"It creates many first steps." *(Granby Island focus group)*

many first steps

interim report to DTI and DfEE Learning Centres Board

on the first phase of 'The Five' Pioneer Learning Centres

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Acknowledgements

Summary of findings and recommendations

Particular strengths of the projects' experience so far are that:

- They are clearly occupying a vacant market niche in the provision of access to learning and ICTs;
- they have stimulated interest and are having an immediate impact on levels of confidence among local people;
- significant and threatening organisational stresses placed on the organisations have been absorbed, leaving some of the centres noticeably stronger and more confident.

Particular weaknesses thus far have been:

- low levels of involvement with the private sector as partners;
- low levels of engagement with SMEs;
- low impact among the more excluded population who might be reluctant to enter either a public or a community building. (Introduction)

Dynamic individuals with vision, contacts, trust and leadership qualities are key to the success of initiatives of this kind. (Introduction)

There is a need to ensure that in any low-income neighbourhood there is supported access to informal learning in a community context; and that effective partnership links exist between local providers of different kinds. (Section 2)

The centres can support non-traditional learners by providing a context which is sensitive to their needs, providing unambiguous and individually-pertinent opportunities, and smoothing the transition to further learning in a more formal setting. (Section 2)

All five projects can demonstrate an enhanced capacity as viable partners in parallel developments for regeneration and other initiatives. (Section 3)

Our focus groups revealed strong anticipation that the learning centres will be of direct benefit to their localities. (Section 4)

Support for learners needs to be flexible, sensitive, informal but structured. Peer support is a distinguishing characteristic and has to be nurtured. (Section 5)

Quality learning may depend on quality teaching, and the centre's links to further education can be as important as its range of software. (Section 5)

The work of the centres can transform levels of self-esteem significantly, leading to an enhanced quality of life and the pursuit of further learning. (Section 6)

There is a need to develop a methodology which demonstrates the value of personal and community outcomes. In terms of individual lives, the impact of community-based ICT learning centres can be transformational. The task is to systematise the demonstration of that evidence in order to inform policy further. (Section 6)

Our focus groups indicated a rich variety of intentions among users to exploit the technology in various ways. The most common concerns were to get a job and / or qualification, and to enhance a contribution to voluntary activity. (Section 7)

The centres perform a role in offering people a stigma-free focus for their basic skills needs. They cannot be expected to identify and help everyone with basic skills needs, but they offer one acceptable option for many people. A more systematic approach is called for. (Section 8)

Ideally, centres will always provide both supported drop-in and formal sessions. An issue of concern is the fact that in many cases there is inadequate physical space. (Section 9)

Word-of-mouth is an effective promotional technique, which can be systematised. It is not certain to reach excluded groups and needs augmenting. Centres don't need a full glossy marketing campaign, but community development work. This takes time but it will bring people in. The centres are already attracting people who are not really involved in their community sector. (Section 11)

Community-based learning centres have an important role for people who own computers and want to exploit them fully. Many of the necessary skills and attributes can most effectively be gained, or enhanced significantly, in a community context. (Section 13)

Strategic help is needed if the centres are to secure private sector involvement. (Section 14)

The sustainability of centres of this kind is unacceptably uncertain. Research effort is needed to demonstrate their outcomes, and policy effort is needed to render them sustainable. (Section 14)

In the Learning Centres Programme generally the three issues which concern people are the imbalance of capital and revenue; the complexities of the application form; and investment and support for community involvement and partnership building. (Section 14)

Because centres are used to having many activities involving different groups of people, they are in a strong position to bring in expertise from other agencies. Much of the added value which they offer is not something that colleges, libraries or other institutions can ever bring about (Section 15)

1 Introduction

The [Learning Centres programme](#) is a large-scale national initiative intended to address inequalities of access to learning technologies, and aimed at stimulating the uptake of learning opportunities in the Network Society. A number of 'pioneer' and 'pathfinder' centres were established in late 1999, including the five projects, supported by Community Development Foundation, which are the subject of this report. Brief descriptions of the work of the centres, and their use of the technology, are provided at Appendix A. While 'The Five', as they have become known, are smaller in terms of capital funding than any of the other initiatives, key lessons emerge from their early experience which are relevant for the further development of the Learning Centres programme, and for social policy generally.

This report builds upon a previous study presented to the Social Exclusion Unit's Policy Action Team on 'Access to IT' (PAT15) in February 2000. A summary of that report, *Everyone gets hooked*, is provided at Appendix B.

The key audiences for the programme relate to the Social Exclusion Unit's target groups in disadvantaged communities, addressed in the PAT15 report, and also include 'rural and dispersed communities'. The Five projects were set up in low-income neighbourhoods in urban areas in England, located as follows:

- Granby Island Community Centre, Devonport, Plymouth
- Hangleton and Knoll Community Project, Hove
- Scotswood Support Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne
- Bolton Woods and Windhill community centres, Shipley
- Peel Precinct, South Kilburn, London Borough of Brent.

It is important to note that while the first four are based on existing community initiatives, the project in South Kilburn is effectively a new centre. Following negotiations with South Kilburn Regeneration Unit, the project, which became known as 'INNIT', was located in a vacant shop front rather than in any existing facility.

Capital funding from DfEE, and revenue funding until March 2001 from DTI, was confirmed in October 1999. CDF was funded by DTI to support and evaluate the initiatives. A number of factors contributed to delays in bringing these centres up to capacity: these included delays in the provision of the funding - which severely jeopardised one of the centres; technological complications and delays; and in two cases the need to build confidence and involvement carefully with local people. This meant that the eventual opening of the projects as functioning learning centres was as follows:

Scotswood:	1st week of February 2000
Bolton Woods, Shipley:	18 February 2000

South Kilburn:	23 February 2000
Windhill, Shipley:	week beginning 13 March 2000
Granby:	last week of March 2000
Hangleton:	1 June 2000

Hence the 'living and breathing' experience of the projects as operating ICT learning centres is limited, but the gestation has been full of lessons. In particular, it has given us insights about:

- integrating the centres into the local context
- the impact of the centres on the local community
- the provision of support to learners, including peer support
- how they might be promoted to the most excluded groups
- the conditions under which access is most appropriately provided
- what technology issues they are confronting
- collecting information on use
- the relationship between computer home ownership and community access.

The particular strengths of the experience so far are that:

- the centres are clearly occupying a vacant market niche in the provision of access to learning and ICTs;
- they have stimulated interest and are having an immediate impact on levels of confidence among local people;
- significant and threatening stresses placed on the organisations, to manage and adapt to their new roles and accommodate the new facilities, have been absorbed, leaving some of the centres and communities noticeably stronger and more confident.

The particular weaknesses thus far have been:

- low levels of involvement with the private sector as partners;
- low levels of engagement with SMEs;
  low impact among the more excluded population who might be reluctant to enter either a public or a community building.

We would also draw attention to the perennial issue that *dynamic*

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individuals are key to the success of initiatives of this kind. This issue was highlighted in the report *Down to earth vision*, a study of community-based ICT initiatives which CDF published in 1997. Similarly, PAT15 drew attention to the importance of 'local champions' for the integration of ICTs, and the fact their skills may need to be nurtured and supported if local communities are to benefit fully from what they have to offer.

The key attributes of leadership, not necessarily belonging in a single individual, appear to be:

• being able to clarify and communicate a *vision* of the community in the Network Society, and an understanding of the possibilities which the technology offers in the local context
• being able to establish and sustain *contacts*, and *trust*, across sectors.

It is also clearly important that such leadership is readily and consistently supported with *technical expertise*. And we are beginning to see the need for *project management skills* as these centres develop and grow.

This issue merits closer attention, since it is often crucial to the success of initiatives of this kind. It may be, for example, that the work being carried out with social entrepreneurs by Community Action Network could provide valuable lessons on how to support local champions.

This report has been prepared for the ICT Learning Centres Board in July 2000.

Research methods

The original plan was to examine the following research areas:

> • a baseline evaluation: users
> • statistical monitoring
> • case studies
> • measuring outcomes
> • how it was

In addition, the intention was to use the following:

> 1. A questionnaire for all visitors to Centres
> 2. A short 'exit' questionnaire
> 3. A flier and survey form to people's homes
> 4. Focus groups
> 5. Personal case studies
> 6. Regular questions
> 7. Local information gathering
> 8. Project group meetings

Due to the staggered and late opening of the centres, only the following were completed or partially so:

Questionnaires

> 124 questionnaires from learners at five centres including Windhill

Community Centre in Shipley and Honicknowle Youth and Community Centre in Plymouth. As numbers of forms returned were limited, only a little reliable data can be had so far from them. Comments arising from the data are to be found below (see Survey Questionnaire, Appendix C).

Focus groups in the five centres

These covered the following questions, and have informed the writing of this report.

What facilities should be provided at the Centre to encourage people to come and use the computers?

What help and information do people need when they come to use the computers?

What kind of support should be provided for people generally whether they have a computer at home or not?

What do you like or dislike about the sessions you have been to so far?

What do you think you would like to do once you have learnt the basics about using the computers?

What are the benefits of having computers and training support here at the Centre?

Case studies

A small number of case studies were completed by projects and by talking to people on visits. Five are presented here. Some have been anonymised.

Standard questions

A series of questions emailed on a fortnightly basis to project managers. These were:

1. Thinking about how you decide how the LAC project is working, what has been successful and not so successful (in the last fortnight)?

2. What issues have there been concerning the computer equipment and software (in the last fortnight)?

3. What questions or problems have arisen around access to the centre - (such as opening hours, physical access, supervision, problems of specific groups of people)?

4. What organisations have been involved in the project - who and how?

5. How is the project fitting in with other objectives and activities at the centre, and elsewhere in the local area?

6. What personal successes have there been with people accessing the technology in the last fortnight?

This was a successful source of ongoing comment and information about the varied experiences at each project.

Project group meetings

The projects met together four times in all - once at a meeting organised by DfEE for all Pathfinders and Pioneers, and once at the Home Office Active Communities Conference. Two workshops were held with CDF staff (the second attended by Hall Aitken Associates). Within a structured approach, much useful additional evaluation information was assimilated. This took the form of project staff developing criteria for ICT learning centres and sharing best practice, and projects all said that the opportunity to learn from others' experiences was invaluable. An online discussion group was set up but as yet has barely been used by projects themselves. This reflects the point that project managers are busy people, but they do need to be able to use current communications technology effectively.

Project visits

The researchers also visited and interviewed staff and learners on a number of occasions, and made extensive use of email to seek information and provide feedback and advice to project staff.

Questionnaire survey of users

The questionnaire was designed for all new learners, and was mainly completed on paper forms. Our objective however was to design a web-based form which could be displayed on a PC screen (see Appendix C), and which would be completed by new learners as one of their first tasks using the new technology. Its simple point and click to multiple-choice questions was seen as a very useful way of introducing people with low IT skills to a purposive use of the computer, and an experience which would provide them with a tangible result at an early stage to build their confidence. In the event, multiple technical difficulties prevented this from happening.

Because of the low returns, and that we know that questionnaires were not necessarily filled in on a first visit, all interpretations and figures are indicative only. What follows are a few comments broadly interpreted from the data.

In an attempt to determine whether centres were attracting isolated people we included questions about their knowledge of and involvement in local activities. Very few said they had not heard of *any* groups or activities, although only a few said that they had been involved in local campaigns. Some knew a lot about local activities - and these may have been

regular users of the centres, or revealed they were involved with them in some way. The suggested inference - backed up by anecdotal evidence - is that some early learners will be those active in the centre's operation or in local community groups: potentially the champions and animateurs for the learning centre campaign.

Exactly half of respondents said they had a computer at home, and 77% had used a computer before. The main reason for not having a computer at home was the cost of buying and running it.

Most people (90%) had heard of the centre by word of mouth, through a local group or by invitation or referral from another agency. Advertising campaigns have not been carried out, and can have had no impact, although several centres have attracted publicity from local and national newspapers (see section 12 Promotion).

There was little to distinguish the numbers from all respondents who were in paid work (31%), not in paid work (27%), or in full time education (32%) - this last figure partly reflecting the distribution of the questionnaire at the youth centre in Devonport.

More people were likely to be interested in learning about IT (28% of respondents) than looking for training for work (6%) or a college course (13%). Seventy-seven per cent of respondents preferred to drop in rather than book in to use a computer, and except at Granby Island which has seven day opening, there was, not surprisingly, little expressed preference for weekend access.

44% those who answered the question preferred to learn from a self-study package with a tutor present, with a third (33%) preferring a taught class. Only four respondents preferred a telephone hotline.

Overall, 72% of respondents were women, although in Plymouth there were more men involved (without the Plymouth figures the total of women was 80%). Project staff have been discussing with researchers how to attract men, particularly middle age men, into the centres.

2 The local context for access

One assumption in establishing the pioneer centres was that community-based initiatives will reach target audiences more effectively than institutionally-based provision, such as that provided in libraries, colleges, schools and other public buildings. In this section we discuss the nature of the centres' constituencies; their place in the mixed economy of ICT provision at local level; and the importance of strong partnership arrangements.

The constituencies for the centres

All five localities are low-income neighbourhoods where people experience a range of problems including poverty, poor health, bad housing conditions, high and persistent levels of unemployment, poor transport services and amenities, high crime rates, and so on. Descriptions of the localities are provided in section 3 of *Everyone gets hooked*. Here we wish to draw attention to two issues which have resonated at several centres.

> "People lose the sense of responsibility for themselves and others. There's an incredible amount of fatalism… A great deal in the way people live is chosen by others. What this ICT's allowed is, as a confidence-builder, it gives them status because they're the people who know what it's about."
>
> *(Tony Mason, personal communication, 3 July 2000)*

First, that people who experience exclusion are often resistant to the institutional provision of services. Institutions present to many people an image of imposing requirement and conformity rather than participation or involvement; of bureaucratic language and status-oriented forms of behaviour.

Secondly, many people in low-income neighbourhoods and situations of deprivation live highly unstructured lifestyles. As one worker put it to us, "For

some of these people, just turning up for anything is a major achievement."

Another pointed out that we are talking about "people whose lives are so chaotic and they have so many problems which need to be sorted before they even think about sitting in front of a computer." *(Helen Cairns, personal communication, 3 July 2000)*

Access at local level: the mosaic of local provision

> The FEILT strategy sees 'the community dimension of local provision, with local pooling of plans and resources, as an essential component in a meaningful lifelong learning culture'. (1999, p7)

The Learning Centres programme will depend heavily on partnership and a local appreciation of the available provision for access to, and exploitation of, ICTs and learning opportunities. The present research has begun exploring ways to represent this and encourage projects to think about it.

> "While we are able to establish progression into the CFE for most courses, the ICT stuff has to be *here* or people won't do it. They would rather learn informally here, than attend accredited training at the CFE."
>
> *(Sam Swabey, personal communication, 22 June 2000)*

The three key variables for provision appear to be:

- whether or not provision is supported with expert help and guidance
- the extent to which learning is formalised, withfor example set sessions around a syllabus, or locally and personally-set learning content, or with rules and regulations or with classroom style presentation
- the degree to which the context is an institutional or 'community' context, *ie* whether or not it takes place in an environment which people feel reflects their community, because it provides support from people with whom they have something in common, in a place with which they are familiar and feel comfortable.

These are presented as matrices such as this:

Centre: _____

formal learning

community context —————————— **institutional context**

informal learning

one
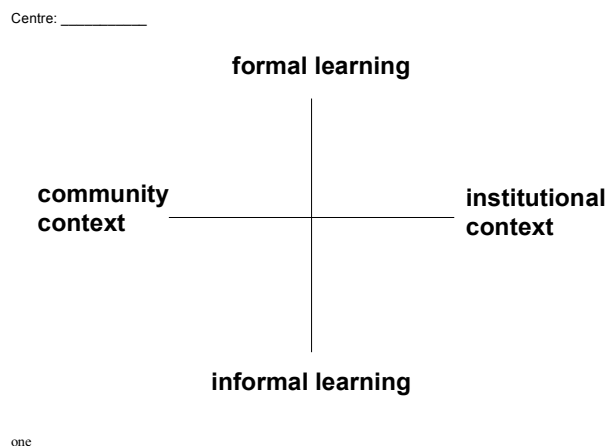
Each centre has been invited to consider their own provision and that of other local providers, indicating where the various agencies appear on each matrix.

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Thus INNIT, for example, is emphatically about supported access to informal learning in a community context. Many libraries, colleges and cybercafes would place themselves elsewhere on each matrix. Some centres and facilities - Granby for example - offer a mix of styles and options.

One example of a completed set, from Scotswood, is offered here, with two other providers in their area being indicated.

Centre: Scotswood

| one | X Scotswood | ◆ Newcastle College | ◆ John Marley Centre |

Centre: Scotswood

| two | X Scotswood | ◆ Newcastle College | ◆ John Marley Centre |
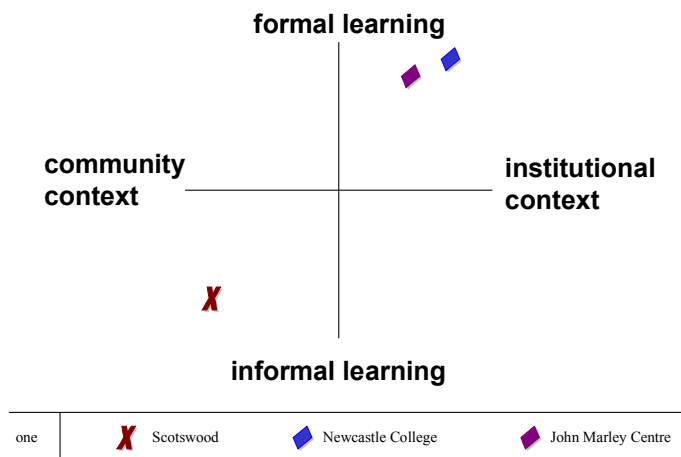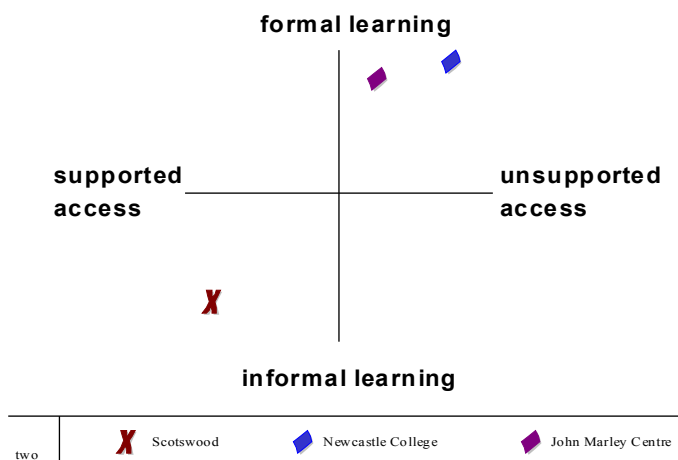
This is not simply a device for detecting duplication in a given locality. We have two points to make.

First, we can easily foresee situations in which projects might become beguiled into offering a kind of access which is beyond their competence or which stretches them dangerously, simply because it is not being covered in their locality by another provider. Few community organisations, for example, can get heavily involved in formal institutional training without changing their style significantly and thereby jeopardising their base. These graphics may help clarify the appropriate range for a given organisational type.

> "We're picking up people who would never go to the library. Even if the library's training room was seen as an annexe of the community centre, and the room was associated with the community project, there are some people who would use the community centre but would not use the library. HAKIT is not an institution, that's why people use it." *(Sarah Christie, personal communication, 27 June 2000)*
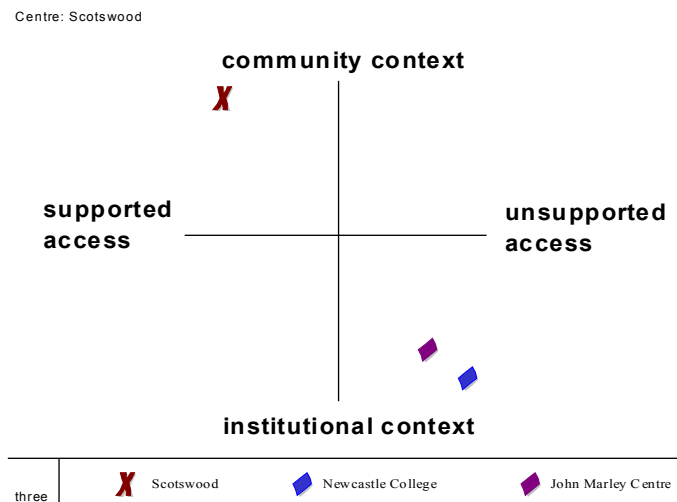
Secondly, our focus group discussions on access suggested a very broad range of demand for open access and timetabled sessions, for formal courses and informal learning, usually supported but not necessarily. It could be argued that any locality needs a good range of provision covering each quarter of each matrix. A key point for the development of the learning centres programme, however, is to try to ensure that in any low-income neighbourhood there is a community-context provider offering supported access to informal learning; and that partnership links between the providers are effective to ensure the maximum exploitation of the resources available.

We propose to develop our understanding of this particular issue by mapping such connections.

The 'P' word

While we have been drawing attention to the need for a mixed economy of provision at local level, we should also be alert to the possibility of over-saturation of demand for access in a locality. In Hangleton and Knoll, "the local

schools all have classrooms full of computers, the library has at least six PCs." There are several computers at the learning centre's main location in The Parade, plus one in each of the two community centres. "If we're not careful, we're going to reach a point where there are so many computers around... but people are not coming and using them. That's why we have put our main effort so far into working with community groups and key activists." *(Sarah Christie, personal communication, 27 June 2000)*

In such a context, it will be important to be clear about which agency is targeting which constituency; and about referrals and links between the different providers. All of The Five have been developing links with either colleges or libraries, or both, as they have understood more clearly their own role in the mosaic of local provision. Our expectation is that these partnerships are likely to strengthen as the mutual benefits of collaboration become more evident.

The FEILT report (1999, p23) discusses the necessity of partnership and lists certain benefits, although it does not mention the fact that collaborative approaches can reach and support people from the more excluded groups, who may be the most reluctant to access formal learning. The learning centres can play a crucial role for such learners, by providing a context sensitive to their needs, providing unambiguous and individually-pertinent opportunities, and smoothing the transition to further learning in a more formal setting. Such work deserves the patient support of policymakers if it is to be realised.

3 Impact in terms of community development

The outcomes from these projects will need to be appreciated over years rather than weeks or months; and they will concern the neighbourhood, its economic and social infrastructure, as much as they concern local people's adoption of learning opportunities. All five projects can demonstrate that in the sometimes restrictive bid culture that is characteristic of regeneration and social inclusion programmes, they can quickly establish themselves locally as viable partners in parallel developments (with SRB or the New Deal for Communities, for example). Over time we would expect to test whether these centres will in fact, through their learned behaviour and successes, be able to respond to the new challenges of national, local and regional policy.

They will be more ready for the next big challenge. The capacity and the contacts, the respect of partners, all the experience will help them articulate their concerns and fulfil their roles, for example in Neighbourhood Management and local strategic partnerships.

The following quotations from the projects illustrate how project workers feel local capacity has developed.

"As soon as news came out about [the housing crisis in] Scotswood, the ICT users were designing posters on the PCs that very day - these are people who would have had a moan and groan once previously, now taking a lead role in the Save Our Scotswood campaign. Others were looking on the net for human rights information etc. "Part of this could be that relating to the Personal Effectiveness course they have nearly all done with us, they have a better sense of self worth, and more self esteem than previously."

(Steve Winterburn, personal communication, 2 July 2000)

"It is early days yet. The community itself did not set up the Learning Centre so as yet has no ownership of it. In our case people seem to have a real ownership of the community centre hence the lack of damage and vandalism and the minimal security. So once people use the computers more and more, and more people too then there will be ownership. People's capacity will be improved as they use computers to build up skills and get employment and as their confidence grows they will respond to challenges. This is already being proved by Shipley Communities Online… "It takes time for the local people to take ownership and rise to challenges. After all they are being heavily researched at present. I'm amazed at how willingly people reply to questionnaires and questions. As in the field of health, people are just beginning to cotton on to the fact that they are being asked about their views and experiences and that what they say counts - that is empowering!"

(Alison Swiszczowski, personal communication, 3 July 2000)

"At Bolton Woods Tony is currently leading a feasibility study into taking over the school as a new community centre. If the results look positive then we should be able to use our ICT provision to help us consult/canvass/involve the community in what they want to see in an enlarged community centre."

(Marge Ellis, personal communication, 4 July 2000)

"Having the ICT Learning Centre here meant that when New Deal for Communities (DETR) arrived, we had a core of local people ready to go. Three of the five initial community signatories to the bid are partners in our ICT project. Without that initial common interest, it is doubtful that we would have been successful in our first competition round, as there might well have been gaps in our proposal. We have also been able to find a core of 10 local residents prepared to take on

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> training in mentoring skills that we intend to use, once qualified, in order to engage others in consultation *re* New Deal."
>
> *(Sam Swabey, personal communication, 3 July 2000)*

> "At INNIT, the local people recruited to the project have been discussing and thinking about local developments - in particular New Deal for Communities -as a result of being involved with the SKLAC. Dennis is chair of his Tenants Association, but he was pretty much disengaged from the 'community politics'. He's ended up taking an interest in how NDC might operate and thinking about the PC recycling initiative to get a PC networked community.
>
> Keith was working away on projects to help the youth in South Kilburn through his South Kilburn Triangle group. Now he is looking at ways to work on ICT initiatives for youth - pc music, digital arts to promote the music and a web site forum to get the music online. A broadening of the vision.
>
> Jenny was plugging away in the South Kilburn area on her TA and the Area Housing Board and she developed a wider vision of what can be achieved in an area like South Kilburn using ICT and the Learning Access Centre as a community resource."
>
> *(Robert Campbell, personal communication, 3 July 2000)*

Impact on the organisation

We have also begun exploring the extent to which becoming an ICT Learning Centre has had an impact on the organisation or community centre. All the projects felt that there were enough appropriate management skills to hand. The main issue was dealing with the funding delays and back payment. They stressed the importance of support from colleagues. The lesson from the experience of INNIT is about having appropriate management infrastructure in place at the outset. The explosion of activity with no pre-existing structure, combined with funding delays and technical difficulties, created temporary tensions.

It seems likely that project partners and other stakeholders will continue to play a key role in the development of the centres, where a certain amount of entrepreneurial acumen might be called for. Keeping partners informed and involved should not be an afterthought but could be critical to long-term, success and sustainability. The NTIA evaluation in the USA found that:

"Grant recipients and partners had developed different understandings of (1) their roles and responsibilities, (2) the types of services that would be provided... and (3) what their projects were ultimately designed to achieve..."

The Learning Centres Programme may well come to depend heavily on guidance and support for organisations in the management of change and the design of sustainability. To this end it is valuable to point people to the kind of advice on 'How to create centres' and preparing a business plan, prepared by Jane Berry for community agencies seeking to bid. The DfEE and DTI could also play a role in helping to establish mentoring and project-twinning systems.

4 Perceptions of community benefit

Our focus groups revealed strong anticipation that the learning centres will be of direct benefit to their localities. For example, at Bolton Woods it was felt that through involvement and participation in learning, and by raising awareness there would be a long-term impact for the community. At Scotswood, people argued that the centre can "encourage young people off the streets, reduce vandalism and improve employment prospects." A better employment situation will lead to local economic benefits, and raise communal standards, it was said.

One of the groups at South Kilburn gave the following feedback:

> It creates a positive feeling on the estate - problems of trust, crime, poor communication - can be improved as people from the neighbourhood interact with each other

> People may feel more comfortable and less threatened

> Its free - children really appreciate it

> Its exciting - it can get children off the streets

> The centre is not run by the Council or Regeneration office who are said to have a poor record of consultation

> Parents will see it as a safe place, children will recognise it as a positive and creative thing to do

> The centre can act as a focus of activities - including meeting Councillors, dealing with crime

> It may be held up as a local initiative for others to copy

> It may make people more proud to live on the estate.

Another group at South Kilburn said:

> The centre can help to deal with the problems of crime, drugs and family values.

> Through IT local people can identify with 'mainstream society' ... allowing collective action and the use of information and knowledge. Life chances can be improved.

People can connect worldwide with others with similar problems, accessing knowledge which is not found in official agencies, schools or libraries. IT opens doors to self-help. The centre can challenge the 'norm' of the deprived neighbourhood - for example by accessing goods and services not available locally without travelling.

And at Granby, in separate groups, people were anticipating "cohesion through better personal relations" and "improved parenting skills, better relationships through learning together".

In these groups then, expectations were high and some thought had gone into the meaning of a local ICT centre from their point of view. Experience with the Neighbourhoods Online game, which has been used at least once at each of the locations, shows that when people talk about ICTs in their neighbourhood, it's not the same as talking about crime or housing or childcare - issues with which they all have a more-or-less similar level of familiarity. This technology is new to many people and experiences vary hugely. That makes it difficult to establish a baseline on which community experience can be built. This point makes some of the work we have witnessed, especially at South Kilburn, all the more remarkable, and it also highlights the value of the positive expectations expressed by those who attended focus groups. People are not just passively waiting for their ICT facility: they are keen to exploit it in the interests of their community.

It's also the case that, more generally in the local population, expectations may be low, and where local people have experienced disappointment in regeneration programmes there can be considerable scepticism. At Granby Island, community consultations carried out in 1998 brought no references at all to ICTs.

> "Local residents did not ask for ICT services because they were not aware they could, and their expectations were low. Just seeing the IT raised peoples' expectations and interest."
>
> *(Sam Swabey, comment at project workshop, 14 June 2000)*

Finally, we note that the possibility of benefit to the local economy is real. On a visit to the INNIT project, one of the researchers took the opportunity to ask a nearby shopkeeper if he had noticed an increase in trade since the INNIT centre opened. The response was, yes. The estimate: 6%.

Case study: Laura (anonymised)

Laura has experienced poverty, homelessness, intense racism, drug abuse and prostitution. At one point she was experiencing physical violence from a man who had been living with her.
"The beatings just got worse, but worst of all my kids were afraid of him. I tried everything I could until eventually the Social Services stepped in and took my kids into care. I was devastated, with my kids gone life had no meaning. Every

---

time I left him he found me and I went back, I was so scared I didn't know what to do. We had a big argument one night and he stabbed me in the lower back. I crawled up to the hospital which was just up the road from where I lived with the knife still in my back..."

Some years later Laura was persuaded by a friend to go with her to the community centre to find out about computers. It was something to do, but she would never have gone on her own. Within a few weeks, Laura was plotting how to tell her life story in multimedia. Now a grandmother, she has begun writing text and taking digital photographs of the key locations in her life. "It will take me a little while," she says.

5 Support for learners: 'a hovering body'

"At the centre, people need experts and to work in small groups with trained trainers on hand as well as centre staff - a '*hovering body*'. People need to develop confidence, and always have someone on hand to help, learning in groups."
(Bolton Woods focus group 1)

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of appropriate support for learners in the target groups. The FEILT report, not oriented towards excluded groups or communities in particular, stresses the importance of "peer and tutor support - both 'live' and through telephone, email and electronic conferencing - so that learners have ready access to advice and guidance at key points in their learning." (p17)

"There should be assistance which is knowledgeable, friendly and patient." *(Granby focus group 2)*

Learners we have spoken to tend to describe their experience of learning in terms of the personal support they get from those providing the tutoring, and the camaraderie of the group. They say that there needs to be someone on hand, and possibly someone available on the phone too - "someone who you can speak to on an even level", with whom you can have a laugh and be helped along at your own pace. An approach which is informal yet provides structure is important for many people who have experienced profound instability in their lives. This approach is exemplified at Scotswood, where it appears to have a lasting impact on learners and has transformed levels of self-esteem.

"Not working to a set lesson planned style session, but working with those who attend, on their individual ICT needs. This style of delivery has been welcomed by all the users."
(Steve Winterburn, personal communication, June 2000)

Information should be on hand about routes to learning, but the centre should not be simply a feeder to the FE college, but rather could be funded to provide a signposting service, involving remote access to education sites. The aim would be to provide independent advice and support to learners. *(Granby focus group 3)*

Peer mentoring

This tends to happen informally. It helps spread workloads of staff, builds up confidence, is empowering, and develops skills (especially communication skills). There are some tensions around the amount of time and the direction of help given, although differences between those who help and those helped become eroded. Learners who help others can gain all sorts of benefits, for example confidence, respect, and contacts. The "system" helps people find out what they have in common and strengthens existing support networks.

> The college FAST course run at the centre was relaxed, and people helped those on lower levels - "it was like a game really" - by level 3 one person was taking too long helping the others! (*Granby focus group 1*)

Skills needed by centre staff

> People acting as tutors need to be able to move learners on at their own pace, and to be on hand and understanding, treating learners as individuals - and they do not necessarily have to be qualified trainers. (*Bolton Woods focus group 2]*

The most important skill was felt to be the ability to gain and sustain trust and confidence, which depends on interpersonal skills. In addition, organisational skills, time management, team building were identified. There is a need to recognise people's needs for different levels of management, for example some people don't like having too many grey areas, they need to have roles and responsibilities which are agreed and understood.

> "We have the project management skills but *the ICT skills were lacking* (including among those who are enormously confident with it)." (Sarah Christie, comment at project workshop, June 2000.) This point raises the importance of ensuring that staff and support workers, *e.g.* youth workers, community workers etc have basic ICT troubleshooting skills.

Creating the environment for mutual support

Recruitment of support tends to evolve depending on who is attracted in to the centre. The issue for the centres was, 'How to create the environment in which informal mutual support is provided, while ensuring that quality formal learning opportunities are readily accessible?' Pushing learners into an environment which assumes they want formal training is to be avoided: people were adamant about avoiding the 'qualifications-only' approach. It follows that there is a need to be able to demonstrate that non-accredited, informal learning has value in its own right. The projects all echoed the importance of flexible and varied support.

Working with volunteers

The HaKIT project is paying particular attention to the recruitment of volunteers, who are seen as critical for the sustainability and credibility of the initiative. Informal voluntary support is commonplace among the projects and,

after all, has sustained many community centres through many years. The needs here are:

- to find time and space for volunteers to receive appropriate support and training if they need it;
- to ensure that their information about progression to further learning opportunities, and about other access opportunities, is kept up-to-date;
- and to ensure that as a team they have opportunities to share and learn from their experience, and share knowledge of the needs of particular users.

Granby Island Community Centre has recent experience of working with people on community service. About five workers have come to them so far. They are always low-risk offenders and the arrangement appears to be mutually beneficial. An important factor is that the centre as an organisation should be able to give them a rewarding role and that the day-to-day running of the centre is not jeopardised by the additional management and administration.

Recognising the boundaries of competence

As we have pointed out in our discussion of the mosaic of local provision, learning centres need to be aware of the extent of their role. An issue for the development of the programme is that small organisations providing access to computers and technical expertise could give the impression that they can teach people coming through the door, just by having a range of software available and some willing hands. This may of course be true but it doesn't necessarily follow. Quality learning may depend on quality teaching, and the centre's links to further education can be as important as its range of software.

> Peer group support was seen as valuable, with staff on hand who know what they are talking about. Staff need to be trained well in the basics of IT, with a down to earth approach to helping people. Learning situations need to be flexible, with individual and group training. The idea of a 24 hour help line was liked. *[South Kilburn focus group 1)*

Case study: Dave

"This starts when i had been made homeless, I had found myself in a really bad rut, things from my past had caught up with me & i couldn't see a future. I walked past a building, purely by accident & saw a number of computers through the window & because I am interested in computers I went inside to find out what was going on. I met the guy in charge & he explained that the computers were for anyone to use & told me to feel free to come in. I told him a bit about my background, 10 years of working with computers & he said he would be glad to have me here.

"Since then my life has changed, i have a flat, a job i enjoy, & for the first time a qualification, not a huge one, but more than i have ever had before. I owe a big thank you to this center for giving me a chance for trusting me & for helping me to see that i have a lot to offer to what is now my community."

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6 Confidence and self-esteem

When people come to a centre to learn they are often taking a first and courageous step. Their recollections of being taught at school or college may have damaged their confidence, and the notion of IT itself may intimidate them. 'Lack of confidence' was identified as a major barrier to the exploration of ICTs when we carried out research for PAT15 in 1999 **(***Everyone gets hooked*) and the theme has recurred in focus groups and project visits. What is striking about the comments made in the focus groups is that there was an unquestioning anticipation that 'community spirit', the quality of life, and levels of confidence will be enhanced.

> "For one person it had the benefit of reaching a next goal and improving self-confidence, for another it would enable her to help as many other people as possible, and for a third was the chance to write her life story. Generally, learners will be able to encourage others, including young people, to come in, and re-assure them that they can do it themselves. The learning experience brings people together with a chance to socialise and meet and help rebuild the sense of community." *(Scotswood focus group 2)*

> "Something worthwhile to do will build confidence and self esteem, and possibly lead to jobs or making money and opening doorways to new opportunities." *(Granby Island focus group 2)*

> "Increasing personal worth and confidence" *(Granby Island focus group 3)*

> "Keeping your brain active, building self-confidence." *(Hangleton*

focus group 1)

Our case study of Anne and Ann in Scotswood shows this understanding to be well-founded. The issue for the development of the learning centres programme is to develop a methodology which demonstrates the value of such outcomes. Manifestly, in terms of individual lives, the impact of community-based ICT learning centres can be transformational. Similarly, there is evidence that local communities can gain in strength and capacity (see sections 3 and 4). The task now is to systematise the demonstration of that evidence in order to inform policy further.

An impromptu exercise with a group at Scotswood, in which users were asked to score out of ten their *levels of self-esteem* before and after taking the course, gave the following result:

	Before	*After*
Anne	0	8
Julie	2	20 *(sic)*
Mandy	0	10
Ann	0	9
Carol	0	8

As we take our evaluation forward and explore more closely the issues around changes in self-esteem which might be attributable to use of the centres, we will be looking to take account of health changes and people's perceptions of their own well-being. Roger Burrows from York University has carried out work on online self-help forums and 'Virtual Community Care'. He notes:

> "There is a very strong and enduring relationship between people's level of social support, their connectedness, and their sense of wellbeing and health."

> (Roger Burrows, presentation to *Virtual Society?* conference, London, 19 June 2000)

A case study about confidence - Anne and Ann

Anne is a grandmother who has had computers in her home for at least fifteen years, used by her sons, and never attempted to switch one on. Her sense of exclusion from the world of computers which the men occupied was emphatic.

"I wouldn't even touch it, I were terrified. I used to shove the

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feather duster underneath. I thought you had to be intelligent to use it." There was also a computer in Ann's house.

"My son had a computer but I'd not touch it." Having started on the 'personal effectiveness' course being run at Scotswood, she committed her friend Anne to joining her on a basic computer skills course. They both do voluntary work for their local church, but Anne has problems with arthritis, which meant that she had difficulty holding a pen and writing.

Anne says: "I thought Steve (the tutor), he's younger than me, I thought he'd think I was thick. When I started to ask him he was brilliant." She travels into Scotswood from another locality: "We've got one (community computer centre) in our area but I wouldn't go because I didn't know anyone… Maybe people I knew, but I felt incompetent beside them, whereas here, I know people." Her grandson would say that she couldn't do anything: "Nanna you're thick."

But since joining the course at Scotswood, Anne has bought her own computer, with advice from Steve. Now, she says "I've made my porch - it's crazy - it's now an office!"

Her son came back one day and said "whose is that computer in the porch?" She said: "That's not a porch, that's my office!"

The remarkable transformation in Anne's confidence is not quite complete. In spite of the fact that probably she could now teach them a thing or two, she still says - "I wouldn't go and sit in a classroom with the young ones. I'd feel an idiot."

The views of her friend Ann exude a more thorough confidence: "The confidence that it's given is unbelievable." Had it not been for the course, she says, "I would be in the house just pottering around doing mundane things…"

Now she takes pride when her grandchildren ask for help or information: "I can go on the Internet and I can do it, and I feel great. It boosts your morale."

"We've learned so much from it. Here we've been able to get one-to-one, we're all at different levels. The combination of the computers with the personal effectiveness, hey I can do anything if I put my mind to it. I'm not afraid to stand up in front of people and talk."

July 2000

7 What people want to do with ICT

Our focus groups indicated a rich variety of intentions among users to take

advantage of the technology in various ways, once they had got to grips with it. The most common concerns were to get a job and / or qualification, and to enhance a contribution to voluntary activity. Keeping up with and helping children is also an objective for many.

One group at Bolton Woods wanted to get formal qualifications, participate in Internet dating, establish self help groups, shop online and get business training in order to exploit ICT possibilities. There was thought to be an interest in *eg* web based interior design information, football and fishing, email pen friends, access to on-screen benefits advice, health information, parenting information, cooking and housework, and the possibility of starting new community groups online, though concerns were expressed about offensive material. [Bolton Woods FG 1]

At Granby group members were interested in writing letters using the spell check, starting a micro community business, and using the digital camera to produce birthday cards, which will advertise service. Also using the video conferencing network to avoid travelling. Other uses suggested were playing games, networking, emailing with elderly relatives, researching family history, broadening horizons, developing personal interests by learning oneself, 'producing something for myself', online shopping (possibly with credit union), developing social activities at the centre through the IT, community development. [Granby FG 3]

An interesting example of informal learning has emerged at Granby Island. A number of users, mainly women, have begun playing backgammon online and chatting online with other participants around the world as they do so, discussing and learning about time differentials, weather patterns, national differences and so on.

Suggestions from South Kilburn included: Using downloaded midi files for composition, teen chat, web surfing. Shopping, using the Internet and email to communicate, faxing and letters, paying bills, getting a qualification and writing a story were all personal ambitions.

The following comments from a Hangleton focus group were similar to those from elsewhere:

> "Get back to work and get a qualification"

> "Get paid employment which will bring income to allow continued voluntary activity"

> "Enhance voluntary activities."

8 ICT skills and basic skills

People will identify themselves as having ICT skills needs when in fact they have basic skills needs. The centres perform a new role in offering people a stigma-free focus for their basic skills needs, and it is crucial that this is understood and carefully exploited. For many people with low literacy and numeracy levels, the technology offers the possibility of creative and rapid personal development. Skills, confidence, creativity, employment - these are all genuine and realisable outcomes if the centres are culturally accessible for people with basic skills needs.

According to the Basic Skills Agency the latest research undertaken as part of the International Adult Literacy Survey suggests that as many as 1 in 5 adults in the UK have poor basic skills. (The figure in the USA is comparable: according to the Benton Foundation, 44 million Americans, 20% of the population, are functionally illiterate).

The professional assessment of literacy and numeracy, and the provision of training and support to address those needs, are not necessarily appropriate roles for community-based learning centres. But many people with basic skills needs are unlikely to venture into a college or school - an environment which may have failed them in the past - in search of help. The role for the centres is to provide a context in which such needs can be identified and considered in a positive way, with help in following options elsewhere if appropriate. We draw attention to the success of the combination of personal effectiveness courses and basic computer skills courses run by Mason Port Associates at Scotswood.

Critical to the fulfilment of this role is the cultural sensitivity of the centre, and

its staff and volunteers. INNIT provides a good example. The project's central location in the neighbourhood and the ethos of open access make it inviting for many people, but the vibrant activity could be off-putting to the diffident. The workers, however, spend a lot of time in contact with individuals and groups in the street and around the neighbourhood. In so doing, they identify people whose needs might be addressed by what INNIT has to offer, and ensure that there is non-threatening time and space for them to come in and discuss their needs. The back room at INNIT is essential for this, a small space where a few people can sit quietly and not feel their lack of skills is exposed to view.

These centres cannot be expected to identify and help everyone with basic skills needs, but it is certain that they offer one acceptable option for many people. We suspect that there is scope for a more systematic approach, and recommend that the attention of the Basic Skills Agency be drawn to the opportunities provided by the Learning Centres programme. In the meantime it will be important to ensure that all community-based centres are aware of the issue and have procedures in place; and that their workers are aware of local and national support and advice.

Case study: Stephanie (anonymised)

Stephanie is a single parent who has experienced persistent dismissal by her family of her attempts to better herself, belittling her efforts and telling her she's wasting her time. She had to abandon a college course because of child care costs but contacted the 'Workfinder' service and got referred to the learning centre. She has been attending a course with other women who she feels give her the strength and the confidence to reject her family's dismissal. Now she is intent on using her ICT skills to get a job.

Recently Stephanie's son needed to complete a job application letter. Although she would never normally use a library, she used the library's computer, without support, to prepare the application for him. She said "I would never have done that before".

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9 Access and sessions

"Ideally it should be like the swings outside the centre - open all the time." *(Bolton Woods focus group 2)*

"Like the luncheon club it can be seen as a day out and an opportunity to dress up." *(Hangleton focus group 1)*

We asked project workers and focus group members to consider how access and sessions should be arranged. The main themes that this threw up were as follows:

- timetabling and drop-in open access
- special sessions for particular groups
- the need to avoid encroaching on other activities which might be going on at the centre
- the availability of appropriate space to meet the need.

It is unlikely that general principles will emerge from this material. What matters is that local people have been and will continue to be involved in taking decisions about the provision at their own facility. The following examples illustrate the range of the discussions:

At Granby it was felt that booked training sessions should be:

- Starter and drop in to give people confidence
- Basic level 1 course
- Themed sessions which are project based
- Formal college courses.

The key is to provide a 'flexible menu' according to peoples' changing needs. *[Granby focus group 2]*

For another group at Granby, open access and drop in sessions are seen as core, but there may well be a move to a timetable providing sessions for different people at different times. Mixed sex sessions were seen as the norm, though if asked for, single sex sessions should be arranged. A timetable is needed just to organise the space. *[Granby focus group 3]*

People in South Kilburn wanted their centre open seven days week, with some evenings to 22:00. Both booked sessions and drop in should be provided, ensuring that machines were free for drop ins. There should be different structures for different times of the day: for example women only sessions in the mornings when children at school, during holidays and after school. Sessions could be run for community groups and for religious groups, which will have different ideas around issues and training. [*South Kilburn focus group 1]*

The second Kilburn group suggested an after school informal but assisted session for young people, but with a homework session included. Saturday and evening sessions if staff available. *[South Kilburn focus group 2]*

Another group at Kilburn felt that sessions should not be too structured, no special sessions, but rather to let people access as they need, although practically an appointment system may be required. In all cases, when people come in they should always be given something to do - not put off. There should be the choice of formal learning or not as required. *[South Kilburn focus group 3]*

A group at Hangleton said there should be a range of support according to circumstances, with mixed, teenage (evening cyber café 'policed'), older people sessions. There could also be topical sessions on WP, web design, with accreditation, and flexible hours to suit learners, perhaps with taught sessions in the morning and drop in during the afternoon. Courses should be flexible - in terms of content and time. *[Hangleton focus group 2]*

People at Scotswood wanted special drop-in trial sessions to introduce people to ICT and the learning opportunities. One-to-one learning with the tutor is most liked, though learning together in a group allows peer support when the tutor is busy. For those without access to a PC outside, practice at the centre is difficult as the room is used for so many other functions. People do need to be able to drop in to practice, and the issues of having noisy talkers when people are concentrating on the PC, of coffee and smoking breaks, of separating the refreshment and learning areas, of drop in as against booked sessions, and of giving priority to the ICT over other centre activities were all raised. Generally the group thought that there should *not* be separate sessions for particular groups of people or genders. [*Scotswood focus group 2]*

At Bolton Woods the group wanted to have formal and informal sessions where people could turn up at any times. However on further examination, homework sessions for children, family group sessions, 'job club' sessions, and a newsletter production group session were all thought desirable. A special effort should be made for people with special needs. Also as people came, there should be flexibility to create sessions tailored to individuals and groups. Existing 2 hour sessions were thought not to be long enough. *[Bolton Woods focus group 2]*

Some problems remain. At Scotswood one member of staff commented about "People trying to gain access who are unauthorised (young people from next door) - this is still a main point of concern, and I feel it is very-off putting to the group."

Surplus formal learning publicity/leaflets in the centre can make it look like a classroom. If the environment reflects a sense of power from grassroots - not messages coming from above - people will feel more comfortable. This point led to recognition of the need to try to reflect the local gender/age/race profile in the centre's staff profile.

> "The ICT is just a bit of what we do. It works better with small numbers coming in on a regular basis. The way it works here, works well for Scotswood." *(Helen Cairns, personal communication, 3 July 2000)*

It is clear that ideally, the centres would always have a facility available for supported drop-in; but formal sessions are important for people and where possible need to be provided on their terms. Of more long term concern is the fact there in some cases there is an issue about physical space: some of the community centres are at full capacity. These limitations constrain the possibilities, as do constraints on available skilled staff, and appropriate times for given constituencies such as older people.

10 Facilities to be provided

We asked the focus groups what facilities they felt should be provided at the centre to encourage people to come and use the computers. Almost invariably they talked about the training aspects first, then about 'facilities' (except

crèches), and when prompted, about PR activities. A welcoming atmosphere was seen as a facility too. A crèche was mentioned on all occasions and a quality colour printer several times.

People at South Kilburn asked for "refreshments and competitions". All of the computers it was felt should have identical software or facilities so as to make them equally accessible to people's needs, and they should have software that was up to date and beyond what was likely to be found at home. A good physical environment is essential. CD-based learning materials and printed manuals should be provided. People would be attracted in if there was community information at the centre, in paper form and by pointers to web sites that would deal with regeneration issues. A 'news board' of success stories should be produced and used to attract people in. The centre should allow people to deal with their current situation using its facilities - including fax, phone and copier), allow them to identify with IT through dealing with 'life crises'. Support with languages other than English was seen as a necessary facet of provision.

At Granby people asked for a dedicated space with more and better computers, with free tea and coffee. A non-threatening, comfortable environment with trainers on hand *[Granby focus group 1].* The third group at Granby offered the following:

People will come across the IT because they are at the centre for the many other things there. People will be encouraged in by:

- Club activities (homework club) and evening classes
- Taster sessions
- Drop in open access
- A crèche and more space for the IT
- Welcoming friendly faces with a non jargon approach, talking the language of local people
- Friends
- Transport provision
- Seeing its *fun* in a comfortable environment
- Seeing TV monitors rather than computer screens
- Free tea and biscuits
- Older people being involved to bring other older people in.

At Bolton Woods and Hangleton it was suggested that transport could be provided for those with difficulties. Only one group, at Bolton Woods, suggested free access to the Internet and free email for all in response to this question.

Content

Availability of particular kinds of content has not yet been a major issue for the projects. They have all made their own selection of software in the set-up phase. Our expectation is that over the next few months the content will be

reviewed and some particular needs identified. We have commented elsewhere on the importance of addressing basic skills needs, as indeed has PAT15. We expect the centres to begin exploring available basic skills software in due course, and sharing advice and recommendations with one another and with other projects.

> "One of the main reasons people wanted access to the technology was for getting work or better work. This requires upskilling, and content then becomes critical... There are more interactive learning products gradually (too gradually) coming on the market. I think this kind of product has big advantages over print based material for the people we are working with, where reading skills may be an issue." *(Margaret Robson, personal communication, 22 June 2000)*

11 Technical facilities and support

'The experts should be on tap, not on top'

(Cited by Sylvia Summer, p15)

The projects organised the specification, procurement and installation of ICT facilities in a number of different ways:

- in-house specification and installation (HaKIT)

- in-house specification using consultant; design and installation contracted out; and locally-grown and employed IT support (Granby Island)

- in-house specification; supply and installation contracted out; and paid and voluntary sessional support of software and hardware (INNIT)

- consortium specification initially with college supply and installation, and after personnel difficulties, contracted out installation, later replaced with temporary bought-in freelance consultancy (Bolton Woods)

- initially city council supply and installation, then installation and support from training and consultancy provider tutor (Scotswood).

"IT and time management do not go together"

(Helen Compton, York City Libraries, Pioneer project workshop, 13 June 2000)

ITC project management has as ever proved a non-trivial task. Issues that

have arisen are:

- software: Microsoft is easy, but choosing (and integrating) other software depends on identifying local needs, price, availability and knowledge

- using leading-edge solutions which may have started off as 'vapourware'

- capital payments have not always met IT deadlines

- networking increases the complexity and reduces stability

- IT management skills have not always been immediately available. Where these have been brought in, continuity and consistency of effort have proved necessary for reliable systems

- documentation and training have not always been to the level required for handover

- project staff recognised the need for special provision for people with disabilities and special needs - voice recognition and output, large screens, keyboards and special workstations. Several of the options are already being pursued although limited funding and space have constrained such provision in the first phase.

Technical problems have beset two of the projects in particular. At Shipley the long-term illness of the college technician was the prologue to a succession of difficulties with a private sector consultant who failed to establish the network at Bolton Woods. The college was only able to pay for the consultant because of revenue funding through DTI. This experience indicates that even the most professionally-supported community-based project can be vulnerable with a (relatively) technically ambitious specification. It has been suggested that projects need an independent feasibility study to advise on connectivity solutions and set up, before they start, because the issues are complex and decisions required on a daily basis. Furthermore, it may be that accessible troubeshooting guidelines should be prepared as a matter of course by those providing the technical set-up.

At Granby Island there have been difficulties in networking the video-conferencing across all the sites originally proposed. To some extent such difficulties were anticipated and it should be noted that Internet access there is untroubled and in use, and that three of the sites are using the video-conferencing already. Failure to meet the project workers' irrepressible ambition should not distract us from the fact that in most senses it is already a success with a range of courses being run and Internet widely used.

These experiences are neither surprising nor unusual. In the case studies examined for the US National Telecommunications and Information Administration in October 1999, it was found that "The most frequently cited problems were related to the time, cost and effort required to develop the infrastructures that supported the technological innovations." (p11)

The evaluators' report says:

> "Almost all of the projects indicated that they underestimated the

amount of time implementation tasks would require, particularly with regard to technology... In some sites... these delays contributed to other problems." (p13)

Project workers with The Five recommend that the following should be in place:

Security and maintenance

Implies need for management and responsibilities for ensuring tasks get done and systems monitored. Also implies security of people's own data. There is an issue of freedom versus security control, and this requires an acceptable use policy to be clearly formulated. Strict controls on what users can do (bounded by the operating system, settings and password control) are ideal to ensure system reliability, but can mitigate against personalising the experience. Individual accounts, though more complex to administer can achieve the necessary balance.

Confidence of users with the technology

It is important that both workers and tutors exude the confidence derived from proper training. Peer support and well developed relationships with tutors both inspire confidence - "when they've got to know people they're much more confident in using the stuff."

How is reliability ensured?

Three levels of technical support are needed: troubleshooting, staff on-site, and remote support. The first requires straightforward documentation and escalation procedures for use by learners and staff. Centre staff must be trained in basic computer and network operation and fault finding. Good, high competence support then needs to be on hand or on call to provide fault diagnosis and repair, routine maintenance and upgrades. Such quality assured standard support is necessary, as fragile technology has proved to undermine learners' confidence and expectations.

Sustainability

Planning for continued funding to ensure that the technology can be kept up to date to meet changing demands is required.

12 Promotion

"Success draws on existing networks of relationships with members of a community."

Liff, Watts and Steward, *The distinctive role of e-gateways*, 1999

All the centres have been considering different aspects of promotion, but little systematic work has been done, for the following reasons:

- workers have been too busy establishing the basic resource and curing technical and funding problems

- some have not yet felt ready to claim that they are up-and-running
- people have been coming in anyway, and the creation of greater demand could put excessive stress on the centre.

It's also the case that some publicity has already come about, for example users at INNIT and Granby Island gained coverage in the *News of the World*.

In this section we touch briefly on four issues which have arisen: (i) suggested techniques for general promotion, (ii) the implications of systematic promotion, (iii) targeting excluded groups, and (iv) what has been termed 'the problem of men'.

General promotion

It can be very valuable to take alternative views on established services. At Scotswood, one focus group member said that he had thought the support centre was for young people only, since they always seemed to be outside. The establishment of the new resources is helping the centres to rethink how their buildings are seen by outsiders. In the same group at Scotswood, it was noted that the centre does not advertise itself on the building so that "people pass by and don't notice it". Sonia Liff and her colleagues, in their research into e-gateways, have pointed out how community-based ICT resources tend to be far less enticing as buildings than the 'shop-front' model of provision.

The focus groups gave rise to numerous suggestions for promoting the work of the centres generally. Thus at Bolton Woods, where community involvement needs constant stimulation, the group recognised that some people do not use the centre now, and that a campaign of leaflets, mail shots and newsletters are essential; and that this should be 'professional'. It was suggested that a local residents' meeting should be held, and that the new ICT facilities are a focus and attraction in an area which lacks or has lost various other community facilities (such as adequate public transport and most recently, a primary school).

A group at Scotswood came up with the following list:

- Posters in shops and the post office
- Leaflets put through doors
- Being linked to work finding programmes
- Via the Probation service
- On (both commercial) local radio stations
- At sports centres
- Through speakers at *e.g.* luncheon clubs for older people

Another group there suggested that:

> Getting people in would be achieved through friends, a moving electric sign on the outside of the building and advertising in local shops, nursery and school. The key method would be to have an open day, with a mailed out invitation offering fun and refreshments.

At Granby we were told:

"Promotion of the centre will be via word of mouth, advertising by posters, leaflet drops, school newsletters, three local radio stations, hospital radio and by getting groups of people to produce publicity for their peers." *[Granby focus group 3]*

People in South Kilburn asked for 'themed days' and 'grab-a-granny' days. Newsletters, posters, and leaflets were common suggestions. It was also noted that promotion should make it clear that wheelchair access and space was provided; and when creche facilities were available.

Case study: David

David is a postman in his mid forties living in Windhill. He had little knowledge of computers to start with, so he began with an Introduction to Computer Course at North East Windhill Community Association, followed by studying CLAIT. He hopes to gain qualifications like this to get another job. He comes into the centre after his shifts on midweek afternoons, and has benefited from the support of the Community Tutor from Shipley College.

The implications of systematic promotion

A well-marketed centre will attract people in, sometimes from a surprising distance. This brings in people from beyond the neighbourhood. The demand is there, and the centres are unlikely to be ready to cope with it. There are issues to do with over-stretching staff, management, availability of equipment, shortage of space, and reserving places for local people. At INNIT, for example, consideration is now being given reluctantly to making a small charge to people who come from beyond South Kilburn. These issues reflect the impact of a fast-growth service on an organisation, and they require sensitive management if the centres are not to fail in the longer term.

At the same time, staff recognised that energy put into the general promotion of the centre could have important benefits, both in terms of raising the profile of their work, and in terms of bringing in local people who might hitherto not have crossed the threshold. At Scotswood they have been surprised at the extent to which people who they have seldom if ever seen have been lured in by the ICT.

"Many of the people who come in now to access the ICT are people who have not come in before. They're new faces."

(Helen Cairns, personal communication, 3 July 2000)

Reaching the more excluded groups

"What we have found with online learning is that we are reaching people who would never have come into college." *(Margaret Robson, Shipley College, personal communication, 22 June 2000)*

While it seems that the centres are proving more able to reach some people

who would not use traditional learning provision, they are conscious that more needs to be done. The projects felt that word-of-mouth is the most reliable and cost-effective promotion technique, but could not be sure that it would reach the most excluded. It's a straightforward, familiar and inexpensive process, and survey respondents indicated that this was what brought them in. The next step is to *organise* a word of mouth campaign, and to use groups and community workers to that end. Hence the importance of providing awareness sessions for activists and workers, as in Hangleton.

Referrals from agencies were seen as critical in this respect, also engagement with family networks. It was felt that targeting specific groups for given periods would be effective. Workers felt that inserts in local newspapers would work to some extent, but not simple mail drops.

> "Scotswood have no problems attracting people, but I would be sure that certain groups are being excluded. We have little ethnic minority uptake (low percentage in the area), and fewer men than women. More time would mean we could target sessions to these individuals."

> *(Steve Winterburn, personal communication, 26 June 2000)*

In a sense it is encouraging that 44% of questionnaire respondents had not heard of more than two of the eight local community groups listed. This question was included in order to get a sense of the extent to which the centres were reaching beyond their own circle of contacts. The finding suggests that they may already be attracting significant numbers of people who are not really involved in their community sector.

Perhaps the most important message was that centres don't need a full glossy marketing campaign, but community development work. This takes time but it will bring people in. Once the centres have settled into a pattern of provision over the next few months, these questions will be revisited and strategies will be developed.

"It's not raining men"

> "We have found in this centre that a more equal gender take-up exists and I believe it is because our ICT staff are all male. Our formal training is however run by females and we have much lower numbers of men at those sessions." *(Sam Swabey, personal communication, 22 June 2000)*

It seems likely that far more work is needed to understand why this technology might be pertinent to men in the forty-sixty age group, particularly those who are unemployed. One approach is to consider under what circumstances they might congregate: but the options for engaging people at or around football matches, or in pubs, are limited. One community worker pointed out that typically this kind of outreach raises initial interest, which tends to fade.

Another point is to look at the kinds of issue which occupy them. DIY, for example, could well be an area where a few examples of friendly software

could show a great increase in take-up. All the centres are considering providing courses on computer building and expect that this would lead to an increase in the use of the centres by males.

At the same time, the programme may need to accept that for some people, ICTs in general and the Internet in particular may have little pertinence. As Sally Wyatt and her colleagues suggest,

> "maybe some people do not use the Internet because they have alternative sources of information and forms of communication which are appropriate to their needs, or because they think it is cumbersome and expensive." *(Wyatt et al, forthcoming)*

13 Collecting information

Typically centres and projects need to collect information for three different requirements - the centres' (or institution's) own management and administration needs; monitoring information (outputs) for funders; and statistical and subjective data for researchers. It is quite possible for learners to be asked to complete four separate forms shortly after taking up an opportunity - a college course enrolment form; a learning agreement or plan; a learner research questionnaire; and a quality assurance or exit survey monitoring form. For many people informality and a lack of bureaucracy are important to the decision to take up a learning opportunity, although clearly a decision to take up formal learning will need form filling. Occasionally there will be resistance and it can mean that people may visit a centre and not be recorded in any way.

> "The IT is for people's needs, not for government programmes" *(Granby focus group)*

Granby Island has a booking-in system and all new users as far as possible have been asked to complete a research questionnaire. At Scotswood people have a referral sheet completed by the tutor, and attendance sign-in. There has been no evaluation yet. HaKIT has not completed its plans for information collecting activities, but the local music IT project uses an SRB monitoring form. 'Opportunities' (the employment training and advice project) has contact details and a track record is kept.

At Bolton Woods and Windhill, learners complete a College online learner's (SCOL) form *and* a college enrolment form. A book-in diary is used at the centres. Staff are exploring how personal case histories may be documented, probably in multi-media format.

At INNIT, a members' database is being set up. Originally young people at sessions were required to sign in a book: all visitors now use this method, and data is transferred to the database. INNIT did not complete any research questionnaires, but staff are keen to set up an online questionnaire as the first use of the technology when people visit the centre.

Research information has been collected from Project Managers with some success by email or fax. An attempt to use an online form, whereby all new

learners would complete a survey form as their initiation to ICT at the centre, has not so far proved successful. This is due to inconsistent technology at the centres, and the use of a web server which prevented the survey forms being automatically emailed to a survey database set up for research purposes. In principle however this may become a useful tool and learning aid to new learners. A separate report on this option was submitted to DfEE in June 2000.

Case study: Mandy

Mandy came to the drop-in computer access sessions at Scotswood with her mother, sister and mother's friend. She had been referred from the probation service. She suffered from anxiety attacks and her life consisted of staying indoors almost all the time.

Mandy felt a need to resume her education with the ultimate goal of gaining employment, and saw ICT as a conduit to this. She attended a course at a local centre, but inappropriate delivery methods brought on anxiety attacks and she left.

It took considerable courage to sign up for a course again. Since joining the ICT activities at Scotswood Mandy has taken part in the Personal Effectiveness course and more recently in the Graingertown Hosting Project, where she had a short work placement (admin based). Her reference was highly positive, and given her condition just five months earlier it is a remarkable transformation.

Mandy has proved to be an extremely fast learner, wanting new challenges more and more frequently. She is now the second option for answering queries and providing help, after the tutor, for those who attend.

For Mandy to be answering questions, and helping out is a giant step for her. Her morale is very high, she speaks up in group sessions, and now works at the centre on a voluntary basis to assist with ICT.

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14 Computer ownership and the learning centres

It has been argued that public and community access is a short term solution to a short term problem. Perri 6 and Ben Jupp suggest that:

"If prices of non-PC communication devices fall relatively quickly ... and the fixed costs of the global satellite infrastructure are therefore recovered relatively quickly, then public systems should be of declining importance or else of purely additional or occasional convenience benefit, rather than the principal strategy for combating information exclusion. They have their place today, but they should not be mistaken for the heart of a strategy." (6 and Jupp, 1999)

This stance might possibly be sound in the long term but is weakened by

appearing to overlook almost all issues in the use of technology except its financial cost and market penetration - issues like basic skills, confidence, and the added value of basing the use of ICTs on existing social networks. By contrast, ESRC-funded research into public and community access, carried out at Aston Business School and Warwick University, found that "increased access to technology in the home or at work will not diminish the need for this type of public provision." (Steward p96) The researchers argue that these facilities:

"provide an environment that addresses motivation, fear and the need to learn new social and creative skills as well as technical ones. Learning the potentialities of the information and communication technology may be a bigger barrier for new users than lack of technical access." (Liff, Watts and Steward, 1999)

It is important to note that 'home ownership' does not indicate use, as the instance of Anne exemplifies. Nor does it indicate effective or efficient use. In the same way, statistics on 'Internet access' tend to tell us nothing about the effective and rewarding exploitation of this information and communication resource for people's personal, social, or economic development. 'Use' and 'non-use' are complex and constantly fluctuating, as Sally Wyatt and her colleagues remind us. Drawing attention to the possibility of deliberate 'non-use' they suggest the following categories:

- Never used - because do not want to ('Resisters')
- Stopped using - voluntarily (boring, alternatives, cost, etc.) ('Rejectors')
- Never used - because cannot get access for a variety of reasons ('Excluded')
- Stopped using - involuntarily (cost, loss of institutional access, etc.) ('Expelled')

(Wyatt et al, forthcoming)

We should be alert to the possibility that, while the target groups for these centres are likely to be numbered among the 'excluded' and the 'expelled', we could see an increase in rejectors.

In discussing this issue with project workers and users, we have been struck by two points. First, anecdotally the extent of home computer ownership appears to be higher than might be supposed. Half of the respondents in our survey said they had a computer at home, and 77% had used a computer before.

Secondly, discussants have been unanimous and unambiguous in their insistence on the long-term role of their community access point, for computer owners as much as for non-owners. The following support needs were identified in focus groups at all locations:

- Advice on upgrades, buying software and hardware
- Laptops for loan
- Support for maintenance and repair at reasonable cost
- Support for both old and new computer systems, with demonstrations of the new

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- A 'help your neighbour' scheme for an IT installation and set up. Cheap or free software upgrades and also support with hardware upgrades
- Technical support for new equipment, delivered at home at low cost
- Computer loans or low cost recycled ones
- A purchasing facility for local residents, possibly linked to Council supply contracts or a credit union
- Training provided at centre for home based IT
- Support for home owners would need to be in the evenings, or provided on the phone
- Computer loans and rentals, and grant assistance
- Computer assembly classes
- Local telephone support could be provided to home workers
- Technical support is needed (particularly for home PC owners) and this could be provided through the Centre
- Information on what to buy - hardware and software - that is suitable
- Grants and loans to assist purchase
- A problem hour for PC owners
- An advice line would be good though difficult to support

This is not an *either-or* issue, and local people in low-income neighbourhoods certainly do not appear to see it that way. Home access and community access are complementary, not alternatives. Community access, is not just something made available to people on low-incomes until they can afford computers and Internet access. Community-based learning centres have a role for people who own computers and want to exploit them fully.

We suggest that owning a computer at home is not the same as being connected and being part of the Network Society. It is not even a necessary condition.

Being connected in the Network Society will mean knowing how to exploit access to communication channels and learning technologies for personal, community, social and economic development. That means:

- basic literacy and numeracy
- technical understanding of machine functions (how to make ICTs do what you want)
- an understanding of the possibilities of the technology (including the smooth adoption of new applications)
- communication skills (listening, summarising, flagging-up, following-up, presentation, choice of medium...)
- information capability (information awareness, access to information, exploitation of information).

Many of these skills and attributes can be gained or significantly enhanced most effectively in a community context. This context brings with it all sorts of spin-off benefits, as comments from our focus groups suggest. Policies that promote home access without a range of public support options could seriously delay the development of the UK as a connected society.

Owning a PC is not just a financial burden, it raises issues of ongoing support.

This raises the question, how do people get access to this support without paying high rates to High Street companies? People in the focus groups were clearly expecting the learning centre to provide this kind of support.

A group at Scotswood was challenged that the computer resource would be redundant if they all had home access. They vigorously rejected this:

> "I would still come here even if I had a computer at home."

> "A lot of people have a computer at home but don't know how to use it."

> "To pass on ideas."

> "To go on a course."

> "For the company."

> "You need someone to take you through the new applications."

> "You might not need the basics, but to find out more things, new things."

> "We also sit down and discuss what we've picked up and how we feel about it."

15 Other issues

Private sector involvement

There has been some private sector involvement in The Five: BA have been involved at Scotswood, for example, and both Shipley and Granby have worked closely with their telcos. But engaging commercial organisations is often difficult and time-consuming, with uncertain reward, and consequently there is little incentive for projects to invest their energies. It may be that a concerted strategy, perhaps led by DTI through Business in the Community, might break some deadlocks. It should be stressed that private sector involvement should

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not be seen as a factor in sustainability. Commercial organisations quite rightly tend not to see any requirement on their part to do more than contribute to start-ups or innovative experiments.

Sustainability

Some of these projects will undoubtedly go on for a long time and adapt, because they are embedded in thriving community centres which fulfil a genuine role in their localities. Some may not survive in their current form.

CDF has argued before, on the basis of extensive research and experience, that community resource centres require core public funding on an ongoing basis. In *Down to earth vision* we noted:

> "From the point of view of many people working at local level, the uncertainty of large grant schemes ... does not compensate for the decline of the local authorities' discretionary grant structure. It is felt that any large funding scheme, such as those offered by the European Union, tends to require a disproportionate amount of investment, and favours those who are articulate in its culture. In our view, this is no way to prepare for a socially-inclusive Information Society. The unevenness and short-termism are both extremely negative aspects of these social policy mechanisms, and they can have the effect of demoralising members of the community and practitioners.

> "Big funding distorts. It can distort agencies in their ambitions, their outlook and their energies. It can exhaust and it can inflate. Great things have been achieved and great hopes have been dashed. The issue here is about the appropriateness of large-scale funding schemes for a sensitive and crucial area of policy."

Now that we have come so close to establishing community resource centres which are based on a rationale of social inclusion, efforts are needed to ensure that the movement is main-streamed. To jeopardise some of these initiatives would be profligate. The financial instability of INNIT, for example, contrasts very strongly with the vibrant feel of the place. A community centre has been created in South Kilburn at extraordinarily low cost and huge effort. The local authority has got a bargain. Staff and residents could well be asking authorities where *their* contribution is. The question 'what have the centres been doing about their longer-term sustainability?' is valid; but so is their likely riposte: 'what have the policy-makers been doing about the longer-term sustainability of the centres?'

In this context we should note the point made by Liff and Steward in their recent ESRC-funded research into 'e-gateways':

> "Both telecottages and cybercafes identified ways in which Local and National Government could help secure their long term sustainability. These included direct subsidies, rate rebates, and support for particular groups of users such as job seekers or students to use their facilities or take up training with them."

Cyber Cafes and Telecottages: Increasing Public Access to computers and the Internet, Sonia Liff and Fred Steward, http://www.virtualsociety.org.uk

To some extent, arguments for main-streaming continue to depend upon demonstrating outcomes. Until we are able to point to the work of centres like these and prove their effectiveness against certain criteria, we will continue to struggle to justify the resources they need.

Issues specific to the Learning Centres Programme

Given the role of these projects as pioneers or pilots for the Learning Centres, it is appropriate to offer feedback on three key aspects of the programme so far. The issues which stand out are:

- the imbalance of capital and revenue
- the application form
- investment and support for community involvement.

The concern about the availability of funding has to do with the imbalance between capital and revenue funding. Our view is that for most community-based initiatives, a figure of £100 000 for capital funding is likely to be too much and could distort organisations dangerously. Most do not have a need for £100 000 worth of equipment. Their need is for revenue funding, probably in the ratio of roughly 1:8. Projects established now could be wasting money on equipment which will become out-of-date in two or three years' time, and might not have the resources to engage people to exploit the equipment, or the funds to upgrade.

Comments about the application procedure have been forceful and views are widely known. Experienced grant applicants have found them daunting. Here are two examples:

> "The application form was a nightmare. I have experience of Lottery, SRB, RDA, Trusts, City and many other types of funding, both major and small grants, including New Deal for Communities, and this was the worst, without doubt. If any small community led groups have actually managed to complete applications without a great deal of professional help, they should just be given whatever they applied for."

> "The form was bad even for those of us used to European claims... The FEFC income tables (estimating students by quarter over 3 years, including retention and achievement data per qualification) were a particular torture. The headings in the financial tables didn't correspond with those on the application form so if you set up your spreadsheet to fit the form you would have to completely redo it to fit the tables."

Lack of investment in community involvement and partnership building is less visible as an issue at present, but could well give rise to problems. The expertise of groups and organisations in low-income neighbourhoods, and the strength of the partnerships in which they are involved, will be critical to the success of the programme. It follows that such agencies should have

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professional, reliable support both at the bidding stage and, for those which are successful, throughout the period of becoming established as learning centres. Issues of access, confidence and capacity in poorer neighbourhoods are particularly complex, and the lead time for setting up centres can be considerable. There is also concern about the competence of some institutions, which might appropriately lead on bids to the programme in some areas, to engage with community sector agencies in equal partnerships. Such organisations will need workshops, resources and guidance if they are to make an appropriate contribution to the overall programme.

16 Concluding remarks: many first steps

Because centres are used to having many activities involving different groups of people, they are in a strong position to bring in expertise when it is needed: tutors for basic skills, librarians for teaching information use ("informacy"), work and career advisers for job seeking, retired people interested in local history to teach web searching, disability workers for help with special needs, and so on. The centre can be a place where such advisers can interact on neutral ground with people, some of whom may never have had such contact before.

It is a truism to say that community centres provide added value. A great deal of activity which spins-off from, or draws people into, ICT provision in these projects can only happen in that context. It is not within the scope of this research to track them. We have tried to hint at the breadth and significance of this added value, from online global backgammon to posters for campaigns, and it is clear that we need methodologies for demonstrating some of the outcomes. One statistic comes to mind, an individual learner who has been on a course and thus provided a tick in someone's box: an output. It happens that she had experienced protracted ill-health and was housebound, but now teaches her partner at home because he can barely read nor write: an outcome. Such tiny, colossal markers line the way. Many people are taking their first steps to becoming involved and skilled citizens in the Network Society. As we have said, these centres are now more ready for the next big challenge. Much of this value is not something that colleges, libraries or other institutions can ever bring about.

Appendix A

Project overviews

Descriptions of the localities are provided in section 3 of the report to PAT15, Everyone gets hooked.

Granby Island Community Centre, Devonport, Plymouth

The project is based in a community centre established in 1999 by local people to meet the needs of an area blighted by Royal Navy dockyard closures. It comprises two large areas for child support activities, offices and a large general-purpose room that has been fitted with a computer network and PCs. The Project aims to:

- improve communication between community centres across the city using video conferencing and a community intranet
- provide web and IT access to local communities, in particular the underprivileged and those on income or unemployment benefit
- offer training initiatives and new opportunities for career development for local people, using the IT facilities.

The project is staffed by local people and a Project Consultant under the direction of the Centre Manager. It has engaged local contractors to install a ground-breaking video-conference network between seven community centres, and although this is as yet incomplete it has meant that sharing and support of IT initiatives in other centres has begun. Developing relationships with other partners - college, university, library and City Council have also sprung from the project which is now offering long hours for formal and informal exposure to ICTs.

HaKIT, Hangleton and Knoll Community Project, Hove, Sussex

The Hangleton and Knoll Community Project has been operating as a community development vehicle for over 15 years in two large and isolated estates to the north of Hove. HaKIT has been installed in Opportunities, which is a shop-based employment and advice centre established with SRB funding. There are also laptop computers for outreach and a PC in each of the two community centres on the estates. The project has been cautious in development, concentrating on not over-stretching expectations and ensuring a sound basis of community engagement. Staff have worked with the Sussex Community Internet Project (SCIP) and local community workers to provide workshop sessions in one community centre. The project has concentrated on developing community worker and activist IT skills by providing training sessions, and now has a new member of staff responsible for developing a volunteers and service programme.

Scotswood Support Centre, Scotswood, Newcastle

The Centre was established by local people concerned about the social conditions in the west end of Newcastle, taking over a redundant building, and having young people very much as a focus. The centre is overseen by an active

management committee responsible for the Scotswood Area Strategy, a charity set up after the so-called riots of 1991. It has strong and complex links with local government and the business sectors. The centre has a variety of rooms used for community and youth work; a community bakery (taken over when the commercial bakery chain pulled out); and an out-of-school learning centre. There is a large multi-purpose room, which has been fitted with networked computers, some provided by the City Council after a successful IT day run for PAT 15, and the rest provided under the Learning Centres scheme. A PC is installed in the youth area, and one is planned for the bakery to form a cybercafé for local residents. IT training and support, together with a personal effectiveness course, is provided by Mason Port Associates, a local training provider, and this is linked to employability training and careers advice.

Bolton Woods Community Centre, Shipley, Bradford

Bolton Woods follows a fairly typical Community Association model of a centre run by professionals and volunteers with a variety of activities centred on young people, sport, parents and so on. It is a partner in Shipley Communities Online, along with the Windhill East Community Association (which has been represented throughout the pioneer projects phase in communications and meetings). It has offices and a large multi-purpose room, with networked computers installed in a secure room at one end of the building. It is staffed by tutors from Shipley College, (which has also provided technical support) and by the existing centre staff with augmented hours. Online learning and drop-in use are supported, and more recently a development worker by has been appointed by Shipley Communities Online to enhance the work of the two centres. In addition to the CMF and DTI revenue funding, funding in support has come from a successful ERDF project.

South Kilburn Learning Access (INNIT), South Kilburn, London

INNIT was set up under the aegis of Brent Council's South Kilburn Regeneration Unit following a successful IT day organised for PAT15 in the summer of 1999. The centre is managed by a committee drawn from the local authority and local community agencies, and employed a consultant for five months to set up the project from scratch. The original plan to install the centre in a local school fell through, but negotiations resulted in the adoption of a redundant shop which had been vacated by the regeneration team in favour of premises next door. It comprises two rooms, with the smaller used mainly as a multimedia and music room. DTI revenue funding was used to employ sessional staff to cover all aspects of the centre's work, drawn from local residents. The project has focussed completely on drop-in access with welcoming support, and has maintained a high profile by providing free access to digital multimedia facilities, including music and video production. Since opening the project has entered into formal and informal relationships with several local partnerships and agencies.

Appendix B

Summary of main findings from PAT15 local projects, 1999

The projects were concerned with ICT familiarisation in low-income neighbourhoods. The main activities took place in Barnsley, Brent, Hove, Newcastle, Plymouth and Shipley. An ICT Awareness Day was run in each locality and this was supplemented with research carried out by local people.

Structured opportunities for awareness and familiarisation, in appropriate settings, are a highly effective way of introducing ICTs to people in low-income neighbourhoods. (5.6)

There is a clear need for a basic level of community activity or community development as a foundation for any familiarisation initiative. This meant that the nature of the Awareness Day and its publicity were sensitive to local interests and were supported. It would be difficult to establish research activities of this kind in more fractured neighbourhoods or where there was no trusted contact with local people. The relative integration of the neighbourhoods in which we worked should not disguise the need for basic community development and community involvement where this does not exist already. (5.6)

Community provision of ICTs offers different and complementary benefits to home access, which are quickly recognised by people whose way of life includes social networks based around community buildings. Offering access to the Internet in a low-income neighbourhood is likely to be most successful in a centre which offers a range of community-based activities. The key attributes of community access are:

- integration with existing community provision and support networks;
- 'localness', and
- the shared experience.

'Discovering together' is a key aspect of effective familarisation with ICTs. (5.4)

The main reason why people do not own computers is that they are perceived as too expensive to buy or run. Twenty per cent of those who did not own a computer felt that they did not know enough, and 14% felt that they didn't need one. Just 14% of those asked said they hadn't had the chance to try one. Only a tiny proportion of respondents were worried about the effects of content on the Internet, or of games. There is evidence that 'fear of messing it up' is a reason for non-ownership. (4.3)

The research shows the importance of recognising the diversity of applications, interests and motivations. Once people get the chance to see the range of possibilities which ICTs provide, they can often quickly see the potential for their own lives. This might be to do with skills for employability, helping to run their family business, keeping up with or encouraging their children, pursuing a hobby, gaining information, cultural expression, or plain old-fashioned

curiosity. (5)

The projects demonstrated that local champions, who help stimulate interest and activity, will often emerge when an occasion is provided for them. But there is no reason to assume that they will necessarily; and when they do come forward, we should be in a position to support and nurture them. (5.5)

A single ICT Awareness Day is not sufficient to uncover and meet the likely potential interest and need. Repetition of the events over a period of several weeks would multiply their effectiveness, taking advantage of the power of word-of-mouth at neighbourhood level. A structured programme of similar events, providing basic awareness and familiarisation, and possibly including activities targeted at specific social groups, could make a significant impact on some of the barriers to the use of ICTs in low-income neighbourhoods. (5.6) It is important not to under-estimate the role of technical support in running ICT Awareness Days. (4.1)

The two major motivations for people in low-income neighbourhoods to explore ICTs are:

- employability, and
- helping or keeping up with children.

The other main areas of motivation are:

- education, (informal) research, homework
- supporting own work or business, and
- leisure, communities of interest. (5.2)

The main barrier inhibiting the engagement of people in low-income neighbourhoods with ICTs is *confidence*. This is associated with a number of other issues such as the complexity of the technology, its diversity, lack of opportunities, and low levels of basic skills. The technology is powerful in providing an entry point into learning. It offers a new skill for many people, irrespective of class or educational background, and is not associated with earlier school failure. Once people achieve early successes with IT, they then feel more confident to tackle other basic skills needs. (5.3)

Most of those who attended the events were clearly 'actively interested' or already converted. It is important to offer events for such people because their interest can atrophy or become disillusion if opportunities are not provided. However, there is another job to be done, which takes longer and involves working with community activists and practitioners, in order to attract those who are indifferent or too profoundly excluded to be attracted to community buildings and events. (6)

Appendix C

Sample questionnaire survey form

Learning Access Centre Questionnaire
Please help us by answering the questions below. Fill in what you can. Choose your answers from the lists, and tick boxes by clicking on them with the mouse. Sometimes there is a white box for your comments. Click in the space and type these in if you can. We do not need to know who you are. Your answers will be used here, to make sure local people benefit from the centre. The answers will also be used to help set up other centres throughout the country.

Q1. Is this your first visit to Granby Island Community Centre?
- ○ No
- ○ Yes

Q2. How did you hear about the computers at Granby Island Community Centre?
- ☐ Word of mouth
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Local news
- ☐ By invitation
- ☐ Through local group
- ☐ Someone suggested I go there.
- ☐ Other [＿＿＿＿＿＿]

Q3. If someone suggested you go there, who was that?
[＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿]

Q4. Have you heard of any of these groups?
- ☐ Short Mat Bowls Club
- ☐ Welcome All Group
- ☐ Walkers & Talkers
- ☐ The Mens' Group
- ☐ Learning Links
- ☐ Let Loose
- ☐ Pelican Centre
- ☐ The Community Café

Q5. Have you been to any of these groups?
- ☐ Short Mat Bowls Club
- ☐ Welcome All Group
- ☐ Walkers & Talkers
- ☐ The Mens' Group
- ☐ Learning Links
- ☐ Let Loose
- ☐ Pelican Centre
- ☐ The Community Café

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