RESEARCH

Evaluation of Pioneer and Pathfinder UK Online Centres: Follow-up Study

Hall Aitken Associates

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No 362

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Executive Summary

Brief outline

The aim of the UK online centres is to bridge the gap between those in society who have access to and are able to use information and communication technologies (ICT) competently, and those who do not. The Government's target is to provide 6,000 centres. The centres are intended to be located in places people visit every day, with convenient opening hours to offer easy access. The key success criteria are the extent to which the centres increase ICT awareness, ICT skills and people's participation in local communities. Around 2,000 centres in disadvantaged communities will receive support from the Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF).

Pilot CMF-funded centres launched by the former Department for Education and Employment are now at a mature stage and beginning to yield evidence about the likely impact of the initiative. The six Pioneer projects received notification of funding in October 1999, and the thirteen Pathfinder projects in early February 2000. The Department for Education and Skills is on course to complete the full roll-out of around 2,000 CMF-funded centres during 2002. An initial evaluation of the pilots provided a range of lessons that were incorporated into the main rollout of the programme. This report provides an update on these pilot centres, with a particular focus on establishing the economic and other benefits that the centre users have gained.

Key findings

A survey of early users of the centres (one year on from their first involvement) indicated that:

- computer ownership among respondents has increased by 30 percentage points since they first attended the centres, compared to a national trend of 10 percentage points increase over the same period
- the number of economically active UK online centre users has increased amongst survey respondents by almost one third
- the number of centre users classifying themselves as not working has dropped by over 40%, compared with a 12% drop nationally over the same period
- around half of all respondents indicated that attending the centres had **definitely** helped them secure a job or a better job, or move on to further education or training
- 85% of respondents say that coming to the centre has increased their confidence levels to some degree

Amongst new users of the Pioneer and Pathfinder centres a similar survey indicated that:

- the percentage of users drawn from the most disadvantaged target groups has increased significantly
- around 20% of users indicate that they first heard about the centres through media advertising (this includes local and national newspapers, radio, television and poster campaign advertising) – and since few centres use this method, the response suggests success for the national campaigns
- satisfaction rates with centre staff and learning materials remain at the high levels indicated in the first survey
- 73% of respondents say that attending the centre has increased their confidence
- respondents agree that coming to the UK online centre has helped or could help them: get a job (21%), go onto further or higher education (31%), become more involved in their community (33%)

Background

One year on from the original evaluation of the pilot UK online centres, DfES wished to determine if and what progress had been made. A further survey of the original Pioneer and Pathfinders projects aimed to:

- provide a more detailed insight into issues arising from the first evaluation.
- provide a longitudinal aspect to the original study to identify any new issues at future stages of projects' development.
- provide further insight into long-term impact of the programme as a whole.

This short study was therefore designed to include a follow up survey of respondents to a survey undertaken in the formative Pioneer & Pathfinder evaluation, a survey of new users and a telephone survey of centre managers. Substantial difficulties were encountered in contacting some of the centres, reducing the response rates to the new surveys and the numbers of managers contacted. The results are therefore indicative rather than definitive.

Previous Study

The formative Pioneer and Pathfinder Evaluation conducted for DfEE by Hall Aitken set out to:

- investigate the development phase of the Pioneer and Pathfinder centres and identify any problems and constraints with setting up a centre
- identify examples of good practice and innovation in the early stages of delivering each of the Pioneer and Pathfinder projects

- in particular, identify effective approaches to: supporting the learner, learning content, marketing the learning centres over the longer term, overcoming barriers to participation, sustaining the target group's participation

- identify the short term impact of the learning centres on individuals

The report "ICT Learning Centres: Formative Review of Pioneer and Pathfinder Projects" gives detail on usage, achievement, short-term impact, revenue funding, monitoring and partnerships. In summary we found that:

- There had been over 5,000 users by the middle of June 2000

- Over 90% of users were satisfied with their experience

- Over 75% of users were drawn from the key target groups

- Less success was achieved with the most digitally and socially excluded

The report recommended that:

1. "The linkages between the ICT Learning Centres programme and other initiatives are clarified, particularly in order to ensure appropriate revenue support

2. Future projects are selected on the basis of their focus on the most excluded groups

3. A range of support measures is introduced for those developing and implementing projects"

Significant initiatives are already underway by the Department for Education and Skills (formerly DfEE) in response to each of the above recommendations.

Progress by early users

Computer Ownership

In mid 2000, 43% of survey respondents had computers at home – around the national average at the time. By mid 2001 this figure had risen by 30 percentage points, to 73%. We estimate that the national average had risen around 10 percentage points over the same period. Centre users appear to have acquired home computers at a much faster rate than for the general population.

Economic Status

In mid 2000 around 36% of the original users (who also responded to our follow up survey) were employed in some capacity. By mid 2001 this figure had risen to 46%. At the same time those classifying themselves as 'not working but hope to soon' had almost halved. Finally over 20% indicated that attending the centre had **definitely** helped them get a job. This appears to be strong evidence that, for the survey respondents at least, the centres have made a

significant impact on the economic status of users. Of course results may be distorted if more successful users have been more likely to respond, which could be the case.

The same group of users also reported significant gains in other areas:

- 25% of people said that coming along to the centre had **definitely** helped them get a better job or promotion
- 21% said it had helped them go on to more advanced training
- 45% said it had improved their business skills
- 85% of respondents said that coming to the centre had increased their confidence levels

Characteristics of new users

Gender and Age

It appears that the proportion of 2:1 female to male users of the centres, identified in the first report, has remained. As before this varies, with some centres having up to 60% males. On the basis of our sample it would appear that there has been a move towards the over 60's and away from the 25-44 age group. However we know that here are large numbers of younger users in some centres where we had difficulty in securing returns.

Target Groups

On the one hand the level of computer ownership (which might be thought to relate to income) amongst centre users has increased and now runs well over the national average. As before this is often because the non computer literate members of households with computers are attending the centres. The level of home internet access appears to run at around the national average or perhaps above.

On the other hand there has been a significant increase in the proportion of users drawn from the excluded groups identified as key target groups for the programme:

- Lone parents
- Disabled people
- Ethnic minorities
- Those with literacy and numeracy difficulties

User satisfaction and progress

Early indications from new users suggest that they have found the centres to be as helpful as early users. Staff are seen as friendly and approachable, whilst learning materials are seen as being interesting, useful and relevant.

Around 75% of new users claimed that attending the centre had or would help them improve their confidence. Already substantial numbers expected their attendance to help them secure jobs, progress to Further Education and become more involved in their community.

Publicity and Marketing

For both centres and users of centres, word of mouth is the most important form of marketing – and centres show this through a variety of other activities, such as networking with local groups, to stimulate this further.

Overall 20% of respondents first heard about the centre through media adverts. This included local and national newspapers, radio, television and poster campaigns. Roughly 13% of users said they first heard about their centre through local newspapers, and yet, only one centre (with a relatively low share of the respondents) placed such ads. 3% indicated that they heard through television advertising. This suggests that publicity from national campaigns – learndirect, UK online, Byte Size – are resulting in new users in good numbers. The importance of such users, who may be beyond the existing networks reachable by word of mouth, could be significant.

Also under-rated by centre managers was the power of walking past the centre. None listed the visual impact of their centre as a marketing point, though one alluded to the impact of what people see through the shop window, yet, 12% of users responding to the new users survey said they first heard of the centre by walking past it. The image of the centre along with its accessibility is clearly a key factor, as was highlighted in the original study.

Conclusions

Overall we conclude that the main thrust of the findings in the original report remain. The centres may be attracting more excluded groups, but levels of home computer ownership and internet access might suggest otherwise. At the same time we expect that our survey methodology would have been biased to some extent against the more excluded users.

The follow up survey of earlier users suggests extremely high levels of success, even if this is only measured in terms of hard economic outputs. Again we suspect some sample bias but judge that the pilot centres are helping their users to make good progress in terms of confidence building and informal learning and in relation to progress towards further learning and employment.

If the main roll out projects replicate the success of the pilot projects, we would anticipate a significant impact overall. In saying this we believe that the pilot projects are very likely not to be representative of the roll out projects. Nevertheless, these early indications are broadly positive and encouraging.

Chapter

1

Introduction

This section of the report gives some background on the study and describes the methodology employed.

Background

This report focuses on the gathering of longitudinal information on the success of the pilot UK online centres Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF) funded. The UK online centres (CMF funded) are referred to in this report as "UK online centre(s)" or as "the centre(s)". Managers of these centres are referred to as "centre managers" in this report. This evaluation is a follow up roughly one year on from the formative evaluation of the pilot UK online centres and aims to build on conclusions from this earlier report.

Previous Study

The original Pioneer and Pathfinder Evaluation conducted for DfEE by Hall Aitken set out to:

- investigate the development phase of the Pioneer and Pathfinder UK online centres and identify any problems and constraints with setting up a UK online centre
- identify examples of good practice and innovation in the early stages of delivering each of the Pioneer and Pathfinder projects
- in particular, identify effective approaches to: supporting the learner, learning content, marketing the UK online centres over the longer term, overcoming barriers to participation, sustaining the target group's participation and
- identify the short term impact of the UK online centres on individuals

The report "ICT Learning Centres: Formative Review of Pioneer and Pathfinder Projects" gives detail on usage, achievement, short-term impact, revenue funding, monitoring and partnerships. In summary we found that:

- There had been over 5,000 users by the middle of June 2000
- Over 90% of users were satisfied with their experience
- Over 75% of users were drawn from the key target groups

- Less success was achieved with the most digitally and socially excluded
- The combination of programming, location, marketing, staffing and the balance of the drop-in against programmed courses have a major impact on the target groups attracted. For example women appeared to respond better to programmed courses, whilst men responded better to drop-in access.
- Few projects had stable long term revenue funding. The revenue funding will dictate the future direction of projects to a much greater degree than the Capital Modernisation Fund.
- Centres were generally successful at overcoming barriers to learning - this is related to their location, nature of the provision, informal atmosphere, nature of staff support, and links to existing activities.
- The main marketing methods had been word of mouth and location.
- Private sector partnership had been particularly important in attracting men.
- Early indications were that users were benefiting in terms of improved skills for employment, social and personal purposes.
- Monitoring was generally weak and could be improved.
- Partnership was a key element in many successful projects.

The report also gives detail on usage, achievement, short-term impact, revenue funding, monitoring and partnerships. The recommendations made were that:

1. The linkages between the ICT Learning Centres (now UK online centres) programme and other initiatives are clarified, particularly in order to ensure appropriate revenue support
2. Future projects are selected on the basis of their focus on the most excluded groups
3. A range of support measures is introduced for those developing and implementing projects

Significant initiatives are already underway by the Department for Education and Skills in response to each of the above recommendations.

Research Objectives

One year on from the original evaluation of the pilot UK online centres, DfES wished to determine if and what progress had been made. This further survey of the original Pioneer and Pathfinders projects aimed to:

- provide a more detailed insight into issues arising from the first evaluation.

- provide a longitudinal aspect to the original study to identify any new issues at future stages of projects' development.

- provide further insight into long-term impact of the programme as a whole.

This short study was therefore designed to include a follow up survey of respondents to a survey undertaken in the formative Pioneer & Pathfinder evaluation, a survey of new users and a telephone survey of centre managers. Substantial difficulties were encountered in contacting some of the centres, reducing the response rates to the new surveys and the numbers of managers contacted. The results are therefore indicative rather than definitive.

Methodology

The survey instruments used are provided in the Appendix.

Initially we re-surveyed 659 of the respondents from the original survey (all those people who replied and gave a name and contact address when completing the original form). This was a very short questionnaire and provided an update of general experiences since undertaking learning at the Pioneer or Pathfinder UK online centre.

We also contacted Pioneer and Pathfinder UK online centres to involve them in a follow up survey with new users of their UK online centres. UK online centres were given the option of handing out Hall Aitken addressed reply paid envelopes with the questionnaires or collecting the completed questionnaires and returning them to us in bulk.

To complement both the follow up and new user questionnaires, we conducted a telephone survey with UK online centre managers to look at how the UK online centre had evolved since the original Pioneer and Pathfinder study.

The study was designed to be a short exercise with limited re-surveying. We assumed that it would be relatively easy to contact projects and arrange for surveys as we had already been in touch with most managers. In fact this was not the case. There was clearly a high level of "survey fatigue" with several projects being very unwilling to participate. Others (including mobile projects) proved difficult to track down. As a result the study was more protracted and less comprehensive than envisaged.

Chapter

2

Findings on follow up of original respondents

This section looks at the findings of the follow up survey sent to previous respondents of the formative review of the pilot UK online centres. It describes the methodology and presents the results of the survey including some softer indicators of success. Key findings are given at the end of the section.

Background

We conducted a survey with people from the previous study to track outputs related to UK online centre users learning at the UK online centres. This survey was sent to each person on our database individually with an incentive of a prize draw worth £200 for one person who returned the questionnaire. We received 214 responses from the 659 questionnaires we sent out: a response rate of 33%. As far as possible comparisons between the original and follow up surveys have been made comparing **the same** individual respondents' responses.

Methodology

Returns were received from users of the following Pioneer and Pathfinder UK online centres:

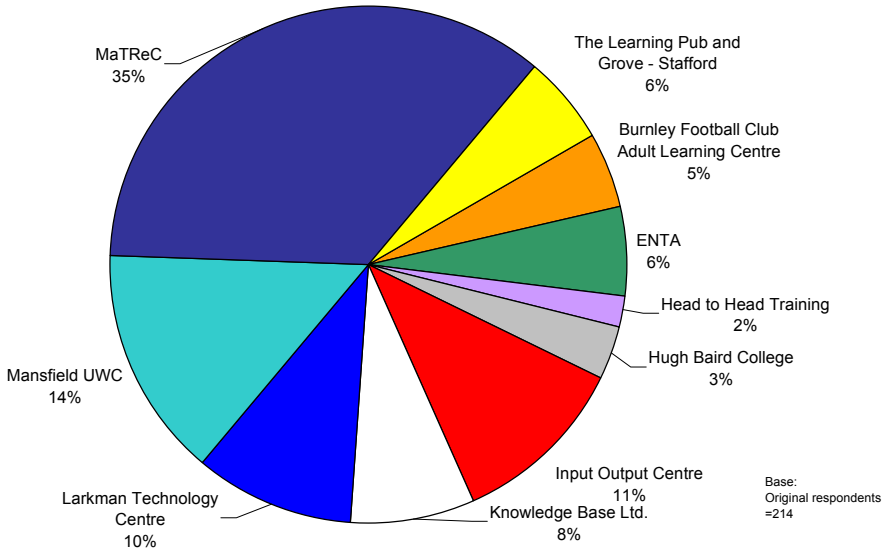
- Burnley Football Club Adult Learning Centre
- ENTA
- Head to Head Training
- Hugh Baird College
- Input Output Centre, now Internet Exchange
- Knowledge Base Ltd.
- Larkman Technology Centre
- Mansfield Unemployed Workers Centre
- MaTReC
- The Learning Pub and the Grove Primary School (Stafford College)

Results

The numbers of responses varied from UK online centre to UK online centre. The largest proportion of returns came from MaTReC, but reasonably high numbers were returned from previous users of Input Output Centre (now Internet Exchange), Knowledge Base in Scarborough, Larkman Technology Centre and Mansfield Unemployed Workers Centre.

A breakdown of the response distribution by UK online centre is shown in Chart 1. The largest numbers of questionnaires for the follow up survey were sent out to those who attended Matrec and the Input Output Centre as these had high response rates in the original survey. Other UK online centres responded proportionally to the numbers sent out to people from those UK online centres in the first survey.

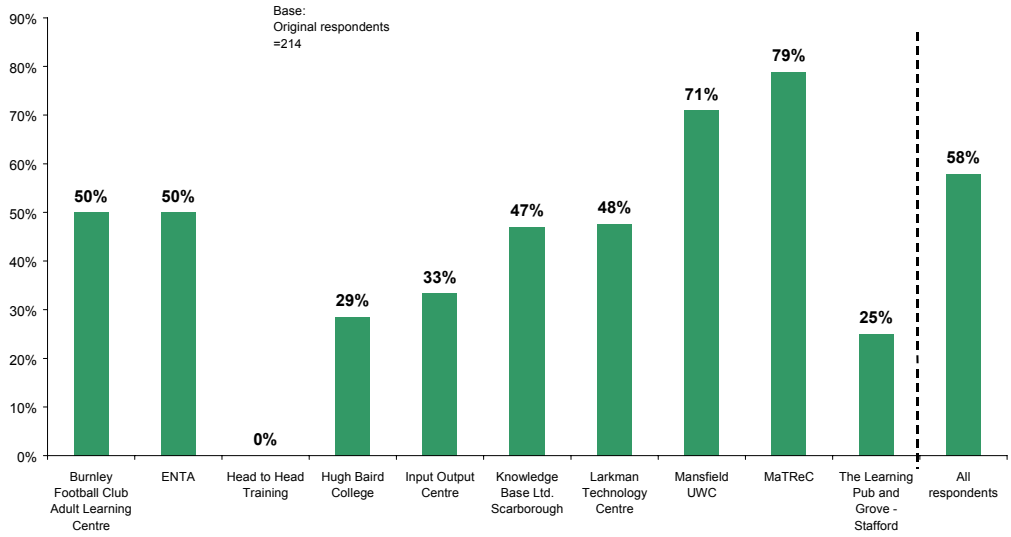
Chart 1: Distribution of responses to follow-up survey by centre



Length of time attending UK online centres

The length of time respondents attended UK online centres was high, with averages for attendance at centres ranging from 3 months (Input Output Centre and the Learning Pub and Grove) to 20 months (MaTReC). This is also reflected in the fact that large percentages of those we sent questionnaires to as previous users are actually still attending the UK online centres. This can be seen from Chart 2. It would seem that some UK online centres have a higher turnover of users than others.

Chart 2: Percentage of respondents still attending by centre

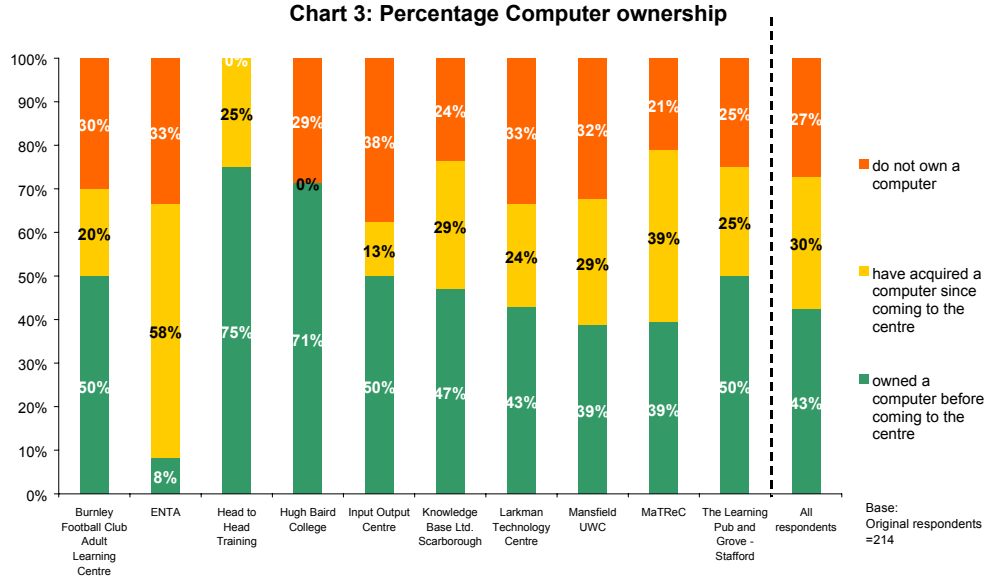


The chart suggests that Head to Head have no people still attending the centre a year on. This is because at the time of the original survey the first users of the UK online centre were those doing a 10 week course in job readiness, and many of these came from outside the local area, so they may no longer have links to the centre. In addition, since the sample size of respondents from Head to Head was small anyway (2% of the total respondents) this can't reflect accurately what the situation is in terms of turnover at Head to Head. The overall figure of 58% of all respondents still attending the centre a year on does give a clearer indication of user turnover at the pilot UK online centres.

Computer ownership

76 respondents had email addresses (35%). Chart 3 shows the percentage of respondents at each UK online centre who owned a computer when they started attending the centre; those who have since acquired a computer and those who do not own one at all. The original study findings suggested that at certain UK online centres people attended in order to learn how to use computers they currently owned but didn't have the skills to use.

Chart 3: Percentage Computer ownership

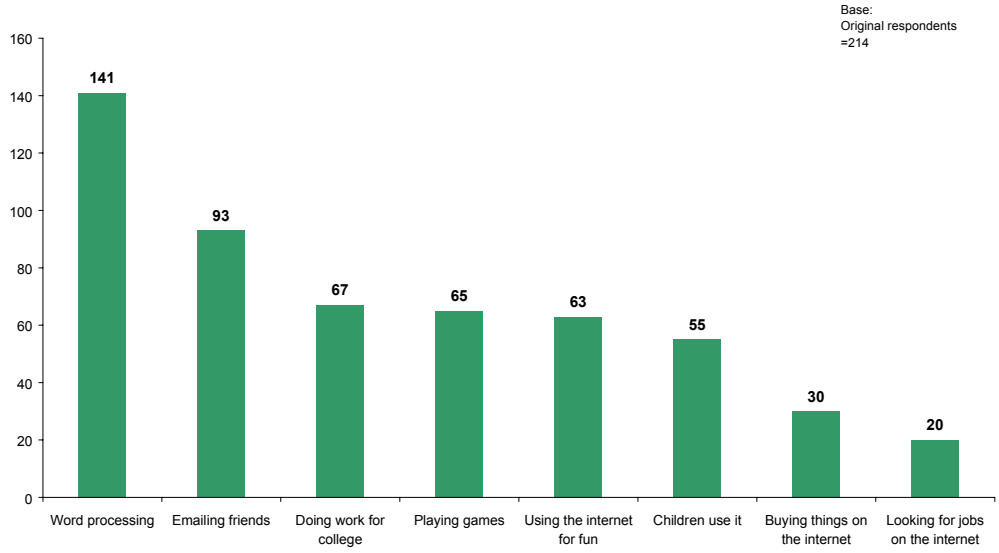


ENTA provided free home PC's with wireless internet access to the first 100 UK online centre users who completed 30 hours of learning in the centre. Increases in computer ownership in other UK online centres could be as a result of other schemes such as Computers within Reach running alongside the UK online centres pilot. These schemes have been providing low cost or free computers to the same target groups that the UK online centres are engaging.

Computer ownership at around May 2000 for users of the UK online centres was 43% which is close to the national average level at August 2000 of 44% (DfES Research Report 252: ICT Access and Use). If a constant rate of increase per month is assumed from November 1999 to August 2000 (around 0.75% per month) then by June 2001 there would be no more than around a 10 percentage point increase. This would imply that the national level of computer ownership would be currently at 54% compared with the actual level of 73% among the respondents of this survey. This would therefore appear to be an impact of the UK online centre. The causal link is not certain as increases in computer ownership could also be a reflection of possible intentions to purchase a computer before respondents attended centres.

Usage helps to identify whether the people who own computers are actually "online" as opposed to just using and improving their general computer based skills. Chart 4 shows how activities such as using computers to type letters and playing games rate against using the internet to email friends and family or to look for jobs.

Chart 4: What respondents use their PC's for

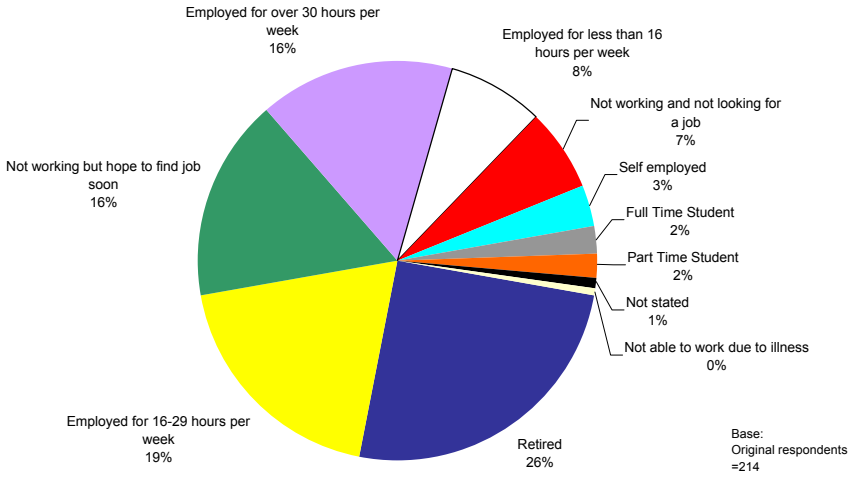


Clearly word processing is still the most popular choice of activities amongst the users of these UK online centres. Emailing friends was also very popular and "buying things over the internet" and "looking for jobs" appeared at significant levels. In fact respondents regularly used their PC for more than one activity and the overall percentage of respondents who had a PC and were online in some way was 65%.

Economic Status

The economic status of UK online centre users, and how this has altered, if at all, since they started using the centre is a key indicator of success of the Pioneer and Pathfinder UK online centres. Chart 5 shows the status of the users who responded to the follow up survey and their current economic status.

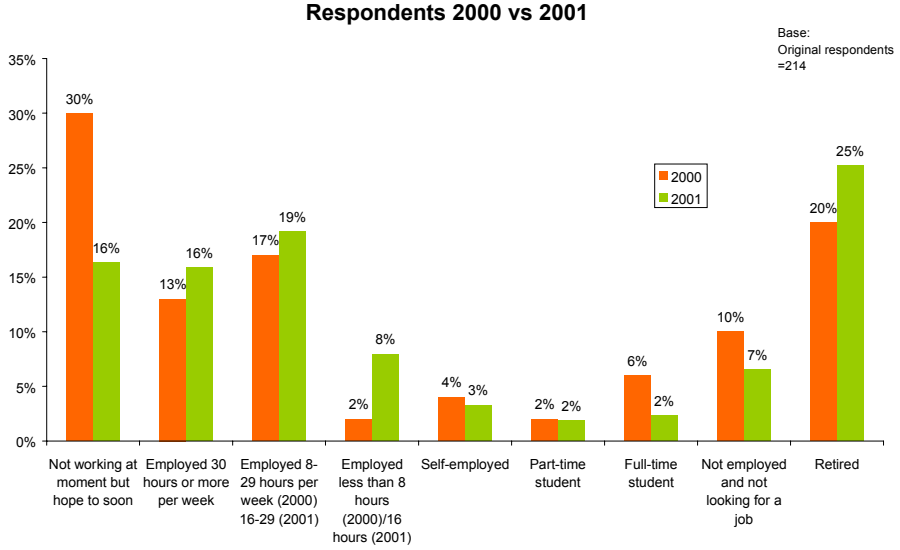
Chart 5: Percentage split of respondents by economic status



Retired people make up the largest proportion of UK online centre users. The numbers of employed (either part time or full time) now make up 46% of our respondents. We also

compared the economic status of the follow up survey respondents with the economic status of those **same** individuals in the original survey. Of the respondents of the follow up survey 36% were now employed (either part time or full time), an increase of 10 percentage points or almost one third. The results of this are shown in Chart 6.

Chart 6: Comparative Distribution of Economic Status of Follow-up Survey Respondents 2000 vs 2001

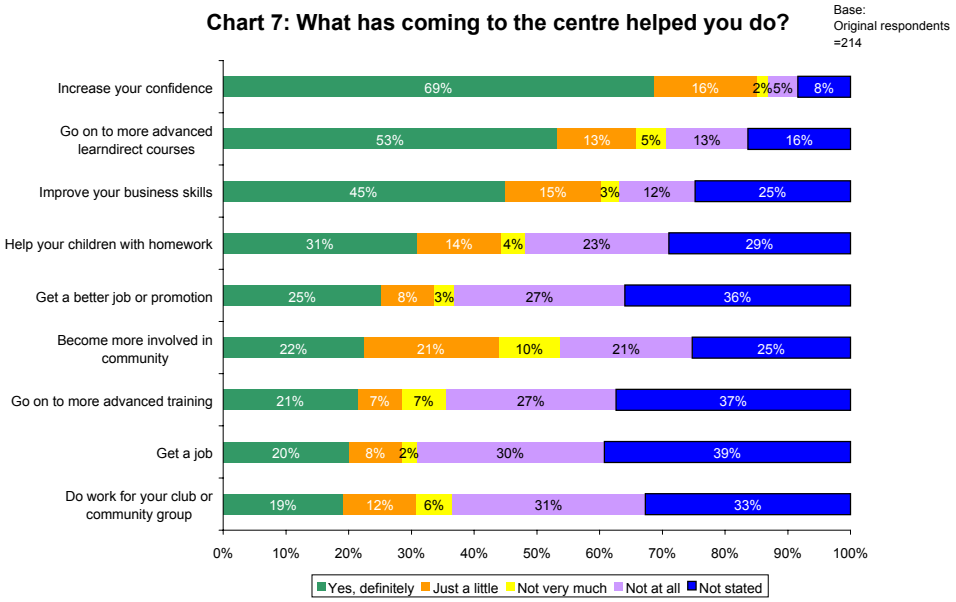


The number of respondents classifying themselves as "not working but hoping to find a job" or "not employed and not looking" has dropped by around 17 percentage points or a drop of over 40% compared to the national figure for the same period of around 12% drop in unemployment (Labour Force Survey: 2000 vs. 2001 – MGSC).

Softer Indicators of Progress

We asked respondents to rate how attending the UK online centre helped them in a variety of life areas including increasing their confidence, enabling them to help their children with homework, and improving their business skills. Chart 7 shown below illustrates the level to which the respondents now said coming to the UK online centre helped them do these things.

20% of the original users who were re-surveyed felt that going to the UK online centre had **definitely** helped them to get a job. This reinforces the findings on change of economic status, outlined above. A total of 30% of respondents said that to some level coming to the UK online centre has improved their ability to get a job.



Further self reported gains were made by

- 25% of people who said that coming along to the UK online centre had **definitely** helped them get a better job or promotion
- 21% who said it had helped them go on to more advanced training
- 45% who said it had improved their business skills and
- 85% of respondents said that coming to the UK online centre had increased their confidence levels

There is a clear view by around half of all respondents that attending the UK online centres had **definitely** played a part in helping them to improve their economic status and/or potential. The survey was not sensitive enough to quantify the level of impact but suggests significant levels of success.

Key findings

The follow up of the original users of the UK online centres has flagged up a number of key issues. These are:

- computer ownership among respondents has increased by 30 percentage points since they first attended the centres, compared to a national trend of 10 percentage points increase over the same period
- the number of economically active UK online centre users has increased amongst survey respondents by almost one third

- the number of centre users classifying themselves as not working has dropped by over 40%, compared with a 12% drop nationally over the same period
- around half of all respondents indicated that attending the centres had **definitely** helped them secure a job, secure a better job or move on to further education or training
- 85% of respondents say that to some degree coming to the centre has increased their confidence levels

Chapter

3

Survey of current UK online centre users

This section looks at the findings of a new survey sent to centres to capture information from current centre users. The same centres involved in the formative review of the pilot UK online centres were used so that comparisons could be drawn. The methodology for this part of the study is described and the results presented. Key findings are given at the end of the section.

Background

In addition to surveying people from the original study, a survey sweep was carried out with current users of the Pioneer and Pathfinder UK online centres. This survey was sent to each of the UK online centres for them to distribute to people who had started to use their centre since 1 January 2001.

Methodology

UK online centres who distributed this survey were:

- The Learning Freeway, Romford
- Larkman Technology Centre, Norwich
- Head to Head Training, London
- Knowledge Base Ltd., Scarborough
- ENTA, The People's Learning Centre, Birmingham
- Hugh Baird College, Liverpool
- Internet Exchange, London
- Learning Pub and the Grove School, Stafford
- Burnley F.C. Adult Learning Centre, Burnley
- MaTReC

We received 360 responses in total, which was below our targeted 1,000. The target population of 1,000 matches our approximations, based on the original study, of the number of centre users in a three month period for the above centres. Therefore the response rate of between 30% and 40% means that the results from this survey shall have a margin of error of better than +/-5%, if the returns are truly random.

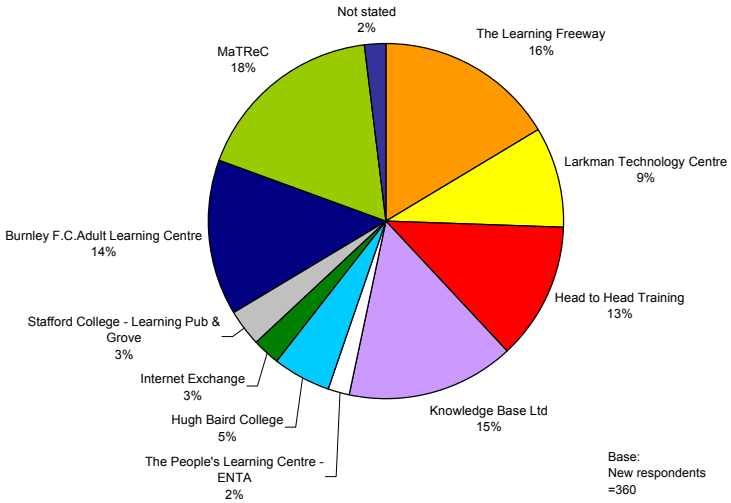
Results

The numbers of responses from each of the UK online centres was diverse. The largest proportion of returns came from The Learning Freeway in Romford, Larkman Technology Centre in Norwich, Head to Head Training in London, Knowledge Base Ltd. in Scarborough, MaTReC and Burnley F.C in Burnley. This can be seen in Chart 8

The UK online centres in this part of the survey all made their best efforts to gather questionnaires from users who have been using the UK online centres more recently as a comparison to the original users.

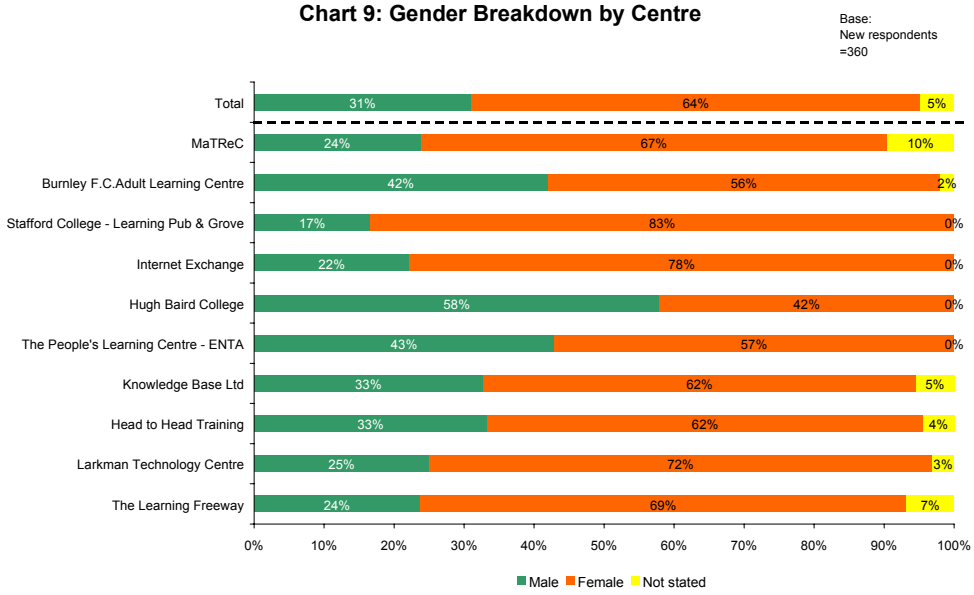
Breakdown of UK online centre Users

Chart 8: Distribution of Responses to New User Survey by Centre



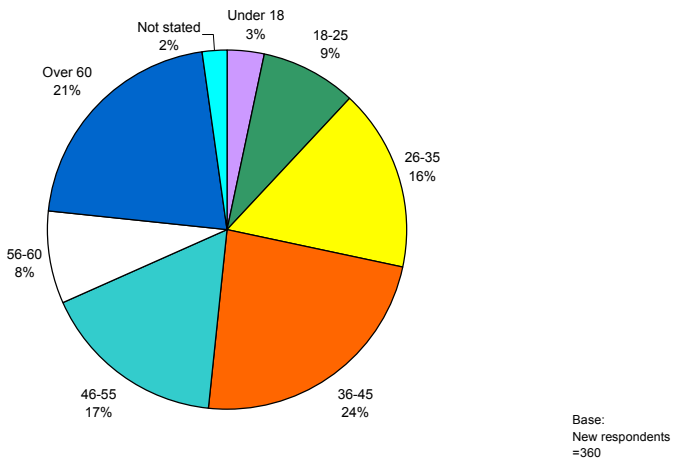
Overall, the centres appear to be engaging the identified target groups. The number of male respondents in all but one of the UK online centres in this survey was lower than female respondents. The 64% female/31% male split is roughly the same as the original survey found (5% did not state their gender). However, UK online centres such as Hugh Baird College in Liverpool, ENTA and Burnley had substantial numbers of men attending. We found in our first survey that the gender split is attributable to the activities offered in the centres.

Chart 9: Gender Breakdown by Centre



The age mix of users is shown in Chart 10. The age brackets used in this survey were changed from those used in the original survey so that they would more easily match up with monitoring systems in use by the UK online centres. However, even with broad comparisons, there appears to have been a significant shift away from the originally strong 25-44 age group and indeed 45-64's towards over 60's. This may be particularly the case for some UK online centres more than others. In four UK online centres, over 60's were the biggest group – albeit with small very sample sizes in some centres.

Chart 10: Age Breakdown of respondents



In terms of more specific target groups for the UK online centres programme, the centres appear to have had increased success in reaching more excluded groups. Table A shows that in all of the following target groups there has been an increase in the numbers attending these UK online centres since the time of the original study.

Table A: Comparison of original and new study target groups attending

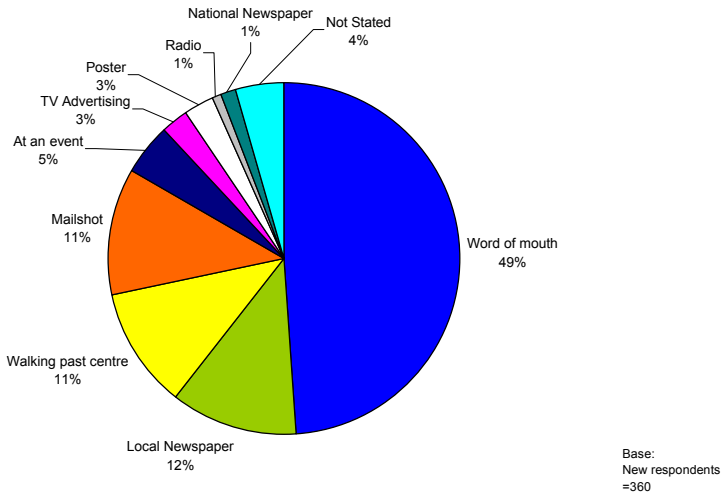
Target Group	Original Study	New UK online centre Users
Lone Parents	10%	13%
Ethnic Minority	2%	13%
Disabled	13%	15%
Literacy problems	2%	8%
Numeracy Problems	6%	16%

This suggests that the UK online centres are now attracting people who fall into the more excluded target groups as well as the broader target groups.

Engagement

The process through which people find out about the UK online centre often has some impact on who actually attends the centre. Chart 11 shows the breakdown of how UK online centre users first heard about the centres. The traditional methods of marketing for community initiatives such as word of mouth, local newspaper, a mailshot and physically walking past the centre, are the most popular of ways for users to find out about the UK online centres.

Chart 11: Where first heard about UK Online Centre?



These findings show a shift in types of marketing attracting users, when compared with the responses given in the original study. Table B below illustrates this.

Table B: Comparison of original and new study marketing methods

Marketing method	Original Study	New UK online centre Users
Word of mouth	50%	49%
Mailshot	30%	11%
Event	10%	5%
Walking past centre	4%	11%
Media advert	2%	20%
Other	5%	4%

The table suggests that around the same number of people find out about the UK online centre through word of mouth and fewer find out via mailshots and events. However, it does show that a much higher percentage of people using these UK online centres found out about the centre through some form of media advert (including local and national newspapers, TV advertising and posters) than ever before. Given that the UK online centres themselves have not advertised in this way, this response must be due to the national campaigns.

Computer and Internet Access

It is possible to compare the levels of computer access from the previous survey and the current users. This is one measure of digital inclusion of the users of UK online centres. Table C illustrates this.

Table C: Comparison of original and new users' computer access

Computer access	Original Study	New UK online centre Users
At home	44%	64%
Work or college	19%	37%
At a friends home	8%	-
Elsewhere	-	20%
No access	27%	11%

It is clear that the new UK online centre users have higher levels of access in all areas that were asked about. In particular home access has risen by 20 percentage points which again mirrors the earlier finding from the follow up survey of original users that more UK online centre users now own PC's. It now appears that some respondents had access to a computer in more than one of the places asked about. This is likely to be related to the growing numbers of computers in the workplace, homes (including friends and relatives) and those available to the general public from train stations to libraries.

The levels of UK online centre users with no access to a computer appear to have decreased substantially.

Table D gives the response rates of new users of these UK online centres.

Table D: New users' internet access

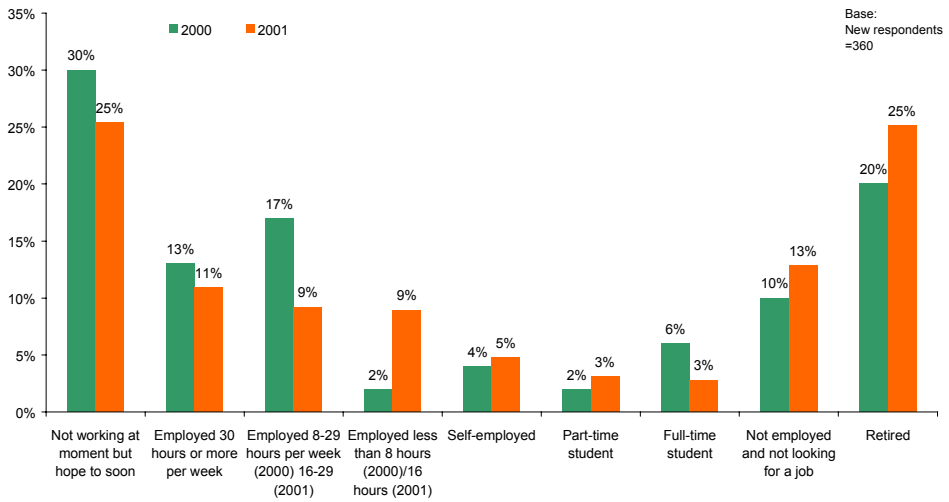
Internet Access	New UK online centre Users
At home	36%
Work or college	22%
Elsewhere	14%
No access	16%
Not stated	23%

It would appear that amongst respondents only 16% have no access at all, although 23% of respondents did not state whether they had internet access or not. As there is some overlap there are some people who have access in more than one place. Current levels of home access to the internet among the general public nationally are around 34% (Source: Family Expenditure Survey – Internet Access – June 2001) so it would seem that access to the internet in any location is high among users of UK online centres and that levels of access to the internet at home appear to be at least at the level of the national figures.

Economic Status

While Table A showed that the representation of socially deprived groups increased from the original survey, it might be expected that a similar improvement in representation of economically disadvantaged users at the UK online centres. Chart 12 below compares the economic status of new users with original users.

Chart 12: Comparitive Distribution of Economic Status of Users of Centres in 2000 vs 2001



These figures suggest that the proportion of employed users has remained steady overall (34% in 2001 compared to 36% in 2000). However, full time and substantial part time have dropped and only those employed for less than 8 hours per week have increased. The UK online

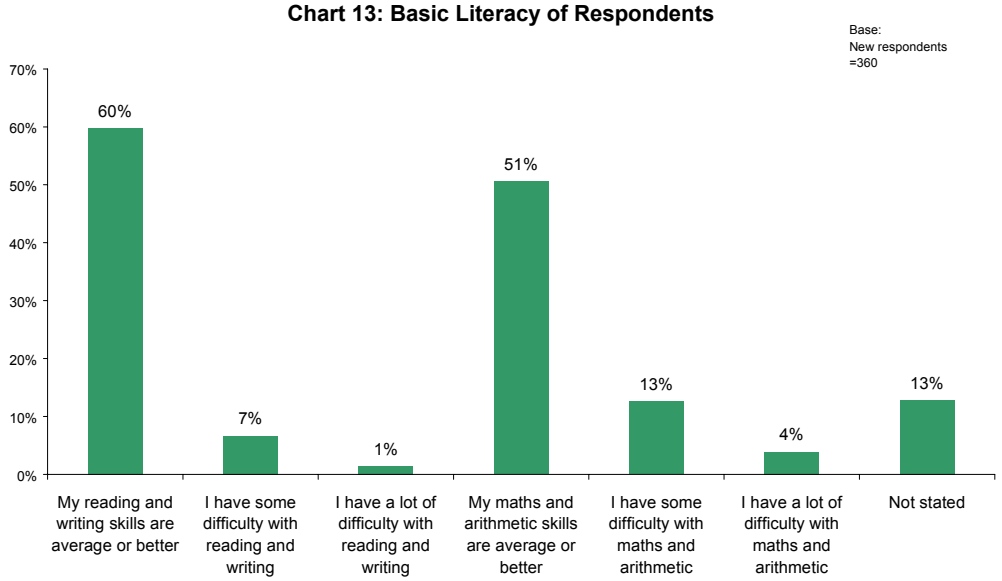
centres also seem to be shifting their emphasis toward retired people and to an extent, those who are not currently looking for work. Economically inactive people and retirees are among the target groups, so centres are reaching target groups.

Literacy and Numeracy

A major target of the UK online centres initiative is to improve the basic skills of those using the centres and to draw in those people who need some level of help with either their literacy or numeracy skills (or indeed both). Table A illustrated that there were increases of 7 percentage points and 11 percentage points respectively in the number of UK online centre users with some level of difficulty with their literacy and numeracy skills. Chart 13 shows the breakdown of responses.

A greater percentage of respondents have said they have some level of difficulty with numeracy than do with literacy. This is a subjective measurement and further research would need to be carried out to measure the literacy and numeracy levels of UK online centre users in a more standardised, objective fashion.

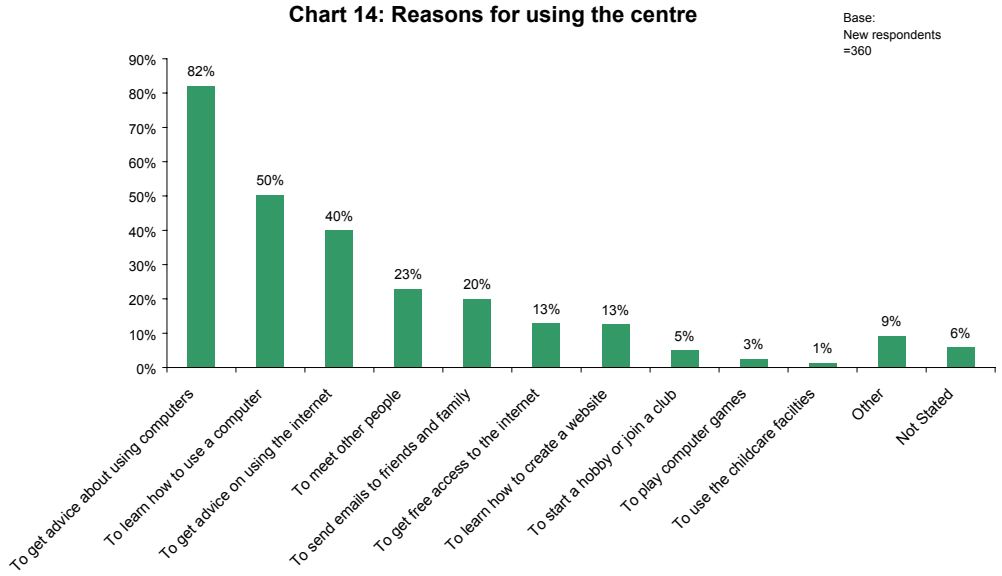
Chart 13: Basic Literacy of Respondents



UK online centre Experiences

Chart 14 gives the reasons why people attended the UK online centre. Most respondents had multiple reasons for attending the centre as might be expected.

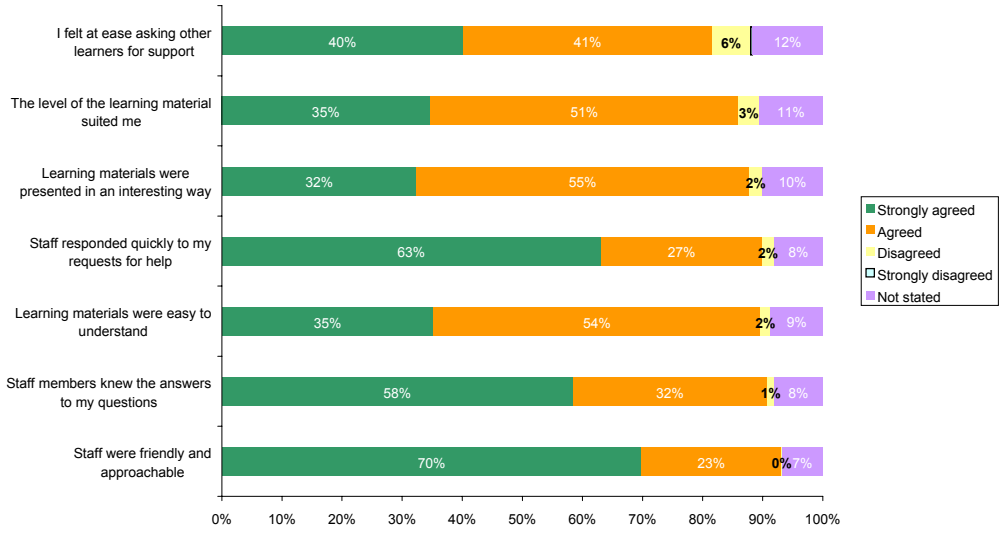
Chart 14: Reasons for using the centre



Clearly the main reason stated was to get advice about using computers although this is a general term and covers a wide range of other reasons. The other main reasons for using the UK online centre were to learn how to use computers or get advice about using the internet. There were also high numbers of people using the UK online centre for online purposes of some kind, either emailing, accessing the internet or creating a website.

As well as looking at reasons for coming along to the UK online centre the survey looked at satisfaction rates with some aspects of their learning shown in Chart 15.

Chart 15: Satisfaction levels with support at centres



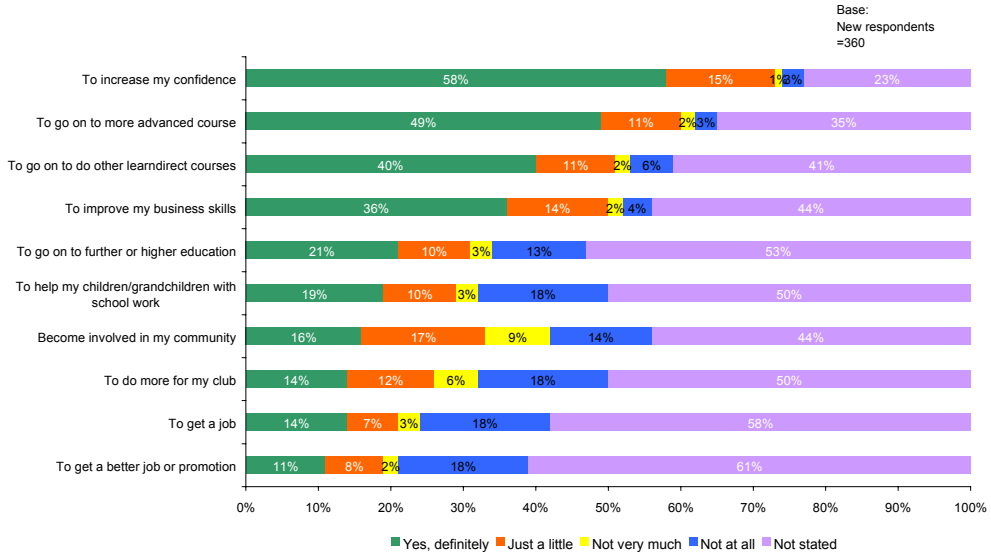
Very high percentages of respondents either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the staff were friendly, approachable and responsive. Satisfaction with learning materials is also high with high percentages (86% or over) who "strongly agree" or "agree" that learning materials were easy to use interesting and relevant. Although levels of dissatisfaction were low, it is worth noting that there were people attending the centres who "disagreed" that the level of the learning materials suited them (3%) and that staff responded quickly to requests for help (2%).

Soft Indicators

As in the follow up survey of original users, new users were asked to rate how they think coming to the UK online centre will help, or has helped, them for example, increase their confidence, enable them to help their children with homework, and improve their business skills. Chart 16 illustrates the level to which the respondents said coming to the UK online centre helped them do these things.

14% of new UK online centre users **definitely** agree that going to the centre had helped or would help them to get a job. Another 11% thought it **definitely** had or would help them get a better job or promotion. Given that only some UK online centres include guidance advice and support in their wider offering, these figures are quite significant.

Chart 16: What has coming to the centre helped you do?



In addition, 73% of respondents of this survey said that coming to the UK online centre had or would increase their confidence levels to some degree, 31% said it would or could help them go onto further or higher education and 33% said it would or could help them become more involved in their community. The satisfaction ratings are subjective, but do give a flavour of how respondents are currently rating the UK online centres they are using. The main evaluation of the UK online centres initiative will aim to investigate these issues in more detail.

Key findings

The survey of new users of the Pioneer and Pathfinder UK online centres has flagged up a number of key issues. These are:

- the percentage of users drawn from the most disadvantaged target groups has increased significantly
- around 20% of users indicate that they first heard about the centres through media advertising (this includes local and national newspapers, radio, television and poster campaign advertising) – and since few centres use this method, the response suggests success for the national campaigns
- satisfaction rates with centre staff and learning materials remain at the high levels indicated in the first survey
- 73% of respondents say that attending the centre has increased their confidence
- respondents agree that coming to the UK online centre has helped or could help them: get a job (21%), go onto further or higher education (31%), become more involved in their community (33%)

Chapter

4

UK online centre Managers' Survey

This section looks at the findings of the centre managers survey. The methodology for this section of the study is provided and a short up date on the centres surveyed is given. Issues from this section of the study are discussed and key findings are given at the end of the section.

Background

The UK online centre managers survey was conducted with all managers who were contactable and who had time to provide information on how the centres had changed in the past year. We experienced significant difficulties with contacting managers for their part of the survey. As the survey includes 8 of the originally funded 19 projects, it is more able to give a flavour of their progress and current activities than to necessarily be representative.

As most aspects of the survey show, the UK online centres are quite diverse and cannot be taken as a homogenous group. The UK online centres involved in this part of the survey are shown in the table below, along with their number of learners since opening/receiving funding. Estimates are given for UK online centres we were unable to contact. The estimate for WEA, Square Mile and Paces was based on monitoring information while information from the previous study for other centres was assumed to have doubled during the period June 2000 to June 2001.

Project / UK online centre	learners
Larkman Technology Centre	650
Head to Head Training	253
Input Output Centre now Internet Exchange (Willesden Green 771, Shepherd's Bush 402, Acton 431)	1604
ENTA	278
EETAC	450
Knowledge Base Ltd. in Scarborough (Filey 600, Eastfield 250, Scar Business School 1500)	2350
Learning Freeway in Romford	130
MaTReC	750
Big Top (response only given for numbers attending)	286
TOTAL	**6751**

The previous total for these UK online centres at June 2000 was 2448 users. If it is assumed that the other centres have progressed at a similar rate of increase then we estimate that for all of the pilot Pioneer and Pathfinder projects (including CDF) there have been over 14,500 users. This does not take into account the large numbers of informal users that some centres have reported so the final total may actually be higher than this.

UK online centre Information

Larkman Technology Centre

Larkman Technology Centre, is based in Norwich and is run by the Council's adult education department. The centre has drawn in around 650 people since it opened in February 2000 with 70% living in the surrounding area and the other 30% who work or volunteer in the area. At any one time 200 people are enrolled on courses at the centre. The centre is open from 8.30am to 9.30pm.

The UK online centre has 13 PC's and 20 laptops some of which are available for loan by other community organisations or for providing an outreach service. The centre mainly runs courses (CLAIT, IT2 and **learndirect**) but also has drop-in access available although this is used mainly by people already enrolled on courses. Online learning such as **learndirect** has not proved particularly popular so far at this centre, with most people opting for taught ICT courses with tutor support.

The centre is also used for children and parents groups, children's groups before school hours and homework groups. This fills a gap since the local school do not currently have access to the internet for school children.

Head to Head Training

Head to Head Training is located in St Raphael's area of Brent in Northwest London and was opened as a UK online centre in June 2000. There are a total of 18 computers, 8 of which are used for training and the other 10 used for drop-in.

The drop-in provision is for internet access and email but **learndirect** courses are also offered. The organisation is at present in the process of setting up another centre which will meet a gap in provision for employed people and young people improving their ICT skills. The current trend in usage is towards online and self directed learning rather than taught courses.

Internet Exchange (formerly Input Output Centre)

Input Output Centres run a chain of ICT training centres across London offering drop in access to the internet and in-house designed self-paced training packages, predominantly in Office, though a broad range of interests can be catered for on request. In April 2000, IOC opened pilot UK online centres in libraries in Acton, Willesden Green and later in Shepherd's Bush. The centres have between 16 and 20 computers in each location, with one AbilityNet approved computer in Acton and Willesden Green libraries and 3 in Shepherd's Bush.

Internet Exchange bought Input Output Centres in 2000 and the company applied for funding for further centres through the first two rounds of the main rollout of UK online centres, but unsuccessfully. An application for Round 3 was still pending at the time of interview.

While previous IOC centres had been located in the city centre to cater for office workers on their lunch breaks, these three centres are in areas inhabited by people with lower incomes and less access to ICT. To make the courses affordable to this client group, government funded programmes cover the cost of training and Individual Learning Accounts pay for the first course learners take.

Clients range from teenagers to pensioners and are reached through newspapers such as the Metro and Sun, along with exhibition stands and promotions. The centres have varying opening hours in line with the libraries that host them, mostly from 9.30am till around 7.30 Monday to Thursday with shorter hours on Friday and Saturday and one weekday closed. The Shepherd's Bush centre is also open 1-5 on Sundays. The libraries are located in high street locations with high footfall and an existing customer base for the libraries before the UK online centres were added.

ENTA- The People's Learning Centre

The People's Learning Centre run by ENTA was established first with five computers based in a maisonette in the midst of the Wyrley Birch Estate in Birmingham and is now in the larger premises of the Wyrley Hall Residents Club, with plans for expansion to 16 PC's. Early on, the centre recruited two learners as staff and provided them with a tutor training programme with assistance through South Birmingham College. This won the project a Community Learning Award from the Birmingham Learning Council.

Mailshots and word of mouth have been the prime marketing tools, though ENTA staff knocked on neighbours' doors to tell them about the centre before it opened. The small centre targeted lone parents, the unemployed and families within this isolated council estate, and has attracted some 286 people since opening on 19 May 2000. Eight people have gone on to jobs.

Demand for the supported drop-in access to the internet and self-paced courses such as CLAIT, **learndirect** and ECDL has been strong. The estate has a high proportion of dyslexic residents and 40% of centre users are dyslexic. In response, ENTA has collaborated with the

Dyslexia Advice and Resources Centre (DARC), with a web-cam link in the new centre to DARC and there's been demand for ICT products designed for dyslexic users.

The centre is open 10.30-4.30 Monday to Thursday, 11.00-3.00 Friday, with a mum and tots session 10-4 Friday. The new centre will be open longer hours, including 9-9 Monday to Thursday and Saturday 9-4.

Further new developments that will further spread the word of the centre around the estate have included a community newsletter written and edited in the centre, as well as printing t-shirts with learners' own designs.

EETAC

Employment, Education and Training Access Centre (EETAC) was set up eight years ago to serve the community near the Adult Education campus of Leicester College. The organisation operates on its own but shares marketing and technical expertise with the college, and the location of the new UK online centre at EETAC was one of two proposed to CMF by the college. The project draws together EETAC's flexible training and learning approach with the technical input of the college. It opened in April 2000 and has now attracted between 400 and 500 learners.

The centre has 15 computers (including one specially equipped for disabled or visually impaired people) and is open 8.30-4.30 Monday to Friday with evening hours that were added as demand increased. It offers drop in access to a range of self-paced courses, including **learndirect**, as well as tasters. Users are encouraged to book into "workshop sessions", where learners work on different courses with a shared tutor.

Key client groups are local people, particularly older men and lone parents. The centre offers access to a crèche elsewhere in the building and is introducing "return to learn" on Saturdays, to entice parents to come with their kids and become comfortable with computers themselves. The centre also had particular success reaching older men through the UK online centres free places scheme which included pensioners. Now 70 pensioners have undertaken a CLAIT course and many have stayed on to do **learndirect** courses. Marketing of the centre is through a prospectus, posters at the Employment Service and in local shops, along with national press coverage of UK online centres. Word of mouth provides an estimated 50% of the marketing mix.

Knowledge Base Ltd. and Yorkshire Coast College in Scarborough

Since opening the three Pathfinder UK online centres have attracted a total 2,300 users (from 250 in Eastfield to 1500 at Scarborough Business Centre). The centres are of varying sizes. The centres in Eastfield and Filey and at street level at Scarborough Business School are each single room computer suites, Filey with 16 pc's and Eastfield with 14. The main Scarborough Business School centre has 6 classrooms, three of which contain 12-18 pc's each, and the other rooms are used for courses in personnel, community work and other college offerings. Each centre offers a range of activities: from 10 week taught workshops on different topics to drop in access for web access, tasters, self-paced ICT courses and non-ICT courses. The centres at Filey and the Scarborough Business School are open 9-5 and some evenings Monday to Friday and Saturday mornings, for a total of 60 hours a week. The Eastfield centre

is open 40 hours a week, but the project is looking to increase its hours to be more user-friendly.

The project's target groups were unemployed people, disabled people, lone parents, over 60's (especially at the Filey centre) and the socially deprived in general. There is a general sense of successfully attracting these groups, but as no targets were set for the project, there is no way to definitively determine success. The project combines open days and word of mouth marketing with a service designed to appeal to learners. The managers of each centre are constantly looking for new ways to attract users and as centre users sign out the receptionist books them in for their next visit to keep people coming back. One of the most powerful moves the project made to get people in was the change from staff attire from suits and ties to t-shirts.

Learning Freeway in Romford

Learning Freeway got its approval in early 2000 for a small UK online centre at the bottom of a tower block, but after unanticipated difficulties, the centre eventually opened in September 2000 in refurbished shop premises, still in the heart of the housing estate in Romford. Since then, they've had a good response from the local community – 130 users since September – and have a waiting list for several courses. The centre was planned to target local people who wouldn't feel comfortable going to the local college for courses and at present 90% of users live only a few minutes walk away.

The centre is quite small but provides 12 pc's and 4 laptops and is open Monday to Friday with the occasional Saturday, mostly 9-5 but with some evening sessions. Because of the centre's small size and high demand, the programming is focused on 2 hour sessions for use by people who have registered and had an interview. These people may opt to do foundation or specialist taught courses that run for 5 weeks, or self-paced courses ranging from Webwise and desktop publishing to basic skills and job searching, as well as some accredited courses. Programming also includes tasters, and special events, like "Tupperware parties" with laptops, are planned for next term. The learning opportunities are complemented by progression advice and visits to colleges.

Key target groups within the local community are older people, parents and returners to work, as well as community groups. Word of mouth is the key marketing tool, the centre has waiting lists which prohibit further marketing which would bring in even more people to the centre.

MaTReC

Manor Training and Resource Centre (Matrec) is a community enterprise based in the Manor and Castle area of Sheffield. The centre was started 14 years ago by the local community and is staffed by people who have trained at the centre. The operation has grown organically in response to the demand and particular interests of users. UK online centre pilot (CMF) funding was used to provide the centre with new state of the art computers in February 2000, and has allowed the older computers to be put to use in new ways.

MaTReC has three IT suites on two upper floors, hosting a total of 70 computers, it also has a coffee bar and reception on the ground floor. The centre is open 9-3 Monday to Thursday, 3-7 on Tuesday and 5-7 on Wednesday. 600 learners attend the centre each week and are limited to one 2 hour session.

Although **learndirect** was offered, the centre staff found that in the early stages users preferred a classroom environment and the in-house developed, OCN approved learning materials. Courses are offered on a range of topics from a ten week Introduction to Computers course to more advanced desktop publishing and internet use. Drop in web access is also available to students on courses. In addition to MaTReC's own course materials, they also offer RSA and City & Guilds courses. Assessment is optional, so as not to daunt students while still offering them the option of accreditation for their achievements.

Basic skills support, career advice and support for dyslexic students is also supplied. Further opportunities for learners include student representative places on the management committee and employment positions which are all filled by people who have started as students.

Technology

The type of people attending the centres dictates what types of technology are needed in order to support their learning. For example ENTA as well as some other UK online centres use AbilityNet Software due to high proportion of dyslexic people using the centre and Larkman have a music centre which shows that many people using this centre have an interest in music through multimedia.

UK online centre	Number of Computers	Number of Laptops	Other ICT equipment
Larkman Technology Centre	13	20	Music Centre
Head to Head Training	18		web cameras and are high spec, with access to other equipment such as scanners, digital camera, camcorder, digital colour photocopier/printer
Input Output Centre now Internet Exchange	19 WG 20 SH 16 Acton	0	AbilityNet Software printers, interactive whiteboard and presentation equipment
ENTA	5 → 16	0	Webcam connected to Dyslexia Advice & Resource Centre
EETAC	15	0	AbilityNet kit and magnified screen, scanner, videoconferencing,
Knowledge Base Ltd. in Scarborough	16 Filey 14 Eastfield 45 SBS1 15 SBS2	0	scanners, printers, AbilityNet kit for 3 centres.
Learning Freeway in Romford	12	4	2 laserjet printers (1 colour, 1 black and white)
MaTReC	70	0	3 scanners, 2 digital cameras, presentation projector, laserjet and colour printer (15 printers in total)

Most of the pilot UK online centres focused on desktop computers rather than laptops, though several offered a range of interesting additional equipment.

The UK online centres' connectivity arrangements varied considerably:

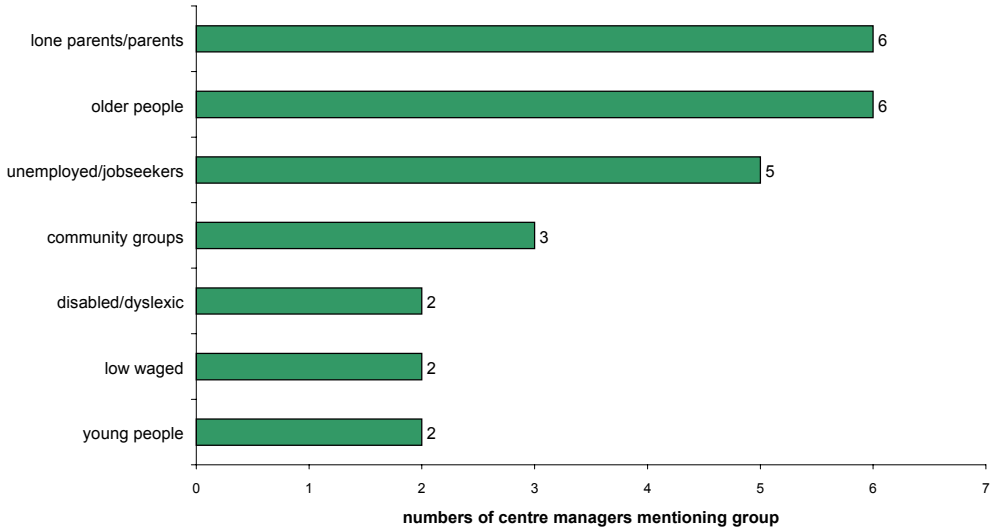
- Force 9
- SuperJanet
- BT Learning Stream, which recently replaced ISDN2E (using underspend from cancelled project)
- ISDN2

Not all UK online centre managers interviewed were clear about the connectivity their centre used as IT support and purchasing was provided by specialists elsewhere in the organisation.

Learners

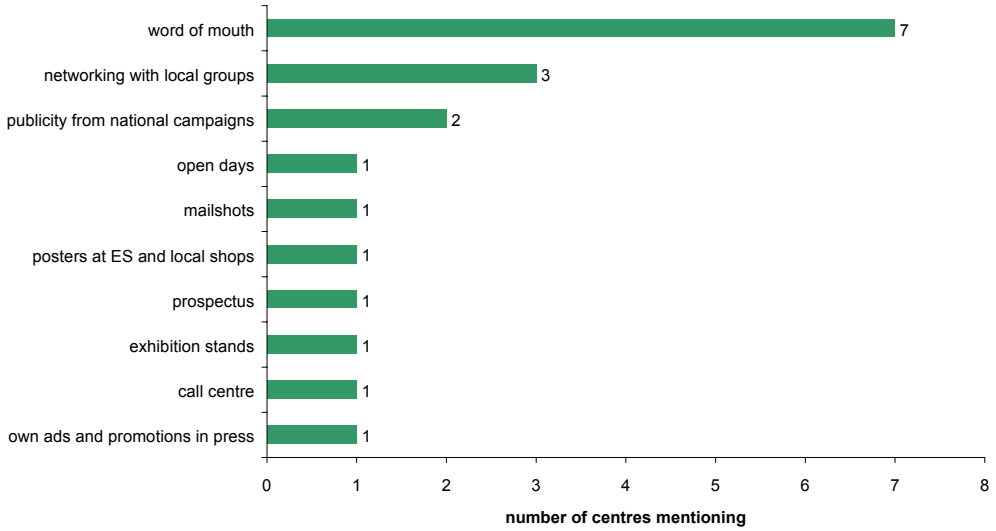
The UK online centres' **target groups** feature different aspects of the potential target group listing provided in the original guidelines of the programme. All centres said they were for the local community, particularly socially deprived people, and that no one was likely to be turned away. Chart 17, highlights the target groups mentioned in an open ended question during the telephone interviews with UK online centre managers.

Chart 17: Key targets groups mentioned



Marketing to attract these groups is still predominantly through word of mouth. Chart 18, shows that there are several other methods being used, but few by more than one centre.

Chart 18: Types of Marketing Used

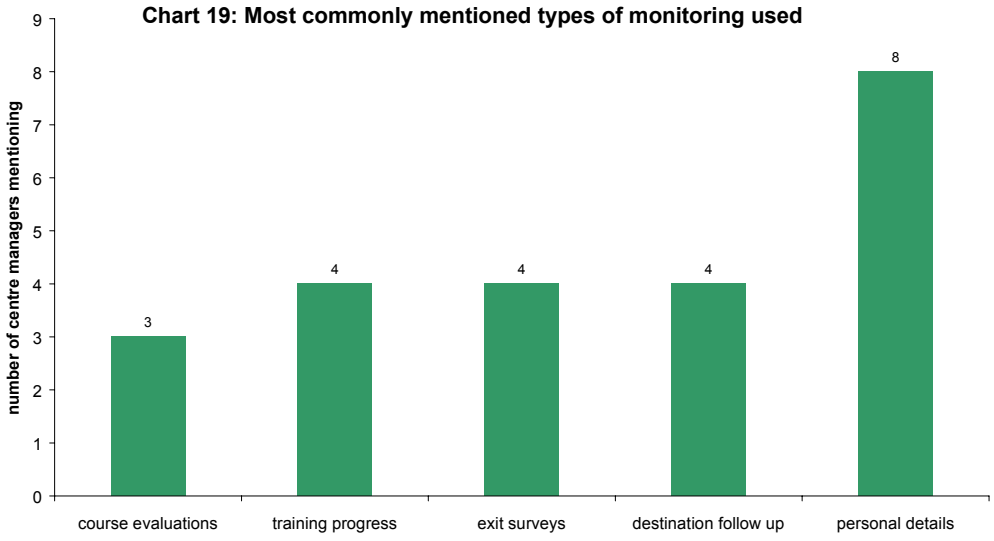


Internet Exchange was the only project with no users saying they first heard of their UK online centre through word of mouth, and the project manager not claiming word of mouth as a marketing tool. This project is run by a substantial company with UK online centres across London and a marketing machine to match – including a call centre and ads in the Sun and Metro. The Pathfinder UK online centres are in very busy areas and are entirely drop in. Users aren't required to register unless they are doing a training course and the numbers of users far exceed that of other UK online centres (estimates of 40,000 visits between the centres) – basically a very different product from other centres.

Monitoring

Although UK online centres still don't formally track users' level of digital exclusion upon arrival or on leaving, there are quite significant monitoring systems in place in most UK online centres. Internet Exchange only tracks details on people who do training, and the number of users through the door for informal drop in use – these have totalled 41,500 (by footfall counter).

All UK online centres in this study keep personal details users, usually in the format required for European or LSC funding, and this may also include attendance records. We asked UK online centre managers which types of monitoring they use and the most common answers are shown in Chart 19.



In addition, there were several other techniques used for both soft and harder monitoring. Some of the factors measured were:

- source of referral
- pass rates on qualifications
- funding stream
- improvement of quality of community groups' posters
- the centre's not been vandalised

Additional monitoring mechanisms used were:

- attendance records
- client feedback forms
- careers advice and guidance reports
- learner reps on management committee

As mentioned above, the UK online centres didn't formally track the level of digital inclusion of their users in a way that could be used for monitoring or reporting. However, they all now seemed to have solid mechanisms in place to identify client needs and interests on arrival and informally, and fit support, advice and service developments around those.

Key findings

From this telephone survey the main findings were:

- There have been over 6,000 users since opening in the UK online centres involved in this part of the survey. It is estimated that for all of the Pioneer and Pathfinder projects (including CDF) there have been over 14,500 users.

- Monitoring is varied but all UK online centres in this study monitor users to some degree. Much is basic quantitative information but one centre, ENTA, has adopted a version of an earlier Hall Aitken questionnaire as a monitoring tool

- The marketing method that UK online centre managers felt worked best was word of mouth

- There is awareness among UK online centre managers of the programme target groups but most centres respond to demand rather than try to meet all the specified target groups.

Chapter

5

Conclusions

Intended outcomes at the inception of the programme were to enable people to use ICT to enrich their lives, improve their skills and make full use of the technologies in the Information Age. The survey goes some way to determine how far the UK online centres have gone in achieving their aims.

The survey of early UK online centre users shows that computer ownership has increased among this group, they have improved economic status overall and satisfaction levels are high. Furthermore large proportions of original respondents have cited attending the UK online centre as having some part in increasing their confidence, helping them get a job, help them get a better job or promotion or encouraged them to become more involved in their community.

This is backed up by the survey of new users of the pilot UK online centres which also identified an increase in confidence, increases in ability to get jobs or promotions as well as increases in numbers of people becoming involved in their communities. Success in reaching targeted excluded groups appears to have increased since the opening of the UK online centres with higher proportions of new centre users falling into the target groups of lone parents, ethnic minorities, disabled people and those with literacy or numeracy problems.

There have been over 6000 users since opening in the centres involved in the UK online centre managers survey, although when approximating for centres not involved in this part of the study the number rises to over 14,500 users in total (including CDF).

Monitoring is varied but all UK online centres monitor users to some degree. Much is basic quantitative information but this is beginning to change as centres see a greater need for evidence to justify what they are offering. In addition there is awareness among UK online centre managers of target groups but most UK online centres respond to need rather than try to meet all target groups.

Finally in terms of engaging people the marketing method that pulled in most respondents and also that UK online centre managers cited as the most useful way of engaging people was word of mouth. There were increases however in other forms of marketing notably national advertising campaigns that individual UK online centres were not involved in.

From the evidence provided in this study it can be concluded that the pilot UK online centres have indeed had some impact on the lives of the people who use or have used the UK online centres and that the key successes have been in improving economic status, increased computer ownership among users of UK online centres, high satisfaction rates with what's offered at the UK online centres and in reaching greater numbers of the intended target groups.

Chapter

6

Appendix

Summary of the earlier report: *Formative Evaluation of the Pioneer and Pathfinder UK online centres*

The key questions for the pilot programme were:

- Are people coming to the centres?
- Are the people who are attending benefiting?
- Who should be attending?
- Are these actually the people attending?
- Why are they coming?
- What makes an effective centre?
- What did the centres need from the (then) DfEE in order to maximise their success?

These questions are addressed in the following sections.

Were people coming to the centres?

	Centre/Project	Start date	Drop-in only	Tasters	Courses	Total*
	Pathfinders					
1	Head to Head	Late May/June	10	41	38	67
2	ENTA	Late May/June	61	8	11	80
3	Hugh Baird	Late May/June	35	0	36	71
4	Stafford	Late May/June	25	35	69	129
5	Input Output	May	380	300	220	600
6	Burnley	Late May/June	68	197	80	197
7	Scarborough	Late April/May	632	0	372	1004
8	EETAC	Late May/June	0	0	54	54
	Pioneers					
9	GMBA	Feb	12	0	48	60
10	Norwich	Feb	107	0	136	243
11	CITINET	Jan/Feb	10	0	961	971
12	Mansfield	Jan	0	0	110	110
	CDF projects					
13	South Kilburn	Jan/March	1537	0	0	1537
14	Granby Island	Jan/March	120	0	20	140
15	Scotswood	Jan/March	0	0	45	45
16	Shipley	Jan/March	18	0	23	41
	Totals		**3015**	**581**	**2223**	**5349**

Estimated total usage of centres at June 2000. (Not all centres count their taster sessions as separate from drop-in. "Total" given attempts to count each user only once, though systems used for counting users varied from centre to centre and it was not always possible to accurately divide users into the above categories, therefore rows will not always add up.)

The table shows the total number of users from each of the centres surveyed, as at the end of June. This is the number of *all* users in as of June 2000, not just those we surveyed. The rough proportions of the types of use are also given.

The build up of users in the Pioneer projects appeared to be slower than in the Pathfinders – most of which had been operating for a month or less at the time of survey (mid June 2000). Some had been particularly successful at attracting good numbers quickly:

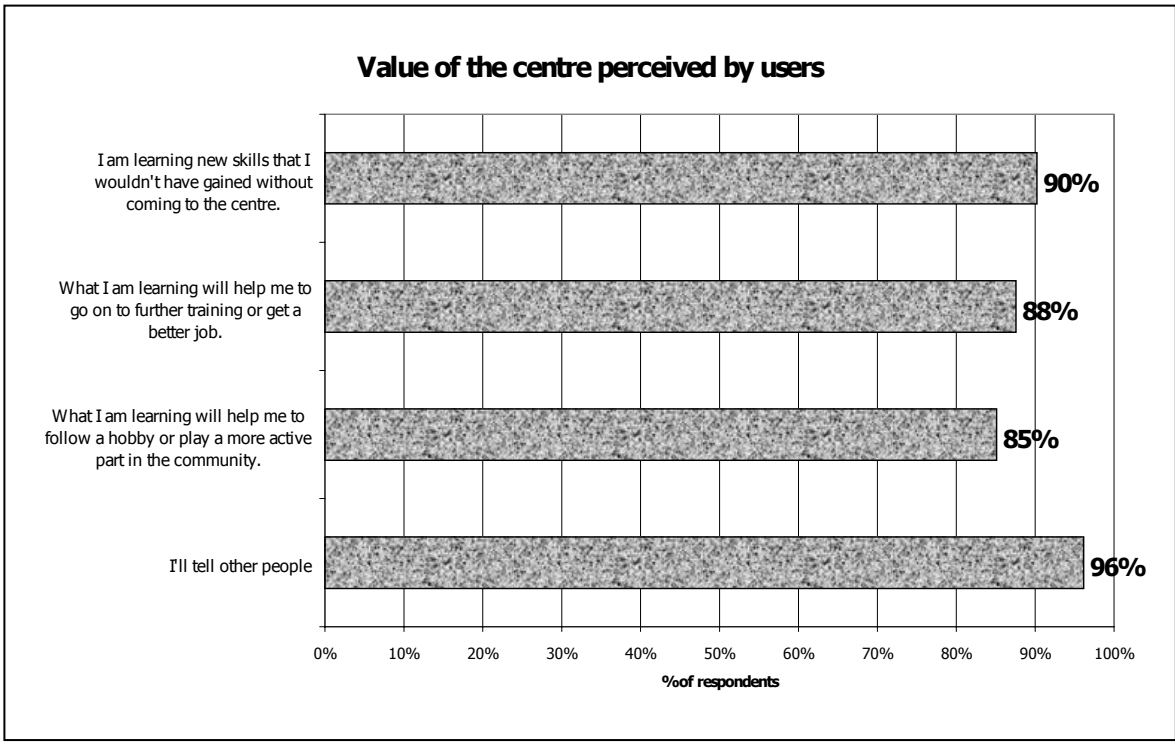
- Input Output Centre had a flood of users after putting up external signage in the form of a large banner
- Burnley was expecting their centre to be used mostly at evenings and weekends but in reality it was busy all day
- ENTA had to re-negotiate their access to the building to increase hours to keep up with demand
- Stafford had all their courses filled within 2 weeks of marketing

There were also reasons to expect that several of the centres' usage would expand for developmental reasons or early constraints to be overcome:

- ENTA and Burnley were planning bigger premises (ENTA started with 5 computers and planned to get 20 more, as well as giving out 100 home computers; Burnley started with 15 computers and planned to expand to 50 with special areas of the centre for basic skills, women's groups, graphic design)
- Input Output Centre was waiting for Individual Learning Accounts to be processed
- Mansfield experienced increased demand for courses and was exploring ways to fund extended hours

On the other hand, two centres only had revenue funding until the summer. One of these went on to fill that gap through delivering UK online Computer Training, but the other expected to shed all its dedicated ICT Learning Centre staff until new funding could be secured.

Were the people who were coming benefiting?



Value of the centres as perceived by users surveyed

Nearly all the users surveyed said they would tell friends or family about the centre so they could use it too.

High numbers felt that what they were learning would help them – whether to move on in terms of educational or career prospects or becoming more active in the community or with hobbies. The degree of scope for becoming more active in a less career related way varied from centre to centre, depending on the programming on offer.

90% of those surveyed said they were learning things they wouldn't be able to anywhere else, offering a resounding argument of additionality – for the market the centres were attracting at least.

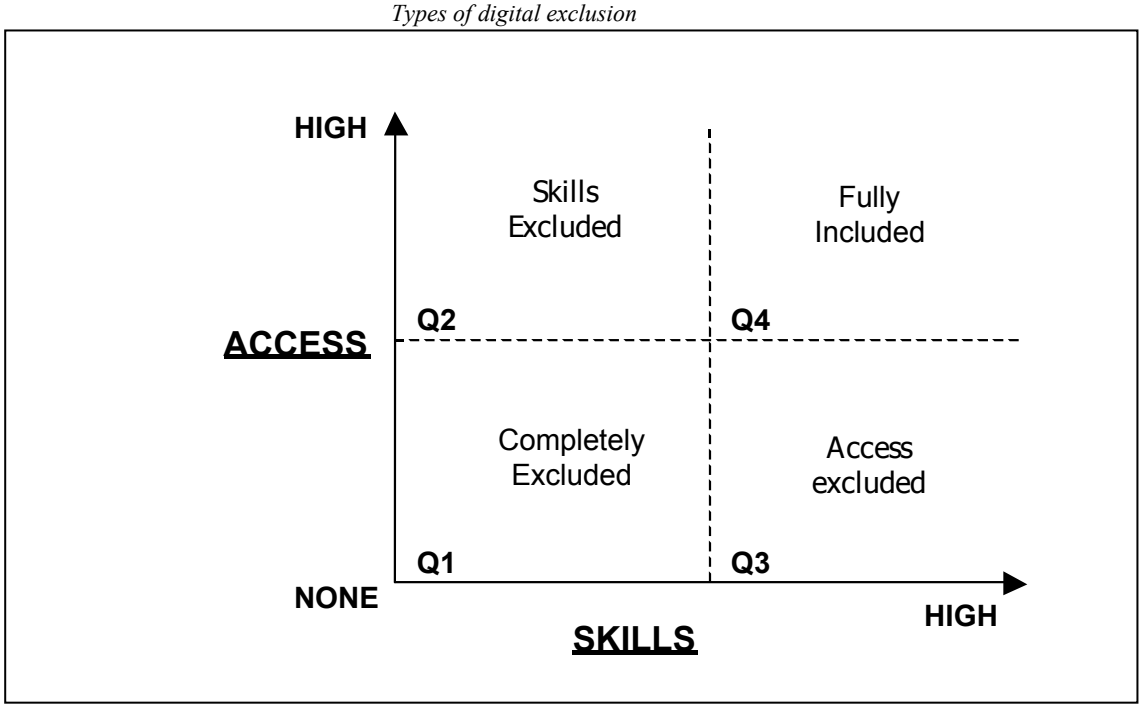
Who should be attending?

In the prospectus for the main rollout of the ICT Learning Centre Programme, the DfEE stated that, "the purpose of establishing ICT Learning Centres is to bridge the gap between those in society who have access to ICT and are able to use it competently and comfortably and those who do not".

Elsewhere the gap referred to by the DfEE is often called the "digital divide". Lack of access to ICT and lack of ability and/or confidence to use it are often referred to as "digital exclusion".

In addressing digital exclusion through the evaluation of the Pioneer and Pathfinder projects, it is important to clarify definitions, the various implications and degrees of exclusion and to provide a common framework for analysis and discussion.
The diagram below attempts to do this. It shows along one axis a range of access to ICT from "none" through to "high" – and along the other a range of "computer literacy" ranging from "none" through to "high". Although there was a tendency for there to be a direct correlation between access and literacy, individuals may occupy any place on this matrix.

Types of digital exclusion



In discussions with project managers, their own definition of "digital exclusion" and their priority groups varied. Some saw digital exclusion as being entirely in Quadrant 1 (i.e. those with no or limited access and no or limited literacy). Others made the case that anyone without access to a high specification machine with fast internet access and a high level of skills was to some degree digitally excluded and therefore fell into their target group. Certainly, it can be seen that those in Quadrants 2 and 3 suffer from some level of digital exclusion.
In addition, the prospectus and the contracts with pilot centres specified the following target groups. People who:

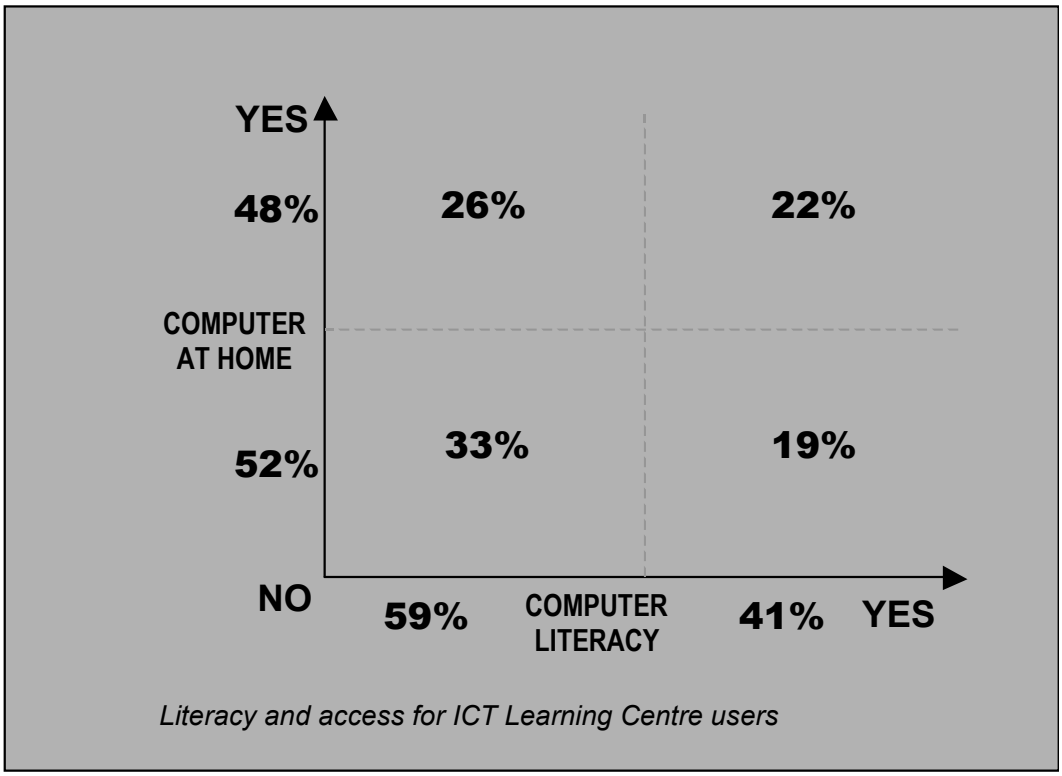
- were intimidated by ICT or felt it is irrelevant to their lives;
- lacked confidence due to a negative experience of more formal education and training;
- felt it was too late in life for them to learn to use new technology;
- were unable financially to take advantage of existing provision or feared that taking part might affect their state benefits in some way;
- have cultural traditions which made it difficult for them to access provision;
- were physically or psychologically isolated and felt that what was currently on offer was not practical or appropriate; and those who
- ran or worked in small businesses that gave low priority to training and development or were not making effective use of ICT.

Finally the programme was intended to concentrate on the two thousand most deprived wards in England and in particular on those who experience social exclusion. This includes people who:

- were lone parents
- considered themselves disabled
- considered themselves a member of an ethnic minority
- lived on a housing estate that suffers from vandalism
- lived in a rural area with quite a lot of poverty
- had some difficulty with reading
- had some difficulty with arithmetic
- were unemployed

Were these people being attracted to the centres?

Mix of digital exclusion experienced by users of the centres, average of centres



The profile of users indicates that at least 78% of users of the centres fell within the general target group of being digitally excluded. The remaining 22% may have had good access to a computer and some level of computer skills. Feedback from focus groups suggests that at least some of these people were likely to lack sufficient skills or a sufficiently high specification machine or an internet connection.

We undertook a telephone survey of local residents in five areas. This indicated that only around 7% of the local population who had a computer at home could not use it. This compares to 26% of the centre users being in this category. This suggests that the centres were being particularly successful in drawing in those who did have a computer in the home but who could not use it.

The following table details the proportion of users surveyed that identified themselves as falling into different socially excluded groups.

Disadvantage	% of respondents
Lone parent	10%
Ethnic minority	2%
Housing estate with crime and vandalism	18%
Rural area with much poverty	5%
Literacy problems	2%
Numeracy problems	6%
Disability	13%
Unemployed and seeking work	31%

Representation of socially excluded groups among centre users (not mutually exclusive) (self selected)

The centres appear to be reaching a reasonable mix of the population, on the basis of age and gender, as shown in the table below. However, older people and young men appear to need special attention to involve them in the centres.

age group	males		females	
	National avg	**Survey**	National avg	**Survey**
16-44	26%	**18%**	25%	**39%**
45-65	15%	**15%**	14%	**20%**
over 65's	8%	**3%**	12%	**3%**

Profile of age and gender of users of the centres vs national averages, based on Regional trends, 1996.

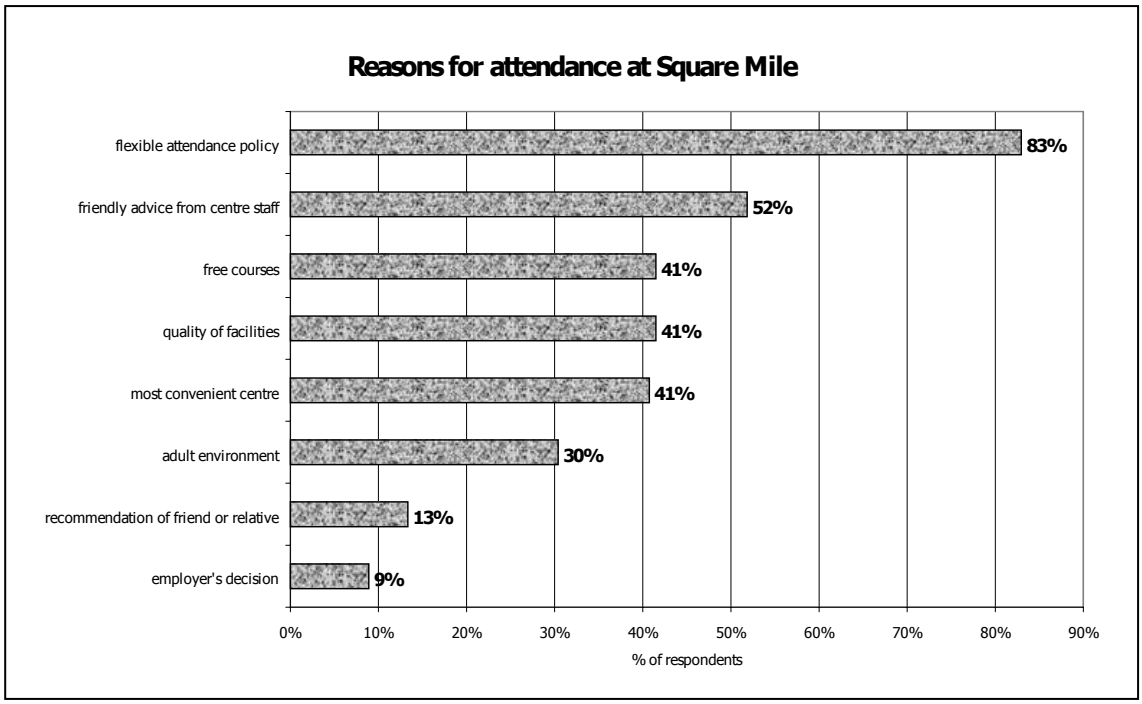
* **Users' survey respondents** are indicated in **bold** and national averages in plain text

Some of the target group definitions were too subtle to address with a standard questionnaire. Through focus groups and discussions with project managers, we could suggest the following levels of success.
The pilot centres were being successful in reaching people in the following groups; those who:

- lack confidence due to a negative experience of more formal education and training
- were unable financially to take advantage of existing provision or feared that taking part might affect their state benefits in some way
- were physically or psychologically isolated and felt that what was currently on offer was not practical or appropriate
- felt it was too late in life to learn to use new technology
- were intimidated by ICT or felt it was irrelevant to their lives

Why did they come?

The table below shows common responses to this question in a survey carried out by Square Mile Training Centre. Focus groups and interviews with users at the other centres showed that these views were representative across the centres (with the exception of 'employer's decision, which was not relevant elsewhere).



Reasons for attendance

Other comments made consistently in focus groups with users included:

- *It's more friendly and intimate so the environment is less daunting and easier to feel at home in.*
- *There is no pressure – to hurry through the course, to commit to a long term qualification, to get the answer right on the first try.*
- *There is a higher tutor/learner ratio than at colleges.*
- *The approach provides a much gentler warm up to computers than a college or internet café would offer and builds confidence.*
- *Tutors tend to be very patient, letting you try their advice on how to do something, rather than too quickly doing it for you, and they are happy to answer the same question over and over until the answer sinks in for you.*
- *There's a high quality setting with nice furnishings, pleasant décor and high spec computers – changing the image of what people in socially deprived areas are offered*

Differences in motivation to use the centre by gender

Male and female users had different interests that attracted them to centres.

Men were more interested in internet-based activities:

- using the internet to find information
- sending e-mail to friends and family
- using the internet for fun
- pursuing a hobby or researching a project
- learning to create a website

Women, on the other hand, were looking at computers as a way to improve their employability or be more useful at helping their children with homework. The topics that were clearly preferred more by female users were:

- studying computer skills
- learning computers to keep up
- finding out what computers can do

- learning computers to improve job prospects
- learning to type letters
- learning to make posters
- meeting other people

These differences correlate with the usage profile of centres offering different types of provision. Women were more attracted to the centres with structured courses and men were more attracted to centres that encourage drop-in and less structured activity.

Differences between age groups

There were also differences in what different age groups were looking for:

- only two activities were chosen by 50% or more of 15-24 year olds as reasons to come to the ICT centre – e-mail and searching the internet
- 25-44 year olds and 45-65 year olds each had four activities that appealed to 50% or more respondents. These were: learning about computers, keeping up with the world, searching the internet for information, improving their job prospects
- the over 65's responding to the survey had the broadest range of interests – with six topics of interest to 50% or more of them. These included: finding out what computers can do, keeping up with the world, studying computer skills, using the internet to find information, sending e-mail, and poster making.

What makes an effective centre?

The link between programming and client group

The pilot projects took a variety of approaches to attracting people who are digitally excluded. The 'product' on offer seems to have an impact on the nature of the client group.

Centres largely based on ***providing courses*** on a programmed basis tended to attract ***people who already had computers but limited computer skills*** and/or had an existing level of motivation to learn about computers.

Centres largely based around ***drop in*** access tended to attract those who had at ***least basic computer skills but who had no or limited access*** to a computer.

Centres providing ***a mix of approaches***, with courses, drop in access, community use, games, use of graphic and photography packages etc were particularly successful at attracting ***those with neither computer skills nor access to a computer.***

Effective approaches to working with the client groups

The early stage of most of the pilots meant that it was too soon to be able to produce robust findings on the longer-term outputs and impacts of each centre. The level of client satisfaction tended to be uniformly high. The following list of effective approaches is therefore our subjective impression of approaches that appeared to be producing early results.

Effective marketing orientated approaches included:

- location in a 'high street' location – this is not always possible as many targeted communities lack such facilities, but projects situated in shopping parades and in well located libraries were attracting good numbers of people
- using community link workers to tell local groups about the new centres and what they could offer
- having centre staff go door to door speaking to people who live near the centre to tell them what's opening, why it might be of interest to them and answering questions
- offering a free, high spec home computer with free wireless internet access, to anyone who spends 30 hours at the learning centre, doing whatever learning they like
- featuring in leaflets case studies of real people from the harder to attract groups whose lives have been changed by ICT and distributing these extensively
- targeting men by locating in a football club and a pub

More content oriented approaches include:

- ensuring drop-in access was available in parallel with any courses running

- offering project related courses like local and family history research that use the internet and word processing but also working creatively in groups (many centre users and managers commented on the social value of the centre)
- providing a special graphic design area to let people experiment with computers and produce something to show off at home, even if the user had literacy problems or had never used a computer
- running groups like Bible studies, gardening or bingo, but using an internet component
- training colleagues offering other services to use the ICT facilities and bring their own users into the centre as part of other activities

What do centres need from DfEE?

Secure and flexible revenue funding

Degree of revenue funding security	No. centres
Secure funding	2
Shuffling resources in hopes that it will work out in the medium term	8
No revenue funding over the summer	3

Revenue funding security of centres

Although the ICT Learning Centres project was a capital programme, there were many revenue requirements before centres could be successful – from staffing to providing childcare. Most projects have inadequate and/or insecure revenue streams. This was already having an adverse effect upon their success in focusing on the project goals, and was likely to worsen rather than to improve.

There are three implications of this:

a) First, projects will struggle to maintain viability, sustainability and quality, with obvious impacts on their ability to reach target audiences

b) Second, projects will inevitably be drawn to the more certain and more widely available funding sources, which will tend to be more suited to those learners with some level of skill/access

c) Third, as good practice develops and new approaches are identified to reach the most excluded people, centres will not be able to act on these opportunities, and the results of their work, and thus the DfEE's investment, will be incomplete

Policy co-ordination and streamlining of funding applications procedures

There was substantial confusion at the project level in the linking together of various ICT initiatives currently underway. In particular most centres encountered a high level of difficulty using **learndirect**. Given that the University for Industry itself was in the early stages of development the specific problems and criticisms articulated in themselves may not be important.

In general, project managers commented on the difficulty in understanding and co-ordinating the various national initiatives at a local level. This encompassed a wide range of initiatives including UK online, New Opportunities Fund, and the Peoples Network. The more local strategic funding mechanisms such as New Deal for Communities appeared to be playing a key role in bringing some local co-ordination, although we did not review enough centres in this position to make this a firm conclusion.

Access to or possibly support for developing good learning materials

Many centres had developed their own learning materials. Few found the **learndirect** materials available at that point were relevant to their users. In general, there was a lack of awareness of what was available and a general feeling by project managers that bespoke material would be of benefit.

Support mechanisms for project management

In particular, project managers expressed a desire for more accessible advice and idea sharing on:

- generally sharing ideas and asking advice from other centres
- on project development, marketing, learning materials, developing learners into tutors
- for accessing up to date technical advice

The mode of delivering this type of support was discussed in terms of what worked and what didn't and why. The main themes were:

- It was very expensive to travel to seminars, pay for accommodation and find and pay for replacement staff
- Seminars held by UfI or others seemed to be much more for the benefit and needs of programme funders than those people delivering the programme
- The idea of an electronic forum in an enclosed web environment was popular among several centres and one centre was already participating in one such forum