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Making IT Personal – Joining the DOTs: Transnational Study Visit Report

Furtwangen, Germany.

25th – 26th November 2009

Attendees:

(UK project partners)

Philip Briscoe - Barnsley College

Martin Cantor - Barnsley MBC

Lesley Jayne Doorly - Doncaster ICT Academy

Mark Doyle - Barnsley College

Julia Duggleby - The Sheffield College

Claire Louise Fletcher - Sero Consulting

Janis Novitzky - NIACE

Patricia Jarvis - Rotherham College

(Transnational partners)

Karsten Bieberle - Furtwangen Tele-akademié

Thomas Jechle - Furtwangen Tele-akademié

Members of the MITP – JtD team visited the Tele- akademié



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During this event, attendees aimed to:

- Introduce transnational partners to the UK's Digital Inclusion Agenda with specific focus on South Yorkshire and the ways in which Making IT Personal – Joining the DOTs fits into this context.
- Explore the 'training for trainers' that is offered at the Tele-akademié (including training methods, learning materials and the 'bigger picture' i.e. Digital Exclusion in Germany) and consider similarities and differences between this and MITP – JtD.
- Use the opportunity to build links and relations between UK partners to aid delivery of MITP – JtD and to discuss issues and consider future actions.

Digital Exclusion in South Yorkshire and the catalyst for MITP – JtD (Martin Cantor – Barnsley MBC)

South Yorkshire has suffered a 25-30% loss in jobs in the past ten years due to a decline in what were its prime industries, for example the Sheffield steel industry. To add to this, the number of citizens in South Yorkshire that do not use the internet is above the national average, at 35-40%. Contributing factors to this figure include age, disability, wealth and education. To move the region out of this slump, South Yorkshire is being steered in the direction of a Digital Future.

Why are people in the UK excluded?

- 'It's not for me' - seeing no reason to use IT.
- Fear and embarrassment of learning something new.
- Access- restricted due to cost/disabilities/connectivity.



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Tackling Digital Exclusion

The four local authorities of South Yorkshire bid for £10 million of government funding to tackle Digital Exclusion. South Yorkshire's bid, 'Making IT Personal' was unsuccessful; however it did form the catalyst for future movement in the shape of Making IT Personal – Joining the DOTs.

This project supports Digital Inclusion in the following ways:

- Making lives better (Bringing families together, making day to day activities easier)
- Building stronger communities (Linking people with similar hobbies, interests etc.)
- Building a stronger economy (Broader knowledge market)
- Improving public services (Access to what people want and customising services to suit)
- Saving Public Sector money (i.e. £14 per face to face encounter compared with 25p per online transaction).

This project is part of an agenda to make Barnsley and South Yorkshire a beacon for work on Digital Inclusion.

Making it personal

This project relates IT to the issues that the digitally excluded are faced with and reaches the places that they are found in on a day to day basis such as libraries, supermarkets and public transport information desks. Digital Outreach Trainers (DOTs) will identify the needs of an individual and advise on the ways that IT could help to make everyday tasks easier. DOTs will require good people skills and communicative ability as well as a basic understanding of IT. They will not be paid for their services however they can benefit from training and can choose to work towards an accreditation. Above all, they will have a desire to help others.



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The Tele- akademié – Hochschule Furtwangen

(Thomas Jechle, Head of Continuing Education, and Karsten Bieberle, Online Course Manager)

Establishing e-learning in Germany at the Tele-akademié

The Tele-akademié was established in 1995 when Hochschule Furtwangen (Furtwangen University) received a grant to develop its Continuing Education Department. In 1996 the Tele-akademié launched Germany's first online course 'Lernen in Internet' which attracted learners from all over the country to log on and learn about the internet, via the internet. Since then, over 4000 learners have participated in over 150 online courses.

Training Trainers

The Tele-akademié reacted to a decline in the number of e-learners in 2004 and introduced a system that offered e-learning courses for staff, improving their ability to teach via the internet. The Tele-akademié now focuses much of its work on training e-learning tutors through online courses and blended learning courses (Tele Tutor Training).

Tele Tutor Training is offered through three different courses at the Tele-akademié:

Tel- tutor Training (a pre-requisite for all other courses).

European Net Trainer (The Tele-akademié is part of the European NET-Trainers Association (ENTA) and has previously collaborated with The Sheffield College in this field).

Expert for New Learning Technologies (specifically aimed at those wanting to implement e-learning in the workplace).

The prerequisite for all Tele- tutor Training is an academic degree or comparable work experience; students are also expected to have considerable self discipline and basic IT skills. The objectives of the courses are to get students acquainted with the characteristics of e-learning and to the situations of e-learners.

A Tele-tutor Tutor's perspective

Ulrike Ernst, a freelance tutor at the tele-akademié, spoke at the event using Vitero technology (which is used for Virtual Classroom sessions at the Tele- akademié as part of the Blended Learning approach). Ulrike describe her role as:



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- Technical support for students.
- A key learning support figure to accompany the whole learning process.

Ulrike also identified her role as being a judge of new technologies to determine whether they are of use to her colleagues and students and keeps herself up to date with new trends through her work and reading.

Reflections

Relating the DOT scheme to Tele-tutor Training

The parallels between South Yorkshire's DOT scheme and the Tele-tutor Training are apparent from a structural perspective and in a basic sense this can be summarised as 'training the trainer'.

However, the DOT scheme is reliant on a more informal process due to the voluntary nature of the DOTs' involvement. It was also noted that the college representatives who are responsible for the DOTs do not have the time or the resources to provide the level of support that a tutor such as Ulrike suggests is required. This is not necessarily an issue with the DOT scheme as not all DOTs require or want training and accreditation.

It was useful to hear the issues that tutors are faced with regarding online teaching as these may occur on the DOT scheme. For example, learners are required to dedicate eight hours per week to the course, often working around existing commitments such as family and full time jobs and as a result, time management has proved to be an issue in some cases.

MITP – JtD: A preview to the ways that Germany can tackle Digital Exclusion

Thomas Jechle explained that Digital Exclusion does exist in Germany, with parallels between the off liners in Germany and the UK and similarities between the reasons for these people being off line. However, the problem has not yet been formulated and therefore the country is not in a position to apply a scheme such as MITP – JtD. As there are inevitably similarities in the underlying reasons for Digital Exclusion, Thomas felt the event had prepared him well for contributing to Digital Inclusion in the future.



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If steps aren't taken to promote Digital Inclusion there is a risk of widening the social divide. A resounding conclusion of the event was that the Tele-akademié has great potential to address the issues and that people from the UK are willing to lend the benefits of the successes and failures of their own experiences.

The Evaluation process of MITP – JtD: An 'Action Research' approach.

Information from learners and from DOTs will be collated by NIACE to enable the project team to reflect on what has been done and amend practice. A meeting on September will provide the opportunity for this reflection process and to agree what amendments are required. By the end of the project, NIACE would like five models, as recommended by College partners, to effectively evaluate (i.e. working with second language speakers). NIACE would like to form an understanding of what will make a person want to be a DOT, why will they continue to be a DOT and alternatively, why will they not continue to be a DOT?

Management and Responsibility of DOTs

From a delivery perspective, it is not clear who is responsible for the DOTs that are signed up through a particular college and what level of support should be available for DOTs from the delivery team. Colleges may not receive any funding for training and this may limit the level of support that can be offered to DOTs.