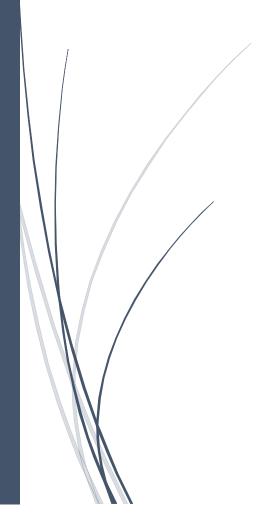# INOU Submission to National Digital Strategy

Consultation Process 2018

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Introduction

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to Ireland's new National Digital Strategy and in our submission we use the questions contained in the on-line questionnaire.

"The INOU is a federation of unemployed people, unemployed centres, unemployed groups, community organisations and Trade Unions. The INOU represents and defends the rights and interests of those who want decent employment and cannot obtain it. We promote and campaign for policies to achieve full employment for all. We also campaign for an acceptable standard of living for unemployed people and their dependents. The INOU is an anti-sectarian, anti-racist, non-party political organisation which promotes equality of opportunity within society." (INOU Mission Statement)

The organisation has over 200 affiliated organisations and individual members. We work at the local and national level on issues affecting unemployed people through the provision of training and welfare rights information services; analysis of Government policies and related advocacy work; and working with a wide range of other organisations on issues of common concern.

2. **What are the most important areas the Strategy should focus on? (please pick a maximum of three)**
    - ☐ Digital Infrastructure
    - ☐ Trust, Security and Privacy
    - ☒ Inclusion and Wellbeing
    - ☒ Digital Public Services
    - ☐ Data Sharing
    - ☐ Innovation and Growth
    - ☒ Labour Market Changes
    - ☒ Education and Skills
    - Other (please specify)

3. **What are the main opportunities and challenges of digital transformation for Ireland?**

The INOU is aware that many will welcome the increased digitalisation of public services as it will facilitate them to engage with them more on their own terms, and address issues that can arise through face-to-face engagement. In particular, it could facilitate people for whom public transport is an issue, because of a lack of services or a lack of accessible services, people for whom the cost of private transport is prohibitive. However, the organisation is keenly aware that for others the increased digitalisation of services will create difficulties. In particular for people who like to have and need someone to talk through what is available, what they need to do to

access it, what they need to do if their personal or family circumstances change. People for whom increased digitalisation is meaningless as they do not have the equipment or infrastructure to avail of on-line services; jobs or enterprise opportunities.

With increased digitalisation each challenge is an opportunity and vice versa. So, for people who face barriers in the labour market because, for example, of their age, gender, ethnicity, class, or disability, on-line engagement with potential employers or clients, if pursuing a self-employment option, could facilitate the building of relationships and opportunities before assumptions are made about people because of who they are, where they are from or what they may have. However, research has shown that increased access to broadband only produces a positive impact for business if a significant number of people living in that area have achieved third level education. This finding implies that increased digitalisation is more likely to exacerbate existing inequalities rather than address them. This is an issue the National Digital Strategy must seek to address and spell out how it will do so.

The INOU is also concerned that the changing nature of work, in particular digitalisation, will have a detrimental effect on people more distant from the labour market, and reduce their capacity to secure and maintain economic independence. To that end it will be critically important to map out the potential impacts and ascertain how best to address these developments so that they do not exacerbate socio-economic exclusion. In particular, how could digital on-line learning facilitate people to re-skill to be able to avail of emerging and changing job opportunities, and what resources would be required to make this a reality.

4. Is there anything stopping you as a citizen from using more digital technology in any aspect of your life?

This question will be answered from the perspective of the INOU's work and concerns raised with the organisation on this issue. Amongst the concerns raised are lack of access to broadband, in particular of a quality that would support the development of work and learning opportunities, especially in more isolated areas. A lack of confidence in engaging with the State on-line, compounded by literacy and language needs. The over complexity of some of the State's digital processes has been questioned. The question of how people can communicate and engage with the system in more public spaces needs to be addressed: there is a role for the local Post Office, Library, and community group. There is an underlining assumption that everyone has a smart phone or personal device that will allow them to engage with state and other services more freely. The system must also plan for when this access is not available, either because it has broken down or because it is not feasible to provide it.

5. What supports do communities and businesses need to benefit fully from the use of digital technology?

The roll-out of broadband that will facilitate access to the full range of services, both public and private, including learning and employment opportunities. The provision of resources to facilitate local based access points, including the necessary devices, for people who do not have the wherewithal to provide for themselves, be that financial or technical. The design of user friendly systems, services and supports that facilitate people to use digital platforms and services to participate fully in society and the economy. The development of policies, procedures and practices that ensure that people can communicate and participate digitally safely and securely. In particular to ensure that peoples information will be not used inappropriately and unknowingly to them, GDPR will address some of these concerns, but it has also added to the complexity of some of the processes of engagement.

6. What do you see as the main benefits and barriers to using online Government services?

Amongst the main benefits to using online Government services are that they are open 24/7 and people can use them in their own time, when they are able and available to do so. People may not need to travel to Government offices and join a queue, which saves time, transport and possibly childcare costs. Users are aware of the information that is required, inputted and maintained as they have played a more active part in the administration of the service. Barriers include lack of access to the wherewithal to use such services, be it literacy, language, lack of appropriate personal device, lack of broadband. Also some people like to be able to talk to someone about the service, course, job, whatever it is that they are trying to access, and availability of on-line services is not an attractive nor necessarily an appropriate method of engagement for all.

7. If you have any additional thoughts or comments, please include them here.

In the Programme for a Partnership Government (PPG) the need to bridge the rural and urban digital divide was noted. It states that *"As part of the Digital Strategy, we will introduce new technology bringing remote learning into classrooms, ensuring all students have access to a wider range of subject choices and consistent quality education."* It is critically important that learning is seen as wider than the classroom, a focus that is particularly relevant to the adult learner who amongst other things maybe trying to enhance their digital literacy and skills.

As noted earlier increased digitalisation has the wherewithal to exacerbate existing inequalities, and to that end the new National Digital Strategy must spell out how it will address this reality. People whose only source of income is their welfare payment may not have additional money to pay for internet in their homes, some are challenged by these new formats, and some have never accessed on-line services. There is a danger that isolated people are going to get lost in

these new systems and if the cannot access community based information supports they may be unaware of their entitlements or the claiming process.

The NDS must also spell out how it will enhance the inclusion elements of the PPG including SICAP; the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion; fostering greater social inclusion and empowering the LGBT community; Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion including the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy and the National Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The INOU notes that the Digital Skills for Citizens Initiative (replacement for Benefit 4) could potentially be very useful in tackling the digital skills deficit, but some of the very people the initiative is aimed at live in rural areas where there's very poor or non-existent broadband so there's a real practical difficulty in running these training programmes. The inclusive implementation of the National Broadband plan will be critical to addressing this issue.

The work of the Digital Strategy Interdepartmental Group to ensure a comprehensive whole-of-Government approach to the development of this strategy is to be welcomed and will be key in ensuring that it is inclusive and equitable.