

Making IT Personal - Joining the DOTs

An ESF Project

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making IT
personal
joining the DOTs

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Making IT Personal - Joining the DOTs

Executive summary

The Model

A range of digital outreach models are developing in the UK, to address issues of digital exclusion. In the Making IT Personal¹ - Joining the DOTs model, DOTs are: “volunteers who offer support and advice on digital technologies to their neighbours, family and friends, colleagues and customers. They are able to develop their skills and access training in mentoring, but they are not a formally organised cohort of specialists. Instead, the project uses informal connections and approaches to create a self sustaining "viral" model that ultimately aims to benefit every person in South Yorkshire. This method helps to tackle barriers to engagement such as confidence and relevancy issues.”²

Statistical Overview

- 442 people have signed on to the DOTs site since its inception.
- 167 of these registrations have been removed, due to drop outs or no real intention to participate. Therefore 275 DOTs are currently registered with the scheme.
- Of those registered, 216 (78.5%) were Trainees, 41 (15%) were Approved, and 18 (6.5%) were Accredited and Approved.

Support Package

The project set out to develop a training and accreditation model for digital mentoring. In the pilot stage, a comprehensive support package has been developed for DOTs comprising: a dedicated website, e-mentoring, an online forum for the community of DOTs, a DOT handbook, bite size ‘how-to’ guides, an approval system centring around a reflective diary, and accreditation. The support package is valued by most DOTs, who feel it has prepared them adequately for their role. Although many DOTs see the value of accreditation, the numbers opting to gain credits for their mentoring activity remain low.

¹ Commonly abbreviated to MITP

² Extract from Project Application to manage an innovative and transnational project part funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) 2011

Although one style of learning will never meet everyone's tastes, the e-mentoring support system and online forum are generally valued. The area of support which continues to draw criticism is the process of approval through the reflective diary. Reflection about learning is a high level skill. In teasing out what trainee DOTs have struggled with, it appears that the issue is not so much around reflection but around the mechanics of tagging the diaries to a set of competences. The staged process of approval, leading to accreditation was added in the pilot stage in response to safeguarding issues. There is scope to revisit and possibly simplify the approval process.

For some people who lack confidence in literacy skills, the introduction of face to face mentoring support has enabled them to operate successfully as DOTs. However it is doubtful whether people with low levels of literacy (below entry level 3) could take advantage of a purely online support package.

DOTs appear to have understood the bottom line message of mentoring: that the role is to build capacity and confidence in the people they support to carry out digital skills for themselves and take better advantage of the digital world. Overall the added value of the scheme is that it enables DOTs to feel part of a community supporting digital inclusion in South Yorkshire.

Lessons from other mentoring projects

The project has operated a hybrid model which seeks to work through trusted intermediaries and through individuals operating within a personal sphere recruiting family and friends. The emerging range of volunteer digital support models in this country and abroad, offers a perspective on the DOT approach. If the recruitment by DOTs is to focus on purely family and friends, then the approach developed is arguably over-elaborate. If the recruitment is to target the digitally excluded, then one could argue that the infrastructure is not sufficiently developed. For individuals supporting family and friends then the approval process could be simplified to enable more people to move beyond the trainee stage.

Effectiveness of DOT support

The scheme has attracted DOTs from a range of backgrounds, including non professional backgrounds; with diverse experiences of digital technology; and different levels of qualifications. In turn, the DOTs have effectively supported people from a range of backgrounds and with different levels of qualifications in developing their digital skills. It is estimated that a quarter of people supported are from digitally excluded groups i.e. those who are having their first experience of using the internet.

The most significant impact on the people DOTs supported (their mentees) was identified as an increase in skills and confidence in using digital

technology. There is evidence that some mentees are moving on to further learning.

Benefits to DOTs

The main reason for DOTs joining the scheme is to help others and share their skills. DOTs find participation in the scheme has improved their own knowledge and skills. A small but significant number say the scheme has improved their employability.

Effective Organisational Approaches

The DOT scheme has developed most effectively in organisations where there is:

- a clear articulation and understanding of the benefits of the DOT scheme for the partner organisation, potential participants, and the people they support;
- capacity to adapt the model to support client groups;
- a clear plan for implementation, with a designated lead responsibility, top level manager agreement, staff briefing, and capacity to promote the scheme within the scope of existing job roles. Word of mouth is critical to engaging prospective DOTs.

Roll Out

The project has recruited DOTs effectively within a core number of partners who are learning providers. It has struggled to engage other learning providers, mainly due to organisational change within those organisations . It has also struggled to extend the project to the private sector and elsewhere in the public sector. There is however a broad sense of ‘in principle’ support for the scheme with many organisations willing to learn about the project, support its general promotion and ‘test-out’ the level of interest from potential DOTs at their site. The organisations most willing to develop an embedded approach tend to be those in the voluntary sector or more supportive service contexts.

The first stage of the project has proved the DOTs model can work, but the difficulties in ‘industrialising’ the concept are clear. The project now needs to have a strategy for rolling out the project to ensure the ‘viral’ approach succeeds and becomes an effective strand of a strategy to address digital inclusion across South Yorkshire.

1. Background

The South Yorkshire project **Making IT Personal – Joining the DOTs** originally was to run for 27 months from June 2009 to August 2011. The project successfully applied for an extension for a further year to August 2012. This Evaluation Report focuses on progress to May 31st 2011.

The first interim evaluation report, October 2010, set out the issues facing the region in terms of digital exclusion, and the rationale behind the project's methodology and approach.

Since the conception of the DOTs scheme, the role of Digital Champions has been seized upon by the national campaign *Race online 2012*. These 'digital champions' are a broad church including scouts, employees of national retailers and individuals who choose to sign up on line and pledge to help others. DOTs sit firmly within this family of digital champions.

2. The DOT model

The DOTs scheme focuses on the role of informal learning in engaging people's interest in digital technologies, and developing self-esteem, confidence and capability. The intervention of the DOT may initiate a journey, from informal learning to engaging with more formal mixed-mode learning opportunities that could enable individuals to achieve a qualification for the first time. DOTs can reach people where they are and show them the relevance of ICT to their lives. DOTs therefore need to be embedded in the community and seek out what interests people. The project uses informal connections and approaches to create a self sustaining "viral" model that ultimately aims to benefit every person in South Yorkshire, though there is a focus on using DOTs to tackling barriers to digital inclusion which exist in the sub region. The essential components of the DOTs support scheme are set out in Annexe 1.

3. Scope of the evaluation and methods used

The focus of the evaluation is on identifying effective models of practice which support a viable and sustainable digital engagement scheme. It includes identifying the benefits of informal learning approaches. The full scope and methods adopted were fully laid out in the first interim report. The emphasis is on qualitative research. Methods have been adapted as the project has developed.

3.1 Key questions

At an early stage the evaluators agreed with partners the key questions which the DOT scheme sought to address. These questions were slightly adapted after the first evaluation. The four key questions are:

- Are DOTs effective in engaging people, including those who are digitally excluded?
- Is the informal learning approach via DOTs effective in supporting learner needs?
- Have we got the right training and support approach/package for DOTs?
- What are good practice models?

3.2 Key methods informing this report

- Transnational case studies and comparisons
- Statistical update regarding DOTs
- A survey of DOTs
- DOT case studies
- Indicative learner case studies
- Organisational case studies
- Analysis of DOT forum postings

4. A transnational perspective

The early Literature Review of European digital outreach projects³ indicated there were few similar projects to MITP in Europe. More recently we sought through current European contacts, to locate projects which matched closely to the MITP model. This did not prove to be possible. A leader of one of Germany's leading Digital Inclusion NGOs offered this reaction.

..”despite our wide knowledge of this area of work in Germany we have not identified any projects which are directly comparable with ...MITP.”

Jutta Croll – Managing Director Stiftung Digitale Chancen⁴

Nevertheless, MITP has sought to learn from practice in Europe and in consequence, we have identified projects which deploy volunteers in some way to

³ Completed by SERO in the early stages of the project

⁴ <http://www.digitale-chancen.de/>

give people guidance, support and in some cases teaching, for their early steps into the online world. The examples are varied but a key common factor is that their area adapted to both their specific target groups and the traditions of volunteering and voluntary structures in their own countries.

We know that volunteering comes in many forms. This transnational review has illustrated well the variety in volunteers' ages, skills and available time. It also shows how projects vary in the level of training support and direction provided.

We have seen that volunteers take on a range of roles which include:

- Preparing and distributing publicity
- Informal outreach worker
- Teacher role with a group
- 1:1 support / mentor

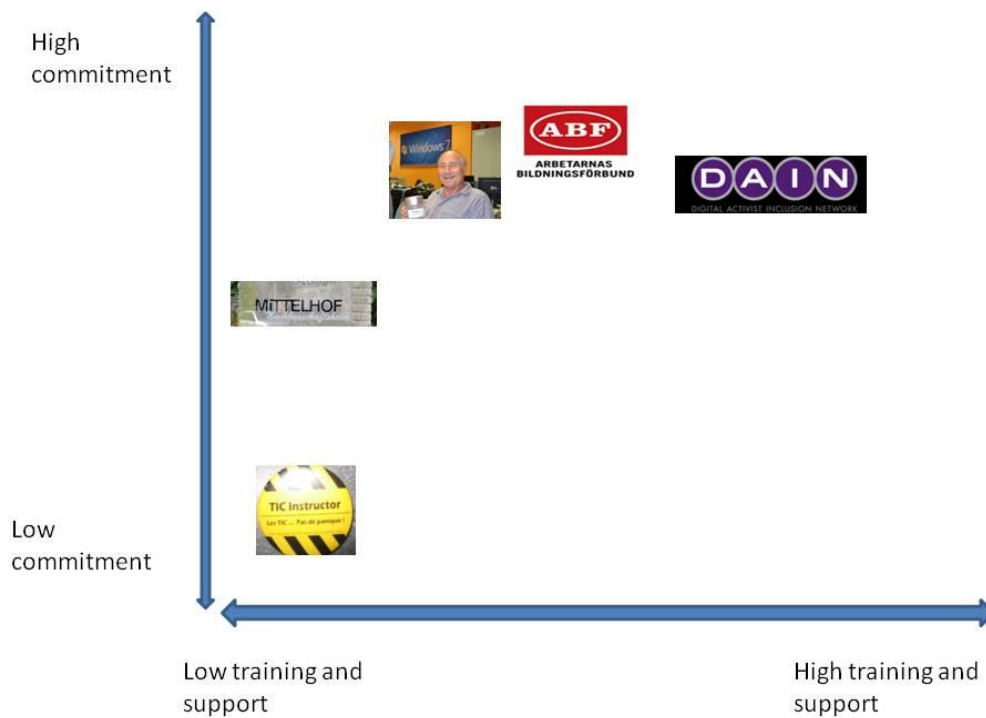
Most of the volunteers that we identified are working within the structure of a centre of some sort. However, two examples, *TIC Trainer* (Belgium) and *Inklusiv Internet* (Germany) offered preparation for independent informal engagement and thus present closest parallels with the way that DOTs operate. Of these two projects the TIC trainer programme collects no data of engagement and impact and with Inklusiv Internet there is a little more monitoring as most participants are in effect offering 'voluntary value added' to their existing roles. There is confident belief that this informal engagement is effective but the very nature of this style of volunteering makes measurement of impact very difficult to assess.

In the projects which we examined the level of training and support tended to rise with levels of commitment demanded of volunteers. A separate transnational report⁵ provides detail of European projects visited. We found the projects most effective at reaching the most excluded groups (DAIN and ABF)⁶ also offered the most significant training and support and set highest commitment requirements for volunteers. This can be diagrammatically represented, as follows:

⁵ DOTs On the Horizon; MITP Transnational Report; NIACE July 2011

⁶ Details of projects are included in the above report.

Figure 1⁷



In examining practice models it is very clear that each project we examined had a different and specific target group and operated within their own local cultural setting.

However common elements of good practice which benefit end users can be identified:

- There remains an attraction to learning from 'someone just like me'⁸
- Users appear to welcome a choice of ways to gain skills
- Meeting wider needs of 'clients' played a key role (social activities in the case of older people, food in the case of homeless drug users)
- Embedding digital skills in other activities can be very effective.

Elements of good practice with volunteers include:

- Methods of recognising and celebrating volunteer achievement are an important part of the 'contract'.

⁷ Source: 'DOTS on the horizon' (Adding a transnational perspective to the evaluation of MITP –Joining the DOTs) NIACE August 2011

⁸ The intergenerational example and TIC trainer were exceptions to this and required clearer boundaries.

- In order to reach most excluded groups higher levels of support and training and direction are needed even when the volunteers are from the target group themselves.
- Volunteers value opportunities to share practice and seek peer support
- Volunteers with IT skills are motivated by opportunities to share them with others.

5. Statistical update

The following data summarises progress in recruiting DOTS, to May 31st 2011:

- 442 people in total have signed on to the site since the start of the scheme.
- 167 of these have been removed from the register, as they had dropped out of the scheme or they had registered without any real intent to take part.
- 275 DOTs are currently registered.
- Of those registered, 216 (78.5%) were Trainees, 41 (15%) were Approved, and 18 (6.5%) were Accredited and Approved.
- 101 (37%) of those currently registered had not visited the DOT moodle in the five month period between January 1st to May 31st2011. Of those DOTs who could be considered 'active', in the sense of participating in the online moodle, 36 (21%) were approved and 13 (7.5%) were accredited and approved.

Chart 1

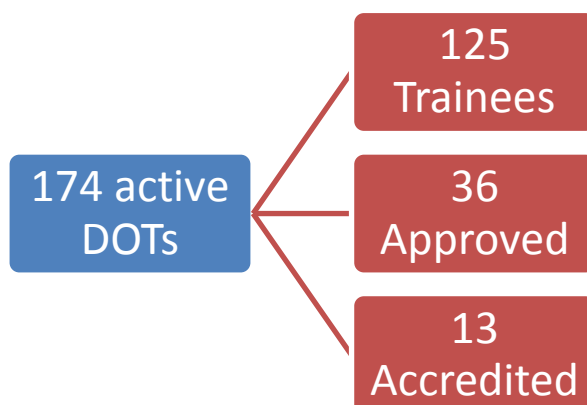


Table 1

Where people heard about the scheme and DOT status (May 31st 2011)*						
	Total	Active	Inactive	Approved	Accredited	Trainee
Learning provider	135	77	58	17	4	114
Friends	32	20	12	3	2	27
Employer	32	24	8	8	3	21
Online	10	9	1	1	1	8
Publicity	14	12	2	1	0	13
Not known	52	32	20	11	8	21
Totals	275	174	101	41	18	216

*

Learning Provider: including colleges, schools, community based learning centres, and Learndirect centres.

Friends: including friends, family members, named people.

Employer: this includes partner organisations, and staff in participating local authorities.

Online: e.g. Twitter, college websites, internet searches.

Publicity: including leaflets and flyers, posters, mail shots.

This data shows that in the first stage of the project, the scheme has been successful in recruiting DOTs within some learning providers. It has had more limited success in recruiting outside of the core partners. There are high numbers of DOTs who could be considered 'inactive' (just over a third of those registered). These DOTs may still be carrying out digital support activities but they are not participating in the online community. Whilst it is known that more DOTs have gained accredited status since May 31st, the numbers opting for accreditation remain low.

6. Survey of DOTs

An online survey was sent to all DOTs who had registered since the start of the scheme up to May 31st 2011. 52 responses were received. This represents a response rate of:

- 12 % of all people who been in contact with the website or
- 19% of those currently registered

A wealth of information was collected about DOTs through the survey. The key elements are tabled here. A separate report is available with full details.

6.1 Background of DOTs

There is an indication from the survey that the scheme has recruited DOTs from a range of backgrounds including non professional backgrounds and with diverse experiences of digital technology.

Although the data returns are not robust enough to supply strong evidence on this question, of those responding, almost half of DOTs have degrees or similar qualification levels, and there is a spread of people, with different educational backgrounds and qualification levels (See table 2). 72% of respondents said they held some kind of qualification in digital technology. 28% did not have a qualification in digital technology.

Table 2

Highest qualification of DOTs	Number of respondents
No quals	0
Level 1	4
Level 2	9
Level 3	4
Level 4+	15
Blank	20
<i>Total</i>	<i>52</i>

One third of respondents said they had not been involved in mentoring or teaching someone before becoming a DOT.

Almost a quarter of respondents said they felt quite unconfident or very unconfident in using digital technology before becoming a DOT. Interestingly, a majority (69%) of those DOTs with lower qualifications were quite confident or very confident in using digital technology before becoming a DOT.

Table 3

Confidence in using digital technology before becoming a DOT	Number of respondents
Very unconfident	1
Quite unconfident	8
Quite confident	26
Very confident	11
Blank	6
<i>Total</i>	52

All DOTs who responded had access to the internet. DOTs had less access to portable devices such as i-pads, and e-readers.

20% of DOTs were from Black, Asian or other ethnic backgrounds, a higher percentage than the South Yorkshire average. 54% of DOT respondents were employed full time; 13% were unemployed and a further 33% were working part time or were working in a parent/carer role or involved in other voluntary activities. There was a spread of ages of DOTs with the most frequent (mode) age group being 46-55. There were more women than men in the sample of respondents.

6.2 Reason for becoming a DOT

The major reason why people became a DOT was to help others. This was the case for those with lower qualifications as well as those with higher qualifications.

Table 4

Why did you decide to become a DOT?	Number of respondents
To help others	36
To share my skills	36
To improve my skills	32
To improve my employability	18
To get me out of the house	3
Other	5
<i>Total</i>	<i>130*</i>

6.3 Impact of being a DOT

The greatest impacts on the DOTs appear to be increased confidence in their skills; the development of new skills and increased motivation to learn more. Alongside this a smaller but significant number of DOTs thought that participation had improved their job prospects and enabled them to feel more positive. DOTs were less likely to agree that being a DOT motivated them to sign up for a further course of study or to look for work.

Table 5

What difference do you think being a DOT has made to you?	Number of respondents
It has increased my confidence in my own skills	28
It has helped me develop new skills	26
It has made me want to learn more	22
It has made me feel more positive	19
It has increased my confidence socially (in interactions with others)	14
It has helped to improve my employment prospects	14
It has helped me to get more involved in the community	11
It has made me sign up to a further course of learning	7
It has motivated me to look for work (paid or voluntary)	4
It has helped me get a voluntary job	2
It has helped me get a paid job	1
Other	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>149*</i>

*Total exceeds 52 as respondents were asked to consider each statement.

6.4 Reasons for dropping out

27% of survey respondents indicated they were no longer active in the scheme. The main reason they gave for no longer participating was lack of time (50%)

6.5 Support received

Survey respondents indicated satisfaction with the support provided.

Table 6

Satisfaction with support provided to DOTs		
Question	Yes %	Number*
<i>Was the support you received from the DOT scheme enough to prepare you to be a DOT?</i>	100	36
<i>Did you use any of the materials from the DOT website?</i>	66.6	24
<i>Did you post to any of the online forums?</i>	72	26
<i>Were the materials on the DOT website useful to you?</i>	86	31

Of the small number of DOTs indicating they would like more support the following responses were received:

Table 7

Other support required	Number of respondents
More information about the scheme	3
More feedback from e-mentor	2
More information about the support available	1
More technical support	1
Quicker response from e-mentor	1
More support from e-mentor	1
<i>Total</i>	9

The main reason for DOTs not valuing the support package was that they felt there was little added value:

'In a way I feel the DOT scheme is a bit self-congratulatory. I don't know how this would help me in the wider workplace as not many people will understand what the scheme is about if they have not heard of it. It is very nice to get certificates and things like that but not sure how much use it is.'

However this was a minority view. Others felt the scheme was of real value:

'I have enjoyed the scheme and my mentor was very encouraging, supportive and motivating.'

'I think this is an excellent scheme that helps others to learn on line in their own time. It also helps DOTs to improve their skills and has an excellent support system in place.'

6.6 People supported

A total of 1256 people were supported by the 48 DOTs who provided estimates. There is considerable variation in numbers supported by individual DOTs. Just over a half of the DOTs supported 10 people or less. This would be an expected pattern if DOTs are mainly supporting family and friends. A substantial number of DOTs supported significant numbers of people (i.e. over 100). It is likely, given the evidence from the case studies, that often these DOTs were in work roles that enabled them to support people in developing their digital skills.

A total of 324 learners were having their first experience of learning to use the internet, as indicated by the 35 DOTs who supplied numbers. This is estimated as a quarter of people supported, and shows DOTs are reaching out to people who are digitally excluded.

However some DOTs felt that more could possibly be done to reach out to those who were not confident in their digital skills. A number of responses suggested that DOTs could be deployed more effectively working in local community centres or libraries:

'Due to the fact that all my work colleagues and most friends are computer literate, I feel that there are a limited number of individuals that need my help with digital technology. Therefore, it would be of much help if the DOTs could be involved in helping others like in local libraries or community centres.'

'I think it would be good if there were more centres where people could go to get the one to one help that they can access through a DOT.'

DOTs identified the impact on the people they supported. The most common benefit to mentees was identified as an increase in confidence in using digital technology. A fifth of DOTs reported that their support had encouraged some of their mentees to go on to further learning.

Table 8

What difference do you think the programme has made to your learners?	Number of respondents
It has increased their confidence in using technology	28
It has helped them to learn skills they hadn't expected to learn	25
It has made them want to learn more	21
It has increased their confidence generally	21
It has made them feel more positive	19
The skills they learned have helped to improve their employment prospects	12
It has made them sign up to a further course of learning	10
It has helped them to get more involved in the community	9
It has motivated them to look for work (paid or voluntary)	6
Other	3
It has helped them get voluntary jobs	1
It has helped them get paid jobs	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>156*</i>

*Total exceeds 52 as respondents were asked to consider each statement.

The informal nature of the project is reflected in the feedback from DOTs that almost half of the sample responding to the survey did not keep records of what the DOTs were learning.

Table 9

Did you keep records of what your learners were learning?	Number of respondents
Yes – often	7
Yes – sometimes	10
No	15
<i>Total</i>	32

Despite this, DOTs identified the range of ways in which they were supporting people to develop their digital skills:

Table 10

Help given to learners	Number of respondents
Help finding information online	31
Help using a computer (i.e. the basics of turning it on, moving between files, saving documents, etc.)	28
Help using a particular device	24
Help using particular software	22
Help to upload content online (e.g. uploading videos, uploading photographs)	20
Help using social media	17
Help to develop multimedia content/materials (e.g. editing videos, editing photos)	14
Help using civic online services	8
Other	3
<i>Total</i>	137*

*Respondents could provide multiple answers.

Respondents were asked about how they supported learners. The most common amount of time spent on being a DOT was 6 hours a month. Many were developing custom made support materials for their learners. This is also confirmed through some of the case study evidence.

Table 11

<i>Did you develop any materials yourself, to support your learner(s)?</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Yes – often	5
Yes – sometimes	13
No	13
<i>Total</i>	31

It is clear that, from the DOT point of view, the informal support they were offering met the needs of their learners.

Table 12

<i>Did you feel the support you offered met the needs of your learners?</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Yes – often	26
Yes – sometimes	6
No	0
<i>Total</i>	32

The main reason that DOTs gave for being unable to help people was lack of knowledge of programmes or software. Lack of time and being asked to do something illegal were also barriers, but these were rare incidents. The responses from DOTs largely indicated when they were unable to help, they usually found someone else who could help or they offered an alternative solution.

‘On a few occasions people have asked for help with programmes that they know I use, without realising that I am not very familiar with the

programmes myself, or with programmes that I haven't used - in these cases I generally advised them to search for help online or directed them to other people who I thought could help.'

'... a friend wanted help to build a website, this was out of my range of skills, but pointed her in the right direction of someone who could.'

'I have ... been asked to 'fix' computers when they have crashed or come up with error messages and had to explain that this was beyond my capability and should be reported to work IT helpdesks.'

6.7 Overview

In short, the responses from DOTs completing the survey when taken together with the analysis from the DOT forum postings (see section 7 below) indicate that an effective online network of support has developed for the DOTs. In many cases, DOTs may have provided digital advice without the operation of the DOTs scheme. But DOTs generally felt the scheme added value: it provided an online community of like minded people and gave recognised status to their mentoring activity. The scheme provided training in mentoring so that DOTs recognised that it was important to support people's confidence rather than 'just doing it for people', and gave them access to a range of materials and contacts to develop their own understanding.

'I think the scheme helps many people gain a qualification for the first time and is very useful for job search.'

'A very worthwhile course and it's great to be offered training for free but also to be able to help people formally with IT skills'

'I have become more aware and confident of my own abilities and knowledge. I do not have any teaching qualifications or many ICT qualifications and had to learn through training, through being advised by others, i.e. experience and my own logic about how a thing should work. Also, because I am coming from a position of knowing nothing myself, I can relate to people who have to make that same journey and don't talk down to them because they have not yet caught up. This scheme has made me feel that I am contributing to making a difference to other people's lives.'

'I thoroughly enjoyed working on the scheme, and I believe the people who received my help certainly gained a great deal from it also.'

7. Analysis of forum postings

As part of the evaluation, forum postings by DOTs were analysed for the third time at the beginning of June 2011. This showed the DOT forum had become more active in the five month period since the previous analysis. The forum is now used on a daily basis by a significant number of DOTs.

As a percentage of their number, Approved and Accredited DOTs are more likely to get involved in discussions. The cause of the relatively small number of Trainees making posts may be that they are new to the role and may lack some confidence. While a significant number of posts are made by a relatively small group of DOTs, they do not give the impression of 'dominating' the space. The forum appears to be welcoming and supportive, and is a good resource with support and guidance available on a range of issues and topics.

The 568 posts made during the last 6 month analysis period were provided by 71 different DOTs. This represents 41% of 'active' DOTs, and 26% of all registered DOTs.

- Trainees provided 29.5% of posts.
- Accredited DOTs provided 31.5% of posts.
- Approved DOTs provided 39% of posts.

The average number of posts made by each type of DOT was:

- Trainee: 4.6 (median = 11; 89 Active Trainees made no posts at all);
- Accredited: 16 (median = 19; 2 Active Accredited DOTs made no posts at all);
- Approved: 9.25 (median = 22; 12 Approved DOTs made no posts at all).

A caveat to these averages is that some DOTs are much more active than others, for example of the 24 Approved DOTs who posted to the forum, thirteen of them made 10 or more posts, the rest made between 1 and 6 posts. Similarly, among trainees six were far more active than others in making 10 or more posts each. Among the Accredited DOTs, 64% made 15 or more posts.

Chart 2

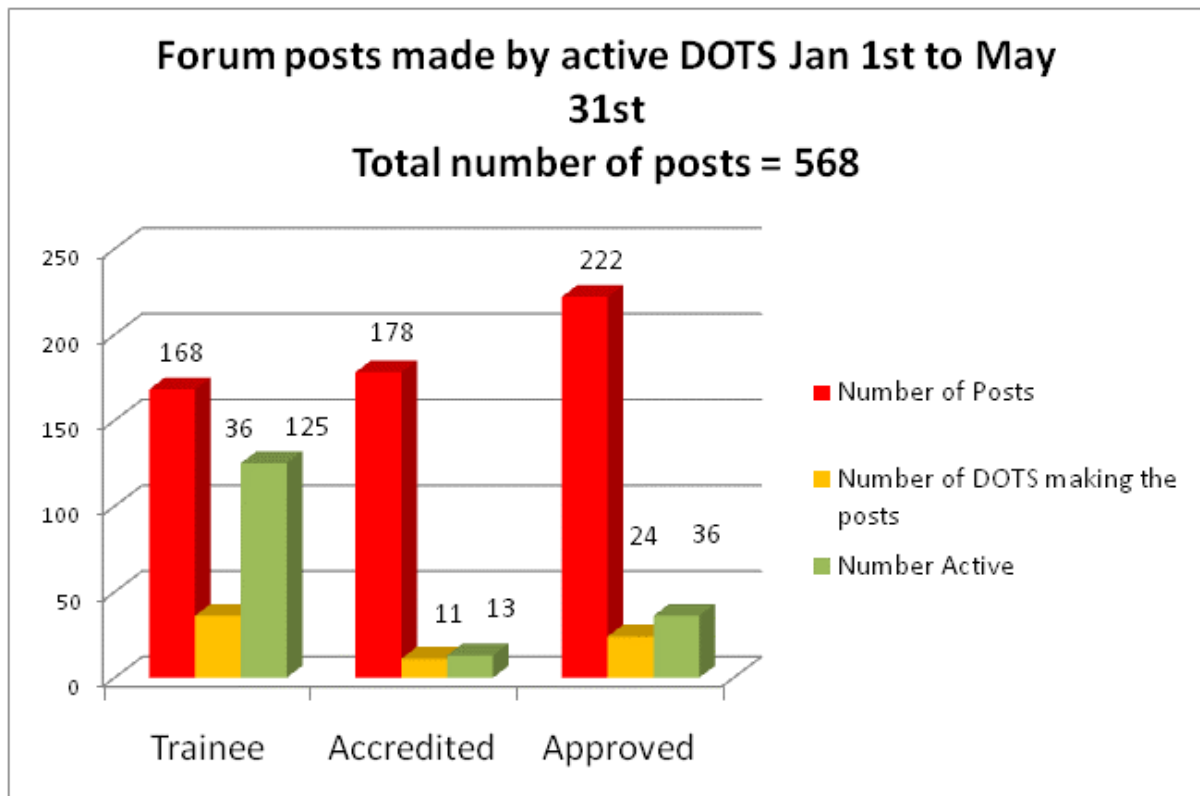
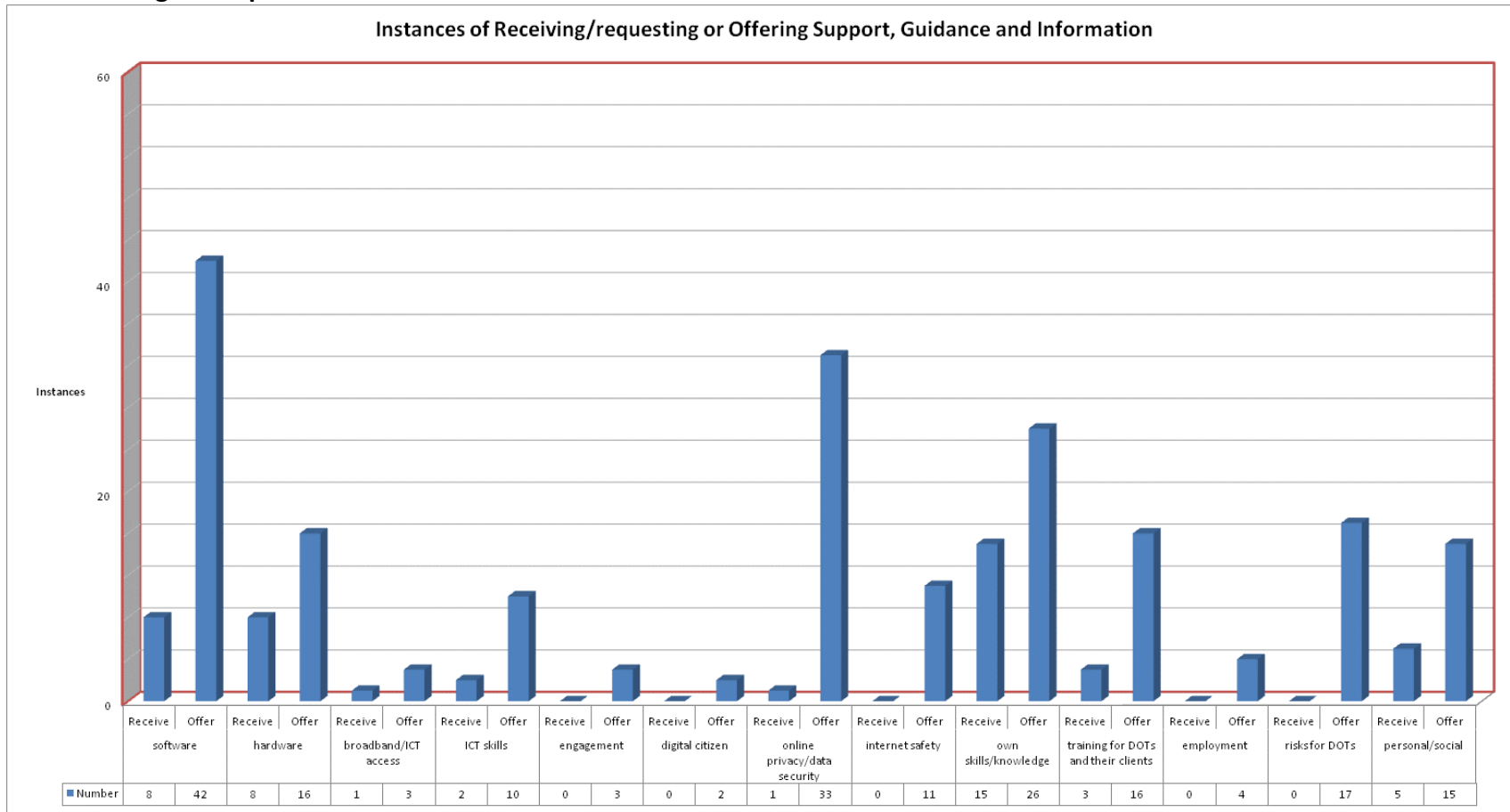


Chart 3: Categorised posts



Postings involved a wide range of subjects as indicated in Figure 4. The most number of postings were around software⁹; online privacy/security; exchange of skills and knowledge; and risk to DOTs. For example, there was a long discussion around the topic of online security and data protection, prompted by news stories regarding the loss of data, and 'identity theft'.

Requests for support and guidance are usually met with multiple responses. There were no examples of a request for support or guidance going unanswered.

DOTs are more likely to start a new conversation with an offer of support or guidance, than they are with a request for support or guidance. The offer is usually in the form of describing a new piece of software, hardware or an application that they have found, or an interesting function or use for one they already use.

DOTs are using the forum for support and guidance. Requests are a mix of asking for technical help e.g. 'how do I ...' or writing about something and asking for the thoughts of others, e.g. 'what do people think of Google as a search engine?'

There are a large number of posts welcoming new DOTs and congratulating DOTs on achieving Approved or Accredited status. While these could be seen as offering support, the analysis concentrated on offers of practical support for particular problems or issues. Had the welcoming or congratulatory posts been included, the number of 'offering social/personal support' posts would have risen from 15 to 263.

8. DOT case studies

8.1 Background of DOT case studies

Case studies were obtained from 15 DOTs, through face to face interviews. Case studies were selected with a view to identifying people from a range of backgrounds and DOT status. Annexe 2 gives a summary of the backgrounds of DOTs interviewed. The sample chosen broadly reflects the DOT cohort information gained from the survey. The case studies had a balance of male to female. Five case studies were in the age range between 16-25, while the others were in the range 25-55. Four DOT case studies were people from black or minority ethnic groups. Five of the case studies had been educated to degree level: some had few qualifications. Two of the case studies had worked previously in digital industries: others were totally self-taught in terms of ICT skills.

Some people were incorporating the DOT role into their existing paid or voluntary job, while others carried out DOT functions with family, friends, neighbours, fellow

⁹ For the purpose of this analysis 'Software' included discussions about web-based applications such as social bookmarking, 'cloud' based file sharing and social networking

students, and workmates in an individual capacity. All those who had come to the DOT role through their work also helped family and friends. Although it is not possible from this sample to extrapolate the numbers of DOTs who are operating in a work context, it is clear that there is a significant number of DOTs who have access to digitally excluded individuals in their work and who could be deemed to be operating as 'trusted intermediaries' often working in a voluntary organisation, public service, or within a learning provider. These DOTs included a librarian, learning support worker, volunteers in learning centres, youth workers, an officer in a sheltered housing organisation, and a mental health support worker.

DOTs who were not primarily operating as part of their work role included a full time parent; a part time parent with a part time paid job, two students on Level 2/3 media courses, two students on e-communications courses one of whom was also in paid employment with an IT company.

8.2 Why do people want to become DOTs?

The case studies confirmed the survey evidence that there are two main reasons for people becoming DOTs. First, people like the idea of helping other people or sharing their knowledge.

'I love learning and I love teaching people what I know I just love to pass it on. I really do.'

'I am one of those people that people generally do come and ask for help, so I think this sort of thing for me- it is a natural thing for me to do because I am a being asked person.'

Second, people recognise the value that participation in the scheme gives to their existing skills. They acknowledge the value which accreditation could bring or they see how participation could enhance their CV and help career progression.

In addition, those who have come to the scheme through their work as intermediaries see the relevance of the scheme to their client group or current voluntary activity:

'..obviously our job is supporting people to be as independent as possible for as long as possible and I know personally how helpful the internet is ...and I know that there is a lot that you can do online that people with disabilities would be able to do, so I just saw it as an opportunity really through my work place –... I'd be able to pass my learning on so that they could understand it and you know better themselves.'

8.3 Who are the DOTs supporting?

DOTs are helping a wide range of learners. In general, those people who were incorporating the DOT role into their work were reaching or had potential to reach significant numbers of learners. Some of these DOTs indicated they had supported 'hundreds' of people. So for example, the librarian estimated she helped between 40-70 people a day in digital skills. The DOT in a voluntary organisation also had supported 50-100 people over a period of nine months. Those working in an individual capacity in general tended to support fewer people depending on their personal circumstances: often around 5-10 people. Some people supported the same family and friends repeatedly, while one DOT said the help he offered was mainly one-offs rather than ongoing mentoring over a period of time. There were exceptions. One of the younger i-media students indicated he had helped more people than he could count!

One of the key questions which this evaluation sought to ask was whether DOTs were reaching out to digitally excluded people. Often those acting as intermediaries had the potential to reach out to significant numbers of digitally excluded: older people, those with mental health issues, second language speakers who had not used a computer before. However, many of those in intermediary roles also worked with people from a broad range of backgrounds. One DOT supporting people in a learning centre supported people with degrees and high level digital skills as well as people who had never touched a computer before. The important aspect of DOTting was that it wasn't a ghettoised support only for people in need.

Most of the DOTs acting in an individual capacity supported people with a range of digital skills. They reported offering a range of support: using Skype, saving digital images, downloading a visa application form, using spreadsheets at work. The potential scope is as large as the interests of people needing help and DOTs offer a flexible method of responding.

Some of the people supported were at a beginning stage of digital awareness. For example, they did not have a computer or know how to use a key board: although these were exceptions rather than commonplace. Many of the DOTs said they were supporting older relatives or clients who were not confident about using IT. Some supported people who lacked confidence with literacy skills:

'It's rare that people can't read at all. But if this is an issue we can show them what they can do where they don't need to read, such as chess or games. We have games nights and embroidery nights and people see where computers can help.'

Part of the rationale behind employing DOTs to reach digitally excluded groups is that learners may feel more relaxed learning with people from similar backgrounds to themselves. In terms of age range this theory does not appear to hold for the DOT case studies. Many reported supporting all age ranges. Neither does gender appear

important. Although affinity in terms of class and ethnicity have not really been tested in the case studies, it may be possible to suggest that what is important is that people trust the people they ask for help.

8.4 Support offered by DOTs

DOTs identified the value of an informal learning approach, to people who want to learn outside the formality or structure of a classroom. This may be particularly useful for learners who already have skills but want support on particular issues and don't want to follow a full course of study.

DOTs also described how they were asked for support by people who were just putting their toe in the water of learning digital skills and didn't want as yet to commit to more formal learning. To encourage them, DOTs tended to demonstrate aspects of IT that linked to people's interest such as shopping, or card games, ways of contacting family and friends who lived abroad.

DOTs were able to offer 'just in time learning' i.e. at the moment it was of use to the people they supported. This has clear advantages for some over having to wait to learn until they can enrol on a course.

DOTs said that many people they supported enjoyed the lack of pressure to get qualifications; and the lack of bureaucracy in college enrolment.

Some of the people supported were not in a position to attend formal classes: they may have children to care for and classes may not be offered at suitable times; or they may have support needs which some classes were not able to cater for.

DOTs mainly knew the learners they supported but occasionally were contacted by friends of friends or occasionally on-line.

Many DOTs felt they were by and large responding to people who approached them with a specific query.

'I talk to other mums in the playground and I offer help when things come up in the conversation.'

'When things go wrong or don't work – people come to me.'

Others told how they encouraged an interest in IT when people may not otherwise have thought about digital solutions for their issues.

'My neighbour wanted to take out insurance face to face but I persuaded her to have a go at doing it on-line. She was nervous about things going wrong and paying on line but I showed her how to look for the best deal on line and tried to reassure her that it was OK.'

'People come and say I want to exercise, but none of the activities that are on at the moment interest me – I'm interested in golf or say boxing or something and I'd say like "Oh Wii does that so let's get the Wii out and yeah I know you don't know how to use it but you'll get used to it !" ... Or you know that someone can't get to Meadowhall and they love Marks & Spencer's clothes and we were like well let's have a look, shop onlinethere's been lots of different examples but it's usually cos they have identified an obstacle and IT has just been a good answer to overcome it'.

Although the backgrounds between DOTs and the people they support may be different, it appears important that DOTs adopt a friendly attitude on a level with people:

'I just try and be me you know cos sometimes you'll see people and they're like 'oh I don't want to click on this cos I'll break it' and I'll sit down with them, I'll sit next to them I'll not like stand over them and say 'right well do this' – I'll sit on a level with them and I'll have a chat with them and I'll say 'right what is it that you are trying to do?'

'..because I'm the youngest in our team they see me as having a bit of a can do attitude and not being afraid of IT so, people ask me more questions about IT and then I might not necessarily know the answer – it might be somebody's phone, like the amount of people that get new phones in my team and say 'can you help me set up this?' 'How do I do this?' So I'll have a play around and then I'll learn something new myself really it's not that I necessarily know how to do it but I'll have a play around.'

DOTs demonstrated an understanding of the need to vary the pace of their support depending on who they were supporting and showed how they checked that the people they were supporting were learning and made sure they weren't just doing things for people.

'I find that what works best is demonstrating how things work once then get the person I am supporting to do it themselves, with me there. Then I repeat it as many times as need be so they can do it themselves without me telling them. If I'm not sure someone is fully confident, I will show them again and get them to demonstrate it next time I see them.'

'The whole point of DOTs is to (support people to) develop an ability online themselves.'

Some of the DOTs developed extra support materials such as prompt sheets or aide memoires.

In some cases DOTs found they couldn't help. Typically this was when people may be looking for someone to do things for them, or perhaps requesting something illegal or if there were concerns over copyright infringement (such as downloading

music). Or there may be concerns over damages liability. For example one DOT was asked to set up a TV system but the DOT felt he couldn't help as he was concerned about the implications if something went wrong and the equipment was damaged as a result. Sometimes when DOTs don't know the answer they can find someone else to help – perhaps through the DOT forum or find the answer on line.

'I have referred people on to a library for more information or a manual; or a course if they want something more formal or CV writing. That isn't something I would help them with.'

DOTs reported lots of example of how people they had supported had developed their skills.

'One chap first said he wanted internet access to communicate with his girlfriend. Now he regularly builds and fixes computers. He has an organised mind. He started off here just by looking rather than getting involved. He looked over people's shoulders, saw the kind of things that were possible and then developed confidence to try them and picked things up from there.'

There is some evidence of progression. People approach DOTs to learn a specific skill and then go on to develop other skills and even go on to formal courses. For example, the neighbour of one DOT used a computer at work for emails, but couldn't do a lot else. He didn't have a computer at home, but wanted to learn more. The DOT helped him to research the kinds of computer he could buy, and find one at a reasonable price that suited his needs. The DOT also helped the neighbour to decide what computer course to go on. He did this by showing him on the internet what courses were available, and helping him to complete a questionnaire to determine what his learning needs were. As a result, the neighbour is now able to use the computer himself, including software such as PowerPoint which he had not used before.

8.5 Training and support for DOTs

Although there was some criticism of the support packages, overall DOTs felt the support offered had enabled them to understand the key point that mentoring is about enabling people to learn and do things for themselves.

The most positive elements of the support package were the e-mentors, mutual support through the online forums, and access to the 'how to' guides.

Although some DOTs identified the value of the reflective diaries especially as a tool for achieving accreditation, this was the single most criticised element of the support package. Reflection is indeed a high level skill but many also struggled with the writing skills needed for completing the diaries. Some DOTs reported preferring to keep a video or audio diary. This applied to one DOT who reported having dyslexia.

Other DOTs felt that the tagging idea of the diary was so complicated they didn't in fact make any diary entries. They did not want to devote the time or did not have the time to devote to working out how to do the diary entry. Despite the fact they affirmed the e-mentor helped address their queries they still appeared to find this a difficult process. This DOT had a degree and was therefore reasonably familiar with the concept of meeting criteria to gain accreditation and educational language. It may therefore be the criteria themselves that were sometimes unclear to the DOTs.

Nevertheless a number of DOTs found the diaries useful. For some the diary acted as testimony to the skills they had developed and thereby boosted their confidence.

8.5.1 E-mentors

Most DOTs felt their e-mentors had provided positive encouragements and good role models.

'The support I have had from my e-mentor has been faultless.'

There were some exceptions. There does not appear to be a way for DOTs to raise issues about their e-mentors when difficulties arise. If there is a way, DOTs do not appear to know about it. One DOT said,

'I would change my e-mentor if I knew how.'

It appeared that when some DOTs were losing interest or when they were experiencing difficulties, this hadn't been addressed by their e-mentor. So for example, one of the DOTs said they had lost enthusiasm mid way into their engagement with the scheme. This was picked up by a third party who wasn't an e-mentor. They pointed them in the direction of the handbook to answer their queries and this was enough to re-engage the DOT who then went on to gain approval status. This really appeared properly to have been something the e-mentor could have addressed.

One DOT reported having started with the scheme and then perhaps from pressure of work they didn't engage and then finally had forgotten what the main aim of the scheme was about. This DOT reported a negative view of his e-mentor.

8.5.2 Forum posts

Most of the DOTs in the case studies found the forum a useful source of information, including links to other websites.

Two of the DOTs had not engaged with the forum posts. Both could see the value, but one didn't feel she didn't have time to be part of that particular community. She felt it was of value to keep getting the posts even if she didn't read them to remind her that the community was in existence. Another felt although they hadn't used the forum to date, they would post to the forum if they needed to find out something they didn't know in the future.

There were a number of DOTs who expressed mixed re-actions to the forum:

'You can get overwhelmed by the number of postings. Maybe a better solution would be to have a separate social thread so you could disengage from the welcome and introductions. I have learned some things from the threads on the forum e.g. about kids on facebook.'

8.5.3 Online materials

The majority of DOTs interviewed for the case studies do not regularly use the 'how to' guides. A number looked at them in the early days of being a DOT but no longer use them. One DOT felt he didn't need to use the materials on the MITP website, as he is already confident with the technology, however, he would point his learners in the direction of these resources if he ever felt they might be useful to them. One DOT found some of them useful:

'I downloaded all the 'How To' guides. I have looked at some I thought were useful. These are mainly the short ones. I haven't really looked at those that are very substantial. I haven't used them to help others but they are there if I need them. I haven't developed any myself but that would be a nice idea – to be able to contribute some.'

Only one DOT interviewed referred to the handbook as a valuable tool. She found the handbook was very helpful and gave her 'all the information she needed about what was expected of her.'

8.5.4 Approval and accreditation

Although accreditation was identified by DOTs as a potential benefit of the scheme, in practice few of them had proceeded to the accreditation stage. Indeed some had remained as trainees a considerable time after having started as DOTs. The barrier was either the mechanics of the diaries; or pressure of time meaning that becoming an approved DOT didn't maintain a high priority. Some DOTs were happy enough to continue as a member of the DOT community without approval status. Others because of pressure of time did not continue to accreditation once they had reached approval status.

'I don't think I'll be going for accreditation; I haven't got time but for me it's more aboutwhat I will have learnt in terms of how to pass the information on.'

'I think accreditation is just a general thing and if you are into learning in this day and age you need skills for everything to get jobs don't you? So I think the more you can add to your CV the better so I do think the accreditation could be useful for some.'

'It wasn't a put off that it (the accreditation) wasn't really highly regarded – it didn't put me off anyway.'

8.5.5 Website

There were mixed responses to the website:

'I think it was a bit too formal, a bit too kind of 'worky'. I mean it didn't look young person friendly to be honest.'

'I found the website generally ok – quite easy to navigate around – you could see the tutorial section, the forum section so – I thought it had a lot to offer.'

One of the DOTs felt that online learning wasn't the best route for them and that they had come to realise that they preferred face to face support.

One DOT confirmed that due to time pressures she had not fully engaged with the DOTs website and the support/ resources on offer. However she still felt that she was a DOT despite not logging on to the moodle.

8.5.6 Informality

Many DOTs found the informality of the support package of value, especially that it could fit into their existing work or social patterns. However two people felt they would have preferred something more structured. They suggested the less formal approach of the DOTs scheme meant that when faced with time pressures it simply slides down the order of priorities:

'because I've not got a milestone to hit .. it doesn't matter if I push it (the DOT scheme) back cos I've not got a target date... for me because I need to prioritise things all the time ... I've not got a deadline for that so I can put it behind.'

This DOT felt it would have been helpful to have more formalised 'DOT sessions' where DOTs checked-in every so often and there was more opportunity to meet up. She would have preferred something more labour-intensive than the DOTs scheme is currently devised to facilitate.

8.5.7 Front loaded support

Support from e-mentors is available up to the accreditation stage. The overall statistics relating to DOT registration and activity hint that DOT activity may reduce beyond the approval and accreditation stage. However, of the six approved DOTs in

this sample, only one suggested that his involvement had dipped since the approval stage. He had partly signed up to being a DOT while on the e-communication course and felt that since he had been busy at work he had not had time to do much of significance on the DOT activity. Future evaluation may wish to test whether the front loading of support for DOTs leads to a drop in DOT activity beyond approval/accreditation.

8.6 Benefits to DOTs

Many DOTs said they learnt new digital skills themselves through supporting other people and finding out for them how to do things. Others already confident in IT said they had learnt not so much new digital skills but a range of other skills such as teaching, mentoring, communicating ideas effectively, organising themselves, timekeeping and managing deadlines.'

Some felt their job skills had improved. This was particularly the case for the young people who had developed their skills in working with people. They felt their employability had improved. Some had directly seen their job prospects increase.

'I was recently showing someone how to do something in the local Apple store, and a member of staff saw, and suggested that I apply for a job there! So now I'm working on my application.'

Another DOT had been offered a teaching support job, having obtained the DOT qualification, and was told at interview that the qualification was a factor in her successful application for the post.

A number of DOTs had enrolled on further courses e.g. effective e-mentoring.

Being a DOT had enabled some to clarify their future job paths. One DOT had realised they liked the technical side of media- hands on activities, taking computers apart and putting them back together again, and programming. Another DOT who had not been interested in seeking employment realised that he enjoyed supporting people. Being a mentor had opened up the possibility of paid work in a similar field which previously he hadn't realised might be available to him.

Some felt that helping people was the best reward:

'Being a DOT has a feel-good factor.'

'You can feel you've got something to offer of worth. You have a reason for getting out of bed.'

8.7 Suggested improvements to the scheme

DOTs had suggestions for how the scheme could better meet their needs.

Suggestions included:

- A list of expertise which DOTs could share with other DOTs
- Signposting to resources which could develop DOTs digital skills based on their initial skills profiles when they sign on to the scheme.
- Signposting to clear information before having to register to see what is involved.

Clearly if there is scope to develop the scheme in future then consulting and involving DOTs will enhance the operation of the scheme.

9. People supported by DOTs: indicative case studies

It proved extremely difficult to obtain interviews with people DOTs had supported. The proposed evaluation methodology was for the DOTs in the case studies to ask their 'learners' if they would be available for a short interview. In the end, we only managed to obtain four in depth interviews with these learners. The evidence from the learner case studies is therefore quite limited.

Of the learners interviewed: three were men; two were starting using computers for the first time; one had a degree but used the internet very little for personal use; and another used the internet a lot but wanted to advance his understanding of work related IT functions: scanning, formatting and use of databases. All four had preferred to learn in an informal ad hoc way rather than do a course. They wanted to learn specific skills at a time convenient to them. For them the advantage of the DOT scheme is that they didn't have to devote a course's length of time to studying and they received bespoke support.

The common theme indicated by the 'learners' interviewed is the importance of DOTs being trusted, friendly and approachable. One person supported by a DOT wanted to find out more about shopping on line. Because her fears were around fraud and on-line safety, it was vital that she was learning with someone she knew would not take advantage; that she knew well and trusted. For another learner, who was learning to improve their digital skills in the workplace, it was important that he could trust the DOT, because he felt vulnerable that there were aspects of his job that he needed help with.

There are indications of how the relationship with the DOT can develop a learners' confidence; understanding of the potential of the digital world; and accelerate skills development. One DOT spoke of how learning in this way broadened her perception of the internet. She started off seeking help with online shopping but is now planning to do an on-line course in chaplaincy. She had thought about this course previously, but hadn't understood how an on-line course could work, and how a tutor could support her through the internet. Having discussed this with her DOT, she understood much better and felt that she could do the course. She is also corresponding more by email. She had had an email account previously, but hadn't used it much. She uses the internet for searching for different things and filling in applications. "Where before I used the computer for doing homework and just doing simple things, now it's much bigger." She has set up a Skype account and talks to family and friends all over the world. Her phone bills have reduced 'tremendously' because of it. Previous to the DOT programme, she had access to the internet at home and work, but used it little, and did no online shopping.

When asked about the value of an informal approach to digital instruction, one learner commented that it is helpful to have taught courses that give you the introduction and overview, but also to have that reinforced by using skills in a practical environment: having someone to show you how to do things in the context of your own work is very useful.

All the learners had a clear sense of the progression they had made in their learning.

One of the learners had never thought that using a computer was for him: *'Well I always said, I could never switch one on so I thought I shall never use one so why bother?'* He became engaged because the DOT showed them the possibilities of IT, namely to get in touch with his son, who lives in Croatia, by e-mail. Subsequently he uses the computer to play games such as solitaire. Having a debilitating medical condition it enhances his leisure time.

10. Organisational case studies and analysis

The DOT model has worked best within a handful of learning providers. A number of learning provider partners struggled to take the model on board, largely due to undergoing organisational change. The four local authority partners have not significantly promoted the DOT concept to their staff.

It has not been easy to develop the DOT model outside of the core learning partners involved with the scheme. Through the work of e@asyconnects, 36 organisations were approached to take part in the DOT scheme. Ultimately, 6 organisations became involved with the project and out of these 17 DOTs were recruited.

The MITP- Joining the DOTs model has therefore been tested in a range of contexts and the evaluation report is based on 14 organisational case studies from seven learning providers; a GP's surgery; a library, sports centre, a housing provider; and three voluntary organisations. A summary of approaches by key partners can be found in Annexe 3. Separate detailed case studies have been compiled, upon which this analysis is based.

It is clear from the case studies that not all organisations are in a position to support an embedded model of DOT activity. There is however a broad sense of 'in principle' support for the scheme with many organisations willing to learn about the project, support its general promotion and 'test-out' the level of interest from potential DOTs at their site. The organisations most willing to develop an embedded approach tend to be those in the voluntary sector or more supportive service contexts. From the case studies, a number of barriers and enablers have been identified. See Annexe 3. There are three main elements which support the introduction of the DOTs scheme within organisations:

10.1 Recognition of the benefits of the DOTs scheme

A significant success factor was where organisations could immediately recognise how the scheme aligned with their own organisational aims, added value to their existing practice and could benefit their client groups. For example, some learning providers described how the scheme enhanced their existing curriculum offer. In one of the learning centres focussing on lone parents who wanted to enhance their employability skills, the scheme offered an opportunity to recognise their effective communication and mentoring skills, giving them 'an entirely new route of activity to enjoy'. It was felt that when the time comes for lone parents to re-engage with the labour market, participation in MITP Joining the DOTs will be a positive selling point for them to offer potential employers.

10.2 Adaptation of the scheme to fit in with existing practice and client needs.

Successful introduction of the DOT scheme often rested upon adapting the key features of the support model to better meet the needs of the client group and organisational processes. For example, in one of the colleges, face to face mentoring was added to the online support system in order to better support the needs of the young people who had strong digital skills but lacked confidence in writing.

10.3 Effective implementation

It was notable that the DOT scheme was less successful where there was no identified person with sufficient authority to drive the scheme forward. Implementation was most successful where top level management supported the

scheme; staff were adequately briefed; and there was a system to take the scheme forward. It was important that promotion of the scheme happened through word of mouth alongside any paper based publicity. Where organisations were going through a high level of organisational change and staff turnover, then there was less capacity to take on the scheme. Where the scheme was promoted outside of the core partners and therefore where there was no pressure to meet targets, it appears less clear how to sustain interest in the scheme if there is no dedicated central resource to promote the scheme. This is an issue for project roll out.

Table 13

Barriers	Enablers
Lack of 'concept match' – what's it to do with me?	DOT concept relevant to organisational goals/ practice and perceived added value
Grasp of process - not easily understood at first	Clear selling point for DOTs
Organisational change means difficult to introduce new ideas and focus staff resources	Adaptability/ flexibility of scheme/
No clearly allocated responsibility for taking scheme forward./Lack of continuity of staff / high staff turnover / Staff absence of lead development worker	Key member of staff with responsibility to take scheme forward
Not bringing all staff on board	Top level management support and leading by example/ managers involvement/staff briefings
Lack of formal structure for those DOTs who prefer traditional learning	Informal structure – any time /any place ('Breath of Fresh Air')
Virtual environment for support	Quality of e-mentoring / Also e-mentors 'faceless' support valued by many
Lack of appropriate support for DOTs who may need more support through approval process	Face to face intermediary support especially with 'vulnerable' DOTs e.g. NEETS
Lack of incentives	Incentives- qualifications and helping others
Organisation perception of accreditation method: complex and unmotivating	Recognition through a nationally accredited scheme
Paper only promotion by organisations	Quality of promotional leaflets and a range of strategies especially word of mouth
Lack of ongoing support to DOTs	Celebratory events for DOTs to maintain support and DOT interest
Reflective diary and tagging seen as an obstacle	The range of online support methods
Time commitments of existing staff to set up scheme/ perceived as 'over and above' duty	Return on investment identified and valued
Lack of interest in ICT	Scheme is optional

10.4 Effective practice

From these case studies we have developed two draft checklists for taking forward the scheme: one for the main partner and one for participating organisations. These checklists are in Annexe 4 and will be refined in the next stage of the project.

10.5 Models of collaboration

Three different collaboration models¹⁰ have been identified

10.5.1 Model A - Showcasing

Here organisational settings operate as places to promote awareness about the scheme and recruit DOTs. Essentially this approach utilises the fact that organisations are controlled spaces – i.e. settings where members of the public will be passing through in their day-to-day lives. This approach would mean less direct involvement and investment on behalf of an organisation in the first instance – although they would be showing their support for the project by offering space to promote it and carry it out. It can be used to show organisations how *they* could take up DOTting for *themselves* and how it can be a way to add value (if not monetary, relational) to their business/ service.

10.5.2 Model B - Embedding & innovating

Here organisations are more fully engaged with the DOT concept. Dotting becomes embedded (involving staff members, service-users or both). Engagement at this level requires commitment, time, resources and often involves adding new methods of working to current practice.

10.5.3 Model C – Recruitment gateway

Here organisations can be ‘gateways’ to identify people (mainly employees – but also members of the public) who can / want to be DOTs. Within this model there are 3 sub-models:

¹⁰ Identified through the work of e@syconnects when engaging public, private and third sector organisations.

- 1) DOTs are individuals within organisations able to support their colleagues. This can be in a structured sense (and therefore borders on Model B) if organisations will allow time to be designated for DOT-ting within an employee's working day (e.g. once a month 'drop in' session). Alternatively DOTs within organisations could operate on a more informal basis if the organisation informs their staff that this person is a DOT willing to be approached with requests for technology support.
- 2) DOTs recruited through organisations primarily take DOT-ting up in their personal lives – the workplace has no other involvement other than bringing the opportunity to the individual's attention.
- 3) An organisation helps MITP-JtD to reach members of the public who might want to be DOTs – for instance through hosting a promotional day where the focus is on getting DOTs registered (rather than doing DOTting – i.e. working with members of public who are learners).

11. What this tells us about our key questions

We have used the information from the DOT survey, quantitative evidence, case studies and stage 1 interim evaluation, to answer the four key questions in our evaluation framework.

11.1 Are DOTs effective in engaging people, including those who are digitally excluded?

The number of people supported to learn by individual DOTs varies significantly: some DOTs report supporting 'hundreds' of people while just over a half appear to support on average about 10 people. Within the first stage of the project just under 300 DOTs are currently registered with the scheme. Extrapolating data from the survey and case studies, it could be estimated that 3000 people plus have been supported to extend their skills.

Due to the open nature of the scheme, DOTs come from a variety of backgrounds. In consequence the people they support also come from a variety of backgrounds. There appear to be two main types of DOTs. Some DOTs join the scheme in an individual capacity and support their families, friends, neighbours and workmates. Other DOTs join the scheme as 'trusted intermediaries'; they are in paid or voluntary

employment (e.g. librarians, voluntary learning champions and mentors, youth workers, housing support officers) and they are incorporating the DOT role into their job. Many of these are in a position to target people who could be considered to be digitally excluded.

Though the informal nature of the project means that precise data about mentees is not available for monitoring purposes, feedback from the survey and case studies indicates a significant proportion of people supported (best estimates indicate a third) are at a beginning stage of their digital skills journey.

The pilot scheme has proved that the DOT model has the capacity to reach out and support people to develop their skills including those who are digitally excluded. What is not yet proved is that the model can have the desired viral effect and recruit people in numbers required to significantly reduce digital exclusion across South Yorkshire.

11.2 Is the informal learning approach via DOTs 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 need of the people they support – and at a time and place convenient to DOT and learner. 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 i-Pods, 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, research for purchasing a new car. DOTs indicate they have supported learners to apply their skills independently. The most common benefit for those supported was identified as an increase in confidence in using digital technology. A fifth of DOTs reported that their support had encouraged some of their mentees to go on to further learning.

However, it has been difficult to obtain feedback from learners in this stage of the project. It is hoped that learner feedback will be strengthened in the final stage of the project.

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

The project set out to develop a training and accreditation model for digital mentoring. In the pilot phase, a comprehensive support package for DOTs has been developed comprising: e-mentoring, a dedicated website, forum postings, DOT handbook, bite size 'how-to' guides, an approval system centring around a reflective diary, and accreditation.

The support package is valued by most DOTs, who feel it has prepared them for their role. DOTs appear to have understood the bottom line message of mentoring; that the role is to build capacity and confidence in the people they support to carry out digital skills for themselves and take better advantage of the digital world.

Although one style of learning will never meet everyone's tastes, the e-mentoring and online forum is generally valued. People feel part of a community of support to support digital inclusion. Although elements of these systems can be tweaked, and should always be reviewed they appear to be working effectively.

For some groups who lack confidence in literacy skills, the introduction of face to face mentoring support has enabled people to operate successfully as DOTs. However, it is doubtful whether people with low levels of literacy (below level 1) could take advantage of a purely on line support package.

The area of support which continues to draw criticism is the process of approval and accreditation through the reflective diary. Reflection about learning is a high level skill. In teasing out what trainee DOTs have struggled with, it appears that the issue is not so much around reflection but around the mechanics of tagging the diaries to a set of competences. The staged process of approval, leading to accreditation was added in the pilot stage in response to the need for risk assessment. There is scope to revisit and possibly simplify the approval process.

Feedback from DOTs indicates the website rates well in terms of accessibility, but a small though significant number have raised questions about its capacity to engage some groups who may be used to more vibrant formats.

Is the support package enough to attract people into the scheme and once there sustain their interest? DOTs report that they have developed their own digital skills through participating in the scheme, through the process of supporting their learners, through the peer support of other DOTs and from other elements of the support package. They report that their main reason for getting involved is to help people and share their skills. There are clear benefits for DOTs. However, the high levels of people not moving to approval and accreditation indicate that different groups of people may benefit from a simplified approval process, or a two tier system with a simpler first stage for those DOTs just recruiting family and friends. This should be a consideration for the sustainability for the scheme.

11.4 What are effective practice models?

From the initial work with key partners, largely learning providers; and then from our transnational comparisons and work in public, private and third sector organisations, a self assessment checklist for taking the scheme forward is emerging from a synthesis of the practice models analysed (see Annexe 4). The key elements centre upon:

- A clear articulation and understanding of the benefits of the DOT scheme for the partner organisation, potential participants, and the people they support.
- Capacity to adapt the model to support client groups.
- A clear plan for implementation, with a designated lead responsibility, top level manager agreement, staff briefing, and capacity to promote the scheme by word of mouth, often within the scope of existing job roles.

12.Action research: suggested actions for stage 2

The following suggestions for project changes emerge from the evaluation and feedback from partners to date:

12.1 Roll Out

The project has demonstrated success in recruiting and training DOTs within a number of core organisations. Evidence from the first stage of the project shows roll out is not a straightforward process. There have been difficulties for some core partners as well as recruitment outside of core partners. The project needs to review its strategy for roll out, taking into account changes in the external environment such as the national Race online 2012 campaign. This is important to ensure the 'viral' approach succeeds and becomes an effective strand of the strategy to address digital inclusion across South Yorkshire. Elements to consider include:

- a media campaign in SY to raise the DOT concept in the public consciousness and have a clear message of what it is about.
- methods of targeting e.g. focus on key deprived areas'; work through VCS organisations working with specific target groups; developing links between schools and elderly groups; all FE IT classes to recruit DOTs; all IT businesses to recruit DOTs; all SY learning champion schemes to adopt the DOTs scheme etc.
- project management.

Action: Steering group to continue ongoing discussions on roll out and sustainability.

12.2 Feedback from learners

It will be important for sustainability of the scheme to investigate cost effective methods for obtaining regular learner feedback. Feedback from users/clients is a quality requirement of any quality user scheme.

Action: SERO to investigate methods and costs for obtaining ongoing learner feedback (with Sheffield College and Access Space).

12.3 E-mentoring

There is scope for ongoing review of any support system. Key points to consider are support for DOTs to move from trainee to approval; and the front loading of support.

Action: TSC to convene a focus group of e-mentors and DOTs to review processes and establish a quality assurance system

12.4 Approval and Accreditation

The two tiered system of approval and then accreditation developed to address safeguarding issues in a project run by a public sector body. In the light of a small proportion of DOTs taking up accreditation, it is timely to review the approval and accreditation scheme. One aspect is to consider a simpler system especially for those individual DOTs supporting family and friends. Another element is to review the tagging of diaries against the approval criteria.

Action: Reflection group to review approval and accreditation process.

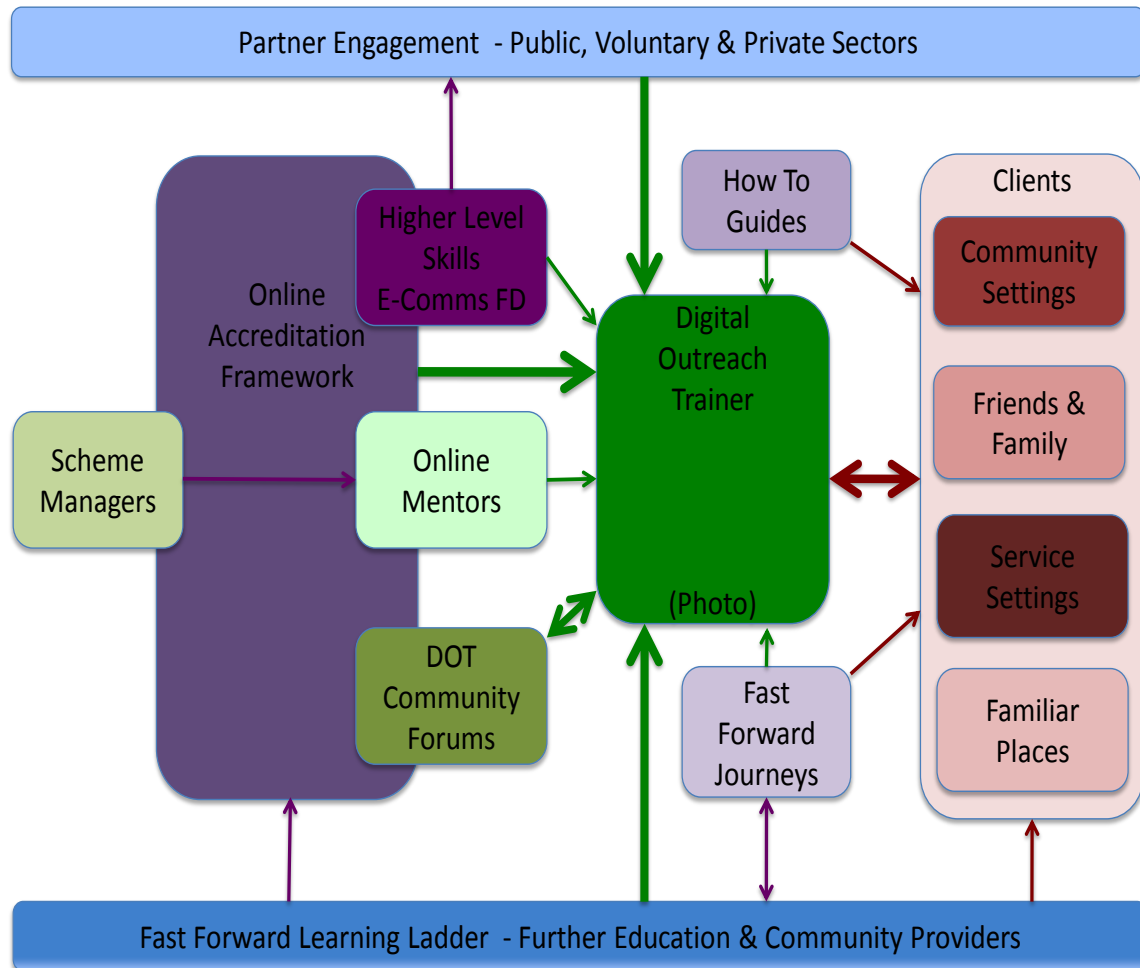
13. Next stage of the evaluation

The extension to the project funding will enable the evaluation to provide a longer view of impact on the DOTs and on their mentees (the “Dotted”) and to track their learning and development journeys. The Kirkpatrick model identifies that most evaluation is short term and studies proxy outcomes, rather than full outcomes. The

evaluation in the project will study 1 cohort at 18 months plus. Current DOTS will be surveyed midway through the extension and followed up with 1 to 1 interviews.

A second objective will be to evaluate the impact of the employability resources: how far these and the supporting structures have enabled DOTs to contribute towards the increased employability of the people they have “Dotted”. A second cohort will be interviewed to ascertain what effect the new interventions have had and how effectively DOTs have been able to signpost the “Dotted” to employment support and route ways. This second objective contributes to building a business case to incorporate the DOTs model within the toll kit for mainstream organisations and providers who tackle unemployment.

Annexe 1: DOT Scheme



Annexe 2: Backgrounds of DOTs in the case studies

15 DOT case studies

Male	8		Female	7
16-25 years	5		25-55 years	10
BME	4		Ethnicity Not recorded	7
Employed	10		Not in paid employment	5
Degree qualification	5			

DOT status

Trainee DOTs	9	Approved DOTs	3	Accredited DOTs	3
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Role

DOT activity incorporated into work role	8	DOT activity incorporated into voluntary role	1	DOT operating in individual capacity	6
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Annexe 3: Summary of approaches of project partners

(Individual case studies of project partners and of the organisations engaged through e@syconnects are available as separate reports.)

Approach 1: Sheffield College

DOTs: college support staff; learners on ICT courses,

Promotion: Online College staff / email

Support: e-mentoring

Recruitment by DOTs: family and friends

Benefits: developed College moodle and added to staff digital skills support

Approach 2: Sheffield College Intergenerational

DOTs: young people (students) with low levels of literacy (mainly L1) on BTEC courses

Promotion: On Line College staff and course tutor face to face

Support: face to face from course tutor and e-mentoring

Recruitment by DOTs: older family members

Benefits: enhanced curriculum offer – mentoring and communication skills/ employability skills

Approach 3: Rotherham College

DOTs: tutors and learners in community learning centres

Promotion: dedicated development worker/ informal networking including outreach centres

Support: e-mentoring

Recruitment: learners / family and friends

Benefits: increased reach to those who couldn't attend college courses

Approach 4: Doncaster College

DOTs: all learners at the ICT Academy

Promotion: briefing sheet in induction pack

Support: e-mentoring

Recruitment by DOTs: family and friends

Benefits: extended opportunities to learners by incorporating promotion into college standard procedures

Approach 5: East Sheffield City Learning Centre Intergenerational project

DOTs: young people from school (ASDAN group) involved in intergenerational project

Promotion: via project course tutors

Support: intended to be via ASDAN tutor and when this didn't materialise conflicted with project work and scheme dropped

Recruitment by DOTs: older people on the Then and Now project

Benefits: Potential to enhance ASDAN portfolio of school students

Approach 6: Barnsley CLLC

DOTs: lone parents

Promotion: verbally via tutors when learner ready and learner induction pack/leaflet

Support: e-mentors and course tutors (to lesser extent)

Recruitment by DOTs: family and friends

Benefits: offers enhanced curriculum to centre attendees looking for work

Approach 7: Access Space

DOTs: attendees at Access Space

Promotion: via staff members at the venue

Support: face to face from staff / e-mentors/ ongoing peer mentoring at centre

Recruitment by DOTs: peer support as part of attendance at centre; and family/ friends outside project

Benefits: little perceived added value to mentoring but accreditation is on offer to existing face to face peer mentors.

Annexe 4a: Volunteering for a Digital World

Self assessment checklist for taking forward MITP

This document could be used to inform future planning of the DOTs programme.

Scoring between 0 and 4 where:

0= do not agree at all

4 = wholeheartedly agree

	0	1	2	3	4	Action to take
The scheme continues to have validity within the overall strategy for digital inclusion						
There is a clear process/strategy for identification and engagement with partners and wider promotion of the scheme						
Marketing materials are regular revised						
The entry requirements for DOTs are appropriate						
The selling point to volunteers is clear						
The process for engaging with beneficiaries						
The training and recruitment of e-mentors is regularly reviewed						
Initial training and support for DOTs is quality assured DOTs are supported and their efforts focussed						
The volunteer role is celebrated and there is on-going support						
Activity in the scheme is monitored and feedback to partners						
The role of the volunteer is defined and there are clear expectations. Safeguarding is addressed.						
Outcomes for DOTs are captured.						
Outcomes for mentees are captured.						
Other						

Annexe 4b Good practice checklist for taking DOT scheme forward within partner organisations

<p>What is the value to your organisation or your rationale for taking forward?</p>	
<p>Who in the organisation has responsibility for taking the scheme forward?</p>	
<p>How are staff in the organisation to be briefed about the scheme?</p>	
<p>What is the process for marketing the scheme and recruiting DOTs – is there any targeting or setting of entry requirement?</p>	
<p>What is the offer / selling point to volunteers?</p>	
<p>Is online support and e-mentors appropriate for the scheme or do you need to adapt the support offered? Is this within the resources of your organisation?</p>	

What is the process for engaging with beneficiaries?	
How is activity in the scheme monitored?	
Is there any need for safeguarding of individuals? How will this be done?	
Other	