

This lively event saw a whole number of stakeholders from older peoples' groups, third sector organisations concerned with older people, government agencies and initiatives and school children come together to hear experts in the area and debate the issues.

As described below (and can be seen from the presentations), there was significant agreement regarding the major issues that have to be tackled, namely:

- Identifying and implementing adjustments to existing technologies to make them attractive enough for older people to want to use
- Assisting people to sustain digital engagement over time and provision of the necessary resources required for this
- Getting people to participate in meaningful ways rather than just engaging

We're all better off when everyone is online

The day commenced with **Alan Thomas** from Race Online and 'Living with Ataxia'. He has been recently involved in a digital world conference through the Welsh Assembly and involved in the launch of Manifesto for a Networked Nation through his work with Race Online (<http://raceonline2012.org/>).

Alan has a rare neurological condition called ataxia and he described how the computer gives him a voice. Alan is part of a group called 'Living with Ataxia', a knowledge sharing community that enables the sharing of stories by those living with the condition. He is the UK online manager for Living with Ataxia which 510 members from all over the globe. Events are managed online and through this medium members are able to meet.

Alan's talk stimulated a whole range of questions and comments.

The first question was concerned with getting the rural community online. Alan agreed that this is difficult and that rural communities (such as where he lives in

Wales) have to club together to purchase broadband which has financial implications for the individuals concerned. Also the speed of service is slow even though there are improvements.

Bridgette Wessels (one of the presenters) told the audience that the installation of Next Generation Broadband in South Yorkshire will lead to social and economic transformation and include models of best practice. As South Yorkshire has both rural and urban areas, infrastructure experiments in different locations are being included.

There was a second question about how the cost of getting appropriate assistive technology was a barrier to use of IT by people with disabilities. Alan confirmed that it is necessary to personally finance this type of equipment. This means that getting online for people with disabilities is particularly challenging. A member of the audience observed that people who are blind can access a range of assistive technology and they wondered how this compared to other groups. It was noted that larger charities such as the RNID can have more resources.

Another delegate stated that in their experience, a frequent reaction of older people to IT is that they do not want a computer. The second reaction is that they cannot type and therefore need to learn to use the keyboard. These and other issues of usability need to be taken forward in addition to how people might access equipment and the Internet. Another person said that it can be difficult for older people to physically use a keyboard.

It was suggested that the public library offers opportunities for computer access.

Crossing the digital divide in the other direction: community-based innovation

David Frolich from the University of Surrey then spoke about the importance of making impact at the grass roots, illustrating this point by describing a project he led (funded through the Engineering and Physical Sciences Digital Economy research programme, Design in the Digital World www.ddw.org.uk). He confirmed that the digital inclusion of certain sectors of society is a big issue. He acknowledged that initiatives such as Race Online are important for introducing people to existing technology but that he is also interested in the role of technology in peoples' lives and how local innovation can promote interest and usage. The digital divide is both national and international with activity taking place globally; for example India is rolling out internet kiosks for everyone and Africa has a computing platform. David

emphasised the need for technology pull as well as push. There should be a participatory approach to generating new technology, thereby designing for social as well as digital inclusion. The SUS IT project provides an example of how older people can be encouraged to innovate <http://sus-it.lboro.ac.uk/>

The project that David engaged in combined community journalism with design, with community journalists being trained as ethnographers. The research location was a housing estate in the North West. Many of the residents were not using technology; there were high levels of unemployment but also lots of community groups and a rich social history with extended families. An anthropologist lived within community for the first year to find out how the community gets issues heard and how they use technology. The information was used to identify 23 design areas which were then checked with the community. David then described how ideas had been translated into innovative technologies for use by the community. The lessons out of the research included the importance of producing innovations that the community wanted and the value of moving beyond the computer platform.

Questions for David included the sustainability of the project; who is going to pay particularly as the research is with low income families. It was confirmed that the goal is to give the community design tools (<http://fab.cba.mit.edu/>). A variety of mechanisms were described including continuing support for community journalism and the social housing group.

A second question was concerned with how to encourage older people to use IT in line with government policy; a modern IT suite exists at one Age Concern local branch but is hardly used. David suggested that it is acceptable not to engage. Benefits of existing technologies need to be promoted but we also need to be more radical. The managers of two other branches of Age Concern in London then stated that in contrast they had a waiting list for IT assistance and would like a bigger suite and more staff but cannot get the funding. A project being led by AgeUK London was described where older people can get reconditioned PCs. It was agreed that ways have to be found to help people to participate and not just as passive consumers.

People, projects and priorities: securing the digital participation of older people

Simon Roberts of Race Online (<http://raceonline2012.org/>) then spoke about this initiative, expanding some of the points made in the introduction by Alan Thomas. Simon stated that more than 9 million living in the UK have never used the internet with 65% of this total being people aged 65 years and over. However social class is also an important factor; people from lower social classes are less likely to be connected.

Race Online has a strategy to inspire, support and encourage which involves both campaigning and partnership. People are finding their own reasons to adopt technology and the need for sustained support with this was emphasised. Irrespective of age, once people get online they tend to engage in very similar activities. Simon illustrated this by statistics that show a 716% estimated increase in use of Facebook in 2008-2010 by over the 65s. With technological developments, some barriers to access will be removed. Touch screen/ tablet PCs are already become pervasive and will get cheaper. The 'app model' will become increasingly important; the i phone is already a best seller among those over 55 years. A variety of technologies are being used already in care homes. The work of another Government initiative 'Get Digital' (<http://getdigital.org.uk/>) comes to an end in March with a legacy that has demonstrated the benefits of technology in supported housing environments.

Questions to Simon included the use of Facebook by older people; older people are nervous about this due to issues of security and need more information but how can this be obtained? Simon responded that there was an existing report on privacy and security but that more work needs to be done as the debate is moving rapidly. We all leave a data trail when we use the Internet. The risks need to be objectively identified but there are also moral boundaries which cannot always be attributed to the Internet.

A second point was made about how the increasing use of the Internet to sell goods and products is disenfranchising those who are not online.

Next-generation services for older and disabled people

Jane Rumble and **Damien Radcliffe** from Ofcom then spoke about the research that they had commissioned on behalf of Ofcom. This had investigated the potential that might be realised from next-generation broadband, including benefits for

healthcare. Broadband take up and internet usage has significantly increased over the last 5 years with mobile connections also increasing. Some of the statistics provided by Simon were reiterated in that the older consumer slowest group to get broadband. However, the single fastest group going online are also older. Multiple barriers to entry were described; for example no need, no pc, the cost, safety, fraud etc. Internet usage also drops off in retirement. Another illustration of how rural communities have to pull together to get Internet access was given.

Jane and Damien then posed the question; would things improve if cost was not a consideration? They suggested that cost is not necessarily a barrier as this are reducing even though consumption is increasing and in comparison to other countries, pricing is competitive in the UK. Understanding is the greatest barrier.

Older people need incentives to get involved. Assistance by relatives can be valuable, enabling proxy use of the Internet. Damien also emphasised how access will be eased through further technological development; 25% of the population already has a smart phone. In the near future the Internet will be accessed through the TV and there will also be Apps through the TV. Investment in Superfast Broadband is set to dramatically increase uptake; 16 million households will have this available to them by the end of 2015.

Jane and Damien drew the audience's attention to the results of the work commissioned by Ofcom which can be accessed online (<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/about/how-ofcom-is-run/committees/older-and-disabled-people/research/>). This describes how next generation broadband will impact upon our health and wellbeing, work and employment and leisure over the next 5-10 years and details the benefits, risks and challenges, giving the audience a flavour of its contents through examples drawn from the report in each of the identified domains.

Questions included the risk that technology will further isolate people. Damien suggested that Internet enabled provision must in combination with face to face services, thereby adding value. This topic was enlarged upon by participants who raised questions regarding the extent of work that has been done with professional staff; how happy are they to monitor rather than see people face to face?

Participation and the web: factors in engaging older people in social and digital communication and services

Bridgette Wessels from the University of Sheffield focused on the meaning of participation and how to engage older people in ways that are meaningful for them. This involves recognising the individual's creativity as well as their specific needs and desires. She then went on to consider how participation and digital inclusion can be fostered whilst also taking creativity into account. The diversity of older people must be recognised and we also need to understand how people live. Bridgette mentioned that those older people who are more engaged are more likely to use the Internet. Active ageing is an important common denominator; optimising for health, participation and security. She then asked the audience to think about what is meant by the 'digital divide'. This is commonly interpreted as those who have internet connection and those who do not. Improving access is presented as the solution. Not having access to the internet creates a knowledge gap but the audience was asked to think about what people are being excluded from. Also terms such as 'access' and 'trust' are often used in the context of the digital world but what do they mean? Bridgette said that social inclusion is multidimensional and includes the individual's sense of belonging as well as having access to resources. People can develop social strategies for coping if they have resources but if resources are lacking then life is about just managing. Inclusion pulls people into behaving in ways that have been established by others while participation focuses more on engagement, accountability and governance. However for participation to occur skills need to be fostered and support services are required. Bridgette emphasised that engagement works when users shape digital services, providing a number of examples of what has worked with older people. The point was made that creativity can be fostered through community design starting with the ideas generated by older people who can come together either physically or online.

Bridgette was asked how communication can be initiated. She described a methodology she had developed called social formation methodology but also emphasised the need to establish a wide infrastructure with all stakeholders.

Engaging older people: digital inclusion initiatives from AgeUK

David Mortimer from AgeUK described the services and campaigns provided through AgeUK. 'Internet champion of the year' (<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/work-and-learning/technology-and-internet/internet-champions/>) is held in partnership with BT.

This is about identifying inspirational people who can provide testimonials. 'Itea and biscuits' is another campaign to help people to get online (My friends online week (20th March) will involve how to keep in touch with people through technology (<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/work-and-learning/technology-and-internet/myfriends-online-week/>) AgeUK also provide a telephone befriending service (<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/relationships-and-family/telephone-befriending/>) and people can access information and advice about digital technology through AgeUK customer shops. Basic IT skills can be also obtained through local branches of AgeUK which are led by the interests of participants and also help with the jargon associated with technology. David suggested that there is fear about technology decreasing the rights of individuals when it can actually enhance rights and access to services; for example by using the Internet to book appointments. AgeUK are concerned about how to improve accessibility through use of the web but it was also pointed out that some services are still resistant to using IT. The Internet can confer other benefits to older people such as fostering new hobbies and Internet shopping (which is cheaper than getting a volunteer to help). Libraries are an excellent venue for fostering participation. AgeUK is trying to encourage skill sharing among family and friends. They are also encouraging volunteering by corporate industries such as BT. It was stated that there is a need to galvanise others to get involved. The involvement of local branches of AgeUK is being expanded to cascade involvement to community groups.

Questions and comments to David were concerned with initiatives and services to improve access.

There was a question about the location of 'silver surfers week'; it was confirmed that there will be an event in London.

Further resources were offered by participants. It was confirmed that younger volunteers are already part of the digital inclusion network, with young people working one to one with older people (<http://www.ageuklondon.org.uk/index.cfm?id=4085>) AgeUK academy zenos is a free phone help line run by graduates. This aims to assist older people with IT problems which can be challenging. Information is available on a regional website (http://www.zenos.com/employers/news_article/age_concern_project)

David confirmed that AgeUK aims to take people through the full journey to connection and sustainability including purchase. They are able to assist people

with broadband purchase by recommending the best deal for an individual in their area (a service that is accredited by Ofcom).

AgeUK is getting involved in recycling computers. It was also pointed out that UK online is offering computers for £80.

Issues were raised such as problems with connectivity in rural locations and the confidence and information that being digitally connected can demand. It was pointed out that individuals need motivation, information, transport to get to IT classes and they also need money to buy broadband.

David said that the intention is to grow AgeUK support. Rurality is a problem, and short grants will be available to help people to travel. Getting broadband access is another challenge and 'pay as you go' is an option. He reiterated how AgeUK can also negotiate better deals but the market also needs to drive down costs.

One of the audience suggested that AgeUK should set up a pilot scheme for a computing in the same way that they provide a handyman scheme.

Some public policy implications of the quest for digital inclusion

The final speaker, Leela Damodaran from University of Loughborough, confirmed that she related to much of what had already been said. There are significant policy implications on the long route to connection and once this is achieved, sustaining connectivity. Leela talked about the challenges of maintaining engagement. People can be easily discouraged and fearful that they are going to break something, not helped by messages on screen such as 'fatal error'. People often learn by trial and error which may not work with older people. However success can be exhilarating as demonstrated by the Digital Unite website.

Leela gave a whole list of issues that can lead to disengagement including unemployment, reduced capabilities, cyber nuisance (can be a cause for concern), viruses, identity threats, cyber barriers e.g. remembering, upgrading. There is no infrastructure support for people at home.

Accessibility constraints include sensory impairment, mobility issues cognitive impairment, language difficulties, age related changes, social changes. Those who do disengage can be excluded from full participation in society.

Leela then talked about how to ensure that drop off in engagement is less likely. Strategies include engaging with business and changing mindsets by demonstrating that this a worthwhile area to invest in. We also need to apply good practice and utilise research findings, promote policy change, and satisfy information needs. The value of proxy assistance to older people was also raised.

Design is another significant dimension. Investment is required into design for accessibility so that technology is intuitive and its upgrading and administration is easy and straight forward.

Leela then asked the audience to consider whose responsibility it is to instigate change to design? Whose responsibility to promote investment? Whose responsibility is it to ensure access and sustain engagement? What kind of capacity building is required? What sort of hard ware and software are necessary?

She reiterated the balance of effort that exists between getting people online and helping them to remain online and posed a number of ways in which this might be taken forward. They included volunteering; for example by befriending for IT support, creating some responsibility by industry; for example by rewarding loyalty and promoting the use of plain language by retail.

The Internet should be simplified and attractive services like Skype should be promoted.

People are fearful of getting locked into contracts. They want to self-learn but also wanted tailored help; is this something for Government to consider?

Discussion points

How can we overcome entry barriers?

- Older people taught as peers, 1-2-1 learning
- Forum to provide support and materials written for older people
- Using analogies with everyday life
- Telephone support
- How to choose kit and get it into your house?

- Personalisation
- Clear communication of benefits
- Kite mark from AGEUK on apps

How can engagement be sustained?

- Peer support – coffee mornings
- Problems with different operating systems may cause difficulties when learning on a different machine
- Partnerships – utilise social responsibility initiatives of companies
- Internet tea room
- Engagement ambassadors, communities
- Addressing concerns with security
- Expanding capacity in libraries
- Tapping into volunteering initiatives
- Call centres

What key policies need to be addressed?

- Funding used where it is most needed – materials and libraries
- National standard for labels on PCs that outlines the OS
- Front page or skin for all computers
- Embracing changing technology, e.g. ipad, digital TV
- Open source software
- User centred design – not led by manufacturers

- Regulation and standards – OFCOM
- Awareness of accessible peripherals
- Need neutral advice with the digital switchover

The event concluded with the following action points:

- There is a clear need for customisation and personalisation with clear visual aids
- KT-EQUAL can highlight how support needs to be structures in terms of design, policy and AGEUK.
- Reduced government capacity leads to a need for further clarity on who will provide this support.
- Clear enthusiasm was shown for a follow-on event with speakers from Microsoft, Apple, Martin Bean, someone from Government, Jonathan Tindale and suppliers of internet services.