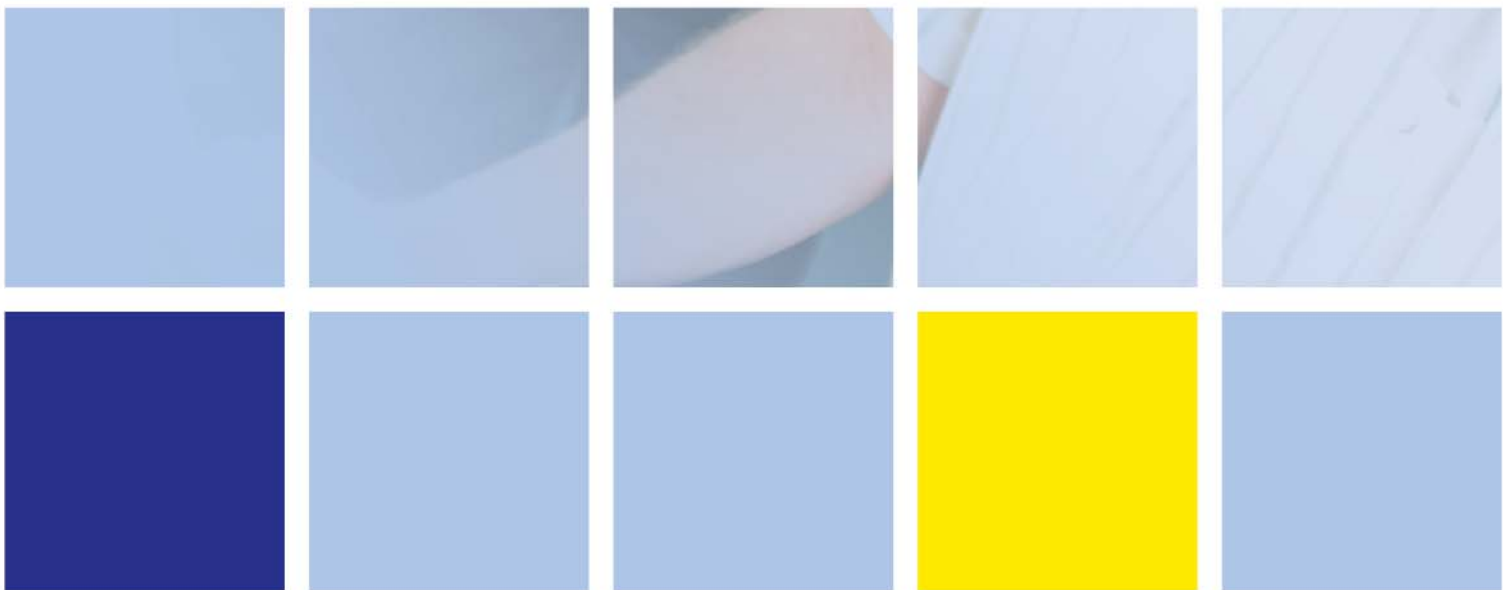




**UK online centres:
Transformational Government for the Citizen
Research report**



Foreword

When the UK online centres network was formally launched in 2002, the issue of digital exclusion was seen primarily in terms of access: tackle that and the journey to becoming a self-sufficient internet user was inevitable.

Evidence from UK online centres and from other practitioners in the field has shown that the picture is far more complex. It's not just about creating pathways to technology, it's about highlighting the potential benefits and facilitating and supporting use.

Technology has become more than a tool which enriches people's lives by opening up a world of internet-based leisure or hobby activities. With an estimated 90% of new jobs requiring IT skills, it is now fundamental to our working lives. It also governs how we communicate and interact in our everyday lives, with Government, with public services and with each other. Those not using technology are increasingly at both an economic and social disadvantage.

Over the same four-year period, Government and Local Authorities have invested an estimated £7.4 billion in online services¹. 'Transformational Government' – which aims to make Government services more accessible and convenient and to design services around the needs of citizens – has also been introduced.

However, a MORI/Microsoft report published earlier this year found that 64% of the population never use public services online, increasing to 77% for those not working and 86% for the over-65s². A further Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) study of local authorities showed that most eGovernment services do not reach socially excluded groups.³ It seems the people with the most need for public services are often those with the least access.

These strong economic and social imperatives were the drivers behind this major project, which explored in depth the use of UK online centres as intermediaries in stimulating the use of Government e-services.

While this project focused on one region, the South West of England, the potential market across the whole of England is estimated to be at least 6.6 million adults. These are people who are both digitally excluded and socially disadvantaged, with two or more 'Social Needs' which require them to contact central Government or their local council. These include living in local authority housing or being in receipt of Government benefits.

Over the course of the project, around 16,000 visits were made by UK online centre customers to eGovernment websites, including Directgov, Jobcentre Plus and NHS Direct. What emerged strongly was the importance of the role played by staff in supporting first time users with technology, in allaying fears about internet security and in interpreting the often complex information on the sites involved; 97% of centre users felt reassured just by having staff around.

The project has shown overwhelmingly that being online is the means to an end, and that the end is of benefit both to the individual and to the Government. A follow-up survey six months on with individuals who took part in the project showed that 45% reported major improvements to their lives, with 9% finding a new job as a result of their participation. Whether it's new or better employment, progressing to a course, finding out information or transacting with Government, the result is of economic and social benefit to the new technology user and to the country as a whole.



To help Government migrate citizens from face-to-face channels to digital channels, a co-ordinated approach is urgently required to smooth the transition. The good news is that the infrastructure is out there already. Most UK online centres are ready and willing to expand their role as the trusted intermediary, and become dedicated e-service facilitators in the communities both central and local Government most needs to reach. This report shows how effectively they can adopt the e-services mantle, and bridge the gaps between Government, technology and community.

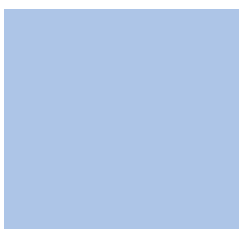
UK online centres are proven hubs in their local communities. This project has shown that 80% of the general population are aware of their local UK online centre, with 49% of all centre users walking to the centre, demonstrating the attraction to local people. Users are frequent visitors – with around 70% visiting once or more than once a week – providing an opportunity for e-service facilitators to guide people to services that are closely tailored to their individual needs.

UK online centres help citizens pass two key milestones in their journey to being the self sufficient user of technology that Government increasingly needs them to be. For many people, centres *initiate* the process by raising awareness of the benefits of technology and helping them to start their journey. In continuing to support people to gain the skills they need to use IT effectively, centres help them pass the second milestone – *empowering* people to use technology and transform their lives.

Simpson Carpenter and Regeneris Consulting, who carried out the research for this project, deserve credit for their thorough analysis of a huge amount of data to form this project report, and for their definitions on Digital Inclusion Groups. Thanks also to the Government and Local Authority partners, and to all the UK online centres and many individuals who took part. I was deeply inspired by the commitment and enthusiasm shown by all involved, which proved to me that partnership working and cross-Government collaboration can be more than just rhetoric.

In the words of our Prime Minister, technology is indeed “profoundly empowering”. Let’s make sure that those who stand to benefit most from technology are not left behind.

Helen Milner
Managing Director, UK online centres



The UK online centre South West eGovernment Project: Report by Simpson Carpenter and Regeneris Consulting

1 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Government has made a significant investment in developing online public services. Increasing the proportion of the population which has access to these services is important not just for economic reasons, but for social equity. The aim of this 2006 UK online eGovernment pilot was to assess the effectiveness of UK online centres in broadening the access to and use of Government e-services amongst the residents of the pilot area – the South West of England.

1.1 Assessment Framework

The assessment of how well these centres deliver e-services, especially to the digitally excluded, comprised several research and monitoring exercises conducted over the period January – July 2006. These were:

- A detailed survey of the experience of the UK online centre managers.
- A weekly monitor of centre use and internet use.
- Interviews with Government e-service providers.
- A residents' telephone survey: 1,028 telephone interviews with a representative sample of 18+ year old residents across the pilot area to assess the demand amongst residents.
- A survey of centre users: 1,616 on-site interviews with visitors to understand centre use.
- An in-depth survey with centre internet users: 300 telephone follow-up interviews to generate use and user profiles.
- Five focus groups with users to explore use and perceptions of eGovernment websites.
- A further follow-up survey 6 months later in November 2006, with 150 of the 300 follow-up interviewees to assess the longer term impact of such use.

2 CENTRE ACTIVITY AND CUSTOMER IMPACT

As part of the pilot, the centres themselves concentrated on:

- Increasing their local marketing, particularly to visitors not currently using their ICT facilities.
- Devoting more staff time to customer advice and support on ICT issues and eGovernment internet sites, and increasing the number of training courses.
- Using a range of innovative techniques to engage and support customers. These included themed sessions, course development and outreach activity.

As a consequence, 66% of centre managers reported an increase 'to some or a large extent' in the numbers asking about or trying to access eGovernment sites.

Among those centre internet users who were interviewed in the follow-up stage in late 2006, nearly all reported improved skills in using the internet through visiting their UK online centre.

- 20% said they had known nothing before their first visit – of these 60% now say they know a lot and can use the internet as well as they need to and the remainder feel they now know a little but want to know more.



- 41% felt they originally knew a little but wanted to know more – among these one third still feel this way but the remainder are now confident in their ability and internet usage.
- Nearly half of the customers (45%) followed up after six months say that using the internet has been a big benefit to their lives.
- As a result of using the internet at the UK online centre, 18% have enrolled on a training course, 9% got a new job, and 45% have found useful Government and/or council information.

“Many of the people who come to our sessions are now able to use our public area PCs independently”

Centre Manager

2.1 Project facts and figures

- 2.1.1 36 centres (and 9 more outreach venues) ranging from Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) centres to Public Libraries and Adult and Community Learning or Further Education Colleges in the South West of England participated.
- 2.1.2 6 Central Government service providers and 4 Local Authorities participated.
- 2.1.3 25 e-services were included in the research including DirectGov, NHS Direct online and NHS.uk, Pensions e-services, Jobcentre Plus, DVLA e-services, the DfES Adult Learning Course finder, and local council e-services.
- 2.1.4 There were 720,000 visits to the centres as logged in 20 weeks (over 6 months).
- 2.1.5 This total footfall figure must be seen in context. The average weekly footfall in a VCS centre is 85, while Education centres receive around 100 visits weekly. Small Libraries have an average of 1,600 visits, while large Libraries receive more than 6,500 visits per week on average. Four large Libraries took part in the project.
- 2.1.6 There were 15,900 visits to Government e-service websites by customers in the pilot centres during the pilot period as recorded by centres. There were also 42,000 instances of general internet advice being given, and 4,900 instances of advice being given about Government e-services.
- 2.1.7 Within the pilot, 5 centres worked with 3 specific target groups – Blind people, Homeless people (2 centres), and Black and Minority Ethnic people (2 centres).
- 2.1.8 Out of the 7,969 wards in total in England
 - 3 of the pilot centres are within the 200 most deprived wards
 - 5 of the pilot centres are within the 500 most deprived wards
 - 9 of the pilot centres are within the 1,000 most deprived wards.
- 2.1.9 There was an even split between centres located in rural areas and in urban areas.
- 2.1.10 In the centres 188 staff members (averaging 5.7) were actively engaged in the pilot (headcount not FTE). On a typical working day an average of 3.2 members of staff (a total of 107) were available to assist customers in using the computers and the internet. 681 computers were open to the public (averaging 20.6 per centre).



3 KEY FINDINGS

3.1 Key Findings about customers and their use and view of UK online centres

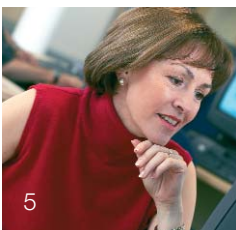
- 3.1.1 80% of adults are aware of their local UK online centre, and 47% have visited one.
- 3.1.2 UK online centres are used as internet access points because they are seen to be easier to get to than other places, and have people there who can offer help.
- 3.1.3 Customers tend to live locally, with 49% walking to their centre.
- 3.1.4 Centre visitors are less likely to be happy in their current job (24% happy v 40% happy in the general population).
- 3.1.5 Centre visitors are more likely to be unemployed and seeking work than the general population (13% v 3%).
- 3.1.6 60% of visitors use the internet on all or most of their visits to the centre (with many centres offering a wide variety of other non-ICT activities).

3.2 Key findings about internet customers at UK online centres

- 3.2.1 49% visited at least one central Government website in the last 3 months.
- 3.2.2 97% felt reassurance just by having staff around.
- 3.2.3 71% felt simply having other users around was reassuring, helping their confidence.
- 3.2.4 60% had something explained to them by staff, and this support was particularly important to them, especially for those whose ICT skills were less well developed.
- 3.2.5 In terms of being able to make financial transactions on the internet, 16% have no, or limited capacity, to do so: amongst the general population it is 10%.
- 3.2.6 The main e-services sites visited relate to training, education, job search and health.
- 3.2.7 Customers show distrust in providing Government with personal information.
- 3.2.8 30% have visited their own local council website.

3.3 Definitions for 'Digital Inclusion Groups'

Group	Definition
Digitally Included	This group have easy access to ICT through home, work or college and the desire, skills and confidence to use it.
Digitally Determined	This group have access to, and use, the internet, but not at any of the accessible locations above (e.g. they have to visit a UK online centre, internet café etc), and may (or may not) also be Digitally Constrained.
Digitally Constrained	A subset of the Digitally Included and/or of the Digitally Determined. This group are constrained in their use of the internet by their level of skill and/or confidence. This group represents 28% of the Included and Determined.
Digitally Dismissive	This group have access to the internet, but choose not to use it for a number of reasons, principally that they perceive they have no need to use it.
Digitally Excluded	This group perceive themselves to have no access to the internet.



- 3.3.1 Compared to the population in the pilot catchment area, UK online centres visitors are almost four times more likely to be Digitally Determined (23% v 6%).
- 3.3.2 The need to make contact with Government based on a range of simple indicators is inversely related to Digital Inclusion. While 78% of 'low need' respondents are Digitally Included, only 44% of 'high need' respondents are Digitally Included.
- 3.3.3 While the target for increasing Digital Inclusion is the 35% of the adult population who are not so, centres are already supporting the Digitally Determined, and can help directly in offering access to the 29% Digitally Excluded and Dismissive.
- 3.3.4 It is clear that this is already happening, in the fact that 43% of centre customers were present for a learning purpose – attending a computer course (20%), to learn computer skills (8%) or some other form of study (15%).

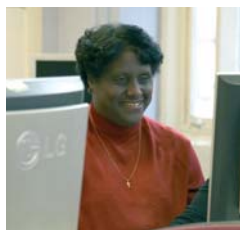
3.4 UK online centre network potential

To scale the market potential for England as a whole from the results of the project, the network has been sized using a multiplier of 2,700. This is assuming that a dedicated, e-services core will be built within the overall network of 6000 centres. Based on the performance in the pilot area, the potential use across a network of 2,700 managed UK online centres could be:

- 3.4.1 around 124 million visits annually
- 3.4.2 made by approximately 4.2m visitors
- 3.4.3 carrying out approximately 21.5m internet 'sessions'
- 3.4.4 making around 3m visits to Government e-services websites
- 3.4.5 and where around 1m visitors might be offered support in using these sites.

The table below estimates the total footfall, internet use and support, and Government e-service use and advice offered for a network of 2,700 managed centres.

Extrapolated: 2700 centres/annum (number of centres by type)	Total number of visits to centre	Customers	Instances of internet use	Internet advice given	eGovernment services use	eGovernment service advice given
Voluntary & Community (1340)	5.69m	190k	2.83m	0.96m	0.94m	480k
Education (360)	1.85m	62k	1.40m	0.90m	0.33m	160k
Small Libraries (850)	68.28m	2.28m	8.72m	2.19m	1.05m	380k
Large Libraries (150)	48.97m	1.63m	8.55m	2.57m	0.64m	60k
Totals	124.79m	4.16m	21.50m	6.62m	2.96m	1.08m



3.5 Government department, Agency and Local Authority involvement

Many of the eGovernment services included in the study have been introduced relatively recently, with a number launched earlier in 2006. Consequently, the services are under-developed and there is limited evidence on the extent to which the anticipated benefits of these services have been realised. On the other hand a number of the national services – Directgov and NHS Direct Online – and local authority sites, have been established for some time and are beginning to build a strong momentum in growing awareness and take-up, although again there is limited evidence available publicly on the extent of the improvement in service quality and efficiency.

Marketing and promotion of many of the eGovernment services has been relatively modest to date, especially where services have been introduced more recently and service providers have been ‘testing’ their operation and effectiveness. Some of the services have not been the subject of any concerted marketing and promotional efforts at all. All recognise the need to step-up efforts to market and promote awareness and have or are developing plans to do so.

With the exception of the Jobcentre Plus initiative, the direct involvement of the providers of the eGovernment services in the approaches and activities implemented by the UK online centres has been fairly modest. There are few examples of the service providers tailoring their sites and associated services specifically to improve their usability with the UK online centre users (although Directgov did make minor amendments). Whilst there was not a need for extensive tailoring of services, there are examples of where this might have been beneficial, for example in the provision of demonstrator facilities which users could work through either on their own or with the assistance of centre staff.

Most of the public services partners have confined their engagement with the centres to the provision of a range of marketing and promotional materials. Furthermore, Directgov created a ‘landing page’ to monitor potential usage amongst customers within the centres.



4 DETAILED FINDINGS

4.1 A new understanding of the scope of the Digital Divide

The term 'Digital Divide' is used by Government to refer to the gap between those people who can effectively use new information and communication tools and have access to these tools, such as the internet, and those who cannot. However, this definition, whilst useful and widely used, does not capture fully the range of reasons why people may or may not be able to make use of eGovernment services. It is important to remember that 'Digital Exclusion' is a more complicated phenomenon with a number of different dimensions and root causes.

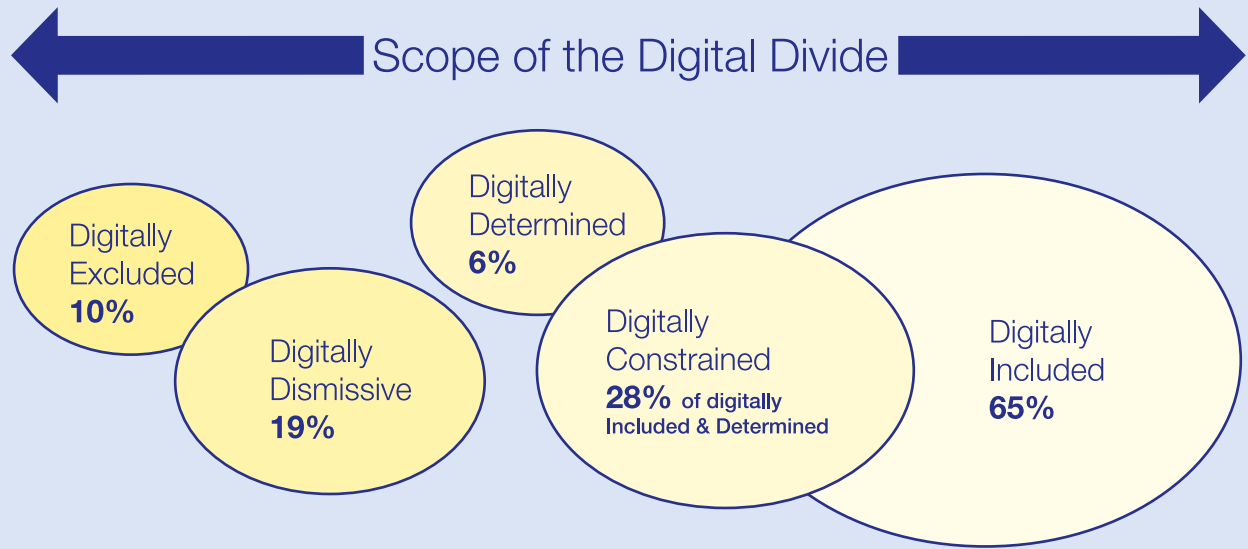
Group	Definition	% across the pilot areas in category
Digitally Included	This group have easy access to ICT through home, work or college and the desire, skills and confidence to use it.	65%
Digitally Determined	This group have access to, and use, the internet, but not at any of the accessible locations above (e.g. they have to visit a UK online centre, internet café etc), and may (or may not) also be Digitally Constrained.	6%
Digitally Constrained	A subset of the Digitally Included and/or of the Digitally Determined. This group are constrained in their use of the internet by their level of skill and/or confidence.	28% of Included and Determined
Digitally Dismissive	This group have access to the internet, but choose not to use it for a number of reasons, principally that they perceive they have no need to use it.	19%
Digitally Excluded	This group perceive themselves to have no access to the internet.	10%

A tenth (10%) of respondents in the general pilot area claim to have no access whatsoever to the internet. This ranges from 4% amongst 16-20 year olds to 25% amongst those over 60 and 14% among those who are workless (unemployed or long-term sick).

While it is clear that the target for increasing Digital Inclusion is the 35% of the adult population who are not so, UK online centres are already clearly supporting the Digitally Determined, and can help directly in offering access to the 29% who are Digitally Excluded and Dismissive. It is clear that this is already happening, in the fact that 43% of centre customers were present for a learning purpose – attending a computer course (20%), to learn computer skills (8%) or some other form of study (15%).



The diagram below shows a 'snapshot' of the percentages of individuals in the general population pilot areas in the different 'Digital Divide Groups'. Evidence from the follow up survey of internet users in centres indicates that the centres play an instrumental role in moving citizens from Digital Exclusion to Digital Inclusion.



“Well I really don’t use the internet as I could because I just find the websites such a lot of hard work, I really do.”

Centre Customer, Bristol

Extrapolating such figures to the total adult population of England shows that 13.6m adults have no or limited access to the internet (that is they are classified as other than Digitally Included).

	Digitally Included	Digitally Determined	Digitally Dismissive	Digitally Excluded
Within the catchment population (base :1028)	65%	6%	19%	10%
Grossed up to England adult population (Base: 39,032,000)	25.4m	2.3m	7.4m	3.9m

Source: Simpson Carpenter Market Sizing Survey 2006; analysis by Simpson Carpenter and Regeneris Consulting



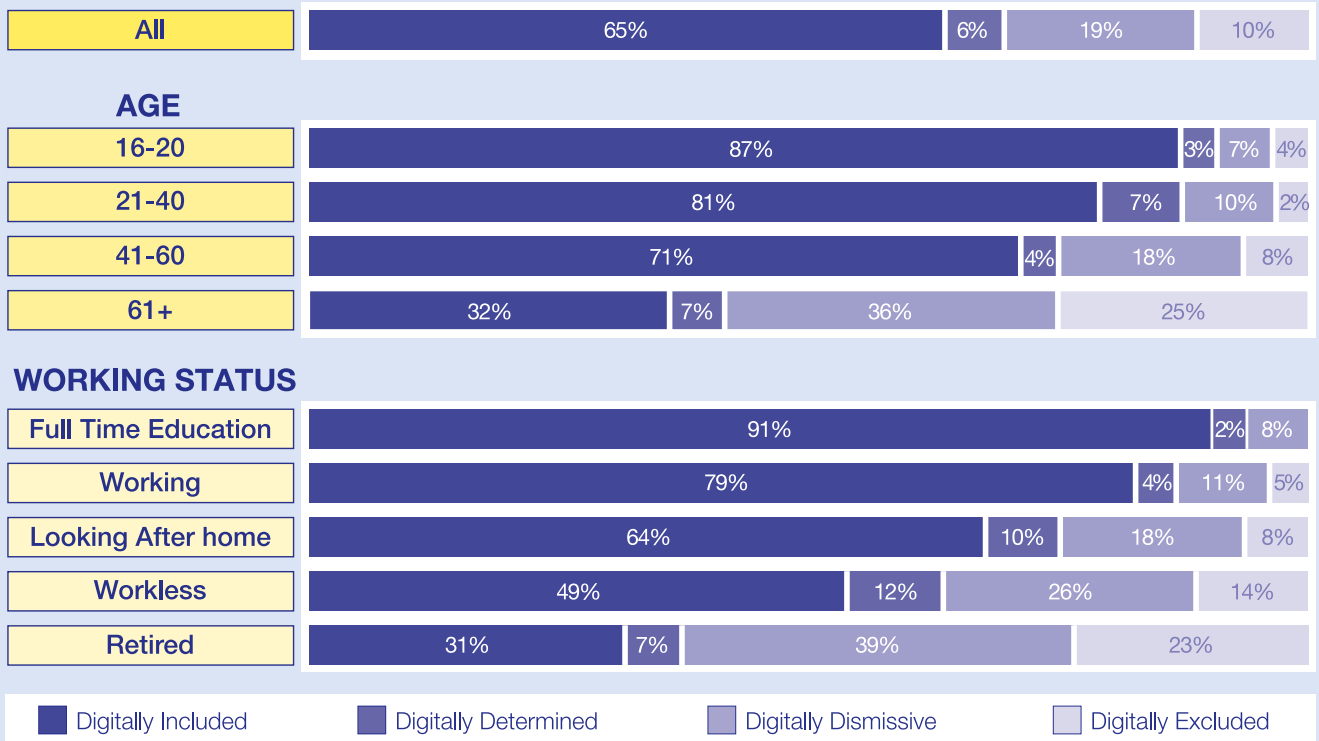
4.2 Access to e-services

At its simplest over two thirds of adults interviewed in the general residents survey in the South West (69%) have access to a computer at home and/or work: such access is highest amongst those in work (85%) or in education (82%), and lowest amongst the workless (48%) and the retired (36%).

An analysis of access to the internet, produced the following classification of the marketplace.

FIGURE 1: INTERNET ACCESS BY AGE AND WORKING STATUS

Base: All respondents (1028): general residents

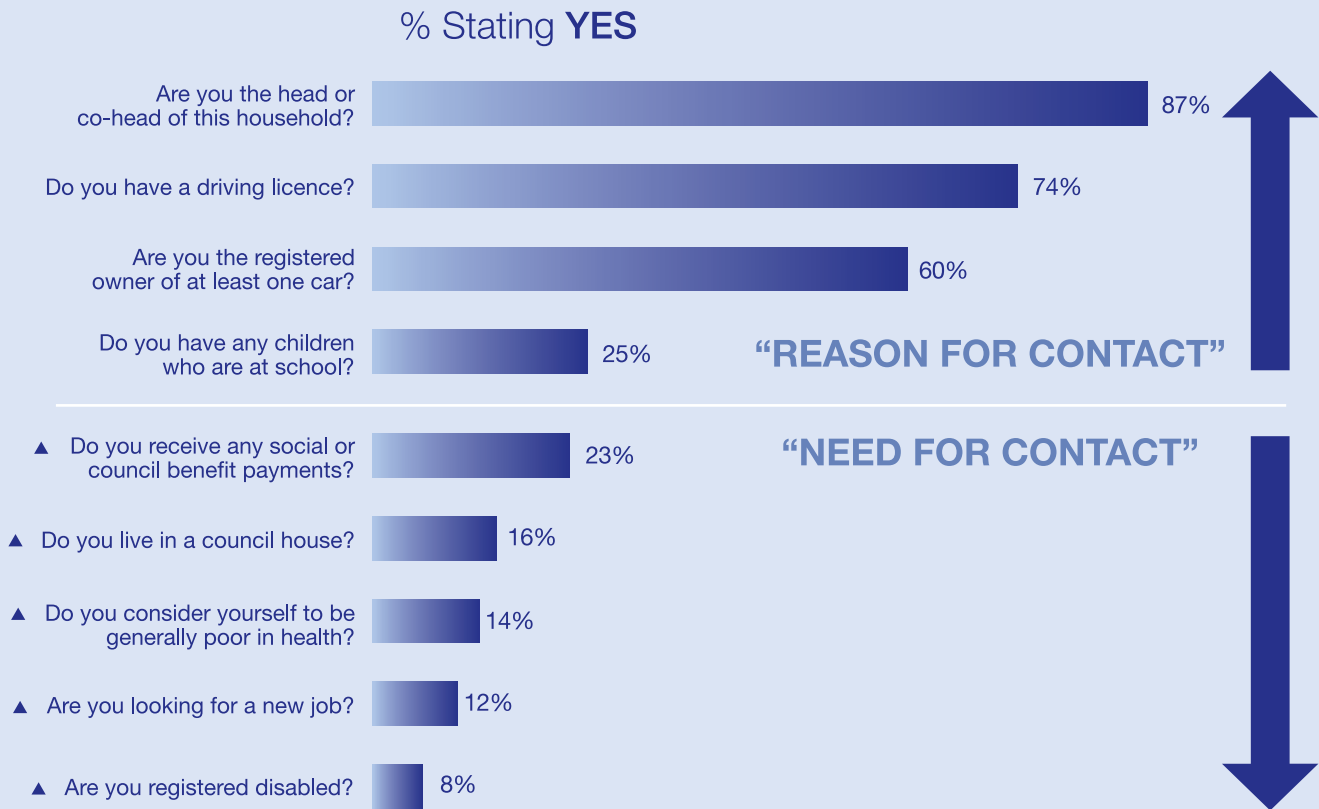


4.3 The need for the e-services on offer

To establish the extent to which respondents might have reason to engage with central or local Government, they classified themselves in varying ways with respect to the Government services being offered online in the pilot.

FIGURE 2: DETERMINANTS OF REASONS FOR CONTACT

Base: All respondents (1028): Market Sizing



The dominant ‘reason for contact’ characteristics relate to:

- being head/co-head of the household
- driving and car licensing.

On this basis, virtually all respondents have some reason to contact Government services, and 88% meet two or more of the conditions.

However, some of these reasons can be classed as being related more to ‘Social Needs’ (i.e. registered disabled) than others with a more ‘General Need’ (car licensing). Those marked ▲ in the figure above have been classified as typifying ‘Social Needs’. The degree of need for contact of each respondent was then graded by simply noting how many of these characteristics each respondent satisfied.

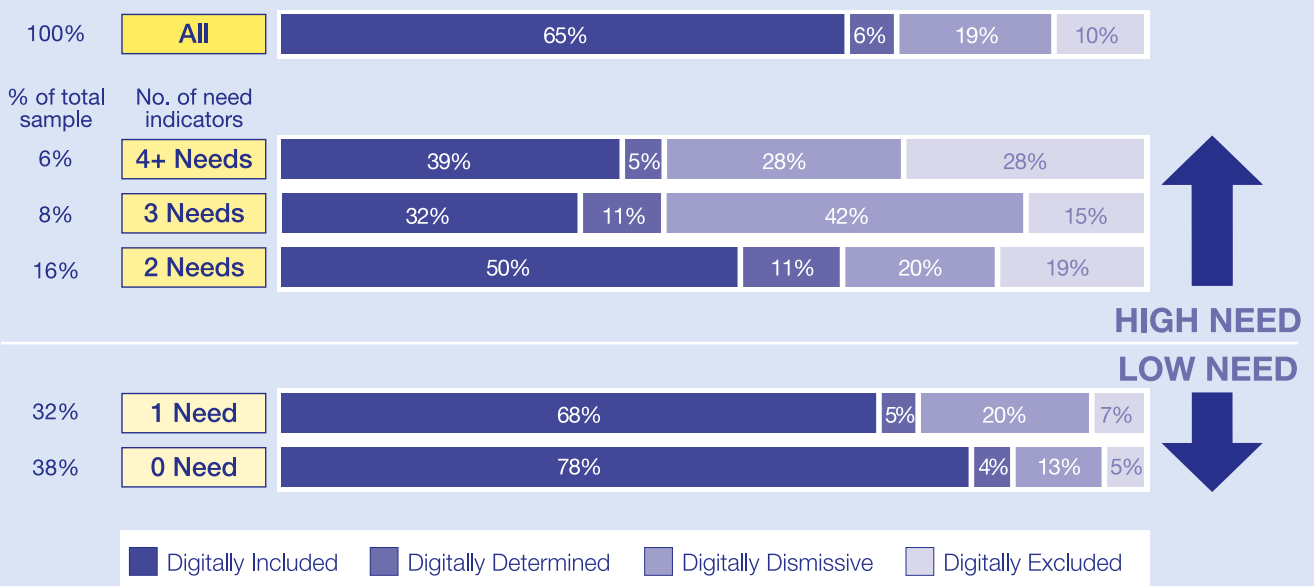


Frank wanted to chase up his pension entitlements, but couldn't get the information he required from the leaflets at the Post Office. "They are too complicated and there is no support to assist in my understanding of them". Centre staff helped him to access the same pension information from Directgov. He discovered that he may have been entitled to pension benefits, to which he had previously been unaware. Frank intends to follow up these leads and was "very pleased with the helpful advice that I gained from the Pensions site".

Customer Story, Cornwall

FIGURE 3: NEED FOR CONTACT AGAINST ACCESS

Base: All respondents (1028): Market Sizing



This simple analysis must be treated with caution: it only considers those aspects which would have some connection with the internet sites under review. For example, it includes poor health as an indicator but does not take into account the need for, say, 'meals on wheels' or measures to determine economic status. Nevertheless, with 30% of respondents in the general population (and 40% amongst centre customers) satisfying two or more of the 'Social Need' indicators, i.e. they have need to contact the Government or their local council, it could be that a minimum of 30% of respondents have a meaningful need for such contact.

This 'Social Need' for contact is inversely related to Digital Inclusion: while 78% of 'No Need' respondents are Digitally Included, 44% of 'Social Need' respondents are.



Need for Contact Versus Internet Access – Target Markets Across All England

	Digitally Determined	Digitally Dismissive	Digitally Excluded	Total
Grossed up to England adult population (Base: 39,032,000)	2.3m	7.4m	3.9m	13.6m
Respondents with “Need”:				
Need for Contact (Base: 1028)	51%	42%	58%	
Grossed up to England Adult Population (Base : 39,032,000)	1.2m	3.1m	2.3m	6.6m

Nigel walked through our centre’s door, persuaded to look online for jobs by his Jobcentre Plus advisor. He was less than enthusiastic. “I was reluctant because I had been looking for work for a long time and had become disheartened. They took the time to show me the best job search sites, and time saving tips and keyboard shortcuts. I found myself looking forward to going online, I gained confidence in looking for jobs, all things I would have scoffed at before. I am very pleased that I made the decision to walk through that door and ask for help.”

Customer Story, Devon



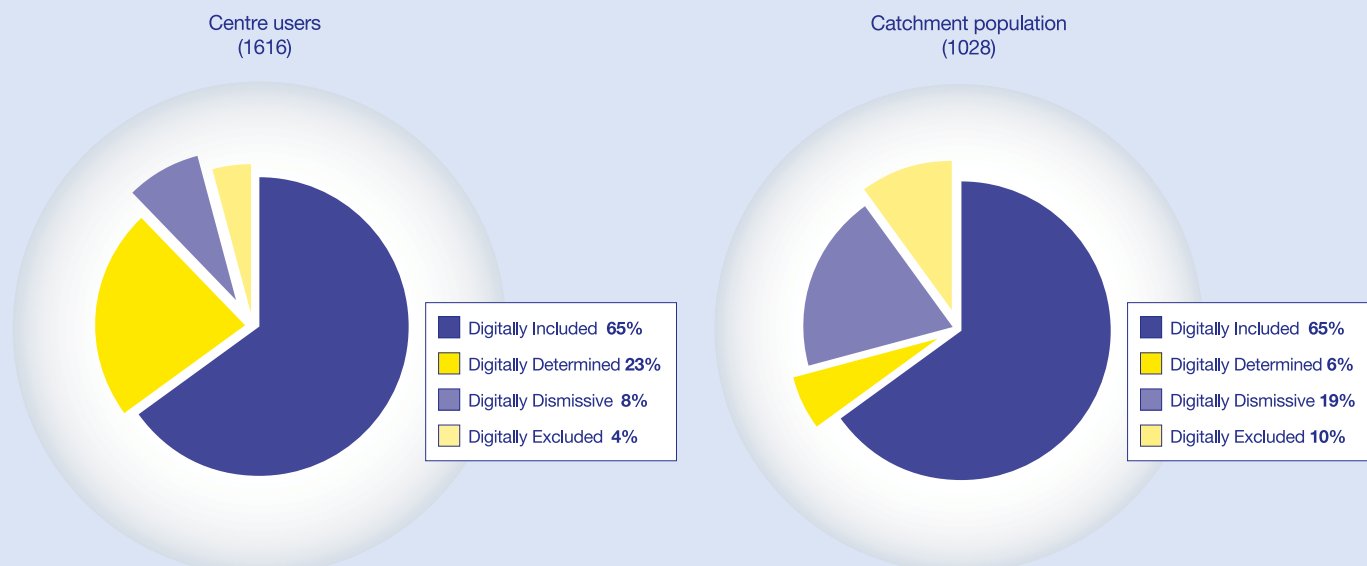
4.4 UK online Centre Visitors

With respect to UK online centres, 80% of respondents from the general residents survey claim to know at least one in their local area and roughly half (47%) have visited one for one reason or another.

Compared to the population in the pilot catchment area, UK online centres visitors are almost four times more likely to be Digitally Determined while 65% are Digitally Included. Furthermore, they are more likely to have a meaningful level of need to contact Government (40% have 2 or more 'Social Needs' compared to 30% of the local population).

FIGURE 4: EXTENT OF DIGITAL INCLUSION

Base: All – see below



It is important to note that this snapshot is of UK online centre users after they have been using the UK online centre services – therefore they have been moved from, for example, Digital Exclusion to Digital Inclusion. It does not demonstrate the extent of Digital Inclusion of users before using the centres.

While the demographic profile of centre visitors in the South West mirrors that of the general population:

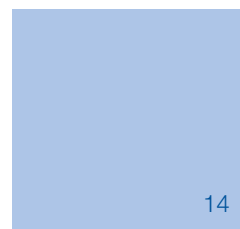
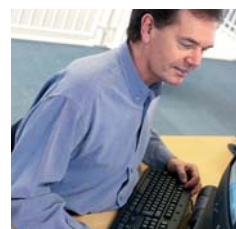
- centre visitors are less likely to be happy in their current job (24% v 40% of the local population)
- centre visitors are more likely to be unemployed but seeking work (13% v 3%).

Two thirds of visitors (60%) use the internet on all or most of their visits to the centre, (with many centres offering a wide variety of other non-ICT activities, e.g. loaning a book, using crèche, etc).

In terms of being able to make financial transactions on the internet, 16% of visitors have no, or limited capacity, to do so: amongst the general population the equivalent is 10%.

Among those centre internet users who were interviewed in the follow-up stage in November 2006, nearly all reported improved skills in using the internet through visiting their UK online centre.

- 4.4.1 20% said they had known nothing before their first visit – of these 60% now say they know a lot and can use the internet as well as they need to and the remainder know a little but want to know more.
- 4.4.2 41% felt they originally knew a little but wanted to know more – among these one third still feel this way but the remainder are now confident in their ability and internet usage.

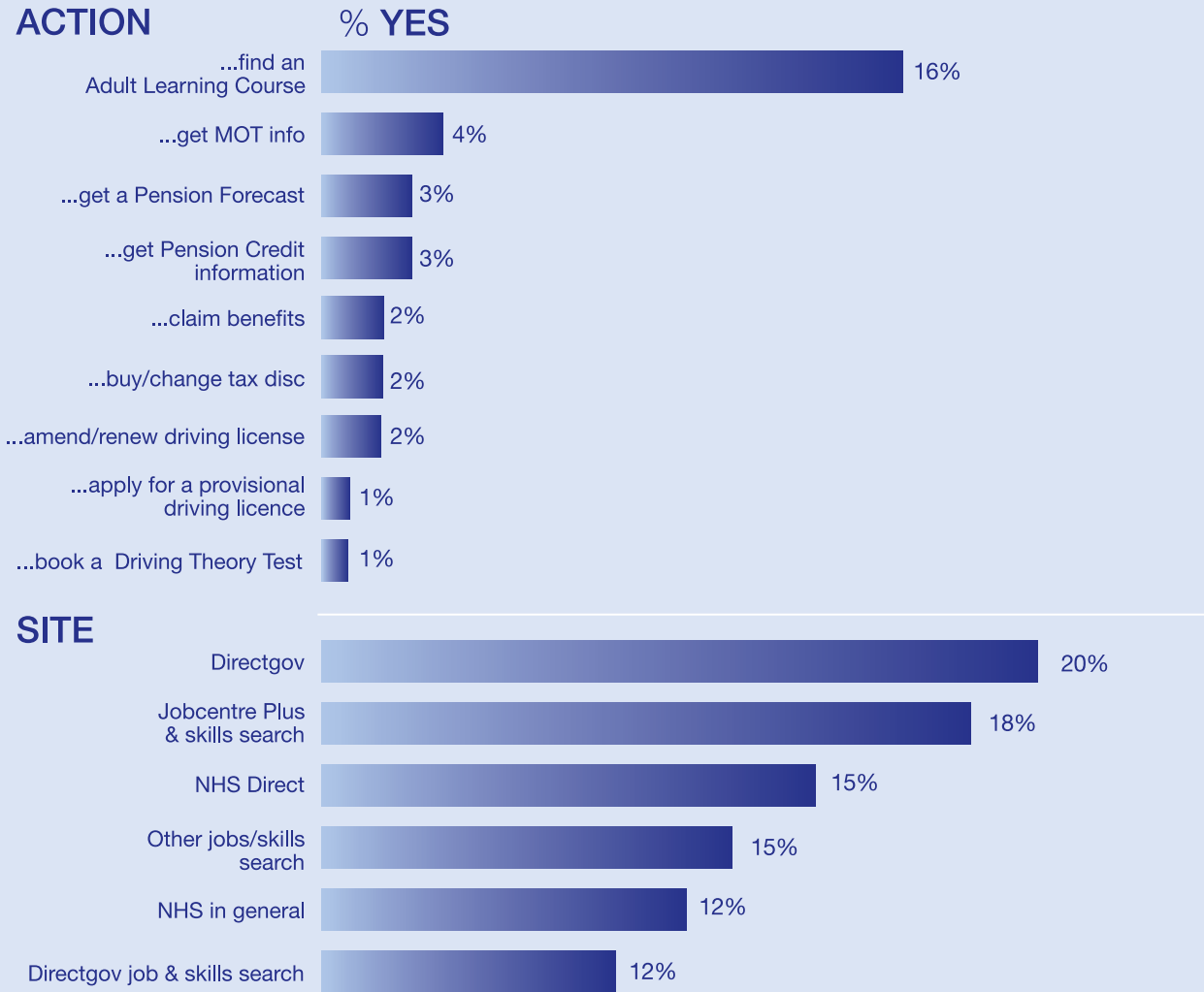


4.5 eGovernment website visits

The eGovernment sites most likely to be visited relate to training and education, and job searches.

FIGURE 5: CENTRAL E-GOVERNMENT SITES VISITED IN LAST 3 MONTHS VIA UK ONLINE

Base: All – 300 indepth survey



“The website is far too difficult, and the links are far too difficult; I mean I got there eventually, but I almost lost the will to live at one stage.”

Centre Customer, Plymouth

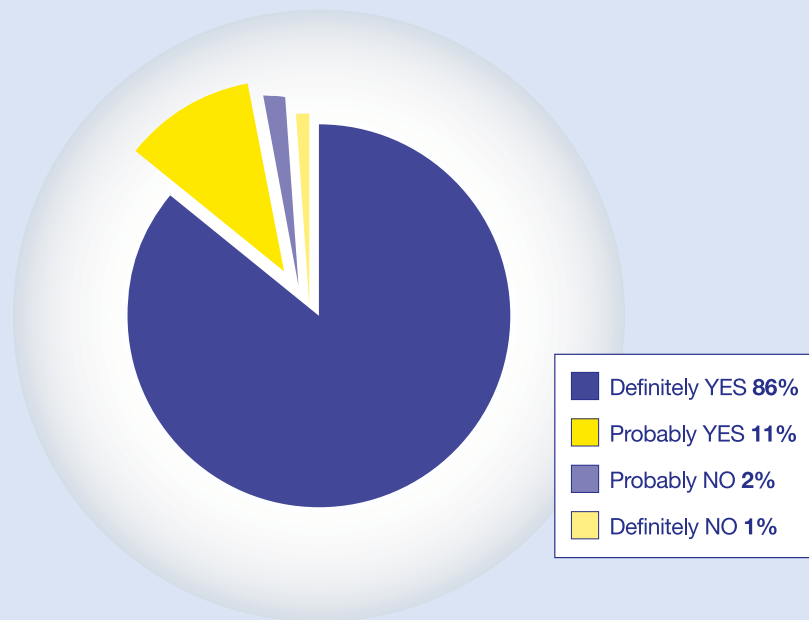
And the reasons such sites have been accessed from UK online centres relate to perceptions that:

- the most up to date information is there (90% feel this way)
- there is wide choice of options (85%)
- it is easier than going to other internet places (84%)
- there is someone there to help (81%).



FIGURE 6: REASSURING, OR CONFIDENCE BUILDING, JUST TO KNOW STAFF WERE AROUND?

Base: All centre visitors aware staff were around – 283: indepth survey



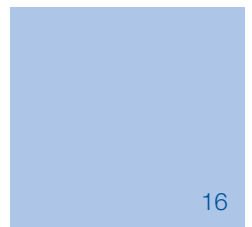
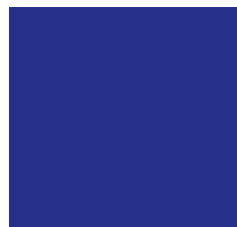
The reassurance of having staff around is overwhelming. This reassurance emerged strongly in the focus group discussions held with UK online eGovernment website users. The other main findings were:

- The greatest fears are about security and the potential for fraud. Participants give their trust – hence their personal details – reluctantly, and only to organisations they feel will protect such information. They do not have this trust in Government and so whilst happy to use informational eGovernment websites, are reluctant to initiate transactions.
- The eGovernment websites they have experienced seem daunting, in some cases asking for too much information or providing too much information to a (perceived) simple enquiry.

“We enjoy coming into the centre and using the computers. We have learned a lot coming here, but found something extra for us through the eGov site that we have access to. It had information on lots of topics about local Government issues, and Rhonda needed to find out about getting a Fishing Licence for her boy, three days before they went on their trip, so we had a quick look to see if there was anything on the eGov site. Rhonda was delighted to find it all, an easy form to complete, and to be able to get it processed straight away. It was really useful.”

“Kathy is off on holiday end of August and has just moved house. Her passport needs updating anyway, so while we were fishing for the licence, we had a look at whether these changes could be done through the site as well. And there it was, loads of information that explained what to do and why. Great!”

From Interviews with Rhonda and Kathy, Salisbury



4.6 The role of UK online centres

Most centres have tailored their provision or approach in some way as a consequence of participation in the project. The centres run by Voluntary and Community organisations have been more likely to carry out outreach activities, or develop courses. In contrast UK online centres located in Public Libraries have tended to have reached much higher numbers of people due to their higher natural footfall, and have tended to offer solely drop-in access. All centre types also tended to offer themed sessions. All of the centres have tended to focus their efforts on encouraging existing users to explore eGovernment websites, rather than securing new users who are digitally excluded.

Around 720,000 visits were made to the centres over the course of the six month project, which highlights the considerable existing footfall they secure. This total footfall figure must be seen in context. The average weekly footfall in a Voluntary and Community centre is 85, while Education centres receive around 100 visits weekly. Small Libraries have an average of 1,600 visits, while large Libraries receive more than 6,500 visits per week on average. Four large Libraries took part in the project.

The research suggests that at least 15,900 of these 720,000 visits involved some use of the eGovernment services (an average of 26 visits to eGovernment websites per centre per week). On balance, the UK online centres have provided an effective means of promoting the use of eGovernment services to a large number of people many of whom would not normally pursue this particular delivery route.

Although the capacity of the centres to provide related advice, guidance and training varies, most can provide a basic level of mediation which helps users to access and use eGovernment services. Many centres, however, have significant unused capacity and could provide a much higher level of support, which is particularly important for those users with poor IT or literacy skills or who lack confidence. The users were clear that this support was particularly important to them, especially for those whose computer and internet skills were less well developed.

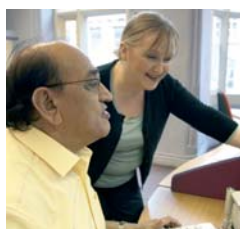
The study has found that UK online centres are accessible; few visitors make the trip especially to go to a centre while most are doing other things when in the area. Customers tend to live locally, with 49% walking to their centre. Once there, the assistance, advice and general camaraderie of the online experience is very much appreciated, as is the relatively low, or no, cost.

“During my time at the centre, I have increased my learning skills, which will allow me to move back into employment, given myself up to date qualifications to show recent learning and been able to produce a current CV. I regularly job search using the internet and find this a very useful resource. The level of teaching and personal support has been valuable to me.

More importantly, after a long period of illness coming to the centre on a regular basis has enabled me to increase my social skills, my ability to communicate with others and given me a routine. This is very important to allow me to move forward, starting some part time work and allowing me to have the confidence to talk to others.

When I first came to this centre my confidence was at an all time low and it is important to say this centre has given me the right balance between learning and social skills, and confidence to move forward with my life after years in the doldrums.”

Interview with Greg, Plymouth



5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 UK online centres should develop detailed models for *engagement* with Government departments and Local Authorities.

Feedback from the Government departments involved in the project was generally positive.

- The project demonstrated to Government partners that with the right amount of effort, resources and cross Government support, UK online centres can help increase take-up of eGovernment services.
- The project also demonstrated that the roll-out to a national delivery will require much more department involvement and commitment.
- UK online centres should work alongside other agencies (public and private) to help overcome the key barriers relating to the inability, and the unwillingness, to use the internet for financial transactions in general, and dealings with Government in particular.

5.2 UK online centres should develop detailed models for *promotion* of e-services within centres.

The UK online centres are accessible, and the assistance, advice and general camaraderie of the online experience is very much appreciated. But while these are important to the offer, none of them are the main one. Being online is only the means; the end is to get a (better) job, a course, information or whatever, and that must be the message. For the centres to become more attractive to digitally excluded, dismissive and determined people, marketing should focus on the following:

- Emphasising the **benefits** (a new job, a relevant course, an up-to-the-minute pension forecast) on offer in the centres, or local network of centres, rather than the means by which these can be accessed.
- Looking at **outreach** as a way to engage the digitally excluded.
- Recognising that **different segments** of the population have different reasons to contact Government, particularly the under 35s and over 60s.

5.3 UK online centres should develop detailed models for *delivery* of e-services within centres.

Drawing on good practice pursued by a number of centres there is benefit in local centres working together to offer the breadth and depth of services necessary to provide high quality services to their community. This could include a number of centres just promoting eGovernment services, providing internet access and basic support, whilst others provide internet specific training and related support. Users could then be referred between centres depending upon their needs. The delivery of eGovernment services should be designed at the local or area level rather than at the individual centre level.

5.4 UK online centres should work with Government departments and Local Authorities to facilitate centres acting as 'testing venues' for the development of quality, customer-facing e-services.

Feedback from customers and centre managers identified that the e-services being tested were not always designed with the needs of socially or digitally excluded customers in mind. UK online centres could facilitate the testing of new Government e-services with customers on behalf of the departments to ensure that they do meet their needs.



6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Overall Project Impact

- 6.1.1 UK online centres transformed the lives of a number of citizens in this project.
- 6.1.2 UK online centres positively influenced the view of citizens in their use and take up of Government e-services.
- 6.1.3 A number of citizens supported in the project have a much improved view of many of the e-services in the project and have recommended them to friends and family.
- 6.1.4 Nearly half of the customers (45%) followed up after six months say that using the internet has been a big benefit to their lives.
- 6.1.5 As a result of using the internet at the UK online centre 18% have enrolled on a training course and 9% a new job, 45% have found useful Government and/or council information.

6.2 Project Outputs

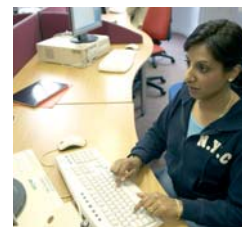
- 6.2.1 Strong evidence to demonstrate the value of the UK online network to the Transformational Government, Digital and Skills Strategies.
- 6.2.2 A dynamic partnership between central and local Government and voluntary sector.
- 6.2.3 A new understanding of the scope of the Digital Divide.
- 6.2.4 Indications of the potential power of the network to reduce the Digital Divide.
- 6.2.5 A wide range of detailed, robust evidence of customer activity and feedback, and data analysis and market research.

6.3 Departmental views of the Project

Feedback from the Government departments involved in the project was generally positive. In summary:

- The project demonstrated to Government partners that with the right amount of effort, resources and cross Government support, UK online centres can help increase take-up of eGovernment services.
- The centre staff and the centre customers provided valuable feedback on the products and services they were introduced to.
- Some Government partners are now considering how UK online centres could become part of their channel strategies and marketing proposals for e-services.

For some, the project highlighted various important issues in the battle against social and digital exclusion, such as the need for information awareness and literacy as well as being able to use the internet. One Government department highlighted that the challenge now is to understand how such an offer may be replicated nationally across this unique network of centres in order to widen participation in eGovernment services.



UK online centres would like to express thanks to the individuals within the Government departments, Agencies and Local Authorities who comprised the Project Board for the project:

Gill Sims, Jobcentre Plus, Transformation and Product Design Directorate
Graham Wayland, Jobcentre Plus South West
Karen Chapman, Jobcentre Plus South West
Mike Swinburn, Jobcentre Plus South West
Mary Simpson, Information for Choice, Department of Health
Julie Chapman, Information for Choice, Department of Health
Martin Hillier, Drivers Re-Engineering Project, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
Andy Carroll, The Pension Service Business Design Directorate
Frances Tennant, The Pension Service Customer and Acquisition Directorate
Norman Butlin, Devon County Council eGovernment Team
Mark Peasley, Devon County Council Library Service
Jill Stevens, Education and Learning Franchise, Directgov, Department for Education and Skills

Huge thanks must also go out to the centres who took part in the project:

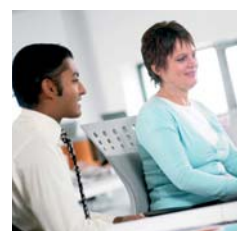
Bournemouth Library	Kinson Community Learning Centre, Bournemouth
The Park Centre, Bristol	Bristol Central Library
Barton Hill Settlement, Bristol	CSV Avon Training, Bristol
Malcolm X Community Centre, Bristol	Easton Community Association (Bristol Wireless Project)
Windmill Hill City Farm, Bristol	RNIB South West, Bristol
Bude/Launceston Adult Education, Cornwall	St Clare's Adult Education Centre, Seaton, Devon
Enterprise Tamar, Launceston, Cornwall	Looe Enterprise Centre, Cornwall
Project COSMIC, Ottery St Mary, Devon	North Devon Pathfinder Trust Ltd, Barnstable, Devon
Bideford Open Access Centre, Devon	Torrington Library, Devon
Kingsbridge Library, Devon	Inverteign Family Learning Centre, Teignmouth, Devon
Equip at Exeter Library, Devon	Community IT (GLOSCAT Mobile Unit), Gloucester
Lymenet, Lyme Regis, Dorset	Granby Island Community Centre, Plymouth
Gloucester Library	North Prospect Community Centre, Plymouth
Keyham Community Partnership, Plymouth	Priorswood Library, Taunton, Somerset
Quay Foyer Community Learning Centre, Poole	Somerset Film & Video, Bridgwater
Frome Library, Somerset	Paignton Library, Torbay
Torquay Central Library, Torbay	Penhill Learning Centre (Solomon Ltd), Swindon
TABS Training Centre, Salisbury, Wiltshire	
Bodmin/Camelford/Wadebridge Adult Education Centre, Cornwall	

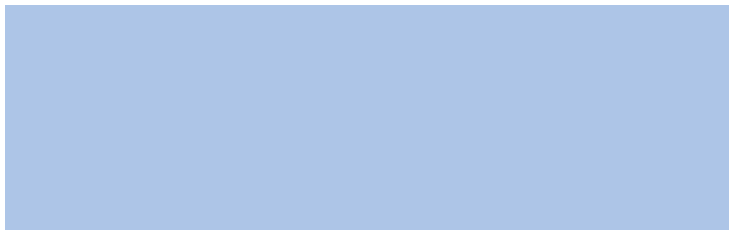
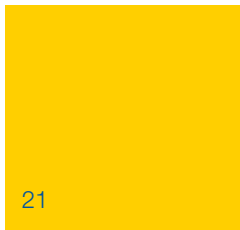
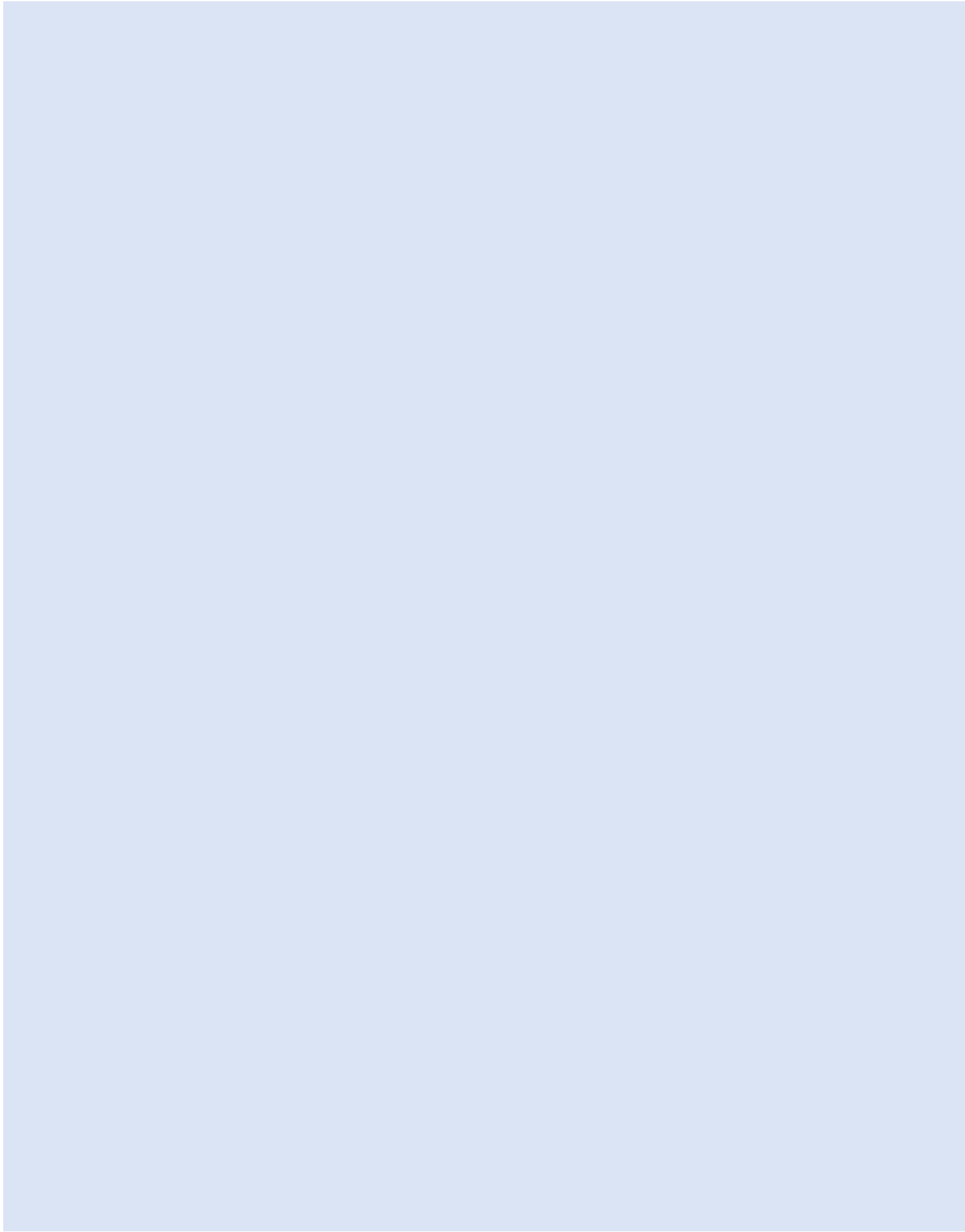
Foreword References:

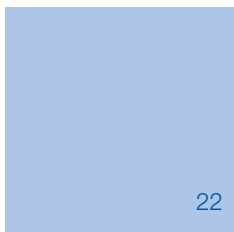
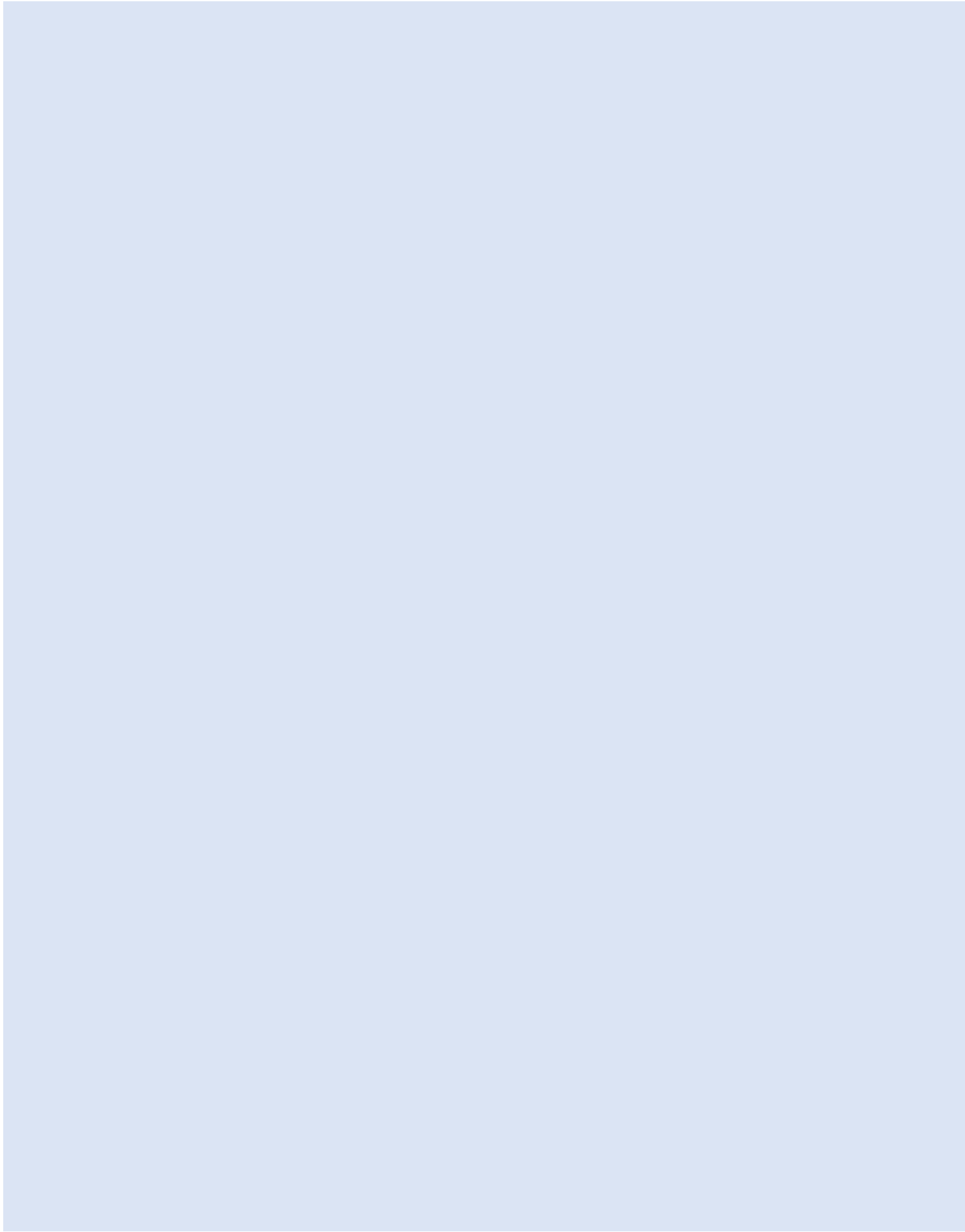
¹ <http://www.kablenet.com/kd.nsf/Frontpage/1630A7F2B9A7B96680256D40002EC027?OpenDocument>

² <http://www.microsoft.com/uk/press/content/presscentre/releases/2006/08/pr03679.mspx>, as quoted by SA Mathieson, Technology Guardian, 12 October 2006, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,1899126,00.html

³ <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=1074872>









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