

The Bristol Declaration

Members of the Information Society Forum, together with participants at infoCity @ Bristol '98, assert that the principles of accessibility, affordability, cultural diversity, empowerment, equality, freedom of expression, open democracy, public service and especially freedom of information, must be at the heart of development and promotion of the Information Society.

The key to active citizenship is ACCESS - regardless of age, ability, gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, social status, income, and religious or political beliefs - to the information each person considers is needed to participate fully in society, and to opportunities to express freely ideas and opinions.

For information and communications technologies (ICT) to play an effective role in reducing the democratic deficit and creating an open, informed and informing society, everyone has to have the opportunity to share in the benefits through:

- access to awareness of the potential of the technology;
- access to appropriate training in its use;
- affordable access to the technology;
- access to the decision-making process about the ways in which the technology is applied;
- access by individuals to personal information held about themselves;
- access to systems of redress if such information is inaccurate or is used improperly.

To facilitate democratic participation:

- local and national administrations need to devise and implement coherent strategies, incorporating public consultation, to create a user-friendly infrastructure for the Information Society and, in particular, frameworks for inter-agency co-operation to simplify and improve access to public services;
- educational institutions need to develop accessible systems of service delivery which encourage everyone to make use of opportunities to gain skills and continue education throughout their lives;
- hardware and software manufacturers and information service suppliers must be encouraged to develop comprehensive, harmonised systems that are genuinely accessible by adopting design-for-all policies through the active participation of user groups. Recognising that the market approach cannot of itself guarantee social inclusion, and that many of the most innovative information and communications products come from small companies, the production and distribution of harmonised design guidelines would assist in combating some forms of social exclusion.

With the convergence of ICT it is vital that coherent and harmonised codes of ethical conduct be established, alongside provisions for copyright and data protection and protocols and technical means of assuring the reliability of information reaching the Internet.

These values and aspirations, which echo those outlined in the EC Report People First, The Next Steps (1997), should rank alongside the final principle of the Bonn Ministerial Conference Declaration (July 1997) that 'opportunities for becoming computer literate should be available to people of all ages and from across the social spectrum', and the principle of lifelong learning described in the ISF Newark Declaration (May 1998) that 'education and training is essential for the use of global information networks'.

Bristol, Saturday 12 September 1998.