'Pressing the Right Buttons' – New Users of the Internet at Older Ages

For Age UK

May 2013

Qa

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Contents

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This research has been carried out in compliance with the
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1.   Executive Summary

Age UK commissioned Qa Research (Qa) to undertake qualitative research with new users of the internet at older ages, exploring the transition from never used to basic online competency.

The primary aim of this research was to better understand and explore, at an individual level, how and why older people (aged 55+) who had never used the internet started to attend training courses gaining basic online competency skills.

In total 36 face to face depth interviews were carried out with individuals who had attended /used one of three different types of online courses, namely:

- An Age UK course
- A UK Online Centre course
- A course through another provider

The face-to-face depth interviews were carried out between March and May 2013 by four members of Qa staff. Interviews were recruited and arranged via a range of gatekeepers that had access to learners either directly or through further local contacts.

Although a detailed sampling frame was developed this had to be relaxed a little as the recruitment progressed as it was difficult for gatekeepers to meet the stringent criteria and they were not always aware of whether their learners fully met all the different criteria. As interviewees mostly met the key criteria of achieving GO ON UK basic online skills competency and having no prior experience of using the internet Qa is confident that the research still meets the overall requirements of the research.

Profile

The interview participants were fairly diverse but with some common characteristics. The majority were 65+ and retired, only a minority were still in work or looking for work.

Interviewees were asked to talk a little bit about themselves at the start of the interview, including a description of a typical day in their lives. It was notable from these discussions that the majority of interviewees were having an active, socially-connected older age; only a small minority could be described as isolated.

Before

A sense of curiosity was something that many interviewees had in common. In general, those interviewed were enjoying a physically and mentally active older age with many interests and had an appetite (and ability) to learn. In general, most interviewees did not have a clear idea about the potential benefits of the internet. They were curious but did not know much about the internet and had few pre-conceived ideas about how they might benefit by being online.

Only a very small minority described themselves as feeling confident. Many interviewees spoke about feeling 'left behind' and the sense that technology was moving too fast for them. Some felt

that there was a pressure to be online and that communication choices were becoming limited to 'online only'.

Fear was also frequently discussed, including a physical fear of the computer e.g. pressing the 'wrong button', or a general anxiety around learning at an older age. Only a minority of those interviewed admitted to a fear of technology in general, however, using a computer to access the internet seemed to represent a more significant leap of faith.

Most of the interviewees had been exposed to the internet to varying degrees through friends and family. Although most families were supportive, some interviewees' descriptions of family relationships revealed tensions. Children and grandchildren were often described as 'busy' and didn't necessarily have the time or the patience to help them with the internet.

Some interviewees carried negative thoughts about computers/learning originating from earlier experiences with computing courses or early experiences in the workplace when computers first became prevalent, when they struggled to do a job at which they had previously been adept.

Triggers

Reasons for wanting to use the internet

Within the interviews there were different cohorts of older people in terms of their attitudes towards the internet and reasons for wanting to use the internet for the first time. These could be summarised as falling into three key groups as follows:

- **Active Resistors**

These individuals often had no particular skills they wanted to develop through taking part in a course and discussed almost attending the courses somewhat reluctantly. A common comment by these individuals was that they almost felt forced online and in some cases felt almost bitter about this when they had managed so far in life without needing to use the internet. Some of these individuals were now active internet users and demonstrated the biggest shift in attitudes and behaviours in terms of realising the benefits of use and transitioning to digital enlightenment. However, this group also comprised of individuals who were still actively resisting the internet, either they hadn't found it to be as revolutionary as they'd heard it could be, so used it very little, or they restricted and controlled quite rigidly the amount of time they would spend online and the kinds of tasks they would use the internet for. Although this cannot be stated with confidence, it raises the question of whether the training has sufficiently tapped into people's personal interests which could influence wider internet use.

- **The Curious**

These individuals formed the bulk of interviewees, in some cases curiosity was already present before learning of particular courses, and in other cases curiosity translated into action when learning of the availability of courses. As the internet was often considered to be somewhat of a mystery by many older people, it is this general curiosity about why the rest of the world (so it feels to those interviewed) seems to be so captivated by it that drives them on. These individuals tend to approach the internet courses with more of an open-mind. When probed, these individuals could often cite tasks, such as email, that they were interested in learning about but

the general curiosity was often considered a primary driver in being interested in a course overall rather than particular skill acquisition.

- **The Purposeful**

These individuals consisted of a number of interviewees that cited particular interests and reasons for wanting to get online and take part in the courses. In some cases these individuals had already made a financial commitment to ICT, purchasing laptops or PC's or broadband/dongles some time ago, some more recently, so they were keen to develop knowledge about how to use their computers and the internet. Sometimes people wanted to learn about basic computer functions, not necessarily internet related but often how to use Microsoft packages and the basics of turning computers on and off correctly. In other cases people had specific goals in terms of what they wanted to achieve, be this keeping in touch with family through email, social networking or Skype; researching and accessing products for their hobbies and interests or being able to keep up to date with the social groups people were involved in. Few individuals cited long-term goals such as making purchases online when considering times when mobility may be reduced.

A common trait amongst individuals was openness to learning, most of those interviewed were also quite active individuals with a variety of interests and learning to use the internet was just one of these. In a small number of cases individuals appeared more isolated or sought a break from the monotony of retirement.

Exposure to the internet in some capacity is key to instilling interest and curiosity in using the internet for the first time. Family is an important catalyst for exposure to the internet. A majority of individuals had been exposed to internet use amongst younger family members or in some cases neighbours/friends (generally when older people have no or few remaining family members). Interviewees regularly cited being encouraged by family members to get online, for reasons of enjoyment but also to facilitate greater independence and with this be less reliant on family members for information and tasks. Families often provided support to those who already had computers.

Awareness of courses

A majority of those interviewed had not actively been seeking information about courses even if there had been a self-identified need or curiosity to learn more about the internet lying dormant for a long period of time (in some cases several years).

There was some awareness of libraries supporting people to use the internet and providing access to the internet and in some areas awareness of particular paid-for computer course providers. However, generally prior awareness of where people could find out about or access information on internet training courses was quite low hence it was a case of people often stumbling upon course information then taking it from there.

In most cases, people became aware of courses via local libraries, media publications, local groups, advertising through a variety of sources and word of mouth amongst those already taking part in courses. Local publications appear to work well in terms of raising awareness of courses when these are well accessed and readily available in the community.

Causes of not accessing courses sooner

Once becoming aware of courses there appears to have been little delay in pursuing these. In some cases people telephoned the contact number straight away or went into the venue to enquire further. In other cases people left it a few days or one or two weeks before pursuing although this wasn't perceived to be long and generally people knew they would pursue it even if there was a short delay. In occasional cases, personal problems and delays in having access to the internet at home (including perceptions of high broadband charges) delayed people from starting the courses as soon as they could have.

In terms of delays in accessing any kind of course since identifying a need or becoming curious about the internet this again seemed to relate to courses not necessarily being a high priority, it's perhaps a case of 'nice to know' but not essential to people's lives when they've reached a point in their lives without using the internet. As such people generally, as mentioned, did not pro-actively search for available courses so it was only when information presented itself at the right time, and in the right format, that a course was considered.

Several people had also taken part in previous computer courses (often basic computer skills) in addition to the more recent ones, these were either run through libraries or local authorities, with some run at community centres. Generally people noticed advertising of these courses as they would already access the library or community centre. Although there were some positive accounts of these courses, in the main it would be fair to say that people were quite critical of these prior courses in terms of teaching methods, format and detail covered.

Negative experiences had sometimes led to people feeling they hadn't learnt anything and then not pursuing any further courses for a number of years as expectations were subsequently quite low.

Reasons for training not being successful

There were several reasons as to why some people had negative experiences of previous training and why it hadn't worked for them. A key issues is that courses had been open to anyone so sometimes comprised a mixture of people, for example older retired people and younger job seekers obliged to attend which wasn't always considered to work well. Courses were generally felt to have too many learners and not enough tutors and those learners were often 'left to it'. A particular criticism was that tutors did not cover the absolute basics that some people need, instead presuming a level of knowledge that didn't exist.

Training had therefore been successful via the three learner settings due to the offer of what is often bespoke training (covering basic skills as well as allowing the learner to have a say in what is covered, either on the day or via further drop-in sessions) tailored to the needs of older learners. In group settings it has overwhelmingly been seen as a positive feature that all learners are older people so are likely to have the similar fears and skill levels when approaching the learning as one another.

Transition from awareness to accessing

A combination of factors is behind why people progress from being aware of a possible course to actually accessing it. Generally however people just commented that they read about a course or heard about it, and immediately thought it could be 'useful'.

The timing of when people become aware of courses is important but difficult to predict. In some cases people had been curious about the internet for a number of years but either they or their partner (or another family member) had suffered ill health. Being presented with information about a course at a time when their health is better proved to be an opportune moment to pursue it.

Some older people have struggled with the adjustment to retirement and having time on their hands. For those without many personal interests the opportunity to take part in a course has been an opportunity to break up the day whilst pursuing new skills. So, whilst some were happy to embrace courses early in their retirement there are others who seem to prefer time to settle into retirement (and almost tire of the routine) before considering new activities.

The method of becoming aware of a course is important in some cases. When people were already accessing a venue, or familiar with it or a particular organisation, this appeared to lessen any fears about taking part, even if the actual course was delivered elsewhere. Correspondingly the location and accessibility of venues for the training is clearly important, few people travelled far to access the courses and some specifically stated that being 'round the corner' was an added incentive to participation. In many cases venues were within walking distance for those interviewed or easily accessible by a short journey on public transport or car journey.

Those accessing courses in more rural locations again lived within walking distance (for example in Meltham the course takes place at a community centre (run by the Resident's Association) set amongst an area of sheltered housing where all those interviewed were living) or were generally able-bodied and well enough to still drive or use public transport (in the case of Louth) although when travelling the timing of courses is a consideration, for example people not wishing to drive during the winter months.

In cases where people were tutored in the home this was considered a bonus and in some cases vital (for those with visual impairments and mobility difficulties), therefore being made aware of this from the onset was attractive. In a small number of cases people had not pursued other courses they had been aware of because they were run too far away from their homes and they would be reliant on public transport.

Generally the specific provider type or course name (or details of what a course will cover) is not considered to be a key influencing factor in terms of uptake. However, the branding of Age UK appears to work well in terms of giving people confidence that courses will be for 'people in the same boat' and that tutors will understand the concerns and worries of someone approaching learning at an older age.

An important factor in terms of converting interest to use appears to be positive communication once a learner makes contact (or in some cases, their carers), limiting any potential to change their minds before the course begins. Those interviewed gave very positive accounts of prompt, friendly and two-way communication when making contact, people calling back when they say

they will and clearly explaining when it would be likely to be that courses would begin (never an off-putting amount of time, generally within a month if not sooner). The individuals that interviewees liaised with were often in charge of running the courses so this ensured they were in touch with the most informed person who could allay any fears a person may have.

The fact that the courses were free was an added incentive to pursuing them with several people emphasising how budgeting is particularly important upon retiring. Some added that it's rare to get anything for free in the current climate so they were keen to put their name down as soon as possible as they predicted high demand for places.

Delivery format

Interviewees included those that had attended group sessions as well as those that had received one to one tuition. The one to one nature of tuition was particularly appealing to some people who were more concerned about looking 'silly' in a group situation and they welcomed the flexibility this allowed. Likewise, those involved in a group course often said this appealed as people would be in the same situation.

As people tended to only be aware of one particular course this raises the question of whether more could be done for providers to offer options for both group and one-to-one courses so that people that could potentially be put off by one format are not deterred and that there is something suitable for everyone.

Although they are unlikely to have been aware of this at the time of signing up for the courses after-care and support is a key feature in encouraging continued use of the internet and further learning. A key benefit of some of the group-courses covered by this research is that whilst delivered in a particular format for a group there have been drop-in sessions available at the same venue on other days of the week where people can recap what they've learnt with a tutor and pursue particular areas of interests with support.

Tutors are key to delivering training in an appropriate format and at the right level to individuals and also advising on the right kind of computers for people (for example some were told they could find tablets easier if they had limited keyboard skills, or laptops easier than PC's if they struggled with controlling the mouse). Many of the tutors appear to have been volunteers, with several being older people themselves, which helped them to develop empathy with older learners.

After

Increased confidence was the most significant feeling post-course along with the feeling of being able to access a limitless body of new information. Most interviewees were using the internet for a more varied range of reasons since completing the course. Emailing friends/family and internet searching for general information of interest were probably the most popular options, along with researching family trees, accessing media content such as YouTube or as aid to shopping, e.g. price comparisons.

A significant barrier to the continued expansion of internet use was a retained perception, common to the majority of interviewees, that the internet was 'unsafe'. This was particularly in relation to online banking/shopping or any transaction whereby personal details are submitted

over the internet. Uptake of social media websites was quite low and this also has implications for digital by default services with a lack of confidence about putting personal details online generally.

Interviewees spoke about the social opportunities offered by the internet. This was mainly in relation to emailing. Interviewees remained generally (with a couple of exceptions) sceptical about social media such as Facebook or Twitter. There was also some evidence that some course participants had overcome social isolation and had made lasting friendships on the courses attended.

The majority of those interviewed remained curious about the internet and were keen to develop their skills further. Most felt that they had retained the skills that they learnt, although some were concerned that they could forget their skills if they didn't use them.

Post-course, 'getting stuck' or feeling frustrated when they experienced problems with accessing the internet/hardware problems was fairly commonplace. This left some feeling isolated and/or worried about the financial implications of making repairs.

Although most interviewees had enjoyed their courses for some the experience had not been revolutionary. They recognised that the internet had its uses but were ambivalent and were happy for it to play a limited role in their lives, on their own terms.

Wider viewpoint

Interviewees were asked for their views on the potential barriers to internet use amongst older people in general and their suggestions for solutions. There is a clear divide between those older people who are open to learning about the internet and those who clearly feel it is not for them. Many interviewees spoke about friends/acquaintances who had quite firmly stated that the internet was 'not for me'. There was recognition that more of an effort would be required to illustrate to these individuals how they could benefit. It is apparent from several interviewees that their interest in the internet has been spurred on because of a link to an existing unrelated interest, and this could be one way to engage the reluctant. Furthermore, interviewees emphasised the importance of course information being conveyed by someone close to them or someone that they can relate to such as another older learner.

Conclusions & Recommendations

This research has provided extensive information on why some older people have made the transition from non-use to gaining basic online competency skills at a particular time in their lives. It must be acknowledged that the participants in this research were by their own admission a minority group and that many of their peers were not internet users, this report therefore presents what has worked to encourage a small proportion of older people online.

Below we discuss what we feel are the most pertinent areas for consideration by Age UK (and other digital inclusion providers) based on these interviews. Please note that these suggestions are devised based on what older people had to say themselves as well as Qa's own interpretation and analysis of interview data. It is recognised that Age UK will need to decide whether suggestions are actionable and this will inform the final set of conclusions and recommendations.

Within this research it was confirmed that there will never be a one-size fits all solution to how digital inclusion can be promoted to older people, and even after attending a course how people use the internet will still vary considerably.

It is clear that not every older person can see the benefits of internet use. Interviewees in this study were by and large curious and open-minded, however many of them felt that they were not typical of their peer group. Whether older people take notice of any marketing information will depend on a range of other factors as suggested by this report, whether people are open to the idea of using the internet generally, whether they feel any personal need or benefit to moving online as well as factors such as health and general suitability of timing for individuals. Naturally any marketing information has to be accessible to older people, tapping into any services and locations older people utilise or frequent.

There were perhaps some best practice examples and suggestions which can be drawn out in terms of features which could be considered by any organisation wishing to promote digital inclusion:

- The benefits of taking part in a course need to be made clear to potential participants, and it may be more effective to use non-internet /computing related subjects to attract the more internet-averse. For example, family heritage, local history, basic DIY (using YouTube How To's), keeping in touch with family and friends overseas, getting the best deal on your large purchases;

- A named contact appears to work well on publicity material, people know who they need to talk to and a photograph of the individual is also considered beneficial;

- On any larger pieces of marketing consider using case studies, for example giving an example of how one older person overcame barriers to accessing the internet to now become an active user. These could also be displayed at training provider and community settings to widen reach to current non-users;

- On paper, all those interviewed were involved in courses enabling them to gain GO ON UK basic online skills competencies. However, recall of covering how to identify spam and confidence in which websites were trustworthy was sometimes low. There was also a continued unease around internet shopping, banking, and providing personal details over the internet which is a significant barrier to the expansion of internet use and 'digital by default'. Courses need to place more emphasis on internet security and safety by placing the risks in context and ensuring that older people are aware of the protection that is already in place from online retailers/banks, e.g. PayPal, paying by credit card, bank protection against internet fraud. More promotion of the Age UK website and links to trusted suppliers could be useful;

- It may be that case studies, or the opportunity to meet people that have taken internet use a step further (online transactions, accessing services online etc) could be particularly beneficial to give people confidence in maximising the internet to its full potential given that there is still a reluctance to provide personal information online by many;

- It is not known to what extent digital inclusion providers maximise the enthusiasm generated by some learners in terms of encouraging them to become internet champions

themselves. With word of mouth being an effective means of finding out about courses this could be a further step some providers could take. Individuals who were particularly anxious or reluctant learners pre-course may be most effective in this role;

- This research has also highlighted that some individuals experience higher levels of computer and/or learning anxiety than others. For these individuals a pre-course assessment/one to one session may be useful in allaying any initial fears, offering reassurances that the computer will not break etc;

- As illustrated by this study, the internet courses had considerable success in stimulating further interest in continued learning and internet use. However, it is also clear that older people can struggle to remain online once the course has finished as a result of getting 'stuck' – especially if they do not have a support network of family friends. Therefore, consideration should be given to setting up a drop-in or technical telephone support service at a minimal cost to ensure that those who get online can stay online;

- Reduce perceptions of cost as a barrier through sharing any information on particular packages that people could access with free internet, any special packages for older people and any drop-in and after care services people can use so people do not feel they have to buy their own computers/have broadband to access the internet;

- As people tended to only be aware of one particular course this raises the question of whether more could be done for providers to offer options for both group and one-to-one courses so that those that could potentially be put off by one format are not deterred and that there is something suitable for everyone;

- As physical accessibility is a key influencing factor when considering a course it raises the question of whether some of the more isolated and hardest to reach older people are genuinely able to access courses, particularly if they do not live in any kind of social, sheltered or independent living accommodation and as such not necessarily coming into contact with services on a regular basis. Some interviewees suggested more individuals could be interested in taking part in courses if tuition took place in the home;

- It also appears that older people are more likely to engage with the internet if courses are provided at the most localised level possible and are delivered within familiar surroundings. One particularly successful example of this included a course delivered with the help of the local Resident's Association in publicising and recruiting participants and delivering the course in the heart of the community;

- Interviewees in this study were largely unaware of where they could find information on internet courses and had either stumbled upon the course by accident or had been alerted to it by family. It is evident that family play a key role in channelling this information and encouraging/persuading. Therefore, a campaign/information targeted at family members may be useful in communicating the message including emphasis on reducing the demands on family member's/carer's time e.g. online grocery delivery. Even if this does not result in the older person being cared for going online, communicating this message to carers within the 55-64 age groups may still be of benefit.

2.   Introduction

Age UK commissioned Qa Research (Qa) to undertake qualitative research with new users of the internet at older ages, exploring the transition from never used to basic online competency.

The primary aim of this research was to better understand and explore, at an individual level, how and why older people who had never used the Internet started to attend training courses gaining basic online competency skills. To achieve this 36 face to face depth interviews were carried out. The interviews were carried out between March and May 2013.

This report discusses the key findings from the consultation, which has been carried out in compliance with the international standard ISO: 20252. Anonymised write-ups of the interviews can be found within the appendices.

3.   Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the work was to explore, at an individual level, how and why older people who had never used the Internet started to attend training courses gaining basic online competency skills. Specific objectives were also to explore:

- Barriers to computer and internet use at older ages;
- How these barriers are/can be overcome and what factors this depends upon;
- What type of courses are more or less effective at ensuring older people gain basic online competency;
- How older people hear about Internet training courses;
- Length of awareness of the internet and its benefits before taking up training;
- Length of awareness of training courses before accessing them.

The research was required to involve consulting with 36 people in total aged 55 or over who had never used the internet before and had attended/used one of three different types of online course with an initial aim being to speak to an even-spread of interviews amongst each provider type:

- An Age UK course
- A UK Online Centre course
- A course through another provider

4. Methodology

To achieve the aims and objectives of the work 36 face to face depth interviews were completed between March and May 2013.

An initial ideal sample was drawn up following discussions with Age UK concerning the criteria the interviewees should meet. This sample consisted of particular targets in terms of the following:

- Type of course;
- Geography;
- Age category;
- Socio-economic status;
- Whether people had used the internet prior to taking part in the course;
- All participants to have Go ON UK basics skills competency immediately after course attendance;
- A proportion of participants to still be evidencing this basic skills competency after at least 6 months.

The success of the research was dependent on forming positive links with a range of gatekeepers that could facilitate access to older learners as no database of learners exists and gatekeepers naturally have to adhere to data protection guidelines when sharing any information with a third party.

Age UK's Digital Inclusion Project Manager made initial contact with several gatekeepers who they already had links with, introducing the research and making them aware of Qa's role. Qa then liaised directly with these gatekeepers, some of whom passed on further local contacts to liaise with, some of whom were unable to help further. This process was effective overall and gatekeepers were generally very willing to help facilitate recruitment for this research.

In most cases gatekeepers liaised with learners directly, scheduling interviews at particular times for Qa. In two cases gatekeepers sought initial interest and consent to be contacted from learners before providing Qa with individual contact details to liaise with about dates and times.

A difficulty within the recruitment process was meeting the strict initial sampling criteria. This had to be relaxed somewhat as the recruitment phase progressed as gatekeepers were often able to help with recruitment, but not to very particular criteria as they often were not aware of the details themselves. There was also difficulty in recruiting non Age UK/UK Online learners as often leads would link back to UK Online in some capacity, or courses people/organisations were running were very basic so GO ON UK basic online skills competency was not met. In the end the 'other' provider category comprised of eight interviews of which were recruited via a housing association and a local Citizen's Online provider, one link was made by Age UK, one directly by Qa after performing internet searches.

Confirmation letters were sent to individuals recruited directly by Qa and confirmation calls took place a day or two before the interviews took place, with individuals themselves if we had their details or through a reminder call to the gatekeepers Qa liaised with. This ensured a positive turn out on the interviewing days.

The interviews themselves were conducted on a one-to-one basis with the exception of one setting where only a group discussion was viable due to a lack of space and interviewees turning up at the same time. Nevertheless Qa is confident the individual stories were still drawn out through this discussion and the best use was made of the situation which Qa was not in control of.

A majority of interviews took place in venues where those participating were already comfortable and familiar with, often where the actual training had taken place. This included Age UK offices; community centres; a library and a district housing association office. Upon liaising with the gatekeepers it was clear that it was considered that potential participants would be more comfortable accessing these public venues rather than being interviewed in the home. One interview was conducted in someone's home; two interviews were conducted in a library café (participant's suggestion).

A team of four experienced interviewers worked on the project, with each interviewer receiving a briefing on the project ahead of fieldwork by one of the project managers to ensure consistency in context and understanding of the importance of each question within the script. Each interviewer conducted a minimum of six interviews. The interviews were completed over eleven trips.

Each interview was designed to last half an hour. In most cases interviews lasted 30-45 minutes when time allowed before the next interview (in some settings there was more of a time gap between interviews than others). Within future research of this kind we would suggest a minimum of 45 minutes for each interview to allow the researcher to fully probe. A slight difficulty in some cases was using a venue where people were used to attending already and people turning up early as they're keen to attend (without there necessarily being the space for them to wait whilst the previous interview is concluded).

In order to verify the sampling criteria a short profile sheet was completed with each participant at the start of each interview. This checked their self-reporting of GO ON UK basic online competency post course-attendance and six months later and so on. Although gatekeepers were made aware of the strict criteria we were working towards it was also useful for the research team to check how the make-up of participants matched this on the day, some differences were apparent once these checks were made although this isn't felt to be detrimental to the overall research. The final profile of interview participants is shown on the next page:

Table 1: Profile of Interview Participants

Criteria	Achieved		
Geography	28 x North 8 x London		
Urban/rural	Based on postcode: Less sparse urban: 26 Sparse urban: 1 Less sparse town & fringe: 4 Less sparse village: 3 Less sparse hamlet: 1 Sparse village: 1		
Age	55-64: 9 65-74: 11 75+[1]: 16		
Attended course over 6 months ago?	33 x yes 3 x no		
Had used the internet prior to course?	12 x yes (often minimal experimental use) 24 x no		
Gained GO ON UK competency through course?	36 x yes (a few hadn't cover all of the competency criteria but most of it – of the skills not covered or recalled this tended to be spam and evaluating which websites to trust)		
Still meeting this competency 6 months + later	All 36 yes to at least some of these skills, most all (some gave qualified answers including that they think they can but a couple hadn't actively tried since completing the course)		
Socio-economic group		B	6
		C1	8
		C2	10
		D	8
		E	4

Each interview was audio-recorded, with permission of respondents, to ensure accuracy of write-ups and quotes used within the report. The confidentiality of the interviews was emphasised at the start of each interview.

Each participant was provided with £20 cash to thank them for their time and to cover any transport costs (one interviewee opted to donate this to a community centre they attended).

[1] Respondents were asked which age group they belonged to rather than actual age. It is however known that at least four respondents were over the age of 85 as they offered this information.

Video recorders or Smart Phones were taken to each venue. It was hoped that some participants may complete vox pops video messages for Age UK after the interviews. Due to the tight scheduling of interviews in some cases it was not always feasible to ask about this as the interview itself naturally took highest priority. In total four participants completed a vox pop interview.

Age UK inputted into and signed off all of the research materials designed by Qa before use.

Overall the researchers are very happy with the level of detail participants were willing to share within the interviews. The respondents were judged to be very forthcoming and honest with their experiences.

In terms of analysis each interview has been written up using the audio to ensure accuracy of quotes. The moderators also met to discuss and test out the themes (commonalities and differences) arising from the interviews which Marcus Green from Age UK also attended.

Within the remainder of the report we draw out the main themes and discussions in the research, using anonymous quotes to illustrate as appropriate.

Research Considerations:

Bearing in mind that one of the initial aims of the research was to try and explore what types of courses are most or less effective at ensuring older people gain basic online competency it is important to note that there was no clear uniformity in course delivery amongst the three different provider types to be able to comment on this with confidence. As an example, some Age UK courses are run as group sessions, some are run as one-to-one tuition. Within the report therefore there is greater emphasis on discussion on the format of delivery rather than provider type. When possible interesting findings by provider type are drawn out however.

It is also worth noting that several participants had taken part in courses prior to the ones we were there to discuss, often these had been attended some years before, occasionally more recently. These were not always internet courses but sometimes basic computer courses. In these circumstances Qa endeavoured to discuss triggers at both stages to get a true sense of why people chose to start using computers/moving online at particular points in time.

5.   Key findings

5.1   Profile of participants

The interview participants were fairly diverse but with some common characteristics. The majority were 65+ and retired, only a minority were still in work or looking for work. Interviewees were mainly from urban areas of varying population density; however issues relating to the urban/rural nature of communities were not prominent within the interview discussions.

The majority had not used the internet at all prior to taking part in their course and for those that had their usage was frequently minimal or experimental. All interviewees had attained most of the GO ON UK skills competencies, however there were some gaps which seemed to be around dealing with spam and evaluating which websites to trust. All interviewees felt that they were still meeting these competencies six months after completing the course, however for some this was theoretical as not all interviewees were actively using all of the skills they had learnt on the course.

Interviewees were asked to talk a little bit about themselves at the start of the interview, including a description of a typical day in their lives. It was notable from these discussions that the majority of interviewees were having an active, socially-connected older age with many giving descriptions of busy weeks with scheduled activities on several days including various sports and hobby activities and some volunteering. Some interviewees were caring for their spouse or other family member and, from their descriptions, only a small minority could be described as isolated. The proportion of interviewees with family living overseas also seemed fairly high, which as discussed later in this report may have influenced their decision to attend an internet skills course.

5.2   The 'before' picture

This section of the report discusses how interviewees felt about the internet (and other forms of technology) prior to starting a course. At the start of the interview, individuals were asked to select a series of words which they felt best described their feelings towards the internet prior to starting the course. Interviewees were asked to select a maximum of six words from a list although they were free to suggest other words if these did not appear on the list. The image below illustrates their responses with the most frequently used words appearing in larger text.

Courtesy of wordle.net.

Curiosity and an open mind

Curiosity, a lack of knowledge about the internet, a feeling of being left behind, and fear, appear to be the main factors that characterise older people's feelings towards the internet before they embark upon a course. Many interviewees struggled to differentiate between using the internet and using a computer, particularly those with no prior knowledge.

A sense of curiosity was something that many interviewees had in common. In general, those interviewed were enjoying a physically and mentally active older age with many interests and had an appetite (and ability) to learn.

"everybody kept saying how wonderful the internet is, so I thought really I ought to give it a try" (female, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

"computers have become such a large part of everybody's lives including mine and I wanted to know more about it" (male, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

In general, most interviewees did not have a clear idea about the potential benefits of the internet. They were curious but did not know much about the internet and had few pre-conceived ideas about how they might benefit by being online.

"I wasn't thinking oooh yes I'll be able to do this, this and this" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

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"I think until you start it, you think you don't need it, or don't think it will useful to you" (male, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

Feeling 'left behind'

Many interviewees spoke about feeling 'left behind' and the sense that technology was moving too fast for them. They could see that using the internet was second nature to their children and grandchildren and observed that the language of the internet was becoming increasingly pervasive.

"just not knowing, we never had this facility when we were younger; to a young person it's just natural." (female, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

"I think I did feel left behind because I felt like I ought to be doing it" (female, 75+, D, less sparse, Hamlet)

Furthermore, some interviewees (particularly those who could perhaps be described as *Active Resistors*) felt that there was a pressure to be online and that communication choices were becoming limited to 'online only';

"I feel a bit cheated, because not everyone has got a computer, not everyone wants a computer and we're almost being forced into getting one and the Government are certainly encouraging it they want everyone to have a computer" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"[I felt] powerless – because I didn't know really truly how to do it 'til I came here, and you are powerless really because everything now is on the internet, if you want to buy anything you've got to go on the internet or a website, and I didn't know how to do it so I was powerless" (female, 65-74, C2, less sparse urban)

"you're invaded by it really aren't you, on the television and things like that, if you want further information go to www." (male, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"We're a non-computer age group, living in a computer world. These days, if you want anything, after asking your name, address and telephone number, they want your email address. It's the way the world's gone and it's not going to go back. You really have got to join in as well as you can with the modern way of doing things." (male, 65-74, C2, less sparse village)

Fear and reluctance

Fear was also a strong undercurrent of feeling. This included a physical fear of the computer e.g. pressing the 'wrong button', deleting something that cannot be undone, breaking or damaging the equipment.

"I was scared as people said they can hack the computer so I was scared that if I touched the wrong button and anything goes wrong but now I know how to turn it on, I know what to expect to do and everything" (female, 75+, D, less sparse urban)

"Frightened to death of busting the computers, they're so expensive" (female, 65-74, C2, less sparse urban)

"You're frightened to press the wrong button in case you make the matter worse. Every time I used it I would be a bit apprehensive. If you do not know how to use it properly you can go up a bit of a blind alley – I had felt this way for around a year." (male, 65-74, C2, less sparse Village)

"When I went on I was worried about pressing the wrong button. I thought I might sign up to something or pay for something….When you don't know a lot about it, you are frightened of pressing the wrong button." (female, 65-74, C2, less sparse urban)

Interviewees also spoke about fear in relation to feeling stupid within the course environment and fear of not being able to learn new skills at an older age:

"This course has been good in that anyone can come along and not feel stupid - because that is the worst thing being made to feel and look stupid." (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"I feel like you could go and make a bit of an idiot of yourself" (male, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"just I suppose the fear of modern technology, the fear of not being able to learn as you get older. I think as you get older it doesn't always come as easy to learn things like a computer" (male, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

A minority of interviewees, (who could be categorised as *Active Resistors),* spoke about their reluctance to engage with the internet. These feelings were sometimes driven by a change in personal circumstances. A couple of female interviewees who had recently been widowed spoke about having previously relied upon their husbands to use the computer/access the internet. They also suggested that it was not uncommon amongst their circle of friends for the husband to take on this role:

"Some of my younger friends, some are good but a lot say 'I let my husband do that'" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

To a degree some felt that the internet had been forced upon them and was just another task that had become 'theirs' again or that they had taken on for the first time:

"I'm not somebody that was desperate to learn I felt I ought to but didn't want to. I'm not that interested but I just feel I'm getting left behind. I was terrified, with good reason… I've just cleared a lot of photographs off my husband's computer, my son has got it going but the photographs have gone… he says they are on a stick somewhere but I can't find it." (female, 75+ B, less sparse urban)

Previous experience of the internet and technology

Only a minority of those interviewed admitted to a fear of technology in general, most already had digital television and owned a mobile phone even if it was used infrequently, just for emergencies or just the odd text or phone call. However, using a computer to access the internet seemed to represent a more significant leap of faith.

"I felt fearful – it's a machine, I'm a right luddite, I know I am, I don't like machines." (female 75+ B less sparse urban)

Most of the interviewees had been exposed to the internet to varying degrees through friends and family. This was not always a positive experience and contributed to the feelings of being left behind as children and grandchildren were often described as 'busy' and didn't necessarily have the time or the patience to help them use the internet:

"My granddaughter helps but she's on her phone all the time, you need some one-to-one." (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"I suppose there's a bit of pride perhaps, they [grandchildren] can do it and you can't" (male, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"well my grandchildren are always on their computers, but if I ask them how do I do this? They're like 'come here Grandma' and they do it, they don't show me but they say no it's easier if they do it, but it's not, it's not easier for me" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

Similarly, some had previous experience of internet/computer courses which had not always been a success and had perhaps left them feeling somewhat computer and internet averse:

"I think I was put off by that course, I found it so difficult and the tutoring was very poor. They just assumed that I knew, and I didn't, and to get their attention was difficult and their help was very brief, the assumption was that you knew, I barely knew what a mouse was" (male, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

Several interviewees first came into contact with computers towards the end of their working lives. It appears that the phenomenon of 'the computer' arriving in the workplace with little training or support offered to staff was fairly commonplace and there was also a tendency to be taught how to use only one specific aspect related to the task in hand. It is likely that these earlier experiences may have contributed to a general feeling of unease.

"I think I hated computers to be honest, because I felt it was imposed on me so I didn't have a positive [opinion]. I didn't anything to do with computers for a number of years, it was a necessary evil as far as I was concerned but I've never really had any tuition in it. I'd gone from what I was confident doing on paper to being restricted with what I could do on a computer" (male, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

"the first time I met computers was about 30 odd years ago and somebody said to me 'don't touch that, because if you switch it off you'll lose everything' and throughout my life I've thought if I touch that computer I'll switch everything off, and I was really scared of computers. I must honestly say that I've always been nervous around computers but I'm beginning to love it so it's made a big difference" (female, 75+ C1, less sparse urban)

5.3   Triggers

This section of the report explores the triggers behind older people identifying a desire to learn how to use the internet and how this desire has converted into participating in a course and subsequently enabling them to secure GO ON UK basic online skills competency.

Reasons for wanting to use the internet

Within the interviews there were different cohorts of older people in terms of their attitudes towards the internet and reasons for wanting to use the internet for the first time. These could be summarised as falling into three key groups detailed below, although there was some degree of overlap between categories in some cases.

Active Resistors were a minority but nevertheless an important minority to consider in the context of this research. These individuals often had no particular skills they wanted to develop through taking part in a course and discussed almost attending the courses somewhat reluctantly, the curiosity was there but they were also sceptical about what the benefits for them could be and almost fought against this curiosity. A common comment by these individuals was that they almost felt forced online and in some cases felt almost bitter about this when they had managed so far in life without needing to use the internet.

"It's getting to be a pressure you are not going to have as many choices of different methods of doing things maybe a bit late for me in my day but you have got to become computer literate" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

Some of these individuals were now active internet users and demonstrated the biggest shift in attitudes and behaviours in terms of realising the benefits of use and transitioning to digital enlightenment. In many cases however, Active Resistors comprised of individuals who were still actively resisting the internet, either they hadn't found it to be as revolutionary as they'd heard it could be, so used it very little, or they restricted and controlled quite rigidly the amount of time they would spend online and the kinds of tasks they would use the internet for. Although this cannot be stated with confidence, it raises the question of whether the training has sufficiently tapped into people's personal interests which could influence wider internet use.

"I didn't really think that I wanted to [learn how to use the internet] and then I realised that I was missing out that a lot of information you can only get on the internet or on websites" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"I came because I thought everybody's passing me going for jobs online, so that is why I came. I was going for anything and everything, but youth and community work really [is what I want]. You have to go online now to apply for a job, unless it is a job advertised in a window. I was very hostile to it…It was a means to an end and I had to do it. I still haven't got a job but I get more responses. It's the way ahead really. If you don't you're out of it." (male, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

The Curious formed the bulk of interviewees, in some cases curiosity was already present before learning of particular courses, in some cases curiosity was stirred when learning of the availability of courses. As the internet was often considered to be somewhat of a mystery by many older people it is this general curiosity about what the rest of the world (so it feels to those interviewed) are so captivated by that is a key driver. These individuals tend to approach the

internet courses with more of an open-mind. When probed often these individuals could cite tasks such as email they were interested in learning about but the general curiosity was often considered a primary driver in being interested in a course overall rather than particular skill acquisition.

"it was just the email and being nosey to see what is out there really. But I wanted to learn how to email and actually how to get into a computer, I know how to turn it on but it's getting onto Google and things like that, I wanted to widen my potential" (female, 65-74, C2, less sparse urban)

"just curious, and also I thought it'd give me a bit of an interest in something instead of just sitting in the house day in and day out" (male, 75+, C2, less sparse urban)

"I wanted to use it; I didn't want to get left behind. When you get older and technology moves as fast as it does you are not able to do the things that you are supposed to be able to do… well not supposed to, but things that are useful for this modern world" (male, 65-74, C1, less sparse urban)

"When you're retired you've got a lot of time on your hands and you have to pass it, don't you? It was more for pleasure and a bit of fun. You can contact your kids with it on Facebook and you get a few contacts that way and you keep in touch with them. Instead of ringing them up you can send them an email. My sister lives in Australia and it is very nice just to send an email with photos of the family. It's nice to see a part of the world that you don't actually see, and to keep in touch with your family." (male, 65-74, C2, less sparse village)

The Purposeful consisted of a number of interviewees that cited particular interests and reasons for wanting to take part in the courses. In some cases these individuals had already made a financial commitment to ICT, purchasing laptops or PC's or broadband/dongles some time ago, some more recently, so they were keen to develop knowledge about how to use their computers and the internet. Sometimes people wanted to learn about basic computer functions, not necessarily internet related but often how to use Microsoft packages and the basics of turning computers on and off correctly. In one case a new widow wanted to learn how to use the internet as she was already tied to a broadband contract which her husband had previously dealt with, therefore there was a financial incentive to learning.

"financial, I'm paying thirty five pounds I have better learn how to use it I was a reluctant computer user, probably wouldn't have bothered if I hadn't had the computer though… gave all cameras away. I'm not a willing person." (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"it was in fact the writing [reason for going on course], I wanted to go back to the writing, I thought the computer would probably be the best thing and I didn't really know how to use a computer so I thought I'll get myself a laptop and I'll go and learn about it, and I did" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"being in control of the computer rather than it being in control of me" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"what I wanted to know is how I use this damn thing that I've got in front of me. I don't just want to go to plug it in and press internet and look at the internet, I want to know how it works, how do I work it and that's really what I found out by coming" (male, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"when I first went into it I didn't think I would use the internet, but then after a while I thought I've bought this computer and I'm not doing anything on it that's of any value to me, because unless you're on the internet there's not an awful lot you can do on them really" (female, 75+, D, less sparse urban)

These individuals with their own computers (or those open to purchasing one) appeared to welcome the acquisition of GO ON UK basic online skills competency the most (although mostly with hindsight), particularly the security side of the internet.

Sometimes goals amongst *The Purposeful* were internet related, for example those of working age cited triggers such as an identified need to learn how to search and apply for jobs online (a need identified by JCP but acknowledged by the older person) and learning more about how they can pursue particular career goals (one individual was interested in self-publishing his books).

"what put me onto it was the Jobcentre suggested I get some computer experience for looking for jobs, that sort of thing. Now I'm happy to keep in touch with friends and family by email, it's a cheaper way of keeping in touch and in that way I've found it very useful. [ ] It didn't really register until the jobcentre said, I'd sort of wanted to go on this course before then but it was the jobcentre that gave me the initiative to go ahead" (male, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

Others of retirement age cited specific goals such as wanting to learn more about particular interests they had and social groups they were involved in (including enabling them to work as volunteers more effectively). In some cases the level at which they could keep up to date with activities was limited with the movement of information, newsletters and so on online. Being able to undertake research online to plan trips and so on were also skills some people wished to develop. Other influencing factors included the Government push towards services online.

"because the Government say it's good for elderly people to know what's going on and I'm really really interested in it now, at first I never interested, it's only my brain, I know it here and because when I go home I don't have anything to practise on it's gone. I go to Morrison's and buy my shopping and the brain take away what I learn" (female, 75+, D, less sparse urban)

"I retired in April last year, and I was trying to set things up so I had access to a lot of different things and I found my inability to use the net was holding me back so it's enabled me to get involved. [ ] I just hoped that it would make things easier to organise, like paperless bills. Plus the societies I'm involved in they keep me updated if there are any changes" (male, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

"you feel excluded unless you can access their websites" (male, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

"I wanted to be able to look up things that I'm quite interested in, I'm quite interested in history I wanted to look up things, and I wanted to be able to send emails, and I wanted to set up one or two bills. But I'd no interest in the games or anything but now I do play games which is a lot of waste of time really!" (female, 75+, D, less sparse hamlet)

Some older people had experimented in using their own computers or computers at libraries prior to taking part in any kind of course, these individuals tended to acknowledge they weren't perhaps doing things properly or making the most of the computers which was an incentive for wanting to learn more formally. In some cases people had been reliant on friends on family on how to do things.

"even all the time in the library I didn't know really what I was doing, things worked and I got through to sites and I found out things but it was all a big muddle. So I was virtually left behind" (male, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"I think if something went wrong, I wouldn't know how to rectify it. Even if my screen went blank, instead of just touching it to make it come back again" (male, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

Few appeared to have particular post-course goals when signing up for courses although there were occasional cases where people were thinking long-term towards the future, considering that mobility may become impaired and they made need to start ordering food and products online for example. Thus the internet was seen as a means of maintaining independence and reducing reliance on other people.

"Being the age I am I thought it would be useful to find out about dialling into supermarkets online shopping don't obviously need it at the moment I thought it might be useful to people e of my age group you never know what is going to happen my children are not near.." (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

A key trigger for making older people want to access the internet for the first time relates to family and, in some cases, friends. Maintaining contact more easily (and cheaply) is a key driver for some older people, via email or Skype, particularly when family members did not live nearby.

"I've always been a prolific letter writer but as you get older…so it's just a matter of keeping in touch rather than letter writing" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

"the main thing I wanted to do was to learn how to use the internet to converse with them [her family overseas]. That's the one reason I was eager to learn" (female, 55-64, D, less sparse urban)

"the reason why is because I live on my own and I thought it'd be making my brain work a little bit more, being able to talk to different people, seeing how the other side lives, getting in touch with people you know of but have not seen for a long time or spoken to for a long time, communication I think a great deal, to communicate with people, even though I'm blind it doesn't mean I can't communicate. To me communication is a great achievement" (female, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

A wish to research family history was also mentioned several times in interviews with one interviewee citing they'd gone as far as they could in their searches offline and to get further information they needed to now move online.

"I've always wanted to know about my mum's background and there's nobody around to ask, why don't you ask while you're young, this is the trouble, but you don't. That was one of the main reasons I wanted to get on the internet, but also to know I wasn't on a different planet" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

Exposure to the internet in some capacity is key to instilling interest and curiosity in using the internet for the first time, but naturally for all those that become curious via exposure there are others that are frustrated, fearful and marginalised by it and not everyone will seek to overcome these feelings by embracing the internet.

Family is a key catalyst to exposure to the internet. A majority of individuals had been exposed to internet use amongst younger family members or in some cases neighbours/friends (generally

when older people have no or few remaining family members). Interviewees regularly cited being encouraged by family members to get online, for reasons of enjoyment but also to facilitate greater independence and with this be less reliant on family members for information and tasks.

"I was never particularly interested and I would watch my daughter-in-law on it and my son kept saying 'why don't you get one you're lonely in the winter when you can't get out so much" and I said 'no, it won't be for me' and I absolutely adore it now! I'm on it most days. It's a brilliant thing, I love what you can find on it" (female, 75+, D, less sparse hamlet)

"It was my husband who spurred me on and suggested I came for computer lessons because there is going to come a time when everything is done by computer. It's true. I suppose a lot of things now, they say go online. If you're not online, you miss out on them." (female, 65-74, C2, less sparse urban)

In many cases family members had tried to show interviewees how to use the internet (particularly when they had their own computers) but a difficulty often cited was that the family members would do things for them rather than show them how to do it so they could repeat the actions themselves at a later date. This acted as an incentive to pursue an actual course.

"I thought if I could have somebody there to show me rather than doing it for me…" (female, 75+, C2, less sparse urban)

"I knew eventually I wanted a computer I just wanted to feel more confident my husband and daughter had helped but it's not the same they haven't got the same patience, my daughter will help but she will tend to do things and she doesn't explain what she's done it and she expects you to take it in..because she's so good and proficient she doesn't think that I'm not as much" (female, 65-74, C1, less sparse town and fringe"

In some cases the interviewees felt they almost wanted to prove their family wrong, that they could learn to use the internet even if they had their doubts themselves. Some also wanted to learn how to use the internet to prove to themselves they could do it and to give them confidence in using the internet.

"I just wanted to try to be up to date, my grandchildren knew how to use them and why shouldn't I? Everybody else did. It was just a case of my husband said I'll buy you one for your birthday and I said right that's it I'll have one and this morning he's been and bought me a Wi-Fi tablet so I'm progressing. He's got a little e-reader and he's always on that" (female, 75+, C2, less sparse urban)

"mainly to give myself more confidence that I can still do [things], self-esteem, and feel that I'm achieving something in my life that….you sort of get to the stage where you think I can't do these things and I'm going to be left well-behind. I didn't want to get to that stage where I thought well I'm not going to be bothered to do it, because I think once you get that into your head then you're just letting yourself go, so mainly for moral support and to bring my confidence back" (female, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

In other cases curiosity about the internet stemmed from the television and radio when references were made to 'if you want to find out more…' and people needing access to the internet to do so.

A commonality amongst those interviewed appeared to be an openness to learning and embracing activities. Often those interviewed reported having a range of hobbies and interests be these

group-based, solitary, indoors or outdoors. In some cases such hobbies and interests acted as an added (but not necessarily primary) incentive to be online (for example being able to download knitting patters or images for card making online; looking up cycling routes).

"I'm always up for a challenge, I like to do stuff and I like to learn, I've never done learning and all my life I've wanted to learn" (female, 65-74, C2, less sparse urban)

"using Excel…that's why I got the computer, wouldn't have done it if I didn't think I needed to or hadn't got a computer but I do like to learn different things…do Indian head massage and reflexology, that's the kind of thing I like to do.. I just thought it's just another class to go to" (female, 75+, C2, less sparse town and fringe)

In a small number of cases it was clear that rather than having a particular passion for or identified need for wanting to learn about the internet it was the act of getting out of the house and doing something that was an incentive to taking part in a course once they heard about it. This was generally the case for people that had now settled into retirement and were ready for new challenges, those that didn't have other hobbies or interests and those with limited social networks but also those that enjoyed socialising with other people.

"I know most people round here anyway and when I started to come here I thought, mmm this is going to be a social outing! It was nice to come here and have that." (female, 65-74, D, less sparse urban)

Awareness of courses

A majority of those interviewed had not actively been seeking information about courses even if there had been a self-identified need or curiosity to learn more about the internet lying dormant for a long period of time (in some cases several years).

There was some awareness of libraries supporting people to use the internet and providing access to the internet and in some areas awareness of particular paid-for computer course providers. However, generally prior awareness of where people could find out about or access information on internet training courses was quite low hence it was a case of people often stumbling upon course information then taking it from there. As well as financial barriers to accessing paid-for courses there was also perhaps greater fear that they would know less than other learners and be less able to learn.

In most cases people became aware of courses via local media publications, local groups and word of mouth amongst those already taking part in courses. Local publications appear to work well in terms of raising awareness of courses when these are well accessed and readily available in the community. An example of this is 'Voice' an Age UK publication for Bradford & District which features a regular full page article by the IT Projects Co-ordinator (a copy of an article is in the Appendices) which is informative, sells the benefits of taking part and features a friendly photo of the person to contact about courses. In a more rural location those interviewed had found out about a course through a Church newsletter; in one London area participants had often found out about the course through a Digital Champion working at the local library, this person was able to let people know about courses run at the library as well as longer courses run at a local community centre.

"it was just a small article to say silver surfers, get up to the 21st century or something and I thought well that sounds about right! There was one for singing which I didn't do but this one and I thought what a good idea, a six week course that'll give me an introduction into and before I buy one I'll see if I take to it and I realised straight away that I would do" (female, 75+, D, less sparse hamlet)

In other cases people were already accessing groups or services run at the venue where the training took place (or provided through) and heard about them through these. This included housing and residents associations. In other cases notices had been seen, either in the windows of training venues or on noticeboards at sheltered housing accommodation or people were informed verbally of this opportunity through members of staff. In one couple's case an information leaflet caught their attention at a doctor's surgery. As mentioned, word of mouth was also key in raising some people's awareness of courses, particularly amongst peers.

"My daughter came home and said, have you seen the course with Age Concern, its 10 weeks and its free basic stuff…you might learn something" (male, 65-74, C1, less sparse urban)

"I didn't think I would bother, but I saw [advert] in the little window and our daughter was with me and she said 'look at that Mum' and I said 'I know I'm looking at it' and she said 'well what about it? And I said 'well what do you think?' and she says 'well we can go and ask'. So that's what happened [ ] if I hadn't of gone in there [Age UK shop] and [co-ordinator] hadn't of rang us I don't think I would have ever done it" (female, 65-74, C2, less sparse urban)

"the way in which we found out about the course was through picking up a flyer at the doctors now if that hadn't happened, we wouldn't have known about it so the advertising of courses of this type in this area, you don't see them very often it seems" (male, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

Causes of not accessing courses sooner

Once becoming aware of courses there appears to have been little delay in pursuing these. In some cases people telephoned the contact number straight away or went into the venue to enquire further. In other cases people left it a few days or one or two weeks before pursuing although this wasn't perceived to be long and generally people knew they would pursue it even if there was a short delay. In occasional cases, personal problems and delays in having access to the internet at home (including perceptions of high broadband charges) delayed people from starting the courses as soon as they could have (in some cases it was considered important to have internet access at home to practise through), although they had made the initial steps to register and followed this up at a suitable time.

"obviously when you're on a pension you've got to watch your money a little bit but I did a deal with BT and I wasn't paying much more than I was for my phone bill to start with, I never sort of looked to see if you could get those sort of deals to start with otherwise I would have gone on it before but I love it!" (female, 75+, D, less sparse hamlet)

In terms of delays in accessing any kind of course since identifying a need or becoming curious about the internet this again seemed to relate to courses not necessarily being a high priority, it's perhaps a case of nice to know but not essential to people's lives when they've reached a point in their lives without using the internet. As such people generally, as mentioned, did not pro-actively search for available courses so it was only when information presented itself at the right time, and

in the right format, that a course was now considered. Those who had already purchased laptops were perhaps the most keen to pro-actively search for courses.

"other things happened so I pushed it to the back, and then, I was meant to come here wasn't I?" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

"not really thinking about it, not thinking should I learn?"(female, 55-64, D, less sparse urban)

Several people had also taken part in previous computer courses (often basic computer skills) in addition to the more recent ones, these were either run through libraries or local authorities, with some run at community centres. Although there were some positive accounts of these courses, in the main it would be fair to say that people were quite critical of these prior courses in terms of teaching methods, format and detail covered.

Negative experiences had sometimes led to people feeling they hadn't learnt anything and then not pursuing any further courses for a number of years as expectations were subsequently quite low.

"they just assumed that I knew, and I didn't, and to get their attention was difficult and their help was very brief, the assumption was that you knew, I barely knew what a mouse was. [ ] I think I was put off by that course, I found it so difficult and the tutoring was very poor. So it was younger friends helping me, but I still felt frustrated"

Reasons for training not being successful

There were several reasons as to why some people had negative experiences of previous training and why it hadn't worked for them. A key issues is that courses had been open to anyone so sometimes comprised a mixture of people, for example older retired people and younger job seekers obliged to attend which wasn't always considered to work well. Courses were generally felt to have too many learners and not enough tutors and those learners were often 'left to it'. A particular criticism was that tutors did not cover the absolute basics that some people need, instead presuming a level of knowledge that didn't exist.

"all I knew is you go to night school then, you'd be with a class for a qualification, and I didn't want that. Then they had one at the library, they said we're having a short course at the library so I put my name down straight away and I went. It was an hour's course just to do what you want, well, I didn't know what to do, there were six or seven of us in this little room and there was one person and she got bogged down with one person so all you do is the same thing as what you were doing outside on the library one, you learnt nothing, so disappointment and then I found this and it was one to one" (male, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"we went there and we did nothing, we did nothing 'cos there were so many people she was only one person and she didn't have time." (female, 65-74, C2, less sparse urban)

Training had therefore been successful via the three learner settings due to the offer of what is often bespoke training (covering basic skills as well as allowing the learner to have a say in what is covered, either on the day or via further drop-in sessions) tailored to the needs of older learners. In group settings it has overwhelmingly been seen as a positive feature that all learners are older people so are likely to have the similar fears and skill levels when approaching the learning as one another.

On a positive note the interviews helped to identify how, with the right signposting, people can access the right course for them. In Acton some of the learners had made preliminary enquiries about library courses or had some sessions at the library, it was clear that the Digital Outreach worker there was effectively signposting people on to a further (and longer) UK Online course run at a nearby community centre when this would be considered beneficial or more suitable.

"I thought once the library was full up that was it there was no alternative, but he [Digital Champion] gave me the number. And this is much better than the library, much" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

A difficulty acknowledged by some of the interviewees themselves is that libraries can now be under-resourced which gives less opportunity to perhaps signpost effectively or support individuals with specific computer-related requests. One learner had been aware that there was a course run at the library for at least three years before she was eventually signposted to a UK Online course at a local community centre.

"each time I tried, there was one girl that said to me 'I'll help you' because she knew about my mum, but when I next went she'd gone and I thought innit marvellous, you can never guarantee you're going to see that person the next time" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

Transition from awareness to accessing

A combination of factors are behind why people progress from being aware of a possible course to actually accessing it. Generally however people just commented that they read about a course or heard about it, and immediately thought it could be useful:

"I thought this would be useful, to be able to find my way around a computer. It was a beginner's course as far as I can recall so I thought that's what I need 'cos I could just about switch one on" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"I read through it and I thought that's just what I need really something that plugs a few gaps and gives me a push to get beyond what I'm capable of doing at the moment" (male, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

"I just thought I'd have a go at that and have a dabble into that and find out if they would put me on it" (female, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

The timing of when people become aware of courses is important and difficult to predict.

"one [reason in pursuing] was I'd not long lost my parents, and I was feeling quite isolated. I thought the computer would be a way of engaging more, with life and with people and the world. And it was one of those things well when will I do it? And I think most importantly it was with an organisation I hoped (and it did) understand that I'd be struggling with terminology and technology with that underlying technophobia that's been with me most of my life really" (male, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

In some cases people had been curious about the internet for a number of years but either they or their partner (or another family member) had suffered ill health. Being presented with information about a course at a time when their health is better has been an opportune moment to pursue it.

Some older people have struggled with the adjustment to retirement and with time on their hands for those without so many personal interests the opportunity to take part in a course has been an opportunity to break up the day whilst pursuing new skills. So whilst some were happy to embrace courses early in their retirement there are others who seem to prefer time to settle into retirement (and almost tire of the monotony) before considering new activities.

"I thought why not, there's nothing for me to do, why not do something" (female, 55-64, D, less sparse urban)

"we had time on our hands really, in a way. We hadn't got to go to work and it was just sitting and vegetating really so I thought it'd get us out of the house. We were both in the same opinion that we needed to get out of the house and do something" (female, 65-74, C2, less sparse urban)

The method of becoming aware of a course is important in some cases. When people were already accessing a venue, or familiar with it or a particular organisation, this appeared to lessen any fears about taking part even if the actual course was delivered elsewhere. Correspondingly the location and accessibility of venues for the training is clearly important, few people travelled far to access the courses and some specifically stated that being 'round the corner' was an added incentive to participation.

"With me it was a case of finding a course near me, because I can't get very far, I wouldn't have done it if it hadn't have been here, [we]brought our own laptops [which was] useful if there was something on your own computer you wanted to ask about" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse town and fringe)

"being so close, we're only round the corner, that acted as an additional incentive" (male, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

In the cases where people were tutored in the home this was considered a bonus and in some cases vital (for those with visual impairments and mobility difficulties), therefore being made aware of this from the onset was attractive. In a small number of cases people had not pursued other courses they had been aware of because they were run too far away from their homes and they would be reliant on public transport.

"that was ideal, absolutely brilliant. Even though I've got [guide dog] I'm not very good at riding on buses, my balance is not very clever. I used to take [guide dog] on the buses but now they have prams and pushchairs and they run over her feet, they've no consideration some people. I can't sort of go without [guide dog]" (female, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

Generally the specific provider type or course name (or details of what a course will cover) is not considered to be a key influencing factor in terms of uptake. However, the branding of Age UK appears to work well in terms of giving people confidence that courses will be for 'people in the same boat' and that tutors will understand the concerns and worries of someone approaching learning at an older age. This is something that appears to be linked automatically with the Age UK brand, the brand equates to suitability for older people, whilst for other providers it's a case of someone explaining that people would be of the same age (which appears to be a high priority for most people taking part in group courses) and so on once contact is made or through promotional literature.

"the fact that it's Age UK I knew that it would be suitable for me whereas if you go to any other course it's geared towards perhaps younger people" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"because it's older people that actually do the course. My sister went on a course when she first started and it was run by a younger person and they used a lot of computer language which she didn't know. Here it's older people that actually teach you what you're doing so they know haven't had all this training at school" (female, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

"I think it's geared for older people, there's an understanding that most older people haven't grown up with a computer so there's that prepared ground if you like" (male, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

An important factor in terms of converting interest to use appears to be positive communication once a learner makes contact (or in some cases, their carers), limiting any potential to change their minds before the course begins. Those interviewed gave very positive accounts of prompt, friendly and two-way communication when making contact, people calling back when they say they will and clearly explaining when it would be likely to be that courses would begin (never an off-putting amount of time, generally within a month if not sooner). Those interviewees liaised with were often in charge of running the courses so this ensured they were in touch with the most informed person possible that could relay any fears a person may have.

"whilst you've got it in your head to try something, if you have to wait and wait and wait…that was a good thing actually [not having to wait] it made you want to come a bit more. If I had to wait and wait I wouldn't have bothered to come" (female, 65-74, C2, less sparse urban)

"I think it's vital that someone gets back to you quickly because that shows that they're interested that you're interested so that increases motivation I think" (male, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

"When I first rang this place up I didn't know what it was. I spoke to the tutor and I thought how good he was on the phone. He offered to come and meet me so that I would know where I was coming. I thought how nice he was. I came in and saw the set up and thought I could be comfortable here." (male, 75+, C2, less sparse urban)

The fact that the courses were non-chargeable was an added incentive to pursuing them with several people emphasising how budgeting is particularly important upon retiring. Some added that it's rare to get anything for free in the current climate so they were keen to put their name down as soon as possible as they predicted high demand for places.

"I knew there were other courses, I'd seen adverts and there was a place on the other side of the road from Age UK that did run courses but they weren't free" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"I saw it advertised in the magazine [Voice, which she picked up in town they also have them at the centre she goes to for her craft club] and I just thought it'd be an opportunity to go on a course and it doesn't cost anything, that was another thing, I didn't want to be spending a fortune if it was something I found I didn't really want or need" (female, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

Delivery format

The interviews consisted of those that had attended group sessions as well as those that had received one to one tuition. The one to one nature of tuition was particularly appealing to some

people who were more concerned about looking 'silly' in a group situation and welcomed the flexibility this allowed.

"because you're on a one to one basis if you don't understand something you can just say, and sometimes if you're in a group you can feel a bit stupid" (female, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

"I thought it'd be more personal than a library environment. It's one-to-one tuition here" (male, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

"I thought it were good because it was one to one, at [previous course] the course lasted two hours but there were about fourteen of us" (male, 75+, C2, less sparse urban)

Likewise those partaking in a group course often said this appealed as people would be in the same situation.

"we were all in the same boat, we all wanted to learn, and I think that's what it was. I believe in chemistry, you've got to have chemistry with people" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

"it was a happier atmosphere [compared to imagining a course at a library], you had people around you who didn't know computers the same as you did and you was all on the same level so it wasn't embarrassing if you didn't get something right and it didn't interfere with us if a tutor is talking to someone else in the background" (female, 65-74, C2, less sparse urban)

"I prefer a group course because you learn from other people as well. Its more interesting because you can help each other out and you get reassured that you're not so thick after all" (female, 65-74, D, sparse village)

As people tended to only be aware of one particular course this raises the question of whether more could be done for providers to offer options for both group and one-to-one courses so that those that could potentially be put off by one format are not deterred and that there is something suitable for everyone.

Although they are unlikely to have been aware of this at the time of signing up for the courses after-care and support is a key feature in encouraging continued use of the internet and further learning. A key benefit of some of the group-courses covered by this research is that whilst delivered in a particular format for a group there have been drop-in sessions available at the same venue on other days of the week where people can recap what they've learnt with a tutor and pursue particular areas of interests with support. In some cases tutors of group-courses have gone on to support people in their homes with particular queries free of charge which was highly welcomed by the learners.

"I kept saying, ancestry, that's really what I came for. The only problem was I was the only one that wanted to do that, well you've got to see what everybody wants to do really or it's not fair otherwise, but he did come to my house one day, ah he's lovely, I thought that was ever so kind, and he was willing to do that for everybody not just for me" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

To some extent there has been some flexibility with one-to-one tuition with learners sometimes stating this doesn't always equate to a certain number of sessions but can be on-going for as long as resources allow. One venue offered weekly group sessions but this was quite informal and run

as a drop-in with tutor support, although people had to book their places for the following week this format appealed to some learners as they didn't have to commit to a certain number of weeks in a row. This particular venue was praised for enabling socialisation with the friendly atmosphere often referenced by these learners:

"You can even swap books here and make yourselves a drink." (female, 65-74, C1, less sparse urban)

Tutors are key to delivering training in an appropriate format and at the right level to individuals and also advising on the right kind of computers for people (for example some were told they could find tablets easier if they had limited keyboard skills, or laptops easier than PC's if they struggled with controlling the mouse). Many of the tutors appear to have been volunteers, with several being older people themselves helping to form empathy with older learners.

"It was so simply explained. He prepared his lessons tremendously well. He had a big screen which showed what to do on the computer. He made it very easy to learn." (female, 75+, D, sparse village)

Feelings towards accessing courses

As discussed in the 'before' section there were a lot of negative thoughts and feelings towards the internet and people's opinion of their capability of embracing the internet before signing up to a course. When asked about any hesitations or concerns once they'd signed up for the course however fears and concerns appear to have alleviated for the most part, although some concerns about the extent to which people would absorb the learning still remained. Several people were looking forward to beginning the courses, although nerves were still prevalent amongst some, particularly it appears amongst those with the least amount of prior computer skills, e.g. no typing skills.

"I were going blind, I'd literally not touched one but having said that the young lady that was teaching us soon put you at ease" (male, 75+, C2, less sparse urban)

It largely appears that any barriers faced or feared by participants have been overcome or are no longer such profound concerns once people have made the active decision to do a course, and this also perhaps relates again to the positive communication and relationships formed with providers upon making contact.

"I did say to [librarian digital champion] I don't think I can learn this and he say you just continue, you just continue and you will learn, you will learn" (female, 75+, D, less sparse urban)

"you always have that feeling you're going to make a bit of a fool of yourself, but I was put at ease straight away when I came in here. I think [co-ordinator] put me at ease, he spoke to me, talked to me about things, asked what I'd done and told me not to worry that we'll go back to the very beginning" (male, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"as you get older I think there's always a fear you'll make mistakes, look stupid or something" (male, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

5.4   The 'after' picture

This section of the report discusses how interviewees felt about the internet after the course, including any lifestyle changes, and the extent to which they have developed and sustained their internet use. Interviewees were asked to select a series of words which they felt best described their feelings towards the internet after completing the course. Again participants were invited to provide up to six words from a list although these could also be of their own choosing. The image below illustrates their responses with the most frequently used words appearing in larger text.

Courtesy of wordle.net

Confidence

Increased confidence was the most significant feeling post-course along with the feeling of being able to access a limitless body of new information;

"I can go on the internet and I can search, I can go on Google earth which I'd never seen or heard of before and I think that's fantastic, I've got relations in South Africa, I've been there on Google Earth, I've walked up the path and I've looked straight at the house" (male, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"More confident that I could come in, sit down at a computer and log on and do the things, with help, but as I say part of that is an inquiring mind and curiosity that's still a motivator" (male, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"I didn't think it would be useful because I didn't know enough about it, but now I'd find it hard to live without it" (female, 75+, D less sparse Hamlet)

Uses for the internet

It is evident that interviewees were using the internet for a more varied range of reasons since completing the course. Emailing friends/family and internet searching for general information of

interest were probably the most popular options, along with researching family trees, accessing media content such as YouTube or as aid to shopping, e.g. price comparisons.

"The other day I was planting raspberries and found out from YouTube how to do it. What to do, not too deep, how far apart. There were a dozen films to look at…You can find everything, anything, how to do anything…that YouTube…and two hours has gone – whoof!" (male, 75+, D, less sparse Urban)

"If you want to find something out, like how to bake bread – that's the beauty of it. YouTube is brilliant…I do email but there's always more to learn. It's infinitum isn't it?" (male 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

However, a significant barrier to the continued expansion of internet use was a retained perception, common to the majority of interviewees, that the internet was 'unsafe'. This was particularly in relation to online banking/shopping or any transaction whereby personal details are submitted over the internet, e.g. contact with local authorities or social media websites. Only a small minority of interviewees used or would consider internet banking or shopping (although several checked prices online before buying in a shop). Several interviewees mentioned media scares about 'hacking' or 'boiler room scams'.

"I don't want to get into that, that [online banking] part of the internet I don't like, when I booked my holiday that was it my money was gone swoosh, I think it's dangerous in some respects, it's like everything, there's a downside to everything isn't there" (female 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

"I don't trust it because there are people out there much cleverer than I am if I am to believe what I read in newspapers or magazines, I could be hacked." (male, 65-74, C1, less sparse urban)

Post–course, interviewees seemed more aware of the social opportunities offered by the internet; this was mainly in relation to emailing or in some instances using Skype to communicate with family. Interviewees remained generally (with a couple of exceptions) sceptical about social media such as Facebook or Twitter and were happier to use email to keep in touch. A couple of interviewees who had signed up to use social media had done so just to see what it was like or had been 'signed up' by a family member.

"I have Facebook but only because I wanted to see what it was about. I see people who I consider to be very intelligent writing rubbish, it's not for me…I don't want to know what he had for breakfast." (male, 65-74, C1, less sparse urban)

"I avoid that [social media] like the plague, I'm not interested in that sort of thing, you don't know who you're dealing with you have to trust someone is being truthful" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

A notable exception was one interviewee (registered blind) who had learnt to use Facebook using assistive software:

"now I've more reassurance with it, I've more confidence with it and it helps me in lots of ways. I'm not saying it's taken over my life, I don't think it will ever do that, but it does make me feel part of human people, meeting with human people, I know you're talking to them over a computer but you'd be surprised how much…I quite enjoy that" (female, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

There was also some evidence that some course participants had overcome social isolation and had made lasting friendships on the course:

"there are some people here who I've gotten to know over the past year that I would class as friends, who I would never have met otherwise" (male, 55-64, E, less sparse urban)

Further learning and 'aftercare'

A clear illustration of the impact of this initial period of learning is the fact that the majority of those interviewed remained curious about the internet and were keen to develop their skills further both in terms of internet use and in applying their skills to other areas of interest.

"I've thoroughly enjoyed what I've done and I'm looking forward to the future learning more" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

"[I feel inspired]…to do a bit more and start painting again. I have taken some photos this weekend and put them on the computer. I have magnified one and am now inspired to start a painting, based on the photo." (female, 75+, B, sparse urban)

Encouragingly, most felt that they had retained the skills that they learnt, although several interviewees commented that if they did not frequently use these skills then there was a danger of them being lost:

"The older you get the slower you are at learning and if you don't do things you forget what you've learnt you do need quite a lot of help - well I need a lot of help. But I'm still struggling away there and I'm enjoying the emailing." (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

Along with an aversion to online transactions, some interviewees commented that they still frequently 'got stuck' or felt frustrated when they experienced problems with accessing the internet or with their computer hardware. This had not necessarily meant that these individuals had or intended to stop using the internet but the learning curve was still steep. For those without a support network to turn to this tended to exacerbate any feelings of isolation and worry, particularly about the potential cost of fixing the problem.

"If I didn't have my daughter and son in law I think I could become stuck fairly quickly. Of the five of us friends four have seen my son in law [for computer help] otherwise it would cost them a lot of money, if they get a bug they would pack it in if the only way you can resolve it is to spend money." (male, 65-74, C1, less sparse urban)

"I learnt how to not be terrified which is a start; switch it on and how to hold the mouse. Since, I've had a go at doing things some successfully some unsuccessfully. After a year I am not computer literate. I would have found a printout of the computer keyboard useful, to know what all the buttons were for and the terminology; it's like a foreign language…someone said you need a 'link' but what's that?" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

"I haven't got anybody to ask really I suppose my son in law is good but he is busy, it is awkward asking, I do get stuck frequently. It can get very frustrating at times I know how to handle the central heating boiler and TV when it breaks down but when something goes wrong with the laptop I lose interest and switch it off if it's not doing what I wanted it to do… through my ignorance really…" (Female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

Other interviewees with support networks had not made the transition to being fully independent online as they could still rely on friends and relatives for support. A couple of interviewees had asked family to buy products for them online or download audio books or games.

Some interviewees had enjoyed the course but for them it had not revolutionised the way they lived their lives. They recognised that the internet has its uses but were ambivalent and were happy for it to play a limited role in their lives, on their own terms.

"it's there for me, I'm not there for it" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

"Perhaps it could be ever so useful if I was prepared to spend more time on it…I may find a heck a lot of uses for it… But I'm not really bothered. I like to do other things rather than sit staring at a screen…at the minute it takes me forever to read the Sunday paper, because I go out, I have other things to do. By the time I've taken the dog out two or three times a day, by the time I've done my large garden, shopped, cooked, it doesn't leave a lot of hours." (female, 65-74, D, sparse – Village)

"I don't want the computer to take over my life. I come here and also use the library's computer. I come here to learn. If I want to do anything by myself I go to the library…What I want from my computer is just what I need." (female, 65-74, C1, less sparse urban)

5.5   The wider viewpoint

This section of the report discusses interviewees' views on the potential barriers to internet use amongst older people in general and their suggestions for solutions.

It appears that there is a clear divide between those older people who are open to learning about the internet and those who clearly feel it is not for them. This was evident through interviewees' discussions of their friends and acquaintances:

"It would be difficult to engage the housebound, it would have to come from someone close to them, I do know that there are a lot who can't be bothered…it's apathy, 'we've managed all these years without it' (female, 75+, B, less sparse, urban)

"I think plain ignorance and the things frighten them to death. I've heard people say, 'I'm not on the internet don't mention it to me', some people wouldn't ever use it. A friend of mine a retired bank manager, an intelligent man, said 'why do I need a laptop'?" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

"Well, a lot of older people are no longer curious, no longer interested in new things" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

The group of interviewees in this study were fairly consistent in that they had retained a broad range of interests and a curiosity about life, and for some the internet was another subject to add to this list. However, for those less curious, or less open to learning new things, there was a recognition that more of an effort would be required to illustrate to these individuals how they could benefit.

"[you need to] get it over to people that this is for YOU, this is going to make your life so different" (female, 75+, C1, less sparse urban)

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"You have to give people real reasons for why they would want to do it" (male, 65-74, C1, less sparse – town and fringe)

It is apparent from several interviewees that their interest in the internet has been spurred on because of a link to an existing unrelated interest. For example, one interviewee who openly described his feelings towards the internet as 'hostile' and 'resentful' due to being 'forced' to use the internet for job applications was now enthusiastic about how the internet had enhanced his experiences of cycling – one of his main passions in life:

"I have been cycle touring round Ireland and Europe. Before I used to look at a map to plan; now when I am thinking about cycling across Europe again I can go on the internet and see all the routes that cyclists have done and keep off the dangerous roads, so I can map it out before we go. It's so useful for that. You can see the distances and where to go to keep off the big roads. On YouTube you can see other cyclists who have done those routes. We found a cycle path all along the coast. That was just from going on the internet." (male, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

It was also clear that, (as illustrated by the ways in which interviewees became aware of courses) that awareness of where to find information on internet courses is low, as is the proportion of older people likely to be proactively looking for such courses. Therefore, interviewees emphasised the importance of the information being conveyed by someone close to them or someone that they can relate to such as another older learner.

"[It would be difficult to engage] the housebound, it would have to come from someone close to them, I do know that there are a lot who can't be bothered… apathy, we've managed all these years without it…" (female, 75+, B, less sparse urban)

Taking the course to older people at home was also mentioned as a solution to engagement or ensuring that the courses are very local and delivered via familiar local organisations in familiar venues, e.g. Resident's Associations.

"Some people are just afraid. My elderly neighbour is not into it, but it would be so good for her. Even if I brought her along she wouldn't come. She does go out a bit, but if she learnt it would open up so much for her, when she is in the house. She wouldn't feel as lonely, which people do when they live by themselves and I know she does. The only way round that would be to take the computer to her and force her to look at it! It would open up a whole new world for her." (male, 55-64, C2, less sparse urban)

6.   Conclusions & Recommendations

This research has provided extensive information on why some older people have made the transition from non-use to gaining basic online competency skills at a particular time in their lives. It must be acknowledged that the participants in this research were by their own admission a minority group and that many of their peers were not internet users, this report therefore presents what has worked to encourage a small proportion of older people online.

Below we discuss what we feel are the most pertinent areas for consideration by Age UK (and other digital inclusion providers) based on these interviews. Please note that these suggestions are devised based on what older people had to say themselves as well as Qa's own interpretation and analysis of interview data. It is recognised that Age UK will need to decide whether suggestions are actionable and this will inform the final set of conclusions and recommendations.

Within this research it was confirmed that there will never be a one-size fits all solution to how digital inclusion can be promoted to older people, and even after attending a course how people use the internet will still vary considerably.

It is clear that not every older person can see the benefits of internet use. Interviewees in this study were by and large curious and open-minded, however many of them felt that they were not typical of their peer group. Whether older people take notice of any marketing information will depend on a range of other factors as suggested by this report, whether people are open to the idea of using the internet generally, whether they feel any personal need or benefit to moving online as well as factors such as health and general suitability of timing for individuals. Naturally any marketing information has to be accessible to older people, tapping into any services and locations older people utilise or frequent.

There were perhaps some best practice examples and suggestions which can be drawn out in terms of features which could be considered by any organisation wishing to promote digital inclusion:

- The benefits of taking part in a course need to be made clear to potential participants, and it may be more effective to use non-internet /computing related subjects to attract the more internet-averse. For example, family heritage, local history, basic DIY (using YouTube How To's, keeping in touch with family and friends overseas, getting the best deal on your large purchases:

- A named contact appears to work well on publicity material, people know who they need to talk to and a photograph of the individual is also considered beneficial;

- On any larger pieces of marketing consider using case studies, for example giving an example of how one older person overcame barriers to accessing the internet to now become an active user. These could also be displayed at training provider and community settings to widen reach to current non-users;

- On paper, all those interviewed were involved in courses enabling them to gain GO ON UK basic online skills competencies. However, recall of covering how to identify spam and confidence in which websites were trustworthy was sometimes low. There was also a continued unease around internet shopping, banking, and providing personal details over

the internet which is a significant barrier to the expansion of internet use and 'digital by default'. Courses need to place more emphasis on internet security and safety by placing the risks in context and ensuring that older people are aware of the protection that is already in place from online retailers/banks, e.g. PayPal, paying by credit card, bank protection against internet fraud. More promotion of the Age UK website and links to trusted suppliers would be useful;

- It may be that case studies, or the opportunity to meet people that have taken internet use a step further (online transactions, accessing services online etc.) could be particularly beneficial to give people confidence in maximising the internet to its full potential given that there is still a reluctance to provide personal information online by many;

- It is not known to what extent digital inclusion providers maximise the enthusiasm generated by some learners in terms of encouraging them to become internet champions themselves. With word of mouth being an effective means of finding out about courses this could be a further step some providers could take. Individuals who were particularly anxious or reluctant learners pre-course may be most effective in this role;

- This research has also highlighted that some individuals experience higher levels of computer and/or learning anxiety than others. For these individuals a pre-course assessment/one to one session may be useful in allaying any initial fears, offering reassurances that the computer will not break etc;

- As illustrated by this study, the internet courses had considerable success in stimulating further interest in continued learning and internet use. However, it is also clear that older people can struggle to remain online once the course has finished as a result of getting 'stuck' – especially if they do not have a support network of family friends. Therefore, consideration should be given to setting up a drop-in or technical telephone support service at a minimal cost to ensure that those who get online can stay online;

- Reduce perception of cost as a barrier through sharing any information on particular packages that people could access with free internet, any special packages for older people and any drop-in and after care services people can use so people do not feel they have to buy their own computers/have broadband to access the internet;

- As people tended to only be aware of one particular course this raises the question of whether more could be done for providers to offer options for both group and one-to-one courses so that those that could potentially be put off by one format are not deterred and that there is something suitable for everyone;

- As accessibility is a key influencing factor when considering a course it raises the question of whether some of the more isolated and hardest to reach older people are genuinely able to access courses, particularly if they do not live in any kind of social, sheltered or independent living accommodation and as such not necessarily coming into contact with services on a regular basis. Some interviewees suggested more individuals could be interested in taking part in courses if tuition took place in the home;

- It also appears that older people are more likely to engage with the internet if courses are provided at the most localised level possible and are delivered within familiar

surroundings. One particularly successful example of this included a course delivered with the help of the local Resident's Association in publicising and recruiting participants and delivering the course in the heart of the community;

- Interviewees in this study were largely unaware of where they could find information on internet courses and had either stumbled upon the course by accident or had been alerted to it by family. It is evident that family play a key role in channelling this information and encouraging/persuading. Therefore, a campaign/information targeted at carers/family members may be useful in communicating the message including emphasis on reducing the demands on carers' time e.g. online grocery delivery. Even if this does not result in the older person being cared for going online, communicating this message to carers within the 55-64 age groups may still be of benefit.

7.   Appendix

7.1   Copy of Discussion Guide

Age UK – New Users of the Internet at Older Ages Interview Guide

Interviewer:
Date:
Time:
Respondent:

My name is XXXX and I work for Qa Research an independent research company completing the research about internet use amongst older people for Age UK. Thank you for letting me come along and speak to you today. As you should know we're trying to find out a bit more about why people have accessed an internet course/session at a particular point in time and also discuss the kind of things that can put people off from going on one of these courses and developing online skills.

As you know the interviews should take about half an hour depending on how much people have to say, you can stop the interview at any time if you wish. When we have finished all of the interviews we will be writing a report for Age UK which will contain quotes and anonymised case studies, but we won't use anybody's real name.

I would like to record the interview if that's ok, this is just so I don't have to make notes and for me to listen back to before we write the report, the recording will not be passed on to Age UK. Is that ok? The only time we would need to share information with someone else is in the unlikely event of someone we interview indicating they or someone else is at risk of significant harm; in that case we would be obliged to notify a safeguarding lead.

You will receive £20 to thank you for your time and to cover any travel expenses at the end of the interview.

If anyone wishes to provide feedback on camera you will have the opportunity to do so at the end, but this is entirely optional.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1: Introductions

1.1   To begin with, as a bit of background can you tell me a little bit about yourself? (who they live with/whether they work/former job/length of retirement). *[we will have the key profile criteria with us]*

1.2   What would a typical day be like for you? *[try and get a sense of services accessed/who they come into contact with regularly]*

Section 2: 'Before' feelings & knowledge

2.1   So, I believe you accessed xxxx course at xxxx. We'll come on to that course in a bit more detail in a moment but I wondered if we can go back a bit further first, can you tell me what experience you'd had with computers, technology and the internet before doing this course?

Areas to probe:

•   Experience of different devices (PC's; laptops; tablets; smart phones)

•   Experience of the internet (web browsing; email; social networking, Facebook, Twitter etc)

•   Experience of digital photographic, audio, video and games technologies

•   Experience of digital radio and television.

•   Were any of these used regularly? [try and establish when they first started using them and why at that point in their lives]

•   Were they aware of everything mentioned?

•   If non-users themselves had they seen friends/family use/talk about these/help them with these?

2.2   If we try and think back to before you signed up to do the course, can you pick out six sets of words which would best describe how you were feeling at that time towards the internet? [laminated set of words will be displayed on a table]. If there are other words that best describe how you were feeling just let me know. [need to be clear this is before they signed up to the course, we will organise into a positive list and negative list]

•   Alone

•   Hostile

•   Confident

•   Confused

•   Connected

•   Curious

•   Didn't know much about it

•   Didn't think it would be useful

•   Excited

•   Expensive

• Fearful	• Powerless
• Fun	• Offers social opportunities
• Ignorant	• Thick
• Inspired	• Uneasy
• Isolated	• Unsafe
• Left behind	• Useful
• Motivated	• Vulnerable
• Never considered it	• Waste of time

Probe on why they picked each one and ask them to elaborate- why did they hold these opinions?

I've only allowed you to pick six, but if you could pick more words what would they be? Why?

2.3   Do you think you held similar thoughts and feelings towards the internet as other people in your life? (probe: spouse/friends/family? If people close to them were using the internet before them did it influence their attitude in any way? Positively or negatively?)

2.4   To what extent do you think you understood the potential benefits of using the internet before doing the course? (Probe: for daily tasks such as food shopping; banking and paying bills; finding out information on local activities, support, health and social opportunities)

Section 3: Triggers

3.1   Thinking about your own experiences, what kind of barriers do you think can prevent older people from:

        a) finding out about the internet and what it has to offer in the first place and

        b) seeking out information on places to access and learning to use the internet

        (probe fully: explore practical as well as attitudinal barriers)

3.2   Ok, now thinking back a while, can you tell me why you were interested in using the internet for the first time? (probe fully, what did they hope to achieve/learn, practical achievements as well as how these skills could impact on different aspects of their lives; draw out the key drivers in them wanting to get online)

3.3   What was your main reason for signing up for the course overall (first course if one of many)? (same as 3.1 or other reasons? If actually learning to use the internet was not the primary driver what was?)

3.4   Can you remember how you first found out that such a course existed?

3.5   What did you think about it when you first heard about it? (Probe for what they considered to be the good 'selling points' to someone like them? Anything they didn't like the sound of? Probe on the intended skill acquisition as well as mode of delivery)

3.6   How long was it roughly between when you first heard about the course and when you signed up for it/ (took part if drop-in)? Probe for why it took this long (and probe for benefits/negatives of it taking this long e.g. if it had been a casual drop-in would you have ended up still doing it? Or was it best that they had committed to reserving a place?)

3.7   How long roughly before doing the course had you been interested in/thought you would benefit from attending a computer course? (was it a self-identified need or not?)

3.8   [if applicable] How important do you think it was that you heard about the course via xxx in terms of you actually pursuing it? (e.g. could be important if it's a worker they already knew telling them about it; knew other people doing it? Heard via a place they frequent regularly?)

3.9   What made you decide to do this particular computer course via xxx? (only one they knew of or other reasons, knowing other people, location etc? why this particular method of learning – group v one to one if there's a choice? Probe fully if they were aware of different providers they could learn through and reasons for selection)

3.10   And why did you decide to go on the course at that particular point in time? (probe: had they considered it at other points/providers but not pursued it, why?)

3.11   Did you have any reservations when signing up/attending for the first time? Probe: how did they overcome these?

Section 4: 'After' feelings & knowledge

4.1   What happened as a result of attending the course?

        Probe on:

•   Skills developed

•   Attitude change

•   Indirect benefits – making friends, socialising, reducing isolation

•   Pursued further courses?

•   Lifestyle changes as a result of application of skills/encouraged new learning/new interests?

4.2   (if relevant) We've noted that you are still using the internet for [reason for pursuing course] which is great, can you tell me a bit about how you've carried on using this and why since the course? (e.g. continued to access at setting/bought equipment/broadened use?)

4.3   (if relevant) We've noted that you are no longer using the internet for [reason for pursuing course] can you tell me a bit more about why that is? (Probe: could anything have helped to sustain skills and use in their opinion? Do they anticipate going back to it in the future? Do they use the internet for other reasons?)

Qa
R E S E A R C H

4.4   What six set of words would you use to describe how you feel about the internet now? If you want to say other words just let me know. [words to be displayed as a positive and negative list]

- Alone
- Hostile
- Confident
- Confused
- Connected
- Curious
- Didn't know much about it
- Didn't think it would be useful
- Excited
- Expensive
- Fearful
- Fun
- Ignorant
- Inspired

- Isolated
- Left behind
- Motivated
- Never considered it
- Powerless
- Offers social opportunities
- Thick
- Uneasy
- Unsafe
- Useful
- Vulnerable

- Waste of time

Probe on why they picked each one and ask them to elaborate- why did they hold these opinions?

I've only allowed you to pick six, but if you could pick more words what would they be? Why?

Section 5: Promoting internet use at older ages

5.1   Is there anything else which you think could be done to help encourage and support more older people to start to use the internet?

Section 6: Close

6.1   Is there anything you wanted to mention today that we haven't already covered?

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me today. We will be writing our report for Age UK in April but like I said before we won't be using anyone's real names and Age UK will not be told who has taken part. The report should be available on the Age UK website by the end of May. (http://www.ageuk.org.uk/professional-resources-home/research/social-research/work-and-learning1)

However, because Age UK are keen to support as many older people as possible to get online and start benefitting from being online we are asking people if they are interested in saying a few words on camera about how the courses and being online has benefitted individuals? I just have

this small camera here and I'd just ask you a couple of similar questions to those we've already discussed – this is entirely optional, the footage could be used in presentations we give discussing the research and be used by Age UK to promote the benefits of getting online amongst older people. If you are happy to do this it'll just take a few minutes more, as this part wouldn't be confidential I would just need to ask you to sign this form to say you're happy for us to use this video footage.

Note: if there are any safeguarding concerns inform the respondent of our obligations to raise a safeguarding alert.

If undertaking Vox Pops: (guide questions only, follow up as appropriate)

• Can you introduce yourself on camera first of all giving your name, age and what experience you had of using computers and the internet prior to doing the course?

• What difference has doing the course made to your life?

• In what kind of ways has being able to use the internet helped you?

• What would you say to older people who are a bit daunted about using the internet?

Thank you so much for coming along today and contributing to what will be a useful piece of research for Age UK and their partners. [issue incentive]

7.2 Age UK Bradford, Publicity Article

News from the Keyboard
By Peter Wright

Hopefully the worst of the winter weather is now behind us and we can look forward to better days ahead. The bad weather certainly hasn't deterred people wanting to learn how to use the Internet. Judging by the number of applications we have had from people applying to come on our free, One to One computer courses, interest is a keen as ever. Of course there are still people who say "What would I do with a computer. They are no use to me." This got me thinking and I came up with the following.

Government figures released on the Internet in August 2012 state that in Bradford 74,000 people had never used the Internet. Bradford's population at that time was approx 513,000. This amounts to about 15% of the population having never used the Internet. Trends would indicate that the majority of this number were people over 50 years of age.

At a time when vital information about prices, energy saving, pensions, prescriptions, medical records, dental appointments, etc. are being moved online, it is vital that we try and educate people in the use of computers and the Internet, thus enabling them to access important information. Giving them the confidence to use a computer is a vital part of our project as fear of the technology plays a big part in some people avoiding computers and the Internet. It really is not as hard as you might think. There are several major issues which we try to address.

Loneliness and isolation for the elderly is a major problem which we try to help alleviate via the Internet. The many free social networking websites available such a Skype, Facebook, Twitter, Genes Reunited, Messenger and E-mails etc., means that people, who maybe find it difficult to get out of the house, can keep in touch with friends and relatives around the world. From the comfort of their living rooms, using a free program called Skype, they can actually see the person they are talking to. Imagine that, if you have relatives or grandchildren who live abroad. The calls are free no matter how long you chat for. All this for the price of a broadband connection and a simple, reasonably priced, computer.

As we all know, the cost of living is outstripping the rate of increase in income. We help our learners to find the best prices for goods online. They can get everyday shopping delivered to their door, a real luxury in the winter weather we have had this year. Even if you can get out of the house it may be slippery with ice or snow or just plain miserable. Of course shopping online is a mine field of well publicised scams and frauds so we are able to teach learners the safe way to shop online and mitigate the perceived threats.

Unemployment is a major issue at any age but for the over 50's without basic IT skills it can be devastating. Age UK Head of Policy in London said in January 2013 that 72% of employers will not grant an interview without basic IT skills and 25% of companies now only advertise jobs online. We can and have helped over 50's in the Bradford area get IT skills to enable them to search and apply for jobs online. After attending our IT course they can demonstrate basic IT skills. The local Job Centre sends us people whom we are able to help with our courses. These are courses rather than drop in classes as provided by many local Community Centres. Not only do we teach anyone who is unemployed basic computer skills but we also help to prepare and teach them how to update their CV's and how to complete an application form online. We know many people who were unemployed gaining employment after getting basic IT knowledge via our courses.

Learners who have attended our courses have said that the one to one tuition that we offer with our friendly volunteers greatly helped their learning and understanding of computer use. Tuition is taken at their pace rather than a set syllabus in a classroom situation. Having gained a bit of confidence, some learners have also returned as volunteers to teach others, thus helping to sustain and expand the programme.

You don't need to be a computer wizard to help us out. If you are confident using the Internet and e-mails, have an hour a week to spare and enjoy meeting people, how about volunteering in our I.T. department. We give lessons in Shipley and Keighley as well as Bradford and could do with help there as well. You could pass your knowledge onto someone who is just starting to use a computer, possibly for the first time. We don't take things too seriously and we concentrate on using computers rather than how they work.

If you would like to join our free classes and learn more about computers or if you would like to join our team of volunteers, give me a ring, Peter Wright, on Bradford (01274)395144 and let's have a chat about what Age UK IT department can help you with. If you are a complete beginner or relatively competent using one I am sure that there is something that we can help you with. What are you waiting for?

That's all for now.

9