# E-petitioner: A Monitoring and Evaluation Report

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| CCIS | Craigmillar Community Information Service |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| ITC | International Teledemocracy Centre |
| NSA | Napier Students Association |
| PPC | Public Petitions Committee |
| SCF | Scottish Council Foundation |
| SMEs | Small and Medium Enterprises |
| SIP | Social Inclusion Partnership |
| SUfI | Scottish University for Industry |
| WDM | World Development Movement |
| WWF | World Wide Fund for Nature |

## 1   <u>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</u>

This investigative project has been undertaken by The International Teledemocracy Centre at Napier University in Edinburgh. The project focuses on a specific case study of the introduction of technology to encourage public participation in governance through the use of on-line electronic petitioning to the Scottish Parliament. The central question is: how and to what extent might e-petitioner make a contribution to e-democracy?  The research has been designed to monitor and evaluate the development and use of electronic petitions by groups and individuals, and to develop a framework to investigate the significance of electronic participation tools for democratic processes. The electronic petitioning system, called e-petitioner, is at [www.e-petitioner.org.uk](www.e-petitioner.org.uk). It is an internet based tool, designed to support the collection on-line of names and addresses, and generally gather people's views about a petition. A special arrangement with the Scottish Parliament allowed the Centre to host petitions on-line for the Parliament and submit the names and addresses electronically to the Public Petitions Committee.  Research began on 2nd October 2000 and lasted 6 months until March 31st 2001.

During the course of this research, three new e-petitions were created and hosted on the e-petitioner system. These were Globalisation and Health Issues raised by the World Development Movement; Tackling the Digital Divide, raised by the Craigmillar Community Information Service; Investigation into Scottish Football, raised by East of Scotland Supporters Association. There was one on-going e-petition, Cubie, raised by Napier Students Association and the National Union of Students. To broaden knowledge of e-petitioner, collaborations were formed with civic, professional and community organisations; specifically with the Scottish Civic Forum, the British Association of Social Workers, Craigmillar Community Information Service and Communities-Internet, a voluntary organisation now managing 33 community web sites in Scotland. Also, the Centre collaborated with the Scottish Parliament to design a brief detailing each e-petition, and assisted them to formulate section 18 of their guidance on the submission of petitions, produced on-line and in hard copy by the Parliament.

In this research, the effectiveness of e-petitioner was measured through evaluation research. The main methods used for field research were semi-focused interviews and participant observations. A central aim throughout was to conduct well organised research, while remaining flexible enough to obtain explanations and rounded understanding on the basis of contextual data.  During the course of the study, care was taken to ensure that methods used remained sensitive to the social context in which data was produced. Data was subsequently extracted from observations, interview transcripts and from on-line evaluation questionnaires which are part of the e-petitioner system. In line with the principles of triangulation, findings from one area were checked against data in other areas.

Interviews were conducted with all e-petition sponsors[1]. They indicated that they viewed e-petitioner as a useful tool in influencing politicians and complimented more traditional methods of petitioning. The ability to access at a convenient time and reach wider sections of society alongside the slower more deliberative processes made possible by e-petitioner were considered inherently more democratic. Sponsors realised they would have to consider a range of different ways of promoting their petition to highlight its existence and garner public participation.  In making a number of suggestions, e-petition sponsors highlighted the need for organisations and people to develop a new culture of use and establish new routines in organising e-petitions.

Participant observations were conducted in a variety of public access settings with a range of users. It was possible to watch what people did with e-petitioner, and conduct conversations with participants to take account of people's experience of use and their perceptions of e-petitioner and its function as a tool to support democratic participation. Indications are that all participants had acquired the technical and communicative skills to navigate and sign an e-petition successfully. However, observations also highlighted frequent hesitation in providing addresses on-line, at least until reference to the disclaimer on the site pointed out that addresses would not be used for any other purpose without the express permission of the signatory.  Observations also showed many signatories did not access all the pages on the e-petitioner site. Many remained unaware of the separate sponsor's background pages, information about why the e-petition was raised, and the comments pages.  Re-designing the e-petitioner web-pages

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[1] In the context of this report, e-petitioner sponsor refers to the individual, group of individuals or organisation putting forward a petition to the Scottish Parliament.

with these observations in mind can help address this problem. Generally speaking respondents found e-petitioning easier and more efficient than traditional petitioning. Ability to comment was viewed as an important democratic opportunity, however, it was suggested that the system needs to be re-designed to make ability to comment more prominent. Ability to 'deliberate' on issues in a self-regulated timescale was considered an important advantage. The accessibility, openness and transparency of e-petitioner was highlighted and welcomed. Respondents believed they were now more generally aware of the possibilities of e-democracy after using e-petitioner. The need was identified for a similar e-democracy system to operate locally to deal with local issues. Another insight suggests need to acknowledge and deal with social involvement deficit.

All petition signatories were given opportunity to complete an on-line evaluation questionnaire. Data indicates that those who signed an e-petition and went on to complete the questionnaire felt confident in using electronic technology and did not require or want help to do so. It is possible to conclude from this data that different petitions raised by different sponsors can generate different public use patterns, as the increased number of signatories from community centres signing the digital inclusion petition indicates. It is also possible to conclude that respondents believed information and communication technology (ICT) designed to support democracy was both necessary and effective.

Findings indicate considerable support for the e-petitioner, with signatories applauding various advantages, in particular the opportunity to be included in what was viewed as more democratic interaction. There was, however, some marked concern that security and confidentiality may yet be problematic. Interesting data was gathered indicating how signatories found out about e-petitioner. This is likely to prove very useful in relaying best practice to sponsors about to promote and publicise new e-petitions. The evaluation questionnaire also provided opportunity for signatories to make suggestions for improving the look and operation of e-petitioner, and these comments will be closely scrutinised and taken into consideration when re-designing the system.

Semi-focused interviews were arranged with Mr John McAllion, MSP, Convener of the Public Petitions Committee and Mr Steve Farrell, Clerk to the Committee to take account of their views. These interviewees indicated that the Parliament were happy to liase with the Centre in the on-going development of e-petitioner. Advantages of an electronic petitioning system over traditional petitioning had been noted. In particular, ability to add a comment to an e-petition was highlighted as providing scope for future development. The interviewees also believed the brief, which had been devised by the Centre, provided a useful summary of each e-petition, supporting the work of the Committee. The Centre's collaborations with civic and professional bodies was considered very beneficial in informing people and improving the mode of communication supporting the democratic process.

The research into e-petitioner has illustrated some of the benefits and limitations of e-democracy. In particular, the research has highlighted scope for developing e-petitioner locally. Further research needs to be directed to clarifying the role of e-petitioner locally, and working with other partners, ensure that new possibilities for local development is closely scrutinised.

Close attention is drawn to the character of e-democracy at the local level. While many community networks and other community-based organisations now provide access to ICT and operate as learning centres to promote skills for the information age, there has been very little involvement so far of local people in planning, designing and participating in democratic issues using ICT. It is likely that if people are not included at planning and design stages, they are less likely to participate later when they are suddenly expected to do so. No structured consultations so far have been carried out with local people to establish what they want, specifically to gauge what type of issues they would want to be involved in, the extent to which they would want to participate in local, regional, national and global issues, and how they could contribute democratically to those issues at the local community level using new technologies. An action research project is required to work with local people to assess the democratic requirements of a cross-section of communities, and to enable appropriate design and development of ICT supported democratic community systems. Also, new insights from this study highlight need to address social involvement deficit - the focus here is on e-democratisation. There is a need to stimulate cultural change by disseminating information, encouraging community involvement, and illustrating how individual people and groups at the local level might use electronic tools in democratic ways in their community.

In conclusion this study has highlighted a large number of comments and recommendations to take electronic democracy forward.

## 2    <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

### 2.1    Context

This evaluation report has emerged as the result of a successful funding proposal made in 2000 to support research in electronic petitioning at the International Teledemocracy Centre (ITC) at Napier University in Edinburgh. ITC's electronic petitioning system is called e-petitioner and is an internet based tool, designed to support the collection on-line of names and addresses, and generally gather people's views about a petition. A special arrangement with the Scottish Parliament allowed the ITC to host petitions on-line for the Parliament and submit the names and addresses electronically to the Public Petitions Committee (PPC). Research began on 2$^{nd}$ October 2000 and lasted six months until March 31$^{st}$ 2001. The main aim of the research was to develop protocols to monitor and evaluate e-petitioner and feed emerging data back into the continuing design and development of the system.

This introductory section outlines the context of the research and explains research motivation and benefits of the research. In addition, aims and objectives of the study are outlined and the design, tactics and methods of data collection are explained. Section 3 offers a case study outlining background information and detailing the emergence of the International Teledemocracy Centre and the design of e-petitioner. Section 4 presents empirical data assembled to monitor and evaluate e-petitioner. Section 5 offers a set of conclusions from the research. Finally, in the appendices section, we present examples of petitions, examples of briefs designed and compiled by the ITC and sent to the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament, and a list of publications and presentations compiled from research data.

### 2.2    Research motivation and benefits

Widespread claims have been made that democratic politics is in crisis as a result of public apathy, low turn-out at elections, and poor levels of public participation. These claims have co-incided with the arrival of a so-called 'digital age,' which has brought with it the now widespread concern that a digital divide is widening in society. The motivation for this study is derived from a perceived need to investigate how and to what extent governments and citizens in the new 21$^{st}$ century use new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to promote electronic democracy and support a more participative system of governing. While new ICTs are becoming increasingly more sophisticated, the question is raised: Is information and communication technology encouraging and assisting participation in government? By investigating the development and use of electronic petitioning, the Teledemocracy Centre seeks to reveal the conditions that would encourage and assist different sections of society to

participate in government through the utilisation of ICT. Moreover, the centre hopes to develop a framework for the management and delivery of electronic petition services which will inform those involved in developing technology to support the democratic process.

## 2.3    Aims and objectives of the study

The perceived ability of ICTs to support e-government combined with the knowledge that people do not always use technology according to original design imperatives has underpinned this study funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The investigation reported here focuses on a specific case study of the introduction of technology to encourage public participation in governance through the use of on-line electronic petitioning to the Scottish Parliament. The central question is: how and to what extent might e-petitioner make a contribution to teledemocracy?  The research has been designed to monitor and evaluate the development and use of electronic petitions by groups and individuals, and to develop a framework to investigate the significance of electronic participation tools for democratic processes.  It was hoped to develop better understanding about e-petitioner in a variety of societal contexts, and feed information derived from the study back into the on-going design and development of this and other e-democracy systems.

## 2.4    Design, tactics and methods of  data collection

In this research, the effectiveness of e-petitioner was measured through *evaluation research*, referring, as Babbie (1998) points out, more to a research *purpose* than a specific research *method*.  The research, as indicated already, was designed to monitor and evaluate e-petitioner, part of an e-democracy toolkit being created by the ITC to support modernising imperatives and broaden democratic participation using technology. As a form of *applied* research, the evaluation was designed to have some real-world effect. Active engagement with key issues in a fair and ethical manner was central. Drawing from *action research* (Robson, 1995), it was hoped to address problems with e-petitioner in real life situations and also further the goals of science by adding to the Centre's research portfolio.

Taking a broadly interpretivist approach, the research was underpinned by philosophies associated with qualitative research.  The main methods used for field research were semi-focused interviews and participant observations. A central aim throughout was to conduct well organised research, while remaining flexible enough to obtain explanations and rounded understanding on the basis of contextual data.  During the course of the study, care was taken to ensure that methods used remained sensitive to the social context in which data was produced.

The study aimed to investigate:

1. *Access to the technology:* to assess the technical and communicative skills that the individual requires to participate in electronic democracy;
2. *Control mechanisms*: to assess how technology-based security and authentication mechanisms affect the level of participation and the type of participation;
3. *Range and degree of participation*: to investigate the number of people that participated and the overall and individual level of their contribution;
4. *Characteristics of electronic participation*: to address how similar or different the participation is from real-life/traditional participation;
5. *Feedback and assessment*: to investigate whether electronic petitioning has made a real difference to government policy.

Protocols were sought to monitor uptake of e-petitioner, and in addition, higher-level insights were needed to highlight the mechanisms that needed to be built into future electronic participation systems, taking account of how, where and why people use them. On-going development of e-petitioner was central and it was also important that opportunity was provided for people to reflect on e-petitioner and outline their perceptions of the system and their ability subsequently to affect the democratic process. To achieve these goals, participant observations were conducted in a variety of public access settings with e-petition sponsors[2] and users. Using this method, it was possible to watch what people did with e-petitioner, and conduct conversations with participants to take account of people's experience of use and their perceptions of e-petitioner and its function as a tool to support democratic participation. Semi-focused interviews were also arranged with Parliamentary committee members to take account of their views. While guide questions were compiled for use, interviews remained flexible enough to listen and take account of each respondent's unforeseen views. Data was subsequently extracted from observations, interview transcripts and from on-line evaluation questionnaires which are part of the e-petitioner system. In line with the principles of triangulation, findings from one area were checked against data in other areas.

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[2] In the context of this report, e-petitioner sponsor refers to the individual, group of individuals or organisation putting forward a petition to the Scottish Parliament.

## 3    CASE STUDY: BACKGROUND AND DESIGN OF  E-PETITIONER

### 3.1    ICT, society and the electronic public sphere

Some social analysts allocate a central role to the development and impact of communication technologies.  Thompson (1995), for example, builds on the work of Clifford Geerz, to suggest that:

> communication media are spinning wheels in the modern world and, in using these media human beings are fabricating webs of significance for themselves. (p.11)

Further, Thompson points out, communication technologies over time have been responsible for extending the circulation of ideas into space and time and beyond the immediate contexts of face-to-face interaction in a shared locality.  Contemporary ICTs offer fresh scope for non-face-to-face forms of communication, not dependent on synchronous co-presence.  As a result, there is increased hope for the revival of the public sphere, an ideal communication forum described by Habermas over thirty years ago and now part of established political discourse.  What may be derived from Habermas's (albeit class-linked) account is the notion of a political forum for the public to express a variety of ideas about issues which concern them.  While new media, i.e. contemporary ICTs and the Internet, have been accompanied by great fanfare, rhetoric and hype, easier access to an electronic medium which offers multiple information and communication forums, undoubtedly presents fresh possibilities for the public to gain information and express opinion.

Previously held perceptions of a single public sphere have been displaced as many people belonging to many different publics have begun to interact in cyberspace. While outcomes are never certain, the ability to form multiple electronic public spheres offers new possibilities for rational discussion at different geographic and knowledge levels. Increasingly, the philosophy of the public sphere can be found in civil society, the space which lies apart from powerful state and commercial sectors for use by people to interact with others about routine public matters (Barber, 1995). Additional structural features of the new public spheres include increased potential for horizontal democratic interaction. There are new opportunities for top levels of government to accommodate bottom-up ideas.  Or, to put it another way, there is potential at the micro-level for institutions and people to use technology to become producers of democratic thought, rather than accept a non-participative role as mere consumers of political concepts devised by others and considered good for them.

### 3.2    E-democracy in Scotland: Public access to ICT and potential for electronic interaction

The concept of electronic democracy conjures a utopian image of decentralised, democratic communication underpinned by state of the art ICTs.  However, the (so-called) information

revolution has produced several different generations of new media, customarily absorbed into different areas of the political process without necessarily increasing democratic participation. Some explanations may be found in aspects of communication ethics, issues of power, and the nature of political will. In addition, however, modern democratic politics is immersed in complex social relationships and interrelationships which are not easily understood.

Technology does not offer an automatic or easy panacea for what are often overly complex bureaucratic procedures or out of date political approaches, nor does it ever guarantee more meaningful democratic communication. However, new ICTs do offer scope to replace centralised hierarchical procedures with broader and flatter systems and also make new forms of human interaction quicker and easier. While societal outcomes are never guaranteed, decentralisation underpinned by modern ICTs provides a range of fresh opportunities to embed electronic interaction in new social processes allowing citizens to participate more fully in the political process.

During the late 1990s, contemporary ICTs combined with new societal trends associated with globalisation and localisation brought much political attention to bear on issues of decentralisation and new forms of geographic diversity. In the UK, the arrival of a new Labour government in May 1997 predicated a turn towards centre left social democracy. Under the rubric of the 'third way' a new and more benevolent capitalism in the UK now attempted to move away from right-wing neo-liberalism and traditional left wing political power to establish a more participatory and compassionate democracy, which invited everyone in the UK to rise to the civic and economic challenges of a globalised world and what was increasingly being called an Information Society (Malina, 1999).

There was a growing feeling that regional areas operating under overly bureaucratised structures in the UK had too little autonomy, and pressure increased to create more flexible structures, strengthen identities and improve democracy. By 1997, notions of devolution had begun to reshape the UK government, highlighting opportunities to form new national entities in the regions of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. A 'Yes vote' in the Scottish devolution referendum in 1997 predicated the arrival of a new Scottish Parliament on 12th May 1999. In July 1999 the Scottish Parliament was officially opened. This gave devolved power for specific areas of government from the Westminster Parliament in London to a new Scottish Parliament based in Edinburgh. Figure 1 shows the main web page for the Scottish Parliament.

**Figure 1        Scottish Parliament web-site**



The White Paper, titled *Scotland's Parliament* (1997), drew from recommendations made by the Scottish Constitutional Framework to set out broad objectives for the operation of the new Parliament.  While Scotland was to remain firmly part of the UK and many areas of policy were to continue running on a UK basis, Scotland's new responsibilities were to stimulate its own sustainable growth.  Prior to its emergence, the new Scottish Parliament was billed  as an opportunity to develop a modern efficient parliamentary network, an open political administration  supporting new electronic communications  resources,  new  forms  of political interaction and wider participation (*Electronic Government – Information Technologies and the Citizen*, 1998; *Shaping Scotland's Parliament*, 1998).  From the beginning, the belief was expressed that the citizenry should be able to maximise opportunities presented by an open, accessible and participatory Parliament and new opportunities presented by ICT.  Delivery of one-way information from the top down and the danger of developing new structures primarily along fiscal lines was to be avoided.

The Consultative Steering Group helped to set out how the new Parliament should work, stating that the Scottish Parliament should aspire to use all forms of ICT "innovatively and appropriately" to support its three principles of openness, accessibility and participation. Reflecting these values, all documents and debates relating to the business of the Parliament

were made available on-line.[3] Another clear goal articulated for the Scottish Parliament was to assess the scope of ICT for invigorating democratic participation at the local level (*Electronic Government - Information Technologies and the Citizen*,1998). The following statement underlines the point in suggesting:

> It will also be important to develop a culture of genuine consultation and participation if people in Scotland, particularly those who do not currently engage in the political process, are to be encouraged to participate. (p. 4).

In addition, *Principles underpinning the Parliament* (1999) posits that "ICT is central to the active relationship between the Parliament and the people of Scotland" (p.16). Since the arrival of the new Scottish Parliament, the focus on modernising procedures has had immense ramifications for the design of ICT throughout Scotland. Electronic democracy, i.e. the use of ICT to support the democratic decision-making process, has become an increasingly important area of consideration and expansion.

In attempting to promote democratic accountability, government decisions were to be more transparent. Information was to be made available on-line. Key objectives were to engage with citizens and seek feedback. Important goals were to empower the citizenry, encourage new skills in Internet technology and better sensitivity to the wider possibilities of ICT. Wherever possible, new forms of electronic communication tools were to be used to facilitate better interaction in society (*Report of the Community Planning Group,* 1998). By 2000, the Digital Scotland Task Force prompted the Scottish Executive to consider whether or not pilot electronic voting might increase efficiency and alter participation rates.[4] However, while the focus was on expanding e-democracy, barriers to achieving real democratic participation have often been recognised in government documents. A report issued by the DETR, titled *Guidance on Enhancing Public participation in Local Government,*[5] for example, notes that "participation in democracy tends automatically to be defined as a 'good thing'"; and when left unexplained and "riddled with assumptions," the argument for increased democracy can take on a "mystical aura" (np). If democracy is actually to move beyond abstract and "easy sloganeering" (np), the report suggests, then citizens must be empowered to participate more genuinely in local political and voluntary arenas.

It may be argued, the level of communication power a person or organisation has is commensurate with their ability to access, participate in and use communication. Nowadays, people have to be linked to the new technology in order to participate electronically. The

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[3] Internet site: www.scottish.parliament.uk. (Consulted 2001)
[4] See *Digital Scotland Task Force* (2000) at www.scotland.gov.uk/digitalscotland/report.htm
(Consulted 2000)

*Digital Scotland Task Force* (2000) report pointed out that public access to the Web must become more available (p.27). This emphasis on universal access generates the notion that everyone has the right to be connected to the internet. The goal of widespread public access to ICTs and access to the Internet was also highlighted by the UK government in early 2000, when the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, announced intention to promote 100% universal access to the Internet by the year 2005. The *Digital Scotland Task Force* (2000) recommended the provision of affordable internet access in community based facilities, and in response, the Scottish Executive commissioned a study to map present and planned facilities providing public access to the Internet in Scotland.

The Minister for Communities undertook to promote digital inclusion in Scotland by linking local ICT initiatives to a wider action framework and by addressing the problem of the information poor. Two separate initiatives were highlighted by the Scottish Executive: the 'Connected Voluntary Sector' and 'Pilot Community Cyber-cafes.' The 'Connected Voluntary Sector' initiative was designed to build a network of the entire voluntary sector in Scotland to achieve "joined up solutions and services" (np). The Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), the private sector, e.g. Microsoft and BT, and local groups met to consider how to take a connected voluntary sector forward. Under the 'Pilot Community Cyber-cafes' initiative, pilot cyber-cafes were to be developed to "radically improve residents' connections to the wider world." In addition, it was proposed to develop public access to new learning centres. The development of ICT Learning Centres in Scotland has increased steadily and much emphasis has been placed on ensuring that people in deprived areas are able to acquire the key ICT skills suitable to the demands of a modern Information Society and a new system of electronic democracy.

Fundamental to the concept of e-democracy is the notion that ICTs should be integrated into social transformation and modernising processes. One belief is that appropriately designed technologies may reconfigure existing patterns of behaviour by enhancing the ability of citizens to contribute more fully to the democratic process. The case for developing better local democracy using ICT controlled and owned by local government in Scotland is being strongly made by the Scottish Council Foundation (SCF)[6] and the new Local Government Network. In a report edited by Leicester (2001) titled *The Community Portal: Democracy, technology and the future for local governance,* these organisations have focussed on the relationship of local government to democracy, ICT and e-governance. Here, Leicester (2001) points to the need to develop "the wider network of 'governance' relationships" to

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[5] Internet site: http://www.local-regions.detr.uk/epplg/6.htm (Consulted 2001)

support a Community Portal Model, described as a "single point of access to a network of services and service providers, owned and co-ordinated by local government" (p. 2). In other words, the local authority would act as "the gateway to local services from all agencies for all citizens" (p. 2).

It is recognised that local government transformation "towards owning the customer interface" must be preceded by massive cultural transformation and new organisational structures (p. 3). While there is an increased role for cities and perceived need for strong leadership within the community portal model, the actual level of local citizen involvement in designing and using the community portal is still unclear. The SCF report points out, however, that there will be increased pressure for: "a more interactive system, more participation, and more direct democracy" (p.27). Examples given include public deliberation in the strategic committee to help legitimise the committee's decision making power, particularly where consensus is impossible to find. Moreover, members of the public could be co-opted on to committees set up to scrutinise and assess standards of service delivery. However, beyond these involvements, different ways in which citizens might interact and participate based on stronger conceptions of democracy is still unclear. In the model proposed by the SCF, top down is expected to link with bottom-up at the policy and performance review levels.

### 3.3    Emergence of The International Teledemocracy Centre

As the *White Paper on Modernising Government* indicates, a citizen focus and consultation are key elements for major development. In 1999, Napier University established the International Teledemocracy Centre (ITC)[7] in partnership with BT Scotland to address this area of electronic democracy (see Figure 2). The remit of the Centre is to apply advanced information and communication technologies to enhance and support the democratic decision-making process.  Specific objectives include:

- to promote the application of ICT by governments worldwide in order that elected members and supporting staff can conduct their business more effectively and efficiently.

- to demonstrate how ICT can contribute to more openness and accessibility in government;

- to encourage and assist the public, voluntary organisations and business to participate in government through the utilisation of ICT.

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[6] Internet site: http://www.scottishpolicynet.org.uk/scf/home/frameset.shtml
[7] International Teledemocracy Centre web-site is available at http://www.teledemocracy.org  Consulted 2001

**Figure 2    International Teledemocracy Centre**
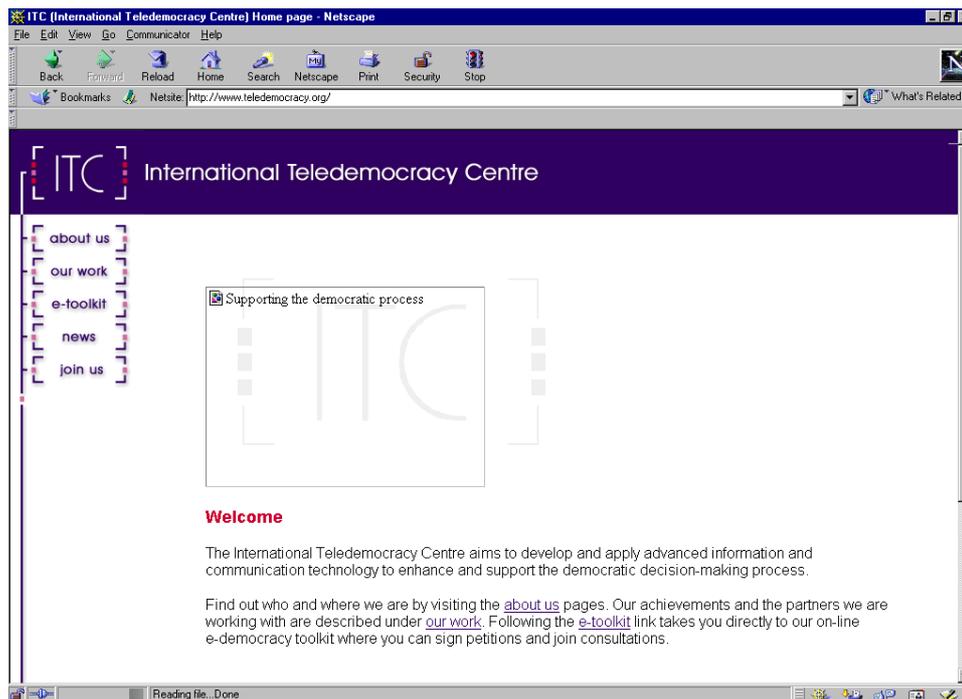


To achieve the objectives outlined above, the ITC is:

- undertaking research into e-democracy;

- developing an e-democracy toolkit to act as a show-case of e-democracy applications to start to demonstrate the potential benefits of the use of ICT to support the democratic process.

The Centre is utilising real world action research to a) develop ICT tools to improve current democratic practice; b) implement these designs in routine settings; c) listen to people and observe effects in different societal settings; and d) reflect on findings as a prelude to further planning action and on-going research. The ITC is committed to designing and developing information and communication technologies that are compatible with strong democracy. The e-democracy toolkit currently comprises three internet-based tools: e-consultant, e-voter and the e-petitioner system.

### 3.4    Petitioning in the Scottish Parliament and the design of E-petitioner

While technological tools such as those being piloted by the ITC may yet radically transform the functionality, reach and usability of software tools to support democratic decision-making, it is recognised that research so far (e.g. Tsagarousianou et al, 1998) has not supported the claim that technology enhances inclusion and participation in the democratic process.  Still, however, proactive design may yet develop technologies to support rather than constrict the types of interaction needed to underpin democratic participation.

In many countries around the world, citizens have used petitions to make their feelings known about issues that concern them. Simply, a petition is a formal request seeking action to a higher authority, eg. parliament or other authority, signed by a number of citizens. The format of petitions and the way petitions are submitted and subsequently processed by parliaments varies greatly. This variation may be demonstrated by considering petitions to the UK Parliament in Westminster and to the Scottish Parliament.

The Westminster Parliament publishes a comprehensive set of rules on how to submit a petition. For the purpose of this report, the important ones relate to the format and the submission procedure. The page on which the petition appears must be hand-written and every petition must be specifically and respectfully addressed to the House of Commons. The petition must have hand-written signatures along with the addresses of the signatories. Only Members of the House of Commons can present petitions. They can be submitted (except on Fridays) immediately before the half hour adjournment debate at the end of each day's business or they can be placed in a large green bag hooked onto the back of the Speaker's Chair. Although this appears a somewhat elaborate procedure, little actually happens to the petition once it is submitted. Many Members term the green bag 'the black hole for petitions.' The fact that only a Member can submit a petition also goes against petitions being an effective lobbying tool for the citizen.

The Scottish Parliament actively promotes petitions as a means by which the public can effectively lobby parliament. On the issue of petitions, the Consultative Steering Group states:

> It is important to enable groups and individuals to influence the Parliament's agenda. We looked at a number of models in other Parliaments for handling petitions and concluded that the best of these encouraged petitions; had clear and simple rules as to form and content; and specified clear expectations of how petitions would be handled.

To achieve this the Scottish Parliament established a dedicated Petitions Committee. Figure 3 shows the home page for the Public Petitions Committee (PPC).[8] The remit of the PPC is to consider and report on whether a public petition is admissible and what action is to be taken on the petition. An individual, a corporate body, an interest group, or any other association may submit a petition. From July 1999 to 7 November 2000, the PPC had received and dealt with approximately 300 public petitions.

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[8] Internet site: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/cttee/petit.htm

**Figure 3     Public Petitions Committee web-site**
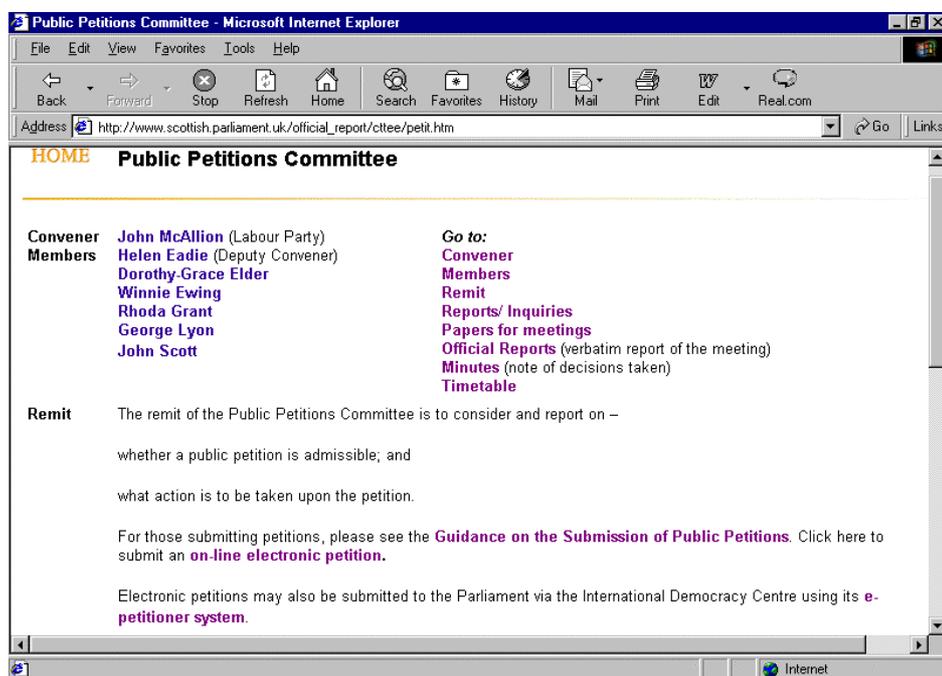


As regards format, petitions must be in proper form that is determined by the PPC from time to time. In December 1999, the Scottish Parliament agreed to allow an internet-based petition from the ITC's web site sponsored by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) to be the first electronic petition to collect names and addresses over the internet.  Subsequently, on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2000, the Parliament agreed to allow groups and individuals to submit petitions using the Teledemocracy Centre's e-petitioner system for a trial period.[9]  The special arrangement between the Teledemocracy Centre and the Scottish Parliament is allowing both parties to start to evaluate the use and civic impact of electronic petitioning in Scotland.

The e-petitioner tool, at www.e-petitioner.org.uk, has the functionality to create a petition; to view/sign a petition; to add background information, to join an integrated discussion forum; and to submit a petition. Figure 4 shows a petition screen created by the ITC with the text of a recent electronic petition on digital inclusion. Macintosh et al (2001) describe the critical issues to be considered in the design of e-democracy systems. In designing the e-petitioning system it was necessary to consider how technology could be used most effectively to support the five key enabling criteria of accessibility, usability, security, transparency and trust.

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[9] The report of the meeting of the Public Petitions Committee to trial internet petitions can be found at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/cttee/petit-00/pumop0314.htm.

However the very nature of governance and the fact that government cannot choose its customers means that, in the design of e-democracy systems, these issues become complex.

**Figure 4        E-petition: Tackling the Digital Divide**
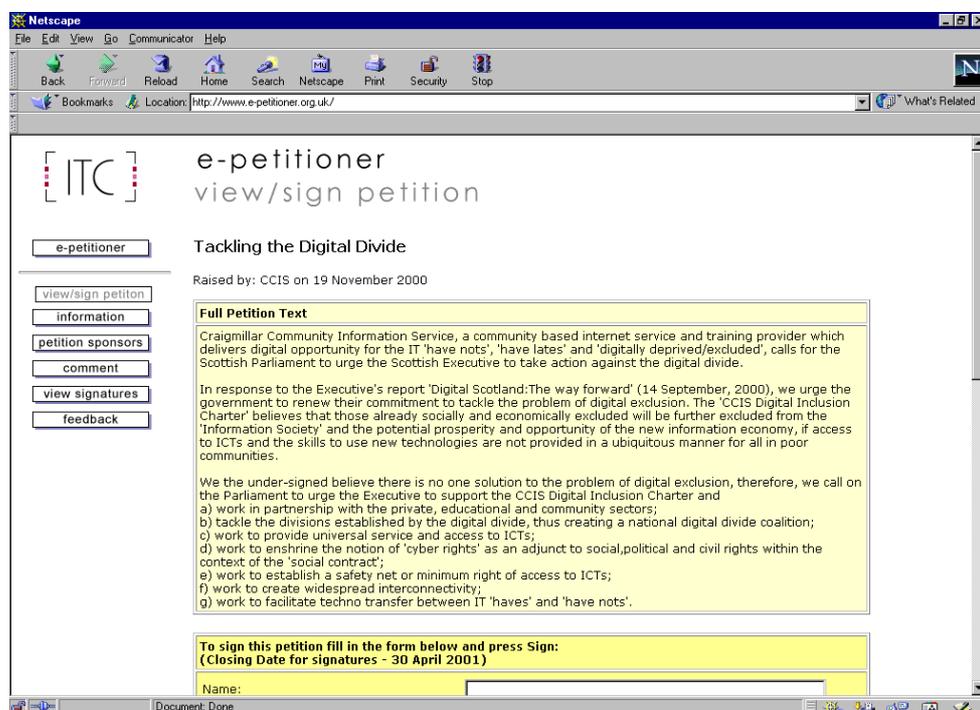


With regard to e-petitioner, it was important to provide access for as many people as possible. With this in mind, the system does not use frames or contain large graphics files. It was important that local community centres running slower machines could easily access the system. The unequal technical capabilities of citizens demanded that e-petitioner was simple to use. It was also important that features that might make the system difficult for the partially sighted to use were excluded.

In some respects, accessibility and security can be conflicting design issues, however, as petitions to the Scottish Parliament are not legally binding, "external" security measures that might have run counter to good accessibility were not required. Therefore, a detailed user-registration process was excluded. Instead the system runs "internal" security checking on the names signing the petition. However, there still remains the question of how much checking of names and addresses is necessary for electronic petitions?  This is an important question to address.  It would be easy to say that it should match the level currently available for paper-based petitions but that then raises the issue of what level of security checking is actually used for paper-based names and addresses other than manually reading the often illegible handwriting.  On the other hand there is always the temptation to say that everything must be checked thoroughly, which is the case for electronic voting, but not necessarily for names and addresses on petitions. The "internal" checking is accomplished by e-petitioner giving each

name and address a "confidence" rating. The actual rating depends on a number of factors, for example, Internet Provider (IP) address and how many times the same IP address has been used to sign the petition in a given time. These confidence ratings are closely examined prior to submission of the petition to check for any irregularities. The system also automatically removes any duplicate names and addresses.

It was important to ensure that the petitioning process was as transparent as possible. However, in some respects usability and transparency can be conflicting design issues. There is a need to ensure straightforward navigation through the system, but there is also a need to ensure that the participation process and relevant information underlying the petitions are open to everyone. Transparency was achieved through three mechanisms. Firstly, by providing background information on the petition, ensuring that people can be adequately informed about the petition issues and therefore can better decide whether to support the petition or not. Secondly, by incorporating an integrated discussion forum so that people who do not want to support the petition or others who feel they have further evidence in support of the petition can add their own statements on-line. Thirdly, e-petitioner has a feedback facility such that the petition sponsor can inform everyone on the progress of the petition once it has been submitted to the Scottish Parliament.

Given the above requirements, the detailed functionality of e-petitioner is:

- e-petitioner has the 'administrative' functions which allow for the straightforward creation of a petition. Information needed is the text of the petition and the address of the petitioner to which all communications concerning the petition should be sent;
- the petition sponsor is encouraged to provide on-line *background information* to provide rationale for the petition and to better inform those reading the petition;
- persons wishing to support the petition can *add their names and addresses* on-line;
- additionally persons wishing to *raise any issues* about the petition can do so on-line through the integrated, on-line discussion forum;
- the *discussion forum* is available for anyone to read or send comments to whether they support the petition or not;
- persons wishing to add their names or enter the discussion *do not require an email account*, they can do so from any internet access point - public kiosk, cyber café, community centre, home, etc;
- with regard to *petition statistics*, the number of persons supporting the petition is automatically updated along with the names and areas/countries, this information is available for anyone to view;
- full names and addresses are filed for use with, and only with, the petition (unless consent for other use is given by the person adding their name and address) ensuring *data protection* requirements are adhered to;
- duplicate names and addresses are automatically removed by e-petitioner at the time of submission of the petition;
- *checking names and addresses* is performed prior to submission of the petition by the system allocating a "confidence rating" to each name;
- the petitioner can *submit* the petition with names and addresses electronically and/or can produce a paper version of the petition for submission;

- the format for the submitted petition *adheres to the guidelines* of the Scottish Parliament.

To be able to quickly demonstrate and try out the e-petitioner functionality the first version of the system was developed using cgi scripts and html files. It was available from both Explorer and Netscape browsers. Once e-petitioner was accepted for trial use by the Scottish Parliament, the system was updated to reflect feedback from users and the Parliament and a more rigorous software engineering approach taken. The current version of e-petitioner is implemented in server Microsoft SQL and ASP.

There are links to the electronic petitioning system from the Scottish Parliament's web site and links from the Teledemocracy Centre's web site to the Parliament's guidelines for petitions. As information contained on the PPC web-site (Figure 5) indicates, the Scottish Parliament supply a pro-forma for the submission of petitions in electronic form, however, submission of lists of signatories are not permitted in electronic format except, as section 18 suggests, via the special arrangement with the ITC. The PPC and the ITC collaborated to produce appropriate wording in this section of the committee's Guidelines for Submission of Public Petitions.

**Figure 5      Extract from Guidelines for Submission of Public Petitions**
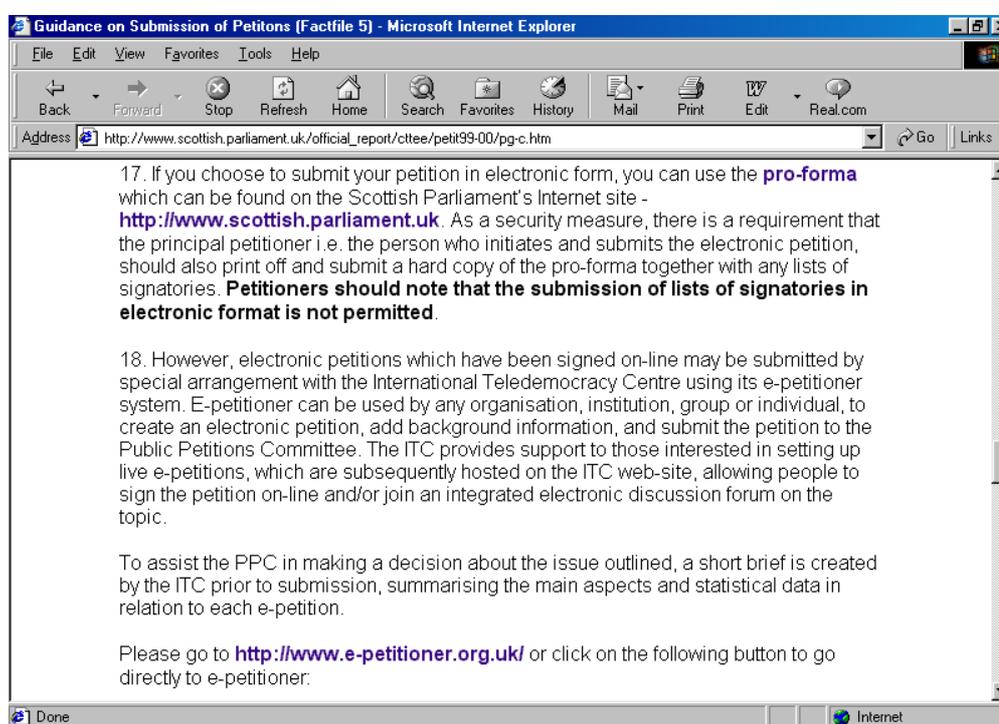
## 4    MONITORING AND EVALUATING E-PETITIONER

### 4.1    Introduction

This section outlines how e-petitioner has been used over the period of the evaluation study, and how findings in the research have fed into the on-going design and development of the tool.   An appraisal of e-petitioner is presented, analysing a) perspectives offered by PPC officials b) the views of e-petition sponsors b) direct observations of e-petition in use, and c) feedback from the on-line questionnaire.

### 4.2    Developments over the time-scale of the research

Figure 6 illustrates the e-petitioner web site (www.e-petitioner.org.uk), which lists both live and submitted e-petitions.

**Figure 6        E-petitioner**
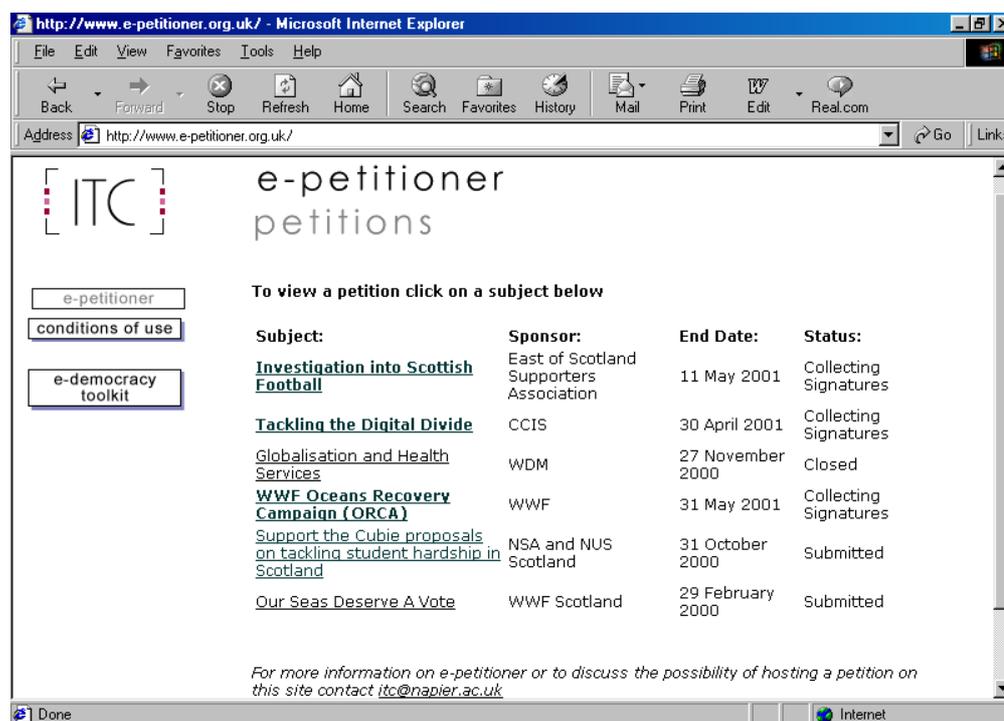


#### 4.2.1    E-petitions set up during the course of the research

During the course of this research, as Table 1 indicates, one e-petition was on-going, i.e. Cubie, raised by Napier Students Association (NSA) and the National Union of Students (NUS).   In addition, three new e-petitions were created and hosted by the ITC on the E-petitioner pages, i.e. Globalisation and Health Issues raised by the World Development

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Movement;[10] Tackling the Digital Divide, raised by the Craigmillar Community Information Service;[11] Investigation into Scottish Football, raised by East of Scotland Supporters Association.[12]

| Table 1   E-petitions to Scottish Parliament active during the research | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Title of petition** | **Sponsor** | **Start Date** | **End date** | **Current status** |
| Cubie proposals on tackling student hardship in Scotland | NSA and NUS | 19th May 2000 | 31 October 2000 | Closed |
| Globalisation and Health Issues | World Development Movement (WDM) | 7th November, 2000 | 27th November, 2000 | Closed |
| Tackling the Digital Divide | Craigmillar Community Information Service (CCIS) | 15th November, 2000 | 30th April 2001 | Collecting signatures |
| Investigation into Scottish Football | East of Scotland Supporter's Association | 21st February, 2001 | 11th May 2001 | Collecting signatures |

During the same time-scale, six further enquiries were made to the ITC in regard to possibilities of raising an e-petition. Four potential sponsors did not take any further action in raising an e-petition, and two did not go ahead after it was realised their petition issues were not devolved, i.e. not appropriate for the Scottish Parliament.

Precise guidelines[13] produced by the Public Petitions Committee in relation to petitioning the Scottish Parliament provided help in creating appropriate e-petitions. As mentioned in an earlier section of this report, the ITC adheres to these guidelines, and also offers additional information explaining the process of setting up, hosting and submitting an e-petition.[14] The ITC also provides close support to sponsors during the process of collecting appropriate information to raise an e-petition.  On-going assistance is also available throughout the e-petitioning process.

*4.2.2    Submission of e-petitions to PPC*

Table 2 below indicates that two e-petitions, i.e. Support the Cubie Proposals, raised by Napier Students Association and the National Union of Students, and Globalisation and

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[10]   Internet site: http://www.muriwo.freeserve.co.uk/wdm/scotmain.html (Consulted 2001)
[11]    Internet site: www.ccis.org.uk (Consulted 2001)
[12]   Internet site: http://www.kessa.com (Consulted 2001)
[13]   Internet site: www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/cttee/petit99-00/pg-c.htm (Consulted 2001)
[14]   Guidelines available on ITC. Internet site: www.teledemocracy.org (Consulted 2001)

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Health Issues, raised by the World Development Movement, were closed and submitted to the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament during the research time-scale.

| Table 2  E-petitions submitted to the PPC of the Scottish Parliament | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Title of petition | Sponsor | End date | Current status |
| Support the Cubie proposals on tackling student hardship in Scotland | Napier Students Association and National Union of Students | 31st October 2000 | Closed and submitted |
| Globalisation and Health Services | World Development Movement (WDM) | 27th November, 2000 | Closed and submitted |

The PPC discussed the Cubie e-petition, labelled PE291, at a meeting on 21st November 2000.[15]  The Committee agreed the petition should be passed to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, to be considered as part of its stage 1 consideration of the new Education (Graduate Endowment and Student Support) (Scotland) Bill, along with a previous petition (non-electronic) from Napier Students Association.  The Convenor drew attention at this meeting to the usefulness of the brief supplied by the ITC summarising information about the e-petition and its use in an electronic forum (copy attached in appendix 3).

At a later meeting on 19th December 2000,[16] the Public Petitions Committee examined the e-petition, labelled PE320, raised on behalf of WDM Scotland, calling for the Health and Community Care Committee of the Scottish Parliament to examine the possible implications for health policy in Scotland of the World Trade Organisation's liberalisation of trade in services.  Again the Convenor commended the brief submitted by the ITC (see appendix 4), noting that it was an extremely useful aid to the Committee.

*4.2.3    Alliances with civic, professional and community organisations*

To broaden knowledge of e-petitioner and support better interaction, collaborations were formed with civic, professional and community organisations.  Information was subsequently disseminated to users of these sites about the potential of e-petitioner.

*4.2.3.1    Collaboration with Civic Forum*

Collaborations with the Scottish Civic Forum[17] - set up to support the civic sector and create a more participatory democracy in the new Scotland - were formed.  Information about e-

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[15] Minutes of meeting at Internet site: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/cttee/petit-00/pumop1121.htm (Consulted 2001)

[16] Internet site http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/cttee/petit-00/pumop1219.htm (Consulted 2001)

[17] Internet site: http://www.civicforum.org.uk (Consulted 2001)

petitioner and potential to raise an e-petition was compiled by the ITC and passed to the Civic Forum for inclusion in the eVox Newsletter, November, 2001 Issue 3 (see Table 3).

| Table 3 Extract from Scottish Civic Forum Newsletter: November 2000 Issue 3 |
| --- |
| **PETITION THE SCOTTISH PALIAMENT ON THE INTERNET: 'E-petitioner' website available to Civic Forum members**<br><br>In 1999 Napier University established the International Teledemocracy Centre (ITC) in partnership with British Telecom (BT).  The primary remit of the Centre is to apply advanced information and communication technologies to enhance and support the democratic decision-making process.  Research is being undertaken into digital democracy; and, in addition, a 'toolkit' is being developed to act as a show-case of digital democracy applications, and demonstrate the potential benefits of technology to support the democratic process.  E-petitioner is part of the ITC e-democracy 'toolkit.'  The e-petitioner site shows the text of the petition and background information.  The petition can then be signed by anyone visiting the site; and, if desired, they can add comments to the discussion forum on the petition topic.  Petitions are usually run for several months, after which time they may be submitted to Parliament.<br><br>In December the Scottish Parliament agreed to allow the first electronic petition from the ITC - sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).  This was a special arrangement between the ITC and the Parliament to enable evaluation of the use and civic impact of electronic petitioning in Scotland.  This first electronic petition was submitted to the Scottish Parliament on 14th March 2000.  As a result of this, the Parliament agreed to allow groups and individuals to submit petitions using the e-petitioner system at the ITC for a trial period of one year.  By arrangement with ITC, Civic Forum members can sponsor an e-petition which is admissible to the Scottish Parliament.  The service which we are providing is free to members during the trial period already agreed with the Parliament.<br><br>If you would like to hear more about e-petitions to the Scottish Parliament, contact Anna Malina on e-mail: a.malina@napier.ac.uk ; or by telephone on:  0131 455 4476; or fax: 0131 455 4477; or write to: The International Teledemocracy Centre, Napier University, 219 Colinton Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1DJ.  Further information may also be found on the centre's web site at www.teledemocracy.org. |

It was later agreed that a 'banner button' for e-petitioner would be placed on the Civic Forum's  home pages to link members of civic organisations using the site to the e-petitioning system.  However, the extent to which this link will lead to increased uptake of e-petitioner is yet unknown.

*4.2.3.2    Collaboration with British Association of Social Workers (BASW)*

A similar arrangement to that established with the Civic Forum is in process with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW).[18]   It has been agreed that a hyper-link on the association's web page would draw attention to how e-petitioner could be utilised by professional social workers in the course of their own work.

*4.2.3.3    Collaboration with Craigmillar Community Information Service (CCIS)*

In exploring progress in the community sector, fresh developments were noted by the ITC and collaborations formed with specific community networking groups.  In early March 2001, the

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[18] Internet site: http://www.basw.co.uk/scotland/ (Consulted 2001)

Craigmillar Community Information Service (CCIS)[19] placed a direct link to their e-petition on digital inclusion being hosted by the ITC on the web-page of their re-launched local community network, Craignet.[20] This development offers potential for people and groups with access to the local network in Craigmillar to sign the e-petition. In the process it is likely that local people might become more aware of the possibility of raising and/or signing other petitions about a variety of issues.

### 4.2.3.4    Collaboration with Communities-Internet, Glasgow

The ITC also formed links with a bottom-up network development in Glasgow, Communities-Internet,[21] a voluntary organisation now managing 33 community web sites throughout Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde. An important goal of this organisation is to ensure local people living in these areas are given opportunity to develop a positive community presence on the web. It does this through a network of local volunteers, who make up the local Web Team. A Web Master is chosen from this team as the point of contact for each community web site and becomes a member of the @communities-Internet Management Team.

In 2001, communities-internet designed a government page,[22] specifically to inform local people about different types of politicians and their responsibilities. In addition, statements on the site were designed to sensitise local people to the possibility of participating more than before in the democratic process. Information about petitioning to the Scottish Parliament, e-petitioning via the ITC site and hyperlinks to the PPC and the ITC web sites were also placed on these pages. While it is yet unknown what the uptake of e-petitioning might be as a result of these links, people with access to the community networks established in these local areas are now receiving information about petitions and e-petitions to the Scottish Parliament. Importantly, moreover, people are sensitised to the possibility of increasing their own participation in the political process.

### 4.2.4    ITC/PPC collaborations

During the time-scale of the research, the ITC has collaborated with the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament, for example, in designing a brief detailing each e-petition, and in helping to formulate section 18 of the guidance on the submission of public petitions, produced on-line and in hard copy by the PPC.

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[19] Internet site: www.ccis.org.uk (Consulted 2001)
[20] Internet site: www.craignet.org.uk (Consulted 2001)
[21] Internet site: http://www.communities-internet.com/sites.htm (Consulted 2001)
[22] Internet site: http://www.Bishopton.com/government/government_index.htm (Consulted 2001)

*4.2.5    ITC brief accompanying submission of e-petitions to the PPC*

Bearing the needs of the petitioner and the PPC in mind, the ITC designed a template for a brief which could be used routinely to summarise the main elements of an e-petition.  Design elements were checked with the Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee since an important goal was to support the Committee in making a judicious decision about the petition issue. The brief notes the petition title, the names of petitioners and dates the e-petition opened and closed.  User statistics are summarised to provide an idea of numbers of signatures and their geographic locations based on postcodes.  Signature validity is checked by considering names and addresses against confidence ratings built into the system as previously described.  The full e-petition text is recorded and background information about the petition sponsors is outlined.  Finally, comments made on the integrated discussion forum about the issue central to the e-petition are summarised.   The brief is compiled soon after the petition closes.  Details are checked by the petition sponsors before it is submitted to the Clerk of the PPC. Subsequently, the Clerk   distributes the brief along with other authorised papers to the members of the PPC in preparation for the meeting.  The brief is then dated and held on file alongside other supporting papers.

## 4.3    Field work and analysis

*4.3.1    Interviews with representatives of  PPC*

Table 4 indicates that interviews with the Clerk to the PPC and the Convener of the PPC were conducted in February and March of 2001.

| Table 4  Interviews with Public Petitions Committee | |
|---|---|
| **Name** | **Date of Interview** |
| Steve Farrell, Clerk to PPC | 23rd February 2001 |
| John McAllion, MSP, Convener of PPC | 16th March 2001 |

The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee recounted how the ITC had offered the Scottish Parliament an opportunity to get involved in the development of e-petitioner.  Subsequently, the PPC were very keen to collaborate and had been happy to agree to a trial period and a partnership to assist in the development of the updated e-petitioner system *(PPC SF: Interview 23rd Feb, 2001).*  Officials of the PPC believed strongly that electronic technology would provide the means to widen the process of petitioning to local people in local areas. A national campaign, for example, could be co-ordinated more easily using electronic petitioning. Advantages of e-petitioning had been noted, i.e. people could obtain background information, make a comment about the issue, sign on-line, and receive feedback about the progress of a petition. Officials commented that with a traditional pen and paper petition,

people did not always have very much time to consider the issues at hand. It had been noted, however, that e-petitioner offers better opportunity to sit down and think about the petition's key points in depth before making an informed choice about whether or not to support and sign the petition.

In considering the interactive component designed into the e-petitioner comments page (the discussion forum), the Convener indicated that "it gives ordinary people a chance to air their views and add to the petition issue" *(PPC JM: Interview 13th March, 2001)*. The Clerk indicated that while the Petitions Committee always tried to obtain a balanced view from the main parties on the issues raised in a petition, e-petitioner provided the opportunity for all those signing a petition to provide their views. Both interviewees felt the comments page was interesting, and indications were that the committee:

> …would be interested in looking more at what signatories say about an issue. What are the ordinary people in the street saying? And it becomes more of a forum or an addition and it feeds into the process exactly what the signatories are thinking, because at the moment all that we have on a paper based petition coming in is a total number of signatures and no way of knowing what these individual people think, whether they have additional views or ideas that might supplement what's been said in the petition – ideas about how the petition proposals might be developed. If we're taking on board views that people make – someone may come up with a fantastic idea that hasn't been thought of even by the petitioners *(PPC SF: Interview 23rd Feb, 2001)*.

PPC officials interviewed also agreed that the comments pages could be broadened more in the future. However, while it would be a positive move forward to stimulate better democratic debate, it was important to avoid producing a "stramash of views that are difficult to decipher" via electronic technology *(PPC SF: Interview 23rd Feb, 2001)*. Both interviewees commented, however, that the ITC had already sought to avoid this problem by analysing and interpreting comments, presenting the Committee with a well balanced summary of views in the briefing paper which accompanied the electronic submission of signatures.

The Clerk to the PPC commented that the brief provided by the ITC with each closed e-petition helped support the work of the committee, adding:

> We ordinarily provide briefing to members – on the paper based petitions that are coming through by traditional means. What we've been trying to do when we receive an e-petition through the e-petitioning system is use the brief provided by the ITC as an alternative – perhaps supplemented by our own internal guidance. So what we are trying to do is make the ITC brief a stand-alone document - just to show members the benefits of the system and how it's being presented and the useful material that we get – because we're very keen that we don't just take the information from e-petitioner and translate it into our own version. We want it to stand alone as a document and the Convener brings it to the attention of members to highlight the work of the ITC and e-petitioner *(PPC SF: Interview 23rd Feb, 2001)*.

The PPC interviewees felt the information contained in the brief provided a useful summary of the petition, its origins and what it hoped to achieve.  The Convener felt the brief offered "a real flavour of the petition and what people think; and we think it's much more information than we get with an ordinary petition" *(PPC JM: Interview 13th March 2001)*.  The Clerk also commented that the brief was able to expand on basic information provided by the petitioner:

> It's very helpful background and it offers additional material on the sources of signatures – the geographical information is also excellent. It's more than we could hope to do with a paper based system or any other petition that comes into us.  It's a great step forward in that respect *(PPC SF: Interview 23rd Feb, 2001)*.

The development of collaborations and links to e-petitioner from civic and professional bodies was considered a positive step forward.  Both interviewees believed that opportunities should be created to engage with civic society, and involve the voluntary and civic sectors more in the process of petitioning the Parliament. Increased public access to ICT through learning centres combined with the collaborations the ITC had initiated with the community sector to increase the scope of public awareness about e-petitioner was also considered beneficial.  The Convener of the PPC felt that collaboration with the ITC was important and "using technology is certainly the future," while the Clerk believed the "collective role is to provide the forum and the opportunity", and while "the will has to come from the people themselves" […] "if we can help promote a system that informs people better and improves the democratic process then that's what it's all about" *(PPC SF: Interview 23rd Feb, 2001)*.

### 4.3.2    *Interviews with e-petition sponsors*

Table 5 lists the names of e-petition sponsors interviewed about their perceptions and experience of using e-petitioner and the dates interviews took place.

| Table 5  List of e-petition sponsors and dates of interviews ||
|---|---|
| Sponsors Name | Date of Interview |
| Alan Melville - Cubie | 14th November 2000 |
| George Baxter - WWF | 16th November 2000 |
| John Watson (interview attended also by John Graham) - WDM | 16th November 2000 |
| John Watson (interview attended also by John Graham) - WDM | 13th February 2001 |
| Andy McDonald - CCIS | 26th February 2001 |

Sponsors generally wanted to use as many tools as possible to influence politicians about issues they considered important, and had viewed e-petitioning as a way of involving the public in a novel and innovative way.  The WWF petition sponsor commented that because Parliament had placed emphasis on electronic communication, e-petitioning seemed a useful

thing to do *(Interview GB: 16th November, 2000).* In response to being asked what expectations there had been of an e-petition as opposed to a traditional pen and paper petition, one sponsor replied that the decision had been twofold:

> One, that we might not actually be able to reach that many people because of the limited access that people have to the internet – however, in fact as it turned out, it was going all the time. But second, you also felt that you were testing the water. And because WWF is quite a well known web-site we felt we'd be able to harness a lot of passing trade if you like *(Interview GB: 16th November, 2000).*

In regard to whether or not the response to the e-petition had met expectations, this sponsor commented:

> It was a success. It wasn't massive but as a pilot we were very happy with it; also it complimented other more traditional means […] We were limited but we have obviously recognised the potential of it in the future to help create a standard way of harnessing public concern *(Interview GB: 16th November, 2000).*

One problem highlighted by sponsors generally was the temptation to sit back and expect the technology to do too much, so allowing an e-petition to drift. It had been noted that effort was required throughout the lifetime of an e-petition to maintain impetus. Moreover, while sponsors had initially expected that e-petitioner would be quick and easy and a short sharp way to target people, several commented that in reality using e-petitioner could actually be slower than a traditional pen and paper petition. However, the slower more deliberative processes associated with signing an e-petition and/or adding a comment were considered inherently more democratic than speedily signing a document with little time to consider the petition substance.

In regard to the notion of petitioning generally, several sponsors believed that collecting very high numbers of signatures was not always the main goal. One sponsor remarked "we don't think that makes a huge amount of difference" *(Interview JW & JG: 16th November, 2000).* Another pointed instead to the "quality of the argument backed by reasonable support" […] "we're looking for a reasonable number that shows there was some concern backed up by strong arguments, backed up by scientific evidence and backed up by individual letters that people have written to the minister off their own back encouraged by us" *(Interview GB: 16th November, 2000).*

In contemplating the advantages of e-petitioner, one sponsor commented that:

> You can choose when and where to fill it in rather than somebody cornering you on the street or banging on your door. E-petitioner is linked from our site and it's always there for people to look at when they want. So that gives people more choice. I

suppose the biggest advantage is anytime anywhere" *(Interview A McD: 26th February 2001).*

Another sponsor pointed out that while it is possible at times to discuss petition issues with people organising pen and paper petitions, this system is not so instantly two-way as e-petitioner which is instantly interactive *(Interview JW & JG: 16th November, 2000).* Yet another sponsor felt that:

> People can do it in their own time – they're not stopped on the street. People from outlying and remote areas can do it. When there are petitions – they tend to be within urban cities. E-petitions are less labour intensive, so once they're up and running you don't have to go out into the street and stop people to get them to sign it. When people do sign it there's more likelihood that they are a committed signer because they've been attracted to that site or they've been encouraged to think about it and come back in their own time; whereas when you do petitioning in the street, it tends to be 'sign this' and people sometimes sign it just to get away without really buying into what is probably the meaning. At the same time face to face meeting people in the street is exceptionally valuable because you can also put a human face to your organisation and argument, and as a result encourage people to take your argument more seriously than just on a screen. So there's both ways to look at it. Really, ideally, I think there should be both *(Interview GB: 16th November, 2000).*

The general consensus was that e-petitions and traditional pen and paper petitions could be complementary to one another.

Another sponsor commented that human interaction seemed to be missing when organising the e-petition *(Interview AM: 14th November, 2000).* While the technology could be perceived as lacking human charisma, sponsors generally believed the concept of electronic petitioning allowed people throughout the world, up and down the country, regionally and community-wide to sign something, whereas there was only ever a limited response when using traditional pen and paper petitioning. Moreover, sponsors felt people signing e-petitions were more likely to do so on the basis that they actually supported the issue, whilst people signing petitions on the street often did so to save time or avoid conflict with the petitioner, without necessarily supporting the issue.

Sponsors commented favourably on the background pages which provided information about the sponsoring organisation. Another main advantage of e-petitioner, according to one sponsor, was that it was "innovative and new", enabling people from far and wide to join together and sign something *(Interview GB: 16th November, 2000).* Indeed some of the most exciting potential of e-petitioning related to the discussion forum and ability to add commentary, although contributions to this so far were still fairly low.

Key problems highlighted were marketing and publicity *(Interview GB: 16th November, 2000).* One petition sponsor remarked that the sponsoring organisation's "size, status and

promotional ability to internetwork" seemed to be related to the number of people signing petitions. Small organisations and individuals, therefore, were likely to have more difficulty in promoting the e-petition and collecting support for their particular issues *(Interview A McD: 26th February 2001)*. Sponsors generally felt that the central issue and additional subject matter must be presented strongly to market the content of an e-petition. Commonly, this is done through email networks, email discussion forums and using search engines, however, it was felt the issue at the centre of the campaign must be sold more effectively to the public both off and on-line. Members of the public must also be encouraged through different media to go to the ITC web-site to sign the petition electronically. While some difficulty had been experienced in finding appropriate ways to collaborate with traditional media organisations to publicise petition issues electronically and organise electronic links, increasingly more media were developing strong web presence. Where this was happening, it was felt petition issues could more easily be publicised.

One sponsoring organisation whose e-petition had already been submitted to the PPC had begun to consider the aftermath to an e-petition, for example, ways in which people could be encouraged to maintain interest in the central issue after the petition was closed and even become more active *(Interview JG & JW: 13th February 2001)*. The recommendation here was that to revitalise more active citizenship, more conspicuous links on the e-petition pages could positively encourage traffic to the sponsor's web-page. Sponsors themselves should be aware of their responsibility to continually provide fresh information about the petition issue.

Recommendations from petition sponsors in regard to improving the e-petitioning system included: the design of more and better discussion pages; better means to link to traditional and new media who could develop "stories" about the petition issue and include links to the e-petitioner site; regular liaison with search engines to upload keywords and information about the central issues. Petition sponsors also suggested a more prominent disclaimer indicating that signatory details would be held in a hidden file and not disclosed to anyone else. In addition, petition sponsors felt organisations needed to develop a new culture of use and different routines when raising and processing e-petitions, in particular when organising marketing and publicity. Another suggestion was to place a map of Scotland on each petition site, which could add a dot to a geographic location each time a signature was added. This would provide a clear visual indicator of the extent of support for a petition issue. In addition an electronic postcard added to each e-petition page would allow people to send information automatically to others they felt might be interested.

### 4.3.3    Participant observations: E-petition users

To find out how people might use e-petitioner and assess their perceptions of the tool, a combination of participant observations and conversational interviews were carried out at various different times and in various different public access centres in Craigmillar, Edinburgh; Saltcoats, Ayrshire; Barrhead, East Renfrewshire; and Paisley, Renfrew (see Table 6).

| Table 6 Participant observations: List of e-gateway venues and dates of observations | |
| --- | --- |
| **E-gateway Venue** | **Observation Dates** |
| CCIS Learning Centre, Edinburgh | 20th November 2000 |
| Saltcoats Learning Centre, Ayrshire | 21st February 2001 |
| Log-In Café, Barrhead, East Renfrewshire | 16th March 2001 |
| Paisley Partnership Learning Centre, Renfrew | 16th March 2001 |

Issues such as skills required for the Information Age and the cost of access to ICT were central to the decision to develop learning centres throughout the UK. These E-gateways have established and sustained ties into the local community and have been set up to support social inclusion, narrow the 'digital divide,' and help to alleviate the problems of being 'information poor.'

It should be noted that none of the participants in this part of the study had heard of or seen the e-petitioner site before, and were largely unaware of the process of petitioning to the Scottish Parliament and the role of the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament. Much time was taken up, therefore, in providing appropriate information and explaining background and context.

### 4.3.3.1    CCIS, Edinburgh: 20th November 2000

*Background:* Observations in Edinburgh were conducted in a learning centre operated by the Craigmillar Community Information Service (CCIS). CCIS is a Scottish Executive, Social Inclusion Partnership funded initiative sponsored by the City of Edinburgh Council.  In January 2000, CCIS launched a new multi-media PC training suite in association with Jewel and Esk Valley College and Napier University.  The 'Up for Learning' centre is part of the Scottish University for Industry (SUfI) programme designed to provide vocational training courses for employees of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and unemployed people who are seeking employment with them.

*Situation and layout:* CCIS is housed in a local business development centre, formerly a local school.  The building is not on the main thoroughfare in Craigmillar but is within easy

walking distance for local people. Units within the premises are used by several other community development groups. Having received European and match funding, CCIS now have a spacious well-equipped training room, with twenty one public access computers linked to the internet and state of the art multi-media equipment for use by the public and local businesses.

*Activities of actors:* Actors present in the training suite during the study of e-petitioner were attending a regular weekly public access training session. The group were using computer software and the Internet to pursue their own interests and were seeking to increase word processing, multi-media and Internet skills. Twelve computers linked to the Internet were available. The atmosphere was busy and creative with everyone willing to share skills and help and support one another. One sessional worker was on hand to provide assistance as and when necessary.

*Gender and age of participants:* The group who agreed to take part in the e-petitioner study comprised two retired men and four retired women aged over sixty five.

*Sequence of events:* Considerable time was taken to converse with each individual actor and explain e-petitioner, before a decision was taken by each participant to open up and read the 'digital inclusion' e-petition. At no time did the researcher exert pressure to sign the petition. However, perhaps in part due to researcher presence, all six respondents indicated they wished to sign the e-petition. Subsequently, the researcher was able to observe the process and assess technical skills and communicative ability.

*What actors did with e-petitioner:* Observations indicated that all participants had acquired the technical and communicative skills suitable to navigate and sign the e-petitioner form successfully. It was noted, however, that all six actors hesitated before navigating through the 'choice of country' button successfully. In addition, four out of the six actors were reticent in providing home addresses. While they would clearly rather not provide addresses, all participants were somewhat reassured by the disclaimer - which in all cases had to be pointed out - indicating addresses would be held by the ITC in a hidden file and not on public display, and would not be used for any other purpose without their express wish. In re-considering, all six actors decided of their own volition to continue signing the digital inclusion e-petition.

In navigating the site, respondents did not notice the side or bottom links to the comments page, and therefore did not add a comment about the e-petition or read prior comments about the issue; nor did participants check out the background information and sponsors pages. All the participants, however, filled in the evaluation questionnaire after signing the e-petition. Most considered their thoughts very carefully and took some time to produce useful input.

However, two actors 'grumbled' about filling in the on-line evaluation questionnaire, commenting that it was too long and very time consuming. These actors offered suggestions for improving the questionnaire layout, contributing as a result to subsequent changes in the questionnaire format.

*4.3.3.2    Saltcoats Learning Centre, Ayrshire: 21st February 2001*

*Background:* The death of local industries in North Ayrshire resulted in widespread deprivation and a high level of unemployment. Funded by the Urban Programme for a period of four years, and later by the North Ayrshire Social Inclusion Partnership (NASIP), the North Ayrshire Community Access Point began its life in 1995 as Ardrossan Saltcoats Stevenston Information Support and Training (ASSIST). Set up by a voluntary management committee under the guidance of a community Economic Development Officer employed by Strathclyde Regional Council,  ASSIST was designed as a 'Jobs Access Initiative' to help overcome barriers to employment and give people access to training and education and eventually, it was hoped, employment. Under NASIP funding ASSIST was merged with other organisations to form a local delivery organisation.  This larger organisation now provides Business Development, Community Economic Development and Client Services.   The Saltcoats centre operates as a Community Access Point under Client Services and is known as the Social Access Unit.

The Social Access Unit was set up to provide information, support and training for residents of SIP areas. The service included: helping people access training through providing information on college courses; helping with funding applications; helping people overcome barriers to employment through completing application forms, building CVs, developing interview skills and techniques; funding vocational training; providing childcare funding to free lone parents to take up training to enable them to return to the work place; setting up training courses in partnership with local colleges to answer client /employer needs; and one-to-one guidance and counselling. Unemployed people from North Ayrshire mainly use the centre.  This group includes short term and long term unemployed and women returnees. People are seen by appointment or on a drop in basis.  Trainees who attend in house courses are drawn from these groups. Local people take advantage of all the services listed above and are also gradually coming into the centre specifically to use the new technology to access appropriate information on the Internet.

*Situation and layout:* The social access unit is housed in a relatively new well furnished building situated a short distance from the main shopping area in Saltcoats. In total, the Centre houses ten computers for training purposes and five for public access provided by the

Ayrshire Electronic Community. An additional PC has been supplied by the Scottish Learning Network which may be used for training and public access.

*Activities of actors:* When the researcher visited the Saltcoats Learning Centre, a well attended training session had just ended and the centre was open on a drop in basis for local people to use the public access computers as they wished.

*Gender and age of participants:* Two males took part in the study. The first was a local man, currently unemployed and aged between 30-45 years of age, who had dropped into the centre to use the public access computers to search for a job. The second participant, also male, was aged between 45 and 55, and was employed as a Client Adviser in the Saltcoats Centre. This participant routinely worked with individuals and groups using the centre, to provide information, support, advice and guidance, and attended courses to support development of personal and social skills. Neither respondent knew anything about e-petitioning prior to the researcher's visit.

*Sequence of events:* The researcher approached both actors separately and requested feedback about e-petitioner.

*What actors did with e-petitioner:* Having agreed to participate in the research, the first respondent entered the web address for e-petitioner and after browsing the site and reading the digital inclusion e-petition, indicated he would not sign that e-petition or any other on the ITC site. The reason given was that he did not feel petitioning the Scottish Parliament through face-to-face means or via e-petitioner had any kind of bearing on his quality of life in Saltcoats. The participant clearly felt excluded from the political process, believing his views would have no impact. It was noted, however, that this participant, who had already undertaken basic training in computer skills at the Saltcoats Centre, was able to enter the web address easily, then open the e-petitioner site and browse pages with relative ease. The participant commented that the e-petitioner site was easy to understand and navigate. On that basis, he could see no reason for change.

The second participant accessed the web site quickly and easily, and subsequently browsed through the e-petitioner pages before deciding to sign an e-petition. This process was completed thoughtfully but with ease. There was no hesitation in using the country button, however, this participant hesitated on being prompted to insert an address. The fear expressed was that information provided might potentially be used for a range of different purposes. The researcher pointed out the disclaimer on the e-petitioner site. Re-assured, the participant continued to sign and subsequently post the form successfully. The participant then took time to consider questions thoughtfully in the on-line evaluation questionnaire before inserting his

answers. At this stage, the participant believed interaction with e-petitioner was at an end. It was noted that the add a comment page was completely overlooked.

*4.3.3.3  Log-In Café, Barrhead, East Renfrewshire: 16th March 2001*

*Background:* Log-in is an internet cafe available to everyone under the age of 25 in East Renfrewshire. While some users drop in to use the cafe or play computer games with their friends, young Skillseekers achieve recognised qualifications and unemployed young people access training and links to further education. Vending machines provide hot drinks and snacks and a large selection of board games are available free to members.

Young people have been closely involved at every stage of Log-in's development, and as part of Log-in's management committee, they have had a major role in decision-making, from the appearance of the cafe to the information, training and outreach activities on offer. All young people joining get a free Log-in photo membership card which can be used as a library card both in Log-in's youth library and in most East Renfrewshire School and Community libraries. Members also have the opportunity to create their own email address and Internet chat has proven as popular as computer gaming.

A large part of the Log-in programme is offered on an outreach basis and state of the art laptop computers are used to bring Log-in to the more outlying parts of East Renfrewshire, ensuring all young people have the opportunity to get involved. Pre-school infants and their parents or carers may also take the opportunity to try out early learning CD ROMs. Cybertots sessions are free and run every Thursday afternoon and Friday morning in Log-in. Laptots, outreach cybertot sessions, are available in East Renfrewshire Community Libraries during school holiday periods. Outreach Laptots sessions can also be arranged for playgroups within East Renfrewshire.

*Situation and layout:* Log-in café is situated on the main shopping area in Barrhead and is openly accessible to passers-by in the area. Log-in has twelve computers linked to the internet at any one time. One is situated in the drop-in area, ten in the main computer room, and one in the quiet room. More could be added to the network over time.

*Gender and age of participants:* One male youth worker aged 35 –50  and five young males aged 15-20 (still in full-time education) agreed to participate in the study.

*Sequence of events:*  Prior to providing feedback, the male youth worker was shown the e-petitioner site and invited to go through the pages. During this process, the researcher spent considerable time providing explanation and contextual information. Respondents in the 15-20 age group were later given the e-petitioner web address and without explanation of the

context or background to e-petitioner were invited to open up and navigate the site. In both scenarios, the researcher followed up observations of use with short conversations about each respondent's experience of using e-petitioner.

*What actors did with e-petitioner:* The youth worker was able to navigate the site and complete an e-petition and evaluation form very quickly. In similar vein, all five participants in the 15-20 age group loaded the site and were able to navigate through pages with complete ease. There was no hesitation in adding addresses, however, in signing an e-petition, none noticed of their own volition that it was possible to express a view on the comments pages accompanying each e-petition.

*4.3.3.4    Paisley Partnership, Renfrew: 16th March 2001*

*Background:* The Paisley Learning Centre is supported by Scottish Power, Learning, Renfrewshire Council, Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire, Reid Kerr College and the University of Paisley. As part of the partnerhip's social inclusion strategy, the centre aims to fill the local skills gaps in ICT. Local people are offered easy access to computers and the chance to learn computer skills which could then be used to access information and take advantage of a range of other possibilities as well as  job opportunities. The centre also offers employment advice, careers guidance and learning information. To support people moving back into work, help is provided in compiling CVs, filling in job applications, and locating access to funding.

*Situation and layout of space:* The Learning centre is situated in the heart of the pedestrian shopping precinct in Paisley High Street, and is equipped with fifteen internet linked public access computers which are free to the user.

*Activities of actors:* Many users present in the centre at the time the observations took place were in process of compiling CVs and job applications or locating job opportunities on-line. Others were searching for interest based information, and/or learning new computer and internet skills.

*Gender and age of participants*: Three users of the centre took part in the study aged between 20-35 years old and one learning centre co-ordinator aged between 35-50.

*Sequence of events:* The researcher demonstrated e-petitioner to the learning centre co-ordinator using an office PC, also explaining the concept and context which formed the backdrop to the development of the tool and the formation of the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament. The co-ordinator later re-examined the site alone and offered feedback during an extended conversation. In the public access area, three unemployed local

people, who had dropped in to complete a CV and find a job, were approached by the researcher and asked to examine the e-petitioner site and provide feedback. All complied.

*What actors did with e-petitioner:* Two participants indicated that before using the centre they had not been exposed to computers or the internet. The third had used a computer while in previous employment. All three participants appeared to lack confidence in their ability to contribute to the democratic process, and indicated that new technology to support democracy was not for them. However, all three respondents displayed adequate technical and communicative skills to load up the e-petitioner web-page. With only occasional prompting, all three participants were able to navigate the site successfully and complete the evaluation questionnaire.

*4.3.4    Conversational Analysis: What users felt about e-petitioner*

The majority of participants felt the site design was satisfactory, however, several commented that, while the site was easy to understand and navigate, enhancing the visual design and making better use of colour could improve the 'look' of the site. Those participants who had signed traditional pen and paper petitions previously felt that petitioning by electronic means was an easier and more efficient system on the whole than its face-to-face counterpart. In addition, the ability to read a petition text in private and feel free to sign or not was felt to be significantly better than signing out of a sense of embarrassment, duty, or even just to be rid of the petitioner on the door-step or in the street.

After navigating through an e-petition, most respondents indicated they had become much more aware of the possibilities of e-petitioner and felt petitioning in electronic format was an extremely good way to interact with those in authority, so that they could put forward or support a view about an issue that was important to them. All commented, however, that ability to petition electronically at local government and local community levels would be even more welcome, and would indicate a step towards better and wider democratic interaction.

When ability to make a comment about an e-petition focus was pointed out, all participants felt this was a very good way to put forward additional views, which would not otherwise be heard, to supplement the text of the petition. However, there was consensus that the comments page should be more apparent to signatories and more accessible during the actual petition signing process. On the whole, however, participants were conscious of a 'step in the right direction,' commenting favourably on the accessibility, ease and transparency of the e-petitioner system. Participants appeared to be particularly engaged by the ability to see the progress of each e-petition from its beginning through to submission to the PPC. Participants

were also very enthusiastic about the added capacity to then track progress at parliamentary committee level via the feedback pages which linked the e-petition to the PPC meeting at which the issue was discussed. Respondents generally felt that they would use e-petitioner again believing that petitioning supported by an accessible, easy to use, transparent electronic system could affect and even make some difference to government policy.

Several insights from this study need to be probed at a deeper level. First, is the feeling highlighted by participants that e-petitioner would also be relevant at a local level. The second insight of great importance is the somewhat blunt sentiment that e-petitioner - or indeed any other technology tool designed to support democratic interaction - is not recognised as relevant in situations where nothing of quality can be perceived by individuals in the daily routine of their lives. Related to this is the insight that people generally are not aware of what they might be able to do that could have an affect on the political process if given the opportunity to do so.

*4.3.4.1    Need identified for local development of e-petitioner:*
Participants generally were able to visualise the advantages which ICT could provide in extending the democratic process. However, many commented that these advantages would be even more appropriate in local settings where people were more likely to be aware of local situations and more enthusiastic about participating to influence outcomes in regard to local issues. The perception here is of close attachment to local areas and scope to develop e-democracy in communities.

*4.3.4.2    Addressing social involvement deficit: Building sensitivity in addition to skills for the information age*
The second insight relates to problems of social exclusion, feelings of detachment from the political process and issues of social justice and digital inclusion. It is widely recognised that there is little trust between governed and those who govern. In addition, Donnison (1999) argues, divisions are widening in society, so producing a less just and equal society. Poverty, particularly long-term poverty which arises from inequality, is often escalated by a sense of powerlessness. Solutions are being sought to address problems perceived by people disadvantaged in multiple ways at the local community level. Philosophical premises attached to the concept of the 'good society' and notions of citizenship in modern democratic societies highlight need to create balance between citizen rights and responsibilities. In this regard, social purpose and a sense of common citizenship demands that while people have a right to access jobs and public services, they must also be given opportunity to realise and become sensitive to what they could do before it becomes possible to accept responsibility for a range of social, political and economic obligations.

It may already be obvious that hardship exists in areas where many of the participants in this study live. While some residents are gaining opportunities to learn new skills for the information age, participants did not show much awareness of the concept of democratic participation. Insights gained in this study indicate that people do not share a collective sense of democratic purpose, nor do they always recognise the relationship between rights and obligations. Observations suggest that participants have little understanding of e-democracy. The crux of the matter then is not just about the need to acquire new technological skills for information age government and governance, it is also about critically addressing social involvement deficit, by building social capital and increasing sensitivity and confidence. For citizens to recognise their own self worth and participate in the political process, issues such as democratisation, democratic engagement, and citizen accountability must be central to the notion of digital inclusion and public learning for the information age. In other words, to support a holistic approach in promoting better democratic interaction, issues relating to social justice must be considered in addition to provision of access to technology and ability to use new electronic systems.

## 4.4    On-line evaluation questionnaire

On signing an e-petition, signatories were invited to complete an optional on-line questionnaire to provide feedback and assist the ITC in evaluating responses to e-petitioner. In response to feedback from users, the original questionnaire was replaced with another version in November 2000. Copies of both versions are attached in Appendix 5. Question 1, remained in the same format on both the new and old on-line questionnaires and is taken together. Question 8 of the new evaluation questionnaire and question 12 of the old questionnaire are the same and are also taken together. Other findings relate separately to feedback contained in each questionnaire.

Of the total number of people that signed an e-petition and went on to complete Question 1, designed to establish where signatories were using the website, 49% were on-line from home, 9% from school or college, 1% from an internet café, 4% from a community centre, 1% from a friend's house, 31% from work, 2% from other venues, and 5% gave no response to Question 1. It was noted, however, that where it was possible to tell responses varied between different e-petitions. For example, of those that signed the digital inclusion e-petition, over 8% were on-line from a community centre, and only 25% from home, while responses from those who signed the Scottish Football e-petition indicated that 0% were on-line from a community centre while 49% were on-line from home. The digital inclusion petition which highlighted need for more ICT resources at the community level provides a reasonable explanation for the increased numbers signing from a community centre. At

almost 64%, those who completed the on-line questionnaire after signing the WWF-ORCA e-petition signed in highest numbers from home.

*New Questionnaire:* Question 2 of the new questionnaire was designed to establish the extent to which signatories had signed an e-petition before, while Question 3 asked whether signatories had signed traditional pen and paper petitions before. Of the total number that completed these two questions, only 7% had signed an electronic petition many times before as opposed to 44% who had signed a traditional pen and paper petition many times before; 25% had not signed an e-petition very often before, while 42% had not signed a traditional pen and paper petition very often before; 63% had never signed an on-line petition before, while only 8% had never signed a traditional pen and paper petition before. 5% of respondents chose to offer no response to Question 2, while 6% offered no response to Question 3.

Of those that signed an e-petition and went on to complete Question 4 of the new on-line questionnaire, to establish how difficult or easy signing a petition had been, 92% found that signing the e-petition was easy enough; 2% were unsure about how they felt; while less than 1% felt it was too difficult. 5% indicated no response to Question 4.

Question 5 of the new on-line questionnaire took the form of an open question requiring respondents to enter comments on how the information on the e-petitioner site was presented. Of those that had signed an e-petition and went on to complete Question 5, most indicated that the page was very well produced, straightforward, easy to use, fast, clear and simple. Several respondents suggested more publicity was needed to promote e-petitions. Contrasting views were noted in relation to signatures, for example, while one response indicated signatures should not be visible on-line, another suggested they should be more visible than currently. Other comments included: call for more e-petitions and preference for more information about the issue in background pages.

Question 6 of the new on-line questionnaire also took the form of an open question requiring respondents to indicate their perceptions of the public using electronic tools to participate in democracy. The biggest proportion of respondents believed ICT designed to support democracy were a necessary and effective use of new technology, and worthy of support. Comments here indicated ICTs were regarded as a modern concept suited to busy lifestyles generating easier, more accessible and more efficient interaction than traditional communication means. Responses indicated that ICTs could provide better information, increase confidence and facilitate better thinking about issues of concern. There was some fear, however, that the technology might be abused, in particular that security may be problematic. In addition, there was concern that after taking the trouble  to participate

politicians may not listen to the views expressed by citizens. However, there was a strong overall perception that electronic tools designed for democratic interaction were good for improving democracy, an aid to citizen action, more inclusive and more supportive of a sustainable society.

Of those that signed an e-petition and went on to complete the new on-line questionnaire, 81% felt they would use the e-petitioner web-site again; 11% were not sure about their future use, while 1% felt they would not use the site ever again. 1% were unsure whether or not they would use the web-site again and 6% indicated no response to Question 7. Most respondents, in other words, indicated their intention to re-visit the ITC web-site and sign an e-petition again in the future

Question 8 of the new on-line questionnaire, similar to Question 12 of the old questionnaire, was designed as an open question to investigate how signatories had found out about the e-petition they signed. Perhaps not unexpectedly, many were informed of the e-petition by sponsors in leaflets, magazines and membership material, as well as via the sponsor's website, email and through mailing lists. Collaborating institutions also carried information on their web-sites and in their use of traditional communication media. One particular organisation, WWF, arranged for information to be included on a credit card (MBNA), on various different finance sites and in the school curriculum. Some signatories had learned of the e-petition and the e-petitioner web-site site through word of mouth contacts, ie. family and/or friends; also mail-shots, postings on internet groups, in publicity material from interest groups and/or by browsing the Internet. Several signatories had seen the web address on the Civic Forum web-site and one respondent had seen it on a car window sticker.

*Old questionnaire:* Of those that responded to Question 2 of the old questionnaire, which sought to establish whether or not anyone helped the signatory to use the web-site, 83% did not require any help in signing an e-petition; 15% required some help; and 3% indicated no response to Question 2. In regard to Question 3, which aimed to establish whether or not signatories had actually wanted help, 83% indicated they did not want any help in signing the e-petition; 13% indicated they had wanted help; and 4% indicated no response to this question. Quite clearly the majority of signatories had achieved necessary skills and knowledge to complete the on-line petition without any external help or support. Of those that responded to Question 4, which investigated how signatories felt the pages looked, 52% thought the web pages looked good; 40% had no strong opinion; 5% felt the pages looked boring; and 3% indicated no response at all.

Question 5a of the old on-line questionnaire took the form of an open question to assess what signatories liked. Responses indicated liking for the straightforwardness of the system, its

clarity, simple but attractive presentation and brevity. In addition, respondents liked the useful, factual, unambiguous and detailed information which was available, as well as ability to find out more about particular issues. Ability to view other comments was also approved, as was on-going feedback about the status of the e-petition. Respondents indicated that they liked the sensible sustainable thinking that underpinned development. Moreover, they enjoyed being included.

Question 5b was also an open question to assess what signatories did not like. Some respondents who completed this question were concerned at the lack of explanatory information about security, and did not did not like the appearance of names on the site. Others felt there was a lack of information about the main purpose of an e-petition. The visual design of pages was perceived by some respondents as dull, boring and not very eye-catching. Moreover, the design of the site did not encourage users to notice information available in addition to the petition form itself.

Of those that filled in Question 6 which sought views on comments and replies, 80% felt the comments and replies were easy enough; 10% were not sure; less than 1% felt the comments and replies were too difficult; 7% had no strong feeling. 2% did not complete this question (Q.6).

In response to Question 7, investigating how easy or difficult it had been to post a comment, 76% felt that posting a comment was easy enough; 11% were not sure; 9% had no strong feeling; less that 1% felt that posting a comment was too difficult; and 3% chose no response.

In reply to Question 8 designed to establish how easy or difficult signing a petition had been, 93% felt that signing the on-line petition was easy enough; 1% were unsure about signing; less than 1% felt that signing the e-petition was too difficult.; 4% indicated they felt no response; while 1% of those who decided to fill in the questionnaire did not answer this question (Q.8).

In their responses to Question 9 which sought to establish whether or not signatories might use the web-site again for other petitions, 83% of respondents indicated they would use the ITC web-site again to sign other e-petitions; 12% were unsure whether or not they would use the ITC web-site again; nearly 5% indicated they felt no response; less than 1% felt they would never use the ITC web-site again; while 1% did not reply to this question

Question 10 of the old on-line questionnaire was designed as an open question to note the areas that users would change about e-petitioner. Respondents felt there was need for a clearer indication of where information will and will not be used, and clearer links to the web-

sites of collaborating or similar organisations. More information, more pictures and more e-petitions would be welcome. It was thought that clearer guides to help support further promotion of e-petitions could be provided. In addition, it would be possible to add an option to email a friend to sign each e-petition. One respondent felt need to indicate where traditional pen and paper petitions running concurrently with an e-petition could be found. Another indicated that a clear navigation button to e-petitioner could be placed on the opening ITC pages, and a link to e-petitioner's privacy policy could also be inserted.

Question 11of the new on-line questionnaire also took the form of an open question to assess what signatories felt about using web-sites like e-petitioner to sign petitions. Signatories felt such web-sites were a good idea, accessible, non-intrusive, paper saving and quick and easy to use. Several respondents thought that hoax signatures might be problematic and such sites might be open to abuse by committed campaigners. However, one respondent indicated that democracy needs a variety of avenues of debate to flourish. Several others commented that more publicity would ensure wider dissemination of information and better responses.

As mentioned earlier, question 12 of the old on-line questionnaire was the same as question 8 of the new questionnaire - designed as an open question to assess how signatories found out about the web-site - and produced similar findings.

## 5    CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1    Introduction

The introduction to this report, Section 2, described the motivation for this study as a perceived need to investigate how and to what extent governments and citizens in the new 21st century use new ICTs to promote electronic democracy and support a more participative system of governing. The central research question posed was: How and to what extent might e-petitioner make a contribution to teledemocracy? The research was designed to monitor and evaluate the development and use of e-petitions by groups and individuals, and to develop a framework to investigate the significance of this and other electronic participation tools for democratic processes.

In Section 3, it was reported that new opportunities are currently emerging for top levels of government to accommodate bottom-up ideas. Moreover, it was noted, there are new possibilities at the micro-level for institutions and people to become producers of democratic thought. This section also described the emergence and design of e-petitioner, an electronic tool designed by the ITC and being used currently to help support the democratic process by facilitating electronic petitioning to the Scottish Parliament. The summary of research which follows outlines how new possibilities for e-democracy are taking shape as a result of the development and use of e-petitioner.

### 5.2    Summary of research

#### 5.2.1    Conclusions: Summary of developments in relation to e-petitioner

Three new e-petitions were created and hosted by the ITC during the time-scale of the research.  The ITC followed the guidelines produced by the PPC and put in place a broad framework of support for sponsors in raising, hosting and submitting on-line petitions. new alliances were forged with civic, professional and community organisations, to broaden knowledge of e-petitioner and increase citizen use of the electronic system. Collaborations with the ITC were also broadened in developing a brief detailing each e-petition, and helping to re-formulate the sections of the Guidelines for Submission of Public Petitions relating to e-petitioning.

#### 5.2.2    Conclusions: Interviews

Interviews were arranged with the Convener of the PPC and the Clerk to the PPC to assess their views on e-petitioner. These interviewees indicated that the Parliament were happy to liase with the ITC is the on-going development of e-petitioner. Advantages of an electronic petitioning system over traditional petitioning had been noted.  In particular, ability to add a

comment to an e-petition page was highlighted as providing scope for future development. PPC officials also believed the brief which had been devised by the ITC provided a useful summary of each e-petition and was helpful in supporting the work of the PPC. The ITC's collaborations and links with civic and professional bodies was considered very beneficial in informing people and improving the mode of communication supporting the democratic process.

E-petition sponsors indicated that they viewed e-petitioner as a useful tool in influencing politicians about issues they considered important. Sponsors generally felt e-petitioner was a useful tool complimenting more traditional methods of petitioning. Indeed the ability to access at a convenient time and reach wider sections of society alongside the slower more deliberative processes made possible by e-petitioner were considered inherently more democratic. Marketing and publicity were highlighted as key areas for consideration. Sponsors, in other words, would have to consider a range of different ways of promoting their petition to highlight its existence and garner public participation. While the ITC could produce broad guidelines, it was likely that each e-petition sponsor would have different means of publicity at their disposal and would have to think innovatively and creatively about how each e-petition could best be promoted during the time it was live on the internet. In making a number of suggestions, e-petition sponsors highlighted the need for organisations and people to develop a new culture of use and establish new routines in organising e-petitions.

### 5.2.3    Conclusions: Direct observations

Participant observations and semi-structured conversational interviews were arranged and carried out with e-petition users in a variety of different public access locations in order to assess citizen perceptions of e-petitioner. It is interesting to note that none of those interviewed had been aware of e-petitioner or the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament prior to the research. Observations were also designed to assess what actors did with e-petitioner. Indications are that all participants - who belonged to a broad range of age categories - had acquired the technical and communicative skills to navigate and sign an e-petition successfully. However, observations also highlighted frequent hesitation in providing addresses on-line, at least until reference to the disclaimer on the site pointed out that addresses would not be used for any other purpose without the express permission of the signatory. Observations also showed many signatories did not access all the pages on the e-petitioner site. Many remained unaware of the separate sponsor's background pages, information about why the e-petition was raised, and the comments pages. Re-designing the e-petitioner web-pages with these observations in mind can help address this problem.

Conversations with signatories were arranged to broaden understanding about what users felt about e-petitioner. Respondents felt that the e-petitioner site was easy to understand and navigate, however, enhancing the visual design would improve the 'look' of the site. Generally speaking respondents found e-petitioning easier and more efficient than traditional petitioning, however, it was suggested the comments page should be made more apparent. Ability to comment was viewed as an important democratic opportunity, however, it was suggested that the web-site needs to be re-designed to make ability to comment more prominent. Ability to 'deliberate' on issues in a self-regulated timescale was considered an important advantage. The accessibility, openness and transparency of e-petitioner was highlighted and welcomed. Respondents believed they were now more generally aware of the possibilities of e-democracy after using e-petitioner.

The need was identified for a similar e-democracy system to operate locally to deal with local issues, and the suggestion is that local development of e-petitioner would be a good next step in development. Another insight suggests need to acknowledge and deal with social involvement deficit. Increasingly more people are able to access ICT and gain new technological skills. However, since people do not share a collective sense of democratic purpose, positive steps could be taken to generate more knowledge about e-democracy and increase sensitivity to new opportunities for interaction made possible by ICT designed specifically to support democracy.

*5.2.4    Conclusions: Evaluation questionnaire*

All signatories were given opportunity to read and complete an on-line evaluation questionnaire. Data indicates that those who signed an e-petition and went on to complete the questionnaire felt confident in using electronic technology and did not require or want help to do so. It is possible to conclude from this data that different petitions raised by different sponsors can generate different public use patterns, as the increased number of signatories from community centres signing the digital inclusion petition indicates. It is also possible to conclude that respondents believed ICT designed to support democracy was both necessary and effective.

Findings indicate considerable support for the e-petitioning system designed and administered by the ITC, with signatories applauding various advantages, in particular the opportunity to be included in what was viewed as more democratic interaction. There was, however, some marked concern that security and confidentiality may yet be problematic. Interesting data was gathered indicating how signatories found out about e-petitioner. This is likely to prove very useful in relaying best practice to sponsors about to promote and publicise new e-petitions. The evaluation questionnaire also provided opportunity for signatories to make suggestions

for improving the look and operation of e-petitioner, and these comments will be closely scrutinised and taken into consideration when re-designing the system.

## 5.3    The Way Forward

The research into e-petitioner outlined in this report has illustrated some of the benefits and limitations of e-democracy.  In particular, the research has highlighted scope for developing e-petitioner locally.  Further research needs to be directed to clarifying the role of e-petitioner locally, and working with other partners, ensure that new possibilities for local development is closely scrutinised.

Close attention is drawn to the character of e-democracy at the local level.  While many community networks and other community-based organisations now provide access to ICT and operate as learning centres to promote skills for the information age, there has been very little involvement so far of local people in planning, designing and participating in democratic issues using ICT. It is likely that if people are not included at planning and design stages, they are less likely to participate later when they are suddenly expected to do so.

But what do local people actually want? No structured consultations so far have been carried out with local people to establish what they want, specifically to gauge what type of issues they would want to be involved in, the extent to which they would want to participate in local, regional, national and global issues, and how they could contribute democratically to those issues at the local community level using new ICT.  Potential is highlighted for action research (i.e. solving concrete problems in real situations) using electronic consultation processes and tools in real and virtual environments to focus on the ideas and opinions of ordinary people not normally engaged in the political process. An action research project is required to work with local people to assess the democratic requirements of a cross-section of communities, and to enable appropriate design and development of ICT supported democratic community systems.

New insights from this study highlight need to address social involvement deficit – the focus here is on e-democratisation, i.e. knowledge of the use of ICT to enhance processes of democracy already assumed to be in place, in ways that "increase the political power of those whose role in key political processes is usually minimised"(Hacker and Todino, 1996, p.72). There is a need to stimulate cultural change by disseminating information, encouraging community involvement, and illustrating how individual people and groups at the local level might use electronic tools in democratic ways in their community. Specifically, a series of workshops could be created in different geographic communities to demonstrate the use of new technological tools to increase sensitivity and support the democratic process.

Workshops could take place in local community networks, learning centres and in education/schools based projects to include different groups of people in civic action using ICT, also entitling them to become involved in the assessment and on-going design of new tools designed to support democracy.

A variation on this theme could be the creation of locally based 'insight' or 'scenario workshops,' designed specifically to facilitate dialogue between representatives of different groups: e.g. local and regional policy-makers, locally based businesses, voluntary sector groups and local residents. Hypothetical problems could be posed and several different technological and non-technological solutions offered, and the task of each group would be to discuss the problem posed and the merits of different solutions before reaching agreement on the most suitable resolution.  The social research agenda here would be to monitor levels of participation and interaction, observe levels of harmony and disharmony, evaluate scope for action, and assess different peoples reactions to what is expected of them in a democratic participation sense.

In conclusion this study has highlighted a large number of comments and recommendations to take electronic democracy forward.

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## 7   <u>APPENDICES</u>

### 7.1 Appendix 1: Conference and publication material

Table 7 below lists the conference and publication material referring to e-petitioner and produced during the lifetime of the study, while Table 8 details the proposals submitted to conferences to report on e-petitioner.

| Table 7 Conference and Publication Material | |
|---|---|
| Title | Comments |
| Malina, A. & Macintosh, A. December, 2000. 'Teledemocracy: Energising the [new] public sphere(s), civil society and citizen action.' Paper presented to New Media New Politics: An interdisciplinary conference, held at St. Ann's College, Oxford. | Published on ITC web site: www.teledemocracy.org |
| Malina, A. & Macintosh, A. (originally scheduled for 9-11th April, 2001, now postponed until September 15-18th 2001). 'Towards electronic democracy in Scotland: The International Teledemocracy Centre in Edinburgh and the design of e-petitioning.' Paper accepted for presentation at the First International Conference on Human Aspects of the Information Society, to be held at University of Newcastle. | Publication scheduled |
| Macintosh, A., Davenport, E., Malina, A. & Whyte, A. Technology to support participatory democracy. In Grönlund, Åke (2001). (ed). Electronic Government: Design, applications and management. Sweden (in print). | Publication in print |

| Table 8 Papers submitted to International Conferences | |
|---|---|
| Title | Comments |
| Macintosh, A., Malina, A., & Whyte, A. September 2001. 'Designing e-democracy in Scotland.' Proposal for paper to the Euricom Colloquium 'E-Networks: Arenas for Democratic Engagement', to be held in Piran, Slovenia. | Conference paper accepted for presentation. |
| Beddie, L., Macintosh, A., & Malina, A. 4.-5. October, 2001. 'E-democracy and the Scottish Parliament'. 4.-5. October, 2001. Proposal for paper to IFIP conference, for Minitrack on E-Commerce, E-Business, E-Government, to be held in Zurich, Switzerland, | Workshop paper. |

**7.2    Appendix 2. Scottish Parliament: Devolved and reserved matters**

| The Scottish Parliament: Devolved and Reserved Matters | |
|---|---|
| Devolved Matters | Reserved Matters |
| Health | Constitutional Matters |
| Education and training | UK Foreign Policy |
| Local government | UK defence and national security |
| Social Work | Fiscal, Economic and Monetary System |
| Housing | Immigration and nationality |
| Planning | Energy: electricity, coal gas and nuclear energy |
| Tourism, Economic development and Financial assistance to industry | Common Markets |
| Some aspects of transport, including the Scottish road network, bus policy and ports and harbours | Trade and industry, including competition and customer protection |
| Law and home affairs, including most aspects of criminal and civil law, the prosecution system and the courts | Some aspects of transport, including railways, transport safety and regulation |
| | Employment Legislation |
| The Police and Fire services | Social Security |
| Environment | Gambling and the National Lottery |
| Natural and built heritage | Data protection |
| Agriculture, forestry and fishing | Abortion, human fertilisation and embryology, genetics, xenotransplantation and vivisection |
| Sport and the arts | |
| Statistics, public registers and records | Equal opportunities |

**Source: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/cttee/petit99-00/pg-an-b.htm/ Consulted 30.01.01**

**7.3    Appendix 3: Cubie Brief to Public petitions Committee**

# ITC International Teledemocracy Centre

## E-petition Brief for
## Public Petitions Committee Meeting
## 21st November, 2000

## 1. E-petition summary details

### 1.1. Title:
Support the Cubie proposals on tackling student hardship in Scotland.

### 1.2. Petitioners:
Two sponsors were involved in raising the e-petition.  The principle petitioner was

        Alan Melville, President.
        Napier Students Association (NSA)
        12 Merchiston Place, Edinburgh EH10 4NR
        Tel: +44 131 229 8791; Fax +44 131 228 3462

The petition was also supported by:

        Mandy Telford, President.
        National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland,
        29 Forth Street, Edinburgh EH1 3LE
        Tel. +44 131 556 6598; Fax. +44 131 557 5679

### 1.3. Dates e-petition opened and closed:
The e-petition was raised on19th May, 2000, and was closed on 31st October, 2000 after running for a period of four and a half months.

### 1.4. Statistical overview of signatures:
A total of 545 supporters signed the e-petition.  455 were from Scotland, 62 England, 4 N. Ireland, 7 Ireland, 5 Wales, 8 rest of Europe, 1 US, 2 Canada, and 1 from Australia.  From looking at the postcodes provided, the majority of supporters were from an EH postcode (299).  Given that the petition was initiated by Edinburgh based students this is not surprising. 67 were from the Aberdeen  area, 38 from the Fife and Dundee areas, and 22 from Glasgow and Paisley areas.

### 1.5. Validity of signatures:
554 names and addresses were entered into the petition database; of these only 9 were duplicates, making the number of signatures to the petition 545.  The e-petitioner assigns each name with a confidence factor. The confidence factor is based on how well the name has passed a number of validity checks that are currently available in the system.  A confidence factor of 7 implies that the name has "passed" all the automatic checks.  283 names had a confidence rating of 7.  237 names had a confidence rating of 6 due to the fact that the user had not provided an email address.  Given that not everyone has an email address this appears reasonable.  25 had a confidence rating of 5 due to the fact that the user did not provide an email address and the same internet provider address had been used more than five times previously.  Again, given that this is a student petition, you would expect that a number of students would be signing from the same location.  Therefore these names should be considered acceptable.  9 names had a confidence rating of 4.  These were the duplicate names and addresses.

## 2. Full e-petition text

The full petition text for this e-petition is as follows:
> "We believe that the Cubie Proposals offer a way forward for the funding of Higher Education in Scotland, and contribute to the welfare of students.
> Furthermore, we believe:
> - Higher and Further Education is central to the expansion of a high knowledge, high skill and value modern economy.
> - Higher and Further Education should be accessible to all who would benefit from it by adding value to themselves and to society.
> - No-one should be denied access to a university education because they are
>
>   financially disadvantaged.
>
> The 1999 Cubie Report from the Independent Inquiry into Higher Education in Scotland offers the practical yet visionary, balanced, and student-supportive proposals for the future funding of Scottish Higher Education and Student Financial Support, to promote access into Higher Education and provide reasonable levels of support to students while engaged on a course of study. In particular, the abolition of up-front tuition fees and the reintroduction of bursaries to support some of the maintenance needs of students from the poorest economic backgrounds, is welcomed.
> We, the under-signed, call upon the Executive of the Scottish Parliament to implement the Cubie Report in its entirety, before the start of the academic year in September 2000."

## 3. Contributing background information from e-petition sponsors

Since the Independent Inquiry into Student Finance, under Mr Andrew Cubie, was commissioned in the summer of 1999, NSA have worked to ensure that students at Napier University were given some opportunity to contribute to the inquiry. Subsequently Napier Student's Association submitted a detailed document illustrating their views. Later, NSA invited the Inquiry to attend a hearing at which Napier students gave anecdotal evidence, discussing the issues facing education in Scotland. The decision by the Scottish Executive not to implement the full 52 points of the report was met with criticism by the student body, and NSA raised a paper-based petition, later submitted to Robin Harper MSP and John McAllion MSP in January 2000. While a re-assessed report has been produced, hope remains that the full implementation of the report can yet be achieved.

## 4. Synopsis of comments to the site

Democratic participation is considered important and broadened not only by incorporating a mechanism for users to add their support for the petition but also to comment on it - negatively or positively. While the design is yet in the early stages of development, there were fourteen comments on the issue of student hardship. To summarise, commentators generally felt the Cubie Report was the best overall solution to the problem of student hardship, however, just over a third were more supportive of the concept of completely free education paid for by government. Full comments available.

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**NB: The above data was produced by the International Teledemocracy Centre; and has been agreed by the petition sponsor.**
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**7.4    Appendix 4: WDM Brief to Public Petitions Committee**

# International Teledemocracy Centre

**WDM
E-petition Brief for
Public Petitions Committee Meeting
19th December, 2000**

## 1. E-Petition summary details

**1.1. Title:**
WTO Constraints on Scottish Parliament Health Policy

**1.2. Petitioners:**
The principle petitioner is:

> John Watson
> World Development Movement (WDM) Scotland
> 14 Forth Street
> Edinburgh, EH1 3LH
> 0131 478 7894 (tel)
> 0131 556 8577 (fax)

**1.3. Dates e-petition opened and closed:**
The e-petition was raised on 1st November 2000 and closed on 27th November 2000, after running for a period of approximately three weeks.

**1.4. Statistical overview of signatures:**
A total of 210 supporters signed the e-petition.  184 were from Scotland, 20 from England, 3 from Wales, 2 from N. Ireland, and 1 from Ecuador.  From looking at the postcodes, it is possible to determine that 70 supporters were from the Edinburgh area, 52 from Glasgow and Paisley areas, 30 from Aberdeen area, 8 from the Ayrshire area, 8 from Perthshire area, 5 from Dundee area, 5 from Fife area, 4 from Highlands and Islands area, 1 from Falkirk area, and 1 from the Borders area.

**1.5. Validity of signatures:**
216 names and addresses were entered into the petition database.  Of these only 5 were duplicates and 1 was invalid, making the number of signatures to the petition 210.
The e-petitioner assigns each name with a confidence factor.  The confidence factor is based on how well the name has passed a number of validity checks that are currently available in the system.  A confidence factor of 7 implies that the name has "passed" all the automatic checks.  112 names had a confidence rating of 7.  87 had a confidence rating of 6 due to the fact that the user had not provided an email address.  Given that not everyone has an email address this appears reasonable.  11 had a confidence rating of 5 due to the fact that the user did not provide an email address and the same internet provider address had been used more than five times previously.  A likely explanation is that these supporters signed the petition from the same location.  6 names had a confidence rating of 4.  These were the duplicate names and addresses and 1 invalid name

## 2. Full E-Petition Text

We the undersigned note that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is pushing for greater liberalisation of trade in services and that the outcome will be binding on the Scottish Parliament. We are concerned at how liberalisation (moves towards the free market) will impact upon our health service in particular.
While trade negotiations are governed by Westminster, the Scottish Parliament remains free to discuss any issue it deems relevant. It is essential that the Parliament makes informed decisions upon devolved matters, and so MSPs must be aware of new limits set by external bodies.
We further note that 53 MSPs have signed a Motion calling for an open discussion of these implications (and that this is a majority of those MSPs eligible to sign such Motions).
We therefore call upon the Health and Community Care Committee of the Parliament to examine the possible implications for health policy in Scotland and to relay their findings to the Executive, the Parliament and to the people of Scotland.

## 3. Contributing background information from e-petition sponsors

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is pushing for greater liberalisation of trade in services. The WTO is the only intergovernmental body which can implement trade laws which are legally binding upon member states.
WDM are concerned at how moves towards liberalisation within services will impact upon health provision in Scotland. We therefore call upon the Health and Community Care Committee of the Scottish Parliament to examine the implications for health provision in Scotland and to relay their findings to the Executive, the Parliament and to the people of Scotland.
WDM Scotland has already implemented a parliamentary Motion calling for an open discussion of the implications of liberalisation within the health sector. 53 MSPs have signed this Motion - this is a majority of those MSPs eligible to sign such Motions.

## 4. Synopsis of comments to the site

Two comments were made to the site. The first suggested that " The World Trade Organisation (WTO) has a mandate to push for greater liberalisation of trade in services. The trade laws decreed by the WTO are legally binding upon the parliament's of member states. The petition calls for a discussion of how such a free market within services will impact upon health care in Scotland." The second view argued that "The use of the word 'liberalisation' sounds too friendly and non-threatening. Would it not be more apt to use the 19th century term `laissez faire' for the free flow of trade without concern for social responsibility? When the WTO push for `laissez faire' in goods or services without regard for the social consequences- they are actually hurting their own future potential consumers- it seems tantamount to their `killing the goose that would lay them a golden egg' one day so it is also short sighted from the WTO's own perspective. In reality the WTO are in effect supporting a 21st century form of `neo-corn laws' based on power without responsibility. Liberalisation sounds too benign - better use `laissez faire' which has the needed note of caution about it for the MSP's to heed."

> NB: The above data was collated by the International Teledemocracy Centre; and has been agreed by the petition sponsor.

### 7.5    Appendix 5: Copies of e-petitioner on-line evaluation questionnaires

Copies of old and new on-line evaluation questionnaires may be found overleaf