Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice
Additional Estimates Hearings February 2014
Communications Portfolio
Department of Communications

Question No: 201 & 203

Program No. 1.2

Question 201

Hansard Ref: Page 99 (25/2/2014)

Topic: e-government and digital economy election commitment

Senator Urquhart asked:

Thank you. I note that the coalition e-government and digital economy policy was very keen to progress online engagement. The update said:

Under Digital First, by December 2017, Government agencies will provide their clients with user-friendly online access to priority services, allowing end-to-end processing for those services through a choice of a single authentication method that enables access to a range of services without needing multiple passwords or multiple tests of credentials.

Is the Digital First initiative still being implemented?

Mr Rizvi: The Digital First initiative has been replaced by the e-government and digital economy election commitment made by the current Government. That sets slightly different objectives and slightly different time tables for implementation, and we are working with all relevant Government agencies to implement the new election commitment.

Senator URQUHART: Do you have some detail around the objectives and the time frames on that? If you can provide it on notice, that is fine.

Mr Rizvi: I can provide the reference to the document on notice, yes.

Senator URQUHART: Thank you. My final question: has there been a substantial loss of momentum in the digital economy strategy?

Mr Rizvi: I do not believe so. We are tracking closely the 24 actions that were in the national digital economy strategy. We provide regular updates to that to the minister, who monitors them closely. The new election commitment outlines a fresh set of targets and milestones, and we are working assiduously to deliver on those.

Senator URQUHART: Is that information about the 24 points that you talked about available?

Mr Rizvi: I would need to take that on notice.

Question 203

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: National Digital Economy Strategy

Senator Urquhart asked:

Can the Department provide an update on the current status of the 24 actions in the national digital economy strategy?

Answer 201 and 203:

Please see table on next page.

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Communications Portfolio

Department of Communications

Action Number and Description	Lead agency/s	Current status and Next Steps (as at March 2014)
Action 1. Complete the development of a new curriculum for technologies The Australian Curriculum embeds ICT skills as a general capability across all learning areas of the curriculum. It will also include the subjects of Digital Technologies and Design Technologies which all students will study from Foundation to Year 8.	Education	**In progress:** The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) provided the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Technologies to education ministers for consideration at the Standing Council for School Education and Early Childhood meeting on 29 November 2013. At the meeting, the Australian Government proposed that the curriculum for technologies be referred to the Australian Government's Review of the Australian Curriculum for consideration. **Next steps:** The review is expected to deliver a preliminary report by 31 March 2014 and a final report by 31 July 2014. Education ministers have not agreed to endorse the Australian Curriculum: Technologies, however the curriculum was made available for use by ACARA on 17 February 2014 including by those states and territories that wish to begin work on implementation.
Action 2. Partner with industry to promote digital careers National ICT Australia will be funded to lead a consortium that will develop programs to promote careers in ICT skills to school students.	Communications	**In Progress:** The funding deed for the program was executed on 24 July 2013. Over 7,000 students participated in five events across four states in January 2014. Another 1,000 students are registered to participate in upcoming events. To date, the National Steering Committee and four State Steering Committees (NSW, ACT, VIC and QLD) have been established and are in the process of preparing state specific activity plans for the 2014 school year. Membership of the committees includes peak industry bodies, governments and research organisations such as Google, IBM, SAP, AIIA, ACS Foundation, CSIRO, AGIMO and VIC, NSW, QLD and ACT Governments. **Next steps:** The program has appointed a National Manager who is finalising the recruitment of State Managers and support staff. In principle sponsorship agreements have been made for the delivery of a number of ICT awareness activities including Club Kidspreneur, Little Scientists and CS Unplugged.

3. Expand the use of the Document Verification Service (DVS) The Government will work with state and territory governments to enhance the accessibility, usability and efficiency of the Document Verification Service – and also make the system more widely available to the private sector.	Attorney-General's Department (AGD)	**In Progress:** Use by private sector in Australia has commenced. Over two hundred and forty companies have applied to use the DVS, with more expected during 2014. Use of the DVS by state, territory and federal governments has also increased, with verifications in 2013 exceeding two million and expected to reach four million in 2014. The efficiency of the service has improved with average transaction times dropping from 2.5 seconds to 1.5 during 2012/13. **Next Steps:** AGD is developing proposals to further expand DVS private sector access, enabled by reforms to the *Privacy Act 1988* (the Act) that took effect on 12 March 2014. This could apply to organisations that have a reasonable necessity to use the DVS in accordance with the Act, in addition to organisations which have requirements or authority to verify a person's identity under other legislation. AGD is also exploring the feasibility of an arrangement with New Zealand to enable the reciprocal verification of identity documents, potentially using the DVS. These proposals will require agreement from state and territory governments. AGD is expanding the processing capacity of the system following the engagement of a new service provider for the DVS Hub. This will enable the DVS to better handle major demand fluctuations that are generated by the private sector.
Action 4. Investigate the use of trusted third-party credentials by Government The Government will investigate the use of higher assurance digital credentials issued by commercial providers such as financial institutions and the use of existing digital credentials, including third-party credentials.	Finance	**In Progress:** Agencies are considering the draft report of the *Study Group into Government Reliance on 3rd Party Credentials* following the November Authentication Governance Committee meeting. The Digital Mailbox Interdepartmental Committee has identified this and other work by the Authentication Governance Committee as being key to the delivery of Government services online. **Next Steps:** Finance, in consultation with relevant agencies will report to Ministers on the outcomes of work underway through the Authentication Governance Committee (AGC) on the scope for Government reliance on third party authentication credentials. The report will be provided to Ministers by September 2014.

Action 5. Release the Digital Citizenship Best Practice Principles The Government will release the principles in the second half of 2013 and encourage Australians to practise digital citizenship's core characteristics.	Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)	**Completed**. The ACMA launched its Digital Citizenship Best Practice Principles (the 'Digital Citizens Guide') on 25 July 2013.
Action 6. Develop the National Plan to Combat Cybercrime The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to develop the National Plan to Combat Cybercrime which outlines a strategic framework for how Australian Governments will respond to the threat posed by cybercrime. The plan is expected to be released in mid-2013.	AGD	**Completed**. The Attorney-General's Department (AGD) led the development of the Plan following comprehensive consultation with federal, state and territory agencies. The Plan was agreed to by all jurisdictions and released in July 2013. The Plan provides an overarching strategic framework to better coordinate efforts and ensure that Australia is best placed to respond to cybercrime. Since the Plan's release, AGD has worked with federal, state and territory agencies to develop an implementation strategy to outline how Governments will deliver the Plan's objectives. **Next steps:** The implementation strategy is currently with the Minister for Justice for approval. Subject to the Minister's approval, AGD will seek state and territory endorsement of the implementation strategy through the National Cybercrime Working Group.

Action 7. Review the regulatory arrangements for employee share schemes The Government will review the tax treatment of employee share schemes and develop guidance to reduce the administrative burden of establishing such schemes.	The Treasury/ Industry	**In Progress:** On 18 December 2013, the Prime Minister announced he would chair a taskforce, comprising the Treasurer, Industry Minister, and Minister for Trade and Investment, to develop a National Industry Investment and Competitiveness Agenda. Amongst other things, it was announced that the taskforce would focus on developing measures to promote national competitiveness and productivity, including an option to encourage innovation through employee share schemes. The taskforce is expected to make recommendations to the Government by the end of June 2014. On 28 January 2014, the Treasury began consultations with stakeholders on concerns with Employee Share Scheme arrangements for start-ups. The consultations ran for two weeks, with meetings conducted in Melbourne. Sydney and via teleconferences. Around 90 individuals participated and around 60 submissions were received. **Next steps:** Submissions to the recent consultation process are currently being analysed, for the purpose of advising the Government about options.
Action 8. Consult on an Australian crowd-sourced equity funding scheme The Government will examine opportunities to develop a best practice framework for Crowd Sourced Equity Funding.	The Treasury	**In Progress:** The Corporations and Markets Advisory Committee is looking into opportunities to better facilitate crowd-sourced equity funding as a means of encouraging new investment models, particularly for smaller start – up companies. **Next steps:** The Committee is currently scheduled to report to Government in April 2014.

Action 9. Minimise exemptions under the Electronic Transactions Act 1999 The Government will review Electronic Transactions Regulations 2000 to remove outdated exceptions to Commonwealth electronic transaction legislation by December 2014.	AGD	**In Progress:** The first stage of amendments to the Electronic Transaction Regulations were considered by the Executive Council at the 11 July 2013 meeting. These amendments removed a number of exceptions for provisions administered by the Attorney-General's Department, the Treasury, the former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Australian Electoral Commission. Fourteen exceptions have been repealed and five have been amended. **Next Steps:** A second stage of amendments has been prepared by the Attorney-General's Department and these are currently with the Attorney-General for consideration.
Action 10. Promote the adoption of cloud computing in Australia To promote the smart adoption of cloud computing, the Government will: • identify training and skills development across the public sector and ensure that agencies consider cloud services for relevant ICT procurements • develop resources to assist small businesses, not-for-profit organisations and consumers to use cloud services with confidence • work in partnership with cloud vendors to promote Australia as a trusted hub for data storage and processing, and encourage foreign investment in cloud services.	Communications	**In Progress.** Eleven actions in the Cloud Strategy are complete, thirteen are to be completed in 2014 (mostly in relation to information provision). **Next Steps:** The Government continues to place a strong emphasis on the adoption of cloud computing, with a particular emphasis on increasing adoption by Commonwealth agencies. This issue is being progressed as a key element of the broader e-Government strategy. The Departments of Communications and Finance have been working together to implement the policy and are involved in ongoing consultations with agencies towards this end.

Action 11. Explore making the G-NAF a freely available data set The Government will explore options for providing open access to the G-NAF including an analysis of the legal, financial and security implications.	Communications	**In Progress.** The Department commissioned KPMG to undertake a study of options for making the GNAF a free and open dataset. **Next steps:** The final report is expected to be provided to the Department shortly. The Department will then consult with other agencies to discuss the next steps to be taken.
Action 12. Release the Big Data strategy The Government will release its big data strategy in 2013 and continue to support the Data Analytics Centre of Excellence.	Finance	**In Progress.** Note that the Government has committed to release an updated big data strategy by end 2014. **Next Steps:** In March 2014 Finance publically sought proposals for joint private-public projects using big data. The call for proposals will come to a close by the end of April 2014 and will be followed by an evaluation process.
Action 13. Implement the Digital First initiative Under Digital First, by December 2017, Government agencies will provide their clients with user-friendly online access to priority services, allowing end-to-end processing for those services through a choice of a single authentication method that enables access to a range of services without needing multiple passwords or multiple tests of credentials.	Communications	**In Progress:** The previous Government's Digital First commitment has been superseded by the Government's Policy for *E-Government and the Digital Economy* which includes election commitments to provide *Convenient Services Anywhere Anytime*. Under this policy the Government will designate the internet as the default way to interact with users, other than for defined exceptions and establish a Digital Service Standard and Digital Design Guide, modelled on the UK equivalents. The policy includes a commitment that every Government interaction that occurs more than 50,000 times per year can be achieved online by 2017. **Next steps:** The Departments of Communications and Finance have been working together to implement the policy and are involved in ongoing consultations with agencies towards this end.

Action 14. Boost the Keeping Seniors Connected program The Government will provide senior Australians with free access to the latest technology and to training that will educate them on issues of particular concern to them, such as cybersecurity and cybersafety.	Social Services	**In Progress:** Implementation of "Keeping Seniors Connected" is nearing completion. 1,500 new computers are being distributed to organisations hosting Broadband for Seniors internet kiosks. In addition, around 1,300 kiosks will receive a $2,000 training grant. Delivery and installation of the new computers and payment of the grants are expected to be finalised by the mid-April 2014. There are around 1,600 organisations currently hosting Broadband for Seniors kiosks. **Next Steps:** Implementation is expected to be completed by mid-April 2014.
Action 15. Expand the Digital Enterprise program and develop industry-specific digital business kits The Government will expand the Digital Enterprise program and develop industry-specific digital business kits to provide small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the not-for-profit sector with resources to better engage with the digital economy.	Communications	**In Progress:** Digital Enterprise: The Department has engaged MarketScape to assist in evaluating the Program. **Next Steps:** The evaluation report will be finalised in the first half of 2014. Digital Business Kits Nine sectors have signed funding agreements and delivered first module (Telework) in November 2013. **Next steps:** Completed kits are due to be released by mid July 2014.

Action 16. Consider the expansion of the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) for telehealth items The Government will undertake a review in 2013 to determine the costs and benefits of an expanded range of MBS telehealth items to include patients participating in video-based consultations with their GP.	Health/Veterans' Affairs	**Completed.**
Action 17. Evaluate outcomes from telehealth trials and develop action plans to address key challenges. During 2014-15, the Government will evaluate the current telehealth trials, share trial findings and lessons with the healthcare community, and use the findings to develop action plans to address key telehealth issues.	Health/Veterans' Affairs	**In Progress:** Evaluations of telehealth trials are scheduled to take place from early 2014 to mid-2015, with the majority of evaluations to be available in the second half of 2014 **Next steps**: Continue to monitor progress of trials and ensure evaluations are undertaken as scheduled.

Action 18. Implement video consultations for the after-hours GP Helpline and the Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Helpline From the second half of 2013, the Government will commence a phased implementation of video-consultation capabilities starting with the after-hours GP Helpline and the 24-hour Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Helpline.	Health	**In Progress:** While locations for service implementation have been identified, the capability is continuing to be developed and tested to optimise the quality and safety of services delivered via video consultation. **Next steps**: Firm dates for service launch may be known in May 2014, subject to Ministerial consideration.
Action 19. Support increased use of digital platforms to provide aged care services The Government will introduce a range of reforms such as: • revision of relevant aged care program guidelines to recognise and encourage the use of innovative and digital delivery options for the provision of aged care services • expansion of the Community Visitors Scheme into home care including through the use of technology • launch the My Aged Care website to provide coordinated information for aged care services.	Social Services	**In Progress:** Progress has been made on encouraging the increased use of digital platforms for aged care services. An introductory statement supporting the use of innovative and digital delivery options for service delivery has been drafted for inclusion in relevant aged care guidelines as appropriate. As guidelines are developed and/or updated, this statement will be considered for inclusion. Guidelines for the new Home Care Package Program (which commenced on 1 August 2013) were released in mid-July 2013 and encourage home care providers to use innovative and digital delivery options to provide services, including through videoconferencing, remote monitoring and other assistive technology. The My Aged Care website and national contact centre was launched in July 2013. Additional functionality is expected to be added progressively. **Next steps:** The Department will continue to monitor progress of the use of digital platforms to provide aged care services and will consider opportunities as new guidelines are released, to encourage the use of innovative and digital delivery options for the provision of aged care services.

Action 20. Encourage access to virtual classes for vocational education and training (VET) students The Government will work with the states and territories to promote the virtual delivery of VET.	Industry	**In Progress:** Through the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG), the Australian Government provides funds to all jurisdictions to promote the take-up of e-learning in the vocational, education and training (VET) sector. Additionally, in 2013 FLAG developed a report on the application of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) in the vocational education and training sector, which was presented to the National Senior Officials Committee (NSOC) on the 28 November 2013 for consideration. The report is available at http://flexiblelearning.net.au/about/research/ NSOC agreed that FLAG would maintain a watching brief on the development and use of MOOCs in the VET sector, disseminate information on MOOCs to VET sector stakeholders and investigate the possibility of developing a MOOC about e-learning. Note: Following the Council of Australian Governments on 13 December 2013 decision to establish a new Industry and Skills Council, the various governance arrangements supporting the former Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment and their activities are being reviewed. This will include a number of FLAG activities. **Next steps**: Monitor outcomes of review of governance arrangements in light of the new Industry and Skills Council, and identify opportunities to continue to encourage virtual delivery of vocational education and training.
Action 21. Conduct an annual National Telework Week The Government will conduct an annual National Telework Week to promote the benefits of telework and facilitate the take-up of telework.	Communications	**In Progress/Ongoing.** Second Telework week held 18–22 November 2013. **Next steps:** Continue to progress plans for 2014.

Action 22. Facilitate more efficient use of rail infrastructure The Government will collaborate with mainland state Governments to develop a single national spectrum allocation for interoperable train communication systems in metropolitan and regional areas.	Communications	**Completed.** State rail authorities currently hold spectrum licences in the 1800 MHz band that will expire in 2015. Some of this spectrum will be made available for reissue at a public interest price so that it can be used to support the deployment of nationally harmonised next-generation rail safety and control systems. The public interest price for rail spectrum is given effect by the Radiocommunications (Spectrum Access Charges) Direction 2013. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is responsible for the reissue of spectrum licences and is currently considering reissue of the rail licences.
Action 23. Expand the Digital Local Government program The Government will extend the Digital Local Government program to enable about 15 additional local councils, including many in regional areas, to take advantage of the NBN to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the services they deliver.	Communications	**In Progress:** An expansion to the Digital Local Government Program was announced in the 2013-14 Budget with funding of $5.148 million. A competitive selection process was undertaken in July 2013 which resulted in 15 local councils being awarded funding under the program to deliver innovative online Government services using high speed broadband. Funding deeds for the Round 4 projects were executed during August and September 2013. The additional 15 projects brought the total number of local councils being provided with funding under the program to 48. The Round 4 projects, scheduled for completion in the second half of 2014-2015, cover a range of services including online lodgement and tracking of development applications; provision of health services; hosting online workshops; 3D modelling and mapping; CCTV implementation and use of high definition video conferencing to deliver online customer support. **Next steps:** The program will be evaluated by an external consultant in the second half of 2014.

Action 24. Provide free Wi-Fi access to remote Indigenous communities The Government will progressively adapt community satellite telephones to provide public Wi-Fi services to remote Indigenous communities.	Communications	**In Progress:** The trial, in six remote Indigenous communities, of free public internet access through fixed community satellite phones that were converted to become Wi-Fi hotspots, was successfully concluded in June 2013. The Wi-Fi conversion of the remaining 295 fixed community satellite phones that were provided under the Indigenous Communications Program (ICP) has recently commenced, starting with some communities in West Arnhem Land. Once an ICP community phone is Wi-Fi enabled, ICP Community Liaison Officers will provide some basic computer and internet training, including cyber-safety, to community members, at a time to be arranged with each community. The Wi-Fi rollout to these 295 phones is expected to be completed by June 2015. Responsibility for this programme has been transferred to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. **Next Steps:** Wi-Fi enabling has commenced, as these phones are enabled community liaison officers are going out to each community and providing basic internet, e-security and cyber safety training to the community members.