Get IT Together Longitudinal Study

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September 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Get IT Together Programme has been established in 15 locations through a national partnership involving BT, Citizens Online, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Communities 2.0 and key local partners. Further national partners support the programme with their complementary offerings, such as free software, internet safety trainings or specific routes to engagement with those who are offline. As part of the evaluation of the programme, a longitudinal study has been running for 2 years to establish if those who take part in training sessions become regular Internet users, install home broadband, and gain the benefits of being online e.g. finding employment, accessing further training or using Government Services online.

The study has found that after two years, 75% of learners are still online and 98% are regular internet users. There is a steady uptake in broadband installations, with 84% of learners having home broadband after two years.

There has been a shift in demographics from the start of the study, with an increase in the proportion of job-seekers taking part in training sessions. There have been successes with helping those looking for work finding employment, and overall, 13% of those job-seeking have gone on to find work.

The survey found that confidence at the end of training, was key to ensuring learners stayed online long term. For over 65s, lack of motivation was a barrier to Internet access, and more needs to be done to demonstrate the benefits of being online to this demographic.

The survey, found that for those who were offline, there was the potential for proxy Internet use, with 70% having friends or family that were online. Further research would be needed to establish if this was actually taking place.

For those who are online, there are many benefits that have been enjoyed as a result. 65% are encouraging others to use the Internet, and 3% have gone on to volunteer to help others. Around a third of learners were accessing Government Services online and 1 in 5 learners have gone on to further training following the sessions with Get IT Together.

Extrapolating the survey results has shown that for the 18,000 people trained to date, 13,500 will be online after two years, with 4,300 new broadband users. If each person who is encouraging others to get online helps one person online, that would bring the total to 25,200 so far. The programme will have also helped an additional 2,340 people into work.

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INTRODUCTION

The Get IT Together programme promotes digital inclusion amongst disadvantaged communities. The approach involves a three-year community development process, managed by a full time coordinator, who works with the local community to:

- Understand the rationale for using ICT and the barriers
- Capacity build and supports local partners
- Plug gaps in provision
- Manage volunteers to support the programme
- Deploy a range of national offerings that support digital inclusion
- Ensure new internet users progress on a learner journey and feel a positive impact from going online.
- Embed the programme in and align with local strategies

Get IT Together has been established in 15 locations through a national partnership involving BT, Citizens Online, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Communities 2.0 and key local partners. Further national partners support the programme with their complimentary offerings, such as free software, internet safety trainings or specific routes to engagement with those who are offline.

The outputs of the programme are subject to a robust monitoring framework and a longitudinal study will measure the impact. This report summarises the findings of the longitudinal study following a cohort of learners 2 years after completing training.

The findings of the longitudinal study have been used to complete a social impact analysis generating a social value for the programme. The results of this show that the programme generates a return of £3.70 for every £1 invested with a social value of over £1,000 per learner[1].

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[1] http://www.btplc.com/Betterfuture/ConnectedSociety/Valueofdigitalinclusion/index.htm

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaires are completed by learners at the start (entry point) and end (exit point) of courses. Learners complete at least four hours of Internet training, consisting of basic Internet skills delivered by Get IT Together or a partner organisation. Learners are then surveyed by phone or email at 3, 6, 12 and 24 months after completing the course. Analysis has been carried out on the learners who have completed the study so far and information has been collated into different sections:

Demographics - personal details about the learner including employment status

Motivation – reasons for using the Internet, confidence and Government Services used

Computer/Broadband Use – device ownership, broadband and internet use and propensity to install broadband

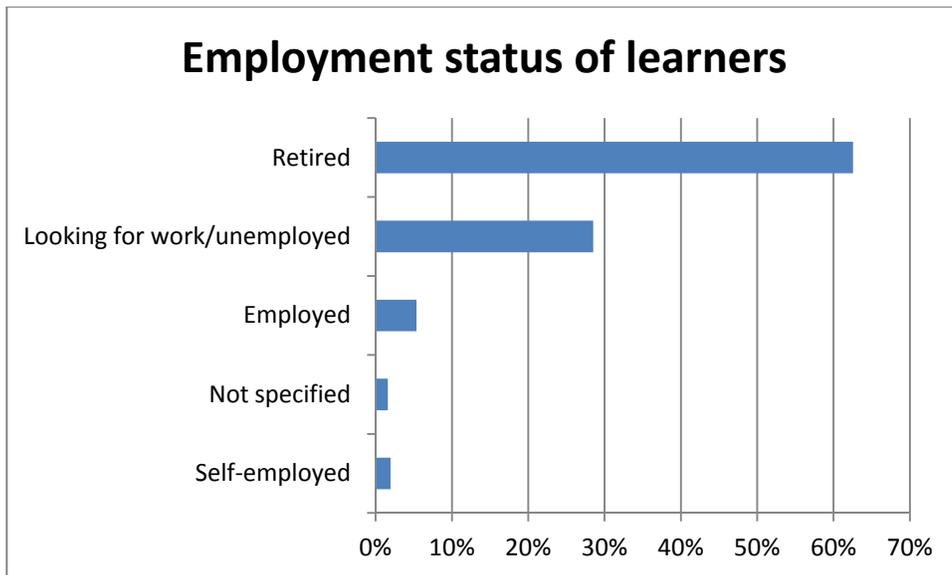Family and Friends – encouraging others to use the internet and support

The results from the longitudinal study have been combined and analysed and are presented in sections below.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Analysis of the demographic information shows that, overall, two thirds of the learners are female. This proportion hasn't changed over the duration of the study but does vary by project. For example, our Leeds project which focuses on unemployment shows a more even proportion of males and females. In more rural projects, we have higher proportions of female learners than male learners.

The age profile of learners shows that 76% are over 55 years old. Again, variations by project suggest that those working with learners seeking employment have a younger age range than those working in rural areas. Around 63% of learners are retired, a reduction of 20% on the study cohort two years ago. The number of learners taking part in the study who are looking for work/unemployed has more than doubled over the past two years. This is likely to be as a result of newer projects joining the study with a focus on employability and an increase in referrals from Jobcentre plus.

Employment status of learners

Category	Approx. %
Retired	~63%
Looking for work/unemployed	~29%
Employed	~5%
Not specified	~2%
Self-employed	~2%

During the longitudinal study, learners were asked if their internet skills had assisted with their job seeking and if they had found a job. 80% of those who were job-seeking stated their internet skills were helping them, and 13% had found work. The proportion stating internet skills were helping them to find work has increased by 30% over the past two years. This may reflect the changing job market and the introduction of Universal Jobmatch for those seeking work.

Motivation

Learners were asked about their level of Internet usage before training and their confidence at both pre and post training. They were also asked about their intended internet use post training and this was compared against their responses in the longitudinal study.

The study shows that around half of learners had used the Internet before their attended training. This has risen over the course of the study, up from 40%, two years ago. However, over 40% stated they were either not confident or not at all confident in using the Internet at entry. This may be the reason for attending training. After training this reduced to less than 15% suggesting that the coaching provided had improved confidence levels for a significant proportion.

Analysing the two groups separately shows different results for continued internet usage a year later. Those who were not confident following training, had approximately half the success rate of staying online a year later compared with those who were confident after training. The results also suggest that the training is more beneficial for those who have had some experience online before attending. This may suggest repeat course attendance, longer training courses or ongoing support would be beneficial.

After training, learners were asked about their planned Internet use. 30% of those who were surveyed were interested in using the Internet to apply for jobs. Around 15% were interested in using the Internet to save money or shop online. 18% were using the internet for social use or to contact family and friends and 40% of learners were interested in using Government Services online.

However, only a third of learners went on to use Government Services online. From the longitudinal data, of those using Government Services online over 50% had accessed their Local Council online; over 35% had accessed Jobcentre Plus online and 20% had used NHS Direct online. Although statutory authorities are keen to encourage online transactions, their websites and processes are not always capable of supporting this and learners need to have good experiences to encourage them to use services online.

Only 15% stated they would encourage family or friends to use after they had finished training. However, when surveyed, 55% were encouraging family and friends to use the Internet. This ripple effect is another positive way that the training provided can reach more people than just those directly trained.

Those who weren't using the Internet 12 months later were surveyed to identify barriers to Internet usage. Almost half cited the lack of a device as the reason, and a similar number stated they weren't confident to use the Internet. A third stated they weren't interested and an analysis of the employment status of learners shows that over 70% of non-users were retired. This suggests that those who are motivated to use the Internet to search for work, are more likely to continue using the Internet than those motivated by hobby/interest or leisure. One of the challenges for those working in digital inclusion is to demonstrate the relevance of the Internet for the over 65 year old age group, particularly around increased prolonged independence and to ensure training is relevant and interesting enough to continue usage. As highlighted in our recent white paper, "a key reason for not staying online is a lack of ongoing support. If we invest in getting people online and providing access, it is only sensible to also invest in keeping them online by supporting them up until they are self sufficient"[2]. This requires stable and appropriate community access points and coaches to provide ongoing support.

What was also interesting from the survey was a potential for proxy users amongst non-users. Nearly 70% of those not using the Internet a year later had family or friends that already used the Internet. This may suggest that for many they have proxy users who can access information or services on their behalf. Further research would be needed to confirm that this is the case.

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[2] http://www.citizensonline.org.uk/2014/07/the-case-for-a-systemic-approach-to-digital-skills/

DEVICE AND INTERNET ACCESS

Two years ago, when the longitudinal study started the questions were designed to capture computer ownership and broadband use. The rise of mobile broadband and increase in mobile devices e.g. tablets and smart-phones have changed the landscape of access to the Internet. In order to keep pace with changes, the study questionnaire has changed to capture device ownership and mobile Internet access as well as broadband.

Devices

The longitudinal study shows that just over half of the participants had a device to access the Internet at entry, and laptop/computers were still the most popular device. However, those with tablets showed a much higher success rate of using the Internet following training. Tablets are becoming increasingly popular, and the cost of tablets has reduced significantly. Statutory authorities are opening their wifi to the public with Jobcentre Plus, libraries and some housing providers offering free internet access in certain venues. One of the challenges for authorities is to ensure that their web services are multi-platform and mobile compliant to ensure that those accessing the services can do so from a range of devices.

Internet Access

Two years after training, 60% of those *without* broadband at entry had installed it. This means that over 80% of the cohort had broadband after two years. Broadband uptake has been analysed, and the number of installations amongst our learners appears to be higher than average (see graph below). For the other cohorts in the study, those installing broadband appears to be at around 70%, suggesting that training encourages broadband uptake within the offline community.

Learners with home Broadband
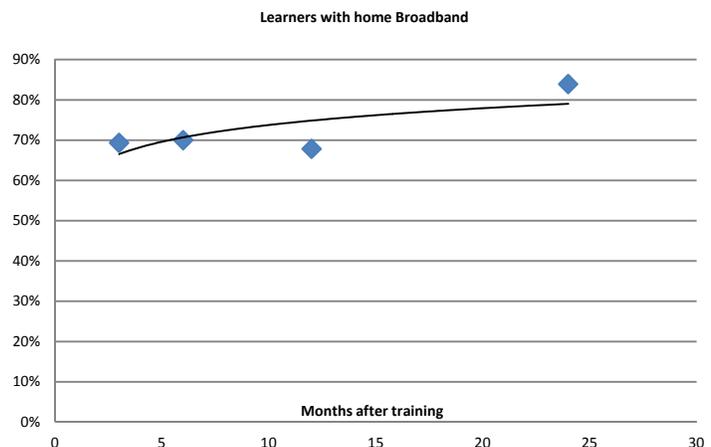
It is unlikely that other cohorts moving through the study will reach this level but may exceed the average. The group at 12 months, contains a higher proportion of people who are looking for work/unemployed compared with the higher number of retired people in the 24 month cohort and this may explain the slightly lower uptake of home broadband in that group. The most popular place to use the Internet, for those without home broadband is the library. It will be interesting to see if this changes over time, as more public spaces are becoming wifi enabled.

SPREADING THE WORD

During the study, learners were asked if their friends and family were using the Internet and if they were encouraging them to get online. Anecdotal evidence suggested that those who enjoyed the training courses were referring others and also helping those close to them informally.

The longitudinal study shows that at 12 months, nearly 70% of the learners' friends and family already use the Internet. Of those who were not already online, almost half were encouraging their friends and family to go online. At 24 months, this increased to 65% who were encouraging others online. This may be as a result of increased confidence over time.

Learners were also asked if they had taken part in any volunteering to help others get online. At both 12 and 24 months, approximately 3% of learners had taken part in volunteering activities to help others online. This is a really positive result and demonstrates the increased confidence that training brings to the local community.

PROJECT VARIATION

The Get IT Together programme has projects across 14 locations of the UK. Some of these projects have come to an end whilst others have just completed their first year. The projects combine a mix of urban and rural areas, across the Highlands, Northern Ireland, Wales and England. Each project has a specific focus to address the levels of digital exclusion in the local area. These differences are also reflected in the longitudinal study data.

The regional variations show that whilst Northern Ireland and England tend to follow the overall results of the Get IT Together Programme, there are some differences in the Highlands and Welsh projects. In the highlands, courses tend to be longer with often 8 – 10 weeks of sessions running. This has been provided to support learners for longer due to the lack of infrastructure in the area and the survey found that over 55% had no ongoing support after training. After 12 months, 67% had used the Internet and all of them were regular users. The high numbers of regular users may be as a result of two factors – the longer training sessions and the access to home broadband at entry. In the Highlands the results show that over 70% of learner had broadband at entry, higher than the average.

In Wales, our projects had a great deal of early success, with over 85% using the Internet after 3 months and over 90% using the internet after 6 months. However, at 12 months, this had decreased to around 50%, and then increased again at 12 months to 68%. Further analysis suggests that the results at 12 months may have been skewed by some courses with hard to reach groups who were more difficult to engage with and also support to stay online. Feedback from these learners suggested that courses were

too short and they needed more sessions. For those trying to engage with hard to reach groups, this may be useful learning.

One of the successes in Caerphilly in particular, has been the Digital Days drop-in sessions. This is reflected in the study with over 1 in 8 learners stating they are regularly supported by a trainer.

EXTRAPOLATION

There have now been over 18,000 learners taking part in the Get IT Together Programme. The study results have been extrapolated to this wider population and this generates the following results for the programme.

After two years, 13,500 learners are still online with 13,230 regular Internet users. There would be over 15,000 learners with home broadband, and 4,300 new broadband users.

11,700 learners would be encouraging other people to get online and if each of these managed to help another one person online, that would bring the total online to 25,200 people online.

Almost 4,000 learners will have been inspired to go onto further training or education as a result of the sessions with Get IT Together and the programme has had great success at helping people into employment as well. Extrapolating from the survey, would mean that an additional 2,340 people have found work after training with the projects. The projects encourage people to use Government Services online where possible, and the study shows that almost 6,000 people can now access Government Services online with potentially more having the skills to do so.

The Get IT Together Programme aims to work with 22,000 people to gain digital skills in total. Doing so and extrapolating from the survey, would mean that after two years, 16,500 people would still be online.
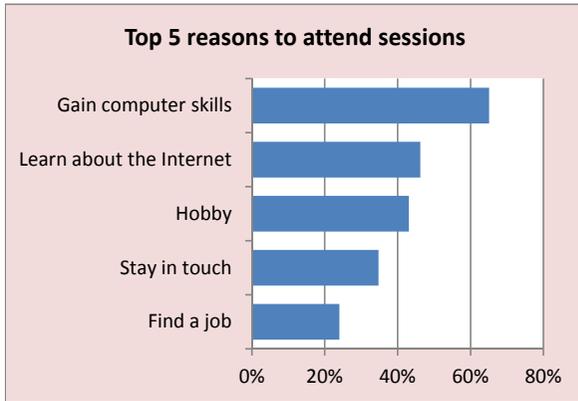
CONCLUSIONS

The Longitudinal study has demonstrated the value of the Get IT Together Programme and has also generated some useful insights to help those working to improve digital inclusion.

There has been a change in need with more jobseekers needed digital skills, and this has been shown in the shifting demographics taking part in the study. Jobseekers make up a higher proportion of learners than they did 2 years ago. The survey shows that confidence is the key to ensure learners stay online longer term, and with hard to reach groups this comes from increasing the number of sessions provided to enable more time to practice skills.

For those who are over 65, motivation to stay online is still a priority, and there needs to be more done to demonstrate the benefits of independence and the use of the Internet to support independent living. For learners of any age who are offline, there may be evidence of proxy use taking place with 70% having friends or family online.

The survey results have been extrapolated to the whole Get IT Together Programme, and this shows that there are now 13,500 people online and 4300 new broadband users. If those who stated they were encouraging others to get online, helped 1 extra person online, that would mean over 25,200 people would be online. When the programme meets its targets of 22,000 learners, there would be over 30,000 people online as a result of the training provided.

Top 5 reasons to attend sessions

- Gain computer skills
- Learn about the Internet
- Hobby
- Stay in touch
- Find a job

(0% 20% 40% 60% 80%)

Get IT Together
CitizensOnline

Longitudinal Research Study
Date: Sep-14
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KEY:	Entry Form	Exit Form	Longitudinal Study

Number of learners surveyed:
Entry   5204   Completed 24 months
Exit   4650   Long study   56

Employment status of learners

- Retired
- Looking for work/unemployed
- Employed
- Not specified
- Self-employed

(0% 20% 40% 60% 80%)

For learners without home broadband:

Learners with home broadband

(90%, 80%, 70%, 60%, 50%, 40%, 30%)
Entry 3 months 6 months 12 months 24 months

If you don't get broadband, will you still use the Internet?

- Yes
- Maybe

(0% 20% 40% 60% 80%)

Where will you access the Internet?

- Library
- Community centre
- Friend's house
- College

If you are job-seeking, are your Internet skills helping?

- 3 months
- 6 months
- 12 months

(0.6 0.65 0.7 0.75 0.8 0.85 0.9)

At 3 months

For those with support at 3 months, who supports your Internet use?

- Family
- Friend
- Trainer

At 24 months

For regular Internet users, how often do you use the Internet?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly

Produced 29/09/2014