

**UK ONLINE IN CAMDEN:
UNDERSTANDING GOOD PRACTICE IN
ENGAGING LEARNERS AND THEIR
COMMUNITIES
FINAL REPORT**

UMA PATEL AND JOANNA BURKE

Uma Patel (*main contact*)

Lecturer (E Learning for Adults)
City University,
Dept. of Education and Life Long Learning,
Northampton Square,
London,
EC1 HOB
Tel: 0207 040 8254
Fax: 0207 040 8256
Email: u.patel@city.ac.uk

TOUCH2000 E Learning Services
41 Nelson Road,
Poole,
BH12 1ES
Tel: 01202 768 164
Fax: 01202 763 128

Joanna Burke

Consultant (self employed)
62A Braemar Avenue,
London,
N22 7BY
Tel/Fax 0208 889 8792
Email: joanna@burkej.demon.co.uk

September 2004

Disclaimer The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of people involved in the research or the funding group.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Brian Mitchell and Iffat Shahnaz for initiating the research, framing the challenging question, and providing invaluable feedback at every stage. We would also like to thank Violeta Ilendo, Lenka Wymer, Ashoka Norman and Nick Durant, they have taken part in discussions, at various times, and their views have helped to shape the direction of this work.

Our most grateful thanks go to the people we interviewed in the UK Online centres, without their cooperation, and willingness to share their experiences, this research would not have been possible.

CONTENT

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
2 INTRODUCTION	2
3 CONTEXT	3
3.1 Methodology.....	4
3.1.1 Data collection.....	5
3.1.2 Analysis.....	5
3.2 Outputs	5
4 MAIN FINDINGS.....	5
5 FINDINGS.....	7
5.1 Typology of UK Online centres	7
5.1.1 Critical threshold capacity	8
5.1.2 Types of Centres.....	9
5.2 How do people know about what is offered by UK Online?	10
5.2.1 Location and buildings - factors that cannot be controlled	11
5.2.2 Marketing ‘learning opportunities’ vs. marketing a facility for using computers and accessing the Internet.	12
5.2.3 Marketing and leadership.....	14
5.3 What is the relationship between target groups and the local community?.....	15
5.3.1 What is community?.....	15
5.3.2 Subtle interpretation of ‘community’	16
5.4 Are there different types and stages of engagement?.....	17
5.4.1 What is engagement?	18
5.4.2 Proactive and broad strategic actions	20
5.5 What are learner needs for widening and deepening participation?	20
5.5.1 Targeting ‘access needs’ and ‘ICT skills needs’	21
5.5.2 Developing the whole learner identity	24
5.6 How is the centre managed (strategically)?	27
5.6.1 Effective characteristics in centre teams.....	27
5.6.2 Effective practice in ICT support.....	28
5.7 Designing learning materials, learning facilitation and staff development.....	30
5.7.1 External providers and vertical progression	30
5.7.2 Designing learning materials.....	31
5.7.3 Learning to teach and staff development	32
6 GOOD PRACTICE FRAMEWORK	34
6.1 General Recommendations	34
6.2 Centre Level Planning and Review	35
7 CONCLUSION.....	37
8 REFERENCES	38

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research is concerned with what makes a UK Online centre successful in engaging non traditional (digitally excluded) learners and their communities. We developed a typology of centres to characterise effective practices in centres which vary widely in locality, stages of development and management structure.

We found there is a critical threshold capacity for a UK Online centre to be viable, and that marketing is about the image of learning and visibility of UK Online physical centres, as well as the 'learning on offer'. We found that engaging learners involves targeting individual learners, learning groups, community centre users and the local community.

We also found that the most valuable asset for effective practice are the people working with learners, to build confident learning identities, and create new and novel informal learning opportunities. Set against this are limited channels of communication for sharing and building on good practice, pockets of low self esteem, and in some cases a narrowing vision of the social justice agenda.

2 INTRODUCTION

In May 2004, the Management Group for the UK Online centres in Camden commissioned independent research to inform strategic planning in the next phase of development. The purpose of the research was to develop an understanding of effective local practice and ask the question: "what is good practice in engaging learners and their communities"?

Quantitative survey data is useful for tracking policy aims, and as a starting point, but can also be a blunt instrument for understanding how to engage with communities so that learning opportunities are taken up. To do this we need to explore the dimensions of what 'better' service looks like from the point of view of engaging learners in their communities. At the same time there is a clear role for innovative and imaginative learning and teaching activities that are emerging in practice. In this sense the research was not an evaluation of the centres - it was explicitly assets-led, looking for what worked and developing an understanding of why. This meant there was a natural focus on teams (i.e. human assets), existing practice and future possibilities. We wanted to know about critical factors in engaging learners and their community including:

- How UK Online teams operate and their relationship to the community and the learner
- What activities lead to 'better' engagement for learners and their communities
- How learning design (including curriculum), delivery, learner support, and management of learning resources impact on engagement
- The next steps for replicating good practice, for sustainability and growth

The objectives of the research were to:

1. Characterise effective practice in engaging learners
2. Characterise effective practice in building relationships to the learner communities

3. Model the dimensions of 'good practice' in engaging learners and their communities
4. Make recommendations about the dimensions of good practice

It is important to stress that our research is qualitative. The field work was carried out in 13 UK Online centres, and to understand the findings we draw extensively on published findings from large scale user surveys (e.g. Wyatt et al, 2003, Morrell et al, 2004); field work in 'Learning and Change in Adult Life' (e.g. Schuller et al, 2002); and the conceptual literature in community development (e.g. Davidson 1998).

The approach to data collection and analysis was wholly qualitative. We dealt with understanding *meaning* in talk and action (i.e. what people said and did), and *the messages* in the 'visual and verbal cues in the physical environment'. As part of the analysis, numerical secondary data and scales are used to discuss patterns and connections, but there is **no claim** that the graphical representations have any statistical significance.

This research takes on the challenge of modelling current practice and community engagement so that desirable outcomes can be reproduced deliberately and repeatedly by strategic actions. The relationship between outcome and 'good practice' is complex and evolving, and we have avoided any implication of simple cause and effect by using visual metaphors and theoretical constructs to present the findings.

All the findings in this report are offered for critical reflection and refinement and should not be taken as definitive or absolute.

3 CONTEXT

UK Online is part of the government's social inclusion agenda. From the government (funding) perspective the aim is to bridge the gap between those who have access and can use information and communication technology (ICT), and those who cannot. UK Online centres, funded by the Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF), are located 'in the community' in places that are easy to access, open at convenient times, and that people visit frequently. Success criteria are broadly defined in terms of increased awareness of ICT, and short and long term gains as a result of improving ICT skills and having access. In a wider sense UK Online is part of neighbourhood renewal and the regeneration agenda, and fundamentally concerned with reaching socially excluded groups and increasing participation in the local community.

The UK Online project in the London Borough of Camden coordinates the work of 26¹ centres organised in 6 zones. Each centre is physically part of some existing community space e.g. library or community space. The centres vary in size, staffing structure, and management style, but technical support is provided centrally².

The centres are set targets, and required to return quantitative data as part of the funding. To supplement this data, 'success' stories and case studies have also been documented. Local and national data can be interpreted to draw conclusions about actual usage of facilities, on how many new opportunities for access are

¹ Source <http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/leisure/libraries-and-online-learning-centres/uk-online-centres.en>

² Community centres are serviced by a dedicated IT professional and Libraries are serviced by a team under the banner of 'Leisure IT mobile'.

provided, on qualifications achieved by learners, and learner responses to survey questions around increase in confidence and re-engagement in learning.

This style of investigation is a useful base line and indicates in relative terms which centres and localities might be providing a 'better' service with 'more' success in engaging learners in their communities.

This project is about going beyond indicators and towards what leads to 'success' in engaging learners in their communities and using this evidence, and understanding, to inform future good practice.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

This research is concerned with effective practice at the level of the UK Online centre. No learners were interviewed, instead it was assumed that learner needs represented in the sample centres could be characterised from published findings of large scale user-surveys (e.g. Hall Aitken Associates, 2002; Wyatt et al, 2003). We wanted to avoid a local inventory list of 'needs'.

The research was designed in 2 stages. We first analysed the secondary data and looked for similarities and differences between the centres in relation to performance. Performance was taken from the secondary data reporting on 'new learners' compared to the target 'new learners' expected. To interpret the complicated pattern of activity reported by the centres we identified key concepts from the literature, like 'community', 'engagement', 'learner need', 'good ICT environment', 'tutoring', 'teaching' and 'supporting'.

This informed the next stage which was the design of questionnaires, protocols and other data collection tools¹ including:

1. Structured Questionnaire: Centre managers and IT support roles.
2. In-depth Interview plan (unstructured): for teaching and learning roles and strategic roles.
3. Observation protocol for analysis of visual cues and messages in the physical environment.
4. Researcher's diary.

At this stage we also segmented the pool of potential interviewees into 6 roles:

1. Pathfinder: person with a strategic or management function.
2. Centre manager: person with overall responsibility for a UK Online centre including for compliance.
3. Professional Tutor: person with responsibility for teaching and learning in the centre including deploying support staff and liaison with external providers.
4. Learning Resource Assistant (LRA): person whose primary role is to support learners, often one-to-one or in a small group.
5. ICT support: person who provides technical support for all the hardware and software in the centres.

¹ Available in Patel, U. & Burke, J. (2004) *UK Online in Camden: Interim Report*. Camden CAL. (CamdenInterimReportv2.pdf)

6. Expert in community development who is also a local key witness: a person with recognised community development expertise with a long term association with the local communities, agencies and campaigns.

3.1.1 Data collection

From a sample of 13 UK Online centres we collected observation data from 13 sites. Where interviewees fell into two role , we used a combination of structured interview and discussion topics. Interview data was collected as follows:

ICT support 1, Pathfinders 3, Professional Tutors 2, Centre Manager/Professional Tutor 4, Centre Managers 6, Centre Manager/Community Witness 1, Learning Resource Assistants (LRAs) 3.

The interviews were transcribed. In accordance with the British Educational Research Association (BERA)¹ ethical guidelines precautions have been taken to protect the confidentiality of both participants and data. Data has been rewritten and interpreted so that all references to people and specifics are made anonymous.

3.1.2 Analysis

As part of the analysis process all the interviews were transcribed and numerical data entered on a spread sheet.

To make sense of the interview data we adopted a four stage process:

1. The data was first described using the question 'what is going on here?'
2. We looked for relevant findings and concepts in the literature and tested these against the data, working inductively from the descriptive accounts. This meant that we were not just looking at responses to questions but at what people said, how they said it, different ways of saying the same thing, and where the meaning was different even though the same words and terms were used.
3. The data was expanded by using key concepts to code the transcribed interviews. The data which linked numbers to words (e.g scales) were represented visually.
4. The final stage is where the themes and patterns are interpreted and an explanation is offered.

3.2 OUTPUTS

- Project Specification: UK Online in Camden: engaging learners and their communities (7th June 2004)
- UK Online in Camden: interim report (28th June 2004)
- UK ONLINE IN CAMDEN: UNDERSTANDING GOOD PRACTICE IN ENGAGING LEARNERS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES (including a section on Planning Good Practice)

4 MAIN FINDINGS

1. There is a critical threshold capacity without which a UK Online centre lacks identity. The critical mass seems to be around 8 machines, dedicated space

¹ <http://www.bera.ac.uk/guidelines.html>

where computers are always visible, and 3 days per week of continuous access (including guided learning time).

2. Half day sessions of guided learning time are difficult to co-ordinate due to the drop-in nature of potential learners.
3. There is a difference in scale between UK Online centres in a Library (L) compared to a Community Centre (CC). Libraries attract learners who are comfortable in using public services.
4. UK Online centres can usefully be described in terms of generalised forms. While a few centres will be recognisable as wholly one type or another, most centres will combine characteristics but lean towards one of the type. The types (or forms) are ACTIVE and SUBMERGED. ACTIVE type is subdivided into ACTIVE INTEGRATED and ACTIVE ADD ON.
5. ACTIVE centres are visible (switched on and on display) and provide visual cues in the centre as to what is being offered.
6. ACTIVE centres tend to be led by an experienced learning facilitator (sometimes called professional tutor, UK Online project manager, or teacher). This person will tend to support the Learning Resource Assistants (LRAs), volunteers, and monitor external providers.
7. ACTIVE INTEGRATED centres are proactive in creating new informal and semi formal learning opportunities.
8. ACTIVE INTEGRATED centres emphasise access to learning with hidden structures for drop-in learners.
9. ACTIVE INTEGRATED centres emphasise collaborative working, team work and groups having fun while learning.
10. In ACTIVE INTEGRATED centres, the UK Online facility is managed as part of the community development. The community of learners are the communities that use the centre.
11. ACTIVE ADD-ON centres want greater local control of equipment and software configuration - there is some preoccupation with the technology.
12. All the centres face similar challenges with regards to residential location and 'look and feel' of the building in which the centre is housed.
13. There is a difference in perspective on marketing UK Online: as offering 'relevant and interesting learning opportunities', compared to marketing UK Online as a 'facility for access to computers and the internet' (comparable to an Internet Café).
14. ACTIVE centres have an implicit rolling programme of on-going marketing combining the elements of 'inviting and attracting', 'welcoming and informing' giving a first impression that the centre is well organised and a safe place to learn for non-traditional learners.
15. ACTIVE INTEGRATED centres target self inclusive communities in groups where new learners include themselves (where new learners share common identity, issues, interests, purpose and goals).
16. New learning communities develop where ICT teaching is combined with group working and collaborative teaching and learning strategies. This is a sure start to bolstering up fragile learning identity.
17. ACTIVE learning centres target new learning opportunities at communities using the centre. There is potential for offering ICT as a part of basic skills and ESOL or combined 'key skills' and 'learning to learn' classes.
18. Projects which target known needs of local communities in the area have shown promising results in terms of recruiting new learners.
19. Effective practice in engaging learners and their communities should aim to build up critical mass of good practice at four levels simultaneously (referred to in the report as 'Individual learners', 'Learning groups', 'Community centre users' and 'local communities').

20. The role of person to person recruitment of the most digitally excluded should not be underestimated.
21. The LRA and the professional tutors offer personal inspiration and role models to encourage perseverance.
22. Progression can be horizontal and vertical. Greater involvement in the local community, and increased confidence was recognised as progression. Informal progression was celebrated in success stories, and in the ACTIVE centres with local awards and media coverage.
23. Community centres have a role in encouraging progression to use of library services and formal courses offered by Further Education Collages.
24. There is a link between the range of formal programmes and informal learning opportunities and the success of centres in reaching the most digitally excluded sections of the community.
25. ACTIVE centres are strategic in targeting different types of digital exclusion (access/skills exclusion) and treat these like market segments.
26. The basis of a holistic view of the learner is person-to-person engagement but this goes beyond the niceties of interpersonal skills to good learning facilitation skills.
27. There is a significant difference in the structure of management between centres which are ACTIVE compared to SUBMERGED.
28. There is a positive confidence exerted by the professional tutors which is a strong empowering influence to other workers in the centre.
29. A knock-on effect of this confidence (or missing confidence), is the discrepancy in how LRAs are deployed, engaged and perceived.
30. ICT support structure is robust and sound.
31. There is scope for some extension of the ICT support function to include management of learning materials and statistical information.
32. Collaborative design workshops which produce learning materials can be a vehicle for wider staff development in 'learning to learn', and 'facilitation of learning'.
33. We found areas of exemplary good practice but limited channels of communication for sharing this or realising its worth.
34. We found that team building and determining priorities for staff development in collaboration with the LRAs and professional tutors is perceived to be a priority.

5 FINDINGS

The findings are reported in terms of what works. To do this it is desirable to look for patterns and exemplars from what is present rather than what is absent or problematic. At the same time it has to be recognised that there are different forms of good practice relevant to different types of centres. The types of centres described in the typology are generalised forms. While a few centres will be recognisable as wholly one type or another, **most centres will combine characteristics but lean towards one of the types**. The characteristics that define the typology are used to present and discuss the findings.

5.1 TYPOLOGY OF UK ONLINE CENTRES

UK Online centres in the libraries were perceived to be a different kind of 'operation' from those based in the community centres. The data shows that there is a difference of scale between UK Online centres in the libraries compared to

community centres. Compared to the community centres, libraries have more support staff, more experienced staff and professional tutors as well as more equipment, dedicated space, and longer opening hours.

Quote(s) i: Perceptions of difference between library and community centres

“The libraries are juggernauts.”

“..Walk in and help is there hovering, it is a professional service for all to see.”

“Libraries are set up like a public service, but there is more and more service to do with learning... and UK Online centres in the library are part of this”

Figure 1 shows a rough comparison based on capacity (number of machines, opening hours) and performance¹. 11 centres are included². The locations divide into centres housed in a library or in a community centre (CC). Performance is against targets set in the project monitoring document¹.

The number of new learners recruited by CC1, CC2, CC3 is close to the number recruited by ‘Library 1’ but all three centres have half the equipment compared to the library. It is worth noting that this library is open 3 days per week while the centres are open from 3 to 5 days per week.

Beyond this observation, characterising differences between UK Online in the community centres is more complex.

An obvious divide is between those centres that are meeting the targets for recruiting new learners and those that are not. Note that targets are already calibrated so smaller centres are set smaller targets (e.g. CC4 and CC5). If we look only at contrasting examples: CC4 is accessible for only 8 hours, and the laptops are stored and inaccessible at other times, but this centre is exceeding targets where as CC6 has longer opening hours and dedicated space, but is not recruiting the expected new learners. CC2 and CC7 have a similar number of computers and mix of laptops and desktop machines but again there is a performance difference.

From comparisons of this kind there seems no obvious causal connection between size and balance of laptops and desktops and performance in recruiting new learners (please refer to figure 1).

5.1.1 Critical threshold capacity

Our observations of patterns in relating ‘capacity’ to ‘performance’ are guesswork and by no means conclusive. The sample size is small and some speculation is inevitable. Having said that, our sense is that the ‘on target’ centres do not, in general, have extra capacity in terms of equipment, space or longer access hours. However:

- In some case ‘access’ is not the same as community centre opening hours and equipment is only available during ‘guided learning hours’ (when an LRA is on

¹ 2GM08_phase2_Year 1 RC Section 8.doc final document 03104

² Two centres are not included. The data for one was not available for the other not reliable

duty). This fragmentation of access hours presents problems in terms of engaging with learners.

- Even when centres are open and equipment has dedicated space and so in theory accessible for learning, in reality access is only seen as possible by the external learners when a professional tutor or LRA is available. Equipment is used by staff (internal learners) in the community centre and is regarded as a useful resource.
- There is a critical threshold capacity without which a centre lacks identity. The critical mass seems to be around 8 machines, dedicated space where computers are always visible, and 3 days per week of continuous access (and guided learning time).

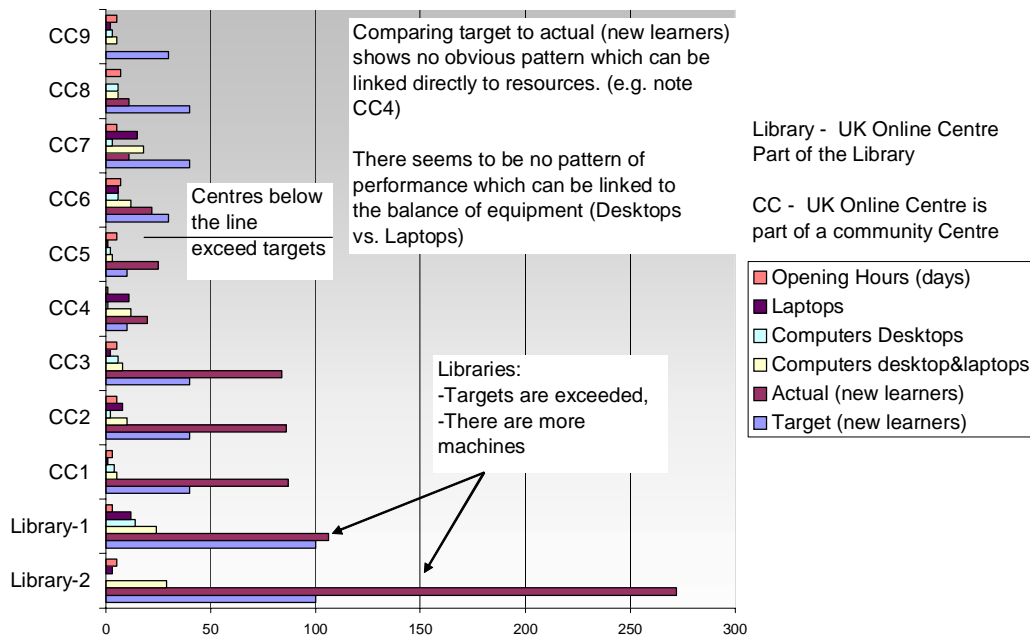


Figure 1. A rough comparison of the centres based on 'capacity' and 'performance' data

5.1.2 Types of Centres

Returning again to the search for similarities and differences between centres, we believe that broadly 'on target' centres share two characteristics:

1. **Visibility:** in the sense that the centre is permanently on display, switched on and Internet ready, (as opposed to lap tops which are set up from time to time). Visibility also includes visual cues in the environment which indicate that the centre exists; identifies the learning opportunities on offer and at what times, and which learner communities are invited and especially welcome.
2. **A UK Online development manager** who is also an experienced professional tutor and who manages all aspects of the learning including the LRAs, volunteers, and monitoring of external providers.

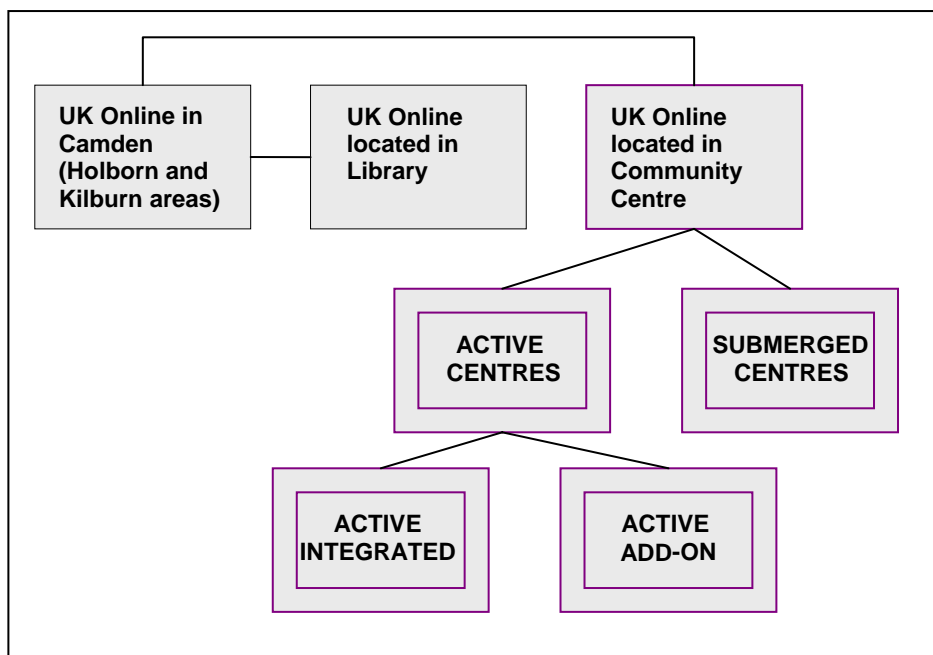


Figure 2. Classification based on characterising qualitative differences between the UK Online centres in the sample.

In this sense the ‘on target’ centres are ‘ACTIVE’ as opposed to the others centres which exhibit lower visibility because the equipment is stored, difficult to access or the centre is open for only two days per week or less. These centres are submerged under other activities and can be described as ‘SUBMERGED’.

A subset of the ‘ACTIVE’ centres are highly regarded by all the five respondent groups and scored a high observation score for evidence of effective practice. Closer examination suggests that this type of centre has two characteristics:

1. Proactive and mature management which is rooted in community learning (as opposed to ICT skills development), with particular emphasis on informal learning, team work, and creating learning opportunities.
2. UK Online provision is managed as part of community development, which means that projects are actively integrated with other work in the community centre.

This type of centre can be called ‘INTEGRATED’ because it goes some way towards embedding UK Online into the main activities of the centre.

This classification of centres is summarised in Figure 2 and is used as a reference point in the analysis that follows.

5.2 HOW DO PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT WHAT IS OFFERED BY UK ONLINE?

To understand how people know what is offered by UK Online we interpreted ‘marketing’ in the broadest sense to include perceptions of image (what is UK Online) and presentation of the facilities (how it feels).

Apart from critical threshold capacity (section 5.1.1), a prerequisite to engaging learners is getting learners to come to the centre, to stay, and to return. To explore what the learner experiences we looked at the visual cues in the physical

environment and what these tell the new learner about what to expect. We also asked the community centre managers how the centre is marketed and their perception of how effective this is. A list of marketing options was used to facilitate the discussion about what works (see table 1). We wanted to understand what learners might find:

1. inviting and attracting (before coming and outside the centre)
2. welcoming and informing (once inside the centre)
3. organised and accommodating (impression within the first half hour)

Table 1: A list of marketing options used to facilitate the discussion	
Leaflets in the centres/libraries	Media (local paper, radio, posters)
Mail drops	Telemarketing
Leaflets handed out on the street	Getting to adults through children
Posters	Schools
Word of mouth	Clubs and places of entertainment
Web sites	Stalls and stands
Community events	
Passing trade (street location)	added by respondents:
Location (commercial facility)	Advertising with Camden personnel
Taster course to existing groups	Cross marketing with City
Community survey	

5.2.1 Location and buildings - factors that cannot be controlled

There are some aspects of the UK Online centres that cannot be changed, but could be impacting on attracting learners e.g. location. Using the data from the observation protocol a rough analysis of observation data offers some insights into differences and similarities between the ACTIVE and the SUBMERGED centres.

Location cannot be changed. We looked at how easy or difficult it is to see each centre from the street (visibility), actually find the centre, and get to the centre by public transport. It seems that apart from one library location, all the centres are 'fairly to very difficult' to see, or find (see figure 3). This is true of the ACTIVE centre and the SUBMERGED centres. Based on this impression it seems that ACTIVE centres are effective inspite of location.

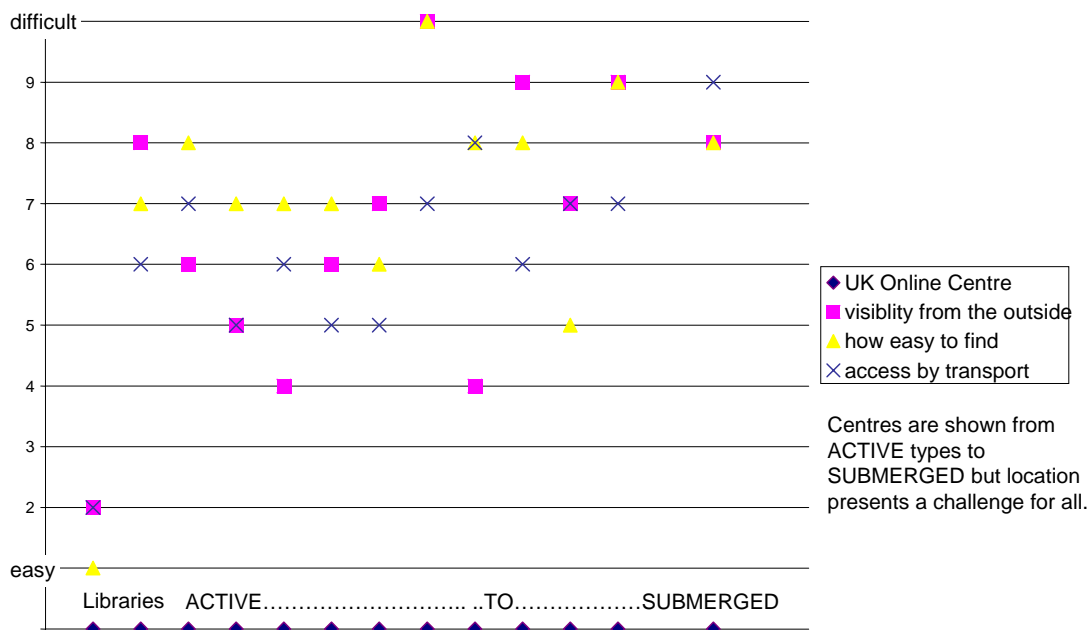


Figure 3. Location is a challenge for both ACTIVE and SUBMERGED centres

Another variable is basic building maintenance. There are some buildings people avoid because they feel run down and threatening. We devised a set of statements e.g. ‘this place is clean’, and ‘this place is safe’ and scored each centre on first impression against the statements on a 10 point scale from low to high). We found that all the centres were physically places that could be regarded as safe, clean, looked after, used and open to everybody.

Our view is that, in terms of factors that cannot be changed, all the community centres are working within the same constraints.

5.2.2 Marketing ‘learning opportunities’ vs. marketing a facility for using computers and accessing the Internet.

We found a stark contrast in perception of what is ‘UK Online’ and therefore WHAT was being marketed (quotes ii illustrate this).

1. Marketing was interpreted broadly to include managing the image of ‘UK Online’ as inviting, engaging and worth getting involved with.

OR

2. Marketing was about selling a facility (UK Online), which would only be possible if there was a demand. In some cases this was combined with the perception that the facility was not necessary, because the libraries in the area provided equipment and access.

Quote(s) ii: Perspectives on 'Marketing UK Online'

UK Online as Opportunity

"Why should the learners know what UK Online means? We need to make it have meaning, make sense"

"...centres like this have a multi-focus role, can be forums for learning and human development"

"We need to attract people who haven't realised they could learn"

UK Online as a facility

"It's not about marketing – it's about lack of demand".

"There is a glut of computers in this area and we are competing for users."

The difference in perception was evident in what was regarded as marketing activity. For ACTIVE INTEGRATED centres, marketing was about creating new learning opportunities to attract non traditional learners.

Table 1 (section 5.2) shows a list of marketing options offered for discussion. We asked the respondents what they did to attract new learners and how effective they thought this was, so the data gave us only examples of current marketing activity and how successful the respondent thought this was. Most centre managers used a broad range of marketing options (four or more). Leaflets in the centres and libraries and word-of-mouth were used by all.

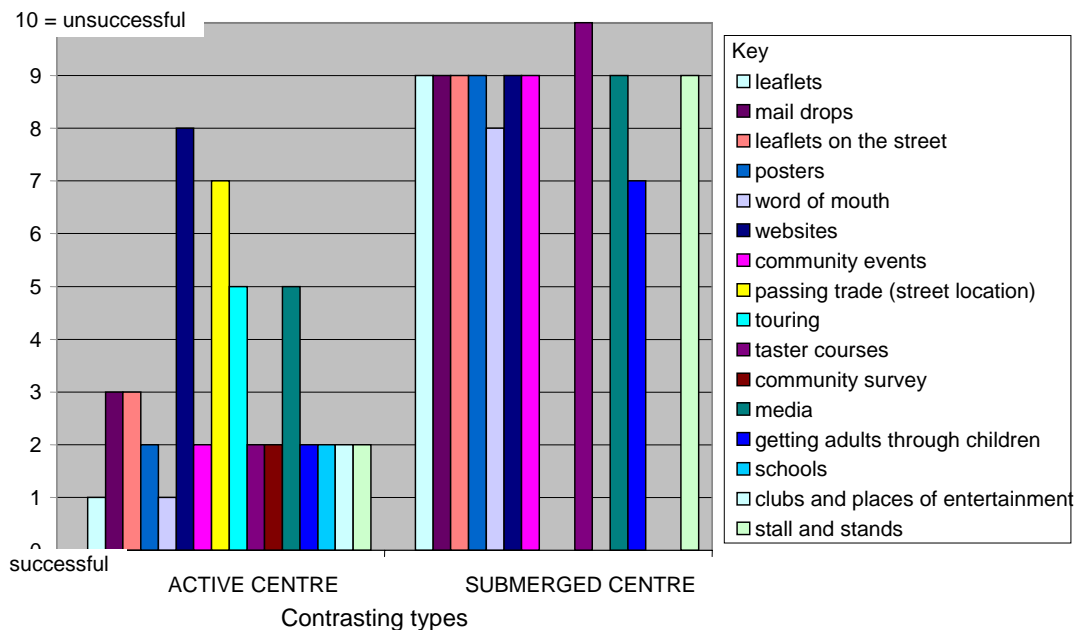


Figure 4. Contrasting centres: in one, the ACTIVE CENTRE some marketing options are perceived to be more successful than others. In the SUBMERGED CENTRE not much works.

The difference in perceptions of marketing can be linked to the difference in vision of what UK Online is about. Our evidence for this claim can be illustrated by

considering two extreme cases. The SUBMERGED centre created the impression that ‘we have tried most things but not much works’ (figure 4)

In one ACTIVE INTEGRATED centre all the respondents associated with the centre said word of mouth worked best and “home grown marketing works best”. However we noted that these centres were full to capacity with a waiting list on regular programmes. In fact, although word of mouth might have been the most visible we noted a rolling programme of ongoing marketing combining the elements of ‘inviting and attracting’, ‘welcoming and informing’ and giving the first impression that the centre is well organised and a safe place to learn for non-traditional learners.

The relationship between marketing activity and attracting new learners is difficult to tease out but we think these are some examples of effective practice:

Systematic and ongoing. Marketing is repeated systematically (for example there is always a stand at the local school fete), and ongoing, some marketing attraction every month (for example a promotion).

Celebrated. Progression is celebrated and public with prizes, faces on posters and media coverage.

Passive combined with active. Marketing which combines passive activities (e.g. leaflets that can be picked up), with active marketing such as taster courses and learning events.

Responsive. Regular user surveys and feedback is used to both market and decide on what is offered.

Visible. Once the user is inside the centre there is clear signage and information about what is on offer with posters and displays of local people involved in projects and a ‘who’s who’ in the centre team.

Visual Cues. The wall displays are well organised with up-to-date information which is informative about that week, next week and the months ahead.

Sit and Browse space. People coming into the centre are welcomed and given things to look at and take away, and there is a place to sit and browse information.

Information about Supporting Services. Where the marketing anticipates barriers and gives the message that these are ‘not a problem’ by advertising solutions - for example evening classes, crèche, and basic skills or ESOL support.

Adult learning environment. Where the centre feels like a club or a community book shop and not a school or a formal learning institution e.g. facilities for tea and coffee and snacks make a difference.

5.2.3 Marketing and leadership

Going beyond the subjective data and looking at patterns across centres, our view is that a borough team has an important leadership role under the broad banner of marketing UK Online. The areas which may require central direction include:

1. Campaigning to develop a unified vision of what UK Online is about and in leading a marketing campaign. In theory a successful campaign can be harmful

if new learners are 'sold' learning opportunities but actually get only access to computers and the internet.

2. Central help with developing marketing material which can be locally adapted.
3. Specific funding for marketing was flagged by most centres as a missing element in support from the borough.
4. Good practice in marketing seems to require a broad view of marketing which needs to be articulated centrally and rolled out in action checklists with a schedule for monitoring and supporting individual centres.

5.3 WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TARGET GROUPS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?

This research is about understanding what is more or less effective in engaging learners and building relationships to the learner communities. Focusing on the concept of community, this raises three further questions:

1. Why UK Online centres should be concerned with engaging learners as members of communities.
2. What the centre managers and other staff understand by 'UK Online target groups'.
3. How this understanding relates to good practice.

5.3.1 What is community?

It is generally recognised that there is no 'correct' meaning of the term 'community', it is a social construct which means different things to different people. Having said that, deconstructing the notion of 'community' turns out to be quite informative in understanding effective practice in engaging learners. Understanding 'community' is as important to 'adult learning' as 'market segment' is to 'advertising'.

There is widespread recognition in the literature that learners are members of communities, and that careful consideration of the target community can lead to a better quality of learner engagement (see for example references in: SPICE Briefing, 2002). UK Online centres, funded by the Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF), are located 'in the community' and are broadly part of neighbourhood renewal and the regeneration agenda. In the case of our sample centres they are all located in recognised community space e.g. library or community centres.

A starting point is to adopt a working definition which simultaneously interprets 'community' from two viewpoints:

1. A broad systems perspective which is about targeting resources, tailoring services, and engaging communities to take responsibility for sustainable change, **and at the same time**,
2. A more personal individual perspective, which is concerned with personal identity, and people feeling comfortable. This can be described as the 'people like me' and 'people I can relate to' level.

Some possible examples of what constitutes a community would include:

- People living in the local area
- People working in the local area
- People of the same age, gender, ethnicity
- People with the same interests, and hobbies
- People who share some difficulties
- People who are concerned about the same issue(s)

In all these cases the grouping is useful at the policy or broad systems level and is meaningful at the individual 'people like me' level. **The core of this approach to the concept of community is self inclusion (in other words members of the community consider themselves included and have the feeling of belonging).**

The test of community at the group level (say in a UK Online centre) is that the individuals in the group share some common identity, issues, interests, purpose or goals.

The question of choice and self inclusion is important as the alternative, by default, is to define 'community' in terms of social exclusion e.g. 'all ethnic minorities, single parents and unemployed people'. What follows according to Hodgson (2000), is a kind of logic of remediation, where the blame for social exclusion is placed on those who do not participate and also the stigma of giving or accepting the label.

5.3.2 *Subtle interpretation of 'community'*

The prospectus for the main rollout of the ICT Learning Centre Programme identified a list of target groups. We found respondents aware of this list (e.g. see quote iii from the Camden CAL website). We found that in some ways this had a blunting effect on engaging with the real communities using real community centres.

Quote(s) iii: From Camden CAL Website

UK Online centres are targeted at people with little or no computer skills, particularly:

- people who need help with basic skills
- unemployed people
- people from ethnic minorities
- people with disabilities
- single parents
- people over the age of 60 and not involved in learning activity.

For example, a typical case is illustrated in Table 2. This is from two ACTIVE ADD-ON type centres. When we asked about community centre users, we were given a breakdown of groups which shared a common purpose, identity or goal. In contrast when asked about UK Online target communities we were offered a generalised list in terms which suggested that these may have been targets proposed in the 'funding bids'.

There is a reactive rather than proactive approach to attracting and engaging learners. Individual learners arrive and fall within the target group usually because of the centre location.

Table 2: Example of contrast in perception of 'community centre users' and 'UK Online targets groups'.	
Community centre users	UK online target groups
Bosnian women Kosovan young refugees Somalian mothers Advocacy group (named) Environmental project (named) Bangladeshi lunch club Healthy eating session for families Youth club Art and Craft classes for older people	Elderly people Disadvantaged communities Community groups All disadvantaged sectors and age groups The unemployed One parent families

In contrast a more subtle relationship with the community is evident in ACTIVE INTEGRATED types of centres. We think that that these centres target the communities using the community centres and build on existing community identities selected by the learner.

This is illustrated in four examples of good practice:

New Learning opportunities targeting existing communities using the community centre. This is in effect targeting people who share a common identity, issues, interests, purpose or goal. The UK Online team (centre manager, UK Online development officer/tutor and LRAs) analyse the groups using the community centre, and plan strategic intervention in the form of ICT learning opportunities tailored to attract specific communities of learners.

Combining ICT teaching with group working and collaborative learning. This recognises that groups of learners may belong to more than one community. For example a class carefully targets single parents by providing childcare facilities but also includes ice breakers and learning sets because the group is ethnically mixed.

Marketing learning as a shared leisure activity for example ICT/craft workshops advertised for friends and family, and activity parties where the atmosphere is buoyant and lively.

Portfolio of labelled projects meeting the known needs of groups in the community. These are activity based workshops where the learners are introduced to skills tasters but in the guise of other activities like writing a CV, producing an advert or poster, printing a t-shirt, or scanning old photographs.

5.4 ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES AND STAGES OF ENGAGEMENT?

Returning again to the original question, “what is more or less effective in engaging learners and building relationships to the learner communities?”, and turning to the concept of engagement, we want to know:

1. What is effective engagement (how do we know it has taken place)?

2. Who is engaged?
3. When are they engaged (what are the stages)?

5.4.1 What is engagement?

An audit of new learners, learners' achievements and stories of reported 'satisfaction' provide a starting point. We found respondents are familiar with recording success stories and this was a valuable source of evidence for discussing achievements, while individual satisfaction ratings are used extensively in evaluation studies (e.g. Hall & Aitken, 2003). This is core evidence (see centre of figure 5 which is discussed later in this section), but we sought to step beyond this because an audit approach to ICT skills focuses only on the 'individual', and offers no insight into 'engagement' in relation to 'learner community'.

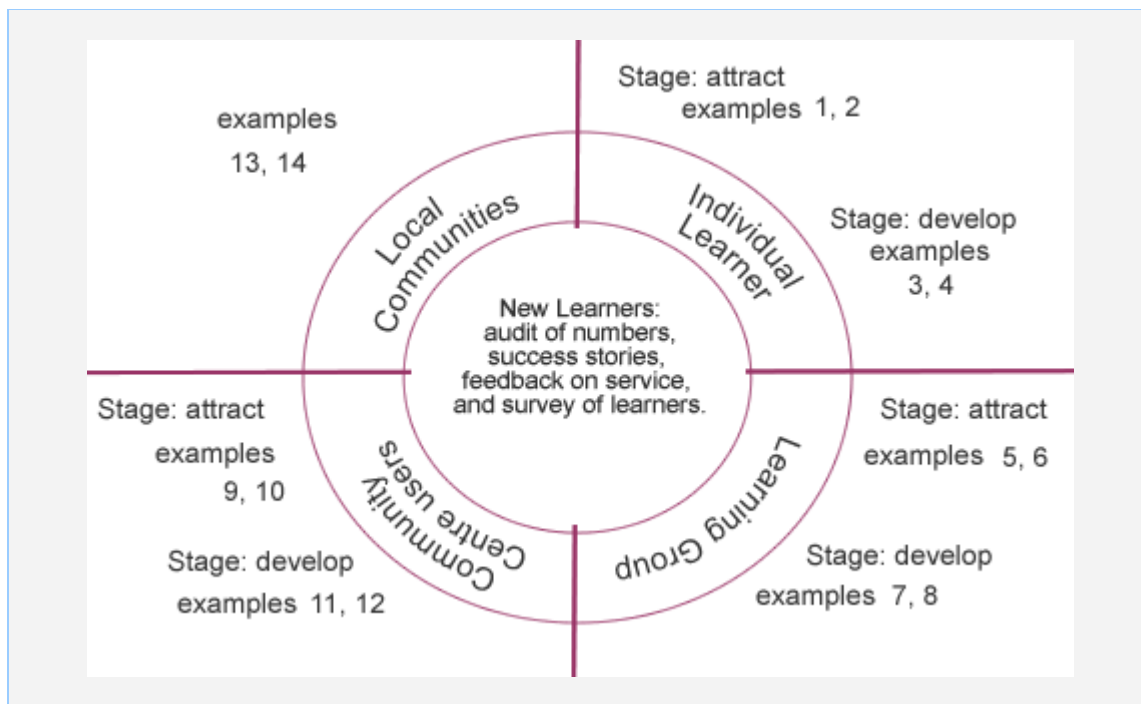
Typical frameworks often used to think about 'engagement' and 'community', are Sherry Arstein's Ladder of Participation(1969) and the Wheel of Participation developed by South Lanarkshire Council in Scotland (2002). These models suggest that empowerment is progressive. **The early stages** are about providing incentives to participate including information, advice, and joint planning. **The later stages** are about empowering the participants to decide what they what to do and how (i.e. goals and means).

Quote(s) iv: Examples of words and statements that are taken as indicating success

"involved", "interested", "satisfied", "got what they wanted", "wanted more", "got the bug", "found it comfortable to stay", "loved the learning with company", "people would not leave", "they brought their family", "recommendation by word of mouth", "..after that tried something else", "kids helped the parents", "they needed flyers so they asked ...and worked at it", "went away with what they had done", "got confident to help others in the group", "they came together", "atmosphere was buoyant".

To model the role of 'engagement' and 'community' we analysed the data to find out 'who' is involved in the learning and 'how'. To do this we:

- flagged all the statements where respondents are talking about 'what worked' or 'success' and looked for 'who' was engaged.
- classified these statements (where possible) into two chronological stages of 'attracting' and 'developing'.



Indicative Examples

- 1: Person-to-person recruitment, listening to and befriending drop-in learners
- 2: Being aware of and mentoring diffident and uncertain learners
- 3: Informal individual learning plans discretely monitored
- 4: Staff development LRAs are learners too!
- 5: Ice breaking exercises
- 6: Fun team building activities (where ICT training is secondary)
- 7: Occasions for informal networking and celebration
- 8: Organising facilities for study groups
- 9: ICT by stealth e.g. inviting special interest group to run information and advice session with Internet and other software demonstrations
- 10: Invitations to local campaign groups to use the ICT resources
- 11: Regular events offering informal progression e.g. scanning, working with digital images, creating a digital album. ICT introduced into basic skills and ESOL classes.
- 12: Local acknowledgement and celebration of achievement milestones e.g. portfolio of achievement, award ceremony, wall displays, and certificates of attendance.
- 13: Outreach programmes
- 14: Planned exposure by action (showing that ICT is useful and empowering) e.g. working with local groups, in partnerships and coalitions on selected issues which are winnable, simple and specific.

Figure 5. Alternative perspective of 'who' is being engaged and stages of engagement with examples of targeted activity.

5.4.2 Proactive and broad strategic actions

We found that the 'who' could be an individual learner, a group involved in collaborative learning, a community centre user group, or local communities living around the centre. This is shown in figure 5. Clearly all forms of engagement are valuable.

The single notable difference between centres which are ACTIVE compared to SUBMERGED, is that ACTIVE centres are **proactive** in attracting, and developing individual learners. For example:

Learners are invited to taster sessions and there is person-to-person recruitment – in contrast with waiting for learners to drop-in. This is an example of creating new opportunities to attract learners.

Drop-in learners are given advice and counselling on taking up other learning opportunities. This development process builds on casual visits.

A characteristic of ACTIVE INTEGRATED centres is that a broad and imaginative vision is demonstrated - strategic action is evident, or planned in all four segments of engagement, and at both stages (to attract and to develop learners).

Figure 5 identifies some indicative examples of 'good practice' which attract and develop individual learners, collaborative learning, active community groups, and local communities. Common evidence of engagement is shown in the inner core. The 'who is engaged' is shown in four equal segments. The outer sections suggest strategies to attract and develop different learner communities. The examples of 'effective practice' are drawn from the field research.

Planning actions to 'attract' and 'develop' learners is also about supporting learning needs and building the curriculum based on need. Both of these topics are addressed in the next sections.

5.5 WHAT ARE LEARNER NEEDS FOR WIDENING AND DEEPENING PARTICIPATION?

Research into community engagement and learning has to address at some level what the learner needs to learn. A common perception of learner needs (shared by respondents who have contact with learners), is that learners cannot always articulate what they need. **Individuals, groups and communities don't know what they want or need until they see and experience the possibilities and can imagine what is possible** and what they would like to do. To develop an understanding of learner needs to inform 'good practice' we analysed the data for:

1. common perceptions of learner needs (tutors, support staff, managers, technical staff),
2. how these translated into learning activity, and relationships with the learners, AND
3. how (1) and (2) relate to conceptual insights from research into digital exclusion (e.g. Hall Aitken Associates, 2002, 2003), and adult education (e.g. Schuller et al, 2002).

5.5.1 Targeting ‘access needs’ and ‘ICT skills needs’

The national aim of the UK Online Centre Programme (referred to in section 4) is to bridge the gap between those people who have access to ICT and can use it competently and comfortably and people who can't. This gap has been referred to as the ‘digital divide’ and lack of access to ICT, and lack of ability and/or confidence to use it are referred to as ‘digital exclusion’.

Figure 6 illustrates four types of digital exclusion and implies different types of learner need. Access to ICT (computers and the internet) is shown on one axis and level of ‘computer literacy’¹ on the other. The matrix is a tool for thinking about scenarios of ICT ‘learner needs’. In understanding the possibilities of different types of good practice we noted that respondents make a distinction between people who see themselves as ‘learners’ and ‘users’ of public services (like a library), and those who have a fragile or fledgling sense of self as a learner (learning identity). This suggests that ‘learning readiness’ will influence what the learner ‘needs’.

Field data suggests that some potential UK Online learners don't use libraries. For example contrast: “There is a big Somalian community, asylum seekers and Bosnians but they don't use the library very much”, with one of the community centres: “we host the national charity of Bosnian and Kosovan refugees and run events for the Somalian culture centre.”

Quote(s) v: Words used to describe the physical environment in the Library UK Online centres and the Community Centre UK Online centres.

Libraries:

‘place of business’, ‘lab’, ‘high tec and machine orientated’, ‘board room’, ‘traditional library hush’, and ‘airport lounge’, ‘formal’, ‘meeting room’

Community Centres:

‘homely’, ‘lived in’, ‘comfortable’, ‘well trodden’, ‘in need of a good tidy-up’, ‘bit cramped like my front room’, ‘cosy’, ‘informal’, ‘familiar’

It can be argued that people who use UK Online centres in the Library are people who are comfortable with using public services (like the library). The observation data suggested that libraries and community centres do present differently. Consider for examples the feeling evoked by words used to describe physical cues in the Library UK Online centres compared to the community centres (quotes v).

Community Centres may have a role in encouraging progression to use of library services. Activities hosted at the library but set up and organised in the community centres, could play a role here e.g. guided tours of the library facilities.

Moving on it is also worth noting that in the national findings, there appeared to be a link between success of centres (in reaching the most digitally excluded) and the range of programmes offered (Hall & Aitken Associates, 2001 pp. 36). To

¹ Computer literacy is taken to be equivalent to basic ICT skills. This can be arbitrarily defined as a small set of enabling skills such as: sending an email, finding a website, word processing a letter, saving and organising personal files, and browsing digital images.

understand how the ‘range of learning on offer’ relates to learner needs, we classified the informal learning opportunities, and programmes into generic types (listed in table 3 and figure 7).

(Adapted from Hall and Aitken Associates, 2001 pp. 31)

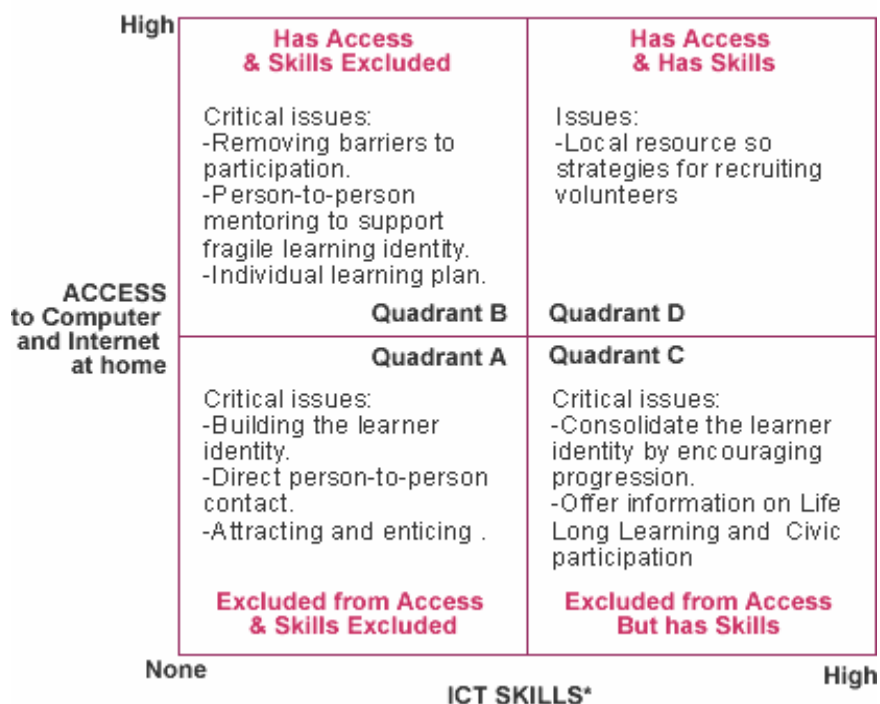


Figure 6. Type of digital exclusion and critical issues for good practice.

Taking the three area of ‘need’ together (i.e. access, skills and learning-readiness) the quadrants in figure 6 offer insight into effective practice.

1. Quadrant A. This group had no access to computers at home and no basic ICT skills. Some learners may be ‘learning-ready’ but there is essential good practice involved in handling encounters so that ‘drop-ins’ stay. The importance of direct person-to-person engagement is cited by all the respondents as an example of what works. This quadrant includes people who feel that ICT or learning is not for them. The ACTIVE centres seem to tackle this group by stealth so that ICT training is included in some other activities such as communication with family abroad, and finding health information.
2. Quadrant B. National research suggests that even where there is access at home, the computer at home might be an older and slower machine or used mainly by other members of the household. Typically the learner does not feel computer literate, and is afraid to use the computer for fear of breaking it. This group is likely to have a fragile learning identity and what is perceived to work is diversity of informal pathways, flexible teaching approaches, and initial one-to-one mentoring to develop a learning plan. For reluctant learners it is also important to address known barriers to participation, for example childcare costs, timing, and family pressures.

3. Quadrant C. This group has basic skills but no access. The initial approach was also regarded as important for these learners. Even if the UK Online centre was being used as an internet café, the presence of a potential learner presented an opportunity to market progression , advice on accreditation and assessment for more formal recognition of learning. This group is also a potential pool for recruiting volunteers.
4. Quadrant D. This is not a target group for the UK Online centres but is a source of skilled and confident volunteers living in the local area.

It seems that the ACTIVE centres (by intuition, design or both) are strategic in targeting each quadrant as a type of market segment. The diversity of learning opportunities and programmes exemplify this (table 3). All the centres offered 'learning guidance' on demand but in the more ACTIVE centres, a person dropping in becomes a new learner when the guidance is supported by written material, and advice on 'learning to learn', or guidance on progression (next steps). We found that a **wider range of informal and formal guided learning is associated** with the ACTIVE INTEGRATED centres (illustrated in figure 7).

Table 3: Range of learning opportunities/programmes	
1	Drop-in cafe: resource centre for equipment, internet, email, own work.
2	Drop-in with induction to learning: advice on 'learning to learn', access to self help worksheets.
3	Coaching service: specific to non ICT tasks e.g. writing a CV, making complaints to council, printing leaflets for local campaign
4	Self paced course (generic): e.g. BBC Webwise , Learn Direct
5	Self paced course tailored locally: e.g. local ICT driving licence, individual learning plan drawing on elements of online courses
6	Classes at set times (generic) : e.g. CLAIT, run by external providers
7	Classes at set times tailored locally e.g. digital photography
8	Taster sessions: sample from services offered in 6 or 7
9	Events: activity based event which includes training where learners go away with what they have created. (e.g. digital album, pillow case printing)
10	Self contained projects: 'snazzy' events (longer than 9) and assumes basic ICT skills e.g. ICT for stamp collectors, buying and selling on e-bay
11	ICT with basic skills or ESOL : ICT training is integrated with other learning
12	Outreach: ICT and basic skills at different venues
13	Specialist: e.g. React Video Arts, LOCN Music Technology, Music technology, Wha-Blow MM

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	key
Library-2	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆		◆						1= use resources and guidance if user asks
Library-1	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆		◆					◆	2= drop-in & induction guidance
CC2	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆		3 = coaching
CC10	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆			4 = self paced generic
CC3	◆	◆		◆		◆	◆							5 = self paced tailored
CC1	◆			◆			◆		◆				◆	6 = regular classes
CC5	◆			◆					◆					7 = regular tailored classes
CC4	◆	◆				◆								8 = taster sessions
CC7	◆			◆		◆								9 = events
CC6	◆			◆		◆								10 = short projects
CC8	◆			◆										11 = ICT & basic skills
CC9	◆													12 = outreach
CC11	◆					◆								13 = specialist

Figure 7. Range of informal learning opportunities and programmes offered by centres (table 2 explains the labels used in the key).

Although there is an expected correlation between access and ICT literacy, individual learning needs could occupy any place on this matrix in figure 7. The idea of matrix is a useful management tool and offers some insights into what works. However the form itself freezes learner needs in a snapshot. We therefore also need to consider the needs of the whole learner.

5.5.2 Developing the whole learner identity

Although the next point is difficult to quantify, subjectively we felt many of the respondents shared a vision of empowerment and transformation through learning. Widening and deepening participation is broadly concerned with ‘attracting’ and ‘developing’ learners (described in the section 5.3) but the ideas are also part of the larger concept of Life Long Learning which, arguably, brings together active citizenship and the knowledge economy, in a triangular conception of the benefits of learning (Coffield, 2000, Schuller et al, 2002), illustrated in figure 8.

Personal identity comes from individual characteristics that are indicators of internal self image and world view. We are particularly interested in effective practices in building and supporting a ‘learning identity’.

Social Capital is the relationships and connections that bring people together in networks (Baron et al, 2000). We are interested in the practices that engage learners in communities of collaborative learning activities.

Human Capital is the knowledge, skills and accreditation that comes from organised programmes of learning (see for example, OECD, 1998). We are interested in how learners come to be on these programmes in the UK Online centres and the before and after.

(Adapted from Schuller 2002 pp.10)

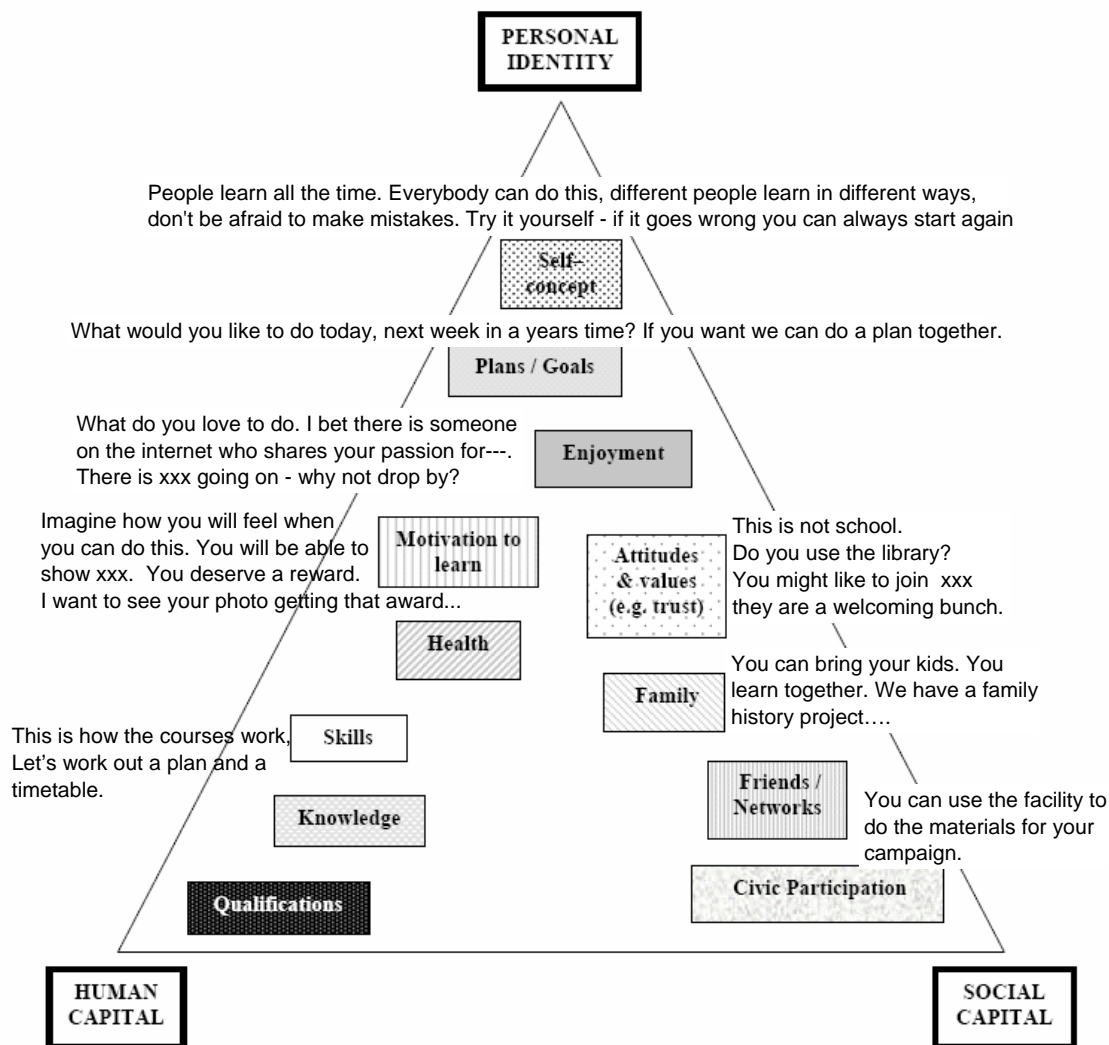


Figure 8. Examples of thinking about the ‘whole’ learner.

From many of the reported success stories, ICT access and skills are not an end but a mean. What people want is skills which can be used for tasks which have intrinsic value (for example writing a letter, finding information, enhancing an image or managing information in a database). We found evidence that the professional tutors recognised that ‘needs’ are negotiated, and learning needs change and will evolve (quotes vi). **This went beyond interpersonal skills, and was more like skilled formative assessment of learner needs “on the fly”.**

Quote(s) vi: Examples of recognition that 'needs' are negotiated

“engaging learners is all about finding what they really want to do and suggesting a plan which includes ICT to meet these needs.”

“the key is watching and listening and then suggesting alternatives ..using ICT of course – the skills come along the way, the formalising bit can come later with progression or an individual learning plan”

“sometimes people want a course, and sometimes they are not ready for it and don't need the pressure”

A holistic view of the learner comes from person-to-person engagement. This was cited as an essential part of what works (see quotes vii). Encounters with learners worked best when the learning facilitator had the confidence, experience (and training) to steer conversations with learners beyond niceties (which are important to make the learner feel comfortable), and beyond 'sorting out' which seem to mean telling the learner which key to press or doing it for the learner. Good practice in this context meant supporting the learner to do things for themselves, and having the confidence to work with learners whose ICT learning needs are combined with literacy, numeracy or ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). The implication for staff development is to build good interpersonal skills into good learning facilitation skills.

Quote(s) vii: Examples of direct person-to-person engagement as an essential part of what works

“we are all about connecting with the individual learner- that's our strength, engaging them into learning, finding out where they are now and moving them on”

“where it works well is where the LRAs get into dialogue and befriend the learners and get them interested.”

“people feel comfortable to start with a one on one chat – nothing heavy”

“the way not to do it is to give them a worksheet and tell them to get on with it, or worse ignore them until they ask for help – imagine what that person went through to come in here ...”

The case studies and examples cited by the centre managers, LRAs and professional tutors provided evidence of progression of individual learners. Interestingly this was often linked to work with the learner to build up confidence and a 'learner identity'. In the best examples of good practice, progression was carefully managed towards a positive outcome and this seemed to be gauged on a case by case basis. Progression was often into further horizontal learning but sometimes progression was vertical on accredited learning, or in a different setting (e.g. library) or simply progression into greater participation in local activities. A characteristic of this professional expertise seems to be building on opportunistic encounters to form powerful mentoring relationships; indeed the activities, projects and programmes were an 'excuse' to do this.

Figure 8 attempts to capture the complex web of good practice in enabling the learner to develop a learning identity. Working back from the narrative (in the data) the questions postulate the generic form of how a professional tutor guides a learner towards the outcome (success story). Good practice would be an awareness of all the possibilities for offering guidance to the learner, and the actions that follow from this.

5.6 HOW IS THE CENTRE MANAGED (STRATEGICALLY)?

This section looks at front line activity (working directly with the learner). The focus is on how the work of people in different roles (listed in 5.1) operating individually and as a team – impact on attracting and developing new learners.

5.6.1 Effective characteristics in centre teams

There is a significant difference in the structure of management between centres which are ACTIVE compared to SUBMERGED.

The key variable is that ACTIVE centres have a key worker in a developmental and steering role which is also hands-on with the learner, in other words the role we have referred to as ‘professional tutor’. This was recognised almost unanimously by centre managers, LRAs and the tutors themselves (see example quotes viii) but notably when it was articulated, it was accompanied by expressions of surprise “I guess that is it, now I think about it...” and “it should be obvious but we never get time to think about these things.”

Quote(s) viii: The role of professional tutor

Managers

“I use his xxxx worksheets myself.... there is an energy and dynamism that comes from having xxxx, well a person in that role ...it makes a big difference.”

“It was a good decision to pool funding to make a post for someone to manage *the UK Online* activities.”

“When I arrived...there were supposed to be about 10 -12 classes set up (with xxxxxx) and they’d all died due to lack of anyone managing them. “

“Centres really need to be staffed properly in order to work – little point in just having equipment without the staff, particularly for reluctant learners.”

“Put someone in charge of it. (*UK Online in that centre*)”

Talking about the setup in that centre with a professional tutor: “It’s helped to achieve a wider range of objectives e.g. giving support to community groups”.

A firm positive influence exerted by the professional tutors, in our view, was the confidence to **differentiate between minor missing skills and skill gaps**. Some missing skills are gaps in ‘know how’ and inevitable in the fast-changing ICT world. Dealing with missing ‘know how’ is about confidence and ‘learning to learn’ by using help, online knowledge bases and other easy to learn strategies. For example if an LRA doesn’t know how to use a particular aspect of spreadsheets the attitude was “what’s the problem just look it up – that’s what the look-up hand-outs are for”. Where the tutor leads with this confidence others (including the centre manager) followed.

A knock-on effect of this confidence (or missing confidence), is the discrepancy in how LRAs are deployed, engaged and perceived.

1. In the LIBRARIES, and the ACTIVE CENTRES (especially the ACTIVE INTEGRATED), we found evidence that the LRAs are valued, and nurtured. For example some professional tutors talked about the strengths of each LRA who came to the centre and how the LRAs were encouraged to join in the learning. Patience, humour, manner with older learner and reluctant learners, skills with specific software applications, and admin skills were all described in positive terms.
2. Our view (based on observations of LRAs in action and the interview data) is that the LRAs are actively learning by working with the professional tutors. We found some indication that where less experienced LRAs observed professional tutors in action; they subsequently experimented with similar strategies, this suggests (to us) that an informal 'apprentice' system is evolving.
3. We¹ would suggest that in contrast, where the LRAs are expected to do the work of professional tutors, we observed a spiral of unrealistic expectations in which the LRA is held to account for new learners not walking through the door. The spiral is downwards, in that blame is sometimes apportioned to what the LRA is not doing (e.g. outreach work), or can not do (e.g. spreadsheets), or worst of all on personal attributes (e.g. speaks too softly and uses headphones). The most damaging effect of this is on the self esteem of the LRA as a learner. In some cases they begin to accept this view and see minor skills gaps as a huge barrier. Rather than saying 'let's work this out together' or 'I don't know but I'll go and look it up or find out' as professional tutors might do, the low self esteem response from the LRA is typified in a type of: 'I've not been equipped with the proper skills by the employer so it's not my fault.'

5.6.2 Effective practice in ICT support

Moving on to the role of ICT support, this aspect of UK Online is included because this is also about empowering professional tutors, LRAs and centre managers, who are themselves learners.

Given the number of computers and the wide geographical dispersal of equipment, and considering all the centres together, there was reason to be encouraged by the robustness of the support system. In other words our data did not suggest an overwhelming picture of broken unusable equipment or complaints of major software incompatibility or system crashes.

The impression we came away with was of:

- A capable and co-operative IT support structure, problem logging and systematic follow-up.
- Willingness to devise ways of helping people to manage their own equipment.
- Checking of capability and capacity for local management before control was handed over to the local centre (some centres have been given access permissions to administer and service their own equipment).
- No short term obsession with new devices and upgrades, or branded products (e.g. Microsoft).

¹ Quotes in this section are paraphrased but retain the sense evident in the data.

- Encouragement to mix shareware software products with expensive brand products.

Few comments were critical about management of equipment, software and support. There were some (limited) comments about lack of local freedom to experiment with the equipment and software, notably the comments were not about the quality of technical support, but objections to the very idea of central control. Commonly the respondent made a plea for local control, either in terms of the right to buy equipment, or the right to configure machines for specialist activities. Our view is that this underestimates the expertise involved in technical support services. We would not advocate local control without central **quality control**, i.e. an assessment (as at present) of whether there is sufficient competence locally (skills and knowledge), and capacity (time and software utilities to maintain systems).

We would like to suggest that a characteristic of an ACTIVE ADD-ON centre is an obsessive concern with control of technology.

Lack of confidence in basic equipment can be a serious barrier to building confidence in engaging learners – the fact that the equipment was hardly mentioned by the respondents is an **indication of good practice which is invisible because it is routine and embedded**. The only concern is the software and hardware support for UK Online in the community centres was provided by one key worker. Success may therefore be down to the skilled work of the sole technical support worker and suggests that the right person for this job is critical.

Three other findings are worth reporting:

1. There was a common view that the community centres would benefit from more multimedia recording equipment and multimedia processing software.
2. The technical support site¹ is under-used and there is more scope for central training so that local expertise is developed to troubleshoot basic problems (e.g. printer blockages).
3. We observed that there was capacity and demand to create a tailored resource bank of learning materials for LRAs and generally staff development. For example, “There are plans to put something on Camden Net – we do have a section on there for the LRAs for learning materials, but there’s not much on there yet...”
4. We found widespread awareness that learners are sometime reluctant to sign paper documents. There was some suggestion (described here as a finding), that support services could effectively use shareware software to minimise data collection overheads by offering online software as an alternative to paper. For example with a User ID and password automatically assigned to new users, this would make it possible to record learner attendance at logon and track activity and progress. Online databases also offer a mechanism for gathering and qualifying new ideas on what learners would like, and generally gathering evaluation data.

¹ http://www.camdenet.org.uk/groups/ukonline/news/item?item_id=8901

5. However it has to be acknowledged that data collection is not straightforward and there are some inherent tensions which no online facility would solve (see quotes ix).

Quote(s) ix: *Inherent tensions with data collection*

“There’s also a tension about the paperwork – it can be seen as a burden, all this filling in forms”

“...we have lots of invisible learners. For example, xxxxxxxx looks good in terms of numbers but it’s more like an internet café, there’s lots of one-off users – something like xxxxxxxx doesn’t look so good but we haven’t really got a way of tracking their progression – we should be able to record when they move on to different activities”

“We’re trying to establish a way of arriving at a reasonable target and a way of recording formal versus informal learning so we can aim for a ‘formula’ to obtain funding e.g. hours of ‘drop-in’ activities.”

“The community centres are all so different – the success stories probably tell us more than the statistics.”

“I’ve always maintained that it’s more important to sit and show a potential learner something and get them interested first, before getting them to fill in anything. That might mean we don’t get something filled in, but I’d rather that than lose them right away.”

5.7 DESIGNING LEARNING MATERIALS, LEARNING FACILITATION AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

From the findings so far it is evident that ACTIVE centres and especially ACTIVE INTEGRATED centres have an advocacy function in championing the informal and situated learning needs of communities that use the centres. This was evident in the strong sense that community centres should provide a lead in developing learning materials, and in demonstrating appropriate learning facilitation and teaching styles.

5.7.1 External providers and vertical progression

The professional tutors especially recognised that the quality of learning materials and the style of engagement is a critical factor in retaining learners. We found some impatience with the formal bureaucracy of Further Education (FE) and frustration was expressed at being tied to specific providers. Whilst there was acknowledgement that community centres should support learner progression (i.e. not ‘hang on’ to learners), and that the role of FE Colleges was to provide progression routes; there was a sense that community centres lacked the authority to evaluate and critique the different training providers. There was a perceived need to create a more competitive market for providers of training.

Quote(s) x: External FE providers

“... xxxxx courses are a problem, despite offering in a community environment, supposedly more flexible, they are still constrained by rules and regulations governing their funding. This causes some inconsistencies – ..(if less that 8 the course is closed) ...If not around for four weeks, off the course – one was withdrawn – they need the place, they’ve got children and difficulties and these are the people we want to reach”

“Also perceived that the tutors ‘expect everything to be ready’ for them when they arrive i.e. the room, the numbers etc – but to be fair they’re probably hourly paid and expect it to be like a college”

“xxxxx - I think our partnership is a positive one on the whole – we’ve encouraged more people who wouldn’t have gone to formal environments such as colleges – they’ve found it more acceptable to go to their local library or community centre – it’s a familiar place, lots have unhappy memories of education”.

5.7.2 Designing learning materials

The LRA and professional tutors have access to a range of ready made material and tutorials which look very professional. (e.g. BBC Computers Don’t Bite, WebWise, Learn Direct). For some learners this is enough and the skill is in offering guidance on selecting an appropriate starting place and progression route (see quote xi)

Quote(s) xi: Tailoring materials

Some tailoring of materials for informal learning:

“What works is beginner sessions – BBC Skillswise/Webwise, sometimes literacy is a barrier”

“I like to use the absolute beginner programmes to test their prior learning – nothing is assumed, gives the fundamentals, good feeder for the Webwise course”

“Some people complain about LearnDirect, but it can really work for some people”

“I’d like to try and build up a resource bank of exercises”

However we found that a characteristic of ACTIVE INTEGRATED centres is that material is extensively adapted for non traditional new learners (see quotes x). Given these two different scenarios we looked at the underlying function of designing learning materials, and why this is higher in cost (more time and effort) but more effective in engaging new learners (quotes xii).

We think that when tutors and LRAs design materials they are actually engaging with the learners’ needs and responding to feedback (e.g. when ready-packaged material does not work in practice). The design is usually a redesign or adaptation of existing material to some specific learner group. **This means that the redesign process itself involves thinking and reasoning about how learners learn, what they need and how to engage them.** In some ways this is a hidden version

of what teachers do. Teachers take existing content, activities and resources and selectively reorganise and edit these for a specific group of learners for some desired outcomes. The effort required to do this is cost effective because the results in terms of learner engagement is immediate and rewarding compared to working with material that is too generic (like the teacher telling students to read a book instead of teaching). This is especially true for new learners with fragile learning identities where formality is a barrier.

Quote(s) xii: Tailoring materials

We started with 8 – one dropped out almost immediately because she realised she wouldn't cope with some of the more basic things – needed to be adept....” (*example of response to drop out*)

Extensive tailoring of material based on existing materials:

“I found the resources and found time to prepare a course – course already prepared (it's for A level students but I've adapted it and it works)

“START happened because of my knowledge of ECDL, wanting to do something that was a subset. All the materials are very basic but they didn't meet their needs – wanted to make them specific to here and our computers, I tailored it.”

About START: “They get all the paperwork which I've designed, plus some teaching notes They go through stages, informal assessment, sign it when completed, they get a certificate and want them now!”

“Lots of information sheets, exercises, filing systems – they use this on an individual basis, they go through it logically, set up an email address when they feel confident”

“Lots of people are now getting into image manipulation, we're now looking to next year”

5.7.3 Learning to teach and staff development

The argument in the previous section suggests that group workshops with specific output i.e. design of learning material can be a means for wider staff development.

This line of thinking and the findings in this area suggest:

1. There is a bank of existing tailored materials which could be adapt on a case by case bases. The tutors who have developed these are an invaluable resource for mentoring others who are less experienced.
2. There is a willingness to share locally adapted resources if a process for doing so can be devised.
3. That all parties who have contact with learners want to be enabled to contribute to this local resource and own parts of it. By “own” we mean actually work through the process of understanding learner needs and tailoring material and activities for a particular type of learner and outcomes.
4. The development can lead to a bank of shared resources but the real gain is individual learning around working out learning needs and appropriate learning outcomes. An example of this is “making good” the ideas around “little snazzy themes” which have been suggested as labelled projects. Labelled projects are short self contained workshops which offer an activity and training by stealth (e.g. writing letters to your local council, pillow case printing, and digital family album - “Things like designing posters, creating cards, so that something nice

comes out of it”).

5. The perception of training needs by LRAs particularly is a strong driver for development (see quotes xiii).

Quote(s) xiii: LRAs: development needs

Designing teaching materials

“Training the staff – LRAs – we’ve had to find our own way and create our own worksheets”

“Learning materials are a big thing – we have to find them out on our own, and sometimes we just don’t have time”

“Time isn’t set aside for creating our own materials – it would be really useful to centralise all these”

Learning facilitation

“Another way of distinguishing is those who have trained teachers i.e. xxxx – he’s able to write a lesson plan – I see the benefits of that, he knows about outcomes and how to teach.”

“I struggle because I’m not a teacher – I feel ill-equipped – we’re told we’re cascading information rather than teaching but I don’t see the difference.”

“ why some people don’t want me around because they’d prefer to learn from a book, whereas others want to be more led – recognising these styles helps me respond in the right way for them”

“ I’m lacking in knowledge about how to do things like create worksheets – I’ve stumbled across things so probably know how to now but it’s all been trial and error – I wouldn’t know how to put a lesson plan together”

“I also need skills on how to convey information and learning”

Progression

“I’m thinking of going to City Lit to do the 7407 teaching certificate, I really want to do that.”

6. The perceived needs for ICT training relating to **ICT Skills** (see quotes xiv) suggest a need for a culture of ‘learning to learn’ rather than a dependence on piecemeal training relating to specific items of equipment or software. Contrast for example a comment from a professional tutor: “there’s nothing I wouldn’t try my hand at, don’t feel it’s any different/difficult.”

Quote(s) xiv: LRAs: skills need suggesting lack of confidence

ICT Skills

“Photoshop, and other new applications like music editing software”

“ More on Word, Photoshop, Publisher, digital camera and scanners (we’ve never had any sessions relating to the scanners)”

7. Moving onto another area for development, we found varied approaches to assessment of prior learning but some examples of good practice protocol which could be replicated.
8. We did not find any superficial concern with 'look and feel' so prevalent in the early roll out of UK Online e.g. "More socially excluded target users would be much more interested in learning if colourful graphics and interactivity were built into the learning materials." (Hall and Aitken 2001, p68).
9. There is great scope for staff development simply by running workshops for sharing good practice (i.e. assets based and not problem based).
10. Finally we found some knowledge of shareware products but these are largely under-utilised. A growing catalogue of useful 'stuff' would be a starting point.

6 GOOD PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

This section proposes a good practice framework which each centre can use individually and collectively to develop a tailored development plan which will broadly ensure that findings from this report are put into action.

6.1 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Where a centre does not meet threshold capacities, consider focusing on outreach and scheduled activities.
2. Identify a wide-ranging marketing strategy.
3. Consider developing tools for monitoring the 'visibility' of each centre.
4. Consolidate roles and responsibilities for the key roles: Centre Manager, Professional Tutor, and Learning Resource Assistant.
5. Develop a planning and review process for supporting people in key roles to take ownership of the findings in this report.
6. Schedule a programme of staff development, for example by using development of learning materials as a vehicle for team building.
7. Develop strategies for retention of staff and consider developing formalised progression routes for the Learning Resource Assistants.

Risk factors:

- A mixture of skills, knowledge, experience and expertise is required to implement the recommendations and facilitate each centre to develop an action plan. Appointing a single person, to do all of this or to 'solve' all problems is a risk.
- Appointing a development worker who does not have a hand-on role with learners is also a risk.

6.2 CENTRE LEVEL PLANNING AND REVIEW

Table 4: .Engaging Learners and learner communities: Action Planning Table				
	Individual Learner	Learning Group	Community Centre Users	New Target Communities
information and visibility¹	develop target	develop target	develop target	develop target
critical mass of good practice²	develop target	develop target	develop target	develop target
embedding³	develop target	develop target	develop target	develop target

Figure 9 can be used as a conceptual aid for thinking about new developments and managing the planning, and review process. Every centre needs to address community engagement at all four levels (Individual Learner, Group Learning, Community Centre Users and Local Community). All forms of engagement will have some value – but the substance of this will vary between centres depending on current assets, locality, stages of development and management structure.

The framework therefore offers a way of reasoning across centres in a way that is still relevant for local action at the centre level.

Within the four dimensions, the basic level is about visibility of existing capacity, and marketing of learning. This level is probably the easiest to quantify with clear concise and measurable objectives e.g. “notice boards updated weekly”, and “computers switched on with attractive screen saver”. A cross centre target at this level is to introduce a checklist for regular self monitoring. The checklist could be a type of “what the learner sees and experiences”. This could be devised collaboratively in an across centres initiative. There is a lot of evidence from the commercial world, and expertise within UK Online teams, on how physical space, and information can be made attractive and interactive e.g. the layout, displays and ‘browsing’ space in bookshops and large computer shops.

The next level (in each of the four dimensions) is capacity building. Here again the aim is to identify clear concise actions. There is again potential for borough wide developmental workshops to generate new ideas, collate best practice and exemplars which can be adapted locally by the centres. The danger is that the potential range of activity might be overwhelming and seen as innovation for innovations sake. It is therefore critical to target what is perceived to be within the

¹ This is about Marketing and capacity building.

² Pick from examples on the ‘Review Wheel’ and tailor or develop from first principle.

³ This is where the action does not depend on an individual or serendipity. Embedding means practice can be replicated annually and management processes and administration protocols are documented.

centres' control and do-able. Small incremental successes will in turn generate momentum.

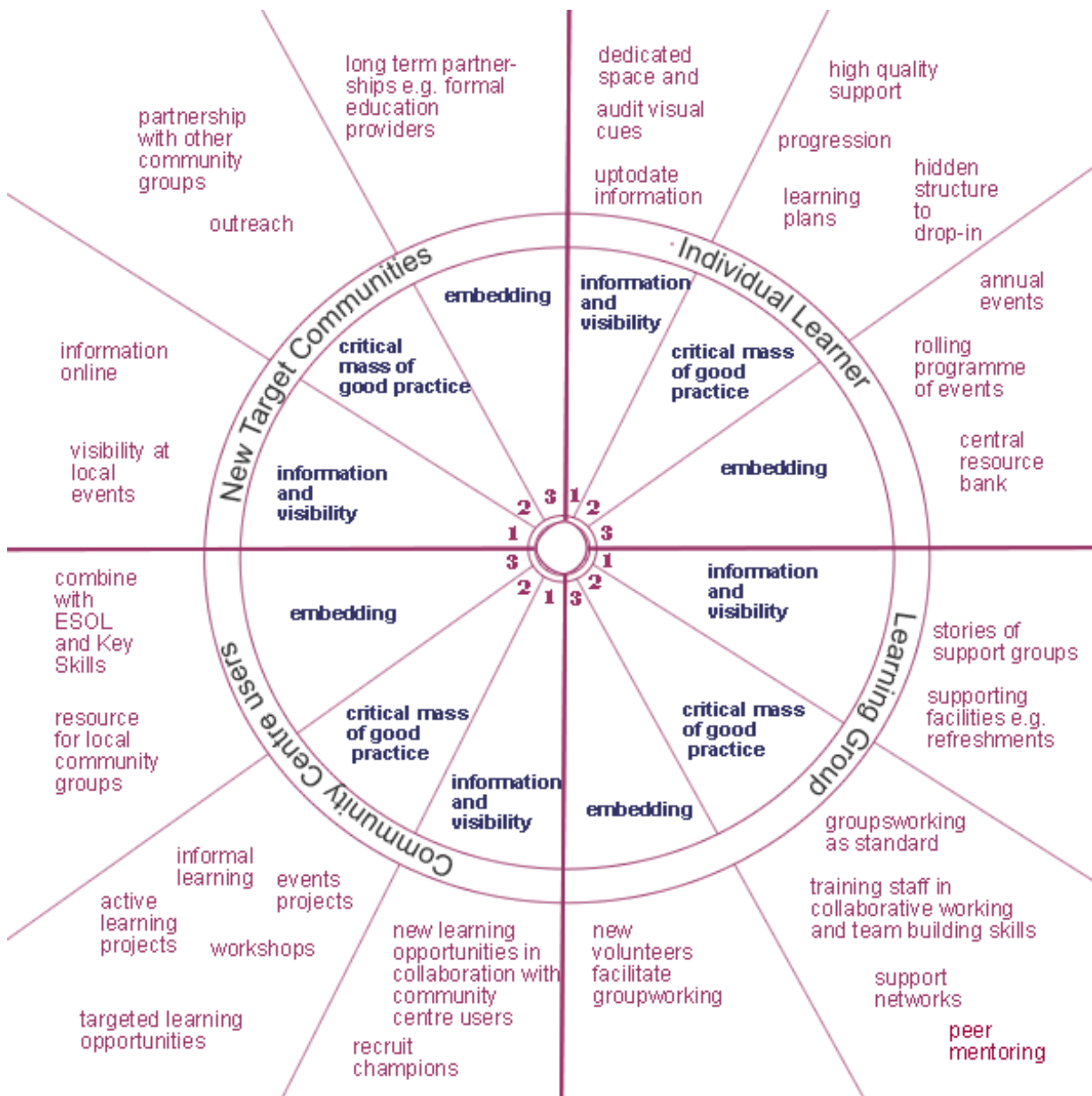


Figure 9. Engaging learners and learner communities: Action Review Wheel

The last level in each dimension is embedding. This is the most difficult and demanding and requires strategic management and vision building. One way forward is to develop the role of a 'critical friend' linked to each centre. This role would entail asking difficult questions "how are you going to make sure that projects xy and z which are successful NOW, will continue to be successful if xxxx leaves", and "how are you going to make sure this x,y,z good practice in managing the physical environment is carried out every six months?"

We recommend that the process of reflection and self evaluation is accompanied by a requirement for each centre to develop a plan of action. To develop an action plan each centre can:

1. Undertake a review of current practice asking the question “who are our current learners and learner communities and what learning opportunities do we offered?”
2. After this audit, the next stage is to use the wheel of good practice to discuss the dimension and levels of planning and review. The discussion may need to be facilitated and revisited many times
3. To complete the first cycle, the final stage is to identify targets in each of the four segments using the table format (table 4 is an example). The targets are then quantified by asking “how do we know when we are doing this?” and “when will we be doing this by?”

This process is the bases for developing a project plan in which action steps are mapped out from current situation to the target.

7 CONCLUSION

The research reported here used qualitative techniques of data gathering and analysis, to understand what makes a UK Online centre successful in engaging non traditional (digitally excluded) learners and their communities.

The findings offer insights into factors, conditions, and activities associated with the more successful UK Online centres. The problem is that ‘association’ is not simple to translate into strategies that can confidently ensure successful outcomes. We know what the issues are, but this does not naturally suggest a formula or list of recommendations suitable for all the centres. One size does not fit all, and simple answers will not do when clearly complexity itself is hiding any obvious answers.

Instead of a single list of recommendations; we have proposed models and visual representations as tools for planning. The tools embody findings from the larger picture, but can also be used to understand the context of each UK Online centre on a case-by-case basis.

There are certainly significantly different perceptions of ‘the problem’ and conflicting opinions on what is required. Our approach has been to resist reducing the question of “what makes a successful UK Online centre” into discrete unconnected parts. Instead we have intuitively proposed that the properties of a complex whole system are more than the sum of the parts. These are *emergent properties*, and we think the emergent properties of **each UK Online centre will be different and diversity is valuable.**

We found there is a critical threshold capacity for a UK Online centre to be viable. We found that effective practice has to be concerned with ‘individual learners’, ‘group learning’, ‘community centre users’ and ‘new target (local) communities’. It is possible to make some general purpose recommendations, however the real energy for development will come from empowering UK Online teams to “work it out for themselves”.

That is the purpose and function of the good practice framework.

8 REFERENCES

- Arnstein SR. A ladder of citizen participation. *AIP Journal* 1969;July:216-224.
- Baron, S., Field, J. & Schuller, T. (2000) *Social Capital: Critical Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Coffield, F. (2000) *Differing Visions of a Learning Society: Research Findings*, Volume 2, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Davidson, S. (1998) *Spinning the wheel of empowerment*. *Planning* 1262 (3 April) 14-15.
- Hall Aitken Associates (2001) *ICT Learning Centres (UK Online) Formative Evaluation of Pioneer & Pathfinder Projects Final Report*. Available at: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RRX3.pdf> (Accessed: 23 August 2004).
- Hall Aitken Associates (2002) *Evaluation of Pioneer and Pathfinder UK online centres*. Follow-up Study Queens Printer's: Norwich.
- Hall Aitken Associates (2003) *Community Access to Lifelong Learning (CALL) learning centres evaluation year one report*. Available at: http://www.nof.org.uk/documents/live/1152p__ictaccessyear1.pdf (Accessed: 23 August 2004).
- Hodgson, A. (2000) 'The Challenges of Widening Participation in Lifelong Learning' in *Policies, Politics and the Future of Lifelong Learning* (Ed.) Hodgson, A. London: Kogan Page.
- Morrell, J., Chowdhury, R. & Savage, B. (2004) *Progression from Adult and Community Learning*. NOP Social and Political: Department of Education and Skills (RR546).
- Schuller, T., Brassett-Grundy, A., Green, A., Hammond, C., & Preston, J. (2002) *Learning, Continuity and Change in Adult Life*. London: The Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning. Available at: <http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/Wbl/Docs/content.htm> (Accessed: 23 August 2004).
- South Lanarkshire Community Planning Partnership Community Engagement Framework Consultative Draft (2003) Available at: http://www.step.gb.com/papers_reports/step/Community%20Engagement%20Framework%20Consultative%20Draft.pdf (Accessed: 23 August 2004).
- The Scottish Parliament; SPICe Briefing 02/57(2002): Issues in Life Long Learning. Available at: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/research/date/2002.htm> (Accessed: 24 August 2004).

Wyatt, J., Allison, S., Donoghue, D., Horton P. & Kearney, K. (2003) *Evaluation of CFM funded UK Online Centres: Final Report*. Great Britain: Department of Education and Skills (RR502)