

Computer Training at Catford Library: Users' Information Needs and Expectations

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Executive summary

The free internet training for beginners at Catford Library in South London is based around the 'Go ON' website. It is well-used, especially by older customers, but people are disconcerted by having to specify a keyword 'goal' for their training when they are enrolling. This dissertation explores users' information needs and expectations about the training and the Learning Centre – the part of the library in which the training takes place. The views of 'non-returners' are also explored – people who abandoned the course without completing it. The views of the existing users were garnered in informal semi-structured interviews. The views of the 'non-returners' were collected using self-completion postal questionnaires. The responses were analysed by coding them according to Nicholas's 'information needs' categories (Nicholas, 2000). The findings showed that, before they started the course, users expected that there would be more staff involvement and guidance, but some of them appreciated the self-taught nature of the course. The users seemed very self-aware of their lack of knowledge, but undeterred by this. The users' feelings about the library space seemed to be a more important factor in whether they returned to the training than their views of the training itself. The users were unaware of the provider of the course, showing trust in this library-based activity. Nicholas's framework was found to be an effective tool for revealing and analysing information in this situation, both for interviews and questionnaires. The difficulties of comparing data collected from different groups by these different methods is discussed. Recommendations for changes to the Learning Centre service are made, including the introduction of 'taster' sessions and allowing users to study on their own laptops.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Catford Library

1.1.1 Local area

Catford Library is part of London Borough of Lewisham Library Service in South East London. The library is situated in the electoral ward called Rushey Green. This ward falls just outside the 10% 'most deprived' in England (3383 out of 32482), but it is well inside the worst 10% in the categories of 'health deprivation', 'barriers to housing and services' and 'crime'. In terms of 'living environment deprivation' it is in the bottom 2% (Office of National Statistics, 2010). Catford does have a reputation as an ugly place:

South London's Catford lacks pzazz. It has none of the raw brutalism of its neighbour, Lewisham, or the old world charm of Peckham. Sandwiched between Hither Green Cemetery and the Ravensbourne ditch, it is one long aesthetic groan (Jenkins, 2011)

On the other hand, Catford has attractions that include a daily market, the popular Broadway Theatre and a public library.

1.1.2 Catford Library users

The library's visitor-count records show that it has about one thousand visitors a day. They are a wide range of people, as shown in the 2010 Equalities Impact Assessment, an extract of which is shown in Appendix 1 (Lewisham Public Accounts Select Committee, 2010). A comparison of these figures with UK census data suggests that the user group is just as varied as the UK population in terms of age, disability, religion, gender and sexuality, but that Catford Library users are four times less likely to consider themselves White British and three times more likely to be unemployed and looking for work than the average UK resident (Census, 2001).

1.1.3 Catford Library services

The library has adults' and children's collections of lending stock, including books, audiobooks, CDs and DVDs. Regular children's activities take place such as craft sessions and lively nursery rhyme and story sessions that often attract over fifty children and carers.

Library staff do ‘outreach’ work, conducting rhyme and story sessions in local schools, nurseries, playgroups and post-natal centres. The staff also work on the busy ‘Information Desk’ answering questions about citizenship, books, education etc. The library is located within the civic Town Hall complex, so there are a lot of enquiries about council services.

The library space is utilised by local partner services to offer regular advice about:

- Volunteering
- Employment
- Health

The library also offers free internet access and training.

1.1.4 Computer training at Catford Library

Library staff at Catford have provided internet training to users since 2001, when the People’s Network funding enabled Catford Library staff to increase their computer provision to twelve public terminals (Brophy, 2002). The People’s Network was a UK Government initiative to connect all libraries to the internet and to train library staff in the use of computers. More information about this is given in section 2.5 ‘The People’s Network’.

Until 2010 the training at Catford was done on a one-to-one basis – a staff member would guide the user to achieve their specific goal, e.g. setting up an email account, searching or shopping online. In 2010 a Learning Centre was opened within the library with funding from UK Online Centres. The UK Online Centres project is a partnership between Government and industry to increase digital access (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010, p.1). More information about this is given in section 2.6 ‘UK Online Centres’ on page 12.

The Learning Centre is a screened-off area of the library with a further five computer terminals for the learners to use. Since the opening of this centre all computer training takes place in this part of the library, and the training procedure has become more standardised, using specific training websites.

Training is now offered to beginners who ask for it or who require more support than the staff can offer in the normal library context. The service is promoted prominently on one of the library's large street-front windows (Figure 1 below). Anyone who is a library member is allowed to join the training – but it is emphasised by staff and in the course publicity that the training is aimed at complete beginners and is an introduction to the internet only. Customers who require more advanced courses are referred elsewhere.



Figure 1: UK Online Centre posters on a window of Catford Library (photo by the author, April 2012)

The training consists of helping users to access self-taught web learning sites. Users who have no experience of computers at all are put onto the BBC 'Computer Tutor' website which introduces mouse and keyboard controls and guides the users through activities designed to develop these skills ("BBC Computer Tutor," 2006). Once they have completed this course (i.e. usually after one or two sessions) users are helped to access the 'Go ON' website – the official 'learning website' for UK Online Centres (UK Online Centres, 2011a). If the staff member in the Learning Centre judges that a learner can already use the mouse and keyboard to some extent, then they can skip the 'Computer Tutor' stage and begin their training on 'Go ON'.

'Go ON' is a self-teaching website that is 'designed as a 'one-stop shop' for new internet users, where they can get the best possible start to their online life' (UK Online Centres, 2011a). The 'Go ON' website homepage is shown in Appendix 2. From this homepage users can sign-in and work through an 'Online Basics' course consisting of:

- How to use a keyboard and mouse
- How to search and explore the internet
- How to keep in touch with email
- How to stay safe online

Each of these stages consists of online exercises followed by a multiple-choice quiz. User accounts are set up by library staff before the training begins, so when users are logged-in the site allows them to resume the course from where they left off. The course was previously called 'MyGuide', until it became 'Go ON' in 2011 - retaining many of the same modules, but with notable differences discussed further on page 13 in the Literature Review section of this dissertation.

A member of library staff is present at all learning sessions, in order to assist with specific enquiries, but as the courses are all self-taught, there are no group sessions or lectures, and the learners progress at their own pace.

Sessions are up to two hours long. There is a high demand for the Learning Centre, causing sessions to be booked-up at least a week ahead. The Centre is not open to learners all day, only at the times shown in Appendix 3, the rest of the week the Centre is used by local partner services to give careers advice. Users are restricted to one session per week, but they can keep on booking sessions until they are satisfied that they have completed and understood the 'Go ON' course. The potential to work through the course at their own pace is promoted as a positive aspect of the training by the library staff when they are introducing users to the centre.

1.1.5 My role at Catford Library

I work full-time at Catford as a Library Assistant. In this role I am the staff member assigned to help the users of the Learning Centre for at least one session a week. I also have responsibility

for explaining the Learning Centre to any customers who express an interest, and I register those customers who do decide to join.

I have always found it rewarding to have a role in introducing people to computers, so I was keen to base my dissertation around this part of my job.

1.2 Limitations to this dissertation

There are user studies carried out on a large scale on behalf of UK Online Centres (discussed more fully in section 2.8 ‘Research into public computer provision’ on page 14). From the outset I was aware that my investigations would be on a smaller scale, due to my comparatively restricted time and resources, and that I would have to find a way of complementing and responding to these existing user studies, by concentrating on an aspect of the training in a different way.

1.3 The research question

When potential users signed up for the course, I noticed that they often had trouble specifying a goal for their learning, something that they are required to do on the Learning Centre registration form (shown in Appendix 4). This prompted me to consider the importance of users’ expectations about the service and it occurred to me that these expectations were closely connected to several other important issues for our Learning Centre:

- Whether people choose to join in the first place
- Whether they remain on the course
- Whether they continue to use computers
- Their previous experiences of computers
- How much they enjoy their training
- Whether they continue to use the library service

I thought that it would be interesting to investigate these issues. The findings could also help us to improve our service at Catford and could possibly be useful in similar situations elsewhere. So I decided to investigate the question:

What are users' expectations of computer training at Catford Library?

When I started to consider and research this question (as detailed in the Literature Review) I realised that these expectations depended on the information needs that the users brought to the course, so my full dissertation title was formed.

1.4 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this dissertation is to find out about the different information needs that the users (and non-returners) expect the Learning Centre at Catford Library to meet.

In order to achieve this aim, I have set the following objectives:

- Find existing literature to:
 - understand the background to this topic
 - avoid repeating existing work
 - discover what type of research will be most useful: what type of information should I try to obtain i.e. what combination of quantitative and/or qualitative information is appropriate?
 - assess the best way to get this information from the users (and non-returners)
 - assess the best way to analyse this information
- Identify any characteristics within the group of users that could influence how I should approach them and engage with them.
- Find a way to involve non-returners, i.e. those who appear to have abandoned the course.
- Consider different methodological approaches to decide which is the most appropriate for returners and non-returners.
- Decide how best to get a representative group of respondents from the whole group of users and non-returners.
- Try not to disrupt the users' learning.

2 Literature review

2.1 My objectives for the Literature Review

Of my objectives for the dissertation as a whole (outlined on page 6), these are the ones that I tried to meet in this Literature Review, with more detail about how I planned to achieve them:

- understand the background to this topic by:
 - bringing together the relevant literature about the People's Network and UK Online Centres.
 - finding information about the state of computers in libraries before the above initiatives.
 - finding out what research has been conducted into computer and internet training for beginners in libraries, specifically user expectations of this training.
- avoid repeating existing work by:
 - finding any research used to develop the 'MyGuide' and 'Go ON' training systems.
 - recognising aspects that have already been well explored and identifying gaps in the existing research
- discover what type of research will be most useful: what type of information should I try to obtain i.e. what combination of quantitative and/or qualitative information is appropriate by:
 - considering the approaches suggested in existing research in the area of information seeking.
- assess the best way to get this information from the users (and non-returners) by:
 - studying how research has been carried out in the past with comparable groups
- assess the best way to analyse this information by:
 - looking at how data from comparable situations has been analysed in the past, and how effective this has been.

From these initial objectives I identified the following search terms:

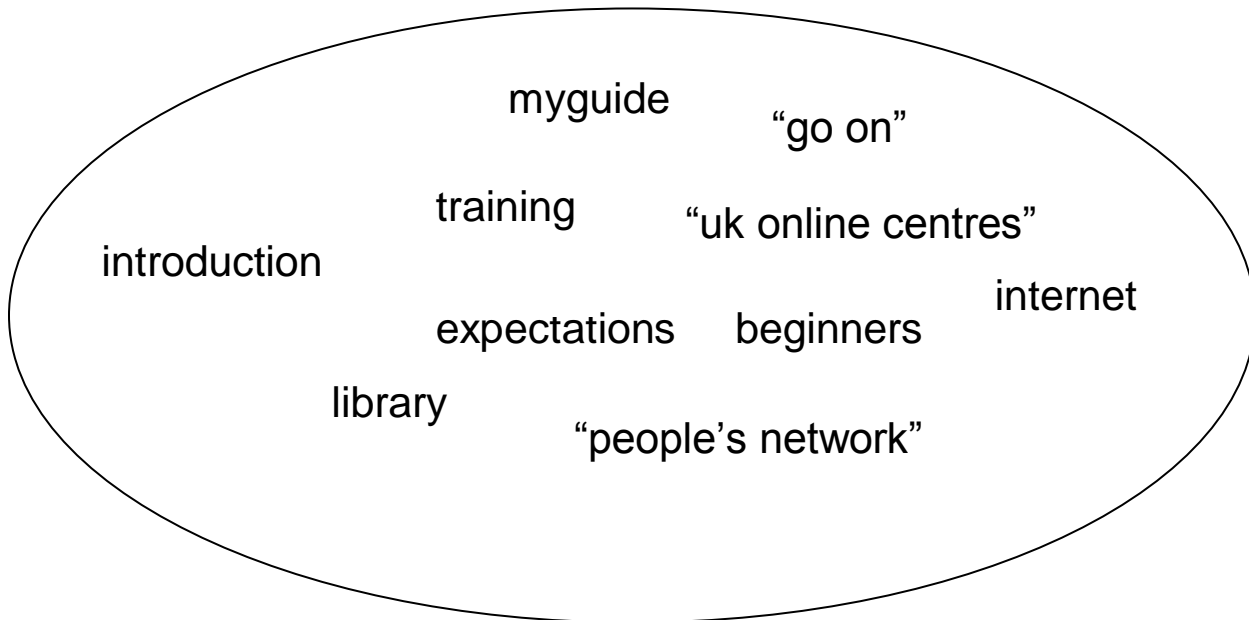


Figure 2: Search terms used to find the literature

The results gained from these initial terms led me to add the terms "information needs" and "digital immigrants" to my search.

Before I started this research I was aware that a large majority of the potential respondents were older, retired people so I tried to identify key and relevant research into older people's use of the internet and their attitude to computers.

2.2 The scope of this literature search

I used the search terms identified in Figure 2 above to search the Aberystwyth University library catalogue and e-journals collection, Library and Information Science Abstracts, ISI Web of Knowledge and also the British Library catalogue. I searched the internet using Google and Google Scholar in order to include a wide range of information from around the world, not only research articles but also lectures, presentations, text books and announcements on websites. The bibliographies of the items that were found from these first searches led to other sources. This was particularly useful for expanding my search into the area of information needs. The research conducted as part of the UK Online Centres project was helpfully collected on one site, including the research used to develop the 'MyGuide' and 'Go ON' sites (Institute for Employment

Studies, 2010). This allowed me to check that my research would have a different focus to previous studies.

2.3 Limitations to this literature search

I found a lot of material that had an agenda other than objective research. For example, much of the UK Online Centres material is overtly aimed at justifying their continued funding. Their report ‘The digital divide and happiness’ (Lawson, 2011) was a direct response to the Prime Minister’s announcement about the importance of wellbeing to the nation (Cameron, 2010). I decided that the findings of such reports could still be of use to me, but I was also aware of the need to find more nonpartisan research from other sources. A major focus of the UK Online Centres research is how marketing could be used to attract new users. I did not want to study this aspect directly because the intention of this dissertation was to focus on the expectations and experiences of existing users of the course. I found that this was an area that was relatively unexplored.

Looking at older documents such as ‘Training the Internet Trainers’ (Balas, 1997) highlighted the rapidly changing nature of internet training methods in libraries and how this made much of the information very time-sensitive. Changes to funding for public services since the recession have made information published after 2008 more likely to be relevant than that from before and also technological changes mean that the older material is, the more prescient it has to be if it is to be valuable for this dissertation. Conversely, I was aware that users’ expectations may be based on older sources of information and that it is important to be aware of a timeline of progress in order to perceive trends that may appear.

2.4 Types of material found

I can divide the material that I studied into seven broad categories shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Key examples of material found in the literature review

Type of material:	Key material studied:
UK Online Centres progress reports which study the users of the Online Centres, including libraries, and their experience and satisfaction levels	(Institute for Employment Studies, 2010) (Kunzmann & Stevens, 2010)
Training and computers in libraries. This included the literature that referred to the development and funding for public computers and the training methods offered. This also encompassed research into the effectiveness of various training courses and also some textbooks and guides aimed at library staff to help them to provide internet training	(Todd & Tedd, 2000) (Ktoridou & Eteokleous-Grigoriou, 2011), (Stephens, 2001) (Gerding, 2007).
Studies that involve users in the development of internet training methods – using beginners to test prototype systems	(UK Online Centres, 2007) (Dickinson, Newell, Smith, & Hill, 2005)
Studies into the wellbeing of users and the benefits of computers and the internet	(Lawson, 2011) (Dickinson & Gregor, 2006)
Studies into the attitude of users (or potential users) to computers or libraries	(Rooney-Browne, 2009), (Gressard & Loyd, 1985) (Griffiths, King & Pomerantz, 2008)
Studies specifically into older people’s use of and attitude to the internet and computer training	(Hill, Beynon-Davies, & Williams, 2008), (Morris, Goodman, & Brading, 2007) (Dickinson, Eisma, & Gregor, 2011)
Studies into methods of finding out and defining the information needs of users	(Inskip, Butterworth, & MacFarlane, 2008) (Wilson, 1981)

2.5 The People's Network

The People's Network was launched in 2000 as a result of the 1997 Library and Information Commission report 'New Library: The Peoples Network' which recommended that:

Public libraries are the ideal vehicle to provide access [to information and communication networks] and support, and to foster the spread of vital new technology skills among the population. (Library and Information Commission, 1997)

The People's Network was backed by funding from the New Opportunities Fund of £120 million (Halper, 2004, p.34) which was used in two ways; to train staff and to furnish UK libraries with new computers. The aim of the equipment provision was to 'connect all libraries to the internet' (Sommerlad, Child, Ramsden, Barkat, & Kelleher, 2004, p.i). By November 2004, 30,000 computers had been installed in 4,000 libraries and 40,000 library staff had received training in ICT (Sommerlad et al., 2004, p.2).

The investment in staff training was a significant recognition of the role that library staff had in helping users to achieve their goals online. Research commissioned by the Tavistock institute into the People's Network programme found that:

Novice ICT users were particularly appreciative of the supportive, informal atmosphere and helpfulness of staff (Hardie-Boys, 2004, p.11)

However, even with the New Opportunities Fund training, this research found that staff still had problems moving too far outside their familiar roles:

Most staff felt that they lacked the confidence and competence to provide tutoring and coaching (Hardie-Boys, 2004, p.13)

The People's Network was presented as the salvation for public libraries, coming at a 'low point for libraries' it offered a 'once in a lifetime opportunity to jumpstart public libraries into the new electronic era' – (Sommerlad et al., 2004, p.i)

In fact, libraries had a tradition of facilitating lifelong learning and they had been investing in IT even before the advent of the People's Network initiative. In early 2000, 89% of public library authorities offered internet access on at least one site and 75.6% of public library authorities offered public computer training (Todd & Tedd, 2000, p.377).

The People's Network investment did change the type and the extent of computer training that libraries could offer. In 2004 a study was conducted to compare ICT learning centres from before and after the People's Network was introduced (Schofield, McMenemy, & Henderson, 2004).

The study reported that, in the pre-People's Network centre:

A general trend in recent years [is] users preferring to work their way through independent learning resources, which allows them to learn at their own pace and own terms. As a result the sessions taught have been abandoned in favour of individual use and independent learning. (Schofield, et al., 2004, p.159)

This method of learning would be familiar to the users of many computer training courses in 2012, such as the 'Go ON' website.

2.6 UK Online Centres

Almost exactly concurrent with the introduction of the People's Network, the UK Online Centres project was launched in 2000. This was a:

Partnership between Government, industry, the voluntary sector and consumer groups designed to increase access to digital technology to those who are disadvantaged (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010, p.1).

The UK Online Centres project was considered to include the People's Network computers in libraries, but also included centres in 'voluntary organisations or community settings and FE or HE settings' (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010, p.3). The UK Online Centres' website mentions 'libraries, community centres, Housing Associations, training companies and pubs' on their 'join us' page (UK Online Centres, 2011d). On their 'background' page, the site reports that there are 3,800 centres in the UK (UK Online Centres, 2011c)

The UK Online Centres project was initially designed to meet the same needs as the People's Network:

a belief that [IT] access for all was thought to be necessary to tackle social exclusion and promote equality in the new 'knowledge economy' (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010, p.1)

On their website UK Online Centres say that this original aim has evolved:

Since then the role of UK Online centres has developed to become more about inspiring people to get online (UK Online Centres, 2011c)

2.7 'MyGuide'/'Go ON'

'MyGuide' was a method of online computer training for beginners developed by the Department for Trade and Industry and the Department for Education and Skills. The 'MyGuide' project was first announced in 2001, but it was not 'rolled out' until 2007, after pilot schemes had been tested. 'MyGuide' was changed to 'Go ON' in 2011, retaining many of the same training modules. This is now the official 'learning website' for UK Online Centres (UK Online Centres, 2011a).

'MyGuide' and 'Go ON' were intended to offer a 'clean, simple' introduction to email and internet searching (UK Online Centres, 2007, p.3) and the 'MyGuide' service included an email system designed to be more minimal and suitable for IT beginners with each screen having a 'clear primary function' (Dickinson, et al., 2005, p.624)

Unlike some other IT training systems, such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) the 'MyGuide'/'Go ON' training is free to all users. ECDL is a very popular course, with over 11 million users (or 'candidates') worldwide in 2011 and 1.5 million graduates in the UK (ECDL Foundation, 2012) However, public libraries that provide this course, such as those in Kingston on Thames have to charge for each module studied (Kingston upon Thames, 2012). This has been considered to make ECDL unsuitable for most other boroughs' library services.

2.8 Research into public computer provision

The users of publicly-funded computer provision are a heavily researched and monitored group. The need to produce quantitative data in order to justify funding for courses means that a lot of data is required about them. The type of data that is collected from users includes their age, occupation, address and ethnic origin. Target groups are identified that the computer centres should aim to attract (there is even a report that creates composite identities of the ideal target personalities in order to entice them more effectively (Kunzmann & Stevens, 2010)).

The research published by UK Online Centres shows that they are succeeding in attracting users from different age-groups and ethnic backgrounds and people from the “most deprived wards in the country” (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010, p.9). Many of the users are also asked to participate in surveys once they have used the service, and the UK Online Centres research shows that in this context the users express themselves very happy. The Institute of Employment Studies (2010, p.13) survey quotes a 2003 Hall Aitkin report showing 96% of users satisfied or very satisfied with the service.

Public libraries are the most common centres for these public computers and research from America suggests that this is appropriate because people consider libraries to be the most trustworthy places to find information and that the public find significant benefits in the internet enabled services they provide (Griffiths, King & Pomerantz, 2008). In times of recession this is particularly important; research has shown that use of libraries and particularly computers in the libraries increases and that greater ‘job related demands’ arise (Rooney-Browne, 2009, p.341).

2.9 Research into beginners' computer training

A pilot study was conducted in five boroughs before the 'MyGuide' website was introduced nationally (UK Online Centres, 2007). This study found that the users expressed a high degree of satisfaction with this method of training – 54% (of their 500 respondents) saying that it met their expectations and a further 25% saying that it exceeded their expectations. Indeed 97% of users said that they had enjoyed the training experience. There is no indication that the authors of the report have considered the possibility of response bias in these results.

Another research report that was used in the development of the 'MyGuide' website is by Dickinson, Newell, Smith, & Hill (2005). This report details the design and testing of the email system that was used as part of the 'MyGuide' training. The pilot testing of this system demonstrated that users found the system easier to use than a standard email system, they preferred using it, they made fewer errors and had more success.

2.10 The points of view expressed in the research

The research that is collected on the UK Online Centres website can be divided into three groups, each of which required that the researchers adopt a specific point of view at the outset and then tested it in their studies:

- **Development studies** – used to help design the website itself. The initial point of view is that the prototype system is suitable and the research tests this: UK Online Centres (2007) studies the 'MyGuide' site as a whole, while Dickinson, Newell, Smith, & Hill (2005) focuses on the email system of the site.
- **Marketing studies** – used to find out how best to promote the service with potential users. They start with a clear point of view that the service should attract as many users as possible from their target groups. Their area of research is: who is in need of this service and how it will be possible to attract them: (Kunzmann & Stevens, 2010)
- **Performance studies** – used to assess the ongoing performance of the service and, importantly, to justify the continued funding of the service. These start with a clear point of view about what constitutes successful performance – in order to demonstrate this

success – or to discover any areas of failure: Institute for Employment Studies (2010) brings together previous research studies conducted in UK Online Centres.

The studies of user information needs such as that by Inskip, Butterworth, & MacFarlane (2008) seemed to be less directly involved in the development and promotion of their subjects, allowing the researchers to adopt a wider view. In this case, it enabled them to explore if a framework could be used to study information needs in a more qualitative way.

Other research starts from the point of view that it is important to understand how users and non-users feel about computers and the internet: Gressard, Loyd (1985) and Morris, Goodman, & Brading (2007)

Other research such as Lawson's (2011) and Dickinson & Gregor's (2006) take specific positions on whether or not computer use is beneficial to the wellbeing of users, the former broadly positive, the latter more sceptical.

The research that is based on the experiences of older users starts from the point of view that they have different views and/or needs from other users and that it is important to take these differences into account: Hill, Beynon-Davies, & Williams (2008) deals with internet adoption, while Eisma et al. (2004) concerns product development research.

2.11 Themes arising from the existing literature

I divided the literature into six thematic categories, as shown

Table 2: Themes arising from the existing literature

<p>Most users report that they are, at the least, appreciative of the computer provision in UK public libraries – the UK Online Centres report found 96% of respondents stated that ‘the internet had made their lives better in some way’ and 96% of users of UK Online Centres were ‘satisfied or very satisfied that they got what they wanted from the centre’ (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010, p.13)</p>
<p>Staff input and presence is an important part of the learning experience – users who received a lot of support were more than four times more likely to obtain a ‘learn direct’ qualification than those who did not receive support (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010, p.13). The ‘MyGuide’ pilot research report found a link between helpful tutors and the quality of experience for customers (UK Online Centres, 2007, p.5)</p>
<p>A group of people who do not want to use the internet have been identified. They are labelled ‘Rejectors’ in the Online Centres’ happiness report (Lawson, 2011, p.4) and in their review of existing research they warned of ‘a core of potential users who are most disadvantaged who are very difficult to attract’ (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010, p.23)</p>
<p>In the reports that involve older users, there is acknowledgement that these users may be ‘undecided about expectations’ to do with the internet (Hill, Beynon-Davies, & Williams, 2008, p.262) and Morris, Goodman, & Brading (2007, p.55) identified respondents who were ‘unsure what the internet meant’ and they found this was more common with older respondents.</p>
<p>Many older people have specific challenges relating to computers. Dickinson, et al. discussed the ‘layers of difficulty’ that they have to overcome (2011, p.261). Some older people express the view that technology is not suitable for them, which has been identified as a barrier to the take up of technology (Hill, Beynon-Davies, & Williams, 2008). The importance of ‘better informing them’ and ‘fostering positive attitudes’ is identified in the research on older people (Morris, Goodman, & Brading, 2007, p.56).</p>
<p>There are ways of studying information needs such as Nicholas’s (Nicholas, 2000) that can be applied in different situations outside of traditional reference enquiries (Inskip, Butterworth, & MacFarlane, 2008).</p>

2.12 Disagreement in the existing research

There is fundamental disagreement on the broad subject of whether the ability to use computers is beneficial to wellbeing or not. The UK Online Centres report ‘The digital divide and happiness – a presentation of the evidence’ states that its intention is to demonstrate that ensuring everyone has access to IT is important and contributes to the nation’s wellbeing (Lawson, 2011). As previously mentioned, the report was written as a direct response to David Cameron’s announcement that ‘wellbeing of the nation’ should be measured (Cameron, 2010). The report mentions several research articles that support this position but unsurprisingly omits the 2006 article ‘Computer use has no demonstrated impact on the wellbeing of older adults’ from the University of Dundee (Dickinson & Gregor, 2006). This report analyses previous research and concludes that there is no evidence that wellbeing of older people is improved by computer use alone. (It concedes that training from a professional is shown to increase wellbeing, but that this is not specific to IT training.)

There is also disagreement between the statements and actions of UK Online Centres regarding their internet training sites and the research commissioned as part of the project – the report ‘Introducing the internet to the over 60s: developing an email system for older novice computer users’ (Dickinson, Newell, Smith & Hill, 2005) was funded by the Department for Education and Skills to develop an email system to be used as part of the ‘MyGuide’ training programme. The report found that older users found this system easier to use and they made less errors. The email system was adopted and became an integral part of the ‘MyGuide’ system. Less than a year after the Learning Centre at Catford was opened, this email system was removed from ‘MyGuide’. Instructions were posted on the UK Online Centres website ‘to set their learners up with other free and simple email providers such as hotmail, gmail or Yahoo! which are all quick and easy to use’ (UK Online Centres, 2011b) – thus contradicting the earlier report that had stated that commercial email systems ‘necessitate a high level of support’ and that it was ‘not possible to continue providing support’ (Dickinson, Newell, Smith, & Hill, 2005, p.623)

2.13 Justification of this dissertation from the existing research

The review of the existing research on UK Online Centres from 2010 highlights the importance of providing computer access to ‘socially excluded groups’ such as ‘older people’ and ‘minority ethnic groups’ or people from ‘most deprived wards’ (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010, p.6). The same report identifies a ‘most excluded group’ who belong to three such categories but warns that ‘only 6% [of the users of Online Centres] were from the most excluded category’. This suggests that studying the experiences and expectations of a group with a higher proportion of the ‘most excluded’ could produce very useful research, because they are so representative of the target audience of UK Online Centres. Each Learning Centre, of course, has a different group of users in terms of age, ethnic background and work status. A Learning Centre that has a high proportion of users that UK Online Centres would class as ‘socially excluded’ would face unique challenges, and it could also provide unique insights that differ from national findings.

The ‘MyGuide’ pilot report from 2007 found that the induction process was an important stage in the learning experience of users (UK Online Centres, 2007, p16). The users who had agreed an objective at this stage ‘were more likely to have their expectations met or exceeded’. This focus on the importance of defining expectations is a justification for some research into this area. Why was it not possible to define an objective for all users in the pilot? Perhaps this research will find information that will help to turn users’ expectations into realistic learning objectives.

Eisma et al. (2004, p.136) found that ‘older people are more likely to fear technology’ so the older people who have decided to confront these fears are an interesting group, who could provide useful information to help to overcome the concerns of their peers. The report quotes one respondent saying that ‘I’m too old to bother with more modern things’ but not all older people conform to this stereotype. Research into the training experiences of these people may help to find ways of convincing others, and could also provide information about how the training methods could be made more engaging for them.

2.14 Gaps in the existing research

The 96% satisfaction statistic found in the UK Online Centres report (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010, p.13) requires further investigation. It is understandable that those users who were attending a centre at the time when the survey was conducted are likely to be satisfied, but what about people who attended once or twice and then did not return? They may have been less satisfied with the provision and it would be worthwhile exploring why. There may also be potential to try to find out about user satisfaction by asking questions that are less liable to provoke polite answers.

Wilson (1981, p.11) says that free flowing qualitative research is the way to find out about information needs and Eisma et al. (2004, p.135) say that semi-structured interviews and informal chats allowing interviewers to 'tailor the approach to the individual concerned' are useful for engaging older people in the development of products. Telephone interviews and focus groups were used in the assessment of the 'MyGuide' project at its pilot stage but the results do not seem to be integral to the findings of the report. Instead, quotes from the focus groups are used like endorsements, displayed throughout the report (UK Online Centres, 2007). All UK Online Centres users have to supply a lot of quantitative data in order to get onto courses, but there is potential for asking them to voice their opinions in their own words and then analysing this information in a structured way, something that the 'MyGuide' development research has not done.

The previous UK Online Centres research is very much focused on identifying the background of the existing users and attracting new users, especially those from specified categories of disadvantage. There is less consideration of the experiences and expectations of the users that already attend.

The 'MyGuide' pilot research did involve users who had completed the pilot, and asked them what they had learned and whether they planned to use their new skills (UK Online Centres, 2007). As these things are what the course was designed to achieve, these are important questions to explore. There is potential, though, to explore the users' experience as they progress through their learning, not just at the end. There are also potential unexplored views of users who have 'dropped out' of courses.

2.15 Possible approaches suggested by the existing research

In his 1981 article ‘On user studies and information needs’ Wilson said that when investigating users’ information needs:

Our concern is with uncovering the facts of the everyday life of the people being investigated. By uncovering those facts we aim to understand the needs that exist which press the individual towards information-seeking behaviour. (Wilson, 1981, p.11)

I think that the people who put themselves forward to use Learning Centres are demonstrating this kind of information seeking behaviour. Wilson went on to say that the most appropriate way of studying this behaviour was to:

Use observation, free-flowing discussion, and the analysis of documents (personal or organisational) and conversational analysis. (Wilson, 1981, p.11)

This suggests a general approach that could be applied to my research in the Learning Centre environment.

The majority of the likely respondents to my research are older people but Eisma et al. warned against drawing unwarranted conclusions about this:

Classifying “older people” as a single separate group also implies homogeneity and may also lead to a narrow stereotyping of the potential user. Diversity among older people is larger than among other age groups. (Eisma et al., 2004, p.134)

This supports the idea of adopting a free-flowing and adaptable approach to studying this group.

Nicholas (2000) created a framework for studying information needs and Inskip, et al. (2008) showed that this framework could be applied to study the information needs of folk music enthusiasts, whose:

motivations are somewhat different to the users typically described in the digital library and information seeking and retrieval literature. (Inskip, Butterworth, & MacFarlane, 2008, p.660)

It would be interesting to try applying something like this to analyse results – while bearing in mind that the training situation is different because users want to develop *skills* as well as knowledge.

2.16 Summary

My literature search revealed that:

- There is already a lot of research into who the users of computer training in the UK are and how to attract new users.
- There are considerations about working with older people that must influence how any research is carried out, when they are the most common subjects.
- There is a precedent for seriously studying information needs and analysing these systematically.

In the context of the previous research, this group of people are worthy of study because:

They are a very different range of people from those represented in the existing Online Centre studies and they are the kind of people that UK Online Centres say that they want to attract (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010). They are people who have overcome age barriers and other disadvantages so they deserve for their expectations and needs to be taken into account by the institution that they are visiting. A more in-depth investigation of their information needs than was conducted in the previous research would be useful in understanding non-users too, because until recently these people were in that category. I hope to include some users who have dropped out of the course to find out why – though getting a response may be challenging (the method that I adopted is detailed on page 36)

This research is also timely because the training system used is changing from ‘MyGuide’ to ‘Go ON’ and funding is being cut by 70% (UK Online Centres, 2011b) - so it is especially important to find out how the limited resources can be targeted most effectively.

3 Methodology

3.1 Sample

All of the users of the Learning Centre are adults who do not feel that they have developed internet skills or knowledge. In order to make sure that I get a representative sample of these users, and also to ensure that I approached them in the best way, I did a preliminary analysis of the users of the Learning Centre throughout May 2011. This period was several months before the main part of the research, so the users were not my respondents. I decided that the figures for this month would give me an accurate reflection of the regular situation; in terms of the age of the Centre's users and how many sessions they had attended. I used the Library Management System records to find the ages of this anonymous group of users. I was aware that this sensitive data should not be used lightly, but I considered that this prying was justified because it was so important that this dissertation was carried out with regard to the age of the group of users. I used a separate group of users for this preliminary study in order to protect the privacy of my respondents. I would not need to divide up my respondents in terms of age, so there was no reason to investigate their library records.

This data from the computer booking system for the Learning Centre throughout May 2011 shows that 83% of the 48 users during that month were fifty years of age or older (including 40% who were over seventy) (Figure 3 below)

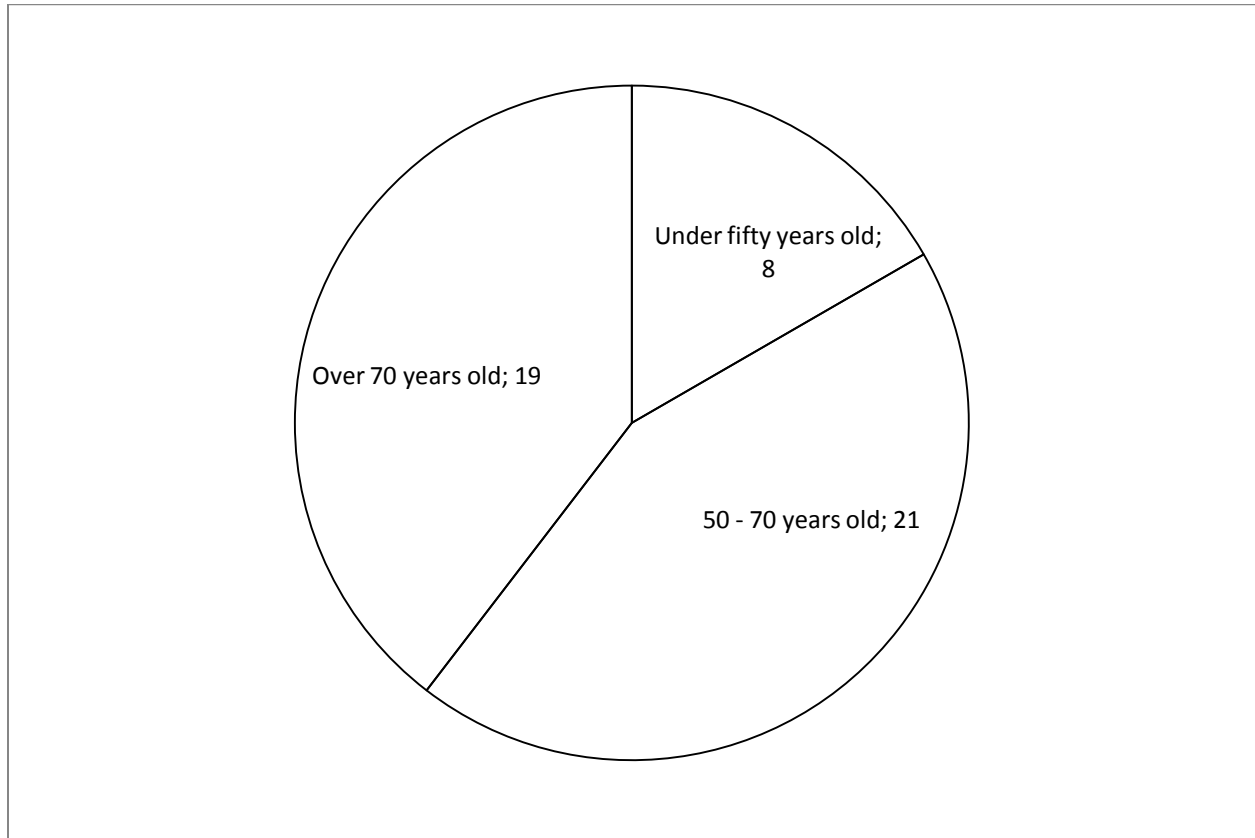


Figure 3: Age of the users of the Learning Centre during May 2011

This predominance of older users suggests that it is valid (in fact necessary) to take into account the age of the users in the method of data collection.

These older people have overcome the acknowledged doubts and fears of many in their position (for example, those explored by Dickinson et al. (2011)) to take advantage of the opportunity that is offered to discover if this technology is useful to them.

3.2 Methodological Approaches

3.2.1 Possible Approaches

In order to collect the information for this dissertation, several different methodological approaches were considered:

- Self-completion questionnaires (for all respondents)
- Focus groups
- Structured interviews
- Unstructured interviews
- A mixture of self-completion questionnaires and semi-structured interviews

The advantages and disadvantages of each of these methods is discussed in the tables on the following pages.

Table 3: Possible approach considered: Self-completion questionnaires only

<p>Advantages: My aim to include non-returners makes the use of postal surveys seem the most realistic approach for them, because of the difficulty of contacting these ex-customers in a non-intrusive way. So if postal surveys are the only viable option for these users, then there would be benefits to using the same approach for all the respondents – including those who are still attending the course as well. This approach would allow accurate comparison of the views of returners and non-returners because they would be answering the same questions, posed in the same way. It would probably be a less inconvenient way for all the respondents to answer questions compared to other methods, because they could fill in a questionnaire when they felt they had the time, rather than at a fixed time.</p>	<p>Disadvantages: Adopting this method would mean that I would miss out on the opportunity to have face-to-face discussions with any of the users. There would be no possibility for users to steer the questions towards the issues that they are concerned with. There would be no possibility of re-phrasing or clarifying questions that the users did not understand.</p> <p>From the literature review, I know that the research by Eisma et al. found that questionnaires are not the most suitable methods for research with older people unless the researcher ‘administer[s] the survey directly’ (Eisma, et al., 2004, p.134)</p>
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Table 4: Possible approach considered: Focus groups

<p>Advantages: This approach is endorsed by Eisma et al. for use with older people, providing that it is ‘presented ... as a social event’ to motivate respondents to participate (Eisma, et al., 2004, p.135). The Learning Centre at Catford could be a good situation for facilitating focus groups – small groups of users at varying stages of learning are assembled at the same time to do their training, so the opportunity exists to conduct focus groups before or after training.</p> <p>Focus groups could develop into interesting discussions in this context – allowing users to compare experiences with each other.</p>	<p>Disadvantages: Users could feel inhibited in the focus group situation. The fact that some users are less advanced in the course than others could make them unwilling to join in a discussion. Despite the debate explored in the literature review about the benefits or otherwise of computer literacy, I do not want to create a situation that would cause any users to be dissuaded from returning to the course (Dickinson & Gregor, 2006) (Lawson, 2011).</p>
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Table 5: Possible approach considered: Unstructured interviews

<p>Advantages: This method could really allow the respondents to define the direction of this whole study. They would be able to discuss their own concerns in their own terms.</p> <p>The interviews could be conducted as friendly chats of the kind that take place in the Learning Centre already every day. These chats could be of flexible length to suit the users so they would be relatively unintrusive.</p>	<p>Disadvantages: The unstructured interviews may move into areas that this dissertation is not designed to explore. The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse the users' expectations in a structured way – and in order to keep the focus of the interviews within these boundaries some semi-structured questions, at least, would be necessary.</p> <p>The potential interviewees may not feel comfortable enough to be very talkative without some fixed questions.</p>
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Table 6: Possible approach considered: Structured interviews

<p>Advantages: This method could be used to ask users a fixed set of questions. It would be possible to combine this method with postal questionnaires because exactly the same questions (and multiple-choice answers) could be used. It would then be easy to collate the results – and easy to compare different interviews because they would have been conducted in the same way. The results gathered with this method would not require the same degree of interpretation to fit them into the coding structure that responses to a less structured interview would inevitably require. This would help to reduce the effect of my subjective analysis of the responses.</p> <p>This method would have an advantage over self-completion questionnaires in that questions could be clarified by the interviewer.</p>	<p>Disadvantages: Similar concerns arise when considering this method as with focus groups; This research needs to be carried out in a very sensitive way towards the respondents in order not to dissuade them from returning to the course. A structured interview could be perceived as an unfriendly test with correct or incorrect answers. Structured interviews would not allow the respondents to guide the interview towards the areas that interest (or worry) them – and this would be a missed opportunity for this research.</p>
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Table 7: Possible approach considered: A mixture of self-completion questionnaires and semi-structured interviews

<p>Advantages: This method (or combination of methods) would allow non-returners as well as returners to the course to be included in the research – because questionnaires are a viable way of including the non-returners. This method would also allow returners to the course to take part in less structured interviews where they could influence the conversation and give more open answers.</p>	<p>Disadvantages: The whole group of respondents would not be questioned in the same way and would not be asked exactly the same questions. The results from returners and non-returners would need to be analysed separately and direct comparison between these two groups would be difficult.</p>
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3.2.2 The Methodological Approach adopted for this study

I decided that this combination of self-completion questionnaires for the non-returners and semi-structured interviews for the returners is the method that I will use to gather the information for this study.

I anticipated that the greatest challenge of this research would be to try to involve users who appear to have abandoned the training course – unlike the previous research into ‘MyGuide’ and UK Online Centres (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010; UK Online Centres, 2007). This group could give useful information about how the training and computer provision could have been adapted to meet their expectations. They also *need* to be included if a realistic impression of the satisfaction of users is to be established; existing research has only included current users of centres and ‘MyGuide’ training when gathering this information. I would need to define and identify non-returners and adopt a methodological approach that could involve them.

In order to examine the expectations of the users and the non-returners in a thorough and systematic way, I have drawn up a series of questions based on Nicholas’s framework for assessing information needs (Nicholas, 2000). The state of users who have not yet developed

internet skills corresponds to being in a state of information need, so it is possible to design questions for each of Nicholas's 'information need' categories that should help to prompt users to express their own feelings about the training.

The non-returners to the course will be sent a self-completion postal questionnaire with a slightly different set of questions to those asked at the interviews. The questions (shown in Appendix 5) also relate to the categories devised by Nicholas for studying information needs, but they are less 'open' in order to encourage responses to the survey (Nicholas, 2000). A pilot questionnaire was initially sent out, as detailed on page 36 the response was low, so the questions were revised. As Bryman advises: 'many writers on the subject recommend that open questions are used as little as possible in self-completion questionnaires' (Bryman, 2008, p. 221). Given the added factor that users who have not returned to training may wish to put the experience behind them – it is essential that I try to minimise the inconvenience of the questionnaire.

It would have been interesting to have asked the same set of questions in the same way to returners and to non-returners, in order to identify the factors that have led people to abandon the course, but that is not the aim of this dissertation. I think that it is valid to ask a different set of questions to each group because the non-returners are in a different situation to the returners. It should be borne in mind when analysing my results that the groups have been questioned in completely different ways.

For the interviews, Bryman's description of qualitative interviewing where 'rambling or going off at tangents is often encouraged – it gives insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important' should be a key precept (Bryman, 2008, p. 437).

3.3 Scope and restrictions

In this dissertation, I will not attempt to include any people who have not attended at least one session at the Learning Centre. There are many library users (and of course many more non library users) who would be eligible to use the Learning Centre but do not choose to utilise it. Their views and expectations about the training would be very relevant and interesting to study - the existing UK Online Centres research investigates different types of non-user in great depth (Kunzmann & Stevens, 2010). The focus of this dissertation, though, is on the users of the course, whose expectations have led them to attend at least once.

I do want to investigate these initial motivations to join the course, how the new users felt and what their concerns and hopes were. For this reason users who have recently begun the course will be a really valuable source of views and information.

This study is restricted to Catford Library. It would certainly be valid to extend this research to include a comparison with the experiences of users and staff in other libraries and in other boroughs, where different methods of tuition are used. The nature of this dissertation, however, is to be focused on the experiences of a small group one location; the existing research by UK Online Centres brings together studies into different types of centre (Institute for Employment Studies, 2010) but there is potential for more studies into the effectiveness of different types of computer training in libraries.

This dissertation will avoid asking respondents directly if they are satisfied with the training. This is one of the most important issues that this dissertation is intended to investigate, and the aim is to find a way of exploring this issue in a thorough way. I think that the previous research compiled by the Institute of Employment Studies (2010) has demonstrated that simply asking the question straight-out can produce an impressively positive statistic, but does not deliver further useful information.

This dissertation is structured around user expectations. The questions will be focused on finding out what people think that the course and the institution will offer them as they are starting – and as they continue through the course. Are their expectations met or exceeded or completely unfounded? The publicity for Silver Surfer's Day – the 'biggest national campaign to promote

the use of digital technologies by older people' (Digital Unite, 2012) had been promoted in UK Online Centres since it was launched in 2002. This publicity challenges people to 'face your online fears' – an acknowledgement that such expectations are not always positive (DirectGov, 2010).

3.4 Sampling Technique

3.4.1 Interviewees

There are a number of different factors that could be considered when trying to select a representative group of respondents from the users:

- Number of sessions attended
- Extent of progress through the course
- Starting date
- Age
- Previous experience

I have decided to stratify the users in terms of how many sessions they have attended and to try to get an even spread of respondents who have had different numbers of visits. This will mean that I collect responses from people who have spent varying amounts of time studying for the course. The reason for choosing this factor to define the sample is that I think that the number of sessions attended is likely to be the single most significant influence on users' perception and expectation of the training. The 'Netloan' public computer booking system that is used in all Lewisham libraries makes it possible to collect this information; users need to produce their library cards in order to book sessions and so the system records the time and duration of their sessions. The chart [Figure 4 on the next page] shows the spread of total sessions previously attended by the users of the centre in my preliminary sample study of non-respondents from May 2011.

I have divided the spread of sessions attended into four categories as shown:

- 5 or less sessions
- 6 to 10 sessions
- 11 to 15 sessions
- 16 or more sessions

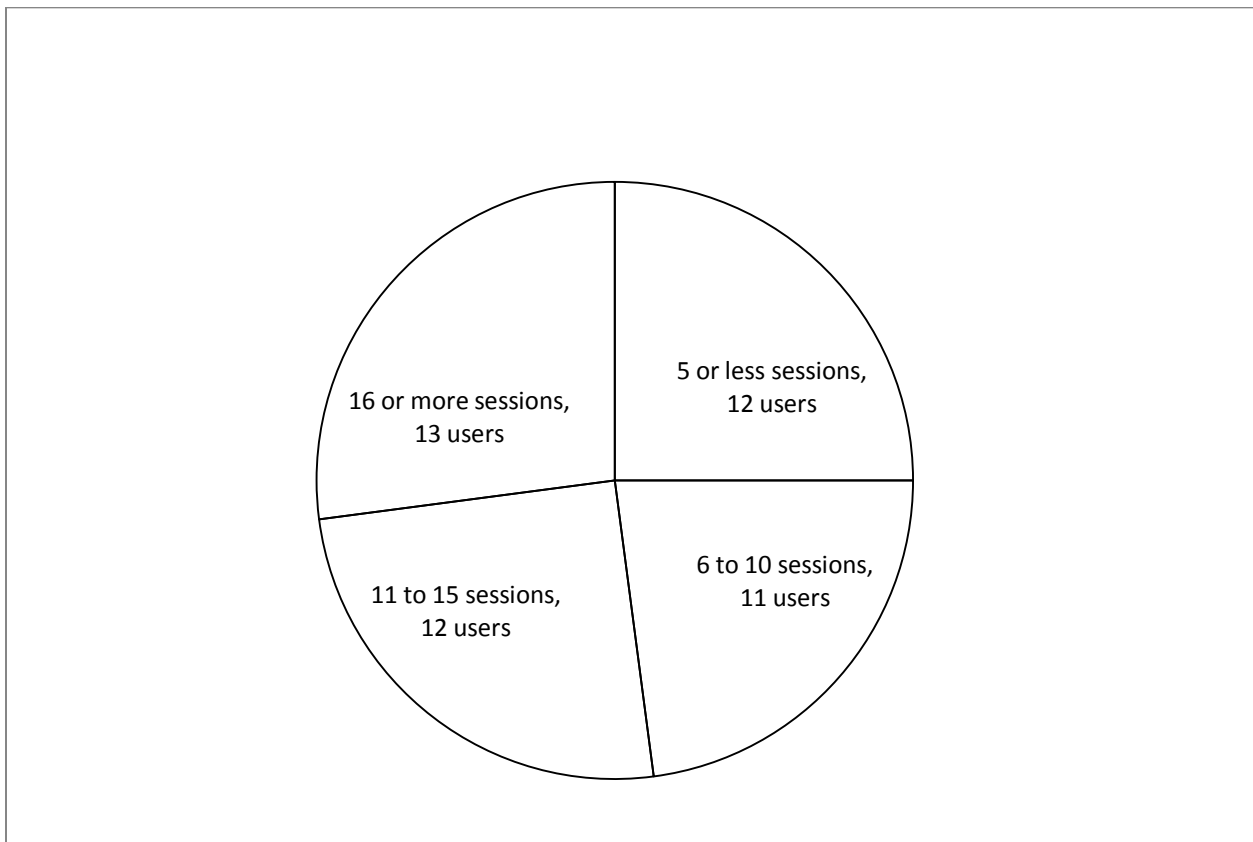


Figure 4: The total number of sessions previously attended by the users attending in May 2011

The pie-chart shows that these categories are roughly equal in size, so in order to get a representative sample of users I will need to interview an equal number of users from each category.

Because the interviews are intended to be in-depth and adaptable, I decided that speaking to three learners from each of the four categories shown in Figure 4 on the previous page would give me sufficient data to analyse. This would necessitate twelve interviews in total, spread over two weeks, as shown in Table 9: 'Interview schedule' on page 39. As discussed in the Literature Review, I found that research in this area is very time-sensitive. I felt that two weeks of interviews was a suitable time period, before I would begin to assess and produce my findings (which would hopefully still be practical and relevant to the library) so I decided on twelve interviews.

3.4.2 Non-returners

As outlined in section 3.2.2 (on page 30), I also intended to use postal questionnaires to include the views of non-returners to the course, as well as the interviewees. For the purposes of this dissertation, I defined non-returners as users who had attended four or fewer sessions and then not returned for two months. I decided that (although people do progress at different rates) it was highly unlikely that these users would have been able to finish the course in less than five sessions, so anyone in this group must have abandoned the course for some reason.

Using the computer booking system, I identified twenty previous users who would become my non-returners sample. In order to find this number of non-returners, I had to search back to February 2011, 13 months before. I decided to set this as the limit because users who had not attended for a very long period would be less likely to remember their experiences. Also, if I got an acceptable response of over 50% from the postal questionnaires (as discussed in section 4.1 'Response rate and respondent characteristics' on page 41) this would give me a similar number of non-returned respondents as my returner interviewees.

3.5 Materials

So the following materials will be used in this study:

- Informal interviews – semi structured
- Paper surveys – self-completion postal questionnaires
- Computer booking system records
- Library Management System records

3.6 Procedure

3.6.1 Pilot questionnaires

Ten pilot questionnaires and cover letters (Appendices 6 and 7) were posted on 21st Feb 2012 to users who had attended five sessions at the Learning Centre and then had not returned for two months. These users were chosen because they did not fall into this dissertation's definition of non-returners (less than five sessions) but they were not likely to return and be available for interviews. By 6th March 2012, four of the questionnaires had been returned. Three of the respondents had not answered all of the questions. One of the respondents had marked contradictory answers to two questions.

As a result of these responses, the questionnaire was amended (Appendix 5). The following changes were made in order to try to encourage a greater rate of response:

- Fewer open questions – four in the pilot, two in the final version
- Clearer choice of responses
- Open questions only at the end of the questionnaire
- Larger font size – from 12 point in the pilot to 14 point in the final version, to improve readability.
- More space between the questions – to improve readability.

3.6.2 Final questionnaires

Twenty amended questionnaires and cover letters were sent out on 6th March 2012 to non-returners who had attended less than five sessions.

A stamped-addressed envelope was included with the questionnaire and also a cover letter explaining the project (Appendix 7). In the letter the potential participants were assured that their ‘answers will be completely confidential and only used for my college project and hopefully to improve the computer training at the library’. I did not mention that they had been identified as non-returners to the course, because I felt that this may influence their answers, and may also influence whether or not they return to the library.

3.6.3 Interviews

The main material for this study will be a series of semi-structured interviews with some of the current learners on the course. Users will be asked individually if they have time to contribute their views.

The interview questions are designed to investigate the different aspects of their expectations regarding the training. In order to identify these different aspects, I have adapted Nicholas’s framework for studying information needs which identifies the following categories:

Table 8: Nicholas's Information Need categories (Nicholas, 2000)

Subject
Function
Nature/description
Intellectual level/Level of complexity
Viewpoint
Quantity
Quality/authority
Date/currency
Speed of delivery
Place/sources
Processing and packaging

These categories all relate directly to the training situation at Catford. Questions about the training corresponding to each of the categories have been devised and are shown in Appendix 8 along with the category to which they relate.

I decided that pilot interviews would not be necessary for this dissertation. I intended that the interviews would be flexible enough that any issues could be addressed in the 'real' interview process.

I conducted the interviews after each Learning Centre session, beginning on Sat 10th March. I identified potential interviewees based on how many sessions they had attended (see Table 10 on page 42) and asked them if they would be prepared to take part in my research, and if they agreed we remained in the Learning Centre after the other users had left and conducted the interview. This fit in well with Bryman's advice to 'make sure as far as possible that the interview takes place in a setting that is quiet . . . and private.' (Bryman, 2008, p. 443).

For each interview, I printed out a sheet of the interview questions (as shown in Appendix 9) and took notes of the key points of the interviewees' answers, despite the fact that I was recording the interviews for transcription later. I did this to maintain focus on the questions, as a method of 'steering' the interview (Bryman, 2008, p. 445)

The interviews continued over two weeks, as shown in the interview schedule (Table 9) below:

Table 9: Interview schedule

Date	Time	Interviewee
Sat 10 th Mar 2012	11.30-12.00	Interviewee 1
Mon 12 th Mar 2012	11.30-12.00	Interviewee 2
Tue 13 th Mar 2012	11.30-12.00	Interviewee 3
	3.00-3.30	Interviewee 4
Thu 15 th Mar 2012	11.30-12.00	Interviewee 5
Sat 17 th Mar 2012	11.30-12.00	Interviewee 6
Mon 19 th Mar 2012	11.30-12.00	Interviewee 7
Tue 20 th Mar 2012	11.30-12.00	Interviewee 8
	3.00-3.30	Interviewee 9
Thu 22 nd Mar 2012	11.30-12.00	Interviewee 10
Sat 24 th Mar 2012	11.30-12.00	Interviewee 11
Mon 26 th Mar 2012	11.30-12.00	Interviewee 12

3.6.4 Ethical issues

I tried to be as mindful as possible of ethical issues throughout the process. I used a separate group of users for my preliminary study into the age range of the sample group (in section 3.1 ‘Sample’ on page 23) in order to protect the privacy of my final respondents. This allowed me not to investigate my respondents’ library records, because I would not need to divide them up in terms of age.

As shown in Appendix 7: ‘Cover letter sent with questionnaires’, I assured the respondents that their replies would be confidential, and I refrained from numbering the forms in order to

heighten confidentiality – despite the fact that this would have enabled me to ‘chase-up’ those who did not reply to the questionnaire.

Before the interviews, the interviewees were given an informed consent form to sign (Appendix 10). I read out the form to ensure that the interviewees understood the consent issues. I included the statement that; ‘this interview is not part of the computer course, and I don’t have to do it if I don’t want to’ because I wanted to make it clear that the questions were not compulsory. I gave users the option not to be recorded, but none of them objected.

3.7 Statistical Treatment

The responses to the questions were sorted by how they correspond to Nicholas’s framework. This allowed me to assess the different responses in each category and to compare the answers from users at different stages in their learning. An example interview transcript showing this coding method is shown in Appendix 11.

3.8 Methodology summary

- Having considered a number of possible approaches, I decided to use a mixture of interviews and self-completion questionnaires that would enable me to involve users and non-returners of the Learning Centre.
- I devised a set of interview questions (shown in Appendix 8) and a separate set of questionnaire questions (shown in Appendix 5) that linked Nicholas’s categories for analysing information needs to the Learning Centre situation (Nicholas, 2000).
- For the interviews I identified potential respondents based on how many sessions they had attended and interviewed twelve users over two weeks.
- For the questionnaires I identified the twenty non-returners from the previous 13 months and, after refining the questionnaires by testing a pilot version, I sent out questionnaires to them.

I felt that using Nicholas’s framework had produced some comprehensive questions concerning the users’ (and non-returners’) information needs so I looked forward to collecting and analysing the results.

4 Results

4.1 Response rate and respondent characteristics

By March 24th 2012, when I began analysing the results, I had received 11 questionnaires back, a 55% response rate. I was aware from reading Bryman that ‘according to some authorities a response rate of below 50 per cent is not acceptable’ for postal questionnaires (Bryman, 2008, p. 220). I was prepared for a response rate of less than 50%, due to the likely dissatisfaction of the sample group, so I was pleased that the response rate fell into Mangione’s ‘barely acceptable’ category (Bryman, 2008, p. 219). My aim was to involve as many non-returners as possible in this research, while being aware that this group would be hard to contact. It is important to bear in mind when considering my results, however, that those who did not return their questionnaires are likely to include the most dissatisfied non-returners.

As for those who were still attending the course, none of the potential interviewees that I approached refused to take part – so I was able to get a good spread of users who had attended different numbers of sessions, as show in Table 10 on page 42.

Table 10: The total number of sessions previously attended by the interviewees

Interviewee	Number of sessions attended
Interviewee 1	6 sessions
Interviewee 2	36 sessions
Interviewee 3	18 sessions
Interviewee 4	10 sessions
Interviewee 5	15 sessions
Interviewee 6	14 sessions
Interviewee 7	39 sessions
Interviewee 8	36 sessions
Interviewee 9	6 sessions
Interviewee 10	1 session
Interviewee 11	4 sessions
Interviewee 12	4 sessions

4.2 Nicholas's categories

As mentioned in the methodology on page 23, I have sorted the results into the categories devised by Nicholas that make up an information need (Nicholas, 2000). The majority of the questionnaire responses were multiple choice answers, so these have been presented as bar charts alongside the interview answers in their relevant sections. There were some written responses to the open questions which I have also included in the relevant sections.

4.2.1 Subject

Nicholas wrote about how subject is often central to information need statements, but that it is 'in some respects an imposed characteristic' and 'the portrayal of information need through keywords alone is symptomatic of the shallow thinking that surrounds the subject' (Nicholas, 2000, p. 39). In order to find out if the users viewed the subject of their own information needs in terms of keywords before they started, or in some other way, I asked the interviewees 'before you started, did you know what you wanted to learn?' Five out of the twelve interviewees responded that they did not know. Of these, some seemed quite dismissive of the idea that they, as complete beginners, would be able to define the subject of their need:

No, I didn't understand it before! (Interviewee 4)

No, I didn't know anything about it at all (Interviewee 7)

Others expressed their general interest in computing, but could not be more explicit about what they had wanted to achieve:

Yeah – to be able to handle computer - - at home I have an old laptop but I'm not able to use it (Interviewee 1)

I just wanted to use the computer. Not anything specific because I am just trying to learn to read and write. Trying to pick up as I'm going along . . . I can't really pick it up. This is good because I can follow it (Interviewee 3)

One of the interviewees showed awareness of her own developing knowledge of the possible subject areas available:

As I go on it opens up more, you know, things that I can find out because, for instance I didn't know that all the services you could do it online. (Interviewee 11)

Only one interviewee expressed any clear 'goals' in terms of keywords:

I had a rough idea, yeah, yeah, yeah. I wanted to do emails. I wanted to go on the internet basically and well, just they were the main two things. (Interviewee 12)

The non-returners had an advantage over the interviewees when it came to responding to this question; they were given a choice of keyword answers to question 7: 'what were you hoping to learn from the course?' so they did not have to answer the question in their own words. The results, in Figure 5 below, show that nine of the eleven respondents specified 'general computer skills', the most frequent answer, but most also ticked at least one of the other answers that they were offered.

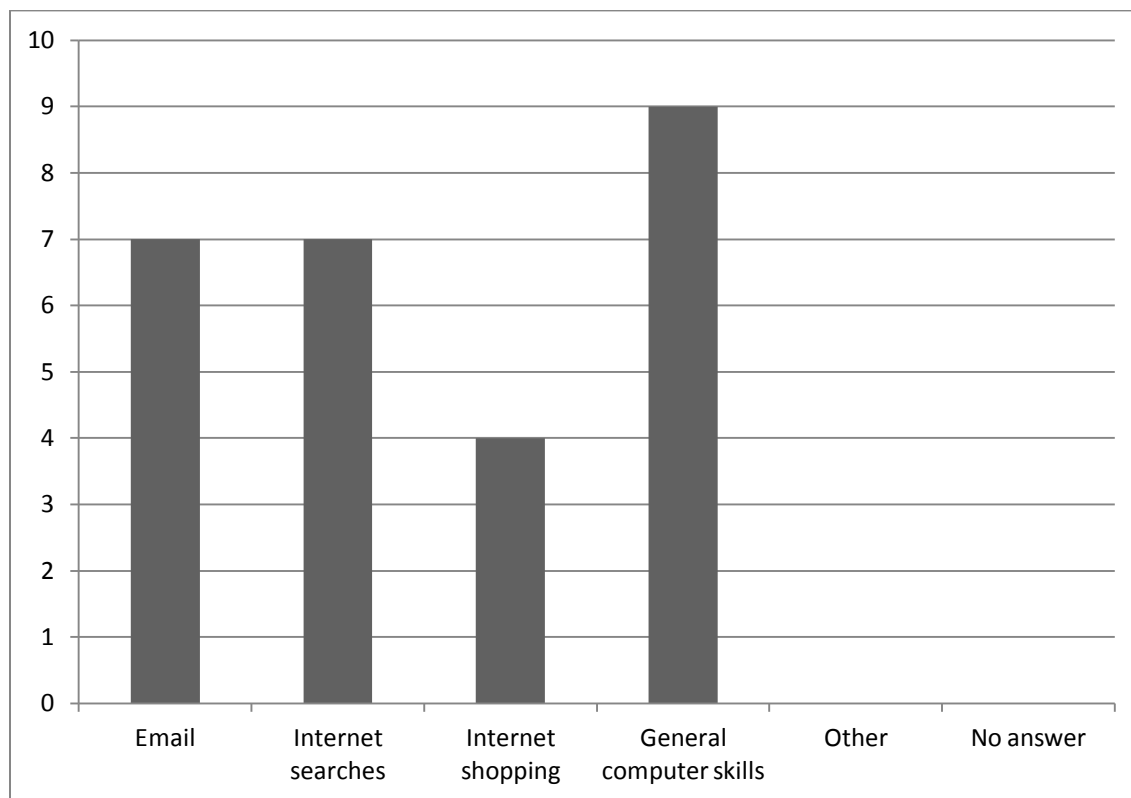


Figure 5: Non-returners questionnaire, 7: What were you hoping to learn from the course? (n=11 respondents, multi-response)

4.2.2 Function

Nicholas defined function as the ‘use to which the information is put’ (Nicholas, 2000, p. 46). Of course, the common function of the information and skills that the Learning Centre users are working to acquire is to enable them to use computers. I asked the interviewees if they intended to continue to use computers after they had completed the course and all of the interviewees said that they did. Nine of the eleven non-returned questionnaire respondents shared this intention, as shown in Figure 6 below (some users ticked more than one option, but only one was definitely negative and one did not answer):

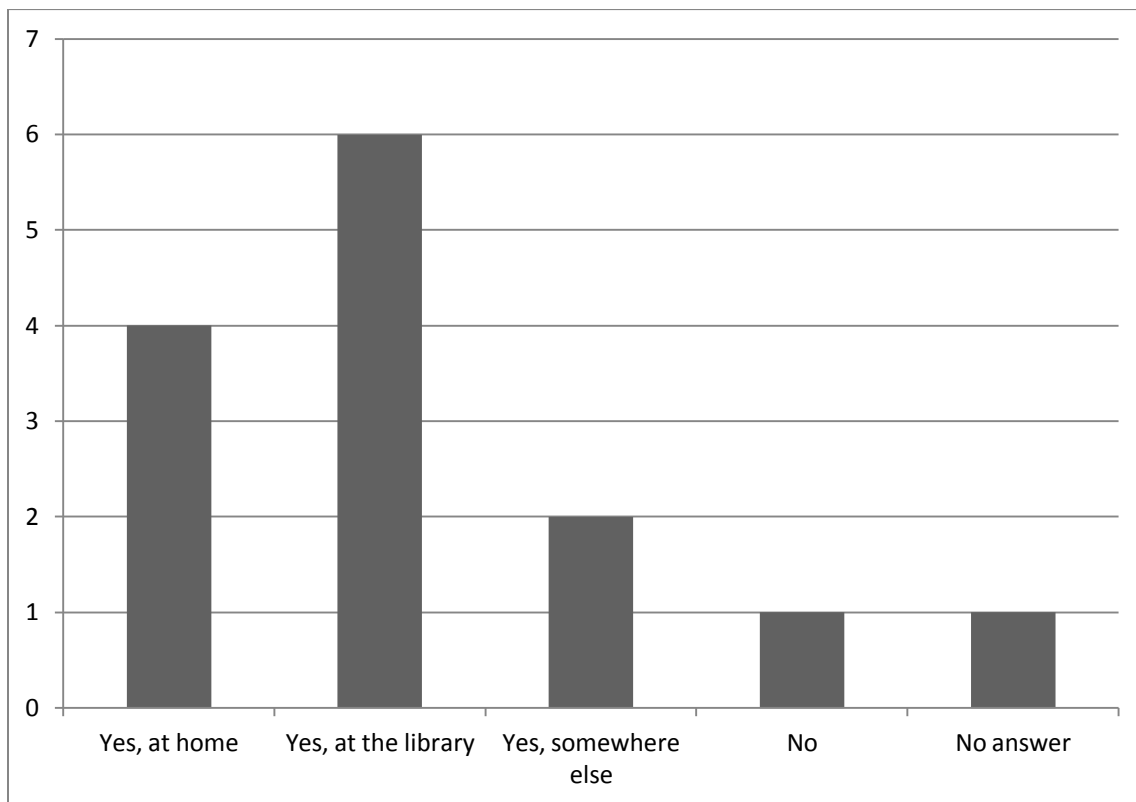


Figure 6: Non-returned questionnaire, 2: Do you plan to use computers in the future? (n=11 respondents, multi-response)

When asked if they had their own computers, some of the interviewees replied that they had recently acquired them and hoped that the course would help them to use these more effectively:

I just got a laptop. Just, just, just now. So I need to know more about it. (Interviewee 11)

I just got one . . . only this week. Um, it's a laptop, er, it's not on the internet . . . yet. I am hoping to do that soon (Interviewee 12)

They got me one . . . laptop (Interviewee 4)

...and one user wanted to study computers with a view to buying his own in the future:

Oh yeah, I'm thinking of buying one – there's no point in buying one and then it sitting there getting dusty coz you don't know what to do with it. (Interviewee 10)

The same interviewee wanted to use the course to discover whether he would like to pursue a career in computers:

I might find computer skills and computer work quite interesting. I used to do reception work many years ago, but they didn't have computers then. But now it's all computerised, so another feather in your cap, sort of thing. (Interviewee 10)

When I asked him if he had known what he wanted to do before he started, he showed awareness that he would need computer knowledge to find a job:

Er. . .internet job searching. Basically learning how to use the computer and that because I'd never used one before (Interviewee 10)

The multiple choice (and minimal) nature of the questionnaire meant that the uses to which the non-returners put the information they acquired were not investigated to the same degree as those of the interviewees, but nine of the eleven respondents indicated that they had found the course useful. This result suggests that they had, indeed, found a use of some kind for the knowledge acquired on the course (Figure 7 on page 47):

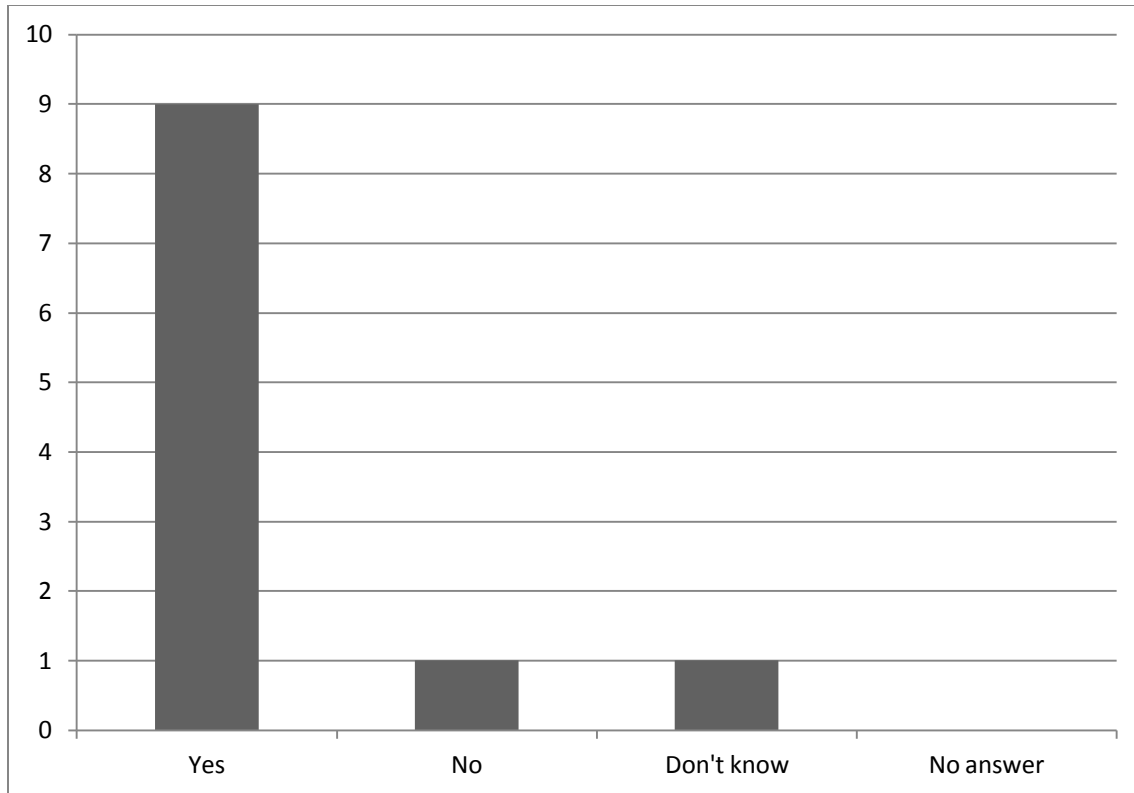


Figure 7: Non-returned questionnaire, 6: Did you find the course useful? (n=11 respondents, single response)

4.2.3 Nature/description

Nicholas wrote about the different types of information that various kinds of users may require; statistical, historical, conceptual etc. Because the location for this dissertation is an IT Learning Centre, it is predictable that the users' responses to questions in this area show that their information needs fall into the category that Nicholas calls 'methodological'. He wrote 'if we interpret the term widely to mean 'how to do' information then hobbyists of all types would be interested in this type of information' (Nicholas, 2000, p. 54).

Hobbyists does not seem like the perfect term for the Learning Centre users (mainly because they do intend to complete the course and then leave, rather than continuing to pursue the course for pleasure) but 'how to do' information does seem to accurately describe what they are looking for:

My main thing is to get started, you know. (Interviewee 12)

One user described her needs by suggesting a way to concentrate on practical information that she could use in future:

Umm erm - - If one had her own computer, can she bring that in? Would that be better? Because that's what she's going to use at home. (Interviewee 1)

The users realise that the course is not made up of information that is quickly acquired, but is part of a gradual, methodological learning process. None of them expressed dissatisfaction with their rate of progress:

What I hope to do is to gradually get versed into the computer when my son comes he will help me at home but I will still like to come here for reference because you do have - - you can help me. (Interviewee 1)

The other users expressed similarly patient views about their learning – which are included in section 4.2.9 ‘Speed of delivery’ on page 56

One interviewee described her position in terms of the Silver Surfer’s Day campaign that had been publicised in the Learning Centre (DirectGov, 2010). It had obviously been effective in defining her needs

. . .like facing your fears and something else coz I'm often you know facing the fears because that's one of my biggest things. (Interviewee 6)

4.2.4 Intellectual level/level of complexity

Nicholas wrote that the ‘information footing’ of individuals varies according to the subject that they require information about (Nicholas, 2000, p. 54). In the case of the Learning Centre the level of complexity that individuals require from the course depends on how well they understand computers, so I asked users about their previous experience. Seven out of the twelve interviewees had never used a computer at all before. Eight out of the eleven questionnaire respondents were in the same position (Figure 8 below).

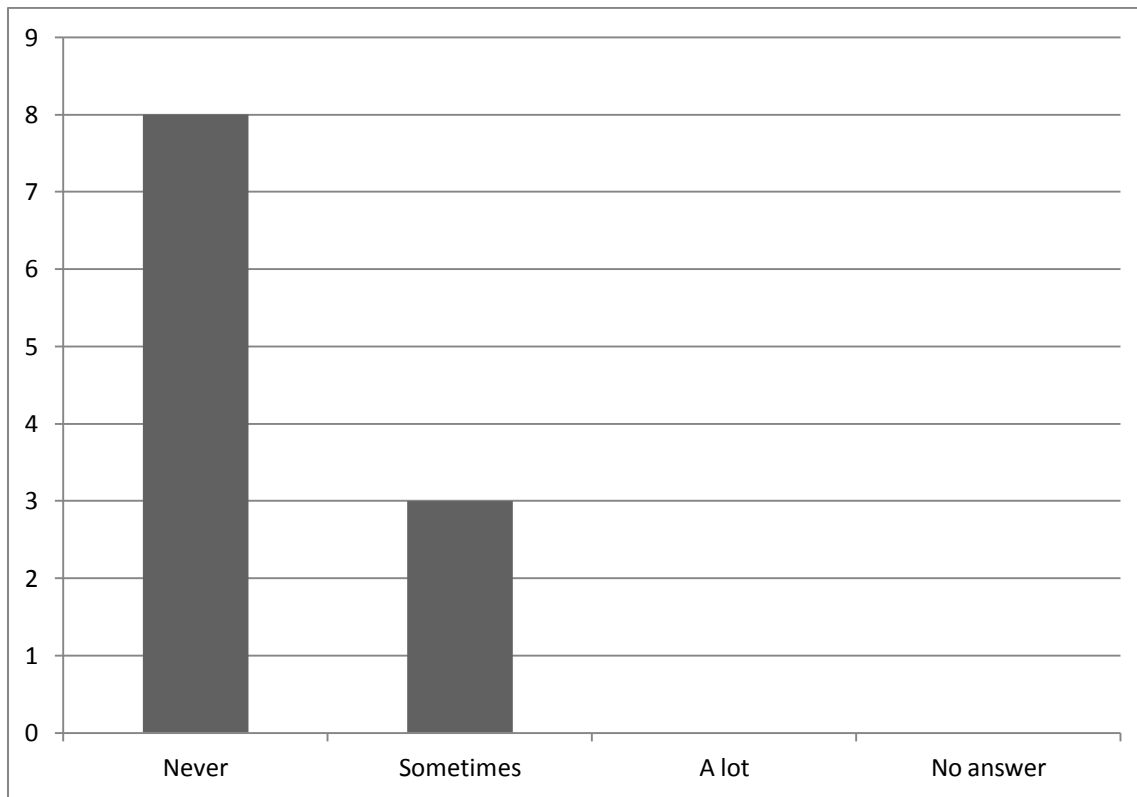


Figure 8: Non-returned questionnaire, 1: Did you use computers before you went to the course? (n=11 respondents, single response)

Five of these eleven non-returned said that they had found the course hard to do, the most common response to this question from those who returned their questionnaires (Figure 9 on page 50)

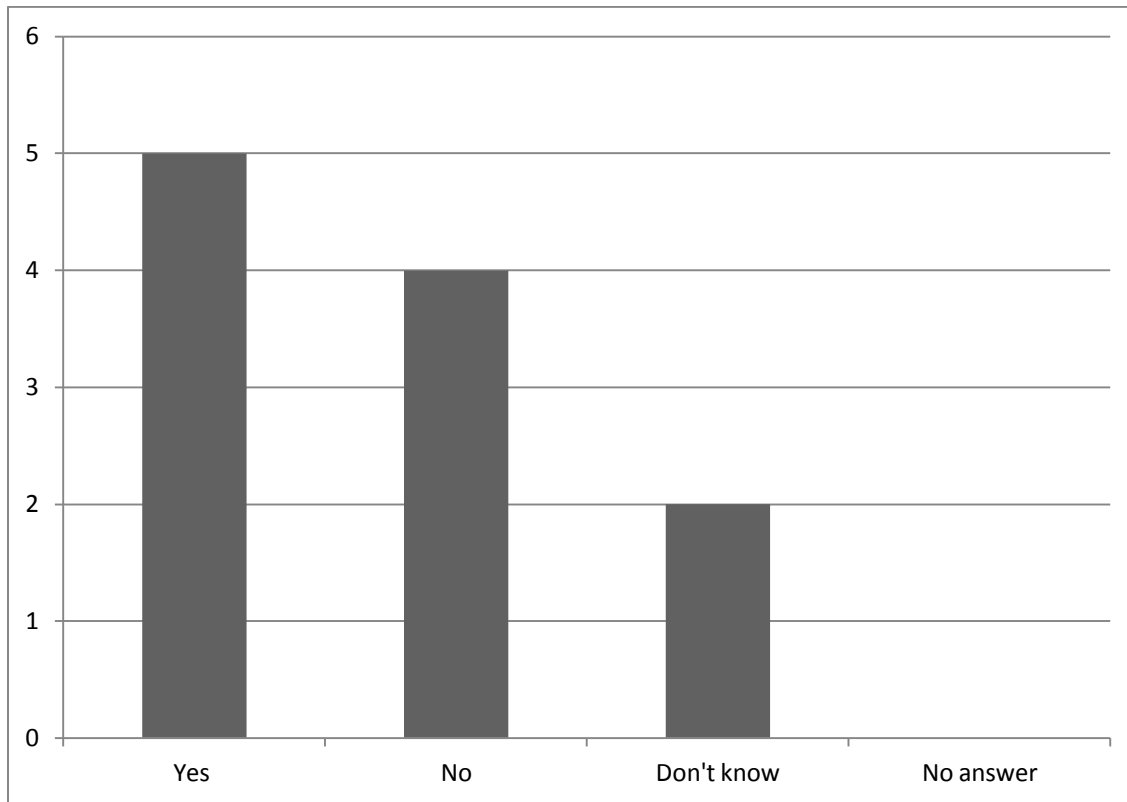


Figure 9: Non-returners questionnaire, 4: Did you find the course hard to do? (n=11 respondents, single response)

Of the remaining five interviewees who had some experience of computers, this had been in the workplace, using very specific work-related programs:

Well I'm a trained nurse so we had to do triage you do all that on a patient. Well apart from reception you're the next contact filling in the, um, patients' complaints and we do some firsthand checking you know for vital signs you just put it all down there
 (Interviewee 1)

One interviewee identified a difference between the way she had used computers at work and her current experience:

I worked with it but when you are in the workplace, the program is all done. You just go and click into the program and it's a bit different. You know the basic things like the desktop, like those. (Interviewee 11)

Another interviewee (otherwise very positive about his experience on the course) expressed his frustration with his present level of ability and his ignorance of terminology:

Erm . . . my main difficulty is getting into the thing. Every time I seem to have forgotten my . . . how to, like. . . get into the . . . into the erm. . . you know . . . the site, or whatever . . . I seem to make a . . . botch of it, you know. (Interviewee 12)

4.2.5 Viewpoint

The users I questioned predominantly shared a positive viewpoint about computers. They viewed computers as part of their lives from now on; as mentioned in the 'Function' section (4.2.2), twenty-one of the twenty-three total respondents intended to continue to use computers.

The pre-course viewpoint of the users is very closely linked to their expectations for the course. When I asked them if they had expected the course to be different, some of the interviewees displayed a kind of devil-may-care attitude, self-aware and revelling in the fact that this was all a mystery to them:

I'm not sure what I expected [laughs] It's the truth! I'm open-minded. You know when you go to college? You don't learn from the basics because you don't know anything. You have to DO. But you've got to KNOW so you have to have some kind of experience. I don't know if I'm making any sense. (Interviewee 11)

I didn't have an idea [laughs] (Interviewee 4)

No idea. But I have lots of fun now [laughs] I go on Google, I can Google now [laughs] I know that Google's not a pet dog now. (Interviewee 5)

Some of the interviewees had preconceptions about what a course should be like, that it should consist of classes or individual tuition:

What did come to me before I started is that you'd have some classes where everyone would be placed on individual computers. (Interviewee 2)

Ummm. . . you know, when I started I thought it was a class where I could have a one-to-one teacher, a person who is there all the time to answer your questions.

(Interviewee 3)

Of these interviewees with preconceptions, some were pleasantly surprised by the reality of the course, and some seemed disappointed. Those who were happiest were positive about working things out for themselves, and learning in that way:

I didn't realise it was, um . . . you had headphones and you would . . . interact with the screen. I thought someone would come round and say 'now you do this, now you do that' . . . so this is very good, yeah. (Interviewee 12)

If you get stuck I knew someone would be there to help, yeah, but I always think it's best to get stuck in and it's the only way you learn really, isn't it? You're scared to lose what's on the screen, but if you do, there's always someone there, anyway. I kept making little mistakes, but I even found out how to cancel it, so I thought, that's it.

(Interviewee 10)

Those who were disappointed thought that the course would be better with more staff:

Training could be improved with a bit more staffing - - if you had more staff to give us a bit more guidelines I think we'd have improved more (Interviewee 6)

. . . and then you could put you don't have a one-to-one because you have only one person. If you have two people on their first time . . . (Interviewee 1)

One of the users had begun on the previous 'MyGuide' course, so her viewpoint of 'Go ON' was influenced by her experiences of 'MyGuide'.

I find this one easier than 'MyGuide'. It informs you about where you got to, if you took the course or not. (Interviewee 2)

4.2.6 Quantity

Nicholas pointed out that the amount of information required for each information need is different and that ‘on the whole, people are quite aware of their information appetite’ (Nicholas, 2000, p. 65). The information appetites of some of the interviewees were not satisfied by the amount of material in the course. When I asked them how the course might be improved, they thought that it should be more extensive:

more modules? (Interviewee 6)

I just did one - - sometimes I go on the quiz over and over - - so they really need to have more of those things (Interviewee 7)

more modules, more skills, more quiz - - - I like a quiz - - (Interviewee 5)

Of course, it is hard for users somewhere in the midst of a course to know if they are going to be satisfied with their level of knowledge by the end of it:

Yeah, I've no idea what other courses there will be, um, this is probably going to be enough for me initially, to get me started. If I try and, well, decide there are things that I need to do on the computer, I will obviously, you know, come along to a course. (Interviewee 12)

4.2.7 Quality/authority

Nicholas wrote that ‘Quality ranks very highly on the list of information priorities. The on-going debate about the quality of information on the web is a testament to this’ (Nicholas, 2000, p. 66). Given this, it is worth noting that none of the interviewees were aware of who designed or provided the ‘Go ON’ course:

Is it not the um, the um - - London, the Borough of Lewisham? (Interviewee 1)

Is it not the Lewisham government? (Interviewee 4)

I thought it was the library (Interviewee 3)

The fact that the training takes place within the library appears to provide adequate reassurance of the quality of the information. Once I had asked the question, two of the interviewees appeared to consider the issue for the first time:

The course? No, I never goes into that, you know, which I should really. . . it would be nice to know. (Interviewee 2)

No, I'm not sure. I should do. It might be a body, you know. (Interviewee 11)

4.2.8 Date/currency

Nicholas identified two questions regarding the date/currency of information:

. . . firstly, how far back in time is information required; and secondly, how up-to-date does the information need to be? The first is largely dependent upon the shelf-life of information in the field.(Nicholas, 2000, p. 73)

The users of the Learning Centre showed awareness of the issue of information shelf-life:

I packed up work a long time ago – I took early retirement – I'd used a word processor, whether that counts as using a computer? They were different. . . Dell. . . '95 I last used one [laughing]. So I'm sure all the techniques have changed, yes (Interviewee 12)

One of the interviewees made the point that, for her, computer skills and knowledge are seen as inherently up-to-date,

I might [do a further course], because it's the in thing now. You've got to be in touch, you know, with what's going on, you know, yeah. (Interviewee 11)

So a major motivation for this interviewee to undertake the course was her perception that the information on which the course is based would have high date/currency value to her.

4.2.9 Speed of delivery

For the purposes of this dissertation, I decided to equate Nicholas's 'speed of delivery' of information with the speed of progress through the 'Go ON' course. I think this is a valid translation to the Learning Centre context, because the users are gradually acquiring information and skills as they work through the course.

When I asked them if they were happy with the amount of time they had spent so far, the interviewees all expressed content, but some also wished that they could book more sessions in order to progress more quickly:

*I could do with more hours on another day. Could we have another morning? Or . . .
Because you don't do afternoons, do you? (Interviewee 2)*

One of the users was worried that, if she progressed too slowly, she would forget things that she had already covered:

You know when you don't do something and you start to forget what you learnt at the beginning? (Interviewee 3)

Two of the non-returners expressed dissatisfaction with the number of sessions available, in response to the questionnaire question 'How could the course have been improved?':

*. . . by having more possibility to learn. It is sometimes difficult to get availability
. . . more hours and more days (Questionnaire responses)*

These comments have added weight for two reasons; the fact that they were made by non-returners who decided that the course was not suitable for them, and because these were amongst very few answers to the open questions on the questionnaire, which were generally left blank. These two factors could indicate that these are particularly strongly felt sentiments.

Of the interviewees (who all remained on the course) some were very accepting that they would progress slowly and were prepared to dedicate the time to do the course thoroughly:

*I think it would take a long time coz when you don't know anything about computers
you have to take your time. It takes a while. Those things come up on the computer you*

don't wait till somebody. If you haven't got the experience, you just can't do it on your own, you know. (Interviewee 3)

I'm just going over some of the same things to make you more sure. I knew I would take my time, because I didn't know anything! (Interviewee 7)

One of the interviewees expressed some frustration with the speed of the website itself:

It was very slow, I don't know if it's the computer or not, but it's sooo slooow! It took about five minutes for a card to turn over! [laughs] but otherwise no, it's fine for beginners, yeah, brilliant. (Interviewee 10)

4.2.10 Place/sources

Nicholas wrote about how ‘the place or origin of information matters to some people’ (Nicholas, 2000, p. 80). While his framework focuses on this aspect of ‘place’, I took the liberty of changing the focus for this dissertation. I investigated ‘place’ in terms of the environment in which the course takes place. The results in part 4.2.7 ‘Quality/authority’ on page 54 show that the interviewees were not highly aware of the source of the information they were studying, and I thought that their surroundings would be more relevant to them.

Several of the interviewees expressed very strong feelings of attachment or family links to the library:

Every since I came to um Catford I joined the library a good - - ten years ago - - coz I used to bring my grandchildren to the Friday - - Friday? And we would borrow books. And I have a disabled son, he has books too. I’m quite happy with the change; you’ve done re-modelling of everything. My niece even came from Ireland and did what do you call the whole display? – storytelling! (Interviewee 1)

I would love to [do another course] - - - if it was here. Because this is like a little home for me (Interviewee 5)

When I change the course and I’m not confident within myself, could I continue here? Coz I’m at this library. (Interviewee 2)

In contrast, just as many of the interviewees said that they had only started to attend the library in order to do the course

I just joined to do this course, I knew there was online, like (Interviewee 9)

Joined up just to learn (Interviewee 6)

I came to the library because I wanted to go online. What I really wanted was to use the PC, but I didn’t understand it, so really, I had to come on the course. To attend this course. (Interviewee 11)

No, no I usually go to another library; basically it’s easier to park. It’s hard to find a spot round here, isn’t it? (Interviewee 12)

All of the interviewees were at least moderately positive when asked ‘what they thought of the place’ (they were, of course, aware that the interviewer worked there). The children’s section of

the library adjoins the Learning Centre, and the proximity of groups of children prompted two interviewees to comment on this subject:

The library is ok, it's good, a nice space. Children can come and do what they want to do [child screams in the background] and get a little time out from home [laughs]. They can come out to come and have something to do. (Interviewee 3)

I think that . . . is that the children's section? It's a bit of a racket! [laughs] But then I, you know, it's not a problem because I know they have to be here, but I can't, you know, hear the audio thing. (Interviewee 11)

Seven of the eleven respondents to the non-returners questionnaire said that they no longer attended Catford Library (Figure 10 below)

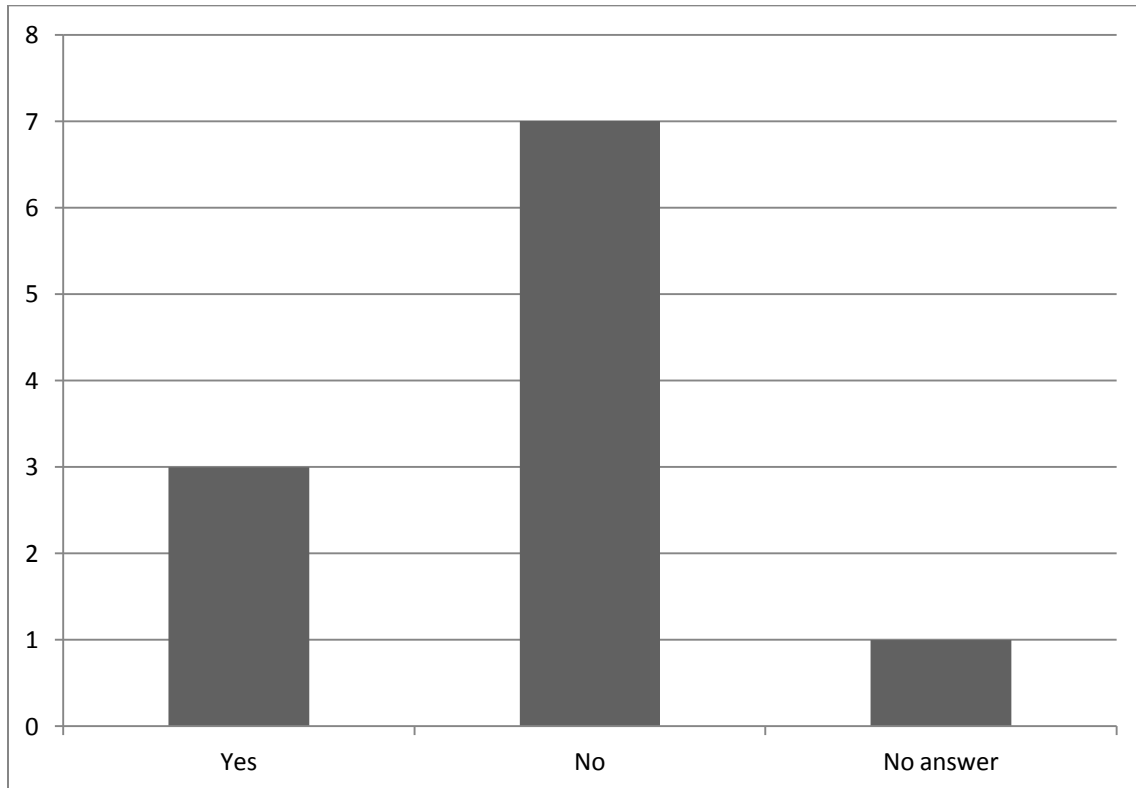


Figure 10: Non-returners questionnaire, 3: Do you still come to Catford Library? (n=11 respondents, single response)

4.2.11 Processing and packaging

Nicholas said that ‘processing refers to the different ways that the same ideas and research can be represented’ and packaging means the ‘external presentation or physical form of the information’(Nicholas, 2000, p. 84). In the Learning Centre context, I equated processing to the design of the ‘Go ON’ training website, because this is the medium through which information is delivered to the learners. I equated packaging with the delivery of the training within the library, because this is the physical form that the training process takes.

Most of the interviewees responded positively when asked if the course was well designed:

It’s useful, it’s useful. I think it’s very useful. It’s good to have the audio, I find, good to have it (Interviewee 11)

I think so yeah, it’s fairly easy to get around, yeah, yeah (Interviewee 12)

One of the interviewees, however, was reluctant to endorse the term ‘designed’:

Ummm . . . not well designed, but . . .it is helpful (Interviewee 3)

...another decided to praise the site on her own terms, by describing her feelings about it in her own way:

When I complete it I will be able to do everything myself (Interviewee 8)

Some of the interviewees expressed the opinion that the training could be improved with more staff presence:

More than one teacher? . . . spending more time? (Interviewee 2)

[Laughs] Could the place be improved with more supervisors? It’s good to have people. We can get them to help us. (Interviewee 4)

The same sentiments were written down by a non-returner on their questionnaire:

More assistance and patience to help those who are slower at learning the system than others.(Questionnaire response)

4.3 Summary of findings

Throughout the questioning, the respondents showed very keen self-awareness of their situation with regards to computer knowledge. They were often all too keen to highlight their own lack of understanding. They were, however, very positive and committed to using computers, many of them having recently acquired their first PCs, and they had strong ideas about how the training could be improved.

Before they started on the course, most of the users expected more staff support and guidance than they actually got, but there was a marked split of opinion about whether or not the self-taught nature of the course was a good thing.

The users realised that they were undertaking a major commitment that would take up a lot of their time. The returners seemed to be happy to spend a lot of time in the library, whereas most of the non-returners to the course did not intend to return to the library at all.

5 Discussion

My aim for this dissertation was to investigate the users' expectations and information needs, an area that was not the focus of the other literature that I found in my review. Because of this, I was not collecting much information that could be compared directly to the existing research, for example the UK Online Centres surveys which are more focussed on customer satisfaction and enjoyment levels (Institute of Employment Studies, 2010). Despite this, there were some areas where my findings seem to support (or contradict) the existing research.

5.1 My findings compared to previous research

The results did not entirely match with the study by Schofield et al (2004) quoted on page 12 that reported on a learning centre's users 'Preferring to work their way through independent learning resources'. As detailed in section 4.2.5 'Viewpoint', some of the users from Catford were happy to work independently but just as many would have liked more assistance 'if you had more staff to give us a bit more guidance, I think we'd have improved more' (Interviewee 6). This opinion shows support for the Online Centres review finding that staff input is important for the learning process (discussed on page 17).

The findings for this dissertation appear to support those of Hill, Benyon-Davies and Williams (2008, p.262) who identified users who were 'undecided about expectations to do with the internet'. The users that I talked to do not seem to view their lack of expectations as a negative thing or an impediment to learning, but rather to be relishing the opportunity to discover the unknown without preconceptions (as shown on page 53 in the 'Viewpoint' results).

The users' uncertainty about what to expect from the course is interesting in the context of the research by Dickinson & Gregor (2006). This otherwise sceptical review accepted that there was evidence that for older people, doing some kind of training does improve wellbeing, but disputed whether the subject areas of the training was important. Those users who remain on the course at Catford seem to have a positive view about undergoing training without needing to have a clear idea of what they will be studying, or how the course will be delivered. This could suggest that these users sense that attending any training is positive in itself.

5.2 My expectations compared to the reality

As I mentioned in the Introduction, before I started this dissertation I knew from my experiences at work that most people who wanted to sign-up for the ‘Go ON’ course had trouble with the section of the application form that required them to specify one goal for their training (shown in appendix 4). This led me to anticipate that some users would find it difficult to reduce their expectations for the course to simple keywords, and this did prove to be the case in the interviews for this dissertation – with just one interviewee using keywords like ‘email’ and ‘internet’ without any prompting.

My other expectation was not so accurate, however; I was surprised at the only comment from an interviewee comparing the ‘Go ON’ course with the previous ‘MyGuide’ version. The interviewee (on page 52) said that she preferred the newer version. I had anticipated that users would be disappointed that the email facility and several of the modules had been removed in the transition from ‘MyGuide’ to ‘Go ON’, but the respondent expressed approval of the way that the course was easy to resume and none of the other users commented on the change, suggesting that it was not a primary issue for them.

5.3 My deductions from the results

A lack of awareness was shown by the interviewees about who the overall provider of the course was (see section 4.2.7 on page 54). If I am to accept Nicholas’s statement that ‘quality ranks very highly on the list of information priorities’ this means that I have to consider what it is that reassures these users of the quality of the information. I think that this demonstrates the trust that these users place in the services provided in the library space. As Griffiths, King and Pomerantz (2008) found, people consider libraries to be trustworthy places to find information. This places a responsibility with the library staff to carefully vet the services that we do offer or host. Several other bodies provide training in the Learning Centre, and it is only used for library computer training part of the time as shown in Appendix 3. By using the library space these groups acquire some of this trustworthiness, so we need to be careful to maintain this.

The respondents recognised that with this kind of computer training it is important to be up-to-date (section 4.2.8 ‘Date/Currency’ on page 55). It is advantageous for the library in this respect to be part of the UK Online Centres programme, as opposed to the more ad hoc one-to-one method previously used (as mentioned in the Introduction). Courses can be updated more effectively on a national scale than anything that the library could provide independently – they have resources and expertise to achieve this.

The response by the non-returners to questionnaire question 3 ‘do you still come to the library?’ could be significant in terms of revealing why users stop attending. Seven of the eleven respondents confirm that they do not come to the library any more. This could suggest that these individuals find the library service at Catford unsuitable for some reason. Combined with the positive response to the questionnaire question 6 ‘did you find the course useful?’ (nine out of eleven did) this implies that it is other aspects of the library experience that deter them from returning. There are any number of things that this could be – one interviewee mentioned lack of parking, others mentioned noise levels from the Children’s Library area. But it does not appear to be as a result of any aspect of the Learning Centre training experience or the training itself – with which they seemed to be happy.

In contrast, the returners to the course were all positive about the library space (see section 4.2.10 ‘Place/Sources’) In this part of the discussion I want to reemphasise the different methods that I used to get the information from the returners and the non-returners. The returners were face-to-face with a member of library staff when they gave their answers, whereas the non-returners were at home, completing an anonymous questionnaire. Nevertheless, as well as being generally positive about the library space, some of the returners also talked about their specific links to the library (page 58). This suggests that they did find the library to be a suitable place for them (and their families).

I think that this difference in attitude between the returners and non-returners to the library itself is significant. Because both groups were largely happy with the ‘Go ON’ course, this difference implies that whether users return to the training or not is more dependent on how individuals feel about the library as a whole than about the internet training course or the Learning Centre.

5.4 The usefulness of Nicholas's framework in this research

Nicholas's information needs framework worked well for both devising questions and analysing results. Even when the responses to my questions seem to contradict Nicholas's premise for an information needs category, this still provoked discussion and responses, for example when Nicholas states that 'quality ranks very highly on the list of information priorities' (2000, p.66) it seemed contradictory that none of the users were aware that they were undertaking a national Government-devised and sponsored course, but this question produced useful responses none the less, and at the analysis stage it was the existence of this category that prompted me to consider what it is that reassures users of the quality of the information (see page 63).

There was a possibility that the Learning Centre situation would turn out to be too far removed from Nicholas's concept of an information need situation for the framework to be useful – he intended it for 'the evaluation and auditing of information systems, like the internet, libraries, OPACS and commercial on-line services' (2000, p.1) – all closely related to the Learning Centre but with the important difference that these users are in a learning situation that involves developing skills and knowledge as well as finding out information. As my research progressed, I became more convinced that Nicholas's categories fitted well in this situation. As mentioned on page 58, I did feel that it was necessary to change the emphasis of the place/sources category from the place of origin of the information (in Nicholas's definition) to the place where they were acquiring this information – a significant change – that I thought was justified to ensure that the questions were relevant to this group of users.

As mentioned in the Literature Review, Inskip, Butterworth & MacFarlane (2008) had already shown with their study of the users of a folk music library that Nicholas's framework could be usefully applied to analyse situations that are outside of the traditional library reference interview scenario, and I think that my findings support this. The interviewees could relate to each of Nicholas's information need categories and discovering how they felt about each was revealing about how they felt about the training situation.

5.5 Suggestions for changes to the Learning Centre based on this research

The responses of the users suggest that it is not appropriate to ask users to specify a goal for their learning in terms of keywords before they have begun the course as we do at present (shown in the registration form in Appendix 4). The respondents were not familiar with the terms shown – so this question must merely highlight their lack of knowledge. Some of the interviewees were self-aware about this and undeterred (as shown on page 51), but it is likely that others, who are less confident, must have been put off by the registration form itself, never reaching the stage where they could laugh off their former inexperience.

I think that it would be more meaningful to users to ask at a later stage in their learning when they have got a better idea of what these terms mean. Perhaps it would be most useful to ask them at the end of their Learning Centre experience what their continuing goals are, in order to refer them onwards to other courses or to develop new courses at Catford.

The Learning Centre is well used during all of the session times that are available so this could be a disincentive to staff to try to attract new groups of users to the centre, but if they do decide to expand the Learning Centre service, this research has revealed some possible areas that could be considered (discussed further below):

- Target the less self-motivated
- Introduce more courses
- Increase session availability

Target the less self-motivated

My results showed that all of the current users (and non-returners) felt committed to future computer use. The people that sign-up for the Learning Centre at present have all put themselves forward without prompting from the library staff apart from the sign in the window (Fig 1). So this is a self-motivated group when it comes to computer training. If the library staff decide to try to expand the Learning Centre they could target people who are as yet undecided about how

useful computers would be to them, and who have more in common with the ‘rejectors’ identified by Lawson (2011) – a group that the Learning Centre does not appear to be serving yet.

Introduce more courses

There is demand from the existing users for more modules and different areas to study. Similar views were displayed by the non-returners, most of whom had initially wanted to learn ‘general computer skills’ in questionnaire question 7 although word processing and spreadsheets are not covered by the course at present.

Increase session availability

There was awareness amongst the users that they would benefit from being able to attend the course more frequently. This supports the idea that some kind of expansion of the Learning Centre would be justified. At present users often have to wait two weeks in-between sessions because the terminals are fully booked. Users are concerned that they need to maintain their knowledge and skills by using them frequently so that they do not regress. Greater availability of session places would help with this.

One of the interviewees asked if it would be possible to bring her own laptop in to do the course. This is not the case at present; the users have to be booked onto one of the Learning Centre terminals. However, it is a good idea that is worthy of consideration. The library does have a free Wi-Fi service and several of the interviewees said that they had new laptops (in the ‘function’ section, 4.2.2). If they could study in the Learning Centre or elsewhere in the library with staff assistance, they would gain confidence using their own machines and ‘free-up’ the Learning Centre terminals for more users.

Despite the expressed views of some of the interviewees, I am not convinced that more staff in the Learning Centre would greatly improve their learning. The users are learning by working through the course independently wherever possible, as some of the interviewees recognised, and more staff would not encourage this. In order to address the concerns of the users who feel that they need more staff, maybe the advantages of self-study could be promoted, or at least mentioned, by the existing library staff in the Learning Centre. Active staff presence is

important, however, as reported by Institute of Employment Studies (2010, p.21). Five of the eleven non-returners found the course hard to do (Questionnaire question 4 on page 50). This is unsurprising because most of them were completely new to computers when they started (Questionnaire question 1 on page 49). This questionnaire answer (from the ‘Processing and Packaging’ section on page 60) reflects on this:

More assistance and patience to help those who are slower at learning the system than others (Questionnaire response)

...and it is relevant because it reveals both insecurity on the part of the learner and also a perceived impatience from the staff. It is not surprising that this user did not return.

Several of the issues that I have discussed already could be addressed if the staff in the Learning Centre were to introduce regular ‘taster’ sessions. This would be an opportunity to explain to potential joiners what the key terms like ‘email’ and ‘internet searches’ mean so that they could decide what is most important to them. These sessions could also include an explanation of how the course works and the benefits of self-study. This type of session may also help to attract users who are undecided whether they have time to devote to studying computers as a new subject, and potential users could get an idea of how the course works without feeling like a failure if the course (or the location of the course) is not right for them.

5.6 Discussion summary

Overall, the results give a picture of the returners and non-returners as:

- **Committed to using computers** – from the ‘Function’ section 4.2.2 I learnt that many of the users have computers at home (most recently acquired) and that the non-returners also intend to continue to use computers.
- **Unsure of their expectations** – I learnt this from the ‘Viewpoint’ section 4.2.5. They do not yet have the terminology to talk about their expectations.
- **Determined and patient** – in the ‘Speed of Delivery’ section 4.2.9, the views expressed show returners that are keen to keep making regular progress (an important issue for non-returners too), but with some returners showing awareness that developing their skills could take a long time.

6 Conclusion

It is important to try to understand what users expect from the Learning Centre, in order to help library staff to communicate with them before and during their learning. My aim and objectives for this dissertation were designed with this in mind, and I think that I met them with varying success:

- I set an objective to involve non-returners in this research, even though these users were likely to be harder to elicit a response from because, unlike the continuing users, they were not available to be approached for interviews and also they have, by definition, moved on from their learning experience at Catford and may be less inclined to contribute. For these reasons, I was happy to receive responses from this group that could contribute to the research.

- I wanted to avoid asking a question that would generate predominantly polite, positive responses – such as the ‘do you enjoy the course?’ one from the ‘MyGuide’ pilot (UK Online Centres, 2007, p.7). However, it turns out that questionnaire question 6 ‘Did you find the course useful?’ (on page 47) produced what looks like exactly such a response, even from non-returners – nine out of eleven saying that they did. I was expecting a less positive response from non-returners. I do not want to dismiss this as a purely insincere result either, because the same respondents gave more mixed responses about the library itself – suggesting that sparing this researcher/staff-member’s feelings was never their prime concern, and that they were answering honestly. I think now that all of those results were revealing – as long as they are viewed together, without isolating the impressive results.

- I addressed my objective to identify the sample group’s characteristics, confirming that they were predominantly older users. I found the previous research into the best ways of involving such a group to be useful in my research – the informal interviews revealed a lot of information. This supports the research that suggests that this is a suitable way to involve older respondents (Eisma et al., 2004). The questionnaires were also useful, but the limited response to the pilot questions demonstrated (as suggested by Bryman (2008, p.221)) that open questions, however useful to the researcher, deter respondents from completing questionnaires.

●One of my objectives was, as far as possible, to avoid disrupting the learning of the individuals who contributed to my research. I did notice, however, that my research questions slightly changed the behaviour of some of those involved. One of the lapsed users returned to the Learning Centre (bringing their questionnaire with them) and resumed the course (this user's answers were excluded from the results). Two of the users began to consider who was the provider of the 'Go ON' course (see page 54) and two of the interviewees have since been more forthcoming with suggestions for improving the Learning Centre. I do not think that any of these changes are disruptive to the individuals' learning, but they were not intended and they demonstrate the unpredictability of the effects of even small-scale research such as this.

I think that focussing on this single location has been effective in finding information that is highly relevant to this Learning Centre, and I would encourage staff from other comparable centres to undertake similar research. There were many areas that I would have liked to explore further:

●For this dissertation I used Nicholas's framework for analysing information needs because it had been demonstrated by Inskip et al. (2008) to be suitable for situations other than traditional reference enquiries. So I was relatively confident that it would help to analyse the data from the Learning Centre. I did not consider using any other frameworks and ways of defining information needs and information searching, but these certainly exist (Inskip et al. (2008, p.648) mention Ingwersen & Jarvelin and Ellis among others) so there is scope for future studies in similar situations to the Learning Centre to be conducted using these other frameworks.

●As mentioned in the methodology 'scope and restrictions' section 3.4, I did not attempt to include any library users who would be eligible for the course but do not choose to join. I think that it would be useful to do some further research that could involve these people. Maybe the results of this dissertation could then be used to compare the differences in expectations that lead some people to take up the course and others not to.

●At the other end of the Learning Centre experience, I also did not involve any users who had completed the 'Go ON' training. Further research could be conducted with these ex-users – to find out, for example, whether they are still using their computer skills, whether they found that

their 'Go ON' training had been useful to them 'in the real world', and how they feel about their previous information needs after time for reflection. This is the type of research that was conducted for the 'MyGuide' pilot report (UK Online Centres, 2007), but it would be useful to conduct it in an established centre, using the 'Go ON' course.

- Further research could be conducted using a different way of contacting the non-returners. As discussed in the Methodology section, I felt that postal questionnaires were the only viable way for me to reach this group. However, the limitations in the questionnaire method meant that multiple choice questions were the main responses collected from this group. Because of this difference in the types of questions, they were not easily compared to the more open types of responses from the interviewees. I was glad to be able to include their views, but perhaps further research could involve telephone or face-to-face interviews with these former users, if this could be arranged in a way that is not unacceptably intrusive.

- Another stage of the learning process that could be the focus of further investigation is the period when users are between signing up and attending their first session. At this stage the users' feelings about their own expectations would be prominent in their minds and these expectations would not yet be influenced by the reality of the course sessions. This research would need to be carried out over a longer period because there are few (usually only two or three) people in this situation at any one time. It would also need to be done particularly sensitively, because users at that stage could be deterred from the course altogether if they are confronted by intrusive questioning before they even start.

The Learning Centre at Catford Library is a great success: it has certainly helped many people to begin using computers, and it is always fully-booked. It is popular with users who enjoy the library space. This type of success should not be taken for granted by staff, however. This research has shown that the users have keen self-awareness about their situation, and while they may not be clear about their expectations, they have good practical ideas about how the service could be improved. Staff will need to respond to these ideas in order to meet the information needs and expectations of more people in the future.

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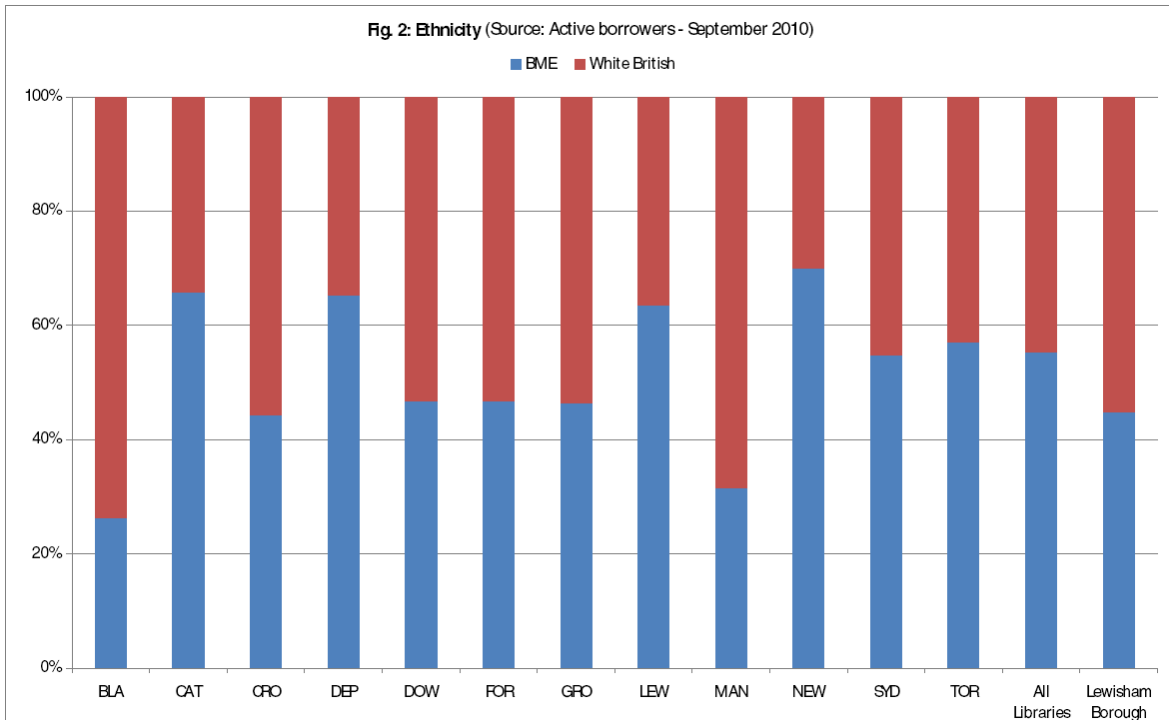
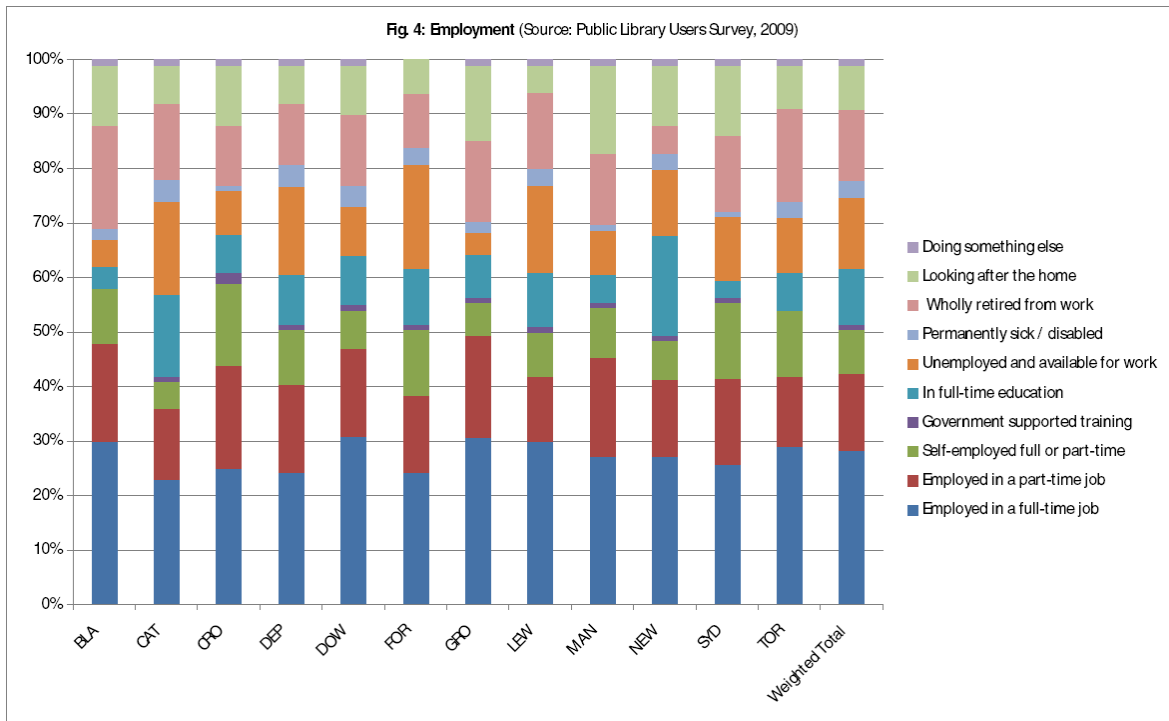
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Appendix 1: Equalities Impact Assessment for proposed library changes (extract) Lewisham Public Accounts Committee, 2010



From: <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/Data/Public%20Accounts%20Select%20Committee/20101109/Agenda/Item5%20SavingsReport%20Appendix5%205aAnnex%204%20Equalities%20Impact%20Assessment%20-%20PDF.pdf>

Appendix 2: 'Go ON' homepage

The screenshot shows the 'Go ON' homepage in a Firefox browser window. The address bar displays 'learn.go-on.co.uk'. The page features a navigation menu with links for 'Home', 'Get started', 'Online basics', 'Learn more', and 'What next?'. There are also buttons for 'Sign in' and 'Create an account'. The main heading reads 'We make getting online easy!' with the 'GO ON' logo and the tagline 'make online easy'. Below this, there are four featured sections: 'European Get Online Week Join in', 'I want to get started with the Keyboard & Mouse', 'I want to set up an Email Account', and 'I'm ready for a beginner's course Online basics'. A testimonial from Gerry, 64, states 'I'm 64 years young and I love to email my friends'. At the bottom, there are three promotional boxes: one for finding a UK online centre by postcode, one for Plusnet broadband, and one for returning learners to sign back in.

Firefox

Go on - make online easy. Learn how to ...

learn.go-on.co.uk

Home Get started Online basics Learn more What next? Sign in Create an account

GO ON
make online easy

We make getting online easy!

European Get Online Week
Join in

I want to get started with the
Keyboard & Mouse

I want to set up an
Email Account

I'm ready for a beginner's course
Online basics

“ I'm 64 years young and I love to email my friends ” Gerry, 64

I need a bit of help from a human being!
Find your nearest UK online centre - just type in your postcode:
Postcode **GO**

Ready to get broadband at home?
plusnet
Find out more about how you can get


I'm back! I want to carry on learning.
If you're a returning learner, click below to back in.
SIGN BACK IN

Appendix 3: Catford Library Learning Centre weekly use timetable.

Go-On Session Times:

Monday	9.30 am	-	11.30 am	Supported Learning
Tuesday	9.30 am	-	11.30 am	Supported Learning
	2 pm	-	3 pm	Supported Learning
Thursday	9.30 am	-	11.30 am	Supported Learning
	6.30 pm	-	7.45 pm	Supported Learning
Friday	9.30 am	-	11.30 am	Supported Learning
Saturday	9.30 am	-	11.30 am	Supported Learning


Appendix 4: Learning Centre registration form



make online easy

Please answer all questions

www.go-on.co.uk



Registration Form

First name: _____

Surname: _____

Postcode: _____ Phone Number: _____

Date Of Birth: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Employment status: _____

Goal (please tick **ONE** only; the first thing you want to learn)

<input type="radio"/> E-Mail	<input type="radio"/> Mobile Phone	<input type="radio"/> Using Facebook
<input type="radio"/> Internet Safety	<input type="radio"/> Online Job Hunting	<input type="radio"/> Using Photos
<input type="radio"/> Internet Searches	<input type="radio"/> Online Shopping	
<input type="radio"/> Job Interviews	<input type="radio"/> Public Services	

Sex MALE FEMALE

Can you use the mouse & keyboard? YES NO

Can you use the Internet? YES NO

Have you only joined the library in order to access this course? YES NO


Signed: _____ Date: _____

I apply for membership and agree to abide by the terms and conditions of Lewisham Library and Information Service and the Go-On website, including those relating to acceptable use of computer equipment on library premises, and agree to the use of this data as set out in the terms and conditions.

This information will be processed under the Data Protection Act 1998

Library Card Number:
B _____

Staff Signature: _____



Lewisham

Catford Library
 Laurence House
 Catford
 SE6 4RU
 Tel. 020 8314 6399
 catfordlibrary@lewisham.gov.uk

Staff Checklist:

- Go-On.co.uk
- VTC.com
- SharePoint, Go-On registration
- Learning log
- Send to Lewisham

Appendix 5: Final Questionnaire

Final Questionnaire page 1

Catford Library Computer Training Questionnaire

Thank you for your time!

1) Did you use computers before you went to the course? *Please tick one*

Never

Sometimes

A lot

2) Do you plan to continue to use computers in the future?

Yes, at home

Yes, at the library

Yes, somewhere else

No

3) Do you still come to Catford Library?

Yes

No

4) Did you find the course hard to do?

Yes

No

Don't know

5) Did you find the course interesting?

Yes

No

Don't know

6) Did you find the course useful?

Yes

No

Don't know

7) What were you hoping to learn from the course? *Please tick one or more*

Email

Internet Searches

Internet shopping

General computer skills

Other, please specify below:

8) How could the course have been improved? *If you have any ideas, please write them below – if not, leave blank.*

Appendix 6: Pilot Questionnaire

Pilot Questionnaire page 1

Catford Library
Computer
Training
Questionnaire

1) Did you use computers before you went to the course? *Please tick one*

- Never
- Once
- A few times
- Every week
- Every day

2) Do you plan to continue to use computers in the future?

- Yes, at home
- Yes, at the library
- Yes, somewhere else
- No

3) What was the most interesting aspect of the course? *Please specify below*

4) What was the most useful aspect of the course?

5) Do you still come to Catford Library?

- Regularly
- Sometimes
- Never

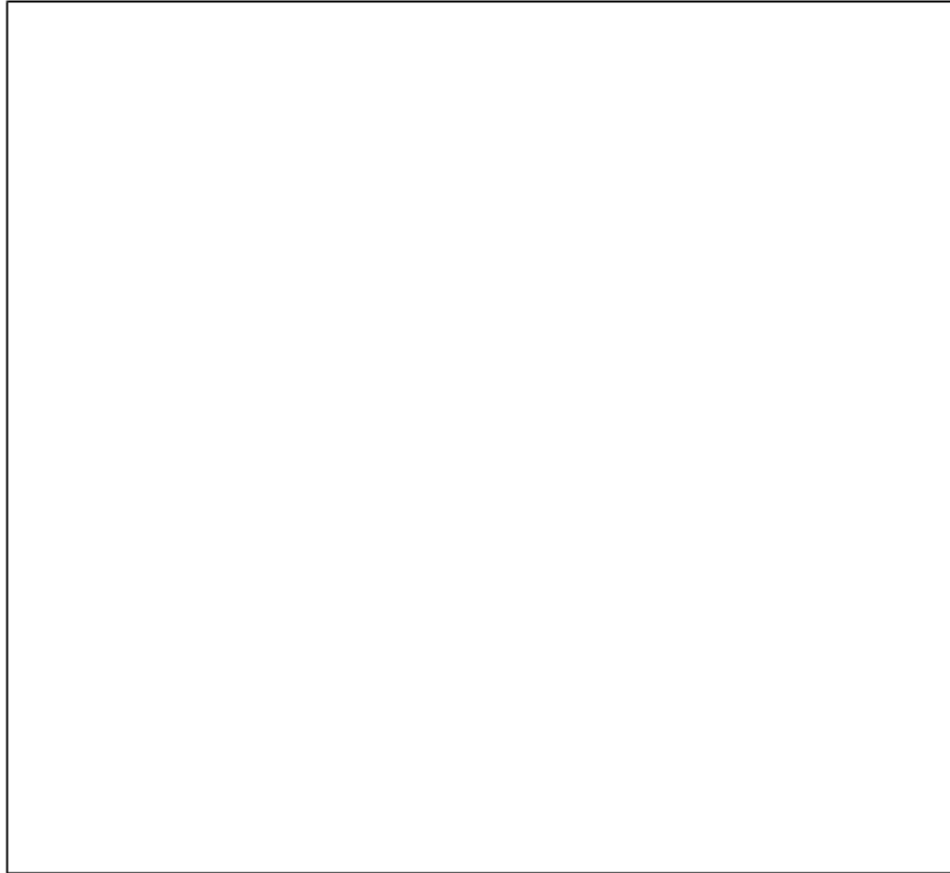
6) Did you find the course hard to do?

- Very hard
- Quite hard
- Not hard
- Quite easy
- Very easy

7) What were you hoping to learn from the course? *Please tick one or more*

- Email
- Internet Searches
- Internet shopping
- General computer skills
- Other, please specify below:

8) How could the course have been improved?
*If you have any ideas, please write them
below – if not, leave blank.*



Thank you for your time!

Appendix 7: Cover letter sent with questionnaires (reduced from A4)

Paul Nash
Catford Library
Laurence House
SE6 4RU

6th March 2012

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a Library Assistant at Catford Library and I am doing a course with Aberystwyth University in order to try to become a Librarian.

As part of my course, I have to do a research project and I have decided to study the computer training at Catford.

I am sending this questionnaire out to people who attended computer training sessions.

If you have time, please could you fill in the questionnaire that I have written? I have tried to keep it short and your answers will be completely confidential and only used for my college project and hopefully to improve the computer training at the library. I have included a stamped, addressed envelope.

If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED] at work or on my mobile [REDACTED].

Thank you for your time,

Paul Nash (Library Assistant – Catford Library)

Appendix 8: Interview Questions and the category of information need that they relate to

Question...	Categories that it relates to...
Before you started, did you know what you wanted to learn? What was that?	Subject, Nature/description, Date
Have you got a computer at home? Do you think you would use it?	Function, date
Are you going to keep on using computers?	Function
Had you used computers before? What did you do?	Intellectual level/level of complexity, viewpoint
Is the training well designed? Do you know who designed this course? Is it important to you?	Viewpoint, Quality/authority
How do you feel about the time it takes to learn?	Speed of delivery
Did you come to this library before? What do you think of this place?	Place, processing and packaging
Do you think the training could be improved, how?	Subject, Nature/description, Date
Did you expect it to be different? How?	Subject, Nature/description, Processing and packaging
Are you going to join another course? Where?	Quantity, Place/sources

Appendix 9: Interview question sheet

Question...	Answer...
<p>Before you started, did you know what you wanted to learn? What was that?</p>	
<p>Have you got a computer at home? Do you think you would use it?</p>	
<p>Are you going to keep on using computers?</p>	
<p>Had you used computers before? What did you do?</p>	
<p>Is the training well designed? Do you know who designed this course? Is it important to you?</p>	
<p>How do you feel about the time it takes to learn?</p>	
<p>Did you come to this library before? What do you think of this place?</p>	
<p>Do you think the training could be improved, how?</p>	
<p>Did you expect it to be different? How?</p>	
<p>Are you going to join another course? Where?</p>	

Appendix 10: Informed consent form for interviewees (reduced from A4)

I agree to being interviewed for Paul Nash's research project about the computer training at Catford

Paul has explained that:

- This interview is not part of the computer course, and I don't have to do it if I don't want to
 - My name and personal information will not be used
 - I can refuse to answer any of the questions
 - I can leave the interview at any time
 - I have at least two weeks to change my mind about my answers being used in the project
 - I can contact Paul on [REDACTED] if I have any concerns
 - The interview will be recorded – only for Paul to write down my answers, and then the recording will be deleted.
- Please tick here if you don't want the interview recorded

Signed _____ Date _____

Appendix 11: Example of interview transcript

Showing coding

Did you know what you wanted before?

Ummm . . . sort of, yes. But then as i go on it opens up more, you know, things that I can find out because, for instance I didn't know that all the services you could do it online. I knew you could do job searching but i didn't really necessarily know how to do it. I don't really know . . . I'm actually doing that now. . . to apply online. . . ok, i might see a job advertised, but i'm not sure how to apply online. I really need to understand it. (interviewee 11)

Subject

Have you got a computer at home?

I just got a laptop. Just, just, just now. So i need to know more about it. I used to work on a computer before, but it's different, you know, at work everything's set up, you understand? (interviewee 11)

Function

Level of Complexity

Planning to use it?

Yes (interviewee 11)

Function

Will you keep on using computers?

Yes (interviewee 11)

Did you use computers before?

I worked with it but when you are in the workplace, the program is all done. You just go and click into the program and it's a bit different. You know the basic things like the desktop, like those. (interviewee 11)

Complexity

You didn't go on the internet?



No no no no no. I need to know more about that. I have to work that one out. (interviewee 11)

Do you think that the course is well designed?

It's useful, it's useful. I think it's very useful. It's good to have the audio, I find, good to have it (interviewee 11)

PROCESSING/Packaging

Do you know who designed the course?

No, I'm not sure. I should do. It might be a body, you know. (interviewee 11)

Are you happy with the amount of time you have spent on it?

quality/authority