

# Part 4

## Central policy on e-government issues

4.1 Since 1999 the UK's policy-making for e-government has strengthened considerably. In comparative terms, the UK now commits more resources centrally for promoting the development of electronic public services than other similar countries, and has a developed set of central institutions. We consider the overall role and set-up of the Office of e-Envoy, its cross-government facilities and projects, and its targets regime, in the light of data on how central government Web services have developed.

### The Office of e-Envoy

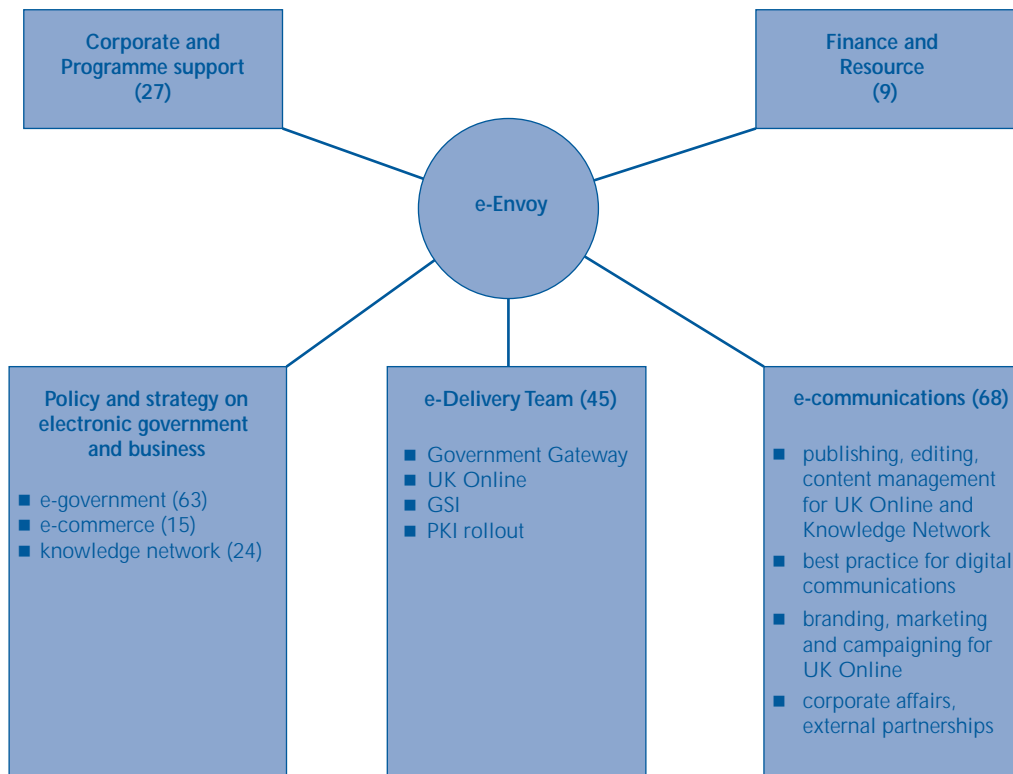
4.2 The Cabinet Office has overall responsibility for coordinating government modernisation, including government services on the Web. Until autumn 1999 its e-government role was exercised by the Central Information Technology Unit (CITU). Then the Office of the e-Envoy (OeE) was set up to play the lead role in the government's wider drive to 'get the UK on-line', and in September 2000 CITU was absorbed into OeE. The Government Secure Intranet (GSI), originally developed by CITU, is now managed by OeE. Following the separate creation of the Office of Government Commerce, OeE also took over some responsibilities of the former CCTA, the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency. CCTA maintained the first UK government finder Web site at '[www.open.gov.uk](http://www.open.gov.uk)' until the summer of 2001. It also used to host many central government web sites (an activity scheduled to end in March 2002).

4.3 OeE has three core policy objectives (set out in detail at its [www.e-envoy.gov.uk](http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk) site):

- to make the UK the best environment in the world for e-commerce by 2002;
- to ensure that everyone who wants it has access to the Internet by 2005; and
- to achieve the target for electronic service delivery, by making all government services available electronically by 2005.

4.4 The Office is headed up by the e-Envoy himself, who reports direct to the Prime Minister, although OeE also works with the e-Minister located in the Department of Trade and Industry. The Office is housed in a modern building in Victoria and grew rapidly to nearly 250 staff by October 2001 (including civil servants and longer-term contract personnel). **Figure 17 overleaf** shows the internal organisation of the office and the staff numbers working in each section. Nearly half of OeE staff work on central policy for electronic government and business, covering e-government (including security issues), e-commerce, and the Knowledge Network (a computerised system for sharing and delivering on-line government briefings and statistics among government departments and agencies). A further large group of staff work on e-communications, with responsibility for publishing on the new government portal Web site called UK Online and for the 'Knowledge Network', external communications (including marketing and branding) and helping departments improve existing online communications. The e-Delivery Team (currently headed up by a contractor) now has full responsibility for the implementation of all central infrastructure projects and initiatives including UK Online, and an authentication system known as the Government Gateway (described below). The e-Delivery Team works with an additional 95 staff from SEMA and Cable and Wireless which support the Government Gateway, originally built by Microsoft, and (until November 2001) with an average of 15 staff from Syntegra (BT's ICT and professional services business) working on UK Online. The Team does not manage the take-up of individual electronic services or integration with departments' or agencies' back-end legacy systems, both of which remain the responsibility of departments. The distribution of staff is shown in Figure 19. Overall 119 staff (24 on the Knowledge Network, 45 on electronic delivery and 50 on e-communications) are working directly on the implementation of specific services. Some OeE officials suggested to us that the office would not (or should not) exist beyond 2005, when its e-government targets have been achieved and appropriate policy and standards have been set in place. Officially the Office's role will be reviewed when the e-agenda is firmly embedded in the work of every part of government.

## 17 Organisation Chart for the e-Envoy's Office



### NOTE

Figures in brackets show the number of staff in each unit

Source: Office the e-Envoy

4.5 The overall annual running costs of the OeE for 2001 were £22.3 million: approximately a third of this total went on staff, a third on external consultants and a third on 'other' items. The most significant 'other' cost is marketing for the UK Online initiative, covering the portal site and other associated campaigning activities promoting Internet awareness and usage, e-access, e-government and e-commerce. However, these running costs do not include the development costs of OeE's main capital projects, the UK Online portal, the Government Gateway or the Knowledge Network. All three are funded from the government's Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF) at a total cost of £60 million for three years from 2001 to 2004. (In addition the Inland Revenue contributed £15 million from its own CMF bid to developing the Government Gateway). The Government Secure Intranet (GSI), which provides the government e-mail system and other on-line services (see below), is funded chiefly by subscriptions from user departments and the OeE cover only some central costs of around £0.6 million a year which are not passed on to users. Thus the overall annual expenditure of the OeE averaged over three years and including the development of its main capital projects, is around £52 million.

4.6 Other parts of the Cabinet Office have influenced various aspects of e-government policy since 1999 by producing reports. The Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) issued *e-Government Services for the 21st Century* in September 2000. Once they report, PIU teams break up, but the report's 43 recommendations were taken up by other bodies, half of them by OeE. The e-Envoy and e-Minister have oversight of the process of following up implementation of all the recommendations. The Modernising Public Services Group issued its first annual report *Citizens First* in September 2000, and now works within the Centre for Policy and Management Studies. The Social Exclusion Unit reported on the digital divide, but responsibility for this policy area has now moved to the Department for Education and Skills.

4.7 The Treasury is the other central agency with significant responsibility for e-government developments, as part of its wider role promoting improvements in the quality and effectiveness of public services. It has no units focusing solely on e-government issues. But Treasury agrees three-year Public Service Agreements (PSAs) or Service Delivery Agreements (SDAs) with departments. These commit each department to achieve the target of 100 per cent availability of all government transactions

by 2005. In the case of HM Customs and Excise which reports directly to Treasury ministers, there is also a target for achieving 50 per cent take-up of electronic services by 2005. Only one other Whitehall department has take-up targets built into their PSA or SDA. Treasury officials see the monitoring of progress against the enablement targets for electronic service delivery as primarily OeE's responsibility and do not specifically link them to departments' productivity targets. In their view, e-enablement should be an integral part of departments' corporate strategies: 'e-enablement is just one element of cost saving'. The Treasury also plays a role as dual keyholder with OeE for money allocated in the 2000 Spending Review for central government and local authority e-government initiatives.

## Cross-government facilities and projects

4.8 There has been a major investment since 1999 in new, central projects and facilities, including the launch of a new government portal and of a mechanism for citizens and enterprises to authenticate themselves to public agencies.

### The government portal at UK Online

4.9 In the private sector portal Web sites (such as [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)) developed to direct users to many different links, providing information in a sophisticated way, organised into categories, and with appropriate search engines to permit easy use. They often offered additional free services such as e-mail facilities. More recently more specialised search engine sites have emerged with very sophisticated capabilities (such as [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)). Both types of sites have become important commercial players since the middle 1990s.

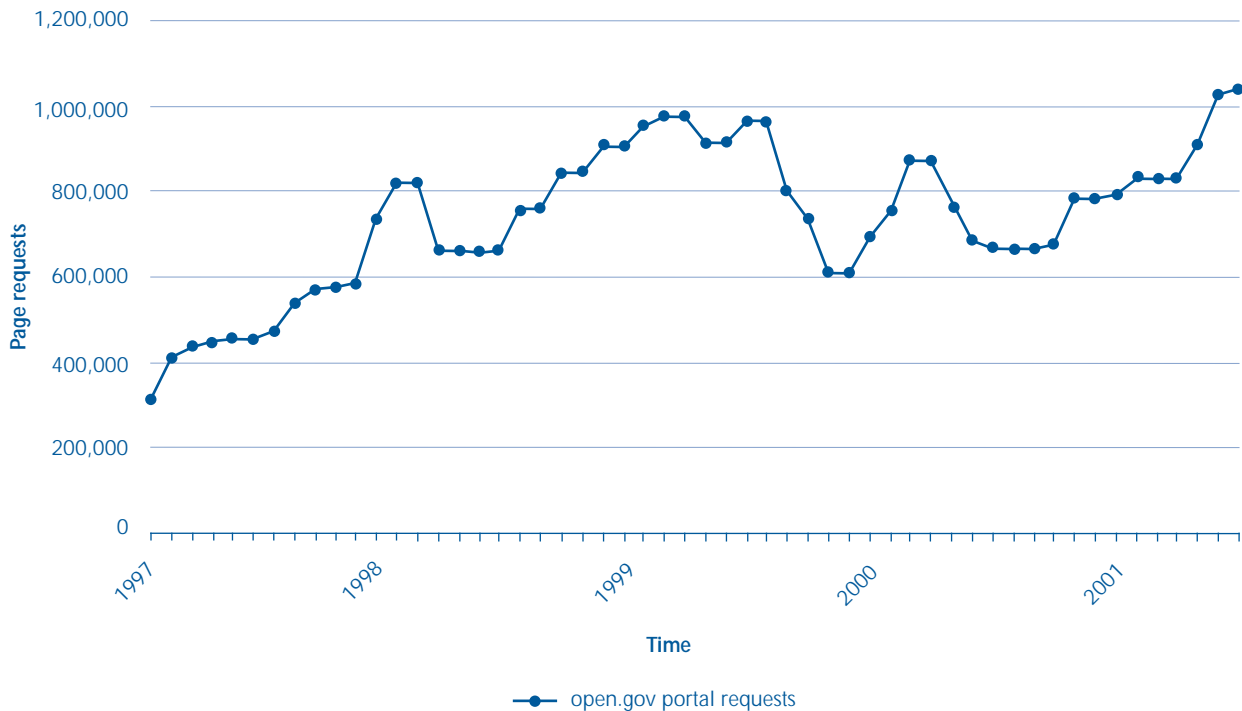


4.10 There were no parallel services for the public agencies in the UK for a long period, although the agency CCTA did provide a simply designed 'finder' site, called [www.open.gov.uk](http://www.open.gov.uk) which was reasonably well used and provided links to other government Web sites. But both government ministers and civil servants recognised that this site did not have a strong 'brand' presence with citizens or enterprises (partly because of its non-obvious name), nor any strong user facilities of its own - hence the decision to build a new portal site. The new site was seen as a service linking the public to government as a whole, not only via providing accessible links information but additional summary text, guidance, news and background articles.

4.11 In September 2000 the Prime Minister launched UK Online as the main government initiative to enable everyone to make the most of the internet. This was backed up by a series of TV and press advertising campaigns and from January 2001 a new central government Web site at [www.uk.online.gov.uk](http://www.uk.online.gov.uk). OeE undertook extensive research for this site, which was to be a rapid application development (RAD) pilot in its first year. The pilot site was developed by Syntegra to an OeE design, and was managed by a project team within OeE. The site allowed for on-line public consultation to drive improvements from the second year onwards. However, some practical difficulties emerged with this approach which the OeE's contract could not accommodate. For example, there was no stated requirement for the site to be updated by OeE - only by Syntegra staff responding to requests on a two-weekly change schedule. (An exception to this was News items, which were posted daily by Syntegra.) The initial design included large areas of static branding which used up space on users' screens. The OeE design for the



## 18 Usage statistics for www.open.gov as a central government portal 1997-2001



## NOTE

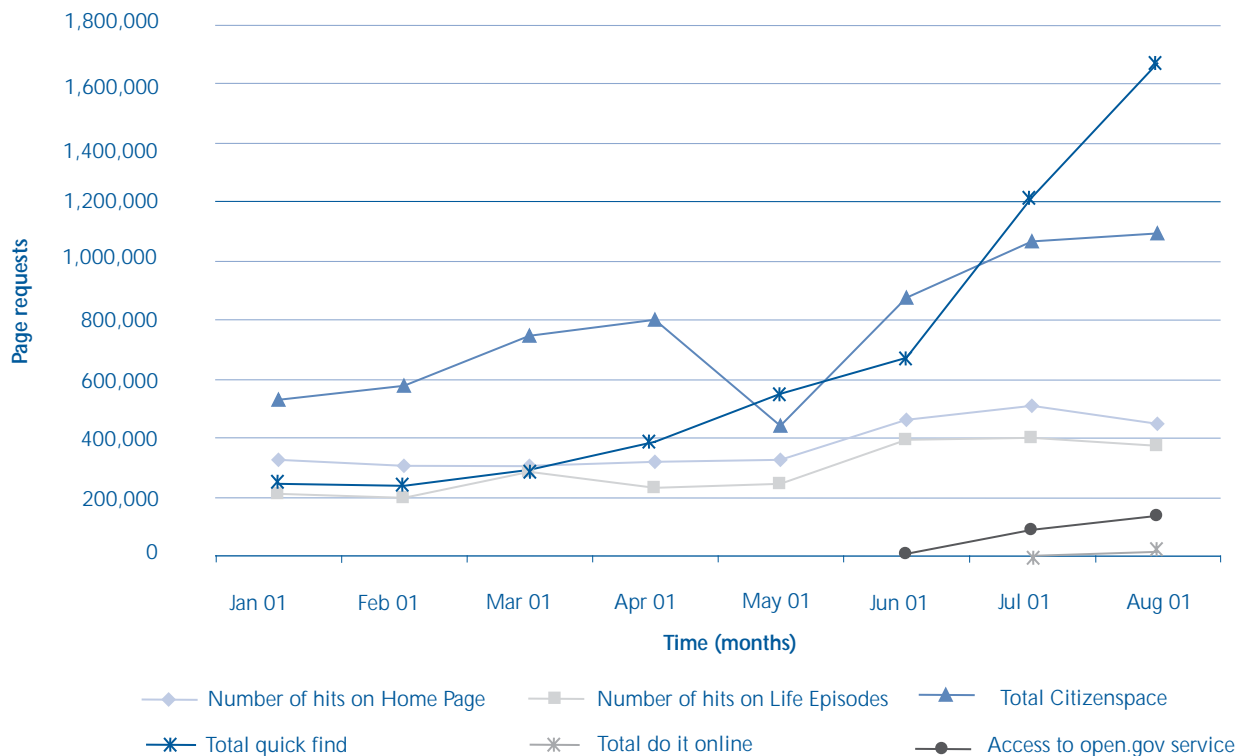
The data are median-smoothed to show basic trends.

Source: CCTA

homepage (including look-and-feel) was initially dominated by six 'life episodes' boxes giving relevant government agency links and external sites, but only on specific topics (initially covering: 'going away', 'learning to drive', 'having a baby', 'death and bereavement', 'dealing with crime' and 'moving home'). Other important facilities, such as 'finder' pages linking to central agencies and local authorities, were not obvious and users had to click-through a number of pages to reach them from the home page. From February 2001 there was a prominent link to 'Quick find' on the home page which took users directly to a search page where these features were available. Users were initially asked to register and 'personalise' the site with their preferred language (English or Welsh) and country within the UK. By November 2001 only around 40,000 people had registered. Conventional wisdom in the new media industry is that perhaps half of users will drop out rather than proceed with such a registration stage. The main point in registering was for users wanting to post comments on the site's discussion forum called 'Citizen Space', which allows people to comment on government policy on-line with others and to access government consultations or complain about a service. All users can see the discussion forums. A feature entitled 'Do it Online' also gave users the possibility to complete a passport application form electronically (which will then be posted to you for signature). It also

connects to the Girobank bill payment service and a button that takes people to various commercial services for notifying change of address on-line. A news service gives news updates and government press releases, also well handled at the No. 10 Downing Street Web site but with a different focus. The design of the search engine on UK Online was derived from consultation internal to OeE, and configured to CCTA's earlier 'open.gov' search engine design. It was not very effective, often generating over 1,000 results for each search, with entries not helpfully sorted. For example, keying in 'Office of the e-Envoy' returned 743,385 matches on one of our searches, from which it was very hard to find the Office's homepage. A 'rebuild' of the UK Online site was launched in late January 2002, with a better-designed and more useful homepage. The search engine has been improved to deliver more intuitive results, such as pointing first to government agencies' basic sites in response to users entering the agency name. Life episodes have grown to 11 but are now reached via a single, much smaller panel on the new homepage. From January 2002 a new contract provider took over as Web site hosts for [www.ukonline.gov.uk](http://www.ukonline.gov.uk) and provided content management tools. In the future design and day-to-day content management for the site will take place at OeE. Another company, Sapient (consultants on e-business) will take over a shorter-term contract for some design elements.

## 19 Usage statistics for the five main activities available on www.ukonline.gov



### NOTE

Total page requests for all parts of the site amounted to 4.6 million in August 2001.

Source: Office the E-envoy

4.12 In 2001 the transition from the earlier CCTA 'open.gov' finder site to the more ambitious [www.ukonline.gov.uk](http://www.ukonline.gov.uk) portal site was not as well handled as it might have been. Press stories reported from February 2001 that the CCTA's open.gov site would be closed completely in the summer, and users logging on there began to receive a similar on-line notice before being transferred to the UK Online home page. If users did not persist and look around the UK Online site it was not obvious that it contained similar directory facilities to the open.gov site they were accustomed to. In July 2001 the newly established e-Delivery Team took over management of UK Online site within OeE and reviewed progress. The open.gov transferees were now routed straight to the UK Online finder pages, thereby by-passing completely the poorly designed UK Online home page and its registration procedure. Belated publicity that the government was not after all closing down its chief finder site had some effect in reassuring users. The open.gov name and logo familiar to its existing users were resurrected and placed prominently on the UK Online home page.

4.13 Assessing the success or problems with UK Online has been difficult because of the limitations of the usage statistics initially available to OeE. The Office has now changed their statistics provider and more information will

be available in future. However, **Figures 18 and 19** show basic 'page impressions' data for both the 'open.gov' and the [www.ukonline.gov.uk](http://www.ukonline.gov.uk) sites. By 2001 the design of the 'open.gov' site was looking very dated, having been static for two years. None the less it was still attracting over 1 million page impressions per month by the time of the transition. By August 2001, the 'quick find' feature of [www.ukonline.gov.uk](http://www.ukonline.gov.uk) was attracting over 1.6 million page impressions, although the site's home page was receiving only 451,000 page requests. The reason for this disparity appears to be that previous users of the open.gov site are linked straight through to the organisational listing located on UK Online's 'Quick find' facility and do not pass through the portal homepage or get to see the enhanced facilities provided there. These statistics and the low number of registered users on UK Online show that usage is still far from what might be expected of a central government portal. By autumn 2001 the total usage figures for UK Online in terms of page requests for the five main parts of the site add up to 4.6 million page impressions a month - but this figure includes multiple requests for pages generated by users visiting more than one part of the site (see paragraph 4.30). This is likely to be particularly the case with users of the 'Citizen Space' section. It was closed for a time as part of the normal restrictions in the general election campaign period (when public comment on issues of partisan



sensitivity might risk being perceived as officially sanctioned), producing a sharp dip in UK Online activity. The e-Delivery Team within OeE has an aspiration that UK Online should achieve 50 million page requests per week or 2 million unique users a week. In the light of performance so far, these numbers look challenging.

4.14 The UK Online portal site is part of the wider UK online initiative. The initiative, which is a drive to enable everyone to make the most of the internet, had a number of campaigns in 2001 (only the last two of which were run by the Office of the e-Envoy). These included:

- A campaign for self assessment on the internet undertaken by the Inland Revenue ([www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk](http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk)).
- A campaign for consumers to shop with confidence on the internet - undertaken by the DTI ([www.consumer.gov.uk](http://www.consumer.gov.uk)).
- A campaign aimed at both parents and children on the subject of child safety on the internet run by the Home Office ([www.wiseuptothenet.co.uk](http://www.wiseuptothenet.co.uk) for Parents and [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk) for children).



- A campaign to publicise the UK online centres run by the DFEE (as it was then) was the only campaign not to have featured a supporting website for people to visit if they wanted more information about either the centres or the campaign ([www.dfes.gov.uk/ukonlinecentres/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/ukonlinecentres/)).
- A campaign for UK online for business particularly aimed at small and medium enterprises run by the DTI ([www.ukonlineforbusiness.gov.uk](http://www.ukonlineforbusiness.gov.uk)).
- The campaign to publicise the services available on the UK online portal ([www.ukonline.gov.uk](http://www.ukonline.gov.uk)).
- A general awareness campaign for the UK online strategy ([www.letsallgeton.gov.uk](http://www.letsallgeton.gov.uk)).

4.15 The [www.ukonline.gov.uk](http://www.ukonline.gov.uk) site makes limited use of aliases which might redirect users typing in words similar to or alternative to the main site address - in contrast to the 10 Downing Street site which has more than 30 aliases. There appears to be some scope still to incorporate the full [www.UKOnline.gov.uk](http://www.UKOnline.gov.uk) site address into more government adverts, brochures and publicity and to take other pro-active steps to attract Web traffic. For instance, we noted in Part 3 that although all English local authorities will receive dedicated funding for e-government development from Whitehall, only half of councils' home pages currently link to UK Online. It might be thought that a condition of central funding would be that all local authority sites prominently incorporate such a link, and a similar approach might be extendable to other public agencies. The OeE consider this approach would need to be balanced against the government's strategy to reduce the conditions attaching to central government funding of local authorities.



4.16 A broader component of the UK Online strategy is to set up 6,000 UK Online centres by 2002, by which time all 4,300 UK public libraries are also to be online, with support for users available from trained library staff. Other centres will be provided in colleges, community centres and local companies. This programme is run by the Department for Education and Skills and information is given at [www.dfes.gov.uk/ukonlinecentres](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/ukonlinecentres). The aim of the programme is to attract new Internet users and is distinct from directing existing internet users to the government portal site, so its 2001 TV advertisements did not include the Ukonline government portal Web address. However, the way that Internet addresses operate means that a user in say a public library wanting to follow up the TV adverts and typing (say) 'www.ukonline' into their Internet browsers will get nowhere. In December 2001 OeE launched a TV and press campaign (with a freephone number to handle enquiries) to support its 'Lets all get on' campaign. The associated website ([www.letsallgeton.gov.uk](http://www.letsallgeton.gov.uk)) aims to explain why everyone in the UK should make the most of the Internet. There was also a prominent link to the campaign site in the January 2002 redesign of the home page for [www.ukonline.gov.uk](http://www.ukonline.gov.uk). The 'Let's all get on' site provides the first clear overview of the government's campaign to get business and society on-line, and includes links to another differently named site [www.ukonlineforbusiness.gov.uk](http://www.ukonlineforbusiness.gov.uk) run by the Department of Trade and Industry. An advertising campaign for 'UK online for business' in autumn 2001 aimed at small medium enterprises publicised the site as a business portal. Companies were urged to take advantage of the £15 billion now spent online in the UK, and various business advice and business benefits were offered (such as a useful business planning facility, case studies and global research evidence). By

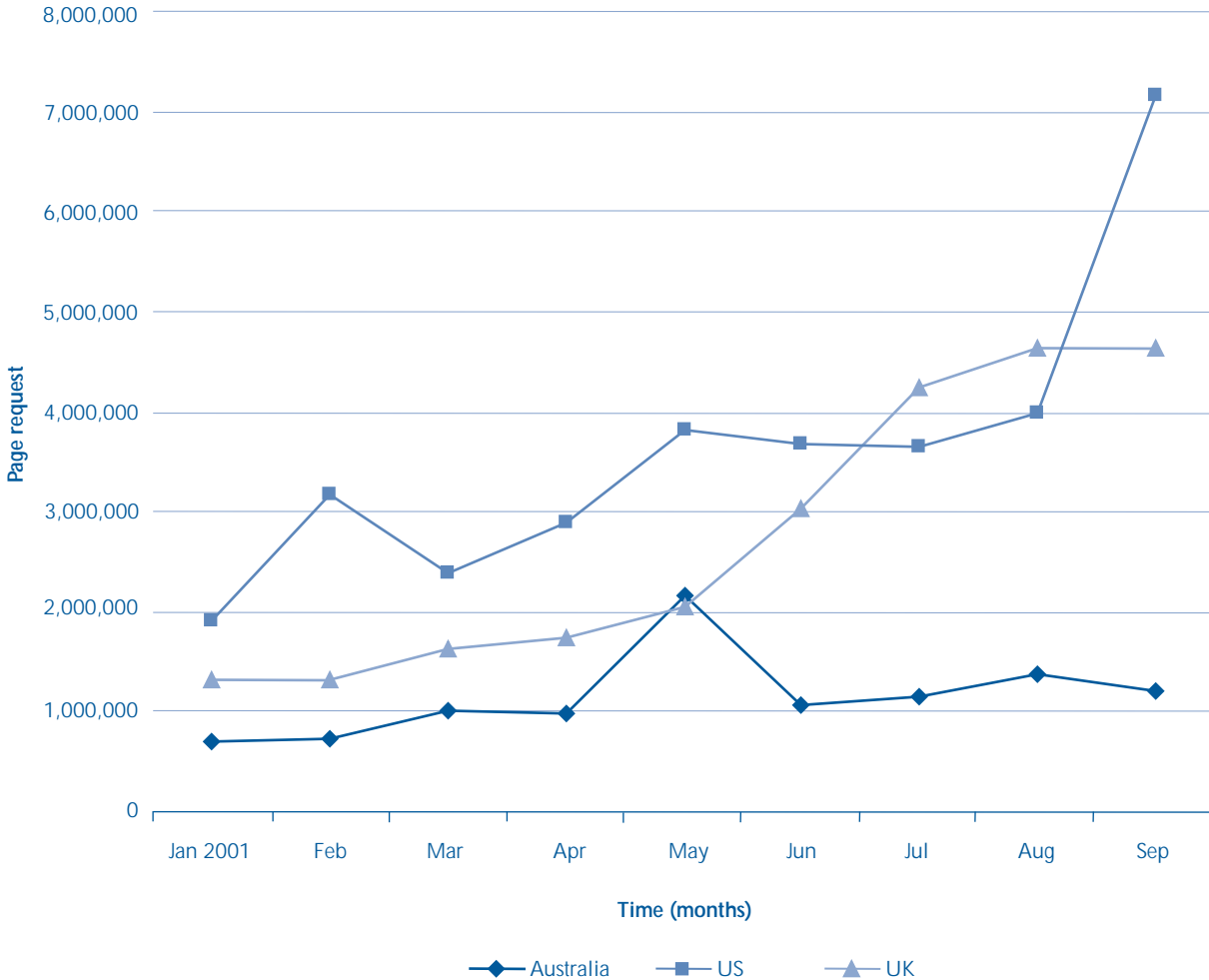
early 2002 [www.UKonlineforbusiness.gov.uk](http://www.UKonlineforbusiness.gov.uk) was not yet a parallel to the more substantive if still fragmented transactional offerings on the Australian government's 'business entry point'.

4.17 Looking at some similar overseas public sector portal sites suggests that the comparatively high investment in UK Online has yet to pay off. In the USA, the official web portal to US government information, FirstGov, was created in September 2000 under contract to the US General Services Administration, at a modest initial cost of \$4 million and with no budget for marketing or branding until June 2001, although it has subsequently been enhanced. By August 2001, FirstGov received 4 million page requests to its home page, 2 million visits and 700,000 unique visits per month. Over 35,400 pages now link to FirstGov (compared to 19,000 to [ukonline.gov.uk](http://ukonline.gov.uk)) and a wide range of agencies now use the site's search engine. The site was widely acclaimed for its response to the terrorist attacks of Tuesday, 11 September 2001. A special section, called 'America Responds to Terrorism', went live on [www.firstgov.gov](http://www.firstgov.gov) by early Wednesday afternoon. Within a few hours of the attacks, the major commercial Internet search sites

such as AOL's Government Guide, MSN, MSNBC, Yahoo, and Google had special hot links to FirstGov. As a result during September 2001 usage of FirstGov rose to over 7.1 million page requests, over 2 million visits, and over 1.3 million unique visitors (of course, for a home population more than four times larger than that of the UK). Twice daily information was added on a wide range of crisis-related topic areas.

4.18 In the Netherlands a government portal site called [www.overheid.nl](http://www.overheid.nl) has received little publicity. But it grew from an average daily number of unique user visits of 4,500 (135,000 users a month) to around 10,000 by October 2001 (300,000 users a month) with an average visit length of 9 minutes. These data equate to around 1 million page requests a month, for a population much smaller than the UK. The Australian Commonwealth government portal at [www.fed.gov.au](http://www.fed.gov.au) receives around 1 million page requests monthly, for a population less than a third of that in the UK. (Australia also has a separate whole-of-government entry point covering both the Commonwealth and states levels at [www.gov.au](http://www.gov.au)). **Figure 20** shows the UK Online usage levels compared with those of the national government

**20** Page request access to central government portals in UK, US and Australia since January 2001



sites for USA and Australia. Care has to be taken in making a direct comparison because the UK numbers represent usage levels for all the parts of the site shown in Figure 19 above - while the data for Australia or the US are only for people visiting the site homepages.

## The Government Gateway

4.19 The Office of the e-Envoy have also developed a centralised 'authentication engine' to ascertain users' identities online, a project, called the Government Gateway. This project was originally initiated by the Central IT Unit. (It is quite distinct from the rather similarly named 'Gateway' process launched by the Office of Government Commerce for assessing procurement projects at critical stages). The first phase of the Government Gateway facility was launched in January 2001, at a cost of £15.6 million (plus VAT). Its aim is to provide a central identity authentication service that enables the online submission of transactions and financial data to government. From the spring of 2002 further phases are planned to provide an online payments facilities and secure e-mail. Transaction requests are first validated, and then routed to departments via the Government Secure Intranet (GSI). By December 2001 five services had been piloted on the Gateway, four aimed at business-type customers:

- Electronic submission of VAT returns (HM Customs and Excise)
- Electronic payment of Integrated Administration and Control Systems (IACS) Area Aid applications (Ministry of Agriculture, now DEFRA)
- Electronic submission of PAYE returns (Inland Revenue)
- Corporation tax (Inland Revenue) and one at citizens:
- Electronic submission of self-assessment forms (Inland Revenue)

However, these initiatives have been disappointing so far. One thousand traders initially signed up for the pilot to submit VAT returns on-line, but two-thirds subsequently dropped out and the end-achievements of this test are not clear (see Part 2). Only 1,350 farmers out of a potential 80,000 (around 1 per cent) had registered on-line for the electronic IACS application by November 2001. This low figure is mainly due to the service's launch period coinciding with travel restrictions of the foot and mouth crisis. The service required farmers to travel substantial distances to relevant offices to buy a digital certificate. Results from the electronic submission of income tax self-assessment forms may be better because the Inland Revenue adopted a password/pin number access method rather than Customs and Excise's use of public key infrastructure (PKI) certificates. Customs and Excise are working with the Office of the

e-Envoy and other Whitehall departments on a more flexible approach to security problems (See Part 2). Some 160,000 out of a possible 9 million income taxpayers had registered via the Gateway by November 2001 (under 4 per cent), and OeE believe that of those registered around 75,000 by the end of January 2002 actually submitted forms on-line. There are now 390,000 registered users on the Gateway.

4.20 The Government Gateway technology has been influential in international IT circles, and there are plans for its main contractor (Microsoft) to market it overseas, from which the UK government will derive a return. However, it is unclear how many other central departments in Whitehall will agree to use it. Inland Revenue now use the Gateway for corporation tax and Customs and Excise for duty deferment, but it is too early to assess usage. The OeE E-Delivery Team is in talks with various departments and has a 'relationship' team of six staff responsible for the task of signing them up for development, architecture and 'joined-up' projects. For example, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) plan to introduce use of the Gateway for Child Benefit transactions in 2002. And projects involving the Home Office, the NHS, the Department of Trade and Industry and other agencies are in development.

## Other Central Initiatives

4.21 For a time the e-Envoy's Office also took over management accountability for the **Government Secure Intranet (GSI)**, which aims to provide completely reliable electronic communications and secure internet facilities both between agencies at central level and also with local government and non-departmental public bodies. However, responsibility for the procurement of the second version of GSI (known as GSI2) will be a partnership between the Office of Government Commerce and the Office of the e-Envoy. Usage of GSI has expanded across organisations and staff since our last report in 1999. But the growth of additional services or content beyond e-mail and directory facilities has proceeded rather slowly. The procurement process for GSI2 will start in March 2002 with a planned completion date of March 2003. Development plans for GSI2 are more expansive. The e-Delivery Team is working to a plan that includes a 'hub and spoke' model allowing interconnections with local authorities and third parties. They aim to have a hundred local authorities on GSI2 by spring 2004.

4.22 Some other policy initiatives by the e-Envoy's Office will be essential to further development of electronic service delivery across departments and agencies. In particular, the issue of security and authentication has the potential to delay or block electronic transactions which involve the submission of various forms and payments to government (see Part 2) or the updating of personal

information about citizens. The government has provided a set of requirements to the industry-led, co-regulation 'Trusted Third Party' (or 'T') scheme for ranking transactions according to their security risk. The Office of the Information Commissioner have indicated that many transactions that include the transfer of sensitive information that government holds about citizens should be ranked at level 3, the highest level (defined as having a risk potential to harm people's lives or substantial financial commitment). This level requires face-to-face registration. Out of 500 transactions surveyed across central government and local authorities, 10 to 20 per cent might need a form of authentication. This issue is being considered by a Security and Authentication unit (currently six staff) within OeE's Technology and Strategy team. The solution that is commonly accepted throughout the IT industry is introduction of an open Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) and the use of digital certificates, despite the low take-up of digital certificates in the VAT pilot. Government policy is that digital certificates must be left to the market to provide - the key problem being that so few other organisations are using them, although some large companies such as Reuters are using certificates for some customer-facing products and services. The Security and Authentication team is investigating various options, including the possibility that government will use those initiatives already developed in the banking sector. E-banking experts point out that although banks are developing procedures for authentication (that is, confirming who a customer is) the next stage is establishing electronic procedures for permissions (that is, confirming what a customer can do). While authentication may be common across banks and government, both banks and government recognise that the issue of permissions is specific to the services being delivered. Commercial and liability issues with authentication also present a number of issues that will require resolution.

- 4.23 Another potentially very important central initiative is achieving common standards for all government information, so that it can be shared across government agencies centrally and locally, an issue handled by the inter-operability team in OeE's Technology and Strategy Division. They have worked on both an e-interoperability framework (launched in September 2000) and a metadata framework (launched in May 2001). They will be merged in Version 4 of the interoperability framework which is due to be published in Spring 2002. The metadata framework would involve all government agencies 'tagging' all their Web pages and data using common standards - specific forms or documents, for example. Although not yet a well-appreciated element of e-government policy, metadata could be crucial in the future to developing joined-up governance. For example, if a central portal is to provide locally tailored information in response to a user's request, then metadata would be the only alternative to

'hardcoding' URLs from all local authority sites in the code of the portal. Hardcoding leads to subsequent problems for updating and maintenance would quickly emerge in the form of broken or out-of-date links. Each of the 'life episodes' on the site have their own sponsor department (for example 'Having a baby' was originally sponsored by the Department of Health) but they are now updated by the E-Communications Unit of OeE, whose staff cannot always be aware of developments on other sites. Without metadata, by now some links to NHS Direct on this part of the UK Online site do not take users straight to specifically tailored information. There are only very limited mechanisms for ensuring that the metadata framework is implemented, which will involve considerable work on behalf of departments, agencies, local authorities and other public bodies. The policy is reliant on their efforts and those of the members of the working groups which OeE convenes. But not all departments and interests sit on these bodies, which are necessarily small in membership. For example, local government is represented by some council officers with particular expertise, by the professional society of IT managers in local government (Socitm) and by the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA). An awareness-raising effort is required across much of government to promote awareness of these issues beyond front line IT staff.

- 4.24 'Interoperability' is being facilitated through a new site (located at [www.govtalk.gov.uk](http://www.govtalk.gov.uk)), which has been created for users across government to receive information and share ideas. A team of seven OeE staff (three civil servants and four consultants) is pushing the policy forward via a number of working groups, consisting of representatives of various parts of the public sector and including private sector representatives: its minutes are published on the 'Govtalk' site. The interoperability team are working with the Public Record Office, which is leading work with departments to achieve electronic records management for all newly created records by 2004. The interoperability team considered that once their policy documents were produced they would be handing over to the E-Delivery Team for implementation at some stage.

## Other central sites

- 4.25 Web sites can be excellent crisis management tools for government, allowing agencies to meet pressing needs for up to date information and taking some load off call centres. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat was created in July 2001 with the aim of ensuring that UK government is sufficiently resilient to meet any crisis. It reports to the Cabinet Secretary and is part of the Cabinet Office. The Secretariat has now absorbed the News Co-ordination Centre (NCC), a small unit originally set up in 1999 to meet the possible public communication challenges of the Millennium date change period. NCC develops all means of public communication, including Web sites, in response to

pressing situations. It has six staff during non-crisis times and 20 per shift during a crisis. The unit has been activated four times since autumn 2000 to deal with the fuel emergency and widespread floods in 2000, and the spread of foot and mouth and post September 11th issues in 2001. There were some presentational problems in deciding what to call the site (for instance it was considered unacceptable to label foot and mouth as a crisis). An un-obvious site name has been adopted at [www.co-ordination.gov.uk](http://www.co-ordination.gov.uk). The URL does reflect the fact that the News Coordination Centre label was already established with journalists, and linked to from well-established sites like No.10 Downing Street, UK Online and the main Whitehall departments. NCC seeks to work in concert with the established Web sites of the relevant agencies, rather than to replace them. The NCC site set up during the foot and mouth crisis was advertised in all newspapers and involved 30 to 40 staff over the whole period, with two staff shifts per day. It received 59,000 page requests in March 2001 and an average of 10,000 per month for the subsequent three months. NCC contacted BBC Online on a regular basis to request that the crisis site was linked to the key news stories - an interesting and rare proactive strategy for disseminating awareness of a government site. The News Coordination Centre's role depends upon the particular crisis and how much key departments ask for assistance. NCC have no enforcement powers and can only offer staff, suggestions, use of their site, and advice on best practice. Another central site, [www.openbritain.gov.uk](http://www.openbritain.gov.uk) was used for the purposes of reassuring tourists during the foot and mouth crisis. The site was launched as part of wider publicity campaign, stressing that Britain was 'open for business'. At the end of May 2001 a further campaign which advertised the URL or site address in the UK and US newspapers sent usage numbers up to 90,000 page requests over two weeks, around a fifth of total usage. By the end of its life the site had received 525,000 page requests, and was seen as better used than a parallel telephone call centre, which was advertised more widely.

4.26 Of other Web sites central for government, the most influential is probably that for No. 10 Downing Street (now at [www.pm.gov.uk](http://www.pm.gov.uk)). It has been greatly professionalised, with a news ticker, video archive, broadcasts and the possibility to register for email updates. The site received an average of 3 million page requests per month from January to August 2001, rising dramatically to 5.5 million requests in September 2001 (in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11th) and over 10 million in October 2001. Like the US FirstGov site, by November 2001 the No.10 site was refocused towards the 'war against terrorism'. At times nine out of the ten highlighted news stories on the front page related to this issue, in addition to many of the other items such as prime ministerial speeches. Officials in departments observed that No. 10 'does its own thing' with respect to its web site. They saw little co-ordination between most departmental



initiatives and the No. 10 site, other than including a link to Downing Street where appropriate. However, staff at the No. 10 site point to close co-ordination with relevant departments in recent months on issues such as post September 11th news and advice, the foot and mouth crisis, on-line events around the Chancellor's annual budget, and on-line 'policy forums' with some senior departmental ministers.

## E-government targets and performance indicators

4.27 Within OeE a Strategy and Service Delivery section of around 20 staff is charged with the key task of monitoring the e-business strategies produced by all the Whitehall departments and their agencies. The Office originally intended these documents to be updated by departments and reviewed by OeE every six months. The first set of strategies were produced in October 2000, and the second in July 2001 (because of post-general election changes) for final assessment in early November. Prior to this strategy process in early 2000 OeE discussed specific milestones for achieving the 2002 and 2005 targets with departments. OeE asked departments to define transactions based on set criteria and linked to their Public Service Agreements/Service Delivery Agreements, which tended to exclude small services from the lists. The key transactions for individual departments were all given the same weight in assessing progress towards electronic service availability, without according any influence or priority to transaction volumes. Providing a very small scale transaction on-line would have the same 'weight' in terms of achieving electronic service delivery targets as enabling a heavily used, high-volume transaction. This feature was clearly apparent to departmental officials, who pointed out what they saw as its anomalous operations in our case studies (see Part 2 especially). In their second e-strategy documents in 2001 departments were encouraged by OeE to be less target-bound and more discursive, with fewer formulaic tables of transactions to be offered electronically. But the e-Envoy's office stress that the two strategy statements should be read in conjunction with each other and so the previous pledges

that individual transactions will be electronically available still hold. By autumn 2001, the main pressure from the e-Envoy's office came from bilateral discussion with departments of their own specific e-business strategy - through 'policy, politics and rhetoric' as one official described it. OeE feel that online provision of services is now firmly embedded in departments' planning processes, with explicit commitments from departmental boards and ministerial approvals.

4.28 In addition to negotiations over e-business strategies, the e-Envoy's office convenes a number of forums at various levels of government to stimulate e-government activity. At the highest level, the e-Champions Forum brings together senior officials drawn from the Management Boards of all departments and charged with advancing e-government. Below them an 'e-Strategists' Working Group' of departmental representatives meets to discuss common issues. The Office's financial control is limited to their role as dual keyholder with the Treasury on £350 million of funding for developing e-government services across local government and their involvement with the release of the rest of the £1 billion resulting from SR2000 for the progression of a list of central government projects. There is a Government Websites team within the OeE e-Communications Unit, which issued *Guidelines for Government Websites* to departments in December 1999 and again in autumn 2001. OeE gave departments and agencies guidance on the appropriate use of statistics and indices for measuring access to their sites. The team has conducted two surveys of government web provision, one on the aspects and the other on the existence of government websites. Both surveys reported in November 2000. MORI was commissioned to survey the aspects of 30 government websites (15 Ministerial and 15 other sites) through checking 217 onscreen features and through interviews and questionnaires on management issues. The team also conducted follow-up interviews with all surveyed sites to agree future action. This was followed by a program of examining individual sites and agreeing future action with webmasters. The team also reviewed all URLs in the gov.uk domain as a cleansing exercise to confirm if they were live, duplicates, mistaken or odd registrations, or out of date. The surveys confirmed the existence of over 1000 central government websites and nearly 500 local authority websites grouped by subject or type with notes on speed of download, technologies that could indicate a lack of accessibility or updates of information and the results fed into revised web guidance. However, OeE has somewhat out of date and incomplete information about the condition of central government Web sites, the take-up of electronic services at present across central departments and agencies, and the extent to which the claims made in the e-business strategy documents correlate with the actual progress of on-line services.

4.29 To provide a better picture of e-government change we undertook two studies. The first looked at the usage data across all central departments' existing Web sites over time. The second repeated and updated in October 2001 a census of all central department and agency Web sites, originally carried out in 1999. These exercises entailed very modest costs when set against the scale of resources now being deployed in the e-government area, but they generated more solid and quantitative information than we believe has been available to OeE. The two studies also follow up a recommendation of the Public Accounts Committee in January 2000 that more and better information on government Web provision should be collected by the Cabinet Office.

4.30 In the summer of 2001 we wrote to all Whitehall departments asking them to send us details of their Web traffic data back to 1999 or earlier where available. Any well-run Web site for such major organisations should be closely monitored on a weekly or monthly basis. This data should form an important part of the organisation's management information system. Modern automatic traffic-recording has very modest annual costs for reputable systems from firms like Webtracker, Webtrends and others. So every government Webmaster should have statistics at a minimum on the following numbers:

- *Hits*. A hit is the transfer of a single bit of information from the Web site to a user. Web designs have moved over time from pages involving only a few bits of information to current pages composed of many separate bits (such as graphics, icons, data assembled from a database, and different text elements). The transfer of any one of these bits and pieces counts equally as a hit. Companies often quoted hits data in the dot.com boom period, but they are essentially meaningless. We have reviewed hits data for all the sites analysed in this report, but we do not quote them because hit numbers are so artificially influenced, mostly by site design changes.
- *Page requests or page impressions*. Essentially a request or impression occurs when a user clicks to download a whole new page from the site. Pages also vary greatly in length. Some Web sites inflate page requests in artificial ways, for instance, building in unnecessary click-through pages before users can reach the homepage. But this is still the most widely available volume indicator of some use.
- *User sessions*. A session starts when a user logs onto a site. But many Internet Service Providers (ISPs) will also count a new session if the same user is still there 20 or 30 minutes later. Session lengths are not standardised and vary across different ISPs. None the less this is the best indicator of the reach of a Web site - but we found that very few government departments have data on user sessions.

- *Time on site.* This is the average time that users spend on a department or agency Web site, including those who click on and off the home page en route to somewhere else, as well as those who look around extensively. Time on site in the commercial sector is often very short (around 5 minutes), reflecting users' often restless surfing behaviour. But on government sites it can be much longer (around 10 minutes would be a norm) or even very long indeed (20 to 30 minutes on some sites).

None of these indicators is perfect. But the last three taken together will give very useful and immediate feedback to any organisation about how its Web site is being used. A competent Web manager should also break down the information across all the component parts of the Web site. Then every month she should alert all sections or divisions within the organisation which originate content for the site about how the usage numbers for their section are developing. Content providers should know clearly which of their pages or topics are attracting visitors and which are not, and how their access numbers are trending. This whole set of procedures is vital if the problems of 'desert' sections on sites or of dated pages are to be avoided (see the recommendations of the 1999 *Government on the Web* report). If any department or agency is to actively grow its Web traffic over time and to effectively segment its users then excellent Web trends data is indispensable.

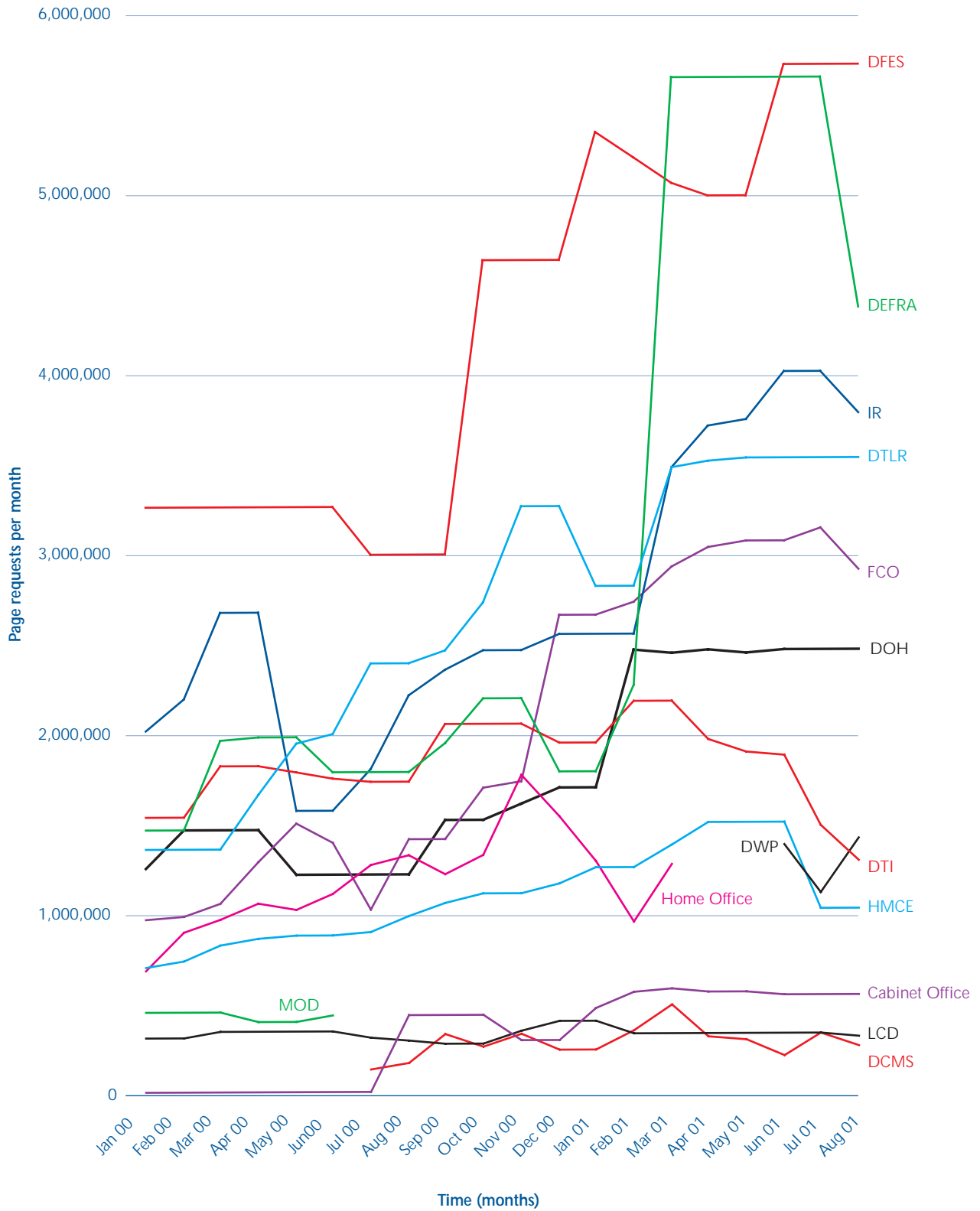
4.31 Despite OeE's 1999 guidance on the use of metrics and access statistics we found few departments where all the basic indicators above were being collected. Even fewer were playing back the information they did have to sections within their organisation in any way that could form a useful and reliable part of their management information systems. Some major departments seem to lack any useable information. The Treasury responded to our request for Web traffic data by saying that they had none at all, for any time period. The Department of Work and Pensions could only send log files of their Web traffic - a vast mass of completely unanalysed information which would have taken a lot of effort to process. Even departments that did have over-time data mostly had it in pre-modern forms. Normally it was only for some of the indicators listed above, and there were often discontinuities in the systems used for monitoring traffic, reducing the data's comparability over time. Several departments (such as the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions) adopted new monitoring methods around the same time as our queries for data reached them.

4.32 **Figure 21** therefore covers only the 14 departments which had useable Web traffic data for some part of the period. We focus here on page requests or page impressions. We have cleaned-up these data considerably, including going back to departments to iron out apparent anomalies, and median-smoothing the data to omit one-off kinks. Consequently these data are reasonably comparable over

time, within any one department. However, readers should not make any fine-grain comparisons of traffic volumes across the departments shown, because the monitoring or recording systems in use vary considerably. None the less, some large-scale differences between the traffic volumes of government Web sites do emerge. The Department for Education and Skills has been top site for most of this period, but DEFRA (previously the Ministry of Agriculture) soared to prominence during the foot-and-mouth crisis in 2001. Some sites (such as the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions) were consistently near the top and grew their traffic steadily. Others, such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Health started in the middle of the pack but grew strongly later on as a result of adding new features. The Cabinet Office has gone from almost nothing to small numbers of users. Sites with apparent declines in traffic for at least part of the period included the Home Office, DTI and Customs and Excise. Three sites with small numbers seemed to have weak or no growth trends - the Lord Chancellor's Department main site, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, and the Ministry of Defence (for the short period for which the department has any data). But some departments (such as the Lord Chancellor's Department and MoD) also have well-used service orientated Web sites distinct from their main Web departmental - a site, covered here.

4.33 Figure 21 is a little difficult to interpret here, because it is not easy to control visually for the different starting points of the Web sites in terms of traffic volume or see their different growth rates over time by eye. Even converting the raw data into index numbers could be misleading, because growth rates will automatically tend to be higher in numbers starting from a small base. We should naturally expect to see the highest percentage growth on the smallest or youngest sites, and least growth with already large and mature sites. **Figure 22** graphs the change in departments' Web traffic over the 20 months January 2000 to August 2001, against their initial traffic volumes at the beginning of the period. The expected relationship does apply to some large and 'mature' sites, notably the DFES and the DTI site. But for most sites the general relationship is in fact the other way round. The large sites are growing faster, and smaller sites are often stagnating. The DEFRA and MAFF growth in 2001 may be mainly a crisis-only phenomenon produced by foot and mouth, but even excluding it would not alter the pattern much. If government Web sites are to remain 'competitive' in attracting Web traffic it is important that their rates of growth should keep pace with that of the overall UK Web traffic. It is clear that some departments' Web sites are effectively stagnant. Others are growing their traffic over time, but by less than the background growth of UK Web traffic as a whole. Relatively few Whitehall departments are clearly increasing their 'market share' by growing Web traffic faster than the background expansion of Internet traffic.

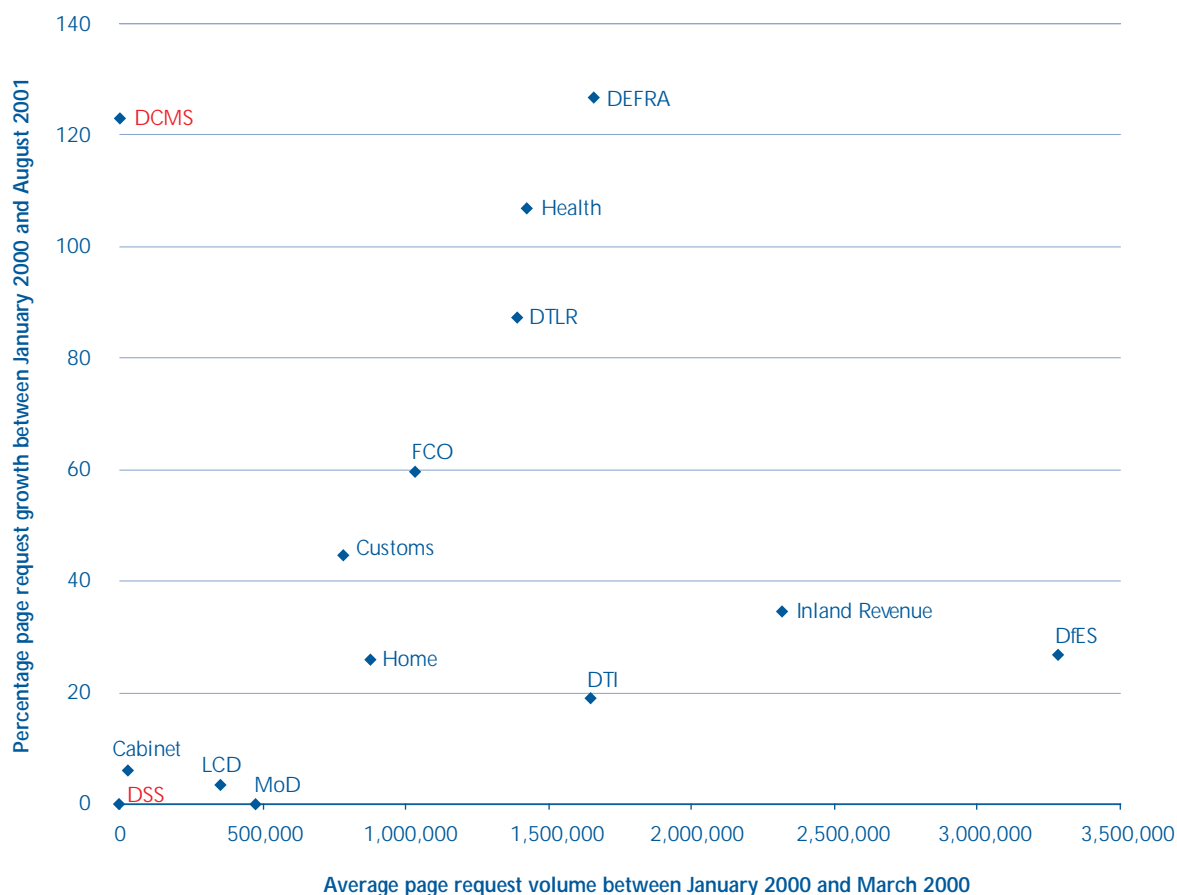
21 Trends in page requests for central departmental web sites in 2000 and 2001



NOTE

Whitehall Departments not shown (such as HM Treasury) failed to supply useable data. Incomplete lines (as for MOD, the Home Office and DWP) indicate that departments had useable data only for a part of the period.

**22** The percentage growth of page requests on central departments' websites between January 2000 and August 2001 by their average traffic (in page requests) between January 2000 and March 2000



**NOTE**

The two sites shown in red are those for which we have percentage growth data but incomplete starting data.

4.34 Our second method of data collection was a census of the content on all central government Web sites, covering 376 organisations in all shown in **Figure 23**. The coding frame and methods used are fully described at [www.governmentontheweb.org](http://www.governmentontheweb.org) but essentially we asked post-graduate student researchers at the LSE to log onto all central government Web sites and to code objectively the presence or absence of 102 site features. We rechecked codings for consistency. As with the local

government sites census these findings should be interpreted with caution. They represent features or facilities which could be found on sites by dedicated and trained researchers committing on average around 50 minutes to finding a long list of features and working in a systematic way. The data are hence likely to give a very generous view of whether ordinary citizens would easily or reliably find the same features.

**23** Organisations included in the census of central Government Web sites

Type of organisation	Number surveyed	Number now with Web site	Percentage with Web site 2001	Percentage with Web site 1999
Whitehall departments <sup>1</sup>	26	24	92	86
Other bodies <sup>1</sup>	31	31	100	77
Next Steps agencies <sup>1</sup>	88	73	83	53
Executive bodies (NDPBs) <sup>1</sup>	231	182	79	59
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>60</b>

**NOTE**

1. A list of the organisations in each category is given at Appendix C.

## 24 Results from the Census of Central Government Web sites, October 2001

## Key

■ Basic site   
 ■ Interactive   
 ■ E-Publishing   
 ■ Transactional   
 ■ Account Management

How often features were found across all central Web sites	Feature	2001	Per cent of Web sites 1999	Change
<b>Universal Features Over 90%</b>	Description of the organisation's current activities	96	90	+6
	Consistent colour scheme	96	na	
	Consistent font size and style	96	na	
	Telephone number and address	94	80	+14
	Logo branding	94	na	
	Downloads of the organisation's documents	90	41	+49
<b>Widespread Features 70 - 80%</b>	General email enquiry service	88	41	+47
	What's New section	79	66	+13
	List of organisation's activities by topic area	78	na	
	Links to other government bodies	75	51	+24
	Press releases	72	17	+55
	Archive for press releases (% of sites with releases)	72	58	+14
	Site update information	71	71	0
	Annual reports	70	20	+50
<b>Features Becoming Widespread 50 - 69%</b>	List of publications arranged by subject or date	64	na	
	Non-governmental organisations	62	47	+15
	Links to supervising government bodies	60	45	+15
	Search engine	58	38	+20
	Explanation of agency's statutory responsibilities	57	53	+4
	Mission statement	55	61	-6
	List of organisation's sub-units or divisions	50	65	-15
	Contacting the webmaster	50	32	+18
<b>Features on a Significant Minority of Sites 30 - 49%</b>	Senior officials' areas of responsibility listed	46	na	
	Links to private firms	43	na	
	Link to international organisations	40	na	
	List of organisation's regional offices	38	na	
	Regional information given	38	33	+5
	Information on the organisation's future strategy	37	22	+15
	E-complaints service	35	na	
	Senior officials' biographical details	34	na	
	Travel directions for reaching organisation's offices	33	23	+10
	Organisation chart for agency	33	na	
	Site Map	31	19	+12
	Email ordering facility for organisation's documents	30	na	

How often features were found across all central Web sites	Feature	Per cent of Web sites		
		2001	1999	Change
<b>Features on Few Sites</b> 10 - 29%	UK Online link	27	na	
	Performance indicators for agency	26	na	
	Senior officials' email addresses	25	7	+18
	Electronic fill-in and submission of forms	24	14	+10
	Senior officials' telephone numbers	22	16	+6
	A-Z listing of organisation's services	20	na	
	E-purchasing on site	19	na	
	HM Government Logo	19	na	
	Free email news service	18	na	
	Facility for citizen consultation	17	6	+11
	Separately branded portal giving tailored information	16	na	
	Senior officials' address details	16		
	Links to foreign governments	15	na	
	Search facility for publications by title or subject	15	na	
	Email response pledge information	15	4	+11
	Search for documents	15		
Staff directory	15	6	+9	
Text only version of the site	13	6	+7	
Facility for managing accounts or finding the status of transactions	10	na		
<b>Very Rare Features</b> 0 - 9%	Dedicated email news service for specific client groups	8	na	
	Facility to input post code and receive relevant information	6	na	
	Web site usage statistics	6	na	
	Postcode search facility of any kind	6	na	
	Email news service requiring subscription payment	5	3	+2
	Chat room or forum service not requiring password	5	na	
	Technology for users with 'special needs'	5	na	
	Chat room or forum service requiring password	2	na	

**NOTE**

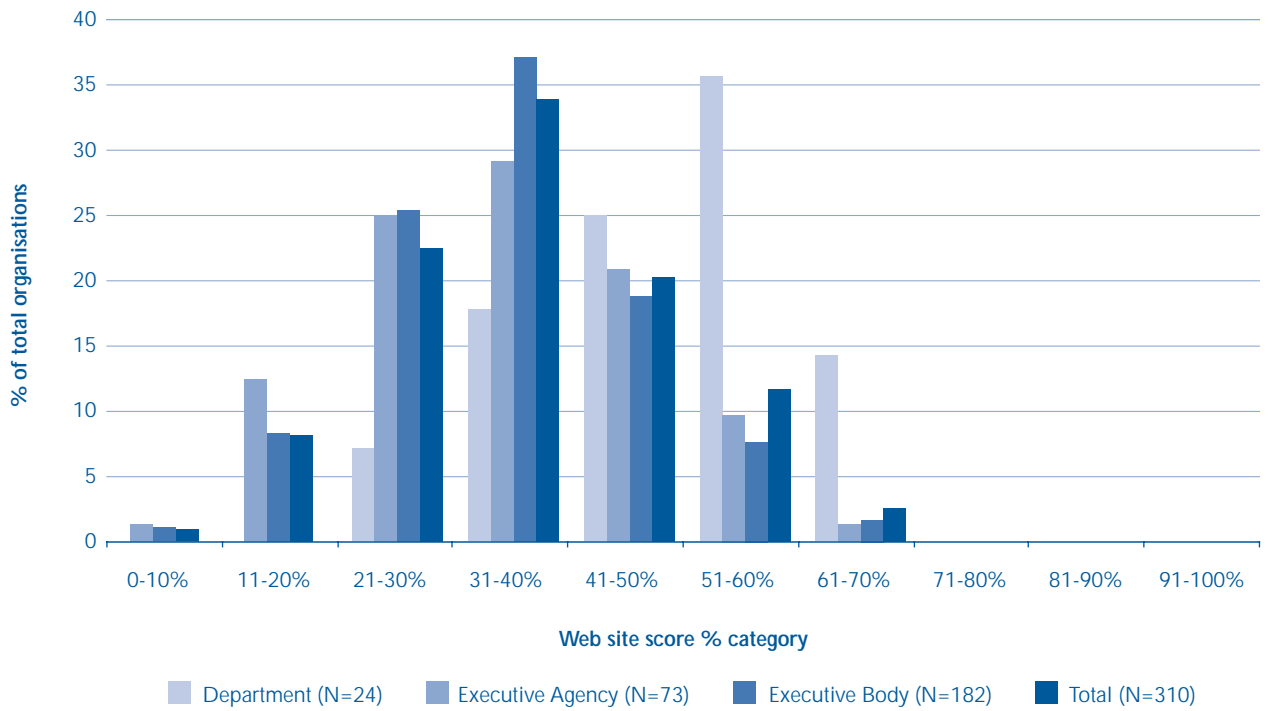
na = not available because item was not coded in 1999 census

- 4.35 The number of central government organisations without a Web site decreased from 125 in 1999 to 66 now, although there were offsetting increases in the number of organisations to be surveyed. There have consequently been substantial increases in the numbers and proportions of executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies maintaining a Web site. Those organisations without a site are chiefly small government bodies which have few if any dealings either with citizens at large or with firms and enterprises, normally because they are units which provide a specialist service within government itself. All the major Cabinet departments have well-developed Web sites.
- 4.36 **Figure 24** summarises the distribution of different kinds of features across the organisations surveyed in 2001, and shows comparable data from 1999 where it is available. The frequency of finding some of the fairly basic features included in our 1999 census has increased strongly, especially the ability to download documents, send e-mails to a general enquiry address, and access press releases and agencies' annual reports. Nearly half of agencies' sites have acquired these features in the last two years. Other changes have been more modest, including increases in the availability of search engines, site maps, press release archives, e-mail addresses for senior officials, defined e-mail response times, a contact route to the Webmaster, links to other governmental bodies and non-government organisations, on-line public consultation facilities, and travel directions for reaching agency offices. Typical of such changes is that the proportion of agencies with sites allowing users to fill-in and submit forms on-line has improved from one in seven to one in four.
- 4.37 However, the performance of central government Web sites in terms of facilities remains patchy. **Figure 24** shows that the only features which the vast majority of government sites have are basic details of how to contact the organisation involved and what it does, plus the ability to download documents, and a reasonably consistent look and feel. Four fifths of sites will also have a general e-mail enquiry service, on-line press releases and annual reports, a breakdown of the organisation's activities and links to other government agencies. But at least one government site in every five will lack such basic facilities. Around two-thirds to a half of sites add other electronic publishing features, a search engine and means of contacting the Webmaster. However, we would put the usefulness of

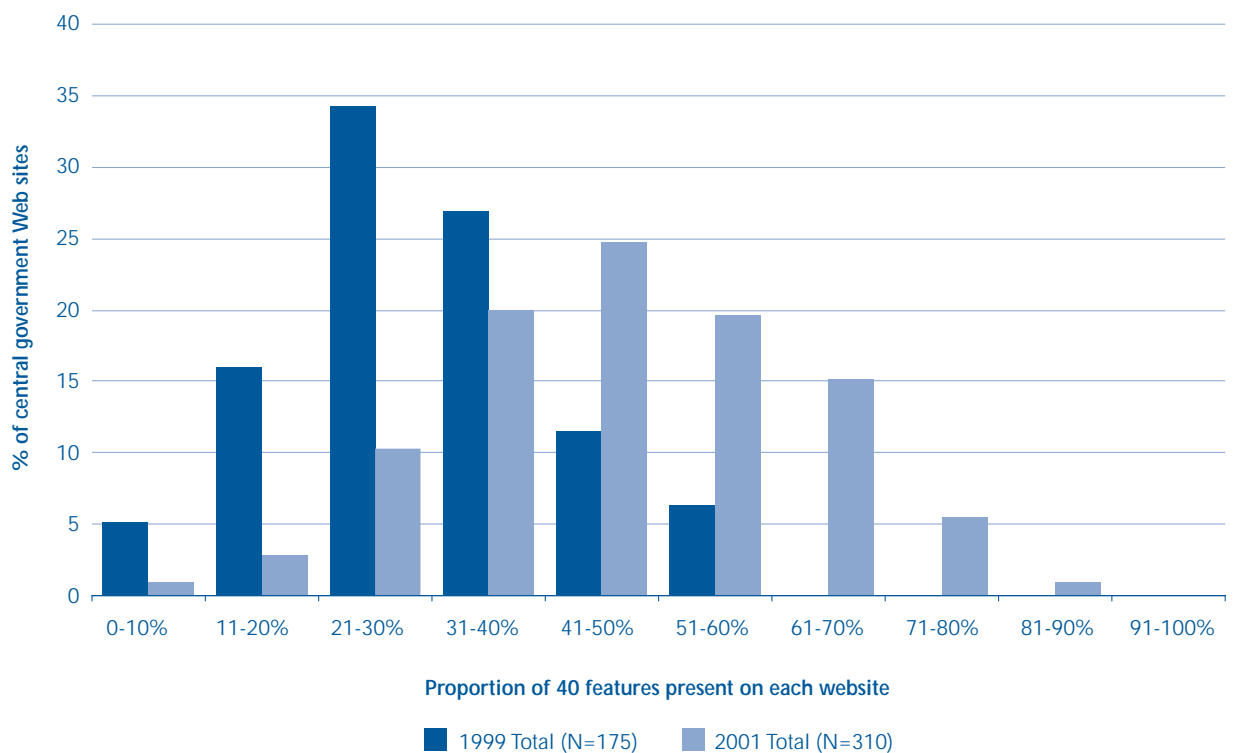
most search engines on government sites as low. In response to quite basic search terms fundamental to the department's mission, the engines often generate listings of myriads of obscure press releases or internal departmental documents. They did not anticipate and link to basic pages that most citizens using such search terms might be trying to find. Reasonably comprehensive repertoires of basic Web publishing features are present in less than half of government sites. Apart from submitting forms on-line, most other interactive services are provided in only a minority of Web sites, often by less than one in ten. Information on public sector sites is overwhelmingly organised in a list-wise fashion, meaning that users must page and click through large volumes of material in an order set out by the agency, rather than being able to search for information that is tailored or personalised to their needs. For instance, only one public Web site in 16 re-presented relevant information in response to users' inputting a postcode. E-mail alert services were similarly scarce.

- 4.38 In order to get a more synoptic view of how government Web sites were performing we coded how many times each agency or department scored positively across all of the 91 performance variables in the 2001 census. **Figure 25** shows the results of this analysis, broken down between the different types of organisation. Whitehall departments clearly had the best Web sites, with the most frequent (modal) category having 51 to 60 per cent of the features coded. Both executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies fell significantly behind: the modal category for both sets of sites has only 31 to 40 per cent of the features coded.
- 4.39 We also looked in more detail at 40 variables coded in a comparable way across the 1999 and 2001 censuses, again computing a score for each agency based on how many of these features were present. **Figure 26** shows that in 1999 the modal government organisation had only 21 to 30 per cent of these features, but by 2001 the whole distribution had shifted rightwards, putting the modal category as 41 to 50 per cent of this unchanged set of more basic features. In addition, of course, the number of central organisations with a Web site increased strongly from 175 coded in 1999 to 310 in 2001. Not only have many more central government Web sites been established but in addition all those now in place are objectively better in their basic features than was the case in 1999. This is solid evidence of worthwhile progress.

**25** Distribution of total Web site scores across all categories for central government organisations in 2001  
(scored from 91 variables)



**26** Distribution of Website scores across all government organisations between 1999 and 2001  
(based on comparable variables)



## Conclusions and recommendations

4.40 The recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee in its June 2000 report on 'Government on the Web' provide a useful framework for considering the extent of progress made in implementing e-government policies at the centre. Box 2 on page 15 above provides the full list of these recommendations, which we have re-grouped into four main headings in **Figure 27**. The Committee emphasised the importance of a clear cultural lead from the centre, which incorporates providing a lead, encouraging cultural change across departments, driving forward the establishment of intranets across departments and prioritising the training of staff with e-government expertise. They also concluded that there would need to be central delivery of joined-up initiatives, in particular a central government portal. The Committee emphasised the importance of collecting information centrally, including specifically the coverage of 'take-up' as well as monitoring the availability and the quality of government web sites. They also pointed to the importance of provision from the centre of a cost/savings methodology for e-government, so that potential benefits from electronic service provision could be realised. Other recommendations related to departments in general rather than to central agencies (notably recommendations 8 and 14 to 16). Some aspects referred to by the Public Accounts Committee have been developed outside the scope of OeE's remit and of this report: responsibility for leading government departments to introduce Electronic Document and Records Management Systems (recommendation 13) lies with the Public Record Office. And overcoming social exclusion (recommendation 18) is being managed by the Department for Education and Skills.

4.41 Central policy since 1999 has clearly given a strong cultural lead in promoting e-government, backed by the commitment of substantial resources. The expansion of the e-Envoy's Office; the strengthening of central policy initiatives; key funding initiatives aimed at increasing electronic provision; and the involvement of the Treasury have all contributed to a far higher awareness of e-government across local and central government. There have been some promising developments in some areas. The Cabinet Office has clearly given a strong lead from the centre (recommendation 1) and is encouraging (via 'policy, politics and rhetoric') departments to embark upon cultural change (recommendation 5). Some ambiguity over the use of the telephone as an 'electronic' transaction has been removed (recommendation 2).

4.42 There is also substantial evidence of progress in delivering joined-up initiatives in a centralised way, seeking to exploit economies of scale and to avoid wasteful effort in duplicating resources for the public sector, especially since the establishment of the e-Delivery Team within the Office of e-Envoy. Since late 2001 the UK Online site represents some progress towards a central government portal for the United Kingdom public sector as a whole. In January 2002 a new version of the portal was launched, but for much of 2001 the UK Online site's design was problematic and usage numbers still lag behind what might be hoped. Similarly the Government Gateway delivers substantial technical advances, but its success depends on usage levels for applications which use it being successfully developed and consolidated. It is important that policy-makers recognise that there is no necessary e-government logic of development that will grow usage of e-services unless users perceive clear and evident benefits from accessing in this way. In the USA during 2001 on-line submissions of income tax fell back appreciably after some accountants warned clients that electronic submission gave the Internal Revenue Service access to more data about taxpayer affairs than paper submission, increasing the likelihood of investigation and the chances of officials claiming more tax from citizens. If government is to grow the take-up of electronic services which reduce its costs or improve its efficiency, it is important that users of e-government services also share in these benefits.

4.43 The PAC recommended that the Cabinet Office should monitor take-up, have more reliable information on the existence and quality of government web sites, and monitor how often government web sites are up dated. Some action has been taken on these recommendations. The OeE's key performance indicator since spring 2000 has been the proportion of services which are electronically available. Amongst Whitehall departments only two departments are being asked formally to consider take-up as part of the Public Service Agreement targets. In its guidance and in discussion with departments, OeE makes clear that the 100 per cent target remains the foundation of the government's online strategy, while also stressing the importance of ensuring that key transactional services are available online and being widely used. While the target for getting all services delivered electronically by 2005 has been a useful way of encouraging departments and agencies to deliver an electronic capability, it is becoming increasingly important that the target is supplemented by, for example, targets for the take-up of services offered electronically. In addition the OeE has relatively little up to date, good quality information about central government on the web. OeE as yet collects no systematic data which would identify the most important transactions in terms of take-up, transaction volume or the monetary value of displacing them onto the web.

## 27 The extent of progress on the Public Accounts Committee's recommendations

### Strong Progress

Clear cultural lead from the centre of government (PAC Recommendations 1, 2, 5, 7 and 19)

Significant dedicated resources (staff and money) have been committed. The government-wide profile of e-government has clearly been raised. OeE provide assistance to departments and agencies through bilateral discussions and guidance on government web sites. Some ambiguities of the previous targets regime have been removed and the delivery timetable has been shortened by 3 years.

### Moderate Progress

Central delivery of joined-up initiatives (PAC Recommendations 11 and 12)

The Government Gateway and new UK Online central portal have been created and considerable resources allocated. Usage figures for the Gateway and UK Online site have been slow to develop. The extent of departmental involvement with central projects remains somewhat unclear.

### Little Progress

Having reliable information on the existence and quality of government Web sites

(PAC Recommendations 3, 9, 10)

The OeE performance indicator since Spring 2000 has been the proportion of services which are electronically available.

OeE does not collect any systematic or regular information on:

- Web traffic data on central government sites;
- transaction volumes on government Web sites;
- quality ratings of public sector Web sites, or the frequency of updates; or
- the market visibility of government online facilities or services.

DTLR has copied the OeE performance regime exactly for local government. The key 'Best Value Performance Indicator 157' is inadequate. DTLR collects no systematic data on local authority Web sites. Checks that extra funding committed will produce genuine change seem inadequate.

Costs/benefits methodology for e-government

(PAC Recommendations 4, 6 and 17)

Initial work in this area in 2000 yielded little. Case studies of e-government changes in four departments were initiated in summer 2001. But no central work on cost benefit or cost assessment methodology has yet been carried out. Hence OeE cannot yet systematically establish that electronic services delivery is generating savings of public money or quality of service improvements.

4.44 A final Public Accounts Committee recommendation stressed the importance of central policy-makers developing a useful methodology for measuring the costs and the savings or benefits of e-government provision. Progress has only been limited since the publication of *Government on the Web* in December 1999. Electronic targets are now included in Service Delivery Agreements and Public Service Agreements - but there appears to be no formal linkage between these targets and either expenditure or departments' productivity targets. In early 2000 the Central IT Unit and the Treasury did commission a report from PA Consulting into the broad costs of funding e-services' delivery. The consultants reviewed some issues and barriers, noted the need for clear measures of success and recommended the establishment of a central organisation to lead e-government issues. The report formed part of the background to the 2000 spending review, but did not result in specific guidance. In September 2000, the Performance and Innovation Unit of the Cabinet Office published a report, *e-gov - electronic government services for the 21st century*, which included a methodology for e-business planning and prioritisation. During 2001, analysts in the Treasury realised that work on the costs and benefits of electronic services was not going on systematically in government, although it could be important for the future. So the Treasury and the e-Envoy's Office have initiated a project (originally due to report in November 2001). It asks four departments to carry out such an analysis for one electronic service project each: Inland Revenue (self-assessment of income tax for individuals), DEFRA (CAP payments to farmers), Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency (driving license authorisation) and Department for Work and Pensions (individuals' payment of retirement pensions). Treasury officials observed that to undertake this exercise and work out a 'cost per unit delivery, the case study departments would need to quantify some basic costs for administrative tasks, data which has rarely been available across Whitehall. The problems in the UK in estimating the costs and benefits of electronic services delivery have not been solved either in comparable governments, and they have considerable parallels in business. But there is scope for major central departments to make progress, which could be very valuable to other central agencies and local authorities considering how to assess a wide range of possible e-government changes.

4.45 If the Office of e-Envoy is to offer more assurance to government and Parliament that e-service development monies are being productively spent, and if it is to increase its useful assistance to departments and agencies in implementing e-government changes, it is

important that it should develop a range of performance indicators which will work effectively in measuring progress in developing electronic transactions at stages before 2005. On current trajectories, progress in developing e-government usage will also continue to need to be measured for many years after 2005. The existing target of 100 per cent availability of electronic services by 2005 should be retained but supplemented by a set of principles which identify priority cases for electronic services development. Within these principles OeE should negotiate agreed targets for increasing the number of Web and electronic service users with all agencies and departments. OeE should put in place a set of performance indicators for monitoring and gauging progress which are comprehensive, evidence-based, and focused on the achieved take-up and the development of user numbers for electronic services and general Web sites. Agency targets should take account of the existing condition of each agency's back office systems and Web services and project forwards developments at least in line with overall UK development of Web and Internet traffic and transactions. The Cabinet Office and OeE should also ask departments and agencies to implement the PAC's 2000 recommendations on monitoring and regularly reporting on Web site usage and take-up of electronic services. They should also put in place monitoring reports to periodically assess the development of facilities across central government Web sites as a whole, which can be achieved at modest cost. OeE should prepare an annual report on progress, not least to feedback information to departmental and agency decision-makers and to create a public source of pressure for improvements to parallel that given in private discussions about agencies' e-business strategies.

4.46 It is important also that the Office of e-Envoy demonstrate that its own direct implementation work on central facilities and central policy development aspects is paying back effectively against the sums of public money committed. There is a clear need for OeE to specify targets and milestones for the assessment of central initiatives, including the UK Online portal site, the Government Gateway authentication system, the GSI2 second stage government intranet, and possible future central initiatives (such as the possible future take-over of all government Web-site hosting and operations control by OeE). OeE needs to adjust its style of operation and reporting from its current self-image as a campaigning agency with a limited end-state goal and an 'insider', government-to-government brief. OeE needs to behave as the substantial regulatory and implementation agency which it now has become. In this role it needs to be more effectively accountable and to run programmes which are externally assessable against clear intermediate performance indices.