



Digital Britain

Response to the Interim Report: 12 March 2009

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Section A: Executive Summary

1. Introduction

1.1 As managing agent of the network of 6,000 UK online centres supporting adults to use ICT and the internet, the UK online centres national leadership body is an expert in understanding and promoting digital inclusion, digital take-up and digital skills.

1.2 Digital Britain is clear that our economy and society will be built on a digital infrastructure which will provide the foundations for a technology-enabled culture change throughout all areas of life. Just as Paul Murphy's Digital Inclusion Action Plan introduced digital inclusion as a social issue, Digital Britain has introduced it as an economic one, and represents a major milestone for this developing policy area.

1.3 In planning for a digital future, however, we strongly believe the key is to put people before sites and pipes, and we would have liked to have seen a stronger emphasis throughout the report and surrounding communications about the people who will benefit from a digital Britain. Britain runs on people power, and making sure people have the skills, access and motivation to use technology as employees, employers and as consumers is crucial in bolstering the economy and keeping it competitive. Lord Carter mentioned at the PITCOM session that the people side just isn't interesting enough to get media attention - maybe Digital Britain can help to shift the media's prejudice.

1.4 UK online centres have been invited to be part of the group led by Ofcom to take forward the Digital Britain chapters on media literacy over the coming weeks and months. This response provides a general view from both the central organisation and the centre network, who work with digitally excluded people in some of the most deprived communities in England.

2. Key principles and themes

We have identified five key principles:

- People must come before pipes
- Co-ordinated leadership is required at all levels
- Funding for take-up should be a priority for government investment
- Local, informal support is vital
- Content is not a silver bullet for those not currently taking up broadband

2.1. People before pipes

2.1.1 'People before pipes' is a key principle we would like to see adopted as the interim report moves forward into the full report and then onto implementation. Leaving anyone behind in terms of digital exclusion will seriously effect civic participation, social mobility and how the country as a whole can perform in global markets. For those on the wrong side of the digital divide, having extra mega-bytes

running past their door will not on its own motivate or support them to use technology.

2.1.2 We were delighted to see media literacy and digital take-up represented alongside plans for infrastructure investment and content development. In particular, we support the principle of universality and agree that all citizens should have the opportunity to use the internet.

2.1.3 We believe that public investment should focus on take-up (rather than infrastructure), and that a 'deal' should be struck with industry so government helps people to understand the benefits of using the internet and get skills needed to use it, and industry makes a universal offer available and ensures low cost options for the disadvantaged. Government may find a much better return on investment in this approach. A recent UK online centres study saw that 12,000 socially excluded people could be motivated and supported to go online for the first time, develop digital skills and then progress for just £163 per person.¹

2.1.4 People with low incomes can't connect to broadband if they don't have the kit to connect to it. We would like to talk to you further about government support for recycled computer schemes, especially those which can also provide new jobs for the unemployed as implemented in Australia². Evidence from one UK online centre project shows free computers can encourage use and even take-up of broadband. More than half of those on an estate in Tower Hamlets paid for their own broadband connections after six months of having the service, equipment and relevant training for free³. Other industry-backed options could include free wireless or fibre connections for social housing estates and care homes.

2.2. Co-ordinated leadership is required at all levels

2.2.1 Digital inclusion is fragmented across departments and across sectors, and in order to improve quality, reduce duplication and maximise on current and planned activities there must be intelligent coordination, clear goals, standardised measures, imperative policies and steadfast direction from the top echelons of government.

2.2.2 We applaud the increased interest in digital inclusion shown across departments, but the fact is it remains peripheral to the core activity of each, and this will slow progress. There must be very strong leadership for digital inclusion to transcend departments, dedicated resource, and robust co-ordination particularly between Lord Carter and Paul Murphy's offices.

2.2.3 Coordination is also essential at a local level, in terms of both delivery and marketing. There are some very successful digital inclusion marketing campaigns already taking place, including those run by UK online centres - like Get online day. However, more can be made of these campaigns and this resource if organisations across sectors work together to support a common theme, using market intelligence about the most digitally excluded. Our evidence shows that spending huge amounts of money on take-up via expensive TV campaigns is not the best investment for the target market. A well led and locally delivered partnership approach – brokered by government – would ensure both general awareness and motivate footfall.

¹ Digital inclusion, social impact: a research study. Ipsos Mori and UK online centres, September 2008. http://www.ukonlinecentres.com/corporate/images/stories/downloads/digital_inclusion_research_report.pdf

² <http://www.greenpc.com.au/> Further contact information is available on request

³ Information from the Aberfeldy Neighbourhood UK online centre in the Digital inclusion, social impact report (above).

2.3 Funding for take-up should be a priority for government investment

2.3.1 The need for long term, sustainable and flexible funding for the engagement of digitally excluded people cannot be ignored by Digital Britain. It is very important that all citizens have the opportunity to develop basic internet skills. Government requires a coordinated approach to this, and needs to ensure funding for ICT learning is spent to help hard-to-reach citizens in the informal style they value and respond well to.

2.3.2 We must recognise that for many of the most excluded individuals and groups – the ‘final third’ - the journey to digital inclusion will take time. There are no quick fixes, and we must see progression in terms of months and years, not sessions or weeks.

2.3.3 Collaboration and partnership should be encouraged and incentivised, and if a discrete digital inclusion budget cannot be achieved, we must direct the money currently available via local authorities, departmental project funding and even independent funds like the Big Lottery towards a coordinated set of outcomes. Not only will this create a more effective and unified service for digitally excluded individuals, but it will avoid random fits and starts of provision and campaigning and enable frontline staff to focus on delivery.

2.3.4 UK online centres know how to reach and support hard-to-reach people who are offline, but as you will read in Section C they are constrained. With greater interest from government departments, with a clear central lead role (so that partners are even more willing to join in), and with additional funding, UK online centres could do more. UK online centres has a successful scalable model and the infrastructure to deliver it – quite simply with more funding more people would be getting online today.

2.4 Local, informal support is vital

2.4.1 Having informal and friendly support available locally is the key motivating factor to people who are getting online for the first time. The value of local support in both delivery and marketing must be recognised and suitably resourced. Interest in learning on the internet by people on lower incomes shifted from 38% to 65% just by including local access to the internet and friendly support.⁴

2.4.2 Much of what UK online centres do is not just about digital inclusion, but about more general support, focusing on the person rather than the technology or the course. Responding to individual needs and being able to adapt curriculums to people’s interests is vital. We must find ways to ensuring quality without enforcing rigid structures.

2.4.3 Self generated content, and the tools, equipment and expertise to encourage and support it will be essential in driving innovation. Government should aim to support those who are currently socially excluded to be the web entrepreneurs of the future, giving people a voice to talk about local, national and global issues. A digital enterprise initiative, along the lines of the Digital Mentors programme established by Communities and Local Government, could be particularly effective in the current economic climate.

⁴ ICM and UK online centres survey March 2008, based on a sample group of 1,300 C2DE respondents, with no internet access at home, work or elsewhere other place. Available on request.

2.5 Content is not a silver bullet for those not currently taking up broadband

2.5.1 The final report needs to be very clear about the definition of content. There is no evidence that people are offline because there is no appropriate content for them. People come online to email family and friends, to use cost comparison websites, to make savings on car insurance savings, to research hobbies. With the barriers of fear and cost taken down, people find compelling reasons to use the content currently available on the internet. At UK online centres, after being introduced to the internet in a friendly and supportive way via **myguide**, 86% said that it had significantly benefited their lives.⁵

2.5.2 This is not to say that content cannot be very engaging. **myguide** content is very popular with the newly digitally included – it's simple, no gadgets and does just what is needed. **myguide** introduces people to the internet and encourages them to explore existing content and services when they are confident to do so.

2.5.3 We do not believe that content is a priority for new government investment for the digitally excluded and unskilled. However, we think more could be done with existing budgets. For example, the BBC has a significant budget for content development and more of this could be directed to attracting and exciting people new to the internet. A staggering third of all licence fee payers are *not* on the internet therefore the BBC should direct offline viewers to places and partners who can provide internet access and support to get online. The BBC must work in two-way partnership with other key bodies working on take-up and support, such as UK online centres.

2.5.4 There is a clear case that once online even the most deeply excluded people are keen to use online public services like Directgov and NHS choices. The more disadvantaged they are the more government services they use; research shows only 32% of people with two or more deprivations can access government online⁶. Government should take the opportunity to consider how this content is made as accessible as possible and relevant as possible for irregular or new web users, and how greater take-up of public services can go hand-in-hand with greater digital take-up in general.

2.5.5 Again it is local internet access and friendly help that will encourage offline people to use online public service content. In a survey of people with lower incomes who did not have internet access at home, work or elsewhere, 46% of them said they would use online government services if there was an internet access place nearby with someone to help them if they got stuck.⁷

⁵ **myguide** longitudinal research. ORC and UK online centres, 2008. Available on request.

⁶ Transformational government for the Citizen. Simpson Carpenter Regenris and UK online centres, November 2006. <http://www.ukonlinecentres.com/corporate/images/stories/downloads/ukonlinegovresearchreport.pdf>

⁷ ICM and UK online centres survey March 2008, based on a sample group of 1,300 C2DE respondents, with no internet access at home, work or elsewhere other place. Available on request.

Section B: Ten point action plan for digital inclusion, digital take-up and digital skills

UK online centres have put together a ten point plan to make a step-change in growth in digital inclusion, digital take-up and digital skills. This has been shared with the team at Ofcom, but lists easily and quickly implemented actions which could make a big difference to the digital divide.

1 in 3 adults do not use the internet.

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1. Ensure there's a place to get online and get support in using the internet in every deprived community by identifying areas of need and plugging supply gaps. UK online centres can deliver more, but lack of funding for this provision remains an obstacle. This must be addressed with the Cabinet Committee as a matter of priority.
2. Support targeted interventions for the most socially excluded people to use the internet, for example homeless people, adults with mental health issues, and unemployed people. There are demonstrable benefits of being online for all of these groups, but not enough tailored awareness raising, outreach or provision. The agencies working with these groups should be brought together and partnerships centrally brokered.
3. Run an annual national Get online day by taking and building on the UK online centres model. Ensure every government department is a partner in this campaign and that they bring on *their* partners, for example, DCMS brings on board all football clubs, as well as all museums, and DoH brings on board all hospitals. This is not an expensive television advertising campaign; it is a network of partners generating consumer interest and media attention, running events and reaching out to the people who interact with them on a daily basis.

3 out 4 people who live in social housing aren't online – representing a full 28% of all those who are digitally excluded.

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4. Place an obligation on all social landlords that they must provide access to the internet, and support to use it, in all of their social housing including all sheltered housing. This could be, for example, the provision of space to set up a UK online centre, or, the provision of a wireless network along with low cost recycled equipment plus training from a third sector partner, UK online centre or local FE college. The decision should be for the social landlord within the rules of the obligation.

50% of older people over the age of 65 are not online.

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⁸ Office of National Statistics, Oxford Internet Institute and others.

⁹ Demographic profiling. ICM and UK online centres, based on 30,000 respondents without access to the internet. Jan to April 2008. Available on request.

5. Support an annual national campaign for older people, building on Silver Surfer's Day. This should bring together and coordinate the efforts of relevant organisations and partners.

6. Subsidise one visit a year by a friendly techie to everyone over the age of 70 to health check their computers and help to install new peripherals such as web-cams or assistive technologies (such as a special mouse for people with shaky hands).

Only 32% of people who most often use government services are online and able to use online public services.

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7. Ensure every government department launching a new online public service has a strategy in place to ensure that as many people who are currently offline can get onto the internet to use the new service.

9. Subsidise a Citizen Shop in every community, designed and implemented by the community, so that there is a local place where digitally excluded people can go to get support and get access to online government services.

Research shows that 46% of people in the social classes C2DE who don't have access to the internet think that they are likely or very likely to use a Citizen Shop.

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The people least likely to complain, to civically express an opinion, to campaign or to canvass other people's opinions on an issue, are also least likely to be online.

9. Support community outreach to inspire disadvantaged people to create and own content so that people without a voice can communicate, campaign and complain.

Although outnumbered by those who aren't working, 26% of all employed people (full time or part time) aren't online.

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10. Incentivise employers to pledge to get 100% of their staff to get online (this could be as part of the Skills Pledge). Government should encourage a salary sacrifice scheme so that employers could help employees lease equipment and access free training.

¹⁰ Demographic profiling. ICM and UK online centres, based on 30,000 respondents without access to the internet. Jan to April 2008. Available on request.

¹¹ Transformational government for the Citizen. Simpson Carpenter Regenris and UK online centres, November 2006. <http://www.ukonlinecentres.com/corporate/images/stories/downloads/ukonlinegovresearchreport.pdf>

¹² ICM and UK online centres survey March 2008, based on a sample group of 1,300 C2DE respondents, with no internet access at home, work or elsewhere other place. Available on request.

¹³ Demographic profiling. ICM and UK online centres, based on 30,000 respondents without access to the internet. Jan to April 2008. Available on request.

Section C: Centre feedback

In order to get a picture of the view from the UK online centres' network on Digital Britain, we contacted key centre managers, working with deprived communities, and posed five questions to get a view from the ground:

- Will universal 2MB broadband access help solve digital exclusion in the UK?
- Will faster broadband create new digital services and new innovation? What sort of innovation is needed to achieve digital inclusion for those at the bottom of the digital and social pile?
- Do the digitally excluded need different digital or website content? Can content motivate use, and if so, what kind of content do you think is required? Please think about what people want to do online in your centre, and what made them decide to come in and start a digital journey in the first place. Do you have people asking to use BBC iPlayer for example if they've never been online before? Do people want to create their own content?
- The Digital Britain report has given the BBC responsibility to lead on inspiring more people to take up broadband. What would you like to see that work involve, and who do you think they should partner with?
- Ofcom have been tasked with leading the creation of an action plan for media literacy (digital skills). What is the single most effective thing they could do to help people get the motivation, access and skills to use digital technologies?

1. Will universal 2MB broadband access help solve digital exclusion in the UK?

1.1. From centre managers' point of view, 2MB broadband was welcomed as a step in the right direction for universality, but not a step towards solving digital exclusion per se. Many centres pointed out that faster speeds don't motivate an off-line audience to get online, and that the expense of owning a computer and connecting to broadband of any speed is a key barrier for those most deeply excluded.

1.2 We know those at the bottom of the social and economic pile are most likely to be digitally excluded, and the economic downturn has pushed computer ownership and internet connections down people's priority lists.

1.3 An apt analogy from one centre manager compared broadband infrastructures with transport infrastructures: *"The country may have a sustainable road network and transport infrastructure, but if I don't know how to drive, can't afford a car and have no money to pay for public transport, the infrastructure doesn't matter to me. There may be places I'd like to go, things I'd like to see and new experiences that I'd like to have. But if I'm excluded from all of that by lack of skills and knowledge or my inability to pay, then increasing the speed with which the cars are whizzing by my window isn't going to help me."*

1.4 Some centres pointed out that while they nominally had 'fast' broadband in their centres, they knew it wasn't as fast as it should be, and struggled with old networks, computers and software to make the most of what was already available. While slow access is frustrating for visitors and staff, it doesn't put people off coming back. What

it does show is that even organisations – especially those in the third sector – need the equipment and resources to make the most of new infrastructures. Again, funding faster broadband will not solve these issues at centre level.

2. Will faster broadband create new digital services and new innovation? What sort of innovation is needed to achieve digital inclusion for those at the bottom of the digital and social pile?

2.1 Centres felt that faster broadband was a factor in *enabling* creativity and the creation of new services, because it could help people access and use new information and new technologies in new ways.

2.2 Many thought technology allowed innovation to come from communities themselves, and that it could put creativity and power into the hands of ordinary people rather than an elite. The key barrier, though, was still not the speed or lack of broadband but the lack of equipment, knowledge, skills and confidence.

2.3 Technology was widely identified as a means to an end rather than an end in itself, and many centres wanted to see more innovation and investment in off-line services which could help people *make* digital journeys. Many UK online centres use technology to engage and empower disenfranchised groups, but it is part of wider work to address local and individual needs holistically. More investment in community development partnerships, pilots and workers were thought to be the real key in achieving digital inclusion for those at the bottom of the digital and social pile. Local action, local delivery, long term intervention and personalised services were reoccurring themes.

3. Do the digitally excluded need different digital or website content? Can content motivate use, and if so, what kind of content do you think is required? Please think about what people want to do online in your centre, and what made them decide to come in and start a digital journey in the first place. Do you have people asking to use BBC iPlayer for example if they've never been online before? Do people want to create their own content?

3.1 Centres agreed that good content *could* motivate use of the internet, but in the things it allowed people to do rather than in and of itself. Many people come into centres with specific goals or tasks they wanted to achieve, and have heard they can do so online. Whether it's sending an email to far flung relatives, helping the kids with homework, opening a picture of a new grandchild, bidding for a council house, booking a holiday or redeeming a shopping voucher, it wasn't the quality of the sites that made them come through the door, it was their function that mattered first. *"Content needs to play on the fact that the user will gain something by going online."*

3.2 UK online centres marketing research has also found that while some people need to know about the benefits of being online and what's out there, others are already aware of what they *could* do online, but are held back by fear, expense, or a lack of confidence. Benefits and barriers require different messaging, and vary widely for different audience groups. *"What appeals to one person won't necessarily appeal to another just because they are both 'excluded'."*

3.3 Centres responding to this question went on to say that the quality and particularly the simplicity of content did motivate those who were already in centres and taking their first steps onto the internet. A good site could build someone's

confidence, a bad site that was hard to navigate and felt complicated, scary or boring could likewise knock it. There was praise for **myguide** and Google for stripping things back, having simple buttons and click throughs which allowed people to achieve tasks quickly and easily. *“If the website is difficult to navigate or has problems with links even people who are efficient internet users will switch off.”*

3.4 People in UK online centres often do want to create their own content, but this is still a step quite far along in a typical user journey. At UK online centres we’ve grouped activities and **myguide** courses across three journey levels – starting, using and understanding. Most new users still want to start with the basics of mouse control, and move on to simple emailing and searching, and from there to more advanced use. For many there is a significant fear factor in participation rather than passive consumption, and for the very hardest to reach knowledge, skill and aspiration are low, and must be slowly built up along with their confidence. As technology and its use continues to change, the creation of content may become a motivating factor, but currently it doesn’t drive initial interest and isn’t on the list of things new users tend to ask about.

3.5 The digital journey for community and social media starts out with photo sharing and basic social networking. People tend to move on to creating their own websites, blogging and using video or audio media to create their own multi-media content, but only when these skills are suggested and driven by centres themselves. There are some very successful UK online centre projects encouraging community and social media, and giving people the tools and voice to innovate and participate. However, this is not yet core to the work of most centres, and as demand increases so will the need for investment in staff skill and centre equipment.

3.6 There seem to be few UK online centre users using iPlayer and 4oD, and demand seems reasonably low amongst first time users. One suggestion is that video and Sky plus still perform this role for many people. Another is that watching TV programmes or films are lengthy and reasonably solitary pursuits while centres are social places, where time is limited. People are unlikely to use these facilities in a centre, and if they don’t have a computer and high speed broadband at home (which for this audience is less likely) they don’t even have a need to *learn* about iPlayer and 4oD at the centre.

3.7 Centres felt that content rich sites did help them create ‘hooks’ to get people interested in computers and the internet. One good example is the BBC’s ‘Who do you think you are?’ programme, which one centre has used as the basis for a genealogy course. However, an interest in family history was the true motivator, and the interest in this programme a symptom rather than a source.

4. The Digital Britain report has given the BBC responsibility to lead on inspiring more people to take up broadband. What would you like to see that work involve, and who do you think they should partner with?

4.1 Centres wanted to see the BBC lead on marketing digital inclusion across programming, websites and education materials. However, they felt the emphasis should be on the final third of people off-line. Therefore instead of inspiring people to take up broadband they should be inspiring people to give technology a go, and signposting not to online resources but to wider digital inclusion practitioners like UK online centres including libraries. In return, centres could build learning around programmes (like ‘Who do you think you are’) and direct visitors to BBC education, **myguide** and general online resources.

4.2 One centre suggested that every time a BBC website or service is advertised, or every time newsreaders ask for stories via text and email, they should also give out the UK online centres 0800 77 1234 freephone number for those who want to join in but don't yet have the skills. There is also scope for digital inclusion to be featured more prominently in EastEnders (following on from the storyline about Dot Cotton learning how to email), and for the news website to target intermediaries with information about how to get their loved ones online too.

4.3 Another idea is a role for local radio stations and regional television stations to champion a digital inclusion campaign. For television this could be news programmes following local case studies over a number of weeks to show their user journey in action and in their own words. On radio there could be whole sections and programmes devolved to community groups who could be helped by BBC professionals to use the equipment and computer systems to put together their own programmes.

4.4 Getting the different arms of the BBC to work together can be complex, and they can be reluctant to work in partnership outside of the organisation. This must be carefully managed by government to ensure maximum impact.

5. Ofcom have been tasked with leading the creation of an action plan for media literacy (digital skills). What is the single most effective thing they could do to help people get the motivation, access and skills to use digital technologies?

5.1 Centres wanted to see more central co-ordination of digital inclusion activity, with even more help to broker partnerships with other organisations – from Age Concern to Jobcentre Plus, the BBC to Citizens Advice. The need for co-ordination was also identified in key messages, campaigns, and a single call to action for digitally excluded people.

5.2 Funding was another theme, and centres made it clear they could only do more for digitally excluded people with more resource. *“We would like to support more people to use the web and give them skills, but we are also aware that sometimes community organisations are expected to deliver these services for free and are not taken seriously enough by government to acknowledge the work that is being done.”*

5.3 Centres wanted funding to be flexible so they could continue to adapt provision to individual needs, and work with people rather than courses and qualifications. *“We find at our centre most people come in for advice on the immediate problems (finance/housing) and may come back later to access other things [like IT].... Work often takes years to show results.”* They wanted to see their holistic role recognised and valued.

5.4 Another theme in responses was the importance of local understanding and local delivery for a deeply excluded audience suffering multiple deprivations. Centres wanted to see national marketing, but wanted to be able to adapt it themselves and tailor it to their communities. The UK online centres marketing model is an example, with national PR to raise awareness, and local marketing materials, hints and tips, to piggy-back on the national theme and drive local footfall. Centres feel this has been particularly effective. In a survey of Get online day centre participants, 84% said Get

online day had helped bring new users into their centre, and 97% wanted to take part in the next campaign.¹⁴

¹⁴ Get online day longitudinal research. ORC and UK online centres, January 2009. Available on request.

Section D: Case studies with relevance to Digital Britain

1. Aberfeldy Neighbourhood Centre – support in the home and their local UK online centre for families and individuals on low incomes

This case study shows how supported home access can encourage independent broadband take-up in the long-term.

The Aberfeldy UK online centre is in Tower Hamlets and serves the deprived Aberfeldy Estate, which includes Bangladeshi, Somali and refugee communities. The project targeted families, who took part in an eight week course at the centre. Four weeks in, social enterprise partner Digibridge provided people with a recycled home computer and a community broadband connection, and volunteers did a home visit once a week to help families make the most of the technology. The equipment remained with the families after completion of the project. People were taken through the basics of ICT, and introduced to government e-services and family resources online.

There was another group supported who were only supported at the local UK online centre (centre-based participants) alongside those supported at home and at the centre (home-supported participants). The project found that:

- 66% of centre-based participants progressed and 87% of home-supported participants progressed onto further training or employment
- 84% of centre-based participants and 97% of home-supported participants said the internet had made a difference to their lives
- 63% of centre-based participants and 97% of home-supported participants are now confident in using online public services
- 85% of centre-based and 94% of home supported participants are continuing to use the internet
- 44% of centre-based and 56% of home-supported participants paid to install or keep broadband running in their homes after the initial six months
- 84% of participants were unemployed, 77% in social housing and 39% with no formal qualifications.
- The computer club family learning was particularly well-received and well attended by participants from both groups.

2. Rosie had access to the internet at home but she never used it

Rosie's story shows how computer ownership and even broadband access isn't necessarily an indicator of digital inclusion. People can have physical access and still lack the skills and confidence to use technology.

“Even though we have a computer at home it wasn't something I even considered switching on. My husband uses the computer a lot to prepare things for work, and the children use it as well. But I was so busy being a mum it didn't interest me. I didn't see how using a computer would benefit me in any way – it didn't seem to have any relevance to my life.”

Rosie, 50, knew that now her youngest was at school it was time to think about going back to work.

She adds: “Because I'd been out of the working environment, I felt like technology was passing me by. When people are at work they use technology all the time, but because I'd been at home I hadn't kept up and that really knocked my confidence.

But as soon as I went into the centre I felt at home. I found it very easy right from the beginning, and didn't feel at all intimidated. They went through everything at my pace and introduced me to a brilliant programme called **myguide**, which is a series of simple courses.

"What's fantastic about the centre is that I can go as often or as little as I like. I usually go once a week, but there have been times when the children have been ill or I haven't been able to go. It's amazing to see how easy it all is, and just how much you can do on the internet. I've learned about car insurance, health advice, booking holidays, and all the different ways you can save money by buying and booking things on line. It was amazing to see how easy it all was."

3. Tonbridge Women's centre and Rachel's story

This UK online centre is part of West Kent Young Women's Project, and shows how centres across the country are using ICT as part of wider and longer term support and inclusion programmes.

Fiona Palmer is coordinator at the centre. She explains: "We get a lot of women through who have had their confidence knocked, so we involve them by looking up a biography of someone they really like, like a pop star. We can then move on to show the benefits of using computers and how important computer skills are to gain employment, so we'll help them to write a CV or do job searches. Some of the women we work with only want to use social networking sites like Bebo, so we educate them in how to use them safely. As a direct result of that talk a group of the girls went on to make their own DVD about internet safety.

"When people do visit the centre, we offer as much help as we can to make it easy for them to return. Our crèche is funded by UK online and is free to women accessing the centre, and we refund travel fares - when you're living on the breadline, travel is expensive. We also provide refreshments with every group. The young mums' lunch in particular has been a very good introduction to internet learning. We talk about healthy eating, and then they go on to the internet to learn more."

Rachel, 21, is one of the young women who has been learning at the centre. She adds: "The lunches are a chance for us to get together and talk about things we've been through. We're learning things we would never have otherwise known. Some of the girls have been through drug or alcohol abuse or domestic violence, or they're living in hostels. Before I came here I felt really sorry for myself, but the centre made me feel supported and I realised I wasn't the only one in that situation, and that actually I'm quite lucky."

"When I started coming here I'd just got out of an abusive relationship. I thought it was ok for him to swear at me, I thought it was normal. The staff and other girls here helped me to see that it was wrong, and now I can recognise behaviour that isn't acceptable, and it's been good to talk about my story and help other people. I would never have been able to do that if I hadn't come here. The centre made me feel supported and I realised I wasn't the only one in that situation, and that actually I'm quite lucky. It's given me so much confidence, so much more freedom. I'd go as far to say it's given me my life back."

4. Harold Tomlins Centre – social impact of ICT on homeless people

This last case study looks at a project which has used ICT to engage some of the most isolated people in society – the homeless. Long term and local intervention, holistic support and flexible provision have been key to its success.

The Harold Tomlins UK online centre is one of eight sites managed by Chester Aid to The Homeless (CATH). It provides services including food, bathing and clothing provision, medical services, resettlement advice and a full education and training programme. The centre works primarily with the homeless, those with mental health issues, ex-offenders, and those with drug and alcohol problems. A five point plan – Living and Learning with CATH – was developed as part of the project, focussing on independent living and job search goals. All five stages involved ICT use, from creating an email address to building a CV, learning how to search for places to live and jobs online right through to skills checks and the chance to take formal qualifications.

The project results were:

- 88 homeless people took part in the project, and 75 had mental health issues
- The internet provided a structure to live that was otherwise missing in people's lives – eg. an email address for personal and official correspondence
- The autonomy of surfing helped to improve client's skills, mental and physical stability
- The use of new social networking technologies to contact old friends has a positive impact in people re-integrating with society
- 80% of participants progressed to further learning or advice and guidance
- 91% of participants went on to a planned move into alternative accommodation compared to 40% where ICT was not part of their programme.

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