

Thursday 30 March 2000

Government to speed up introduction of online services

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The Prime Minister today launched a new drive to speed up Government plans to offer online services to businesses and individuals. He proposed a challenging target for Government to offer all services online by 2005.

The Government had previously planned to offer all services online by 2008. But today's announcement marked a commitment by the Prime Minister to speed up Government action. It comes just a few weeks after he announced his commitment to ensuring that everyone who wants it will have access to the Internet by 2005.

Mr Blair said:

"I want the UK to be the world's leading Internet economy. Businesses and individuals across Britain are responding to this challenge, getting the UK online. I am determined that Government should play its part, so I am bringing forward our target for getting all Government services online, from 2008 to 2005.

"This will mean that people and businesses will be able to access Government services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is a challenging target, which will require more joined up working between departments, less reliance on paper trails, and the development of new ways of working. But it is one we have to meet if our UK Online strategy is to succeed"

Ian McCartney made the announcement in answer to a Parliamentary Question, after the Prime Minister and Cabinet members decided upon the new target at a special Information Age Cabinet meeting this morning.

Ian McCartney said:

"We have been making good progress. Already, we offer online advice in areas such as health, overseas travel and consumer protection. And from next week self-assessment tax-returns can be filed over the Internet and payments made electronically. Businesses can already make online returns to Companies House, and from next year they will be able to make VAT returns online. Next week the Small Business Service will launch a pilot website offering small and medium sized businesses tailored advice based on their size, location, and sector.

"But we must speed up the pace of change in Government so that we can offer our businesses and citizens more efficient and effective services. That is why the Cabinet decided to bring forward the target. The Cabinet also agreed our detailed

strategy for achieving this, “E-Government”, which we shall be publishing on Monday. An important part of this drive will be the new personalised gateway to Government online services - UK Online - which we plan to launch in July.”

Patricia Hewitt said:

“I am delighted that the Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet have committed the Government to this new target.

“This new e-government drive is a key part of our wider strategy for getting the UK online. Alongside it we are working to get small business online - with the £60 million package for SMEs which the Chancellor announced in the budget; and to help individuals and communities get online - through the £450 million we are investing in the national network of over 700 UK Online centres we are setting up this year in libraries, schools, shops and even pubs, where individuals will be able to access the Internet and find out about, or receive, training.”

30th March 2000

Notes to Editors

1. The Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet agreed a new target of offering all Government services online by 2005 today, at a Special Information Age Cabinet meeting. At the meeting, Patricia Hewitt, the E-minister, and Ian McCartney, the Minister with responsibility for E-Government, presented the Prime Minister and members of Cabinet with an update on current and planned Government Information Age activity.

2. The target is that by 2005 all Government services will be available online through personal computer, telephone, or Digital TV. For this purpose, Government services are defined as all services listed in Departments’ public service agreements. Examples include applications for driving licences and passports.

3. Government services currently online include:

- * Companies House (online returns and searches);
- * NHS Direct;
- * Foreign Office advice for those travelling abroad;
- * Consumer advice; and
- * Comprehensive news service on the Number 10 website.

4. Other services soon to be available online include:

- * Tax returns (discount for electronic filing, maximum saving for a small business person is £110);
- * Small Business Service, tailored advice based on company size, location and sector;
- * Employment Service job vacancies will be online by the autumn (and online kiosks will be sited in jobcentres);
- * Vehicle Excise Duty; and
- * VAT registration, declarations and other returns to HM Customs.

5. A new, improved, monitoring regime is to be introduced to measure progress towards the target. The new approach covers all services to citizens and business that are contained in an agreement to be drawn up between the Treasury and individual Departments as part of this year's spending review. The new method will be based on counting the number of these services that are available (end-to-end) online. The previous approach was based on a sample of services selected by Departments and progress was monitored as a proportion of transactions involving those services which were electronically enabled. This method tended to overstate progress towards the target.

6. "E-Government", the Government's Corporate IT strategy will be launched by Ian McCartney on Monday 3 April.

7. The Performance and Innovation Unit report e-commerce@its.best.uk, launched by the Prime Minister in September 1999 committed the Government to seek professional advice on a campaign to raise awareness of the opportunities offered by new information and communication technologies. The 'UK Online' strategy is being developed by Ministers as a result of work to meet this commitment. The central strand of the strategy will be the new personalised gateway to Government's online services planned for launch in July. 'UK Online' will also be used to promote the Government's advice and support centres for small and medium-sized businesses, and the national network of over 700 centres being set up in libraries, schools, shops and other neighbourhood locations where individuals will be able to access the Internet and find out more about, or receive, training.

8. The Chancellor announced in the Budget an additional £60 million package for small businesses to raise awareness of the benefits of the Internet; to help them get on line; and to enable them to access business advice and make tax returns over the internet. The Small Business Service will use £20m to develop a 24-hour business advice. This pilot service offering tailored advice by size of company, region, and sector will be launched by Patricia Hewitt on Monday 3 April.

9. On 1 March, the Prime Minister made a commitment to ensure that everyone who wants it will have access to the Internet by 2005. Access will be in the home through a personal computer, Digital TV or games console, on the move through a mobile telephone, or at a nearby public access point. Current Government

initiatives to increase individuals' access and skills include:

- * All schools and libraries connected to the Internet by 2002;
- * 80% discounts on basic IT courses available from April;
- * Tax breaks for companies that loan computers to employees;
- * 100,000 poor families to lease or buy cheap refurbished computers; and
- * over 700 IT access centres to be open by next year.

10. This month's OECD survey, based on 30 hours Internet access at off-peak times, found that internet access charges in the UK are now the lowest in the world.

11. Contact for Press Enquiries: Ben Wilson, Press Officer, Cabinet Office, 0171 270 0375.

Issued By:

Cabinet Office
Press Office
70 Whitehall
LONDON
SW1A 2AS

Tel: 020 7270 0375
Fax: 020 7270 0618

Out of hours telephone 07699 113300 and ask for pager number 721338.

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