

IT for All – Computer Access and Skills in the UK

Slide 1 – Introduction

Thank you to Barbara Lison for her kind introduction.

This presentation gives an overview of what is happening in the United Kingdom to give ICT access to adults.

I work for the Department for Education and Skills and we see access to Information Technology as having an important role in bringing people into learning.

You may see references in the slides or in hear me talk about ICT. In the UK the term Information Communication Technologies is used more often than IT. Whether it is IT or ICT that is used the meaning is essentially the same.

Slide 2 – Government Targets

The UK government strategy for Information Technology embraces e-commerce, e-Government and public access.

The main commitment on access to Information Technology is to make the Internet universally available to all who want it by 2005. There are of course many who do not see any value in using Information Technology. Promoting the benefits of new technologies to non-users is an important part of the UK strategy. There are currently national television campaigns promoting the advantages of the Internet to non-users.

Another target is to establish 6 thousand UK online centres by the end of this year. This is the main programme for offering public access to technology and the Internet. I will say a lot more about these centres later in the presentation.

Increased use of the Internet provides Governments with an opportunity to expand the availability of services online. In the UK every Government Department and each Local Authority has an e- business action plan setting out how they intend to put services online, and to make there services interactive on the Internet.

Slide 3 – Internet Access in the UK

The next few slides give some statistical information of IT access in the UK.

The efforts of Government are to close the gap between those who have access to the internet and those who do not have access to the internet. The aim is to close the digital divide.

In the UK there is continued strong long-term growth in Internet penetration. Currently 39% of households are connected to the Internet. From the slide you can see that 53% of UK adults have access to the Internet at home, at work or at a public access point.

However, within this overall trend of increasing Internet use there are more men than women using the technology. However, this gap is narrowing. The largest differences in Internet use are by age, occupational status and income levels.

It is not surprising that the youngest people in the population make the most use of the Internet. There is a challenge in promoting the benefits of new technology to those who do not have the confidence, trust or skills to use a personal computer. Older generations are being influenced by those still at school and in full time

education of the potential of IT to enrich their lives.

Slide 4 - Trends – Internet use by Occupational Status

There are also large variations in use of the Internet by social class of households. 71% of professional people have home Internet access compared to 26% for unskilled households. The level of use of new technology is lower again for those who are unemployed, single parents or on state benefits.

While the overall trend for Internet use is increasing. Levels are increasing faster for professional and semi-professional workers.

The digital divide between those who have access and use technology and those who do not have access is getting wider. There are also significant differences in home access between neighbourhoods, local areas and regions.

Slide 5 – What Adults Use the Internet for?

The reasons why people use the Internet depend largely on personal choice. Information about goods and services ranks highest (74%).

There is also a strong attraction for new users who see benefits in using e-mail. There are about a third of Internet users who use the Internet for educational purposes. Exploiting the potential of the internet and IT for e-learning is critical to the future skills agenda.

Slide 6 – Broadband and Infrastructure

The UK compares well internationally in the number of households covered by broadband technology (60-65%). The UK is in 5th place amongst the G7 in terms of broadband coverage behind Germany. Despite decent coverage the number the households taking up broadband services remains very low at around 1%. There remain issues of affordability and the benefits of broadband aren't generally understood. Connection to broadband in the UK is typically 40 to 50 Euros per month.

The situation with public buildings is very different. 98% of schools are connected to the internet. All libraries, colleges and universities are connected. The aim is to have all buildings with a minimum of 2Megabyte connectivity by the end of 2002, with the next generation of broadband looking at 10 Megabyte connections.

Slide 7 – The Digital Divide Barriers

A few years ago the UK Government looked at issues of disadvantage within the poorest neighbourhoods. It was found that lack of access to new technology was putting many individuals living in the poorest neighbourhoods at a disadvantage.

The report showed that:

- there was a lack of a joined up approach at the local level. There were often several local strategies for IT access and use, clearer thinking was needed between what happened between the national, regional and local levels.
- Marketing of the benefits at the local level was generally poor. Target groups (women, black and ethnic minority groups, older people) did not understand the potential of IT

- There was a lack of relevant content and that content relied on literacy levels that many do not have. In the UK there are 7m adults below the basic literacy and numeracy threshold.
- In some localities there were physical barriers because facilities were inappropriate or equipment didn't meet the needs of those with disabilities.
- Good staff who could train and support those new to IT were in short supply. The potential to use local champions or mentors was identified.
- Funding for local organisations was often fragmented and short term. Sustainability of funding was an issue.
- Costs of connection, software and equipment remain a barrier particularly for low income groups.

Slide 8 – Areas for Action

The main areas for action identified by the report were that:

- each community should have one publicly accessible community based IT facility.
- That clear targets were underway to monitor progress in tackling the digital divide.
- It was important that Government reviewed funding arrangements and made sure there was a balance between capital funding for equipment and premises with revenue funding for staff and skills training.
- The report recommended that solutions should be generated at the local level to reach those most in need.
- A programme of research and development activity should be put in place.

Slide 9 – UK Online key features

UK government action to close the digital divide, promote e-commerce and expand electronic services is all under the common brand of UK online.

The emphasis is on the delivery of services. There is a UK online portal through which people can access information linked to life episodes – moving house, leaving school, obtaining health care, getting a job, and so forth.

The aim is not simply to put existing forms and information online but to develop services to make them fully interactive.

Slide 10 – UK online related initiatives

There are many strands to UK online.

The UK online centres are central to the effort to widen public access to the internet. The target is to get 6 thousand centres. This will be exceeded. The 4,300 libraries in the UK will offer IT learning. 40 thousand library staff are being trained to offer IT support. There will be over 3k other types of centres, many in colleges but many in local projects.

We have also completed an initiative called UK online computer training that has given training to 50 thousand individuals.

Through Wired up Communities we are piloting arrangements in several local areas that connect every home, the schools, and other public buildings. This is on a small scale but will tell us a lot about how different types of access add value.

Through Computers within Reach we looked at the potential of using recycled

computers and making them available at low cost to those on welfare benefits.

Worktrain is a national database of learning and job opportunities.

Slide 10 – UK online

I have talked a lot about UK online. I want to close by showing you some images which brings the words I have said to life.

Slide 11 – UK online Liverpool

This picture was taken at Anfield the football ground of Liverpool Football Club in January. It shows our Secretary of State for Education for Skills at an event to encourage sports clubs to offer local community access to IT.

Slide 12 - Sheffield

In the city of Sheffield, which is an ex-steel town, a community group has set up a centre in a shop.

Slide 13 - Reading

In Reading which is 30 miles from London the centre is doing a lot of work to encourage those from different ethnic groups to use IT and the internet.

Slides 14 and 15 – Leicester

In Leicester in the middle of England there is a community bus which takes IT access into different housing estates, it makes use of wireless technology.

You will see that it helps not to be too tall to use this facility!

Slide 16 – Wired up Communities

Whatever success the public access to IT provides the majority of people will want to access technology at home.

Slide 17 – Websites

Finally, to close I have included a list of websites which offer much more detail than I have been able to give here.

Thank you for listening. I will happily answer any questions. I will now pass back to Barbara Lison.