

making IT personal

joining the DOTs



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Welcome to the third edition of our 'Making IT Personal: Joining the DOTs' project newsletter.

This issue focuses on the significant progress we have made in training and accrediting the first DOTs and working with our transnational partners in MALTA. You can see initial results from the evaluation work by NIACE and meet our new researcher, Julie Ellis, who will be helping to take the DOTs approach into many more settings. You will notice that we have been spreading the word at a range of events, including in Berlin. Last but not least, the project has been shortlisted for a prestigious award...

First DOT Awards

Digital Outreach Trainers (DOTs) met each other face to face for the first time when the inaugural Awards Event for DOTs was held at the Workstation in Sheffield on Wednesday 17th November.

The informal get-together was opened with a short thank you video by the Project Director, Martin Cantor, Principal European and Regional Strategy Officer at Barnsley MBC (left), who was proud to announce that the DOTs were the first in the UK and Europe to achieve the status of approved Digital Outreach Trainers.



David Kay, Director of Sero Consulting, one of the project partners, thanked all the DOTs for their involvement and time in the project, saying, "When we first scoped this project, we hoped to create opportunities for natural digital mentors, those who are already good at explaining technology and the web in a clear, understandable way to help friends and colleagues. So 18 months later, it's fantastic to see so many of you here tonight. Thank

you for helping us to pioneer this approach and grow a lively and valued community of digital mentors." Certificates were presented by Liz Wallis, Managing Director of Sero Consulting (above).



Julie Hooper of Sheffield College drew attention to the Fast Forward booklets which provide free training for reading, maths and computing and are available on paper and online, once you've registered as a DOT.

The Awards Event was a great opportunity to build up the DOTs community and enthusiasm for the DOT approach was very evident as people shared their experiences and talked about how to recruit more people to the scheme.

Visit www.makingitpersonal.eu to see the full roll of honour of accredited DOTs.

Already Looking Ahead

Already some of the DOTs who have been approved are looking at next steps and seeing how the DOT accreditation can help them in their career paths:

"Becoming an approved DOT has given me other ideas on how my career path may move forward. I intend to carry on with the DOT scheme and maybe look at attempting further courses."

"I've really thought about my skills as a trainer, and have definitely improved on them. I've just completed the Level 3 DOT qualification so I also have something to show that I have these skills and am aware of these issues - a great addition to my CV. I've also learned a huge amount from other DOTs about technologies that I might not have otherwise come across, and met (online and in real life) some really inspiring people."

"I'm hoping that the skills I've gained from taking part in the scheme will help me to do further work in training and supporting people."

"It could take me into a different career than the one I've had for the past 20 years."



Congratulations to all the DOTs who have achieved approved status!

Making IT Personal - Joining the DOTs Online

You can find out more information about the project on the website: www.makingitpersonal.eu and if you are interested in becoming a DOT, or would like to access some free IT tips, go to: www.makingitpersonal.org.uk



A New Face

Julie Ellis, newly appointed ICT researcher based within e@SY Connects, has an exciting task ahead. Over the next few months she will be doing research that will explore ways in which the MITP:JtD project can be applied in different organisations and settings across South Yorkshire.

Julie will be focusing on places where people carry out their everyday activities such as supermarkets and GP surgeries because that fits with the central idea behind MITP:JtD that people share knowledge about technologies and help each other in the course of their day-to-day lives.

e@SY Connects, where Julie is based, is a partnership of public sector bodies in South Yorkshire which includes the local authorities, health, transport and emergency services. Its aim is to use new technologies to enhance public services and to make them more accessible, especially for those individuals who are most in need. Given its strong commitment to using technologies to promote social inclusion in this way, e@SY Connects is also involved with MITP: JtD as a delivery partner.

The idea is that e@SY's research will find out about how 'dotting' happens in these different settings and allow the project to support even more people to gain the confidence to use technology to make aspects of their daily lives a little bit easier whilst also improving their employability skills.

The research will get underway in December and Julie will be visiting different organisations doing observation, interviewing people and generally trying to find out as much as she can about the role DOTs can play in various settings.

What's more, Julie herself has recently joined the DOTs team as a trainee DOT... so she will get to experience what she is researching first hand! Watch this space for further news.



In the Limelight

The MITP Joining the DOTs project was recently shortlisted for the prestigious E-Learning Awards 2010.

The project was entered in the category 'Excellence in the production of learning content - public sector'. It was a fiercely competitive field and to be shortlisted out of over 200 entrants was a notable achievement, particularly as MITP:JtD is still a young initiative and does more than deliver e-learning in the traditional sense.



The DOTs and Our Digital Future

On 23 November Ian Chowcat from the MITP:JtD management team presented the Making IT Personal: Joining the DOTs project to an audience of some eighty people at NIACE's Our Digital Future conference in London, joining speakers from BIS, UK Online, e-Skills UK, Digital Unite and Ofcom.

The conference explored what digital skills would be needed in the future and initiatives to tackle digital exclusion, in the context of national initiatives such as Race Online 2012 and the launch of the EU's Digital Agenda for Europe. Much of the discussion at the conference focused on basic IT skills courses that could be used in informal as well as formal settings. In that context the DOTs' perspective of completely informal engagement in learning as a way of drawing in the digitally inactive, and the role of learning from people you trust who may not be experts but are just one step ahead, struck a chord with many delegates. The presentation received several references on the conference twitter stream and was highlighted as representing an important perspective by Robin Blake, Head of Media Literacy, Ofcom closing the event.

NIACE is the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education and a partner in MITP:JtD, leading the evaluation of the project. All the presentations from the Our Digital Future conference can be downloaded from

www.niace.org.uk/current-work/area/digital-inclusion

The Story So Far...

Jan Novitsky of NIACE is evaluating the MITP:JtD programme. Jan shares with us what the evaluation has shown so far:

Are DOTs engaging digitally excluded learners?

Based on evidence from DOT diaries, it is estimated that the 104 DOTs recruited up to the end of August have reached over 500 learners. It is clear DOTs are reaching out and supporting learners to develop confidence and gain new digital skills but at this point of time it is too soon to say if DOTs are engaging people with few previous digital skills. This will be explored in stage 2 of the evaluation.

Is the informal learning approach effective in supporting learner needs?

It is clear that the flexibility of the DOT approach has the capacity to meet the wide variety of potential needs of learners and at a time and place convenient to them. To date, DOTs have supported their learners to develop a wide variety of skills including: online banking, buying and selling online, designing CVs, online job applications, using iPods, Twitter, setting up a Skype account, sending mobile pictures by phone, virus software, using Facebook, downloading images from memory cards, use of USB card readers, online spelling and thesaurus and research for purchasing a new car. DOTs are supporting their learners to use their new-found skills independently. It is hoped to capture learner impact in stage 2 of the evaluation, exploring not only technical skills but how digital skills have been applied in learners' lives.

“The description of what a DOT does sounded like exactly what I'd been doing for a long time! Friends, family and colleagues always ask me for help with their IT problems, and I really enjoy helping them to learn how to make better use of technology and figure out answers to their queries. The DOT scheme seemed like a great way to formalise what I was already doing and to improve my skills so I could give people even better help.”

Rachel

“This is a great way to share IT skills with family and friends and gain a qualification. I have now been notified that I have achieved the level 3 OCN qualification. I am also a mentor on the scheme and enjoy encouraging other DOTs to achieve approved status and then the qualification.”

Angela

Have we got the right training and support approach/package for DOTs?

In the pilot phase, the project has developed a comprehensive support package for DOTs comprising: e-mentoring, a dedicated website, forum postings, DOT handbook, bite-size 'how-to' guides, and an approval system centering around a reflective diary. It is clear that DOTs themselves are learning, and developing their skills, through the process of supporting their learners, through the peer support of other DOTs and from other elements of the support package.

The e-mentoring and the bite-size guides have been valued by the first cohort of DOTs. Improvements to the reflective diaries are being implemented based on feedback from DOTs. The forums, the handbook and the web site have had variable feedback. A key element of stage 2 will be to test these issues around the DOT support package further with a range of DOTs.

“The scheme is a great way to actively share your own IT skills and learn new IT skills/ideas from the DOT forums. The forums are very friendly.”

Angela

“It's fantastic having contact with a network of people who also help others with technology. In particular the forums are a brilliant resource for ideas and answers to problems, and getting recommendations about new technologies.”



Rachel

What are good practice models?

The pilot and first phase have developed and tested approaches largely in educational contexts. In stage two we will be testing the interest and capacity of other contexts to host DOTs; exploring what works in different situations; the motivation of different sectors and organisations to take part; what's in it for them; what support is needed etc.

One element, valued by all the partners, is the ESF ITM funding stream which enables providers to take risks, and explore creatively ways of developing the DOT scheme.

DOTs on the Map

The Making IT Personal Joining the DOTs (MITP:JtD) Project is making links across Europe with those who are working in the field of digital inclusion, helping people to benefit from getting online. Forming partnerships with organisations in other EU member states to share ideas and good practice is an integral part of our work because the project is funded by the European Social Fund under their innovation, transnational and mainstreaming strand.

Making IT Personal in Malta

Our partnership with the Maltese Communications Authority (MCA), the agency of the Maltese government with responsibility for tackling digital exclusion on the island, is proving especially fruitful.

In April 2010, 11 members of the MITP:JtD team visited Malta to talk about our work. During the visit the MCA hosted an event for over 30 delegates, comprising representatives from local councils, the University of Malta, community centres and non-government organisations, during which we explored the similarities and differences between the digital inclusion issue in each country. As a result of this visit the MCA is now embarked on a plan to introduce elements of the MITP:JtD project in Malta.

In September, we were able to return hospitality when we welcomed to South Yorkshire Joseph Galea from Malta's public employment service, the Employment and Training Corporation. Joseph coordinates Malta's Employability Programme and leads the development of training materials. He will now be working with Sheffield College on developing Fast Forward Malta, based on the Fast Forward materials we have for each of the four South Yorkshire districts. The visit gave Joseph the chance to discuss the approach to the materials in more depth with the team at the College, as well as to see some local training centres. He was also able to participate in our showcase event at Doncaster Racecourse on 30 September at which Bernard Agius from the MCA was one of the platform speakers.

Sheffield College will be continuing to support our Maltese colleagues, visiting early in the New Year to help conduct the local research required to produce the learning materials. Further joint work is planned in 2011 including the possibility of testing out the DOT model in Malta.

Lessons from Berlin

Internet Erfahren – Experience the Internet – a German national campaign launched by the government eighteen months ago held its mid-point conference in Berlin recently. Martin Cantor, MITP:JtD Project Director, went along to see what we could learn.

“The conference was held in the Ministry of Economy and Technology in Berlin, reflecting official government support. But the campaign's three strands are all run by non-government bodies, and have a very local feel.

One strand focuses on older citizens; one on developing one-to-one mentoring relationships; and the third on digitally excluded groups such as migrants. They operate pretty much independently, but this conference will help them to work together more and more effectively.

Main lessons for us:

- official government sponsorship helps to give drive
- having many initiatives to get people online is good, but joining them together is what really matters
- we can learn from parallel work in other countries
- much was similar, but approaches were subtly different

I was thrilled to see one of the banks actively involved, training and organising internet-savvy customers to mentor the bank's older offliners.”

