones or handheld devices to check that vehicles are fully paid and authorised to park.

To achieve similar improvements in convenience and flexibility, for both service users and workers, Leeds City Council in the UK is using a digital pen

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with mobile phone technology to enable staff to complete forms on location at citizens' homes. The pen transmits data via Bluetooth to their mobile phone, and through to a central database. This means that workers do not need to return to the office to enter data manually onto computer.

### *More Efficient and Convenient Customer Transactions*

Some services are particularly well suited to improvement through technological advances. Taxation is one such area: the Australian Tax Office now offers a full online tax service for businesses and tax agents that allows a range of transactions, and channels data from various sources through a single portal for convenience and efficiency. The site can be personalised by individual users and security is managed through the use of digital certificates: <https://bp.ato.gov.au>. Similarly, in the US, the Free File website ([www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118986,00.html](http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118986,00.html)) enables taxpayers to prepare and file taxes online, and obtain refunds, much more quickly than via a paper returns process. Numerous other countries have embraced online tax processing.<sup>13</sup>

Postal services naturally lend themselves to online usage and are widely cited as an example of an innovative market. In Germany, Deutsche Post provides basic services, including branch information, postcode searches, postage calculators and an online stamp shop and additional services such as a facility to change address details online. There is also an ePost facility with additional services such as e-mail, digital photo albums and magazine subscriptions for citizens, and for businesses, a range of direct marketing services ([www.deutschepost.de](http://www.deutschepost.de)). The United States Postal Service offers an Internet mail-tracking service, Confirm, which helps business customers to plan and manage marketing activities ([www.usps.com/nationalpremieraccounts/confirm.htm](http://www.usps.com/nationalpremieraccounts/confirm.htm)). Various countries have now introduced

services to allow business customers to print postage directly from a computer (see, for example, the UK's Royal Mail SmartStamp service (<http://www.royalmail.com/portal/rm/onlinepostage>)).

### *Certipost secure electronic document services, Belgium*

Certipost (<http://www.certipost.be/certipost/en/home.html>), a joint venture between Belgacom and The Belgian Post Group, launched in July 2003, is a service designed to help companies, individuals and public sector organisations to carry out secure transactions online, including e-invoicing, e-supply certificates and e-signatures. The service saves on paper work and speeds and secures the transactional process for users.

Users can register for a secure personal MyCertipost account, effectively an electronic mailbox for users. Holders of Belgian e-ID cards can register either online, or by arranging an electronic signature at one of 125 registration offices around the country. Once registered, users' personal accounts can be used for all transactions.

### *Delivering High-Level Outcomes*

In addition to transactional and interactional services, technology can also help to deliver high-level benefits in social services such as education and employment services. For example, in education a variety of different initiatives have been introduced around the world, which have both direct and indirect benefits for citizens in terms of improved outcomes and user experience.

The Romanian Ministry of Education, Research and Youth has introduced a National Education Database, a software package used as the main

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information source for policy makers in the sector. The software serves both government and the general public by providing reports, indicators and general information online (<http://harta.edu.ro/>). Portugal has developed eGAIANIMA, a tool that facilitates online interaction between different educational stakeholders, ranging from teachers and pupils to parents and authorities. Parents can log in to check pupils' progress, pupils can enrol online in classes, teachers can complete online job applications and the site also contains a variety of reports and information on different elements of the services and relating to various aspects of the educational experience (<http://www.gaianima.pt/>).

In tertiary education, a number of countries have developed electronic tools to help students applying for financial assistance. The US Free Application for Federal Student Aid site ([www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)) uses skip logic based on users' information, so that online applicants have to answer fewer questions than those using making paper applications. The site also checks answers before submission, so applications are less likely to face rejection as a result of missing or conflicting information. Sweden's Student Aid site, Webbsvar, offers various customer-focussed attributes, including status updates that show the progress of requests, the value of existing student loans and when payments are due ([www.csn.se](http://www.csn.se)).

Technology has also delivered direct user outcomes in employment services. Examples include the UK's Internet Job Bank, available through two portals (Jobcentre Plus - <http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/index.html> and [www.worktrain.gov.uk](http://www.worktrain.gov.uk)) and the Swedish Public Employment Service (<http://www.ams.se/go.aspx?C=223>). Yet another example is an Austrian government portal that offers basic citizenship information on living and working in the country (<http://www.help.gv.at/Content.Node/HELP-FC.html>).

### *EURES – Pan-EU Employment Portal*

EURES is a pan-European employment network, with an extensive online 'job-mobility portal' that aims to provide information, advice and recruitment services to employees and employers, and individual citizens keen to benefit from the EU principle of free movement and employment between member countries.

EURES was originally established in 1993. It is a collaborative venture between the European Commission and the Public Employment Services of the EEA Member States (the EU countries plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) and other partner organisations. Switzerland also collaborates in EURES.

In addition to the 'Job Mobility Portal', the EURES service is underpinned by a network of more than 700 advisers who maintain regular contact with jobseekers and employers across Europe. EURES advisers also offer certain European cross-border employment services, offering problem solving, advice and information on a range of problems related to cross-border commuting, which are also covered online.

EURES is extraordinarily extensive: on 13/02/2008 there were 1,208,373 job vacancies, 310,110 CVs and 13,455 employers registered on the site: <http://ec.europa.eu/eures/home.jsp?lang=en>.

### *Improving Services for Business*

New technologies have simplified transactions between government and business customers, long a source of frustration and complaint, particularly on the part of small business proprietors. The UK's Business Link service is a self-help portal for small and medium businesses, linking to all relevant

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ministries and departments. Business Link is run under a contractual arrangement with a private sector partner (<http://www.businesslink.gov.uk>). A similar facility for business start-ups in Japan is the Sogyo Navi (Starting Business Navigator) portal, a public-private collaboration led by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

Estonia has established itself as a world leader when it comes to speed of company registration through its online Company Registration Portal. Any holder of a national e-ID card can register their company online in 12 minutes, whereas applications under the previous paper system took at least five days to process (<http://www.eer.ee>). A similar system operates in Belgium ([www.e-notariat.be](http://www.e-notariat.be)).

Business tax and customs services have also been improved through technological advances. Sweden has set up a virtual customs office as part of a wider initiative, The Stairway, designed to streamline companies' customs handling ([www.tullverket.se](http://www.tullverket.se)). France has introduced a system for online value-added tax handling (Télé-TVA), run by the Ministry of Finance (<http://tva.dgi.minefi.gouv.fr/index.jsp>).

### Enabling the Creation and Development of New Services

#### *Managing Demand and Improving Delivery in Health Care*

The increasing cost and complexity of healthcare services, as well as socio-economic factors such as an ageing population, are placing an increasing strain on service provision in this sector. A number of governments are using multi-media channels to diversify provision to help meet demand.

As part of a cross-government IT reform strategy, the health sector is a particular target for Japanese reform. By 2010 the government aims to have laid the foundation so that individuals can manage their

own healthcare using online information, and by the following year, it is expected that all medical insurance claims will be capable of being managed online. Promoting remote healthcare should also help reduce regional inequities in service quality and encourage collaboration between institutions. Electronic medical records will provide low-cost links between diagnosis and treatment information.<sup>14</sup>

Many countries already have similar multi-media health services, such as the 'Danish eHealth portal' ([http://www.sundhed.dk/wps/portal/\\_s.155/1836](http://www.sundhed.dk/wps/portal/_s.155/1836)). Other innovations in this sector include 'Health on the Net' in Switzerland, a not-for-profit site offering medical information and a conduit for R&D collaboration (<http://www.hon.ch/>) and more targeted services such as France's Aide aux Jeunes Diabetiques (<http://www.diabcarnet.com/>).

#### *The UK's NHS Direct – User Experiences and Outcomes*

NHS Direct is a 24-hour information and advice service for health services, designed to help patients make decisions about their healthcare. It is also a portal to wider services under the National Health Service (NHS), including details for registering with a General Practitioner (GP) or dentist. The service was founded in 1997 as a telephone advice line and has grown rapidly to reflect the evolving multimedia environment – first with an extensive website (<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>) and, since 2004, through interactive digital television.

The three original aims of NHS Direct were to provide accessible medical advice 24 hours a day for patients requiring urgent consultation; to improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of care through increased flexibility and improved information; and to reduce the burden of unnecessary demands on the NHS as a whole. The success of the service in meeting these objectives has been assessed in a number of studies.

## 4. New Ways of Serving Users through New Technologies

User satisfaction rates suggest patients are generally very pleased with the service and inclined to follow the advice provided. Moreover, NHS Direct users are the most positive of any client group in their perceptions of the NHS and tend to have the highest expectations for its future.

Data on healthcare outcomes are less clear. Indicators such as the number of reported adverse outcomes suggest the service at least provides extended coverage of the same quality as traditional health services. Only a minority of NHS Direct users are referred on to a primary care outlet and evidence suggests that those who are referred to a doctor are more likely than average to require a prescription. However a significant minority of callers referred to a GP do not require further treatment, suggesting that there remains room for improvement.

It is not clear whether there has been a reduced demand for NHS resources, or whether demand will reduce in the future – those referred to a doctor but requiring no further treatment might otherwise not have contacted a primary care outlet. In other cases, patients had already contacted another health service and then used NHS Direct when treatment was not necessary. In both of these cases demand on resources increased.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear from the UK experience that ICT channels do not provide a full substitute for traditional means of provision. Some user groups, such as older people, either lack the knowledge and access to ICTs or prefer face-to-face interaction. Additionally, the simple and low-cost nature of multimedia contact may encourage more people to access health services when they would not otherwise have done so. This might deliver some user benefits, if problems are captured early. But it might also encourage increased

demand from users who feel that they have nothing to lose by making sure.

### *Using Technology to Manage Risks*

New technologies bring new challenges. Accordingly, Italy has created the world's first online police station to deal with cyber and computer-related crimes. The 'Commissariato di P.S. online' website provides general information and a facility for citizens to make online complaints about computer crimes. In addition, users can access advice, communicate with experts and report illegal activities on the Web (<http://www.commissariatodips.it>).

In the US, Gainesville Police Department in Florida operates a similar scheme that is not restricted to e-crimes. The 'Police to Citizen' or P2C website enables users to plot crime incidents on a map, for example, centring on incidents in the area around their home address over a specified period (<http://p2c.gainesvillepd.org/>).

Another innovative mapping tool that has been embraced by a number of public authorities is the 'Intelligent Transport System', where networked cameras provide real-time feedback data on traffic flow to motorists and other interested parties. The aim is to help reduce congestion and road fatalities by providing information on occurrences, obstacles and general road conditions, with digital maps and parking information alongside other services. See for example the Department of Transport, Tennessee, USA: <http://www.tdot.state.tn.us/tdotsmartway/faq.htm#1>.

## 4. New Ways of Serving Users through New Technologies

### *The Enterprise Challenge, Singapore*

The Enterprise Challenge (TEC) is a scheme run by Singapore's Public Service Division, a department of the Prime Minister's Office, with funding from the Ministry of Finance and the Economic Development Board. The idea is to offer a platform for government agencies to try out innovations by providing funding for untested ideas that could potentially deliver public service improvements.

The availability of specific funding and a testing platform offers a way for the government to trial new initiatives outside the mainstream of public services, helping to overcome traditional reticence about moving away from familiar approaches and opening the way for bolder thinking.

Successful innovations sponsored by TEC range from jet mist fire fighting technology developed by the Singapore Civil Defence Force, a CCTV-based early warning system for drowning in public swimming pools; a device for testing how securely windows are fitted are in public buildings; a virtual policing centre for non-urgent enquiries to be routed through to the Singapore Police Force; and teleconferencing for prison inmates to interact with their relatives: <http://www.tec.gov.sg/>.<sup>16</sup>

### *Bridging the Delivery Gap*

In order to ensure that new technologies embrace, rather than exclude vulnerable or disadvantaged user groups, new technologies and networked services are helping governments to provide the facilities and capabilities necessary to include these groups. The Czech Republic is running a National Programme of Computer Literacy through 230 training centres around the country which is specifically targeting groups such as the elderly or disabled that do not necessarily have easy access to the latest technology.

A mixture of e-learning, downloadable textbooks and software-based training programmes are used to deliver the training. One of the reasons for targeting the programme at elderly users is that data from the Czech Statistical Office suggests that pensioners (the over 65 age group) have the greatest interest in using electronic communications to access public administration and interact with others. ICT offers a means of contact with friends and family, so computer literacy has the potential to increase quality of life for these individuals.<sup>17</sup>

An initiative from the UK based on similar principles is 'myguide', a fully accessible online training programme designed to providing Internet and IT skills training for disadvantaged groups in order to enhance quality of life (<http://www.myguide.gov.uk/myguide/MyguideHome.do>).

## 5. The User's Experience of Public Service Delivery

Attitudinal research tells us that the public cares not just about the ultimate outcomes that are delivered by public service providers, but also about the way in which those services are delivered. This chapter focuses on the way that citizens experience public services: on the one hand, issues relating to the quality of service they receive – covering accountability and assessment; on the other, the softer side of delivery – how service is provided, the nature of the user-provider interface and how it feels from the user's perspective.

### Accountability and Assessment

#### *Focussing Services on the User*

The publication of performance data is one of the most important ways that governments have focused public services on the users (examples include school league tables, hospital rankings, and performance information about public transport). This has the dual purpose of incentivising service improvement and helping users to make informed choices about the services they use.

The US pioneered the development of performance management in public services. One of the best-known examples was the Compstat system introduced by the then New York Police Commissioner Bill Bratton in 1994. Compstat centred on the collection of statistics about crime spots around the city, which helped police to target their activities in order to deliver more effective outcomes. Crime levels in the city fell dramatically following the introduction of the system, with obvious benefits for citizens.

The drive towards a more user-centric approach in recent years has coincided with a general shift away from the measurement of inputs towards a focus on outputs and outcomes. In UK local government, a number of authorities have introduced user

satisfaction measures and financial incentives to manage the performance of contractors used to supply certain simple public services in their area. Under this model, the final payment to the contractors is determined in part by the customer satisfaction score the service receives in surveys carried out by independent market research consultants.<sup>18</sup>

A number of countries now have specific schemes designed to champion customer-focussed public service provision and provide measures of success. The Canadian Institute for Citizen-Centred Services (ICCS), launched in August 2005, is a non-profit organisation that serves as an expert champion for citizen-centred public services across municipal, provincial and federal level government.<sup>19</sup> The ICCS uses a Common Measurements Tool (CMT) to assess client satisfaction and identify areas for improvement. It also offers a confidential benchmarking service based on CMT survey results, for public sector organisations to compare their performance against peers and identify best practices. The agency also holds a database of best practices in citizen-centred public services across all levels of government.

#### *The UK's New Standard for Public Services*

Since 1991, the UK government has awarded the 'Charter Mark' to public sector organisations for excellence in customer service. In 2008 it will introduce a New Standard designed to 'encourage public services to configure design and delivery around the needs of their customers.' The New Standard will also cover private and third sector public service providers. Award criteria include:

**Customer insight** – understanding of customers; consultation and use of information collected to shape services; monitoring outcomes and user satisfaction.

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**Culture of organisation** – organisation-wide support for customer focused approaches; staff professionalism and attitude.

**Information and access** – range and quality of information available to customers; ongoing, strategic consultation to put customers at the heart of service provision.

**Delivery** – delivery of business outcomes and promises to individual customers. This relies on customer perceptions, rather than internal measures.

**Timeliness and quality of service** – whether service promises are met.

(See: [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/chartermark/new\\_standard.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/chartermark/new_standard.aspx))

### *Gathering User Feedback*

Although performance management is a powerful tool, it does not enable citizens to directly change or influence the type and quality of service that they receive. Public services increasingly incorporate mechanisms to involve service users more directly – usually some form of feedback channel, direct consultation or dialogue process, questionnaire or survey. This is a way of giving citizens a voice.

In many cases, these mechanisms are service- or even organisation-specific. For example, the Manchester Aquatics Centre, a municipal leisure facility in North West England, uses a variety of mechanisms to assess customer satisfaction levels and the effectiveness of customer service – including ‘mystery shoppers’, and quality assurance inspection and benchmarking. Service users can also provide the views directly through a talkback system that allows them to comment or lodge complaints about the service they receive. Customer satisfaction ratings are reported publicly in an ‘opinion-meter’ in the foyer of the Centre.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to service-specific feedback, many

governments also offer cross-government channels for users to feedback on their public services. Singapore has a dedicated feedback unit that holds forums and dialogue sessions, and produces publications to encourage citizen feedback. Its website, linked to the eCitizen portal, offers a universal feedback form that can be completed online. Each government department also has a quality service manager with a specific freephone line. An internal database tracks when the feedback is received and responses sent, and any responses relevant to a wider audience are published on the Feedback Unit website and in quarterly newsletters.

Another way to give users a voice is through formal consultation. Again, consultation is not a new concept, but technology has helped to throw the consultation process open to a greater number of citizens. The government of Canada now has a website dedicated to public engagement, ‘Consulting with Canadians’ which acts as a single access point to all official consultations (<http://www.consultingcanadians.gc.ca/cpcPubHome.jsp?lang=en>). At a local level, in Spain, the Madrid Participa project aims to increase citizen participation in public decision-making in the city by raising the level of dialogue between politicians and citizens. The project uses secure e-voting technology alongside conventional paper methods to operate e-consultations. In 2007, the e-Consultations platform has been used regularly in 22 citizen consultations involving more than 3.5 million citizens <http://www.madridparticipa.es/>.<sup>21</sup>

### *Listening and Responding*

Citizens expect excellence in complaints procedures and customer satisfaction evaluations, but they also expect their feedback to be heard. At the least, this must involve some form of acknowledgement, which in some cases is all that is required for complainants to feel satisfied. Still better, where

## 5. The User's Experience of Public Service Delivery

possible, suggestions should be taken on board and the service should respond and be seen to respond and adapt accordingly. In the UK, Merseyside Police had thought it important that the police turn up quickly when a crime was reported, but research showed that the public thought it was more important that they turned up at the time they said they would. This illustrates the small but significant difference that listening can make.<sup>22</sup>

Direct feedback channels (comments and complaints) are often particularly important in human services such as custodial and health services, where recipients have limited control over the service that they receive. Without the option of exercising consumer rights by choosing when, where and how to receive the service, the scope to comment on the quality of the experience, and potentially to drive improvements, becomes especially important. Whilst 'voice' channels are often considered to offer an advantage to more powerful consumer groups (the educated, articulate middle classes), in some sectors it is the more vulnerable who most need them.

### *A Point of Contact*

In some cases it is important for citizens to have access to an identified contact in the public service agency that they can hold accountable for the service. This usually applies where the service is personal and the costs of failure are high, such as in social services. If there is a problem with the care or welfare of vulnerable individuals such as the disabled, children or the elderly, citizens want someone to take responsibility for urgent improvement. This need not be a government employee, but perhaps a partner specialising in treatment in this area. The key is that an individual is likely to respond better than a one-stop-shop.

The local NHS in Liverpool, UK, and in particular

the children's hospital at Alder Hey, has established a relationship with an independent organisation Young Addiction Liverpool (YAL) that provides drug and alcohol services to the young people in the area. Young people identified by the Drug and Alcohol Unit at the hospital are now referred immediately to the charity, which contacts them within two days. In 2005–06, the service saw 338 young people face to face.

### **How Users Experience Service Provision**

#### *Information*

The provision of information from government to service user has always been an important part of public service provision. As reform continues and citizens are empowered with greater personal responsibility, the need for effective communication is of growing importance.

On the one hand, this involves the collection and dissemination of performance data of the type discussed earlier in this chapter. Not only are governments making such information more readily available, but they are also focussing more on measuring user outcomes. On the other hand, users require practical information to help them to access public services. Information provision has been improved by technology, but to be most effective it needs to be easily accessible for all users.

The Norwegian government has developed a service on its public sector information portal (Norway.no) for those who would like information, but who are unable or do not wish to access the Internet. Citizens can call a freephone number, to have information from the site read to them. The system is voice sensitive and users who say 'help desk' are put straight through to an individual, providing a human element that service users often miss in online or automated telephone interaction.

## 5. The User's Experience of Public Service Delivery

### *The Personal Touch*

Although there are obvious efficiency benefits from multi-media platforms, there are circumstances that demand face to face contact. Elderly citizens often prefer to collect their pension benefits in person, whilst in the social housing market, it is not always viable to conduct user-interactions online since a large minority of users do not have internet access.

There are also certain sectors where citizens desire the reassurance of an official presence – and are disconcerted by its absence. An obvious case is policing. Reducing the fear of crime is a different challenge to reducing the level of crime but for many citizens, it is no less important. Citizens report that they are reassured by the sight of police presence.

The UK government has responded to this need by introducing Police and Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and Special Constables to work on the frontline of policing. PCSOs do not have full police powers but provide a visible presence on the streets. A key element of their role is community interaction. Similarly Special Constables, a voluntary part-time force, perform foot patrols, interact with local communities, conduct house-to-house enquiries and visit local schools to educate young people about crime reduction and community safety. These are lower-cost solutions for face-to-face service provision.

Reassurance can also come from connectivity to a peer or support network. In the Republic of Ireland, the Centre for Health Informatics at Trinity College Dublin has developed Áit Eile, an on-line community for children in hospital which enables them to communicate with other children in hospital, as well as their schoolmates and teachers via e-mail, live chat or even a video link. The aim of the initiative is to help these children to cope

with the medical and emotional challenges they face (<http://yuriko.cs.tcd.ie/>).

### *Respectful Treatment*

Equally significant is the way that individuals are treated during delivery of their services. This might mean being reassured or provided with an explanation when they are kept waiting. Public transport companies now usually try to make regular announcements if a service is delayed to inform passengers about the cause of the delay and its likely impact on their journey. This is in a response to customer feedback that suggests people are more tolerant of delays and problems if they are kept informed about what is happening. Governments are now beginning to adopt a similar approach.

Respect also covers the softer aspects of customer-provider interaction – the feeling that one is being listened to, that the provider truly understands the customer's needs. So, at a service desk, an agent who cannot solve a user's problem but who deals with them politely, in a friendly manner and demonstrating a desire to help, will provoke a more favourable response than an agent who handles the same enquiry with disinterest, regardless of the outcome.

This principle applies to all categories of public service, not just where specific transactions occur. Thus, in the custodial sector, recent years have seen a clear shift in delivery standards to cover the 'decent' treatment of those in custody, ranging from regular provision of refreshment, to responsiveness to particular needs (e.g. specific requirements of pregnant women or vulnerable individuals).

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## 6. Endnotes

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