

making IT personal

joining the DOTs



European Union
European Social Fund
Investing in jobs and skills

Welcome to the first issue of the 'Making IT Personal – Joining the DOTs' project newsletter.

This issue gives us the opportunity to tell you about parts of the project that will be of particular interest to practitioners involved in digital skills and inclusion. We've provided a snapshot of each MITP-JtD delivery partner and we have addressed key questions, such as 'What is a DOT?' and 'Why is this a transnational project?'

Thanks to ESF funding, this project is a key component in our mission to create an e-confident and digitally engaged community in South Yorkshire. Future newsletters will share emerging practice and showcase our experiences as we progress towards this goal.

Making IT Personal – Joining the DOTs: An Introduction

Making IT Personal – Joining the DOTs (MITP – JtD) is an innovation project funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and managed by Barnsley Council. The aim of the project is to explore the ways that digital outreach, and in particular digital mentors, can help to tackle digital exclusion in South Yorkshire.

The project has an overarching goal which is to increase the level of skill, confidence and, as a result, quality of life of South Yorkshire citizens to make us a digitally empowered region. By offering help and support at a range of different levels, MITP - JtD is offering everybody a chance to take their skills to the next level.

We are now living in a digital world, where information and opportunities are available at the touch of a button. However, many people are missing out because they lack the skills and the confidence to use technology. They may not realise the endless benefits that new technologies can offer or they may feel too intimidated to ask for help in getting started. By exploring the role of Digital Mentors (Digital Outreach Trainers), this project directly addresses the reasons that people are digitally excluded.

As this is an innovation project, MITP – JtD is constantly moulding to suit the needs of all involved and will be continuously evaluated by the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). The project's transnational strand will also steer the project as it enables us to learn from similar initiatives throughout the continent and to share successful models with our European partners.

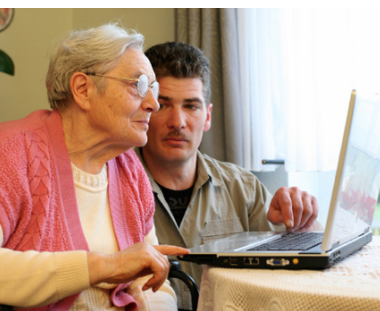


Joining the DOTs

Digital Outreach Trainers (DOTs) are volunteers who have digital skills and knowledge that they can share with others. Whether this be taking photos on mobile phones, paying bills online or using interactive television, DOTs don't have to be technical 'whizzes'; they are helpful, understanding and unthreatening. The MITP – JtD scheme recruits DOTs and provides them with the necessary training to help others as well as offering valuable qualifications which will boost their CVs.

Once DOTs are registered, they join an online community and keep a digital diary which tracks their progress as a digital mentor. The Sheffield College is responsible for the accreditation process, which progresses the DOTs from trainees to fully qualified, and provides each DOT with an e-mentor to support them.

The Sheffield College has also developed a set of learning materials to be delivered in conjunction with the mentoring scheme. These support numeracy and literacy development for learners at the participating colleges and learning centres. The materials are localised to the four Boroughs in South Yorkshire, which makes learning relevant and interesting.



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.

The DOT Training and Accreditation Model

The Sheffield College is leading on the DOT training and accreditation model. The scheme enables DOTs not only to gain a huge amount of informal experience, but also to achieve one or more formal qualifications. With ESF funding, the college is offering a selection of online courses.

DOTs can work towards an Open College Network (OCN) qualification by submitting a portfolio which demonstrates their experience of effectively helping others. Students who achieve this qualification will be in a good position to put their mentoring experience to use in a professional context, as learning support assistants, mentors and teachers.

The College has modified its popular eCommunications Foundation Degree to specifically suit those working in the public sector. DOTs who study for this qualification will get funding towards their fees from the project. GCSE English Online and the Effective Mentor's Toolkit will also be offered for free to South Yorkshire citizens at The Sheffield College. DOTs will be encouraged to take up one or more of these qualifications and those already on the courses will be introduced to the DOT scheme and encouraged to register as DOTs.

The formal qualifications that are on offer to DOTs are a driving force towards a digitally confident and skilled region. As DOTs boost their own skills and knowledge, the level of support, help and advice that they can offer to learners will also increase, maximising the impact of MITP – JtD on South Yorkshire citizens.

To find out more about the online courses that are on offer through Making IT Personal – Joining the DOTs, contact Julie Hooper on: julie.hooper@sheffcol.ac.uk. You can also find out more information at: www.online.sheffcol.ac.uk



Access Space is an open access media lab, welcoming members of the community to learn about digital technology and the internet in a friendly and informal environment.

Some of the first DOTs on the scheme will be members of staff at Access Space who will eventually mentor the DOTs that are recruited through the centre. Ruthie Ford is a Participation Facilitator and is in the early stages of her DOT training. She says,

"To be a DOT, I think it is essential to have good people skills. My IT skills are okay but, to be honest, most of the things I can do, I have learnt through trying to help people figure things out here."

Ruthie hopes that the DOT scheme will encourage more people to learn about IT and to pursue computer and internet based projects at the centre. She explains,



"We are trying to get hard-to-reach groups in the community to come and use the facilities at Access Space. I think that the DOT scheme will boost the amount of learners we have coming through the door because it offers an informal level of support from people that our learners can relate to."

The scheme will provide valuable opportunities to those learners who choose to get their skills recognised by training to be a DOT. Ruthie comments,

"Some of the learners that come here are socially excluded or unemployed and could really do with getting a qualification under their belts. The DOT accreditation will give them a real boost as it rewards them for skills they already have, but they probably underestimate how valuable they are."



Barnsley College aims to inspire its adult learners to train for a new career, qualify for university or simply learn new skills. In the Skills for Life department, learners will use the Fast Forward materials to enhance their numeracy and literacy skills.

They can also benefit from the support of a DOT who can guide them through the process of getting to grips with digital technology.



The Northern College, based in Wentworth Castle in Barnsley, is dedicated to the education and training of adults who do not possess formal qualifications.

It also has strong links with those working in community and voluntary groups and therefore reaches many people who would benefit from becoming DOTs.

Rawmarsh CLC Manager Trish Sharp regularly comes into contact with learners who are experiencing the digital world for the first time. She explains how the mentoring approach may help these learners:

"The digital world appears to be a very complex place and many people fear what they perceive to be involved. A digital mentor can not only guide and coach a person through specific tasks but can dispel the myths and fears, building the learner's confidence and increasing skills."

"In our experience, learners tend to help others and talk about their own skills if they are confident. I think the DOT scheme will help to build skills and confidence beyond the normal learning experience."



The Sheffield College (TSC)

"It used to be easy to dismiss IT and to laugh off technology as being irrelevant. This is not the case anymore; not being digitally literate is embarrassing," says TSC Course Leader, Julie Hooper. Julie sees many students, young and old, struggling with the basics. How can having a DOT mentor help?

"The DOT scheme is respectful of the level that people are at and the intimidation factor is broken down because learning is informal, takes place in the learner's own space and is on a one to one basis."

TSC developed the Fast Forward learning materials after identifying the link between poor literacy and digital exclusion. Julie explains,

"You cannot exploit the internet and the riches it offers unless you can read, and you cannot communicate with friends and family online or allow the internet to help you find employment unless you can write. So, developing literacy and digital skills simultaneously makes good sense."

TSC has an online college, so many of its students have developed good IT skills from using a website and a forum and communicating in electronic format with tutors. Julie says,

"We are encouraging these students to become DOTs and to view themselves as enablers, developing the skills to teach and support others. Success brings confidence and I hope to find that people who had never thought of themselves as being professionals, start to think about paid work as mentors, teachers, and support assistants."

"It will be very good for the South Yorkshire region in general to have lots of digitally empowered, as well as digitally included, inhabitants."

Delivery Partners

The Making IT Personal – Joining the DOTs delivery team is made up of six colleges and two learning centres. The role of each delivery partner is to introduce the DOT scheme to its learners, offering the prospect of gaining formal qualifications by becoming a DOT and providing a new, engaging way of developing their numeracy, literacy and IT skills with the localised learning materials.



Dearne Valley College (DVC) is a vocational college which places a firm focus on the holistic needs of each learner, helping to develop skills needed for work and life.

The college has close links with the local community and delivers learning throughout six different community venues across the three boroughs of Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster.

Given its broad reach, DVC has the potential to source individuals who will benefit from the DOT scheme, both as DOTs and as learners who require a mentor.



Doncaster College uses mentors to increase its learner retention rate and this has led to increased success rates.

At the specialist ICT Academy, many learners already possess the skills that would put them in a good position to join the DOTs. Assistant Director, Ann Jackson explains,

"The ability to gain accreditation from skills they may already possess will often motivate learners to acknowledge and improve their own IT skills. Through helping others to develop digital skills, the DOTs will undoubtedly develop more sophisticated skills themselves."

"The DOT qualification will bring value to them and to the learners they work with."



Rotherham College has a culture that encourages learner to learner help and support.

"Our learners, particularly the older learners, do help each other once they have established trusting relationships," explains Pat Jarvis, who works in the department for Community Education at Rotherham College.

"A discreet approach from the tutor or other trusted worker could encourage the learner to consider a more structured approach to helping others, possibly with progression opportunities for themselves."

"A figure that is recognised as part of the community may get through to some learners much more easily than our tutors can."

Making IT Personal - Joining the DOTs: A Transnational Project

MITP – JtD is a transnational innovation project funded by the ESF. The transnational element aims to engage like-minded organisations from across Europe to share ideas and examples of good practice and to steer the development of the project.

There are four key objectives which motivate the transnational work: to engage in ongoing dialogue with international partners with similar experience or interests; to distribute and share learning materials and the accreditation model; to share and develop working practices with international colleagues and to organise and participate in UK and international events which are geared towards sharing examples of digital outreach initiatives.

The transnational activities consist of events, working visits and exchange programmes and participation in Steering Group meetings and online discussion.

MITP – JtD currently has two transnational partners, Furtwangen University's Tele-akademie and the Malta Communications Authority (MCA), both of which bring valuable expertise to the project.

The Tele-akademie's extensive experience in e-learning tutor training offers a useful perspective to the MITP – JtD approach. The MCA is committed to large scale inclusion programmes and has helped to develop several regional and national 'ICT for all' initiatives. The MITP – JtD team is currently

planning a visit to the MCA where they plan to share experiences of digital outreach and discuss future plans for collaboration.

Find out more about our transnational partners:



www.tele-ak.fh-furtwangen.de



www.mca.org.mt

Transnational Visit

Last November, nine members of the MITP – JtD project team travelled to the Black Forest to consult the expertise of Furtwangen Tele-akademie's Dr Thomas Jechle.

The Tele-akademie specialises in training e-learning tutors through online courses and it launched Germany's first online course 'Lernen in Internet' in 1996. The Sheffield College has links with the Tele-akademie through the European Net Trainers Association (ENTA) and the two institutions have collaborated on delivering Net Trainer courses.

The project team, which included representatives from Doncaster ICT Academy, Barnsley College, Rotherham College and The Sheffield College, heard from Thomas and his colleagues who spoke of their experiences of training E-learning Tutors. This gave the college representatives, who are potential DOT mentors, a valuable insight into the role of a support figure for E-learning trainers.

The visit was also an opportunity to tell the story of MITP – JtD to Thomas and his colleagues, who are in the early stages of identifying Digital Exclusion in Germany. Project Director, Martin Cantor, explains why transnational dissemination is a valuable part of the project:

"The Tele-akademie has great potential to address the issues that surround Digital Exclusion in Germany. These are inevitably very similar to the issues we are tackling in the UK and, through this project, we can lend the benefits of the success and failures of our own experiences."

Thomas also felt that the visit was mutually beneficial:

"There are definitely parallels between the UK and Germany's 'onliners' and 'offliners', but the problem of Digital Exclusion has not yet been formulated here. I feel that this visit has prepared me well to contribute to Digital Inclusion in the future and I look forward to further collaboration on the project."

