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UK Online Centres and E-Government

SQW Limited and MORI Social Research Institute

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. There are now more than 6,000 UK online centres across England. The policy initiative for these came from the Department for Education and Skills and arose from a growing concern about the 'digital divide'. The majority of the centres were set up during the period 1999 to 2002 using Big Lottery Fund and Capital Modernisation Fund money. The remaining centres are made up of existing ICT centres that applied for the UK online centre brand name. UK online centres are located in a range of convenient community venues across England - over half of those venues are in the 2,000 most deprived English wards. Centres provide supported internet access, at zero or low cost, and encourage and provide opportunities for people to progress on to further learning and development. From April 2003 responsibility for administration and development of UK online centres passed to Ufi Ltd.

2. Electronic service delivery is a fundamental part of the Government's public service reform agenda. The Prime Minister has made a public commitment to make all services available electronically by 2005, with key services achieving high levels of usage.

3. The potential for using UK online centres to support access and use of e-government services is appealing because of relatively low take-up of online services to date. The primary purpose of this research was to assess the potential for increasing the take-up of e-government services through UK online centres.

Methodology

4. The research methodology consisted of a number of both quantitative and qualitative research techniques which included:

    - **A series of face-to-face interviews with 30 UK online centre managers** - The sample was selected to ensure a range of different types of centres operating in different locations across the country. The purpose of these interviews was to understand the characteristics of UK online centres, e.g. how they are funded, and who their users are. We also explored perceptions about current demand for e-government services amongst centre users, and the extent to which centres felt willing and able to promote e-government services to their users.

    - **A series of 14 focus groups** - (8 focus groups with non-UK online centre users, and 6 focus groups with users of UK online centres). The research sought to explore the views of UK Online centres and e-government among groups of users and non-users of UK Online centre services.

- **An e-survey of UK online centres** – UK online centres across the country were invited to take part in an on-line survey which sought to gather further detail on the characteristics of centres, as well as exploring their willingness and ability to promote access to e-government services in their centres. 795 UK online centres completed the survey.

- **An Omnibus survey with the general population** – a series of 12 questions were included in the MORI Omnibus, a regular face-to-face survey among the general population. The questions focused on the general public's attitudes towards e-government and their willingness to search for government information online. The questionnaire was undertaken with 2,003 respondents.

- **A telephone survey of UK online centres** – a total of 423 telephone interviews with existing users of UK online centres was conducted. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the views and attitudes of existing centre users around e-government services, and their willingness to use centres as a means of accessing e-government services.

Key Findings

(1) The current UK online centre offer

5.   The e-survey indicated that the majority of centres (95%) are open to the general public. The remainder are delivering services to specific target groups, e.g. homeless people. Other key findings from the e-survey of centres are as follows:

- The majority of centres (87%) are able to offer drop-in internet access, and 83% offer free internet access to all users;

- The majority of centres are offering courses on using the internet (87%), and introduction to ICT (81%); and

- On average, in 44% of centres there is always someone on hand to offer one-to-one advice and support to users (55% of learndirect centres, compared to 15% of libraries. A further 51% of centres are able to offer one-to-one support to users depending on how busy they are.

(2) Awareness of e-government amongst UK online centres

6.   Anecdotal evidence from our face-to-face consultations with UK online centre managers, suggests that detailed awareness of the types of e-government services that are available is fairly low. Furthermore, the e-survey of UK online centres, indicated that just over one-fifth (21%) of centres, rated their staff awareness of e-government services as high. The majority of centres (55%) rated their staff knowledge as being moderate. It seems that the majority of centre staff have some

knowledge of particular central or local government websites, but the breadth of their knowledge about what is available more generally, is limited.

(3) Willingness of UK online centres to promote e-government services

7.   The majority of UK online centres (90%) responding to the e-survey indicated that they would be willing to participate in initiatives aimed at promoting UK online centres as a resource people can use to learn about and access government information. Indeed, there is evidence that, in some cases, UK online centres are already promoting e-government services. The e-survey indicated that just over one-fifth (21%), incorporate information about access to e-government services, into their training on how to use the internet.

(4) Ability of UK online centres to support access to e-government services

8.   The findings of the e-survey suggest that UK online centres consider themselves able - to varying degrees - to promote access to e-government services. The majority (90%) of centres considered themselves very, or partly able to participate in such an initiative.

9.   The potential barriers to UK online centres participating in such an initiative were explored in more detail through the face-to-face centre manager consultations. Staffing resource was the most commonly cited potential barrier to promoting UK online centres as access points for e-government services.

(5) Existing demand for access to e-government services

10.   MORI conducted a series of 8 focus groups with UK online centre users and the general population. The majority of those taking part in the focus groups were able to see the advantages of e-government, and were generally positive about its possibilities. Those who have used e-government for mainly low-level operations, such as locating information and contact details, found it efficient and convenient. However, it is worth noting that some participants had some negative experiences, particularly where these involved transactions. These bad experiences can often lead to mistrust in the technology and an unwillingness to pursue future usage.

11.   Overall, focus group participants liked to use 'tried and tested' ways of contacting the local authority or a central government service. For most people, telephone is the preferred method of contact for urgent enquiries, rather than e-mail. Most participants preferred to write a letter for enquiries that need to be followed up, as they feel it would be more likely to be taken seriously than a telephone call or e-mail.

(6) Potential demand for e-government services: existing UK online centre users

12.   UK online centre users were introduced to the concept of a government website that had links to the local council, and government departments in one place. Centre users were then asked where they might access such a website, if help and training were offered in a UK online centre in how to use it. Over half (56%) said that they would use the service at the UK online centre, and a further 30% stated that they would learn how to use the website at a UK online centre but then access it elsewhere. Only one in ten (11%) current users would not use this website at either a centre or elsewhere. This suggests that there would be enthusiasm and demand from centre users to access such as service, if support and advice on how to use it was available. Indeed, 29% of users agreed that they would use their centre more often if the centre offered this service.

13.   Respondents were then asked how the availability of such a website, coupled with support in how to use it from centre staff, would affect they way they contacted public services. More than one response was allowed to this question. The methods most preferred by users under these circumstances would be 'through a website, or by e-mail at your UK online centre' (46%), and 'through a website or by e-mail in your own home' (37%). Telephone contact falls into third place as the most preferred method of contact (32%).

(7) Potential demand for e-government services: general population

14.   Respondents were again introduced to the concept of a government website that contained information and links to their local council and all government departments. If this were available, over half of respondents (57%), stated that they would use it as a starting point for accessing information. Younger respondents were most likely to be willing to use this website (64% of 16-24 year olds), compared to 31% of those aged 55+. Similarly, it was more likely to be a popular choice amongst the higher social grades (73% of ABs, compared to 41% of DEs), and those that are working (67% of full-time workers, compared to 42% that are not working).

15.   Sixty two percent of respondents do not currently use the internet as a starting point for finding out information about their council or government. However, of these, over one-third (38%) would be encouraged to use the internet as a starting point to find information, if such a website was available. The number of people who would be willing to use the internet as a starting point for finding out information about their council or government services increases if help and support in doing this was offered (61% of respondents). However, just under one-third of respondents (23%) would not be at all likely to use the internet as a starting point, even with help and support on offer.

16.   If a library or learning centre offered help and training in how to use on-line services more generally, 20% of all respondents say they would use these on-line services at the library or centre, and 14% would learn how to use them at the library or centre, and would then use them at home or elsewhere. However, six in ten (59%) would not make use of this service. There are a number of reasons for this. Over one-third (36%) would feel confident enough to use these services by themselves and 34% would not use on-line services anywhere.

Conclusions

17.   From a supply-side perspective, it appears that UK online centres are overwhelmingly positive about the possibilities for e-government and the opportunities for centres to promote this and support users in accessing such services. Indeed centres considered themselves – to varying degrees – able to promote and support access to e-government services. This type of activity is broadly compatible with the business plan aims and objectives of most centres.

18.   In terms of centres' ability to promote and support access to e-government, the most common barrier cited to this was staff resources. Centre managers were confident they could promote such a service, but pointed to the ongoing support that might be required by users. There was uncertainty about the demand that might be created by promoting access to e-government services through UK online centres. However, it was agreed that if high demand was stimulated, then additional resources would be required to support this. In most cases this translated to the need for additional staff

19.   From a demand-side perspective, there is evidence of a demand for e-government services, and for access being available and supported through UK online centres. For existing centre users the current preferred method of contacting government services is by telephone. If there was a single government website providing access to services, and support available in using this site, then the preferred method of contact for this group becomes 'through a website, or by e-mail from a UK online centre' (46%). Indeed, 29% of UK online centre users stated that they would be more likely to use the centre of they could get access to such a website, with help and training on how to use it. UK online centres are currently being accessed by a range of key target groups, e.g. retired, workless, BME and low income groups, who could be encouraged to use e-government services if provided with the right kind of support.

20.   Amongst the general population there is also evidence of demand for a website offering a single point of access for online government services. Over half of respondents (57%) would use a government website with links to services and information, if this was available. This compares to 32% who would currently access government services using the internet.

21. Significantly, of the 42% of respondents who were initially unlikely to use a government website as a starting point for finding information, 78% of these would still not be persuaded to use this site even if there was a place in their local area that offered access to the site and help on using it. Conversely, 17% of the 42% who were initially unlikely to use a government website as a starting point for finding information, would be likely to use the website as a starting point if help in doing so was available locally.

22. There is also the potential for UK online centres to be promoted more widely. If a library or learning centre offered help and training in how to use on-line services, 20% of all respondents in the general population sample say they would use these on-line services at the library or centre, and 14% would learn how to use them at the library or centre, and would then use them at home or elsewhere.

23. A quarter (25%) of respondents thought they would access such a centre if free/low cost internet access were available and/or staff were or hand to help them use the internet or computer. However, most centres are actually offering free internet access and some degree of support in accessing services. Thus, wider promotion of UK online centres, and their 'offer', could result in higher numbers of users accessing centres.

24. Our research also highlighted a number of factors that will affect the success and sustainability of e-government services being promoted and rolled out through UK online centres. These are as follows:

Training

- Users expect staff to be fully trained in the depth of information available
- Staff should be able to provide sound advice on form completion

Range of support

- Users are interested in targeted information sessions
- They also want to be able to book one-to-one sessions to ask specific questions or get support in completing forms

Services being easy to use and successful

- Negative experiences with e-government sites (both from information gathering, or transaction based exercises) will impact upon the number of return visits)

1   Introduction

1.1   Electronic service delivery is a fundamental part of the Government's public service reform agenda.   The Prime Minister has made a commitment to make all services available electronically by 2005, with key services achieving high levels of use.   The Department for Education and Skills is now exploring options for the development of a specific role for UK online centres to support access to e-government services.

1.2   SQW Limited and MORI were appointed by the Department for Education and Skills to conduct research to assess the potential for increasing the take-up of e-government services through UK online centres.

1.3   The fieldwork for the project started in August 2003, and was completed in October 2004. There were a number of elements to this research:

- **A series of face-to-face interviews with 30 UK online centre managers** - The sample was selected to ensure a range of different types of centres operating in different locations across the country.   The purpose of these interviews was to understand the characteristics of UK online centres, e.g. how they are funded, and who their users are.   We also explored perceptions about current demand for e-government services amongst centre users, and the extent to which centres felt willing and able to promote e-government services to their users.

- **A series of 14 focus groups** - (8 focus groups with non-UK online centre users, and 6 focus groups with users of UK online centres).   The research sought to explore the views of UK online centres and e-government among groups of users and non-users of UK online centre services.   The non-user groups were constituted as follows:

  - Disabled. North East

  - 65+, South East, Rural

  - Basic Skills Shortage, London

  - Lone Parents, South West, Rural

  - Unemployed, East, Rural

  - Black and Minority Ethnic, North West

  - 16-34, West Midlands (a 'control' group)

  - 35+ West Midlands (a 'control' group).

> ➤ The six groups of UK online centre users recruited through the UK online centres were held in London (two groups), Yorkshire and Humberside, West Midlands, North West (all urban), and the South East (rural)

- **A web-based survey of UK online centres** – UK online centres across the country (5,115) were invited to take part in a 10 minute on-line survey which sought to gather further detail on the characteristics of centres, as well as exploring their willingness and ability to promote access to e-government services in their centres. In addition to the original e-mail invitation, centre managers were sent reminder e-mails and all those completing the survey were offered the chance to win a digital camera. Finally, those experiencing technical difficulties, or those who did not feel comfortable in completing an on-line survey, were sent a paper version of the questionnaire. 795 UK online centres completed the survey.

- **An Omnibus survey with the general population** – a series of 12 questions were included in the MORI Omnibus, a regular face-to-face survey among the general population. The questions focused on the general public's attitudes towards e-government and their willingness to search for government information online. The questionnaire was undertaken with a nationally representative quota of 2,003 respondents. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in respondents' homes, using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing).

- **A telephone survey of UK online centres** – a total of 432 telephone interviews with existing users of UK online centres was conducted. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the views and attitudes of existing centre users around e-government services, and their willingness to use centres as a means of accessing e-government services. 300 UK online centres were contacted to seek approval from their users to include them in a telephone survey. Overall, 1,019 leads were supplied to MORI. Of these, direct contact was made with 583 centre users and interviews achieved with 432 (a response rate of 74% where contacted).

Report structure

1.4 The appendices contain detailed reports on each of the research outputs. These describe the individual strands of the research project in more detail, and can be read as stand-alone documents.

1.5 The main body of the report concentrates on drawing together the various research elements in order to assess:

- The willingness and ability of UK online centres to support users in accessing e-government services (the supply-side), and

- Existing demand for e-government services, and the potential of UK online centres to stimulate increased use (the demand-side).

2   Key Findings

Introduction

2.1   The key findings comprise two parts. Firstly, we consider the supply-side. In other words, the extent to which e-government services can be accessed through the existing network of UK online centres. We assess the current UK online centre 'offer', i.e. the level and types of services they currently provide access to, and their ability to meet any potential increase in demand from users for access to e-government services. Secondly, we consider the overall demand for e-government services. This includes an assessment of demand amongst existing UK online centre users, as well as the general population. Importantly, we also consider the extent to which UK online centres have the potential to stimulate demand for e-government services.

The current UK online centre offer

2.2   Four types of UK online centre were identified through our face-to-face consultations with centre managers, and the e-survey of UK online centres:

- **Further education colleges** – centres based within and managed by FE providers. These often have a site based within the main college building and perhaps one or more community-based sites;

- **Libraries** – these are usually part of an organised network of library based UK online centres in a local area, typically co-ordinated by a local authority;

- **Community and voluntary organisations** – these tended to fall into two sub-categories (i) stand-alone UK online centres that are based in a community organisation, and (ii) groups of community organisations that have formed a network of UK online centres with a central management team (in some cases a local college or school formed part of this consortium); and

- **Private sector training providers** – these centres are typically providing training funded by employers, and in some cases for individuals.

2.3   In additional to the broad typology of centres outlined above it is also possible to categorise centres in terms of those that deliver learndirect courses, and those that do not. The type of service on offer, and type of user accessing centres largely depends on the nature of the host organisation.

2.4   The e-survey completed by 795 UK online centres, indicates that the majority (95%) are open to the general public. The remainder are delivering services to specific target groups, e.g. homeless people, or adults with learning difficulties. Other key findings from the e-survey of centres are as follows:

- The average number of drop-in users in each centre is 160 per week. Library-based centres averaged 300 drop-in users per week compared to 40 per week in community-based centres;

- The majority of centres (87%) are able to offer drop-in internet access, and 83% offer free internet access to all users;

- Pre-booked learning activity is on offer at 70% of centres, with just over half (53%) offering drop-in learning activities;

- The majority of centres are offering courses on using the internet (87%), and introduction to ICT (81%). Fewer than half are offering literacy (44%), numeracy (41%), or NVQ level 1 and above (39%), courses;

- Almost all centres are open during office hours during the weekdays, with almost half opening on a Monday, Tuesday or Thursday evening. Almost three in five centres (58%) are open on a Saturday morning, and a third (32%) are open on Saturday afternoon; and

- On average, in 44% of centres there is always someone on hand to offer one-to-one advice and support to users (55% of learndirect centres, compared to 15% of libraries) A further 51% of centres are able to offer one-to-one support to users depending on how busy they are.

2.5   The UK online centres responding to the e-survey were also asked to provide information on the profile of their users:

- **Age** – the majority of users are over the age of 15, with relatively equal proportions between the ages of 16-35, 35-55 and 56+ (average of 29%, 32% and 27% of users respectively);

- **Ethnicity** – on average, the majority of centre users are white (79%). Roughly equal proportions of users are Asian or Black (average of 8% and 6% respectively). The remaining proportion of users are from another ethnic group, or mixed ethnic background; and

- **Employment status** – overall, the majority of centre users are not employed. On average, a quarter of centre users are registered unemployed/on a sickness benefit, or retired (average of 27% and 25% of users respectively), one in eight (12%) are in full-time

education, and 10% are caring for family or children. Thus, an average of 22% of users were in employment.

Awareness of e-government services amongst UK online centres

2.6   Anecdotal evidence from our face-to-face consultations with UK online centre managers, suggests that detailed awareness of the types of e-government services that are available is fairly low. However, where centres have close links to local authorities, or were part of a wider network of UK online centres, awareness levels are much higher. Furthermore, the e-survey of UK online centres, indicated that just over one-fifth (21%) of centres, rated their staff knowledge of e-government services as high. The majority of centres (55%) rated their staff knowledge as being moderate. It seems that the majority of centre staff have some knowledge of particular central or local government websites, but the breadth of their knowledge about what is available more generally, is limited.

2.7   When centre managers were asked about their awareness of e-government during our consultations, the most commonly cited websites were those of the local authority, NHS Direct, Inland Revenue, and sites with details of training and college courses. A number of community and voluntary led UK online centres had specific knowledge of e-government services where they were related to services that affected their client group, e.g. Home Office website for information about entitlement for refugees and asylum seekers.

2.8   In a number of libraries we visited, the default home page on their computer was for the local authority, which helped to raise levels of awareness of local e-government services. Libraries also tended to be linked into e-government initiatives that are being driven by local authorities. Anecdotally, take up of these services tends to depend upon the sophistication of what is available, and the extent to which this is actively promoted. A number of libraries are able to offer fully transactional services, e.g. reserving books, checking on planning applications.

2.9   UK online centres collect limited information on the types of site accessed by users. Feedback from the centre manager suggests that users are typically accessing the internet for information on holidays, employment, general research in areas of personal interest, and to send e-mails. The perception is that awareness of e-government services is low amongst centre users, and few people are actively using these types of service. This view is supported by the centres responding to the e-survey, who estimated that just over one in ten users (12%), are using the internet to access information on local or central government services.

Willingness of UK online centres to promote e-government services

2.10   The feedback from UK online centres was that they are generally enthusiastic to participate in actively promoting their centres as places for people to learn about accessing e-government

services. Indeed, there is evidence that, in some cases, UK online centres are already promoting e-government services. The e-survey indicated that just over one-fifth (21%), incorporate information about access to e-government services, into their training on how to use the internet. This is backed up by the findings from the Hall Aitken evaluation of CMF Funded UK online centres (2003), which reports that 56% of users were taught how to use the internet at centres, and that some were shown how to use community and government websites. Furthermore, the centres we visited also promote local authority and central government websites in other ways:

- Displaying leaflets and posters about what is available online (47%);

- Informally signposting users to government sites (45%); and

- Displaying a link to local or central government websites on their home page (40%).

2.11 The majority of UK online centres (90%) responding to the e-survey indicated that they would be willing to participate in initiatives aimed at promoting UK online centres as a resource people can use to learn about and access government information. Indeed, over half (51%) indicated that they would be very willing to take part in such an initiative. A minority (2%) of centres would not be willing to take part in such activity, and 10% of respondents agreed that participation would result in lost income.

2.12 This willingness to participate in such an initiative was mirrored during the face-to-face consultations with UK online centre managers. The overwhelming majority of centre managers could see the benefits of being able to offer access to e-government services. The greatest enthusiasm for making links to, and encouraging take-up of e-government services came from library, and community sector led UK online centres. Whilst FE-led centres were interested in the concept, the focus of their work is primarily on learning and training, rather than as an access point for drop-in use of internet services. Consultees also reported the possible opportunity costs of this type of activity for the FE sector, e.g. they might lose revenue by encouraging open access, rather than concentrating on the delivery of fee earning learning provision.

2.13 A number of the centres we visited – particularly the voluntary and community led UK online centres – were already providing advice sessions for people on particular issues such as finding a job, or accessing benefits. These centres understood the potential link between the support services they offer and e-government, e.g. they could get people to use on-line benefit calculators. In this sense, making links to e-government was consistent with the current focus of their activity.

2.14 There was also a sense that their users trust them and their organisation, and may be more willing to access services via them, particularly on sensitive issues such as benefit entitlement.

In a number of cases, the centres visited were already undertaking an advocacy role and supporting their users in accessing local or central government services.

2.15   As with the e-survey of UK online centres, a small number of centre managers expressed less willingness to take part in an initiative to promote access to e-government services through centres. The primary reasons in these cases were two fold, firstly that that these would detract from their core business, and secondly that they wanted their users to view them as independent from government.

Ability of UK online centres to support access to e-government services

2.16   The findings of the e-survey suggest that UK online centres consider themselves able - to varying degrees - to promote access to e-government services. Just over one-third (35%) of centres considered themselves very able to participate in such an initiative, and a further 55% felt they would be able to some extent to participate in such an initiative.

2.17   Learndirect centres were the most likely to consider themselves able to provide this service, as were centres that always have staff on hand to offer one-to-one support to users. When asked about the impacts of providing users with support in learning about and accessing e-government information, most centres (86%) agreed they had the infrastructure in place to offer these services. Furthermore, nearly three-quarters (73%) felt this type of initiative would be compatible with the centre's business plan aims and objectives. Encouragingly, the majority of centres (74%), also felt that their staff had the skills to support this type of service.

2.18   The potential barriers to UK online centres participating in such an initiative were explored in more detail through the face-to-face centre manager consultations. The majority of centre managers agreed that, even if awareness was raised and training was provided, there would still be a need for centres to offer support in helping people to navigate their way through information and use websites effectively, particularly where there might be forms to complete.

2.19   Staffing resource was the most commonly cited potential barrier to promoting UK online centres as access points for e-government services. Centre managers were confident that they could promote such as service but thought that many users would need on-going support from staff in understanding what is available and how to use such sites, particularly those offering transactional services. Centre managers were unsure about the demand that might be created by promoting such an initiative, but agreed that extra staffing resources might be needed if it stimulated significantly higher levels of demand from existing and new centre users. Potential solutions offered for this issue, included offering advice surgeries on specific days, and encouraging mainstream service providers to offer surgeries on particular issues, e.g. Jobcentre Plus offering advice on job search using the internet. Furthermore, centre managers

also thought there would be a need for additional training in order for centre staff to effectively promote access to e-government services and support users in this activity.

2.20   A key message from centre managers was that if users are to be encouraged to access e-government services, the "offer" needs to be good. In promoting e-government there needs to be a clear understanding of what is available. Information needs to be presented in a simple format that is easy to understand and navigate. There needs to be a "hook" to encourage people to access e-government services though UK online centres, e.g. speed, security, ability to access support and advice.

2.21   A number of centre managers reported a possible tension between trying to promote access to services and trying to promote training courses which are a means of income generation. For some centres, there is a need to direct users towards training courses, such as those offered by learndirect because this generates income and supports their organisational sustainability.

2.22   On a practical level, centre managers raised concerns about potential privacy and security problems. Privacy could be an issue where people are accessing sites that require them to input personal information, or where they need help from staff with finding information on issues such as benefits. Users would perhaps feel more confident in doing this in a semi-private space and having confidence that personal data was secure, for example, not being retained by an internet browser's autocomplete functionality.

2.23   The e-audit found that fewer than half of UK online centres would be able to offer private or semi-private space for internet access (42%). This may be an issue, as the qualitative research with users identified that some would want privacy if they were to complete government forms and/or look up sensitive online government information.

2.24   Centre managers were also probed on the issues of authentification of users. In other words, if some e-government services requires users to authenticated by a third party in order to access a transactional service, e.g. making a benefits claim, was this something that centre staff would be able to do. This issue provoked a mixed reaction. In general, library and FE based UK online centres felt more risk-vulnerable with this type of role, and there were concerns about the repercussions of fraudulent use. However, voluntary and community sector led UK online centres were more open to this type of role. A number were already acting as advocates for their users and helping them with functions such as benefits and housing applications, and as a result felt more comfortable with this role.

Existing demand for access to e-government services

2.25   MORI conducted a series of 8 focus groups with UK online centre users and non-UK online centre users. The majority of those taking part in the focus groups were able to see the

advantages of e-government, and were generally positive about its possibilities. Those who have used e-government for mainly low-level operations, such as locating information and contact details, found it efficient and convenient. However, it is worth noting that some participants had some negative experiences, particularly where these involved transactions. These bad experiences can often lead to mistrust in the technology and an unwillingness to pursue future usage.

2.26   Overall, focus group participants liked to use 'tried and tested' ways of contacting the local authority or a central government service. For most people, telephone is the preferred method of contact for urgent enquiries, rather than e-mail. Most participants preferred to write a letter for enquiries that need to be followed up, as they feel it would be more likely to be taken seriously than a telephone call or e-mail.

2.27   The focus group findings also suggested that lack of awareness of UK online centres might be a barrier to their usage. Amongst the focus groups of non UK online centre users, there was limited knowledge of centres. However, once briefed about the types of services currently on offer at centres, many users had positive views about them. This suggests that centres should be publicised more widely, particularly to disadvantaged groups, who are most likely to benefit from the current services on offer.

2.28   Below we explore in more detail the possibilities for UK online centres to stimulate demand for e-government services and increase usage of centres, amongst existing centre users, as well as the general population.

Potential demand for e-government services: existing UK online centre users

User profile

2.29   The profile of respondents to the UK online centre user telephone survey, broadly matched the user characteristics described by centre staff in the e-survey, in terms of age and ethnicity. The centres are successfully reaching non-white British population groups, who make up 24% of users based on the telephone survey of centre users. The employment status characteristics are broadly similar, however, the telephone survey of users suggests that higher numbers of centre users are in employment (37% in full/part-time), than estimated by the centre staff in the e-survey (22%).

2.30   More than four in five UK online centre users said they use their local UK online centre at least once a week (83%). This is broadly similar across gender, age and social grade**.**

2.31   The main reasons that most people use their local UK online centre were to access computer/internet training or to find information using the internet (44% and 37% respectively). Younger respondents would be more likely to use the centre to find information

via the internet (60% of those aged 16-34 compared to only 22% of those aged 55+) while older respondents would be more likely to want to access training (only 28% of those aged 16-34 compared to 58% of those aged 55+). Only a small minority visited the centre specifically to find information via books or staff or to access other types of training. Interestingly, 51% of centre users also have internet access at home, or a place of work or study

2.32   People who are working were more likely than those who are not to use the centre for finding information electronically (48% compared to 30%), while those who were not working were more likely to use centres to access training (49% compared to 36%). White population groups were also more likely than the BME population to use centres to find information via the internet (40% compared to 24%).

2.33   Centre users demonstrated high levels of confidence and skills in using the internet, with the majority (86%) stating that they are very able, or quite able, to find the information they want from the internet. Only 3% of respondents stated that they were not at all able to use the internet, and would not know were to start.   This compares favourably to the omnibus survey where 32% of the general population stated their confidence and skills were such that they could not use the internet at all. This said, the higher skills levels amongst UK online centre users, probably reflect the high numbers of people that are using centres to undertake training in how to use the internet, or are using the centre for the specific purpose of accessing low cost and fast internet access.

Satisfaction with UK online centre services

2.34   UK online centre users were very positive about the levels of support on offer at the centre, and confirmed the responses given by the centres as part of the e-survey. Three-fifths (60%) of users were confident that centres always had someone on hand to provide one-to-one support, and 38% said their centre was able to offer this support depending on how busy they were. On the whole, users display high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of the UK online centre provision, from privacy and security, and availability of computers, through to the friendliness of staff.   Availability of computers and staff support ranked highly in terms of influencing user satisfaction with centres. When asked to rate the importance of a number of factors that led to a successful visit, the following were ranked highest as being 'very important' by users:

- Availability of a computer when I visit the centre (80%)

- Friendliness of staff (79%)

- Availability of staff to provide information and advice (76%)

- Quality of information and advice staff provide (75%)

2.35 Again, this reflects the experiences of users interviewed as part of the Hall Aitken evaluation of CMF Funded UK online centres (2003), where 90% of respondents reported enjoying their experiences and said they would recommend their UK online centre to others.

Centre users and access to government services

2.36 UK online centre users were asked whether in the last year they had contacted either their local council or a central government department/agency. If so, they were also asked how they had done so. Overall, 62% had not contacted their council and 57% had not contacted a central government department/agency in the last 12 months.

2.37 Of those who have contacted their council, 60% had done so by telephone and 30% by a face-to-face visit. Nearly one in seven (15%) had either contacted their council by letter or through a website/by e-mail. There were no significant demographic factors relating to whether someone contacts their council electronically or otherwise.

2.38 Turning to contact with central government, of those who have contacted a government department/agency in the last 12 months, 49% have done so by telephone. The same proportion, (26%) have done so either via a face-to-face visit or by letter – while 29% have done so through a website or by e-mail. This level of electronic contact is significantly higher than that for local councils, indicating that geography may play an important role in how people contact governmental institutions.

2.39 Respondents were introduced to the concept of a government website that had links to the local council, and government departments in one place[1]. They were then asked to identify which two areas of information they would most likely use this website to find. Overall, around a quarter were interested in finding education-related information (27%), transport- and travel-related information (26%) and general advice (24%). Around one in six were interested in health-related information (19%), information about benefits and tax credits (18%), employment-related information (17%), information about local council services (17%) and information relating to the law and legal matters (16%).

2.40 Centre users were then asked where they might access such a website, if help and training were offered in a UK online centre in how to use it. Over half (56%) said that they would use the service at the UK online centre, and a further 30% stated that they would learn how to use the website at a UK online centre but then access it elsewhere. Only one in ten (11%) current users would not use this website at either a centre or elsewhere. This suggests that there would be enthusiasm and demand from centre users to access such as service, if support and

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[1] A single access point for online government services is now available in the form of Directgov

advice on how to use it was available. Indeed, 29% of users agreed that they would use their centre more often if the centre offered this service.

2.41   Respondents were then asked how the availability of such a website, coupled with support in how to use it from centre staff, would affect they way they contacted public services. More than one response was allowed to this question. The methods most preferred by users under these circumstances would be 'through a website, or by e-mail at your UK online centre' (46%), and 'through a website or by e-mail in your own home' (37%). Telephone contact falls into third place as the most preferred method of contact (32%).

2.42   Centre users were also very positive in their perceptions of centre staff to be able to provide them with the necessary support to access such a government website. The majority of users (89%) were very confident, or fairly confident, that staff would be able to provide them with basic advice and support to use such a website. Users were similarly very confident, or fairly confident (76%) that staff could also provide advice and support in completing on-line forms, e.g. for childcare tax credits.

Potential demand for e-government services: general population

Usage of UK online centres

2.43   Less than half (45%) of the respondents to the omnibus survey have visited their local library, college or community centre to access information in the last year. A quarter (25%) of all omnibus survey respondents, indicated that they would be more likely to visit their UK online centre if free/low cost internet and/or staff were on hand to help them use a computer or internet. Young people were most likely to be encouraged to use centres by the offer of free/low cost internet access (31% of 16-34 year olds). By contrast, older respondents would be more incentivised by having staff on hand to offer help (37% of 35+ year olds). This raises a question about the marketing of UK online centres. Our research has identified that the majority of centres are offering free internet access, and are able to provide support to users. If these aspects of centre provision were promoted more widely it seems likely the use of centres might increase.

Current use of e-government services

2.44   The findings of the e-audit suggests that UK online centres do not perceive there to be much demand for information about, and access to online local authority and central government services. Three-quarters (75%) believed there to be little or no demand for such services.

2.45   Amongst the general population, just under one-third (32%) indicated that, if they wanted to find information about their local council or from government, they would begin by looking

on the internet. The likelihood of using the internet as a starting point was highest amongst the higher social grades (49% of ABs, compared to 17% of DEs), and those with qualifications (41% with qualifications, compared to 7% of those with no formal qualifications). Almost a third (29%) would prefer to telephone their local council or government office to get information.

2.46   There are also regional variations, with respondents in the South of England being the most likely to use the internet to find information, and those in Scotland the least likely (42% and 23% respectively)

Impact of an e-government website

2.47   Respondents were again introduced to the concept of a government website that contained information and links to their local council and all government departments. If this were available, over half of respondents (56%), stated that they would use it as a starting point for accessing information. Younger respondents were most likely to be willing to use this website (64% of 16-24 year olds), compared to 31% of those aged 55+. Similarly, it was more likely to be a popular choice amongst the higher social grades (73% of ABs, compared to 41% of DEs), and those that are working (67% of full-time workers, compared to 42% that are not working).

2.48   Sixty two percent of respondents do not currently use the internet as a starting point for finding out information about their council or government. Almost one-third (29%) would prefer to call their local council or a central government department. However, of those that would not currently use the internet as a starting point, over one-third (38%) would be encouraged to use the internet as a starting point to find information, if such a website was available.

Impact of UK online centres support in encouraging use of e-government

2.49   Just over half of respondents (57%) would be willing to use the internet as a starting point for finding out information about their council or government services. However, this increases if help and support in doing this was offered by a place near-by (61% of respondents). However, thirty-five per cent of respondents would be unlikely or not at all likely to use the internet as a starting point, even with help and support on offer. Again, it was younger respondents, those from higher social grades, and those with higher level qualifications that would be most encouraged to use the internet as a starting point, if assistance was available. Significantly, of the 42% of respondents who were initially unlikely to use a government website as a starting point for finding information, 78% of these would still not be persuaded to use this site even if there was a place in their local area that offered access to the site and

help on using it. Conversely, 17% of the 42% who were initially unlikely to use a government website as a starting point for finding information, would be likely to use the website as a starting point if help in doing so were available locally.

2.50   The types of services that respondents were most interested in accessing through the internet if they were available on-line were as follows:

- Search for a job (38%)

- Find holiday information (37%)

- Apply for a job (31%)

- Find contact information for local council staff (29%)

- Find health information (29%)

- Find a course (28%)

2.51   Respondents were more likely to use the internet to search for information, rather than transaction-based services. For example, 20% would use the internet to access information about their child's schooling or education, but only 13% would apply for school places on-line.

2.52   If a library or learning centre offered help and training in how to use on-line services more generally, e.g. to find holiday information, or search for a job, 20% of all respondents say they would use these on-line services at the library or centre, and 14% would learn how to use them at the library or centre, and would then use them at home or elsewhere. However, six in ten (59%) would not make use of this service. There are a number of reasons for this. Over one-third (36%) would feel confident enough to use these services by themselves and 34% would not use on-line services anywhere.

Conclusions

- *90% of UK online centres are willing to be involved in an initiative to promote e-government.*

- *86% of UK online centres agree they have the infrastructure to promote such an initiative.*

2.53   From a supply-side perspective, it appears that UK online centres are overwhelmingly positive about the possibilities for e-government and the opportunities for centres to promote this and support users in accessing such services. Indeed centres considered themselves – to varying

degrees – able to promote and support access to e-government services. This type of activity is broadly compatible with the business plan aims and objectives of most centres.

2.54   In terms of centres' ability to promote and support access to e-government, the most common barrier cited to this was staff resources. Centre managers were confident they could promote such a service, but pointed to the ongoing support that might be required by users. There was uncertainty about the demand that might be created by promoting access to e-government services through UK online centres. However, it was agreed that if high demand was stimulated, then additional resources would be required to support this. In most cases this translated to the need for additional staff.

- *57% of UK online centre users would use a 'one-stop' government website at their local use online centre if there were offered basic help and training in how to use it.*

- *A further 30% would learn how to use this website at a UK online centre, and would then access it from elsewhere.*

- *29% of existing users would use their UK online centre more often if a 'one-stop' government website was available, coupled with help and support in using it.*

2.55   From a demand-side perspective, there is evidence of a demand for e-government services, and for access being available and supported through UK online centres. For existing centre users the current preferred method of contacting government services is by telephone. If there was a single government website providing access to services, and support available in using this site, then the preferred method of contact for this group becomes 'through a website, or by e-mail from a UK online centre' (46%). Indeed, 29% of UK online centre users stated that they would be more likely to use the centre of they could get access to such a website, with help and training on how to use it. UK online centres are currently being accessed by a range of key target groups, e.g. retired, workless, BME and low income groups, who could be encouraged to use e-government services if provided with the right kind of support.

- *57% of the general population would use a 'one-stop' government website as a starting point for finding information, if such a website was available.*

- *This figure rises to 61%, if a centre near-by was able to offer help and support in using this service.*

2.56   Amongst the general population there is also evidence of demand for a website offering a single point of access for online government services. Over half of respondents (57%) would use a government website with links to services and information, if this was available. This compares to 32% who would currently access government services using the internet.

2.57 Significantly, of the 42% of respondents who were initially unlikely to use a government website as a starting point for finding information, 78% of these would still not be persuaded to use this site even if there was a place in their local area that offered access to the site and help on using it. Conversely, 17% of the 42% who were initially unlikely to use a government website as a starting point for finding information, would be likely to use the website as a starting point if help in doing so was available locally.

- *There is evidence of demand for UK online centres, with 20% of the general population saying they would access services if help and training in how to use on-line services was available.*

- *Furthermore, 25% of the general population would use UK online centres if free//low cost, and/or staff were on hand to help them use the internet or a compute.*

2.58 There is also the potential for UK online centres to be promoted more widely. If a library or learning centre offered help and training in how to use on-line services, 20% of all respondents in the general population sample say they would use these on-line services at the library or centre, and 14% would learn how to use them at the library or centre, and would then use them at home or elsewhere.

2.59 A quarter (25%) of respondents thought they would access such a centre if free/low cost internet access were available and/or staff were or hand to help them use the internet or computer. However, most centres are actually offering free internet access and some degree of support in accessing services. Thus, wider promotion of UK online centres, and their 'offer', could result in higher numbers of users accessing centres.

2.60 Our research also highlighted a number of factors that will affect the success and sustainability of e-government services being promoted and rolled out through UK online centres. These are as follows:

- Training

    ➢ Users expect staff to be fully trained in the depth of information available

    ➢ Staff should be able to provide sound advice on form completion

- Range of support

    ➢ Users are interested in targeted information sessions

    ➢ They also want to be able to book one-to-one sessions to ask specific questions or get support in completing forms

- Services being easy to use and successful

➢ Negative experiences with e-government sites (both from information gathering, or transaction based exercises) will impact upon the number of return visits)

ANNEX A

Consultation with UK online centre managers

Table of contents

A   Consultation with UK online centre managers

Introduction

A.1   In June 2003 a consortium of government departments led by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned SQW and MORI to undertake research to assess the potential for increasing the take-up of e-government services though UK online centres. This report forms the first of a number of research outputs and focuses on consultations that were undertaken with UK online centre managers.

Methodology

A.2   A database of all UK online centres was provided by DfES. From this list MORI extracted a sample of 300 centres that would be contacted to take part in a user survey at a later stage in the research process. This sample was constructed to include a representative number of UK online centres falling within a number of categories:

- library-based centres

- those that received (or did not receive) Capital Modernisation Funding (CMF)

- centres in urban and rural locations

- centres in areas of high/low deprivation.

A.3   SQW used this sample of 300 centres to select 30 centres that would be visited as part of the in-depth consultation exercise with centre managers. Again, the selection of centre was broadly based on achieving a representative sample of different types of centres. We undertook five interviews with UK online centre managers in each of six regions:

- North West

- South East

- London

- West Midlands

- East of England

- Yorkshire and Humberside

A.4   The 30 interviews were undertaken between August and October 2003. Wherever possible we spoke to somebody that was involved in the day to day running of the centre, as well as a strategic person within the organisation who could provide a broader overview on funding issues, sustainability and future priorities for the centre. In a few cases this was one and the same person. The purpose of these consultations was to inform the design of tools for later stages of research, by developing our understanding the following:

- the different models of UK online centre

- what services UK online centres currently offer and how this is resourced

- the user profile of UK online centres

- the level of awareness of e-government services amongst centre staff and users

- the potential demand for access to e-government services and any barriers to being able to meet this.

Types of centre

A.5   Through our visits to UK online centres and consultations with centre managers we identified four broad categories of UK online centres:

- **Further education colleges** – centres based within and managed by FE institutions. These often had a site based in the main college building and perhaps one or more community-based sites

- **Libraries –** these were usually an organised network of library-based UK online centres in a local area, typically co-ordinated through the local authority

- **Community and voluntary organisations** – these tended to fall into two sub-categories, (i) stand-alone UK online centres that were based in a community organisation, and (ii) groups of community organisations that formed a network of UK online centres with a central management team (in some cases a local college or school formed part of this network).

- **Private sector training providers** – these centres are typically providing training funded by employers, and in some cases for individuals. None of the centres selected as part of consultations fell into this category.

A.6   In addition to the broad typology of centres outlined above it is also possible to categorise centres in terms of those that deliver learndirect courses, and those that do not. Of the FE colleges that were visited all were delivering learndirect courses. Within the library and

community/voluntary organisations UK online groups that we visited, around half of all centres in each category were delivering learndirect courses, or provided access points.

A.7   There was no common service delivered by all UK online centres, nor was there a common user profile across the centres. The type of service on offer and the type of user that accessed centres largely depended on the nature of the host organisation, i.e. FE college, library or community/voluntary group. The size of centres we visited ranged from small libraries and community groups with as few as 2 PC terminals through to large FE-led UK online centres with 20+ PC terminals.

FE based UK online centres

A.8   The focus of FE-based UK online centres was firmly on learning. Centres were delivering a range of IT training provision from learndirect self-taught courses through to tutor-led courses. A number of FE providers had a UK online centre within their main teaching sites as well as some kind of community-based facility, e.g. one West Midlands college has a shopfront site within a deprived ward. The centres based in the main teaching sites are more commonly used by students enrolled on mainstream courses and are used to support this learning, e.g. open access for word processing and internet research. The community-based sites were more likely to be targeting different types of learners, e.g. adults wanting to enter learning and those wanting to access help in using a computer. These groups tend to include those that might not normally access mainstream college provision.

A.9   Access to basic IT training learning provision provided by FE-led UK online centres was usually free of charge or available at a small fee. The majority of centres did not offer drop-in access to use the internet free of charge, except to their learners. It was usually a requirement that users are enrolled on courses before they can access the internet. Users will usually either access the centre for the specific purpose of enrolling on training or might come into the centre to ask for help with using the internet or a computer package, at which point they will be assessed and encouraged to undertake training.

A.10   The FE-led UK online centres generate income through learndirect courses and by delivering other provision that helps them draw down funding from the Learning and Skills Council. On the whole, these centres appear to be sustainable in the long term because they have the backing of a large resourced organisation behind them and a reasonable income stream for the delivery of learning. However, a number of those consulted identified that the long term future of some of the community-based sites was less certain if they could not generate enough revenue to cover their costs.

Library-based UK online centres

A.11 Library-based UK online centres usually have less interaction with users. The majority of libraries offered open access for people to drop-in and use computers, usually for internet access. Those accessing the internet in libraries include those that already have and use computers at home. They use the library because it offers quicker internet access, and in most cases it is available free of charge. There does not appear to be a common user profile amongst library UK online centres and the majority do not record user information. However, feedback suggests that the majority of users are adults.

A.12 There was much less emphasis on learning in the library-based centres, although many do provide access to self taught courses such as learndirect. Only a small number of libraries we visited offered taught courses, e.g. Age Concern were given access to a library in South Manchester once a week to deliver IT training to the over 55s, and the Adult Education Service offers training in libraries in one West London borough. In some cases libraries formed part of a local authority's 'One Stop Shop' model which encourages people to access help and advice on a range of council services all in one place.

A.13 In most library-based UK online centres staff were trained to offer users basic help and support with computers. However, resource issues meant that the amount of time they had to support users in using the internet, and computers more generally was fairly limited, e.g. one library mentioned an informal time limit of 5 minutes staff support for users. However, there was some evidence of library staff referring people to other learning opportunities, and of other providers coming into libraries to deliver training.

A.14 The sustainability of these centres is generally good and they are usually contained within the mainstream local authority budget. However, a small number commented that the future sustainability of the centres was not certain, particularly if they were not generating income through sources such as learndirect. Although many make small charges for internet access, disks and printing, this was not usually enough to cover the maintenance and running costs of centres.

UK online centres based in community and voluntary organisations

A.15 Community and voluntary led UK online centres varied greatly in the type of service that they were delivering. There were a number of UK online centres that were part of a network of centres, and others that were single stand-alone centres based in a community group. The common theme amongst this group was the desire to deliver a user-led service. Whilst these centres encourage learning and training, this was not always their primary focus and it might be coupled with access to other support services, e.g. the primary focus of one UK online

centre in Cambridge was as a homeless shelter but they also offered access to computers and training.

A.16   Other centres such as one Family Learning Centre in Merseyside, had a strong focus on learning but again their UK online centre was supported by the delivery of a range of complementary services, e.g. a credit union, money advice and a homework club. In this sense a number of the community and voluntary based UK online centres were offering a package of services, particularly to disadvantaged communities, and the primary reason for users accessing them may not be to use a computer. However, once they are 'through the door' IT training and access were likely to be promoted.

A.17   Community and voluntary led UK online centres deliver access to computers and IT training in a variety of ways, including a mixture of drop-in internet access, self-taught IT training classes and structured IT training.   A number of community and voluntary led UK online centres also 'hosted' other organisations that can come in and use their computer facilities, e.g. a centre in North London allowed other community groups use of their IT suite to provide training.

A.18   The funding base for these community and voluntary led UK online centres was diverse. Funding sources included, SRB, learndirect, LSC, CMF and mainstream local authority funding.   In some cases these funding sources, such as SRB or learndirect revenue allowed centres to offer free training to beneficiaries. In other centres nominal charges are made for access to computers and training. The majority of these type of centres that we visited indicated that they were facing long term sustainability issues in terms of maintaining computers and delivering training, because many revenue funding sources were time limited. A small number of centres such as one Family Learning Centre in Merseyside and an ICT Centre in Shropshire had some success in encouraging the local authority to mainstream at least part of their provision.

Awareness of e-government services

A.19   Anecdotal evidence from UK online centres suggests that people coming into centres to access the internet were usually doing so in order to look for information on holidays, send e-mail, to look for employment and general research in areas of personal interest. Although internet usage is monitored this was usually to ensure that users were not accessing inappropriate sites, rather than as a means of understanding what types of site were most popular amongst users.

A.20   General awareness of the availability of local and central e-government services amongst UK online centre managers was low. However, where centres had close links to local authorities, or were part of a larger network of UK online centres, awareness levels were much higher.

A.21 When centre managers were asked about their awareness of e-government, the most commonly cited sites were those of the local authority, NHS Direct, Inland Revenue and sites with details of training and college courses. Centre managers were able to provide little detailed information with respect to government websites being accessed by users, however, the perception is that few users know about or use such sites. Where centre managers were aware of users accessing e-government services these were most commonly related to: electoral services (one centre was in an area that piloted e-voting); checking planning applications; NHS Direct and general local information from local authority websites.

A.22 A number of the community and voluntary-led UK online centres had specific knowledge of e-government services where they related to services that affected their client group, e.g. the Home Office website for information about entitlement for refugees and asylum seekers, and websites with information on Child and Pension Tax Credits etc. In most cases centre staff sought this information from websites on behalf of users, or they helped them to access the information. Centre managers suggested that users were not always aware of where to find information and needed support in navigating their way through internet sites.

A.23 In a number of libraries the home page on their computers is for the local authority which helps to raise awareness. A small number also had pages with links to local and central government services. Libraries also tended to be linked into e-government initiatives that are being driven by the local authority. Anecdotally, take-up of these services tends to depend on the sophistication of what was available and the extent to which the local authority was promoting it.

A.24 A number of Libraries including those in one borough of West London have an on-line service that allows users to search for books, reserve books and pay fines without even coming into the library. This local authority also had a number of fully transactional services and for certain issues users were referred to on-line services which could be accessed in local libraries, e.g. when someone makes a planning application they were encouraged to check the progress on-line. Similarly, one local authority in the North West offers access to information on benefits and free school meals etc., which could be accessed in local UK online centres.

A.25 Whilst UK online centres were not able to give us a detailed breakdown of local and central government services that users are currently accessing, one library 'One Stop Shop' in, the West Midlands recently recorded the most common enquiries that their staff received from users of the offices. These included:

- payments to the local authority

- library returns and issues

- planning enquiries

- school enquiries

- local service enquiries, e.g. refuse collection

- governance enquiries, e.g. who is my local Councillor

- benefits enquiries.

Opportunities for engaging with e-government

A.26   The overwhelming majority of UK online centres could see the benefits of being able to access e-government services. In a small number of cases UK online centres were already looking at the ways of actively promoting and increasing the usage of such services. A partnership in North London, which is a network of UK online centres was one example of this. They have made links with the e-government officer in their local authority and are developing proposals – subject to funding - for a pilot scheme to offer access to e-government services on a social housing estate in the area. They have identified a shop front site and would like to offer a centre whereby local people can access a single point of entry to get information and transact with the local authority, e.g. they could find out about childcare places, and pay their rent on-line all in one place. The centre would provide support and guide people in finding information they need, encouraging them to do this on-line rather than having to access the services of various different departments face-to-face or over the phone.

A.27   We found that the greatest interest in making links to, and encouraging the take-up of e-government services came from library, and community and voluntary led-UK online centres. Whilst FE-led centres were interested in the concept, the focus of their work was primarily on learning and training, rather than as an access point for people to drop in and use internet services.   There was also an opportunity cost to FE colleges who might lose revenue by encouraging open access, rather than fee attracting learning provision.

A.28   A number of community and voluntary-led UK online centre currently provide advice sessions for people on particular issues such as finding jobs and benefits etc. These centres saw the potential link between the support services that they offer and e-government, e.g. they could get people to use on-line benefit calculators. In this sense making links to e-government was consistent with the current focus of their work.

A.29   There was also a sense that their users trusted them and their organisation and may be more likely to access services via them, particularly on sensitive issues such as benefits. In a number of cases community and voluntary groups were already undertaking an advocacy role and supporting their users with benefits and housing issues.

A.30   Similarly, a number of UK online centres suggested that use of e-government services could form part of their training courses on using the internet because it would provide a very practical example of using the internet, and could be made relevant to the learner's personal circumstances. In some cases this was already being done on an ad hoc basis. One ICT Centre in Shropshire had encouraged people to find information on government websites and find out what is available as part of an internet training course. However, in most cases e-government was not being promoted and the primary use of internet services was to book holidays etc.

A.31   Centres also suggested that awareness amongst users needed to be raised and that e-government could be promoted through posters in centres, TV campaigns and newspapers etc. However, the promotional tools need to be clear about what type of services might be available. Centre managers also thought that the available services need to be very relevant to large groups of users if we are trying to encourage use of e-government services, e.g. how to find information on childcare or registering your child at school. There also needs to be a reason for users to access services on-line, e.g. it is quicker that contacting each service in person or by phone, or they might be able to access help with accessing these services in a less daunting environment. However, most centres thought that users would still want a choice of ways to interact with public services, e.g. telephone and in person, and not just be limited to internet interaction.

A.32   The majority agreed that even if awareness was raised and training was provided there would still be a need for support in centres to help people navigate their way though information and use websites effectively, particularly where there are forms to complete. A number of centre managers suggested having drop-in advice sessions on particular days where there would be a member of staff to signpost users in finding and using e-government sites. This could be done on a generic basis or by theme, e.g. one centre has held employment advice sessions with Jobcentre Plus in the past and thought that accessing e-government information on in-work benefits and accessing employment and training could be a practical link with these types of advice surgeries.

Barriers to take-up of e-government services

A.33   Although there is support for increasing the uptake of e-government services a number of barriers were identified by centre managers.

Resources issues

A.34   Staff resources were the most commonly cited barrier to encouraging the take up of e-government services. Centre managers were confident that they could promote e-government services but thought that many users would still need support from staff in understanding

what is available and how to use these types of sites. It was also likely that where people are required to input information or complete forms this might require help from staff.

A.35 The majority of UK online centres, particularly library-led centres felt that they did not have sufficient staffing resources to support users in accessing e-government. Solutions to this included funding for staff to promote e-government and holding advice surgeries.

A.36 Centres also thought that existing staff required training if they were to actively promote, signpost and support the use of e-government. If this is promoted through UK online centres, users would look to staff for information on services and how to use them.

A.37 A significant proportion of UK online centres were facing issues of sustainability in the long term, including the cost of maintaining and replacing hardware. If promoting and supporting access to e-government were to provide opportunities to draw down additional resources, centres are likely to welcome this.

A.38 Whilst the majority of centres have broadband internet access, a number do not and this will also have implications for speed of access and the extent to which users are encouraged to use centres.

Presentation of information

A.39 The key message from centre managers was that if users are to be encouraged to access e-government services the "offer" needs to be good. In promoting e-government there needs to be a clear understanding of what is available. Information also needs to be presented in a simple format so that it is easily understandable. Users also need some means of asking for further help with completing forms and it was felt that this might be best done by having staff available that have a good knowledge of the sites and could offer support.

Potential users

A.40 The perception of centre staff was that a wide range of users could potentially access e-government services, however, they might not necessarily do this through a UK online centre. A number of centres commented that a large proportion of their users had a computer at home, perhaps owned and used by another family member. Their reason for accessing the centre was often to learn to use a computer so they could then use internet and other facilities at home.

A.41 This type of user might be less likely to come back to the UK online centre once they have completed training. However, they are likely to be encouraged back into the centre to use e-government services if they know that internet access is cheaper and quicker, and that staff are on hand to offer help.

Location

A.42　A small number of centres questioned the likelihood of people using their centre to access local e-government services. Two of the centres we visited were either located very close to the offices of the local council or were located close to a local authority 'One Stop Shop' which was already promoted as single access point for information on local services.

Privacy and security

A.43　The layout of centres varied greatly from stand-alone PC terminals in the corner of a library through to rows of computers in booths. Some centre staff thought that privacy could be an issue where people were accessing sites that required them to enter personal information, or where they needed help from staff with finding information on issues such as benefits, and perhaps would be feel more confident in doing this if they were in a private or semi-private space.

A.44　Concerns were also raised as to whether users would feel confident in sharing personal information with centre staff, if they needed help in being able to use e-government services. The extent of concern about this issue varied between centre-type. Voluntary and community groups were often more experienced in playing an advocacy role for their users and the perception amongst these centres was that their users trust them and are confident in sharing personal information, e.g. to complete benefit claim forms. However, library-based centres were less use to adopting this type of function and had concerns about whether they or their users would feel comfortable with such a role.

A.45　Some additional concerns were raised about privacy. This was in relation to people providing personal information over the internet. This concern was two-fold. Firstly, that many users are still not confident about the security aspects of providing personal and financial information over the internet. Secondly, if multiple users were using the same PC terminal, how you ensure that cookies are deleted between sessions so that users were not able to access other people's information.

Loss of income

A.46　Although there is general enthusiasm for promoting access to e-government this is not a priority for centres. There would be a tension between trying to promote use of these services and trying to promote training courses which are a means of income generation. For many centres, there was a need to direct users towards training courses such as those provided by learndirect because this was a way of generating income and supporting sustainability. As it stands there was no financial incentive for centres to promote e-government.

Authentification

A.47   One of the issues we probed with centre managers was the authentification of users. In other words, if some e-government sites required users to be authenticated by a third party in order to access a service, e.g. making a benefits claim, was this something that centre staff would be able to do. This issue provoked a mixed reaction. In general, library and FE-led UK online centres felt less comfortable with this type of role, and there was concern about the repercussions with respect to fraudulent use.   However, community and voluntary-led UK online centres were more open to undertaking this type of role. A number were already acting as advocates for their users and were helping them with issues such as benefits and housing applications and as a result felt more comfortable with this type of role. It was suggested that anybody undertaking this authentification role should receive rigorous accredited training and be subject to a police check.

Conclusions

A.48   Our consultations with UK online centre Managers suggest that there is enthusiasm to engage in promoting e-government services. Indeed, many centres are already promoting specific e-government services, e.g. local authority websites, and some are even including this as part of their courses on how to use the internet. However, in-depth knowledge about the types of e-government services available at a local and national level is limited amongst UK online centre staff. Those consulted thought that it would be necessary to provide staff with training to understand the scope of services that are available.

A.49   Managers indicated that current users were not accessing e-government services on a regular basis.   However, many thought by promoting e-government more widely, and targeting services at particular groups, e.g. job seekers, or parents of young children, this could encourage people to access services. It was also suggested that centres would need to provide a 'hook' which would encourage people to access this type of service in a centre, e.g. help in finding information, as well as fast and free internet access.

A.50   The majority of centres suggested that the promotion of e-government was generally congruous with their existing, and planned activity for the future. The exception to this might be FE-led centres, and those centres that were learndirect centres. For these centres a primary aim was to generate income through learning activity, and promoting access to e-government could detract from this.   Many centres believed that if e-government were promoted more widely through UK online centres that this would have resource implications, e.g. staff time, and that this would need to be considered in detail.

ANNEX B

Focus group findings

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B   Focus group findings

Methodology

B.1   This report is based upon a series of focus groups held in October 2003 across the country. The research sought to explore the views of UK online centres and e-government among groups of users and non-users of UK online centre services. Overall, 14 groups were held – eight with non-users and six with users. The groups of non-users were constituted as follows:

- Disabled, North East

- 65+, South East, rural

- Basic Skills Shortage, London

- Black and Minority Ethnic, North West

- Lone parents, South West, rural

- Unemployed people, East, rural

- 16-34, West Midlands (a 'control' group)

- 35+, West Midlands (a 'control' group)

B.2   The six groups of users were recruited through UK online centres are were held in London (two groups), Yorkshire & Humber, West Midlands, North West (all urban) and the South East (rural).

Executive Summary

Generally optimistic towards e-government

B.3   Most residents could see the advantages of e-government and were generally positive about its possibilities. Those who had used e-government for fairly low-level transactions such as finding information and contact details had found it efficient and convenient.

B.4   However, it is worth noting that some respondents have had negative experiences – particularly if these involved transactions. These bad experiences can often lead to mistrust in the technology and an unwillingness to pursue future usage.

Telephone is still preferred form of contact with local and central government

B.5   People like to use 'tried and tested' ways of contacting the Council or government, and for most people, telephone was the preferred form of contact for urgent enquiries. Residents could see the advantage and convenience of emailing the Council but most said they would not use this method of contact for an urgent query – telephone was still preferred. Most people preferred to write a letter for queries that need to be followed up as they felt it was more likely to be taken seriously than a telephone call or email. Residents preferred to visit the Council offices if the nature of the query was particularly complex. This was especially popular with those in social grades D and E who tended to have less trust in both technology and local or central government.

Overwhelmingly positive views of UK online centres

B.6   The views of both users and non-users of UK online centres were overwhelmingly positive. Centre users tended to spend most of their time on the computers rather than talking to staff, but were extremely positive about the support provided by the centre staff who, they felt, go beyond the remit of their job. Furthermore, many centre users have a computer at home and tended to use it to practice what they had learnt at the centre.

B.7   Although overall attitudes were positive, one of the most important areas of concern was opening hours. This was a particular problem in rural areas, where the centre may provide the only local, free internet access. A few concerns were also raised surrounding the privacy of information on a shared PC.

Lack of awareness is key barrier to centre usage

B.8   Although when briefed, many non-users had positive views of UK online centres, one of the main reasons why non-users do not use the centre seems to be due to lack of awareness. The centres need to be publicised more widely and the publicity should be aimed specifically at disadvantaged groups, who would be likely to benefit most from the centres. Some non-users were positive about the centres and how they could use them, however, some who had a computer at home said they 'don't have the time' to use a UK online centre. Another key concern that emerged was the 'fear of the classroom' and fear that they might 'show themselves up'.

The Internet and E-Government

B.9   Most people were very enthusiastic about using the internet, and generally have positive experiences of using it.

I got on to the internet and I could have practised law myself in Scotland by the time I had finished. So it was damn useful

Female, non-user, disabled, North East

It is particularly good if you are looking for something which is a bit rare . . . by and large I find it very successful

Male, non-user, 65+, South East, rural

The internet, I find the internet is a good place to finding out resources and information, it's like a massive library

Male, non-user, 16-34, West Midlands

Using a computer is just like anything else really, the hardest part is just the starting really, and when you get there you will just flow. Because it is so interesting, when I first started using it you know, I was fascinated by the whole thing

Male, non-user, Basic Skills Shortage, London

B.10   Respondents tended to use the internet mostly for sending emails, helping with children's homework, booking holidays, and to research issues such as medical information.

My dad has used it to find, he actually found out, looking at medication, that they were actually giving my mother the wrong drugs

Male, non-user, disabled, North East

I use it a lot for access, from my wheelchair, I have got all the hotels from America, because you get a lot of pictures as well, you can see there are no steps

Male, non-user, disabled, North East

I use the computer for websites, but not for public services. But I do use it mostly for websites, e-mails, that is the only time I have really used the computer, I don't use it for like writing letters or anything

Male, non-user, Basic Skills Shortage, London

Most of the time I spend on it is with my granddaughter to look for school, you know, for her homework and stuff like that

Male, user, North West, urban

I would go into the shop and have a look at it and then get a cheap deal over the internet.

Male, user, South East, rural

B.11   A number of the older respondents learnt their IT skills from their children, and most felt it was necessary to learn how to use the internet in order to 'keep up'.

I think in my case I had to learn because I knew the children would do it . . . and I was just being lazy. My husband went abroad, and I thought right I don't even know how to speak to him. So he taught me before he left, like do this, do that, and then . . . I was on it every evening then

My mum, I teach her how to use a computer, she doesn't go to library

Male, non-user, Basic Skills Shortage, London

My children taught me. My daughter . . . first of all she wrote it down in parrot fashion . . . It has taken me years, my progress is so slow, because I don't spend any time actually learning, it is when I come up against something I want to do, I solve that somehow

Female, non-user, 65+, South East, rural

B.12   The more negative experiences of using the internet revolved around jargon-based websites, and websites not containing enough relevant information.

You can spend ages searching for this wonderful search engine and you still don't get the answer

Male, non-user, 65+, South East, rural

I found in the past that the internet information is more general than general, it's kind of almost states the obvious

Male, non-user, 16-34, West Midlands

All this information you are given – people seem to think it comes from God! They don't stop to think that somebody has put that in. And they are just as fallible as everybody else

Female, non-user, 65+, South East, rural

Lot of the words they use, like computer jargon. It is words that you don't know. Like the different types of typing, they call it a font. If you don't know computer language, you sit there, what is a font?

Female, non-user, Basic Skills Shortage, London

E-government

B.13   Although respondents were fairly positive about the possibilities for e-government, of those who have used e-government websites, most had fairly negative experiences of them. These included not knowing if a transaction has been processed, receiving no reply to emails, websites being difficult to navigate and not containing enough detailed information.

If they want us to access their material, information, it's up to the government to make it simple enough that Joe Public can do it without tuition

Male user, West Midlands

I've tried the births, marriages and deaths . . . They didn't give enough information. I e-mailed for a form which I never got

Female, user, London

I did the Inland Revenue for the Working Families' Tax Credit thing, where you had to apply by a certain deadline and I thought I'd apply on-line, but it was so complicated. There was so much to read through and it just got so boring I gave up in the end

B.14 It was suggested that Council websites should be more user-friendly – and that they could take tips from commercial websites. Bad experiences with Council websites lead to mistrust, and an unwillingness to pursue future usage.

> *The Council websites to start with, when they first came up, were very pathetic and you couldn't get links to where you wanted, it wasn't easy to get through. So I mean I was put off going that way because of how difficult it is to find the bit that you want. It is easier to ring up*
>
> Male, non-user, disabled, North East
>
> *You don't see a lot of advertisements to sort of encourage you to use the Council internet*
>
> Female, non-user, Basic Skills Shortage, London
>
> *I think they need to promote it a bit more to all the people, I don't think they promote it enough*
>
> Female, user, North West, urban

B.15 Having said that, those who have used the internet for filling in forms and for finding contact details found it efficient.

> *Yes, I find it's very good actually, because you can fill the form in half way through on the internet and walk away and come back . . . and carry on with the form, you don't have to fill it all in. I found it was far better than filling it in manually by hand, I found it very easy over the internet*
>
> Male, non-user, BME, North West
>
> *All I was after was name and address and phone number and stuff that was really easy*
>
> Female, non-user, 16-34, West Midlands
>
> *It would seem to be more sensible to do it that way rather than have a telephone number, to have an email address so that you can actually receive an email back*
>
> Male, user, Yorkshire & Humber, urban
>
> *The government . . . we looked at was very dry but then you looked at sort of tourist information . . . I think the District Council isn't bad and that's quite nicely designed*
>
> Male, user, West Midlands
>
> *My local MP on the net, I find that incredibly easy to find*
>
> Female, non-user, West Midlands

B.16 Furthermore, respondents could see the advantages of e-government, and were particularly keen on the convenience.

You don't have to go anywhere and drag the children with you. That is quite a good thing

> Non-user, lone parent, South West, rural

You can find out things on there that would take you months and months to find out elsewhere

> Non-user, lone parent, South West, rural

I think is it definitely important, because whether we like it or not, and whether we are not using it as much as we will in the future, which I can see we will, I feel anyway that it is the way forward and that is what people are working towards

> Female, non-user, disabled, North East

I think it is nice that you can do it in your own time as well . . . especially if it's the council and you have to ring before 4.00pm

> Non-user, lone parent, South West, rural

E-Government Interactions

B.17   People were generally keen to use the internet to contact the Council for low-level transactions such as finding information and contact details. Some residents have tried this and have generally had good experiences.

It's more relaxing, you can find out anything you want

> Male, non-user, BME, North West

On a general one, if it is just like a question, sort of vague information, I have done an e-mail one and was surprised how quickly they got back to me

> Male, non-user, disabled, North East

It's probably going to stop me having to wait at the end of a telephone 'cause you try and phone councils usually and you're there, if you want to speak to your local MP, press one, several options and not one of them is what you want. Whereas if you're on the net, you can probably get the information you want off a good site in ten minutes.

> Male, non-user, 16-34, West Midlands

It is quicker not having to chat you see. It is like leaving answerphone messages, sometimes it is just more efficient for just boring things

> Female, user, South East, rural

A quick phone call and you could get the answer but then to get the contact details, the internet is better

> Male, non-user, BME, North West

B.18   They were, however, more sceptical about sending emails and the time it would take the Council to reply. Consequently, they would prefer not to send an email if they needed to contact the Council urgently.

I e-mailed the Council on two or three times, at different days, and it has not worked. Then I wrote a letter and faxed it . . . Two months down the line I'm still waiting

Female, user, London

I tried paying council tax – three hours later, I still don't know to this day if I've actually paid it . . . It literally did take three hours to get it to go through the whole process, it was hideous. It's the same with the job centre website – if it's working, it's still no good

Male, non-user, 16-34, West Midlands

You don't know whether it's arrived. Whether it's been dealt with

Male, user, London

I think if I had a personal e-mail within Haringey Council signed Mr. Joe Bloggs of Haringey Council then I'd be very happy to sort of e-mail . . . but if I just have to send it to a general centralised system I think I wouldn't

Female, user, London

B.19 Generally, however, people like to use 'tried and tested' ways of contacting the Council – if they've had a good experience with a particular method of contact in the past they'll be keen to use it again.

When I went in and got sorted, it meant the next problem that arose, rather than dealing with it over the phone or by letter, I went in instead. That is why I would go in more now, because it worked

Male, non-user, disabled, North East

I think it depends on what kind of complaint. They didn't collect my refuse, so I couldn't write them a letter or go on the internet, it had to be done there and then

Non-user, lone parent, South West, rural

It would be useful if the person who answers the phone actually had the capacity to go and answer the question as well

Non-user, lone parent, South West, rural

It depends how urgently you want your question answered for a start

Female, non-user, BME, North West

Telephone

B.20 The telephone was generally preferred for urgent enquires that need to be dealt with quickly. Most people also saw it as the most convenient way to contact the Council, particularly those who may find it difficult to visit the Council offices.

A lot of the time you need appointments, so it is generally, the best thing for me, is just to pick up the phone and go from there

Male, non-user, Basic Skills Shortage, London

The internet, I mean it is very impersonal, because you just send a letter out that could be anybody. Whereas with the phone you are talking to somebody and you can ask them their name and . . . you are getting a response immediately

<div align="right">Male, non-user, disabled, North East</div>

I think you can get a quick response as well, and like you say you just sit there with the telephone and press a few keys and that's it

<div align="right">Female, non-user, BME, North West</div>

If you have kids running round your ankles, it is quicker

<div align="right">Non-user, lone parent, South West, rural</div>

I think if you know that you can phone one number, phone the civic centre and say, I have got this problem and know they would direct you to the right place. Like the one stop shop, I think that has improved services. Because you just go in and say, I don't know who I am supposed to talk to because it is so complicated

<div align="right">Male, non-user, disabled, North East</div>

I always do that, I always get the name of the person that I've spoken to then I can tell them, or I always say can I speak to this person who knows what I'm talking about

<div align="right">Female, non-user, BME, North West</div>

Visits

B.21   If the nature of the enquiry was complex, many felt that they would prefer to visit the Council offices, particularly if they were complaining, as they felt they could better 'get their point across' with face-to-face contact and that they would have more control over the situation. This method of contact is popular with disabled people who, it is thought, might particularly benefit from the convenience of e-government It was also particularly popular with those in the lower social classes. Previous MORI research suggests that those in the lower social classes tend to have less trust in both technology and local or central government.

If it's quite urgent, telephone. If there's no answer, go in person to person

<div align="right">Female, non-user, BME, North West</div>

I still prefer the face-to-face when it comes down to the nitty gritty, when you are there to complain about something

<div align="right">Male, non-user, disabled, North East</div>

You feel as if you have got more control over the situation if you are actually stood, well sat, in front of them

<div align="right">Female, non-user, disabled, North East,</div>

I just think over the phone they can say, 'All right, we will get back to you' and they don't, so you are still in the same position. Where face-to-face you can say, 'Well, I am not moving until you do something'

<div align="right">Female, non-user, disabled, North East</div>

Letters

B.22   If the enquiry required a response and needed to be followed up, residents tended to prefer either writing to or visiting the Council as they felt that this would be more likely to be followed up than a phone call, which could easily be ignored. Residents preferred to write to the Council if the enquiry was regarding a legal matter, as they liked to have proof of contact.

> *That is why when I mostly complain I try and write, because at least they have got proof, it is not very good, but you still try*
>
> Female, non-user, Basic Skills Shortage, London

> *You've always got it there just for the record*
>
> Male, non-user, BME, North West

> *That is the only way you can be sure that it has had some attention and you see whose name is at the bottom. It is easy enough to be very pleasant over the phone and of course people in those positions are adept at making you feel they are really glad you called, and then forgetting all about it*
>
> Female, non-user, 65+, South East, rural

UK online centres

B.23   Views on UK online centres were overwhelmingly positive among both users of the centres and non-users.

> *I am particularly impressed with what is being done now for those of us who are getting on a bit and need to be dragged into the 21st century. I think it is a wonderful opportunity for elderly people*
>
> Female, user, South East, rural

> *The Centre is also good if you've been coming a long time you learn such a lot, and I really enjoy the courses, they make it easy for you, it's the best way to do one-to-one learning*
>
> Female, user, London

> *And you don't have to pay. And it's local as well so you use it more*
>
> Female, user, South East, rural

> *It's a lifeline for such a rural area*
>
> Female, user, West Midlands

> *I was going to just say that even like it's like a pleasure to come in because it's very cosy, it's nice, and you know, friendly, and you can go upstairs and have like a beverage if you want it. You just feel comfortable sitting here, you know you're at the screen, but you just feel comfortable. So it encourages you to come in anyway because it's just a nice surrounding and friendly atmosphere*
>
> Female, user, London

For youngsters who do not have access to a computer at home, to have somebody to come to, to talk to and I think just having the children come back as well and somebody to guide you and to teach you, for course, it's absolutely essential

Female, user, London

B.24   Users of UK online centres enjoy going to the centre and attending classes. Almost all respondents said that they spent most of their time on the computers rather than talking to staff. However, all spoke very highly of the staff and the support they provide.

I think the Centre is really supportive and the staff are really working hard here, there's very helpful people

Female, user, London

Going to a class is good fun because you learn quite a bit from other people

Female, non-user, 65+, South East, rural

Sometimes I've picked his brains and he hasn't charged me even though he could do . . . They're always helpful

Male, user, West Midlands

I was having a hell of a problem, I was starting to learn Java . . . and I couldn't get it to work, I needed to change something in a file, it's totally beyond me . . . and in the end, I sorted it out with his help.

Male, user, West Midlands

B.25   Most UK online centre users have a PC at home or work. However, they still tended to visit the centre every few days. Some users said they liked to practice at home what they had learnt at the centre.

When you've got your own computer, like I have . . . it gives you much more confidence, doesn't it? it's a load of aggravation on your own

Male, user, London

In my situation it was very helpful because actually my PC died and I could come here . . . so it's very good personally, where I can come in any time and look up things, and get the help

Female, user, London

We heard it from a friend I've sort of taken to it, it's been quite easy to go through the learning process and then I can go back and go through it again and I can do it at home now

Female, user, West Midlands

In my case there is a computer at home, it's been there more than two years. I've not looked at it, my sister will not help me, my niece will not help me, they don't have the time – but at least I come in and I know I can move the cursor!

Female, user, London

Staff support

B.26   Users were overwhelming positive about the support they receive from staff. They were 'helpful' 'encouraging', help to 'build confidence', and were generally thought of as going beyond the remit of the job.

> *I couldn't have got on at all without James, there is no doubt about it, he is very good*
>
> Female, user, South East, rural

> *I mean, for us, it's a second chance, isn't it? It's like we've done our education and things are changing, society's changing and we want to keep that up and this is the opportunity to do it*
>
> Female, user, London

> *I need the tutors . . . I know basically what I'm doing but I still need a lot of help, so sometimes even if I know it a bit, I just let them go over it with me again just to make sure*
>
> Female, user, London

> *Yes, they are very helpful. I did my CV here, they helped me, any time I call, they are ready to help, to assist me. I've no complaints about this centre*
>
> Male, user, London

Concerns and improvements

B.27   Although users were generally very positive about the centres, one of the most important issues was opening hours. This is a widespread problem, particularly in rural areas. Some even said they wouldn't use the internet at home if the centre was open more often.

> *They did a trial on Sunday openings earlier in the year for a twelve week period I think and people came up and did it on a Sunday. I think it was successful and I think they're hoping to do it again*
>
> Male, user, Yorkshire & Humber, urban

> *I would stop using it at home, the internet connection, if the library was open six days a week*
>
> Female, user, South East, rural

> *Well I'd like to be able to come here but it's the access hours – like for instance the library is closed at seven*
>
> Male, user, Yorkshire & Humber, urban

> *I would love for the library to be open on Thursday, but someone has got to pay for a person to be here on Thursday*
>
> Male, user, South East, rural

> *If you have a service a good service like this, it should be open for the public as much as possible*
>
> Female, user, South East, rural

> *Once you have invested that amount of money I think you ought to roll it out . . . I think it should be open and available, because*

otherwise it is sort of a funny mixed message. It is like terribly high quality and really a brilliant service, and then as I say, suddenly not there

Female, user, South East, rural

B.28   Concerns were also raised around using a shared PC (especially when carrying out transactions). This was generally thought of as 'not as safe' as their own PC.

I think you weigh it up against confidentiality, don't you. You would rather do things on your own computer at home than in public places

Male, non-user, 65+, South East, rural

That worries me. What you leave on that hard disc when you walk away from it, what you have been working on

Male, non-user, 65+, South East, rural

I think sending messages out into the wide blue yonder, it does give you a sort of feeling of insecurity somehow, you do wonder, especially if you don't get one back you wonder if they have got that

Female, user, South East, rural

Yes, I just, I like computers for what they can do but I don't trust them 100%

Female, non-user, 16-34, West Midlands

B.29   Some people, especially those who have not been using the internet very long, found time constraints too limiting.

I would have to become organised, to book, to get in to do whatever work I needed to do. Whereas I tend to go in if I want to find information about something. So if there were enough computers and there was always one free, I might consider going in. But the way I see it, it is always full, there are not enough computers

Male, non-user, disabled, North East

The problem there's no booking arrangement

Male, user, Yorkshire & Humber, urban

I don't think half an hour's long enough, sometimes it takes you 15 minutes to get into where you want to be

Female, user, Yorkshire & Humber, urban

B.30   The more experienced users tended to adopt strategies which allow them longer on the computer.

At the minute we don't have to make an appointment so if we've got a couple of hours free, we can come in, whatever the day

Female, user, West Midlands

If you try after three o'clock when there's a great influx of school children you're likely to only get half an hour, but if you come first thing when not many people want to use it, then you can probably have all morning

Male, user, Yorkshire & Humber, urban

B.31 A number of users were aware of the problem of UK Online's visibility.

I think they could be publicised better. You know, advertise it. The way they've been advertising learning and the Learn Direct centre

Female, user, London

I've worked round here for three years and I didn't know this place existed at all a few months ago

Female, user, London

B.32 On the other hand, people were also aware that centres could become victims of their own success.

I think when it's busy, there are some times when I arrive when two people just can't cope with all the people . . . It's not that he doesn't want to help us but it's impossible to cope with five people, two of them, so possibly staffing levels is something that needs to be considered

Female, user, London

The problem is the more people that use it the less useful it is, because you won't be able to get on it

Female, non-user, 65+, South East, rural

The future for UK online centres

B.33 While users tended to value their particular Centre, there was less confidence in the viability of centres in the long-term.

If you get more proficient in what you're doing and you've got a computer at home you'll spend more time at home and do the courses, rather than actually coming into the Centre. I mean you'll probably only come in if you get stuck with a problem

Female, user, London

When I've finished work, I've got to go home to be a parent. I haven't got the time to come here, so if I've got my computer at home, I've got the software and I can go on-line, more times I'd probably go home and do it rather than coming to the Centre

Female, user, London

I think once people start getting it at home they'll be more on-line at home

The Views of Non-Users

B.34   Some respondents (particularly non-users) were concerned that where UK online centres run taught courses, each course should focus on a certain age group. Some respondents stressed that people – particularly older people – would prefer to learn in small groups with people of a similar age and of a similar level of IT literacy.

> *You don't want, let's say pensioners going there with a 17 year old lad. I think you want somebody similar to be there of their age group*
>
> Male, non-user, BME, North West

> *Maybe they should have specific times when it is for older people, because they might be intimidated*
>
> Non-user, lone parent, South West, rural

The fear of the classroom

B.35   Several respondents were enthusiastic about the idea of the centres, but were not sure that they would use it personally – due to a fear of the learning environment and concerns that they might 'show themselves up'.

> *And probably the initial going into the classroom, the fear of like what's this person there, because I don't know anything about the computer, so just the initial going in stage*
>
> Male, non-user, BME, North West

> *That gremlin advert, that is so true. It is kind of like a fear isn't it. I would love to use the computer, I would love to be able to just go upstairs and fiddle around, not have to wait for my son to get in. And you press the help button and you don't get no help, what was the point*
>
> Male, non-user, Basic Skills Shortage, London

> *Some people are scared to go to college, they won't even walk through the door, whereas if you've got some sort of leaflet and somebody that can give you a bit of guidance, or you can take it home and read it yourself*
>
> Female, user, Yorkshire & Humber, urban

> *We would all quite happily try and use one, but we only feel comfortable as I said, with my son like watching over me. As a grown adult, you feel an idiot to walk into a place and say, 'I don't know how to use this'*
>
> Female, non-user, Basic Skills Shortage, London

> *I used to panic, I pressed something and I thought, 'What have I done, I've lost it'! And I'd panic, really panic, you know, and because I've got a computer at home that I bought second hand, I*

was constantly ringing my son, 'I've done something and I don't know what I've done!'. And I could see that he was losing patience with me, and I thought I've got to master this myself. And then a neighbour told me about it so I came trembling thinking, 'I'm a stupid idiot and I won't understand anything' but it's surprised me what I have learnt

Female, user, West Midlands

I invited somebody from our church, an old girl. I said, 'Do you want to come to the library and I will teach you how to do it?'. She closed her eyes, her whole psyche closed down – 'I am so sorry I just can't'

Female, user, South East, rural

Time concerns

B.36   Although most non-users tended to think that the centres are a very good idea, some of those who have PCs at home said that they probably would not use the centre personally as they 'wouldn't have the time'. This view was particularly prevalent among lone parents. However, most said they would consider using the centre to learn new skills and re-train if a crèche was provided.

Probably if I was going up to the library with my daughter or something, and it was free, I might have a go on that for a little while

Non-user, lone parent, South West, rural

If they wanted parents with children then they should set up crèches. And have a specific point in time, day or month, when they are going to do something and they have a crèche set up for that particular hour or two . . . Sometimes you don't get a chance to do it in your own home, when you have a little one

Non-user, lone parent, South West, rural

I don't have the time. Babysitters and everything else

Non-user, lone parent, South West, rural

I don't think I would find the time to do that, to be honest, especially with having access to the internet at home

Non-user, lone parent, South West, rural

Publicity

B.37   One of the main reasons why non-users do not use the centres seems to be due to a lack of awareness. Many were enthusiastic about the centres, but felt that they needed to be publicised more widely.

It was only when the person came round to sort of sign me up that I realised it was UK Online, despite the fact that it said so on the back

Male, user, Yorkshire & Humber, urban

> *Well I didn't really know where the sponsorship for it came from*
>
> Male, user, Yorkshire & Humber, urban

B.38   Others simply find it more convenient to use their home PC, particularly if they are already IT literate.

> *If you are at home you can faff around on your own computer and try and work things out yourself*
>
> Non-user, lone parent, South West, rural

> *There is a difference between doing it here and doing it at home, because you can have an inbox, you can have a list of personal people at home that you can't have there*
>
> Male, user, Yorkshire & Humber, urban

ANNEX C

E-audit of UK online centres

Table of contents

Section	Page

C   E-audit of UK online centres

C.1   This report sets out the findings from the e-audit of centre managers carried out by MORI, on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills.

Background and Objectives

C.2   The Department for Education and Skills, UfI/**learndirect**, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the Office of the e-Envoy are interested in looking at what role **UK online centres** might play to help support the take-up of e-government services.

C.3   Part of this research was to gather information from centre managers about the logistics of the centre (e.g. number of PCs), statistics on users (e.g. type of user, frequency of visits), centre offerings and centre managers perceptions about users' interest in e-government and their staff's ability and willingness to provide e-government services.

Methodology

C.4   5,115 UK online centre managers were sent an email invitation to complete a brief, 10 minute online survey.   In addition to the original email invitation, centre managers were sent reminder emails and all those completing the survey were offered a chance to win a digital camera.   Finally, those experiencing technical difficulties, or who did not feel comfortable completing a survey online, were sent a paper version of the questionnaire.

C.5   Fieldwork was conducted between 8 March and 9 April and 795 centre managers completed the survey.

Presentation and Interpretation of Data

C.6   It should be remembered that this survey is based on a sample, not the entire population. In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that all not all differences are statistically significant. That said, the sub-group differences that are mentioned in this report are all statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

C.7   An overall sample of 795 respondents carries a margin of error of around plus or minus four per cent. Results for different subgroups will need to be further apart for the difference to be statistically significant, depending on the size of the sample and the finding itself – see the section on statistical reliability appended to this report.

C.8 Where percentages do not sum to 100, this is due to computer rounding, the exclusion of "don't know" categories, or multiple answers. Throughout the volume an asterisk (*) denotes any value less than half a percent.

Executive Summary

The majority of UK online centres are open to the public six days a week

C.9 Most UK online centres are in libraries and in community / voluntary centres. The majority of centres (95%) are open to the public. The 5% that are not open to the public tend to serve groups that can often be socially excluded, including older people and adults with learning difficulties.

C.10 Most UK online centres are open in office hours during the weekdays and about half are open on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings. In addition, almost three in five (58%) are open on Saturday mornings, and a third (32%) are open on Saturday afternoons.

C.11 On average, each UK online centre reported serving 161 drop-in users and 91 pre-booked users per week. The majority of UK online centre users were over the age of 15, most were white and the majority were unemployed.

Most centres offer free broadband internet access and staff support

C.12 The majority of centres are using some form of broadband connection. The number of PCs varies by the type of centre, with learning centres and schools/colleges most likely to have 21 or more PCs, and libraries, community centres and village halls most likely to have 10 or less PCs. A similar pattern emerges with internet connection.

C.13 More than four in five UK online centres offer free internet access to all users (83%). Two in five centre managers said their clients tend to use the internet for searching for information and learning online (41% and 40% respectively). However, UK online centre managers did not perceive there to be much demand for e-government services (75% say there is little or no demand).

C.14 The overwhelming majority of UK online centres offered some form of one-to-one support (95%). Learndirect centres were the most likely to say there is always someone available to offer one-to-one support, and libraries were the least likely to be able to provide this sort of support.

Centre managers willing and able to promote e-government

C.15   Almost three quarters of UK online centres said their staff's knowledge of e-government was high or moderate (72%). Although most UK online centres were sceptical about the demand for e-government services, the vast majority of centre managers said they would be willing to promote centres as places where people can learn about e-government (90%). The same proportion said they would be able, to some extent, to support users in learning about e-government (90%).
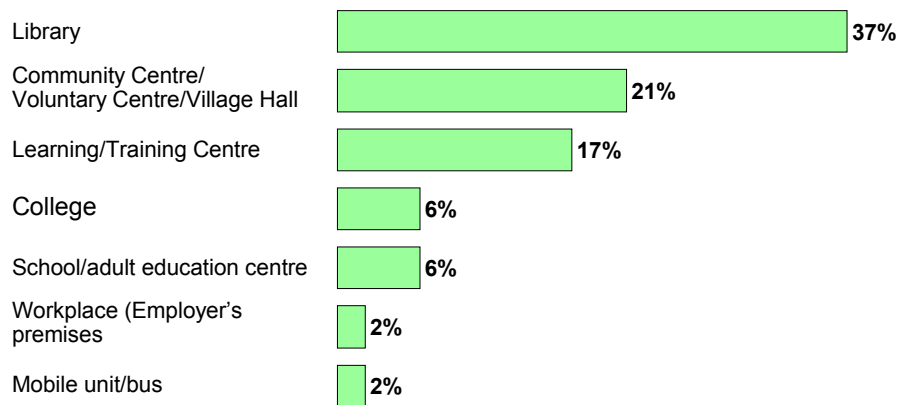
Summary of Findings

Type of Centre

C.16   Just under two in five responses were from libraries, followed by one in five from community/voluntary centres or village halls (37% and 21% respectively). Another 17% were from training centres and the remaining tended to be from schools or colleges (6% for both).

C.17   Overall, those completing the survey roughly resembled the proportions of centres that currently exist. For example, overall most of centres were in libraries and in community/voluntary centres (46% and 35% respectively); and fewer were in colleges and schools (11% and 3% respectively). However, while learning/ training centres only represented 3% of the national profile, they represent a significantly higher proportion of our sample.

Type of Centre

Q Is your UK online centre based in a . . . ?

Type	%
Library	37%
Community Centre/ Voluntary Centre/Village Hall	21%
Learning/Training Centre	17%
College	6%
School/adult education centre	6%
Workplace (Employer's premises	2%
Mobile unit/bus	2%

* Locations mentioned by 2% or more of respondents have been included in the chart

Base: All UK Online esurvey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

C.18   In addition, 40% of centres indicated that they were learndirect centres – increasing to 63% of learning training centres and 58% of schools and colleges. Compared to the national profile of centres, learndirect centres are overrepresented in the sample – possibly due to the higher number of participating training centres.[2]

Opening Hours

C.19   Most centres (95%) were open to the public. Those that were not open (40 centres) served:
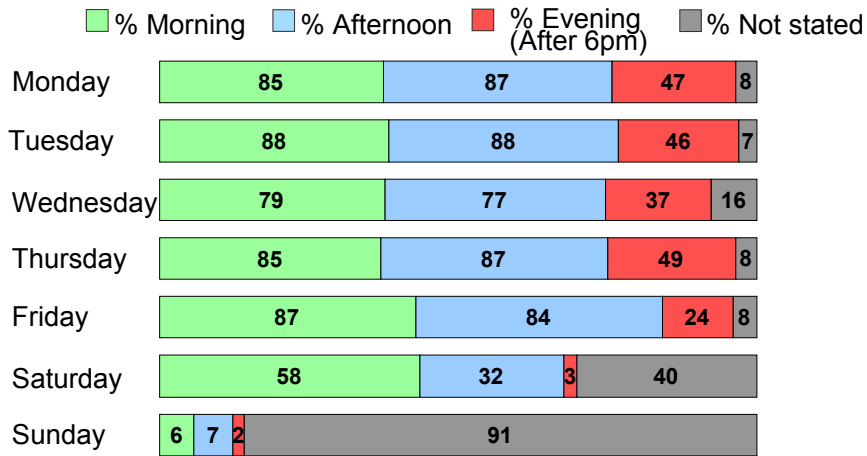
- disabled people (ten centres);

- older people in residential homes (six centres);

- adults with learning difficulties (five centres);

- mentally ill people (four centres);

- unemployed people (four centres);

- carers/care staff (four centres);

- people over the age of 50 (four centres); and

- homeless people (four centres).

C.20   The majority of centres were open office hours during the weekdays and about half were open in the evenings on Monday, Tuesday and Thursdays. Schools/colleges were most likely to have weekday evening hours. Almost three in five centres (58%) were open Saturday mornings, and a third (32%) were open Saturday afternoons.   Saturday evening and Sunday services were more restricted, with a very small proportion of centres saying they were open (3% on Saturday evenings, and 2% on Sundays).

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[2] The higher proportion of learndirect centres needs to be considered when interpreting the findings. To this end, we have reported on any significant differences between centres with and without learndirect facilities.

Centre Opening Times

Q   What are your opening times?

☐ % Morning ☐ % Afternoon ☐ % Evening (After 6pm) ☐ % Not stated

	% Morning	% Afternoon	% Evening (After 6pm)	% Not stated
Monday	85	87	47	8
Tuesday	88	88	46	7
Wednesday	79	77	37	16
Thursday	85	87	49	8
Friday	87	84	24	8
Saturday	58	32	3	40
Sunday	6	7	2	91

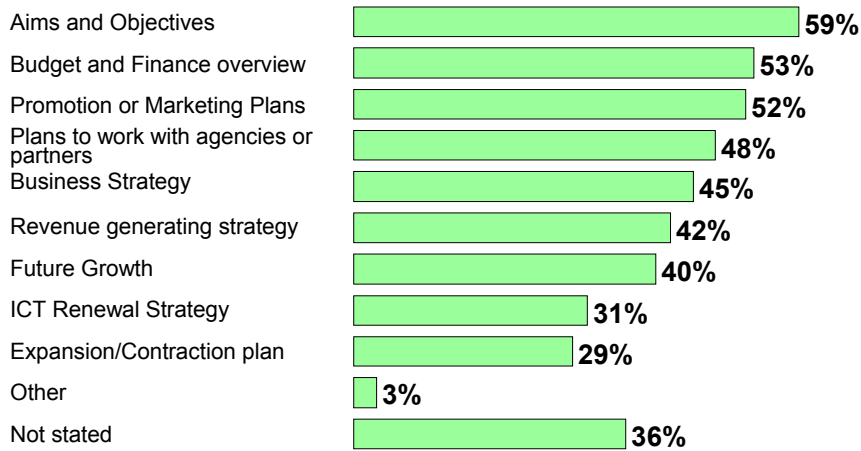Base: All UK Online esurvey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

Financial Status of Centres, Excluding Library-Based Centres

C.21   Almost equal proportions of non-library based centres were stand-alone/independent or part of a network of centres (49% and 51% respectively), with learndirect centres being more likely to be part of a network (56% vs. 46% of other centres).

C.22   About two thirds of non-library based centres currently had a sustainability or business plan (64%). Another 18% said they do not have a sustainability/business plan and the remaining 18% did not know if a plan exists. When asked what elements were part of the centre's business plans, over half said that aims & objectives, budget & finance overview and promotion & marketing plans had been included in these plans (59%, 53% and 52% respectively).

C.23   The chart below provides detailed findings about the elements included in business plans.

Business Plan

Q Does your business plan contain any of the following elements?

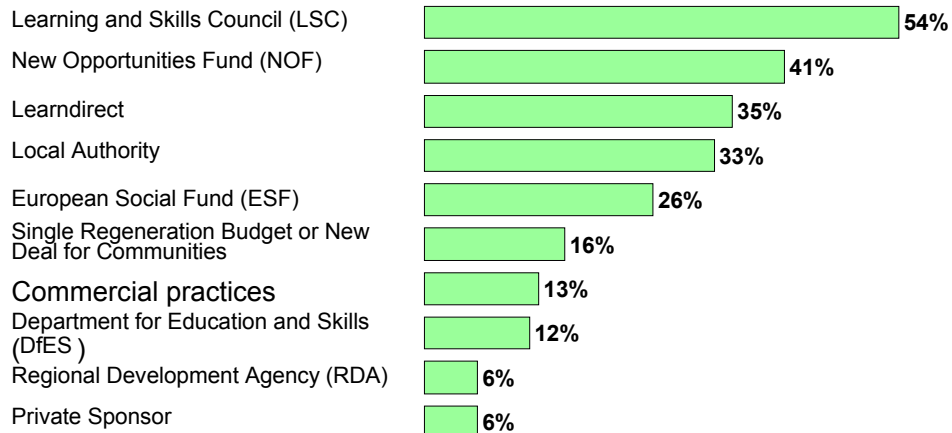|	
Aims and Objectives	59%
Budget and Finance overview	53%
Promotion or Marketing Plans	52%
Plans to work with agencies or partners	48%
Business Strategy	45%
Revenue generating strategy	42%
Future Growth	40%
ICT Renewal Strategy	31%
Expansion/Contraction plan	29%
Other	3%
Not stated	36%

Base: All UK Online esurvey respondents who are not library -based (498)   Source: MORI

C.24   The main sources of income for centres tended to be the Learning and Skills Council and the New Opportunities Fund (54% and 41% respectively). Another third reported receiving funding from learndirect (35%) and their Local Authority (33%).

Sources of Income

Q What are the centres main sources of income?

Learning and Skills Council (LSC)	54%
New Opportunities Fund (NOF)	41%
Learndirect	35%
Local Authority	33%
European Social Fund (ESF)	26%
Single Regeneration Budget or New Deal for Communities	16%
Commercial practices	13%
Department for Education and Skills (DfES)	12%
Regional Development Agency (RDA)	6%
Private Sponsor	6%

* Responses mentioned by 5% or more of respondents have been included in the chart

Base: All UK Online esurvey respondents who are not library-based (498)   Source: MORI

Centre Usage

Number of Users

C.25   On average, each UK online centre reported serving 161 drop-in users per week. This increased to an average of 312 users per week in library-based centres, and dropped to an average of 47 users in learning/training centres and 37 users per week in centres based in community/voluntary centres or village halls.

C.26   The average number of drop-in users varied by centre characteristics. For example, centres most likely to report high numbers of drop-in users include:

- networked centres (average of 103 users/week vs. 45 users/week in stand-alone centres);

- centres offering free Internet access to all users (average of 167 users/week vs. 62 users/week in centres that do not offer any free Internet access); and

- centres where staff have a high level of knowledge about e-government (an average of 262 users/week vs. 140 users/week in centres where staff have low levels of knowledge).

C.27   On average, UK online centres reported serving 91 pre-booked users per week. This increased to an average of 121 users per week in library-based centres, and dropped to an average 52 users per week in centres based in community/voluntary centres or village halls. The average number of pre-booked users was also higher among learndirect centres (an average of 108 users/week vs. 79 users/week in non-learndirect centres).

Profile of Users

C.28   Centre managers were asked to estimate the age, ethnicity and work status of the centre users.

- **Age:** The majority of users were over the age of 15, with relatively equal proportions between the ages of 16-35, 35-55 and 56+ (average of 29%, 32% and 27% of users respectively). This leaves, on average, 12% of users being 15 years of age or less.

- **Ethnicity:** On average, most of centre users were white (average of 79% of users). Relatively equal proportions of users are Asian or Black (average of 8% and 6% of users respectively). The remaining proportions of users were from another ethnic group or a mixed ethnic background (average of 4% and 2% of users respectively).

- **Employment Status:** Overall, the majority of centre users were unemployed. On average, a quarter of centre users were registered unemployed/on a sickness benefit or retired (average of 27% and 25% of users respectively), one in eight were in full-time education (average of 12% of users) and 10% were caring for family or children. This leaves an average of 22% of users who were employed.

Centre Offerings

Service Provision

C.29   UK online centres offer a wide range of programmes, with drop-in Internet use and drop-in IT use being offered by most (87% and 86% respectively). Other services offered by more than three in five centres include:

- pre-booked IT use (71%);

- structured and supported pre-booked learning (70%);

- pre-booked Internet access (67%); and

- self-taught drop-in learning (61%).

C.30   Conversely, one a quarter of centres offered outreach/mobile provision.

Service Offerings

Q What does the centre currently offer?

Drop-in Internet use	87%
Drop-in IT use	86%
Pre-booked IT use	71%
Pre-booked learning (structured and supported)	70%
Pre-booked internet access	67%
Drop-in learning (self taught, eg CD ROM	61%
Drop-in learning (structured and supported)	53%
Pre-booked learning (self taught, CD ROM)	49%
Outreach/Mobile provision	25%
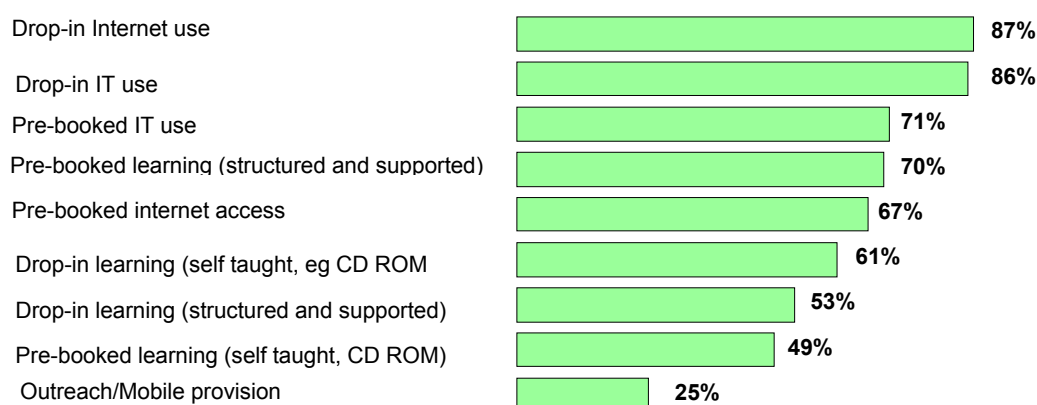
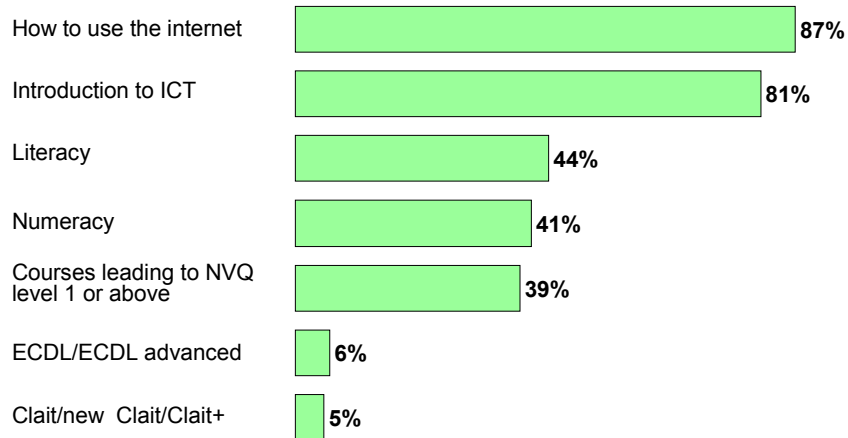Base: All UK Online esurvey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

C.31   Learndirect centres were more likely to offer self-taught drop-in learning (76% vs. 51% of other centres), self-taught pre-booked learning (68% vs. 36% of other centres), structured drop-in learning (64% vs. 45% of other centres) and outreach/mobile provision (31% vs. 21% of other centres).

C.32   Looking specifically at learning activities, 87% of centres offered services targeted at teaching people how to use the Internet, and 81% offered courses/training introducing people to ICT.

C.33 About two in five centres also offered learning activities directed at literacy, numeracy and courses leading to NVQ level 1 or above (44%, 41% and 39% respectively).

Available Learning Activities

Q Which of these learning activities do you offer at your centre?

Activity	
How to use the internet	87%
Introduction to ICT	81%
Literacy	44%
Numeracy	41%
Courses leading to NVQ level 1 or above	39%
ECDL/ECDL advanced	6%
Clait/new Clait/Clait+	5%

* Responses mentioned by 5% or more of respondents have been included in the chart

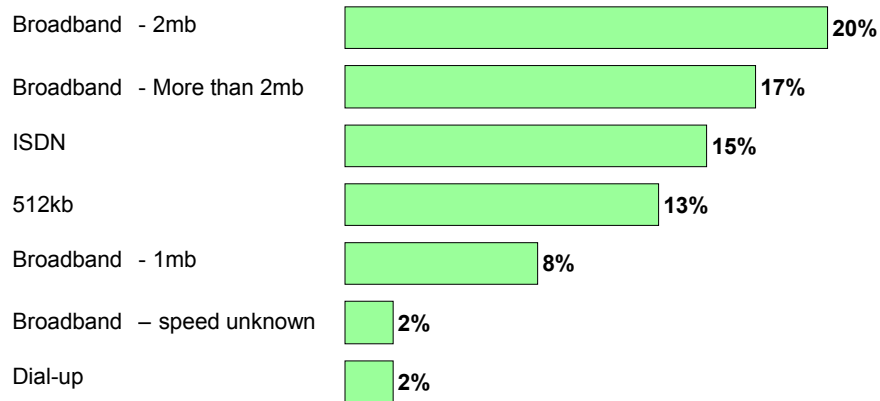Base: All UK Online esurvey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

C.34 Learndirect centres were more likely to offer learning activities focused on how to use the Internet (93% vs. 83% of other centres), introduction to ICT (88% vs. 76% of other centres), literacy (67% vs. 28% of other centres), numeracy (66% vs. 25% of other centres) and courses leading to NVQ level 1 or above (55% vs. 29% of other centres).

Internet Provision

C.35 The majority of centres were using some form of broadband connection, with 37% using 2mb or more. Those not using broadband tended to have ISDN connections (15%).

Type of Internet Link

Q What type of internet links are available at your centre?

Type	%
Broadband - 2mb	20%
Broadband - More than 2mb	17%
ISDN	15%
512kb	13%
Broadband - 1mb	8%
Broadband – speed unknown	2%
Dial-up	2%

* Responses mentioned by 2% or more of respondents have been included in the chart
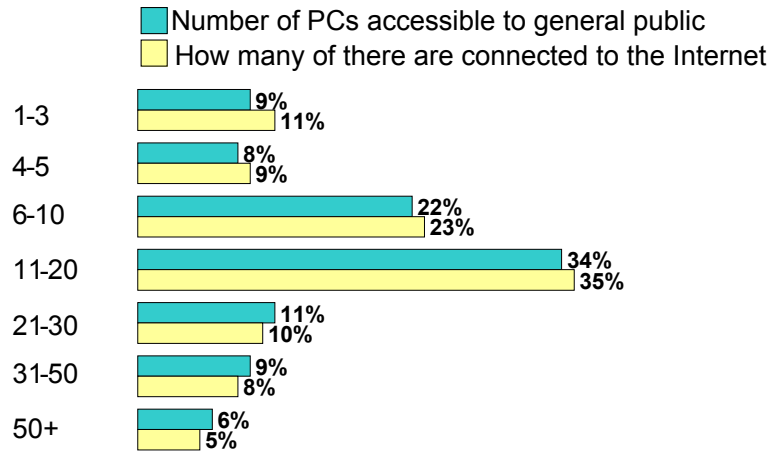
Base: All UK Online esurvey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

C.36   The number of PCs varied by type of centre. Libraries and community/voluntary centres & village halls were most likely to have 10 or less PCs (52% and 36% respectively). Conversely learning/training centres and schools/colleges were the most likely to have 21 or more PCs (34% and 31% respectively).

C.37   A similar pattern emerged for the number of PCs with Internet connections – with libraries and community/voluntary centres & village halls being most likely to have 10 or less (52% and 40% respectively) and learning/training centres and schools/colleges most likely to have 21 or more (29% and 26% respectively).

Number of PCs and Internet Connections

Number of PCs accessible to general public
How many of there are connected to the Internet

1-3 9% / 11%
4-5 8% / 9%
6-10 22% / 23%
11-20 34% / 35%
21-30 11% / 10%
31-50 9% / 8%
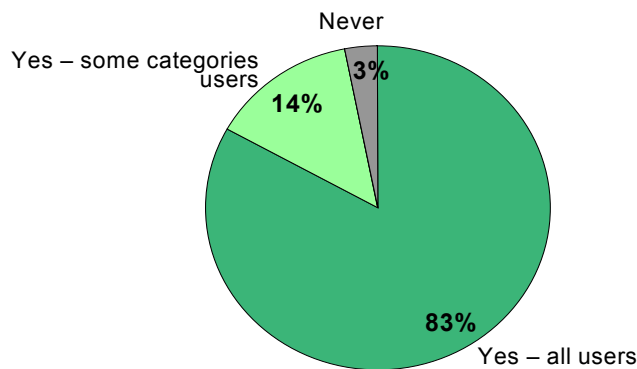50+ 6% / 5%

Base: All UK Online esurvey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

C.38   Over four in five UK online centres offered free Internet access to all users (83%), and another 14% offered free Internet access to some user groups.

Provision of Free Internet Access

Q   Do you offer free Internet access?

Never 3%
Yes – some categories users 14%
Yes – all users 83%

Base: All UK Online e-survey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

C.39   Learndirect centres were less likely to offer free Internet access to all users (74% vs. 89% of other centres).

C.40   Those only offering free Internet access to some users tended to offer this service to those (n=110):

- in receipt of benefits (35%);

- senior citizens (28%);

- who are in full-time education (20%);

- anyone who is enrolled in a course at the centre (19%);

- learndirect users/students (9%); and

- library members (7%).

C.41   Of those UK online centres charging for Internet access (n=136), just under half charged £1 or less per hour (45%). Another 31% charged between £1 and £2 per hour, and 24% charged £3 or more per hour.

Internet Usage

C.42   When asked how clients are using the Internet, on average, centres say two in five users were searching for information (excluding government information) and/or using the Internet to learn online (average of 41% and 40% of users respectively).

C.43   Centre managers felt that a smaller proportion of residents were using the Internet to search for government information and/or make purchases or payments (average of 12% and 8% of users respectively).[3]
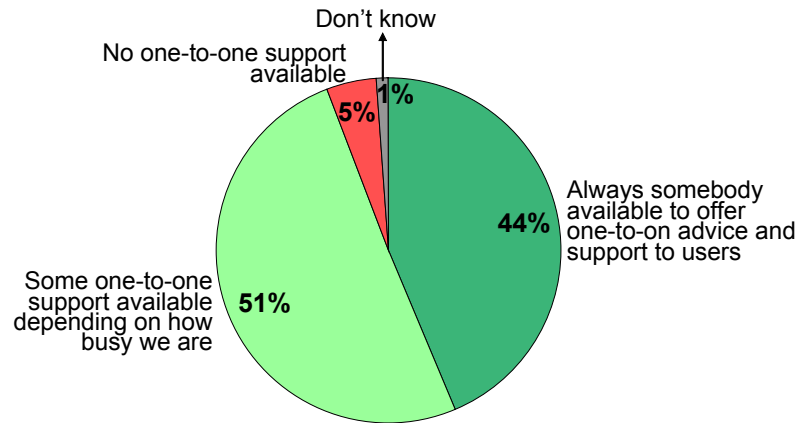
UK online centre Staff Support

C.44   In addition to providing a range of services, 95% of centres offered some form of one-to-one support, including 44% who said there is always someone available to offer individual support

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[3] Please note that 43% (343 of the 795 centres) did not answer this question.

Amount of Advice and Support Available.

*Q   Which of these statements best describes the advice and support available
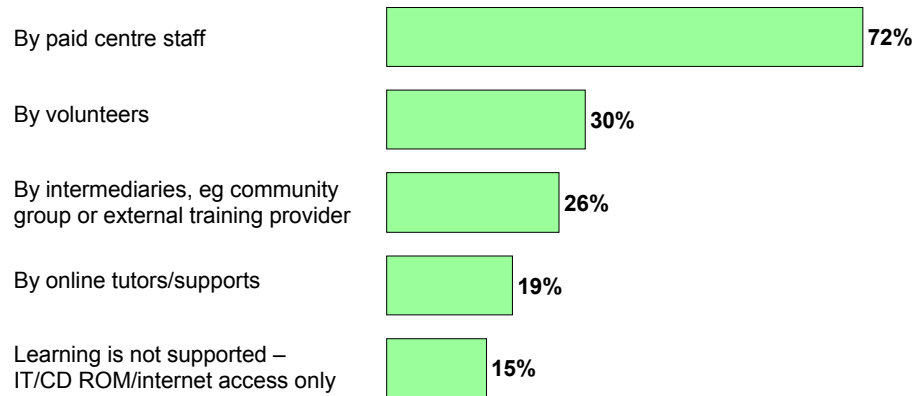to users that access your centre on a drop-in basis?*

Don't know

No one-to-one support
available

1%

5%

44%

Always somebody
available to offer
one-to-on advice and
support to users

Some one-to-one
support available
depending on how
busy we are

51%

C.45   Learndirect centres were more likely to say that there is always someone available to offer
one-to-one support (55% vs. 36% of other centres). Also, libraries were the least likely to say
there was always someone available to offer one-to-one support (15% vs. 61% of other
centres).

C.46   Most UK online centres have paid staff to support learning activities (72%). Centres also
made use of volunteer support and community/external trainers (30% and 25% respectively).
Volunteers were most frequently used to support learning activities in centres located in
community or voluntary centres and village halls. Learndirect centres were more likely to say
learning is supported by paid staff (85% vs. 64% of other centres) and online tutors (38% vs.
7% of other centres).

Support Available

Q How is learning supported in your centre?

Category	%
By paid centre staff	72%
By volunteers	30%
By intermediaries, eg community group or external training provider	26%
By online tutors/supports	19%
Learning is not supported – IT/CD ROM/internet access only	15%

* Responses mentioned by 5% or more of respondents have been included in the chart

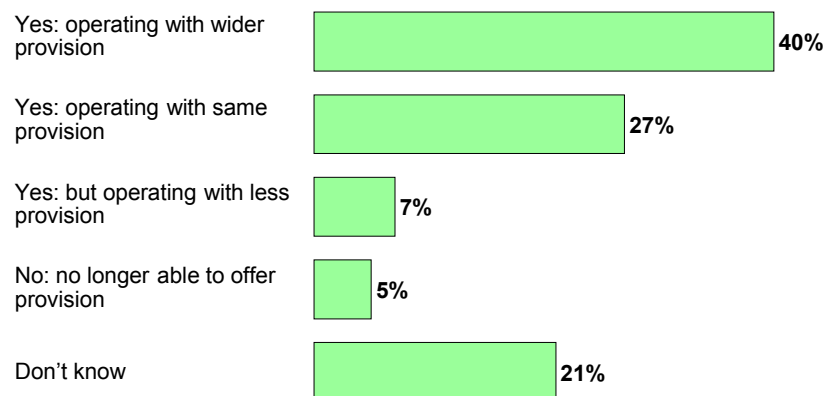Base: All UK Online esurvey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

C.47   When asked to make predictions about future service provision, two thirds believed that they will be offering the same or wider provision in two years time (67%).

C.48   Conversely 5% said they will not be able to offer provision in the future and another 21% do not know what the future holds for their centre.

The Centre's Future

Q Do you anticipate the current UK online centre provision being available in 2 years time?

Category	%
Yes: operating with wider provision	40%
Yes: operating with same provision	27%
Yes: but operating with less provision	7%
No: no longer able to offer provision	5%
Don't know	21%

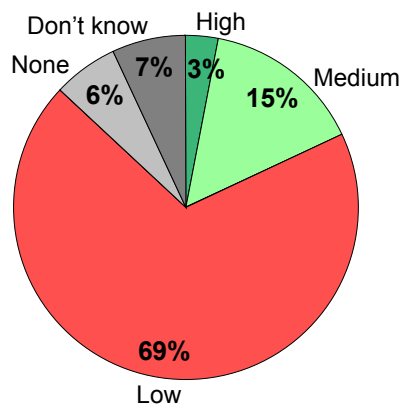Base: All UK Online esurvey respondents who are not library based (498)   Source: MORI

E-Government

Demand for E-Government Services

C.49   UK online centres did not perceive there to be much demand for information about and access to local authority and central government services online, with 75% saying there is little or no demand.

Demand from Users for E-Government

Q   How would you rate the current demand <u>from centre users</u> for information and use of local authorities and central government services on the Internet?

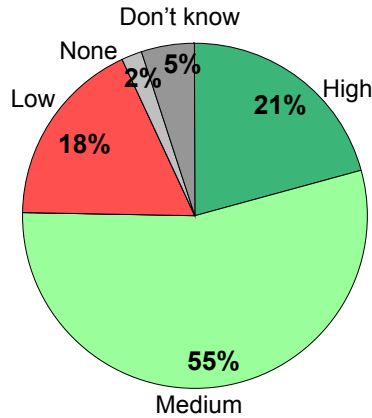Base: All UK Online e-survey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

C.50   Although centres were not convinced about the demand for this type of service, three quarters (74%) agreed that providing users with a place to learn about and receive support in accessing government information and services online would help to attract more people to the centre.

Centre's Ability to Provide E-Government Services

C.51   Just over half (55%) of UK online centres said their staff's knowledge of local authority and central government services was moderate, and an additional 21% said staff knowledge is high.

Staff Knowledge about E-Government

Q   How would you rate <u>your centre staff's</u> knowledge of local authority and central government services available on the Internet?
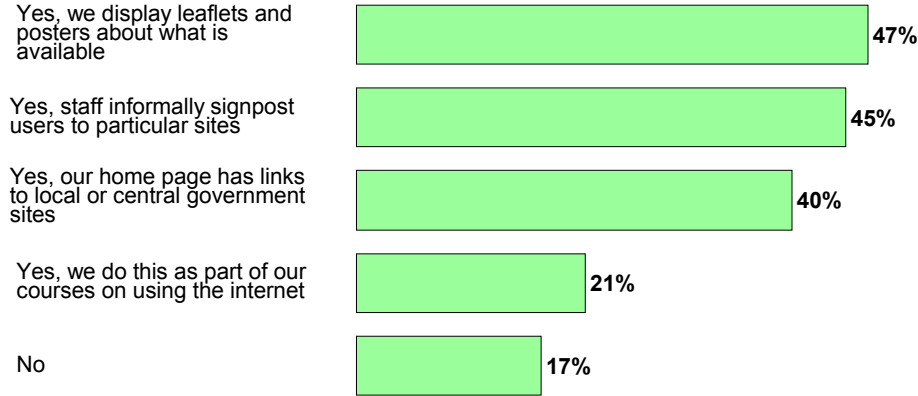

Base: All UK Online e-survey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

C.52   Learndirect centres appeared to be most concerned about their staff's knowledge of e-government, with 24% rating their staff's knowledge to be low (compared to 15% of other centres).

C.53   In addition, some UK online centres already promote and use local authority or central government websites by:

- displaying leaflets and posters about what is available online (47%);

- informally signposting users to government sites (45%); and

- displaying a link to local or central government websites on their home page (40%).

C.54   The proportion of centres currently using local and central government websites as a tool in current courses was lower, with 21% of centres incorporating this type of information into courses on the internet.

Promotion of E- Government

Yes, we display leaflets and posters about what is available — **47%**

Yes, staff informally signpost users to particular sites — **45%**

Yes, our home page has links to local or central government sites — **40%**

Yes, we do this as part of our courses on using the internet — **21%**

No — **17%**

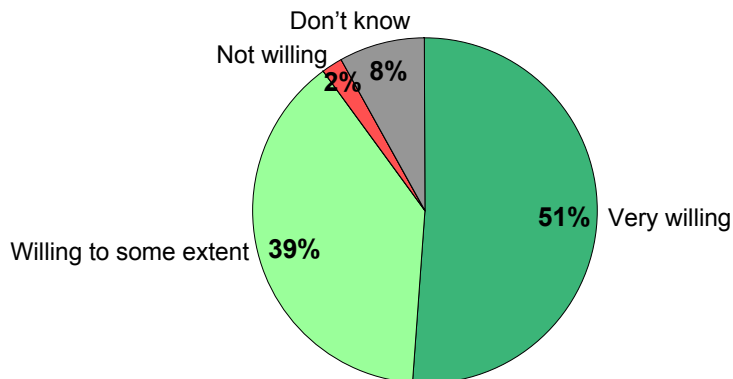Base: All UK Online esurvey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

Willingness to Provide E-Government Services

C.55   Although UK online centres were sceptical about the demand for these types of services, 90% said they would be willing to participate in initiatives aimed at promoting UK online centres as a resource people can use to learn about and access government information. This includes 51% who would be very willing.

Staff Knowledge about E-Government

Don't know

Not willing

8%

2%

51% Very willing

Willing to some extent **39%**

Base: All UK Online e-survey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

C.56   Looking forward, the majority of UK online centres (90%) said they would be able, to some extent, to support users in learning about, and accessing government information and services, including 35% who would be very able.

Willingness to Provide E-Government Services

Q   If libraries/centres were promoted as places where people could learn and get support to access local authority and central government online services, how able would your centre be to participate?
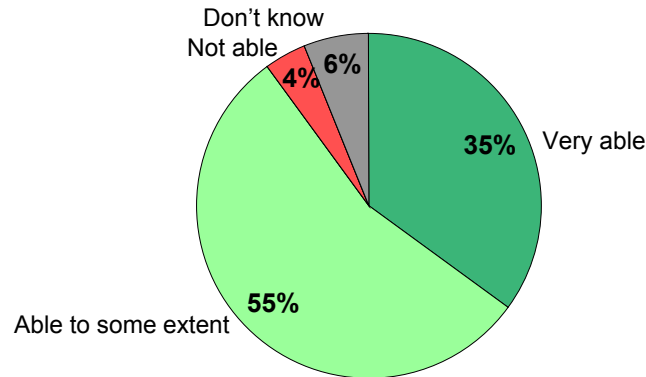
Base: All UK Online e-survey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

C.57   Although learndirect centres were more likely to rate their staff's knowledge of e-government as low, they did feel their staff would be able to provide this service (94% saying they would be very able compared to 87% of other centres).

C.58   Centres with staff available to provide one-on-one support were more likely to say they would be able to provide this service (93% vs. 78% of centres with no one available to provide individual support).
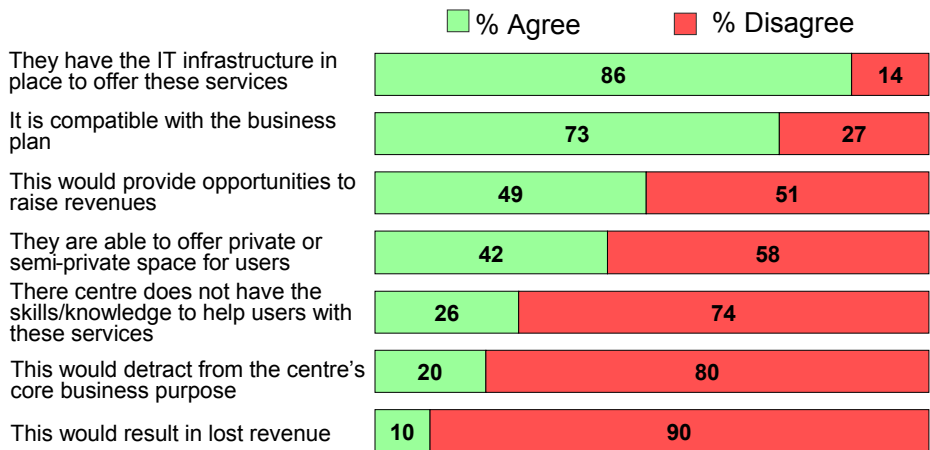
C.59   When asked about the impacts of providing users with support in learning about and accessing government information online, many agreed that they have the infrastructure in place to offer these services (86%) and that this service offering would be compatible with the centre's business plan/aims/objectives (73%). Furthermore, most centres felt that their staff have the skills to provide these services (74%).

C.60   Although most centres have the technological infrastructure to provide these types of services, less than half of centres would be able to offer private or semi-private space for internet access (42%). This may be an issue, as previous qualitative research found that users would want some privacy to complete government forms and or look up sensitive government information online.

C.61   Centres also seem to felt that offering this type of service might help increase revenues, with 49% saying it would provide opportunities to raise revenue and improve the centre's sustainability. Even if centres did not agree that it would increase revenues, most did not feel that it would negatively impact on revenue. Only 10% agreed that offering these types of services would result in a loss of revenue.

Effects of Promoting UK online centres as a Source for Government Information

Q   If libraries/centres were promoted as places where people could learn and get support to access local authority and central government online services would you agree or disagree that…?

	% Agree	% Disagree

They have the IT infrastructure in place to offer these services	86		14
It is compatible with the business plan	73		27
This would provide opportunities to raise revenues	49		51
They are able to offer private or semi-private space for users	42		58
There centre does not have the skills/knowledge to help users with these services	26		74
This would detract from the centre's core business purpose	20		80
This would result in lost revenue	10		90

Base: All UK Online esurvey respondents (795)   Source: MORI

ANNEX D

Omnibus survey: general population

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D   Omnibus survey: general population

D.1   This report sets out the findings from the face-to-face omnibus survey with the general public carried out by MORI, on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills.

Background and Objectives

D.2   The Department for Education and Skills, UfI/learndirect, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the Office of the e-Envoy are interested in looking at what role UK online centres might play to help support the take-up of e-government services.

D.3   Part of this research was to explore the general public's attitudes towards e-government and their willingness to search for government information online.

Methodology

D.4   An array of twelve questions were placed on the MORI Omnibus, the regular MORI survey among the general public. A nationally representative quota sample of 2,003 adults (aged 16 and over) was interviewed throughout the UK by MORI.

D.5   Interviews were conducted face-to-face, in respondents' homes, using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) between 26th February and 2nd March 2004. Due to one question (Q7) being ambiguous in the original questionnaire, this question and three other questions (needed for analytical purposes to compare with the first wave) were asked on the MORI Omnibus between 15th and 20th July 2004.[4] This report primarily presents findings from the original omnibus survey, however, results from the new questions can be found in sections:

- Use of One-Stop Government Website; and

- Impact of UK online centres on Usage of One-Stop Government Website.

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[4] **The original question wording**: 'If there was a place in your local area that offered access to this website, and help in how to use it so that you could easily find what you were looking for, how likely would you be to use this as your starting point to look for local council and government information?' **was changed to** 'If there was a place near you that could offer you help and support on how to use this website, so that you could access the website either there or at home, how likely would you be to use this website as your starting point to look for local council and government information?'

Presentation and Interpretation of Data

D.6   It should be remembered that this survey is based on a sample, not the entire population. In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that all not all differences are statistically significant. That said, the sub-group differences that are mentioned in this report are all statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

D.7   An overall sample of 2,003 respondents carries a margin of error of around plus or minus two per cent. This is an acceptable margin of error for conducting robust statistical analysis. Results for different subgroups will need to be further apart for the difference to be statistically significant, depending on the size of the sample and the finding itself – see the section on statistical reliability appended to this report.

D.8   Where percentages do not sum to 100, this is due to computer rounding, the exclusion of "don't know" categories, or multiple answers. Throughout the volume an asterisk (*) denotes any value less than half a percent.

Executive Summary

Internet access and support encourages residents to use libraries and learning centres

D.9   More than half of respondents said they had not visited their local library, college or community centre to access information in the last year (55%). However, a quarter would be more likely to visit their local UK online centre if free/low cost internet and/or staff were on hand to help them use the computers or internet (25%). This appealed most to young people.

D.10   One in five respondents said that if a library or learning centre offered help and training in how to use online services they would use the services at the library or centre (20%). In addition, 14% said they would learn how to use them at the centre and then use them at home or elsewhere.

D.11   Of those who have not visited their local library or learning centre in the past year, a significant minority (12%) would be likely to visit the centre more often if low cost/free internet access was provided, suggesting they are not aware of their local UK online centre.

Positive attitudes towards e-government

D.12   Most people said they can find information on the internet (57%), with a third of respondents saying they would begin by looking on the internet if they wanted to find information about government or their local council (32%). Residents were more likely to use the internet to search for information rather than use transaction-based services. Over half said they would be likely to use a government website that contained information and links to government

departments and their local council (56%). This appealed more to younger respondents, those who are in work, those in the higher social grades and those with children.

One-stop government websites encourage people to use UK online centres

D.13   Access to a one-stop government website and help on using it might encourage those who have not visited their local library or learning centre to do so. Two in five of those who would not use the internet to look for council or government information said they would use such a website (38%). Almost half of these respondents said they would be likely to use this if there was a place in their local area that offered access to and help in how to use it (48%).

D.14   The two main reasons why respondents said they do not currently use online services at their local library or centre, are that they are confident enough to use them on their own and/or they would not use online services anywhere.

Summary of Findings

Use of Computer/Internet

D.15   Around six in ten respondents claimed they are able to find information on the internet (57%), including three in ten who said they nearly always find what they want quite easily (29%). Conversely, two in five (41%) said they are not able to find information on the internet, including 32% who said they 'wouldn't know where to begin'.

Internet Ability

Q   If asked to rate your own skills and confidence to use and find information on the internet, which of the following best describes you?

Don't know

Very able
29%

Not at all able   32%

Not very Able   9%   27%   Quite able

2%
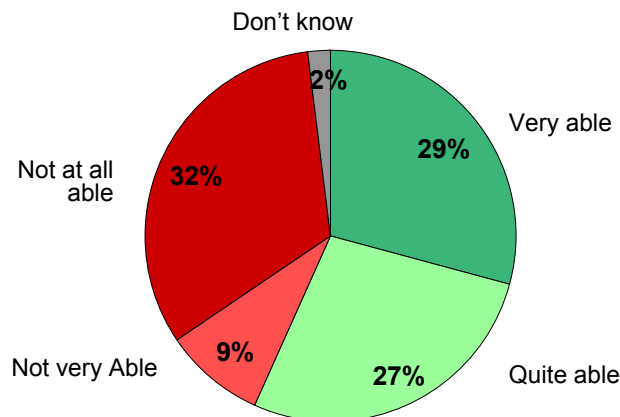
Base: All UK Adults 16+, interviewed face-to-face (2,003). 26/02/04 to 02/03/04   Source: MORI

D.16   Those most likely to say they are unable to use the Internet were not working (59%) and more likely to have lower household incomes (65% had household incomes of less than £17,500).

Furthermore, they were likely to be living in homes without children (47%) or to be older residents (72% of those 55 or older).

Use of Community Resources

D.17 More than half said they have not visited their local library, college or community centre to access information in the last year (55%). Nearly two-thirds of those aged 55+ (63%) claimed they have used their local library, college or community centre in the last year, compared to 38% of respondents aged 16-24.

D.18 As social grade decreases so does residents' propensity to use local libraries, colleges and community centres to access information – 62% of respondents in social grades DE claimed to have never used this facility compared to just half (50%) of ABs. Usage also varies by region, with residents in Scotland, East England and Wales being the most likely to have said they have not used this facility in the last year (69%, 67% and 64% respectively). Those in the South East and London are the least likely to say they have never used these types of facilities in the past year (41% and 46% respectively).

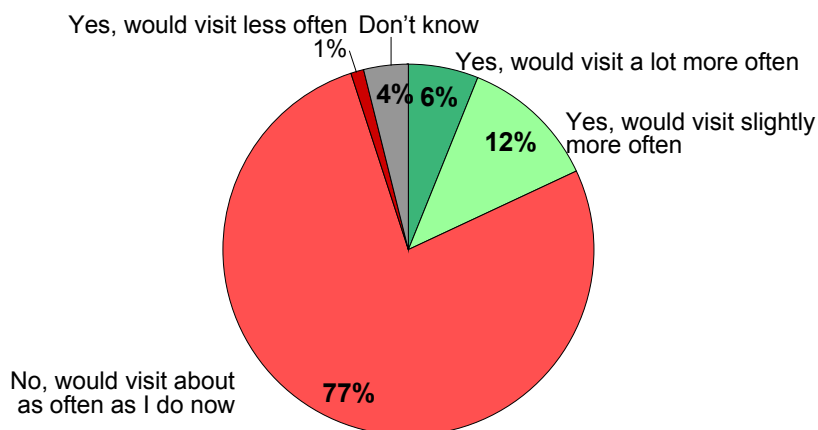## Encouraging People to Visit UK online centres More Frequently

D.19 In total, 25% of people would be more likely to visit their UK online centre if free/low cost internet and/or staff were on hand to help them use the computer or internet. More than a quarter (27%) would do so because staff were on hand to help, older respondents were the most incentivised by having staff on hand to offer assistance (37% of those 35+ vs. 14% of those 16-34).

Encouraging Visitors to the Centre by Offering Free/Low Cost Internet

D.20 One in five (18%) said that if their learning centre, college or community centre offered them free or low cost internet access this would induce them to visit the centre more often. Younger respondents would be more likely to be encouraged to visit because of the free/low cost internet access (31% of those 16-34 vs. 8% of those 35+).

D.21 More than half (55%) would be encouraged due to both of these incentives. However, three-quarters of respondents said that it would not affect how often they visit these places (77%).

Impact of Low Cost or Free Internet

*Q   If your local library, or a place such as a learning centre, college or
community centre offered you <u>internet for free or at a low cost</u>, would this
affect how often you visit these places?*

Yes, would visit less often
1%   Don't know

4% 6%   Yes, would visit a lot more often

12%   Yes, would visit slightly more often
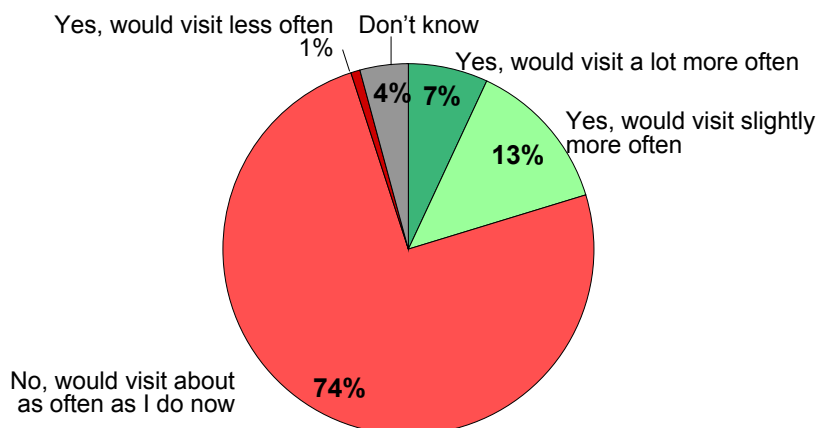
No, would visit about
as often as I do now   77%

D.22   Younger respondents would be most likely to be persuaded by low-cost or free internet access. About a third of 16-24 year olds said they would visit the centre more often (31%) compared with just 13% of those aged 55+. Low cost/free internet also appealed more to those in the social grades DE; 23% of whom said they would be likely to use the centre more often compared with just 15% of those in social grades AB. Free or low cost internet access would not persuade most of those with no formal qualifications – only 14% said they would be likely to visit the centre more often.

D.23   Respondents in London, the South West and East Midlands would be most likely to use this service (27%, 22% and 22% respectively); while those in the rest of the South-East, East England and Wales would be the least likely (13%, 14% and 14% respectively).

Encouraging Visitors to the Centre by Having Staff on Hand to Help People Use the Computer/Internet

D.24   A similar picture emerged when respondents were asked if they would be more likely to use the centre if staff were on hand to help learn how to use the computer and the internet.   One in five (20%) would be encouraged to visit the centre more often if this type of support was available. However, around three-quarters said that this incentive would not affect how often they visit these places (74%).

Impact of Help on Using the Internet

Q   If your local library, or a place such as a learning centre, college or community centre had <u>staff on hand to help you learn how to use the computer and internet</u>, would this affect how often you visit these places?

Yes, would visit less often   Don't know
1%   4%   7%   Yes, would visit a lot more often

Yes, would visit slightly more often
13%

No, would visit about as often as I do now
74%

Base: All UK Adults 16+, interviewed face-to-face (2,003). 26/02/04 to 02/03/04   Source: MORI

D.25   Although this is consistent across age groups, respondents in the lower social grades (DE) would be more likely than those in the higher social grades (AB) to visit the centre more frequently if this service was offered (24% and 16% respectively).

Encouraging Those Currently Not Visiting Centres to Visit UK online centres

D.26   Of those who have not visited their local library or learning centre in the last year, a significant minority would be persuaded to visit these types of centres by the offer of free or low cost internet access. More than one in ten (12%) said they would be likely to visit the centre more often if low cost/free internet was provided, rising to a quarter (24%) for younger respondents aged 16-24. Conversely, eight in ten said this would not change how often they visit the centre (83%).

D.27   One in seven said they would be likely to visit the centre more often if staff were available to offer help (15%), rising to about a quarter of residents in the South West and East Midlands (27% and 23% respectively).

D.28   However, having staff on hand to help would not tempt the majority of respondents who have not visited their local library or learning centre in the last year.

- Eight in ten said this would not change how often they visit the centre (79%).

- The impact of having help on hand is uniform across all age groups.

Finding Government Information Online

D.29   A third of respondents said if they wanted to find information about their local council or from government they would begin by looking on the internet (32%). As social class and education increase so does the likelihood of using the internet to find information (49% of ABs, use the internet compared to just 17% of DEs; and just 7% of those with no formal qualifications use it, compared to 41% of others). There are also regional variations, with respondents in the East of England being the most likely to use the internet and those in Scotland would be the least likely (42% and 23% respectively).

D.30   Almost a third would prefer to call their local council or government office to find information about their local council or from government (29%). Older residents (36% of those aged 55+) and those in social grades DE would be most likely to choose this option (32%).

Use of One-Stop Government Website

D.31   Over half of those giving an answer said they would be likely to use a government website that contained information and links to their local council and all government departments (57%). Around two in five (43%) said they would be unlikely to use this website.

Use of One-Stop Government Website as Starting Point

Q   *Suppose there was a government website that contained information and links to your local council and all government departments all in one place. How likely would you be to use this as your starting point to look for local council and government information?*
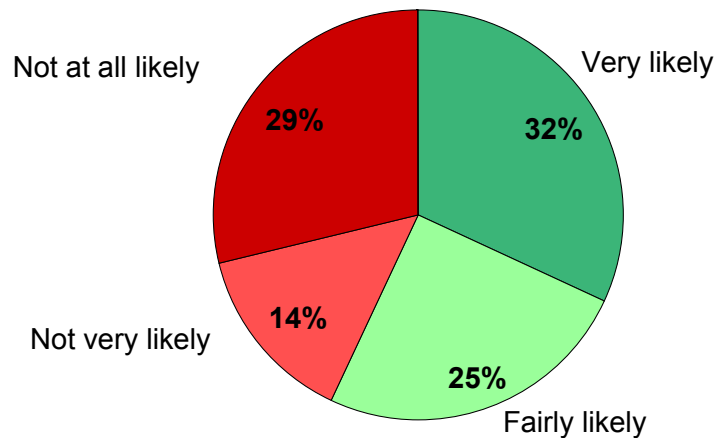
Base: All those giving an answer (1,943). Interviewed face-to-face, 15/07/04 – 20/07/04   Source: MORI

D.32   Younger respondents would be more willing to use this service, with twice as many respondents aged 16-24 saying they would use this website, compared to those aged 55+ (64% and 31% respectively).

D.33   Those in the higher social grades would also be much more likely to use this (73% ABs compared to 41% DEs), as would males (60% compared to 51% females).

D.34   Respondents who work (either full-time or part-time) said they would be more likely to use the one-stop government website than those who do not work (67% full-time, 65% part-time, compared to 42% not working). Similarly, those who have formal qualifications would also be more likely to use the service (67% of those who have formal qualifications compared to just 28% who do not). Respondents who have children in their household were also more likely to say they would use this website, (69% of those who have children in their household compared to 50% who do not).

Impacts of One-Stop Government Website On Those Currently Not Using the Internet to Look For Government Information

D.35   Two in five of those who said they would not look on the internet for find information about their local council or government say they would be likely to use a government website that contained this information (38%).

D.36   This is most popular with younger respondents (52% aged 35 or younger and those in social grades AB (51%). Furthermore, respondents who are working (full-time or part-time) were more likely than those who are not working to use this service (49% of those working full-time, 47% part-time compared to 30% not working).

D.37   Similarly, this service was more popular with respondents who have a household income of at least £30,000 (64% of those with household incomes of at least £30,000), in addition, respondents with children in their household would also be more likely to use this website (54%) as well as those with formal qualifications (50%).

Impact of UK online centres on Usage of One-Stop Government Website

D.38   More than three in five of those who gave an answer said they would be likely to use this website if there was a place in their local area that offered access to and help in how to use it (61%).

Impact of UK online centre on Using One-Stop Government Website

Q If there was a place near you that could offer help and support on how to use this website, so that you could access the website either there or at home, how likely would you be to use this website as your starting point to look for local council and government information?
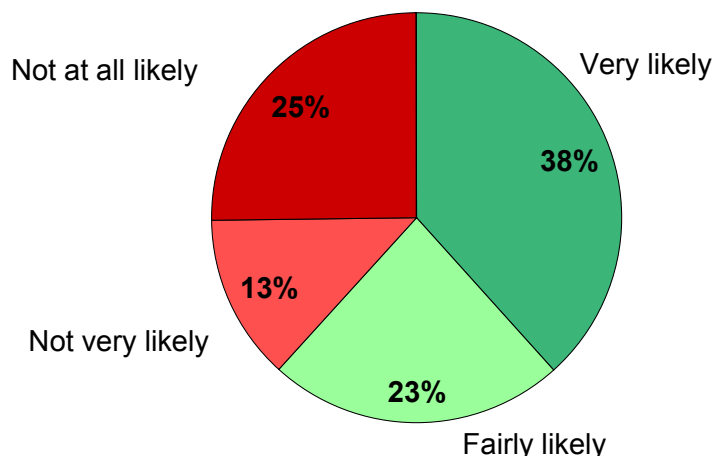
Base: All those giving an answer (1,787). Interviewed face-to-face, 15/07/04 – 20/07/04   Source: MORI

D.39   Younger residents were the most likely to say they would use this service (66%) as well as those who are working (64%) and those with higher household incomes (69% of those with incomes of at least £30,000). Furthermore, residents in social grades AB are more likely than those in social grades DE to said they would use this as a starting point (63% compared to 46%), as are those with formal educational qualifications (69% of those with higher degrees).

Impacts of UK online centres on Those Not Using the Internet to Look For Government Information

D.40   Access to a one-stop government website and help on using it might encourage those who have not visited their local library or learning/community centre to do so. Of those who have not visited their local library or learning centre in the past year, about half said that if there was a place in their local area that offered access to this one-stop government website and help on using it, they would be likely to use this service (48%).

D.41   Access to one-stop government website and help on using it might encourage residents to use the internet to find government information. Two in five of those who would not look on the internet to find information about or from their local council or from government would be

persuaded to use this facility if they were offered help in how to access a government website that contains information and links to other government websites (43%).
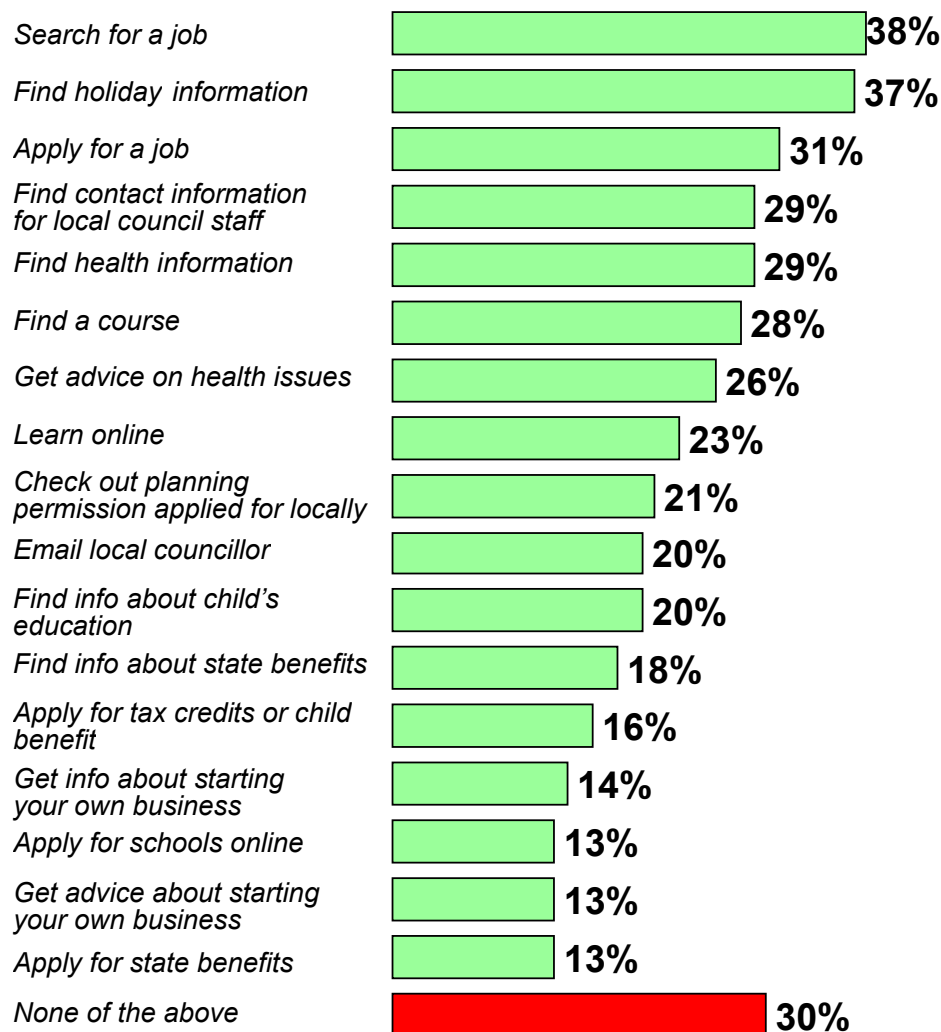
D.42 Access to one-stop government website and help on using it, has encouraged those who do not have any interest in using the one-stop government website as the starting point for government information. Of those who said they are unlikely to use a government website as a starting point, 78% would not be persuaded to use this site if there was a place in their local area that offered access to the site and help on using it. Conversely, 17% said they would be likely to use this service.

Online Services Residents Most Likely to Use

D.43 Residents were most likely to use the internet to search for information rather than transaction-based exercises. For example, 20% would use the internet to access information about their child's schooling or education; but only 13% would apply for school places online.

D.44 Services residents said they are most likely to conduct online include: searching for a job online and researching holidays (38% and 37% respectively). Around three in ten would also use the internet to apply for a job (31%), find contact details for local council staff (29%), access information on health issues (29%) and/or find a local course (28%). Conversely, 30% of residents said they would not use the internet for any of the reasons listed in the chart below.

Online Services Respondents Most Likely to Use

*Q   If the following services were available online, which services,
if any, would you use?*

Service	%
Search for a job	**38%**
Find holiday information	**37%**
Apply for a job	**31%**
Find contact information for local council staff	**29%**
Find health information	**29%**
Find a course	**28%**
Get advice on health issues	**26%**
Learn online	**23%**
Check out planning permission applied for locally	**21%**
Email local councillor	**20%**
Find info about child's education	**20%**
Find info about state benefits	**18%**
Apply for tax credits or child benefit	**16%**
Get info about starting your own business	**14%**
Apply for schools online	**13%**
Get advice about starting your own business	**13%**
Apply for state benefits	**13%**
None of the above	**30%**

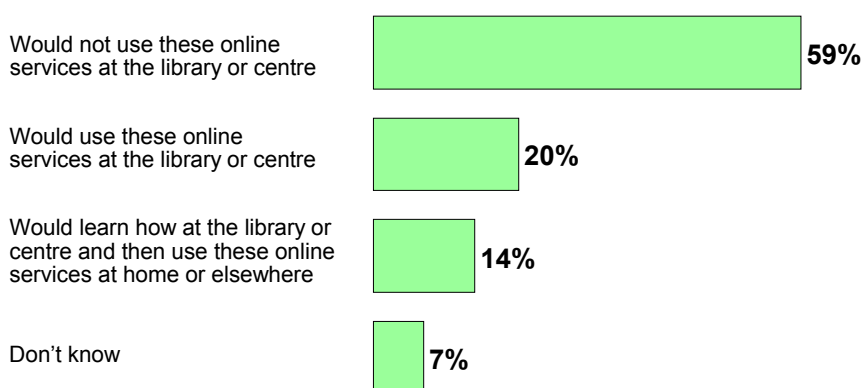Base: All UK Adults 16+, interviewed face   -to-face (2,003). 26/02/04 to 02/03/04   Source: MORI

D.45   Over half of respondents aged 55+ would not access any (of the prompted) services online
(58%). Those in lower social grades would also be less likely to access these services online
(44%).

D.46   Of those respondents who do not access online services, the majority did not use the internet
(64%); and one in five preferred to find information and carry out transactions face-to-face or
over the phone (22%). A minority find it too time-consuming (3%) and 1% were concerned
about internet security and privacy.

How Residents Would Make Use of Online Services if UK online centres Offered Help and Training

D.47   If a library or learning centre offered help and training in how to use online services, 20% of respondents said they would use these online services at the library or centre, and 14% said they would learn how to use them at the library and then use them at home or elsewhere. However, six in ten (59%) said they would not make use of this service.

Making Use of Online Services in UK online centres

Q   If your local library, or a place such as a learning centre, college or community centre offered help and training in how to use these online services, how would you make use of them?

Would not use these online services at the library or centre	**59%**
Would use these online services at the library or centre	**20%**
Would learn how at the library or centre and then use these online services at home or elsewhere	**14%**
Don't know	**7%**

Base: All UK Adults 16+, interviewed face-to-face (2,003).26/02/04 to 02/03/04   Source: MORI

D.48   Respondents aged 55+ (67%) and those in social classes AB (62%) were most likely to say they would not make use of these services, as were respondents in the South-East, Scotland, East England and Wales (70%, 69%, 68% and 67% respectively).

D.49   The two main reasons why respondents say they would not use online services at their local library or centre were that they are confident enough to use them on their own and/or that they would not use online services anywhere (36% and 34% respectively). Others said it was difficult to get to a library/centre (11%), they preferred to use these types of services at home (9%) and/or they were concerned about the lack of privacy at centres/libraries (4%).

D.50   Free training or internet access would persuade one in five respondents to use their local library or learning centre (20%). A similar proportion would be more likely to use it if they could drop in for help with the internet without appointment and/or if the centre or library was open outside of normal working hours (18% for both).

D.51   One in five respondents said that nothing would encourage them to use their library or centre more often to access online services, (20%) – this view was more prevalent with respondents in social grades AB (26% vs. 18% of DEs).

ANNEX E

Telephone survey of UK online centre users

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E   Telephone survey of UK online centre users

E.1   This report sets out the findings from a telephone survey of 432 UK online centre users carried out by MORI, on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills.

Background and Objectives

E.2   The Department for Education and Skills, UfI/**learndirect**, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the Office of the e-Envoy are interested in looking at what role **UK online centres** might play to help support the take-up of e-government services.

E.3   Part of this research was to explore the views and attitudes towards e-government of current users of UK online centres and their willingness to search for government information online.

Methodology

E.4   In March 2004, around 300 UK online centres were recruited to seek approval from their users to include them in a telephone survey. Overall, 1,019 leads were supplied to MORI. Of these, direct contact was made with 583 centre users and interviews achieved with 432 (a response rate of 74% where contacted). Reasons for non-contact included duplication, incorrect phone numbers and ineligibility.

E.5   Interviews were conducted over the telephone using CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) between 15th June and 19th September 2004.

Presentation and Interpretation of Data

E.6   It should be remembered that this survey is based on a sample, not the entire population. In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that all not all differences are statistically significant. That said, the sub-group differences that are mentioned in this report are all statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

E.7   An overall sample of 432 respondents carries a margin of error of around +4%. This is an acceptable margin of error for conducting robust statistical analysis. Results for different subgroups will need to be further apart for the difference to be statistically significant, depending on the size of the sample and the finding itself.

E.8   Where percentages do not sum to 100, this is due to computer rounding, the exclusion of "don't know" categories, or multiple answers. Throughout the volume an asterisk (*) denotes any value less than half a percent.

Executive Summary

E.9 More than four in five UK online centre users said they use their local UK online centre at least once a week (83%). The main reasons that most people use their local UK online centre were to access computer/internet training or to find information using the internet (44% and 37% respectively).

E.10 Most respondents were satisfied with most aspects of their local UK online centre. In particular, almost all said they were satisfied with the friendliness of the staff – the same proportion also said they thought it was 'important' to have friendly staff (99%). Reflecting this, the vast majority were satisfied with the quality of information and advice staff provide (94%) and a similar proportion were satisfied with the staff's ability to provide information and advice (93%).

E.11 Almost all respondents said their local UK online centre provides at least some one-to-one support (98%), including six in ten who said there is 'always' somebody available to offer one-to-one support and advice (60%). Just over two in five (41%) said that they have received some form of training at a UK online centre. One in five (21%) said that they have received training elsewhere, one in six (17%) said they have been shown by family or friends, while one in four (28%) said that they are self taught.

E.12 People were asked what information they would be interested in accessing through a government website. Overall, around a quarter were interested in finding education-related information (27%), transport- and travel-related information (26%) and general advice (24%). Around one in six were interested in health-related information (19%), information about benefits and tax credits (18%), employment-related information (17%), information about local council services (17%) and information relating to the law and legal matters (16%).

E.13 When asked whether they would use such a government website if UK online centres offered basic help and training in how to use it, over half of users (56%) said that they would do so at their local UK online centre. Nearly one in three (30%) said that they would learn how to use it at the centre and would then access the website elsewhere. Nine in ten centre users (89%) felt that centre staff would be able to provide this basic level of advice and support.

E.14 Similar proportions felt that they would make use of UK online centres if they offered more specialist support in accessing the services on such a website (such as help in filling out forms). Nearly three in five (58%) said that they would use the website at the centre if this service was provided, while one in four (26%) said that they would learn how to access such services at a centre and then continue doing so elsewhere.

E.15   If this help and support was on offer, 29% of users said that they would visit their local UK online centre more frequently, while three in four centre users (72%) felt that this help and support would attract new users to their centre.
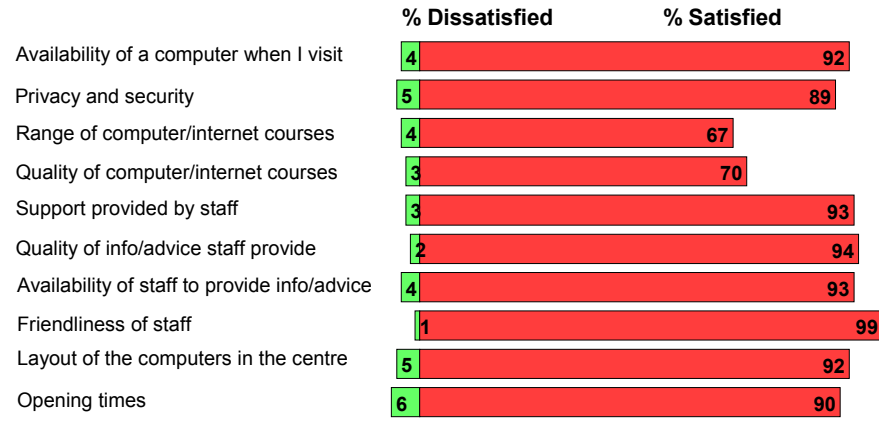
Summary of Findings

Centre Usage

E.16   More than four in five UK online centre users said they use their local UK online centre at least once a week (83%). This is broadly similar across gender, age and social grade.

E.17   The main reasons that most people use their local UK online centre were to access computer/internet training or to find information using the internet (44% and 37% respectively). Younger respondents would be more likely to use the centre to find information via the internet (60% of those aged 16-34 compared to only 22% of those aged 55+) while older respondents would be more likely to want to access training (only 28% of those aged 16-34 compared to 58% of those aged 55+). Only a small minority visited the centre specifically to find information via books or staff or to access other types of training.

E.18   People who are working were more likely than those who are not to use the centre for finding information electronically (48% compared to 30%), while those who were not working were more likely to use centres to access training (49% compared to 36%). White people were also more likely than BME people to use centres to find information via the internet (40% compared to 24%).

Satisfaction with Centres

E.19   Users were asked to rate their satisfaction with various aspects of their centre. Most respondents were satisfied with most aspects of their local UK online centre. In particular, almost all said they were satisfied with the friendliness of the staff – the same proportion also said they thought it was 'important' to have friendly staff (99%). Reflecting this, the vast majority were satisfied with the quality of information and advice staff provide (94%) and a similar proportion were satisfied with the staff's ability to provide information and advice (93%). Similar proportions of respondents also thought this was important (94% and 95% respectively).

E.20   Fewer said they were satisfied with the range and quality of computer and internet courses available (67% and 70% respectively). However, only a small proportion were dissatisfied, which may be due to some respondents not using the UK online centre for taught courses.
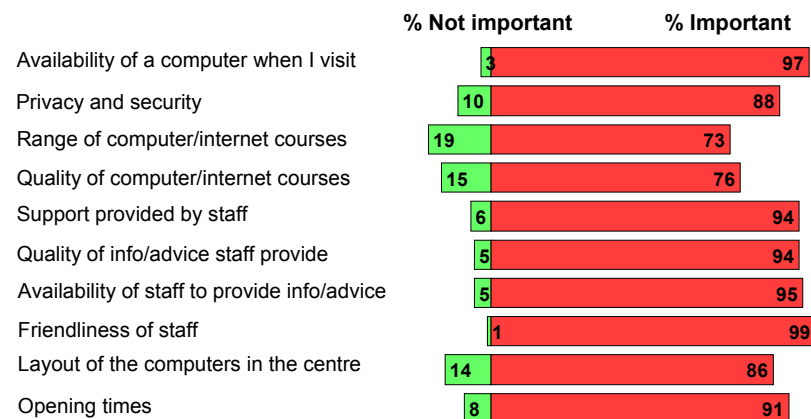
Satisfaction with UK online centres

Q   Thinking about your experiences at your local UK online centre, to what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the . . .

% Dissatisfied   **% Satisfied**

Factor	% Dissatisfied	% Satisfied
Availability of a computer when I visit	4	92
Privacy and security	5	89
Range of computer/internet courses	4	67
Quality of computer/internet courses	3	70
Support provided by staff	3	93
Quality of info/advice staff provide	2	94
Availability of staff to provide info/advice	4	93
Friendliness of staff	1	99
Layout of the computers in the centre	5	92
Opening times	6	90

Base: All respondents (432)

E.21   As well as the friendliness of the staff, the availability of a computer was one of the most important things to users (97% think this is important). Less important were issues relating to layout and privacy (14% and 10% respectively did not see these as important) and to the range and quality of courses available (19% and 15% respectively did not see these as important).

Importance of the same factors

% Not important   **% Important**

Factor	% Not important	% Important
Availability of a computer when I visit	3	97
Privacy and security	10	88
Range of computer/internet courses	19	73
Quality of computer/internet courses	15	76
Support provided by staff	6	94
Quality of info/advice staff provide	5	94
Availability of staff to provide info/advice	5	95
Friendliness of staff	1	99
Layout of the computers in the centre	14	86
Opening times	8	91

Base: All respondents (432)

Advice and Support

E.22   Almost all respondents said their local UK online centre provides at least some one-to-one support (98%), including six in ten who said there is 'always' somebody available to offer one-to-one support and advice (60%).

E.23   Of those who said that there is some one-to-one support available, 88% said that they are satisfied with that support, while 97% of those who said that there is always someone available to support them feel satisfied with that support.

E.24   Most people said their UK online centre provides a range of advice and support services. Almost all people said their centre provides advice on how to use the computer and internet (88%), and three-quarters said their centre provides advice/support on the courses they are taking (74%). Around two thirds said that their centre offers advice on how to find specific information online or advice on how to use particular services which can be accessed online (67% and 61% respectively).

Using the Internet

E.25   While 84% of people said that they access the internet at UK online centres, nearly two in five (39%) access it at home and one in seven (14%) at work or a place of study. There are a number of demographic and attitudinal factors which condition where people access the internet. Those over 55 years old are more likely to access the internet at home than are younger users (46%). Conversely, those under 55 years old are more likely to access the internet at UK online centres than are older users (88%).

E.26   Home access to the internet is related to social grade and household income, despite the fact that these are not significant factors when it comes to accessing the internet through UK online centres. People in the AB social grades were more likely than other people to access the internet at home (55%). As for household income, while 55% of those with an income of £17,500 or more have home internet access, only 29% of those with a lower income do.

E.27   Reasons for using UK online centres also play a role here. People whose main reason for visiting a centre is to find information over the internet were much less likely to have access at home than those whose main reason is to access training (24% compared to 48% respectively).

Confidence in Using the Internet

E.28   Just over half of centre users (54%) said that they are quite able at findings what they want on the internet, while a third (32%) said that they are very able. Only one in ten (11%) said that they are not very able, while just 12 people said that they are not at all able.

The internet: confidence and skills

Not at all able
Not very able
11%
3%
**32%** Very able
Quite able **54%**
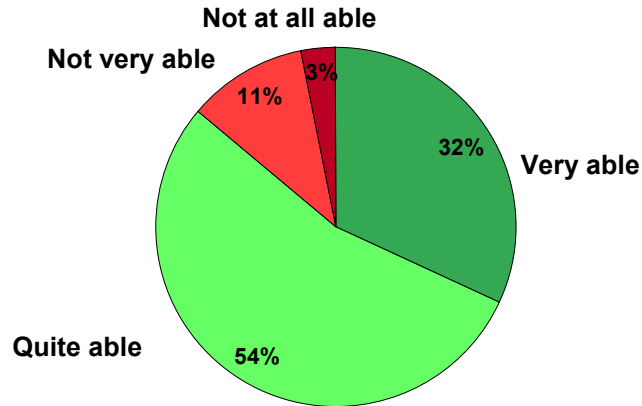
Base: all respondents (432)

E.29   As with centre usage, age and working status are significant factors here too. Just 16% of those over 55 years old said that they are 'very able' compared to 43% of those under 55 years old. Older people were also more likely to say that they are 'quite able' compared to younger people (63% compared to 48%).

The internet: confidence and skills (by age)

16-54 year olds on left; over-55s on right
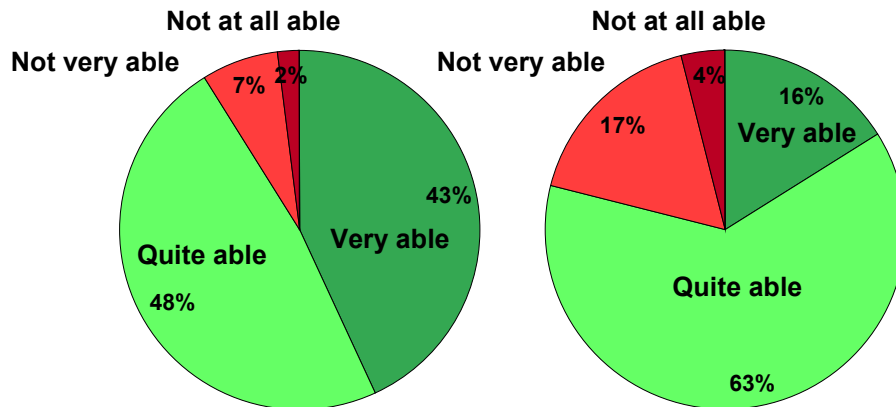
Base: 16-54 year olds (253), over 55s (177)

E.30   Another factor which impacts on confidence in using the internet is that of working status – people who work were significantly more likely to feel able to use the internet successfully

than those who were not working, with nearly twice as many saying that they were 'very able' (44% compared to 23%).

The internet: confidence and skills (by working status)

'Working' on left; 'not working' on right
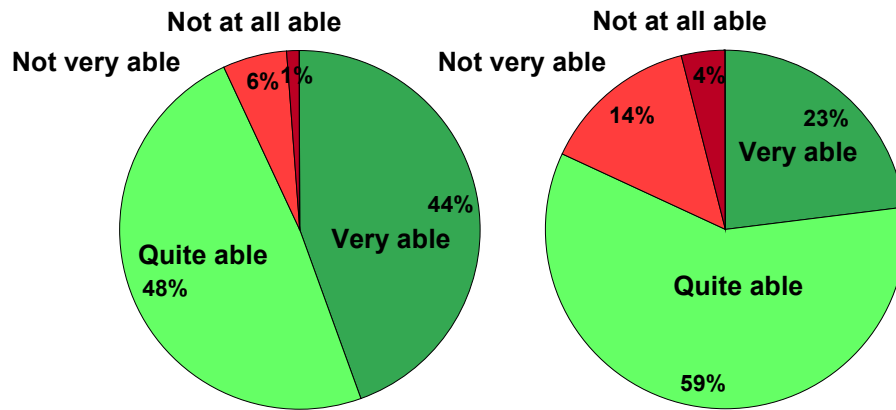
Base: working (163), not working (260)

E.31   People with children living in their household were also significantly more likely to say that they are 'very able' to navigate the internet than those who do not have children at home (39% compared to 29%), while those with household incomes of over £30,000 were more likely to say they are 'very able' than those with lower incomes (48% compared to 31%).

E.32   As for any help people have had when learning how to use the internet, just over two in five (41%) said that they have received some form of training at a UK online centre. One in five (21%) said that they have received training elsewhere, one in six (17%) said they have been shown by family or friends, while one in four (28%) said that they are self taught. Only 15 people said that they do not know how to use the internet.

Contacting Government

E.33   People were asked whether in the last year they had contacted either their local council or a central government department/agency. If so, they were also asked how they had done so. Overall, 62% had not contacted their council and 57% had not contacted a central government department/agency in the last 12 months.

E.34   Of those who have contacted their council, 60% had done so by telephone and 30% by a face-to-face visit. Nearly one in seven (15%) had either contacted their council by letter or through a website/by e-mail. There were no significant demographic factors relating to whether someone contacts their council electronically or otherwise.

E.35   Turning to contact with central government, of those who have contacted a government department/agency in the last 12 months, 49% have done so by telephone. The same proportion (26%) have done so either via a face-to-face visit or by letter – while 29% have done so through a website or by e-mail. This level of electronic contact is significantly higher than that for local councils, indicating that geography may play an important role in how people contact governmental institutions.

E.36   People were also asked how they would like to access government information and services if UK online centres offered help and support in how to use the services available on a central website. It is instructive to note that the proportions of phone, letter and face-to-face contact all fall significantly (to 31%, 22% and 19% respectively). At the same time, the proportions of people who would prefer to access information by e-mail under this scenario either through a UK online centre or from home increase substantially to 46% and 37% respectively.

E.37   These increases are felt across the board demographically, though household income and social grade are significant factors as to whether people would prefer to access information electronically either from home (favoured by ABs and those with incomes of over £17,500) or from an UK online centre (favoured by DEs and those with incomes of below £17,500).
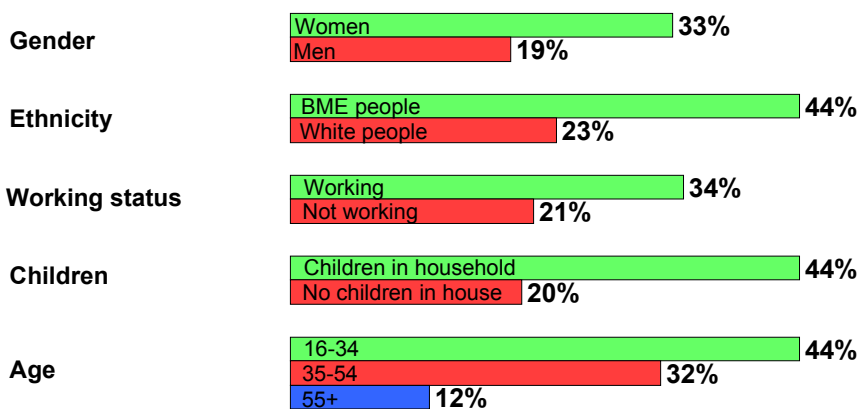
Information Needs

E.38   People were asked what information they would be interested in accessing through a government website. Overall, around a quarter were interested in finding education-related information (27%), transport- and travel-related information (26%) and general advice (24%).

E.39   Around one in six were interested in health-related information (19%), information about benefits and tax credits (18%), employment-related information (17%), information about local council services (17%) and information relating to the law and legal matters (16%).

E.40   Within these broad information categories, the survey found the following:

- Information about public transport was the most popular type of transport- and traffic-related information (cited by 88% of all those most interested in transport/traffic information);

- Finding a job was the most popular type of employment-related information (cited by 74% of all those most interested in employment information);

- General family health was the most popular type of health-related information (cited by 61% of all those most interested in health information);

- General information about the law was the most popular type of legal-related information (cited by 59% of all those most interested in legal information);

- Information on tax and tax credits was the most popular type of benefit-related information (cited by 54% of all those most interested in benefits information); and

- Career advice/training opportunities was the most popular type of education-related information (cited by 51% of all those most interested in education information).

E.41 A number of demographic factors are related to an interest in electronic access to certain types of information. In particular, gender, age, working status, ethnicity and whether people have children in their household are significant factors for people seeking education-related information. As the following slide demonstrates, women, people from BME backgrounds, workers, those with children and younger people were all more likely to want to find this information through a government website.

Education-related information – breakdown

Q   If there was a government website that contained information and links to your local council and all government departments in one place, which two, if any, of the following would you be most interested in finding information on?

Gender	Women	33%
	Men	19%
Ethnicity	BME people	44%
	White people	23%
Working status	Working	34%
	Not working	21%
Children	Children in household	44%
	No children in house	20%
Age	16-34	44%
	35-54	32%
	55+	12%

Base: all respondents (432)

E.42 Conversely, white people, those over 55 years old or people without children in their household were more likely to be interested in finding transport-and travel-related information through a government website, while those who are not working were more likely to want health-related information than those who are working (25% to 12% respectively).

The Role of UK online centres

E.43 When asked whether they would use such a government website if UK online centres offered basic help and training in how to use it, over half of users (56%) said that they would do so at their local UK online centre. Nearly one in three (30%) said that they would learn how to use

it at the centre and would then access the website elsewhere. Nine in ten centre users (89%) felt that centre staff would be able to provide this basic level of advice and support.

E.44   Only one in ten (11%) said that they would not access this website at a UK online centre at all, and only one in 14 (7%) were not confident that centre staff would be able to provide this basic advice and support.

E.45   Similar proportions felt that they would make use of UK online centres if they offered more specialist support in accessing the services on such a website (such as help in filling out forms). Nearly three in five (58%) said that they would use the website at the centre if this service was provided, while one in four (26%) said that they would learn how to access such services at a centre and then continue doing so elsewhere.

E.46   Three in four centre users (75%) felt that centre staff would be able to provide this more specialist support. Again, only around one in ten (13%) said that they would not want to use UK online centres for this service, while the same proportion are not confident that centre staff would be able to provide this more specialist support.

E.47   Over one in four people (29%) said that if this help and support was on offer, they would visit their local UK online centre more frequently. Two in three (68%) said that this would not have much effect on their frequency of visit. It should be pointed out, however, that three in four centre users (72%) felt that this help and support would attract new users to their centre.

E.48   When those who said that they wouldn't use UK online centres to access such a government website were asked why, a quarter of them (27%) said that they would prefer to access the site from their own home. One in six (18%) cited a similar reason – that it is inconvenient for them to get to a centre, while 15% said that they don't have the time to go to a centre.