Taming the Dragon; making technology work for us

This event arose out of the discussions at the successful KT-EQUAL workshop 'Achieving and sustaining digital engagement' event (February 2011). In particular, this Taming the Dragon event, which was hosted in November 2011 by KT-EQUAL at Anglia Ruskin University, Chelmsford, sought to build on a key concept which emerged from that earlier workshop: "**that we should not consider increasing online presence among older people on its own; it is easier to bring people together as a community and to make using the internet part of that"** (Adam Hillmore DWP 2011). The starting point for Taming the Dragon was therefore to review the reported experiences of older people in learning to use information and communication technologies (ICTs), the challenges they face in sustaining use of ICT, the solutions that work for them and their aspirations for future provision.

This action-focussed event aimed to produce an effective model for ICT support for older people to enable them both to achieve and to sustain digital inclusion with the intention of using the output to inform design and provision of ICT support in the community. The carefully tailored and facilitated programme was designed to enable the objectives of the event to be met, namely:

- to achieve a consensus on the characteristics of current ICT learning and support provision available to older people;

- to elicit a shared vision of the ICT learning and support provision sought by older people (and informed by their experiences and preferences);

- to formulate a strategy for transition from the current to the vision for future provision and a supporting "specification" for future learning and support delivery.

To address these issues a range of stakeholders were brought together to co-produce specific outputs. The format on this occasion differed from most KT-Equal workshop events being designed as a collaborative process structured to provide documented outcomes relevant to specifying effective and sustainable learning and support for older users of new technologies and to making it happen.

Invitations to the workshop were sent directly to 80 individuals and organisations who had indicated their interest in ICT learning and support and digital inclusion. The event was also publicised on the KT-Equal website and, in accordance with KT-Equal policy, open to all. The 51 individuals who participated in the event included representatives from older people's interest groups (including third sector organisations); a Government department, academics and practitioners.

Taming the dragon: Making technology work for us.

Leela Damodaran, Loughborough University, opened proceedings by describing the background to the event. The earlier workshop (16th February 2011)had emphasised the crucial importance of effective ICT learning opportunities and support being available to older ICT users in a sustained way in order for them to remain 'connected' in our digital society. Participants had voiced strongly a demand for a follow-up which would lead to improved availability, delivery and provision of ICT

learning and support. In response to this expression of perceived need, Leela explained that the Taming the Dragon event had been designed explicitly to provide a forum for older people, academics, public sector agencies, practitioners and other related stakeholders to work together to produce an effective model for ICT support for older people to enable them both to achieve and to sustain digital inclusion.

Transforming barriers.

Leonie Ramondt, of Anglia Ruskin University, developed the themes identified in the introduction. She presented the work on which she was engaged on the Sus-IT* project which was developing understanding of the relationships between ageing and ICT use. This had included confirmation of the entry barriers for older people learning to use ICTs, identification of the barriers they often face in sustaining their use, and the diverse and variable range of learning and support opportunities that may be available to some. From this research she reported the following findings:

1. A summary of older people's perceptions of current ICT learning and support.
2. An overview of current ICT learning and support provision for older ICT users.
3. Findings regarding good practice for delivering effective ICT learning for older ICT users emerging from the Sus-IT research.

The presentation slides can be viewed at: http://kt-equal.org.uk/calendar/57/35-Taming-the-Dragon-making-technology-work-for-us

The full title of the Sus-IT project is "Sustaining IT use by older people to promote autonomy and independence". http://sus-it.lboro.ac.uk/

Challenges and opportunities in sustaining digital literacy among older people.

Emma Solomon, Managing Director of Digital Unite, further developed the theme of the challenges and opportunities of sustaining digital literacy among older people confirming that from the Digital Unite perspective there were three key challenges:

1. Reaching those who are not online.
2. Supporting the interest and engagement of those who are on-line.
3. Funding.

The opportunities were:

1. To find new and innovative solutions to tackle a long standing problem.
2. To find ways to reach the two distinct groups.
3. To create sustainable learning and make it pay.

She went on to explain how Digital Unite was redeveloping its services in the face of the challenges and opportunities.

The presentation slides can be viewed at: http://kt-equal.org.uk/calendar/57/35-Taming-the-Dragon-making-technology-work-for-us

Developing digital skills

Alastair Clark, Senior Programme Director from NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) reviewed the picture of national provision and policy towards digital learning over recent years and how the work of NIACE was influencing thinking around this topic. In particular he reviewed the implications of the recommendations of the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong

Learning, "Learning Through Life", which reflected the implications for learning of an aging population and the need to rebalance resources across life courses to support increased learning in later life. He went on to give an overview of "Get Digital" and examples of digital learning and inclusion projects in the UK and other EU countries, underlining the theme that individual learning journeys are long and complex.

The presentation slides can be viewed at:

http://kt-equal.org.uk/calendar/57/35-Taming-the-Dragon-making-technology-work-for-us

Savouring the last of the summer wine

Steve Thompson, Community Media Specialist, gave an illustrated overview of how older people were engaging with a range of technologies through Destinations which was a UK online centre and Internet Café in Saltburn on the North East coast of England. The focus was on using digital technologies to help people (mostly retired) do things that were meaningful to them and hence learn and achieve in a supportive environment. The pursuit of hobbies and interests such as photography and local history motivated some older people to learn about and engage with ICTs. Older people had often built up an interest during their lives but in order to continue they had to have access to new technologies and learn new skills. Activities undertaken included creating web sites and blogs, machinima, animation, audio, music etc. The Clubhouse had become known as a place of exploration and took people beyond the norm for ICT training.

The presentation slides can be viewed at:

http://slidesha.re/qtM5rQ

Crystallising the issues: how do we bridge the gap?

Leela Damodaran summarised the morning's presentations by way of introducing the tasks for the afternoon break out groups, which were as follows:

- **Session One**: To review and feedback on the analysis of current ICT learning and support provision for older people presented in the session by Leonie Ramondt.

- **Session Two:** To consider what a solution for delivering effective learning and support mechanisms for sustaining ICT use in the community might look like.

- **Session Three** – To address how we could achieve the transition from the current situation to the vision of the future? Two particular areas for consideration were:

    (i) Influencing the influencers – strategies for systemic change.

    (ii) How do we fund the solutions we have proposed?

Each of the 4 breakout groups comprised 10 individuals who represented a cross-section of areas of interest of those participating in the event. A facilitator led each group and a rapporteur documented the deliberations.

A spokesperson for each group summarised key points and presented these in the plenary session at the end of the day. Outputs from the four breakout groups, each of which considered all the questions posed above, are summarised by session below.

Session 1

All groups endorsed the validity of the parameters of current provision of ICT learning and support presented earlier in the day, shown in figure 1 below. Participants also enriched the analysis significantly by citing important additional considerations. These additional points are listed under figure 1 below.

Current Situation

1. Older people's perceptions of ICT learning and support provision
1. Information about available learning and support hard to find.
2. Wide diversity of ICT learning and support needs to be met.
3. Heavy (sometimes reluctant) reliance on family members and friends for ICT support.
4. Varied learning styles and preferences (e.g. range from self help, structured instruction, to learning from peers and supportive others).
5. Widespread need for help and advice on hardware and software issues.
6. Strong preference for provision in a relaxed, informal social setting without pressure to learn/seek formal or vocational qualifications.

2. Overview of provision
7. Little support available to help sustain ICT use in the face of cognitive, physical and technological change.
8. Provision of learning/training opportunities is patchy.
9. Training varies in quality/level – e.g. one centre's "beginners" is another's "intermediate".
10. Focus is on 'entry level' training and/or qualifications.
11. Public access to ICT's (for example in libraries) is reducing.
12. Lack of data on impact or 'benchmarks' to inform practice.

Figure 1   Current provision of ICT learning and support

Rapporteurs in the breakout group sessions recorded additions made to the above list of characteristics of current provision of ICT support and learning. These were wide-ranging, primarily experience-based, observations which fall into the following categories:

1. Cost issues (e.g. affordability of hardware and costs of internet access for those on fixed incomes /declining return on savings can be problematic).

2. Paucity of information and impartial advice (e.g. on purchasing decisions, access, accessibility/ assistive technology features, good practice).

3. Design shortcomings (e.g. excessive complexity, lack of user friendliness, use of web-based help).

4. Limited public access to ICTs.

5. Lack of a framework for provision of continuing learning and support which applies best practice and includes safeguards for security and privacy.

Session 2

In this session, again, the groups concurred with the "vision" they were asked to consider but as in session 1 they expanded and enriched the vision (presented in Figure 2 below) and offered many ideas for enhanced future provision. These ideas and suggestions, listed below figure 2, were informed by the participants' experience and awareness of their own needs, societal needs and drivers for change.

Vision for the Future

- Accessible, readily available, affordable, ongoing ICT learning support in the community (e.g. drop in centres, clubhouses, multi- access centres)
- Developed in accordance with evidence-based principles and inclusive of all learning styles/sensory modalities.

To deliver:

- Help and support in a timely fashion.
- Affordability and continuity.
- Social contact, increasing sense of community.
- Welcoming, safe and secure environment.
- Sharing of effective practice.
- Engaging in projects that people are passionate about, supported by ICT.
- Tailoring to personal objectives

And to achieve:

- Effective utilisation of existing resources.
- Appropriate funding models for sustainability.
- Integration of adaptive technologies as standard.
- Excellent information/tutorial materials.
- Professionalization and development of trainers, technology stewards etc.
- Engagement of a wide range of relevant stakeholders including the on-line banking and retail sectors of business, Government departments, local government, third sector organisations

Figure 2: Vision for future ICT learning and support provision

The suggestions and ideas offered can be grouped under the following headings:

1. Flexible approaches to learning - to better match the range of learning needs, speeds and styles of older people, and which include learning ICT skills as part of other activities so that the learning is purposeful.

2. Simplified ICT interfaces - designed to be intuitive for users and adapt to user needs thus requiring little or no training.

3. Independent trusted advice – for instance, a central hub of information that users can access for independent and trusted advice, ask questions and add knowledge to e.g. "Internet Direct" (analogous to NHS Direct). ICT learning and support services promoted using the same national brand and message.

4. Commercial interests – commerce could invest in supporting older customers to be online, with access to learning and support offered as a package with ICT products and services or taking 'market places' to community venues, with equipment from different suppliers/different systems, so that potential users can 'try before they buy'.

Session 3

(i) Influencing the influencers

In considering how to gain momentum for change, a strong sense of urgency was conveyed by a sizeable proportion of the participants and summed up by the observation that "there needs to be a real push now – change has to happen quickly (to improve provision of ICT learning and support).

The Vision has to be executable and sustainable in the long term". The need for leadership and a UK-wide framework in which the Vision could be made reality were seen as key enablers for action. To this end there were many suggestions for wide-ranging action and advocacy. These are summarised as follows:

1. Formulate a flexible framework for ICT learning and support provision for older people on aspects such as: delivery arrangements and facilities; quality of information and advice; and leadership of learning. The framework would provide the overarching context within which provision would be designed and delivered with the full participation of the stakeholders to reflect specific needs and requirements.

2. Lobby to communicate and deliver the vision - groups such as AgeUK, 50plus groups, and Older People's Parliament representatives to raise awareness of the deficit in ICT learning and support and of the compelling business case for sustained digital inclusion of older people. Possible courses of action identified were: an "Older Persons Minister", a Government inquiry into lifelong learning, and a Select Committee.

3. Develop the business case for sustained ICT learning and support provision, informed by further research and analysis into the opportunities that sustained digital engagement by older people offers for the health and well being agenda.

4. Communicate widely to promote awareness of the emerging opportunities for business – e.g. for ICT companies, service suppliers and retailers to 'give back' to society by sponsoring opportunities for learning and support for older people using ICT products and e-services whilst also promoting sales.

 (ii) Funding

There was acceptance and understanding that to be effective provision must be a long-term commitment and would therefore need to be sustainable. Participants made many innovative suggestions for a range of funding streams and several of these ideas reflected the view that those who are benefiting/ will benefit from the inexorable migration to on-line provision of services should contribute to the provision of appropriate learning and support for everyone – including older and disabled people so that no-one gets left behind. While there was considerable agreement that Government has role to play in ensuring there is funding for establishing sustained ICT support, it was also felt that such provision should also be funded by those benefiting from the population going online such as banks, shops, utility providers and public services. Better use of existing resources (e.g. in pubs and cafes' that provide Wi-Fi, in schools and adult education facilities) was also seen as a low-cost way of improving provision. Use of attendance allowance/pension credits to fund ICT learning and support could also be encouraged.

A number of participants saw an important a role for ICTs in promoting well-being of ICT users through its potential for reducing social isolation and depression and perhaps a preventative role in delaying the onset of Alzheimer's.

Conclusion

Leela reviewed the achievements of the day and expressed satisfaction that the statements, both of the current position and the vision, had been confirmed and enhanced significantly. She said these would provide the basis for dialogue with government, commerce, industry, service providers and other stakeholders. In planned round table discussions with such groups, emphasis would be placed on the importance of sustaining digital engagement of older people in ways which reflected their priorities and preferences. She stressed the commitment of KT-EQUAL and the Sus-IT project team to taking forward the long-term digital inclusion agenda informed by the outputs of the day. She added that she and her colleagues were acutely aware that to achieve the major changes sought in the nature and quality of ICT learning and support provision throughout the UK would require the 'buy in', leadership, support and commitment of many key stakeholders from a wide range of sectors/groups. In this regard many of the suggestions generated for 'influencing the influencers' to achieve transition from the current situation to the future vision would be taken up. She assured participants that action would follow – but would clearly take time to put in place. To this end, a systematic programme of events was in the planning stage to inform, influence and win support for a strategy for developing and implementing sustained, community-based, participative

ICT learning and support provision. The goal was to achieve and sustain the full and active participation in our digital society of as many older and disabled people as possible.

Finally Leela thanked participants for the quality and range of their contributions, which had enabled the event to proceed so successfully.

Post workshop developments

The vision for ICT learning and support generated from the input of older people and that of other stakeholders at the two workshops identifies clearly the goals to be reached in order for sustained digital inclusion through the life-course to become a reality. This vision, which provides a clear statement of user requirements, has informed the development of a blueprint for sustainable community-based ICT learning and support provision. At a series of round table discussions the blueprint will be presented, explained and deliberated with different stakeholder groups to gain their understanding, their contributions, support and, most importantly, their commitment to playing a part in a participative implementation process. The following events are planned:

1. Businesses involved in developing and/or delivering accessible solutions : May 2012

2. Designers and developers of ICT products : May 2012

3. Retail organisations selling ICT products/assistive technologies to older people : May 2012

4. Government departments/Public sector/Local Government: June 2012

5. Older Peoples' Groups e.g. 50 + forums; AgeUK; U3A: June 2012

6. A multi-stakeholder event (which will include representatives of all the above) will take place in September 2012. Its agenda and proceedings will be informed by the deliberations of the roundtable discussions listed above. The objective will be to agree a strategy for achieving the vision for ICT learning and support provision and an action plan for phased, evolutionary implementation of a user generated strategy for community based ICT training and support.