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University researchers advise on the way ahead for public service delivery.

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Researchers at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne shared their findings on the way ahead for public service delivery this week at Newcastle Civic Centre - the result of three years of research.

Geoff Tierney, head of Government Efficiency and modernisation division was the keynote speaker at the conference; he addressed the challenges faced by local authorities in implementing the national strategy for local e-government.

He said: "In our joint work to modernise public services, we must develop a framework for multi-agency information sharing and e-government is at the heart of this. The research findings by the Newcastle researchers and the work being done by the 'FAME' national project are producing a generic framework which we hope to be able to implement into local government.

"Some of the challenges we face are around project management and data sharing. Through addressing these areas, we can enhance not only the quality, sustainability and efficiency of local services but also the effectiveness of local democracy."

The University's Centre for Social and Business Informatics (SBI) spearheaded the day long event hosted by Newcastle City Council.

Providers of public services are under increasing pressure to work in partnership and share information to provide 'joined up' services in line with Government recommendations. The research undertaken by the AMASE (Advanced Multi-Agency Service Environment) project seeks to address the organisational, managerial, regional policy and technical problems and issues associated with this task.

The event was designed for people working at a senior level in the planning and delivery of public sector services in the North East. The meeting presented lessons learnt from the AMASE project and focused on practical and pragmatic ways to deliver joined up services.

Professor Ian McLoughlin, director of the SBI and also head of the University's Business School, explains:

"Our findings suggest information sharing and joint working in partnerships need to be considered at a level above individual public agencies and instances of joint agency working. This requires new ways of thinking and understanding on the part of public managers and system suppliers.

"This needs to embrace the opportunities offered by internet and related digital technologies but at the same time recognise the distinctive needs and obligations involved in public service delivery. Our research provides a framework for tackling these issues and gives detailed examples of successful attempts to develop multi-agency working from studies conducted in the North East of England."

The AMASE project has been working in the region on a series of case studies. Organisations which are involved include the NHS, Newcastle City Council and other local authorities in the region, voluntary sector organisations and One North East. Two of these studies include the North East Regional Smartcard Consortium (NERSC) and Children's and the Young People's Strategic Partnership in Newcastle.

As a direct result of its work, NCSBI was approached by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to participate in one of its National Projects - Framework for Multi-Agency Environments (FAME). This project is assisting in the take-up of electronic government amongst local authorities in England who all have to meet the target, set by Prime Minister Tony Blair, of having 100% of services on-line by 2005.

ENDS

PIC CAPTION: Geoff Tierney, head of Government Efficiency and modernisation division and Professor Ian McLoughlin, director of the SBI and also head of the University's Business School at the conference.

NOTES TO EDITOR:

- AMASE (Advanced Multi-Agency Service Environment) is an Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council funded project as part of the Systems Integration Initiative. It seeks to address the organisational, managerial, regional policy and technical problems and issues involved in delivering 'joined-up services', in situations where multiple services offered by different agencies have to be provided in varying configurations to a variety of client groups.

- The project is one of a series of studies on electronic government being conducted by the University's new centre for Social and Business Informatics which brings together management and social scientists with computer experts to investigate the role of the internet and related digital technologies in transforming public and private organizations.

- Launched in 2002, NERSC aims to introduce a single multi-application 'Smartcard' into the North East that would provide benefits covering education (e.g. as a student card), leisure (e.g. as a membership card to leisure centres or local football teams) and travel (as an electronic season ticket) and offer incentives and rewards for card holders.

- The Children's and Young People's Strategic Partnership is geared towards establishing an infrastructure that would help the various childcare services combine its skills and draw upon the expertise of a wide range of different public agencies and the voluntary sector.

- FAME is an e-government project funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister as part of the national strategy for local e-government. It works to develop a framework for multi-agency information sharing that will help improve the provision of more efficient, effective and holistic services.

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