This document provides a summary of the key points and conclusions emerging from the 4th Session of the Working Group on "Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections", held 27-28 April 2000.

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1. The fourth meeting of the Working Group on “Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections” met on 27 and 28 April 2000 to review first results of the questionnaire “Using Information Technology to Strengthen Government-Citizen Connections”, determine the final outputs to be delivered by end 2000 and develop strategic directions for future work on Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections, with reference to the Mandate and the new PUMA work programme for 2001-2002. Despite significant delays engendered by changes of key staff within the Secretariat and late receipt of responses to the questionnaire, the meeting was held within the scope of the original time frame agreed at the third Working Group (WG) meeting of 29 and 30 November 1999.

2. The meeting included presentations by the Secretariat, a tour de table of participating countries, presentations by invited speakers and free discussion. The main conclusions to be reached were as follows:

- **Revise objective of developing IT indicators**: The WG instructed the PUMA Secretariat to integrate the data on IT use into the final report and to co-ordinate with and provide input to work on indicators underway in other OECD directorates, notably the Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry (DSTI);

- **Launch selected case studies**: The WG expressed their interest and appreciation of country case studies illustrating concrete instances of information, consultation and active participation. A review of case studies completed in 1999, revealed that the majority focused on policy implementation. Given current budget constraints, the WG agreed that the selection of any additional case studies for the year 2000 would be made on the basis of their strong focus on the stages of policy making and policy evaluation;

- **Publish final report and policy brief**: The WG agreed that the current phase of the activity should be concluded at the end of 2000, with the publication of a final report in early 2001 setting out the main elements of the information gathered through the questionnaires and case studies. This would, in turn, provide the basis for a policy brief destined for national policy-makers.

**Survey on Using Information Technology (IT) to Strengthen Government-Citizen Connections**

3. Although very few responses had been received by the original deadline (20 January 2000), twenty-two Member countries had responded to the IT questionnaire by the time of the meeting. Several countries that had been unable to respond by the deadline, but which had undertaken to complete the questionnaire proposed to submit written responses shortly thereafter. If at all possible, these responses should reach the Secretariat by 15 July 2000.

4. Many participants reported that while data collection for the questionnaire had been a challenge, given the lack of centralised information on use of IT by government, it had proved to be a highly instructive exercise. The Working Group also discussed the limitations of the questionnaire which emerged during the data collection phase, including problems of: definition (for example, of "connectedness"), scope (with the collection of data on access to Internet by public servants, but not citizens) and focus (limited to hardware rather than a measure of public servants' interaction with citizens).
5. Many of the same difficulties in data collection were faced by the UNESCO-CONMET "On-line Governance Survey" which is now finalising its report on the basis of questionnaire responses from over 60 countries world-wide. Joshua Zammit gave a brief presentation of the project’s model website and an update on the activity.

6. As evidenced by the lively tour de table, many initiatives to improve the use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in connecting government to its citizens are currently underway in OECD member countries. Australia reported on its efforts to use new ICTs to reach rural areas, a policy concern shared by Greece with regard to its island communities. Several countries had made improved access by citizens (through schools, libraries, retirement homes etc.) a top priority, including Canada, Italy and Switzerland. All countries have now acquired experience in providing information on-line including Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Netherlands, Poland. Many countries reported significant efforts to put administrative procedures and services on-line, including France, Ireland and Spain, while Korea underlined the impact such measures may have on increasing transparency as well as eliminating arbitrary decisions and corruption in the public administration. Hungary reported on the steps taken to develop the legislative framework for on-line government (including, authentication and electronic signatures). The UK’s experience in health services reflected the concern to integrate new and traditional ICTs in consultation and service delivery (e.g. telephone services). The use of ICTs in on-line public consultation for policy-making represented a new frontier for all countries. Early experience by Denmark, Finland and Norway indicated that the main challenges lay in the organisational rather than technological features of consultation exercises (e.g. ensuring adequate levels of participation by a wide range of citizens, integrating feedback received into the decision-making process).

7. The main issues identified by the Secretariat’s preliminary analysis of the questionnaire responses and raised during country presentations, were:

- the rapid pace of change in new information and communication technologies (ICTs) (e.g. the use of WAP on mobile phones) and the ability of governments to incorporate and adapt to them;
- the growing use of Internet in providing information to the public and its role in enhancing access to information, promoting greater government transparency and reducing corruption;
- progress in meeting the challenges in the development of on-line service delivery (e.g. authentication, data security), its implications for government (e.g. the need for greater co-ordination among levels of government) and impact on traditional administrative structures and procedures (e.g. requirement for greater inter-agency co-ordination);
- initial experience with on-line consultation, its potential in engaging citizens (e.g. in rural communities), its limitations (e.g. low levels of access, willingness of citizens to participate and the need to combine the use of new technologies with traditional measures for consultation and participation in policy-making;
- need for policy measures to address an emerging "digital divide" through investment in infrastructure, training and lower telecommunications costs;
- the limited capacity for evaluation of efforts to improve government-citizen connections common to all OECD Member countries and the need to develop flexible systems for evaluation capable of keeping pace with developments in the field of ICTs.

8. An important finding to emerge from the Working Group’s discussion of the questionnaire results, was the significant investment needed to collect sufficiently high quality and comparable data on which to base the elaboration of indicators on government use of ICTs in strengthening connections with citizens. A short briefing by John Dryden (Head of Information, Computer and Communications Policy Division, DSTI) on the activities of the Working Party on Indicators for the Information Society (WPIIS)
in developing general indicators for economy-wide ICT use (in industry, households, government) confirmed the level of investment required. The Working Group therefore agreed to revise its original objective of developing IT indicators, instructing the PUMA Secretariat to co-ordinate with and provide input to work on indicators underway in other OECD directorates, notably DSTI.

Future work and proposed time frame

9. A session of the meeting was dedicated to the review of both process and products, in order to obtain the views of Working Group members on completion of the first phase of work (1999-2000) and guidelines for the next in line with the PUMA Work Programme for 2001-2002. The main conclusions reached were as follows:

- **Process**: it was agreed to make the results of the activity available on the PUMA website and to seek feedback from a wider public by means of an electronic discussion group. A separate electronic discussion group with restricted access would be established to facilitate exchanges between Working Group members and discussion of draft reports.

- **Products (1999-2000)**: it was agreed that the main findings of the two questionnaires and set of case studies would be presented in the form of a Final Report and a Policy Brief (hard copy and on-line). The individual country case studies would also be published (on-line only). The country responses to the two questionnaires would be made available to members of the Working Group and all OECD Member countries as an on-line database equipped with a search function and -amenable to periodic up-dating of information.

- **Future work (2001-2002)**: it was agreed that follow-up to the "Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections" activity would aim to capitalise upon the extensive empirical data collected during the first phase of the activity with the development of concise, practical documents and working instruments (e.g. concept paper and inventory of tools for citizen consultation and participation)

10. The following time frame was adopted by the Working Group:

- **May - October 2000**: definition and launch of year 2000 case studies; establishment of two electronic discussion networks (public and restricted access for members of the Working Group); circulation for comment of draft index for Final Report; drafting of Final Report and Policy Brief;

- **9 -10 November 2000**: Working Group meeting to review draft Final Report;

**4ème Session du Groupe de travail sur le renforcement des relations entre les administrations et les citoyens /**
**4 th Session of the Working Group on Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections**

**L’UTILISATION DES NOUVELLES TECHNOLOGIES DE L’INFORMATION ET DE LA COMMUNICATION (NTIC) PAR LES ADMINISTRATIONS**

**GOVERNMENT USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES (IT)**

Réunion des 27-28 avril 2000
Meeting of 27-28 April 2000
OCDE/OECD, Paris

**Liste des participants / List of participants**

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