

Supporting Access to ICT for BME Groups in Deprived Areas: Approaches to Good Practice

CLES Consulting, MCCR & CEMVO

**Research Report
No 388**

***Supporting Access to ICT for BME
Groups in Deprived Areas:
Approaches to Good Practice***

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This report presents the findings of a research study commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills in March 2002 on *Supporting Access to ICT for BME Groups in Deprived Areas*. It represents one of three studies commissioned by the Department to build on the work of Policy Action Team (PAT) 15 and to contribute to the principles outlined in the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

The remit of PAT 15, set-up by the Prime Minister under the direction of the Social Exclusion Unit, was to examine the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in relation to social exclusion. Its overall goal was to develop a strategy to increase the availability and take-up of ICT for people living in poor neighbourhoods with its findings published in *'Closing the Digital Divide'* in 2000.

Recognising the need to build upon the findings of PAT 15 with regard to the role of ICT and black and minority ethnic communities, a programme of research was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills in 2002. Three projects were funded through this programme:

- ❶ the use of and attitudes towards Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) by people from minority ethnic groups living in disadvantaged areas;
- ❷ supporting access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for black and minority ethnic groups in deprived areas;
- ❸ scoping the availability of software in ethnic minority languages.

This report presents the findings of the second project within this research programme, which had two main objectives:

- ❶ to study a number of existing community projects which already provide ICT access and services, including training to ethnic minority groups in order to understand the projects' rationales, implementation methods, delivery issues, and identify good practice messages for developing current and future provision;
- ❷ to assess the role or potential role of community leaders or champions within these projects in increasing the uptake and usage of ICTs by ethnic minority populations.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study represents an innovative approach for the Department by adopting the principles of the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal National Strategy Action Plan and placing local communities at the heart of the research process.

Following a tender process by the Department, community researchers were appointed to carry out 'a small scale case study of a successful project in their area which supports access by ethnic minority groups to ICT'. Eleven projects were selected in total with each community researcher required to produce a written report on their case study project.

Recognising the challenges involved in co-ordinating the efforts of a number of individual community researchers based in different locations and with varying support needs, the appointment of a 'Research Manager' was built into the methodology from an early stage. CLES Consulting, MCCR and CEMVO NW were collectively appointed to undertake this role and, from the outset, developed a programme of activities and support mechanisms to help guide the eleven community researchers in their case study research. Following the submission of the case study reports by the community researchers, the role of the Research Manager was to draw these together into a comprehensive report.

Context

Whilst there has been increasing debate on the role of ICT in addressing social exclusion and contributing to wider regeneration objectives in recent years, PAT 15 highlighted that there had been limited research on the specific barriers faced by black and minority ethnic communities and the measures required to support access to ICT for BME groups. However, in its report it refers specifically to language difficulties and the different cultural needs of BME groups and advocates the following:

“For ICT programmes to be successful they need local ICT champions and mentors who are drawn from the same background as the community they serve. They should also ensure that local provision reflects the cultural background of the neighbourhood, for example, by providing home access in communities where women find using public access difficult. There is also a need for more software for teaching English as a second language and a need to improve the availability of software in minority languages and more software based in non-textual representation.” (DTI, 2000)

The case studies

The projects included in the research study were drawn from a number of locations around the country. Nine of the projects are based in England, whilst one each from Northern Ireland and Wales are also represented. Whilst there is some bias in the geography of projects included in the study this can be partly accounted for by the open nature of the tender process and the concentration of BME populations throughout the country. The case studies included are as follows:

- Bangladeshi Youth Organisation (BYO) – Bradford;
- Computer Assisted Learning and Training Centre (CALTEC) – Bradford;
- First Step NE – Newcastle-upon-Tyne;
- Jamia Educational & Cultural Trust – High Wycombe;
- Kelvin Media Productions (KMP) – Sheffield;
- Minority Ethnic Women’s Network (MEWN) Cymru – Cardiff;
- Moss Side & Hulme Women’s Action Forum (MOSHWAF) – Manchester;
- Naari LETS – Leicester;
- People 1st – Belfast;
- Resource & Outreach Community Centre for Information Technology (ROCCIT) – London;
- SheBytes – London.

The study adopted the same definition of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as that used by PAT 15 and relates to ‘any product that will store, retrieve, manipulate, transmit or receive information electronically in digital form, for example, telephone attached to modem, fax, computer or digital television’. However, in practice the majority of the case study projects included in the research have an IT focus and relate primarily to the provision of computers.

Measuring positive outcomes

Identifying the extent to which ICT projects are successful in encouraging access and take-up by BME groups needs to take into account a wide range of contextual factors and a variety of outcomes.

The research identifies the achievement of both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ outcomes among the case study projects. These range from quantifiable outcomes such as the achievement of qualifications, the take-up of further training and entry to employment as well as a host of non-quantifiable outcomes linked to quality of life aspects. For many BME participants, contact with the ICT project was found to represent the first step into adult learning and skills development with positive outcomes noted across a range of ‘soft’ indicators, including those pertaining to confidence, aspirations and self-esteem. In addition, some users felt their communication skills and ability to access information and services had improved through their involvement with the ICT project, whilst opportunities for social interaction and participation in other community activities were also noted.

Despite these findings, it is apparent that the systems currently used by many projects do not enable the full blend of positive outcomes to be captured and, in turn, communicated to potential funders.

Supporting access to ICT for BME groups: key features of good practice

There is no one model of success with regard to ICT provision for BME groups. However, the research has identified a core set of factors which when brought together maximise access to ICT for BME communities and play a central role in encouraging take-up.

These factors, which have been grouped into three main categories, are as follows:

① Service delivery functions

- Holistic approach¹
- Responsive and flexible services
- Accessible, localised provision
- Skilled and professional staff
- Progression routes

② Core support functions

- Language support
- Cultural sensitivity and ethnic diversity
- Effective outreach
- Childcare provision
- Free or low cost provision

③ Management functions

- Vision and leadership
- Effective partnership working
- Forward planning and sustainability
- Access to core funding

The role of champions in supporting access to ICT for BME groups

Project champions, as opposed to community champions, is considered to represent a more accurate term to reflect the actions of those who play a particular role in supporting access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

Two main types of ICT project champions are identified – visionary champions² and delivery champions³. Some projects will reflect evidence of both types of champion whilst in others the balance may lean on one side or the other. For others still, evidence of either form of champion may be non-existent.

The distinction made between visionary champions and delivery champions is an important one in enabling the specific functions of project champions to be captured and for providing a greater understanding of how the potential of project champions can be harnessed and supported in the future.

Recommendations are set out in the following pages.

¹ Where ICT is provided alongside a wide range of social, recreational and welfare related services.

² Visionary champions are identified as those who provide the initial vision, drive and commitment for the development of the ICT project.

³ Delivery champions are identified as those who play a key role in the day-to-day operations and effectiveness of the ICT project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are particularly targeted at the Department for Education and Skills, Prime Minister's Office (including the No.10 Policy Unit), Social Exclusion Unit, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Cabinet Office (including Office of the e-Envoy), Home Office, and the Learning and Skills Council. They are also targeted at ICT projects and project funders.

Twenty recommendations are made in total. These are grouped under the following seven headings:

- ① funding;
- ② provision;
- ③ champions;
- ④ effective partnership;
- ⑤ community engagement;
- ⑥ research;
- ⑦ sharing good practice.

① Funding

In the majority of cases, funding for community based ICT providers is on a short-term basis with projects required to draw upon a myriad of different sources in order to sustain service provision. In terms of revenue funding, this presents particular difficulties for projects regarding forward planning, with the continual use of short-term funding threatening sustainability. It is also apparent, however, that greater coherence is necessary with regard to the funding opportunities available to projects if they are to effectively increase access to ICT for BME groups. For example, co-ordinating funds, which enable the ongoing training and development of ICT project staff and the development of support services alongside the provision of ICT hardware, is central to offering a holistic approach to ICT and maximising take-up. In addition, there is a clear need to recognise the achievement of 'soft' outcomes in the provision of ICT services and to communicate the benefits of non-formal learning opportunities to potential funders. Finally, if community based ICT providers are to offer high quality provision and engage users, there must be a shift away from one-off capital investments in ICT facilities to funding which enables projects to make ongoing upgrades to ICT hardware and to take advantage of new technologies as they emerge.

FUNDING		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
1.1	Provide funding which supports ongoing upgrades to ICT hardware and access to emerging technologies (eg. broadband).	High
1.2	Provide revenue funding on a longer-term basis to enable more effective forward planning by ICT providers.	High
1.3	Increase co-ordination of funding at the local level to enable core support services to be provided alongside ICT services.	High
1.4	Prioritise the release of additional public funds to support capacity building for community-based ICT Project Managers and staff.	High
1.5	Work with funders to communicate the benefits of non-formal ICT learning for BME groups and to establish mechanisms to better support projects, focusing on 'soft' outcomes (eg. re-entry to learning, increased community involvement, improved access to services).	Medium

② Provision

The case study research shows that a number of good practice lessons can be identified with regard to providing ICT for black and minority ethnic groups. In particular, it highlights the need for both policy makers and funders to look away from the sole provision of formal learning opportunities delivered through designated ICT centres to consider a broader range of services and types of provision. For example, this may include providing a laptop loan service to enable home-based provision or the

integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into other project activities or wider neighbourhood services. Adopting new approaches to ICT provision may be considered of particular benefit for addressing the needs of BME communities by enabling more targeted and culturally sensitive services to be provided. In addition, there is a need to recognise the particular barriers to ICT experienced by those with language difficulties and increase access to ICT software in minority languages.

PROVISION		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
2.1	Increase the provision of non-formal ICT learning opportunities (eg. home-based provision, one-to-one support) for those requiring targeted provision in areas of deprivation.	Medium
2.2	Increase access to ICT software in minority languages by building on the results of the scoping study.	High
2.3	Link ICT provision to the wider Neighbourhood Renewal Agenda as one of the many mechanisms for addressing social exclusion (eg. by supporting neighbourhood provision of ICT services, by ICT providers being represented on local area partnerships).	High

3 Champions

Champions can play an important role in the success of community based ICT projects. However, the research suggests that project champion, as opposed to community champion, represents a more accurate term when identifying the positive roles performed by those providing access to ICT for black and minority ethnic groups. Providing capacity building and training for projects in relation to the specific functions associated with each type of project champion, rather than relying on the actions of particular individuals, is advocated to represent a more sustainable basis from which ICT projects can better meet the needs of their target communities.

CHAMPIONS		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
3.1	Refer to project champions rather than community champions when working with BME communities and commissioning any further research in this field.	Low
3.2	Undertake to identify effective mechanisms and relevant funds to support the development of activities performed by project champions and provide ongoing staff development for those undertaking such roles.	High

4 Effective partnership

The reliance on short-term, limited resources places significant constraints and challenges on the ability of many community based ICT projects to adequately meet the needs of their target communities and to provide a professional, locally embedded service. Whilst many community providers are successful in supporting access to ICT and addressing social exclusion at the individual project level, the study shows that significant advantages can be gained by developing effective partnerships with other projects and organisations. Effective partnerships are based on mutually beneficial working relationships and enable the complimentary skills of different organisations to be brought together to achieve a common purpose. There is a particular need to encourage the development of network relationships between community based projects to promote the exchange of information, share facilities and equipment, and enable users to access a wider range of services and learning opportunities. Similarly, the study suggests that advantages can also be gained by developing effective partnerships with the private sector and better linking ICT learning opportunities to those in the local labour market.

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
4.1	Increase linkages between ICT learning opportunities and employment by encouraging private sector involvement in ICT management and delivery and maximising opportunities for progression (exemplified by the SheBytes case study).	Medium
4.2	Facilitate the development of effective partnerships between ICT service providers and other community based projects to achieve mutual benefit (eg. client referrals, networking, access to specific hardware/software).	High

5 Community engagement

The principles outlined in the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy formed the basis of the research methodology adopted for this study. The appointment of community researchers from across the country and the programme of support which was put in place by the Research Managers represents an innovative and challenging approach by the Department for Education and Skills. As such, the research process serves to highlight a number of good practice lessons with regard to effective community engagement and illustrates the benefits of involving local groups and communities in research activity. It is important that these lessons are now communicated effectively to all government departments and the mechanisms put in place to maximise community engagement in future research activities.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
5.1	Ensure that the results of the research process inform the future planning and commissioning of research undertaken by the Government.	High

6 Research

This study, together with the two complimentary projects commissioned by the Department, have contributed significantly to our understanding of ICT with regard to meeting the needs of black and minority ethnic communities. At the time of the PAT 15 report, the paucity of research in this field was recognised and recommendations made for additional work to take place in this area. The fact that a specific programme of research has taken place is testament to the commitment of the Government to address issues of social exclusion faced by BME groups and to harness the opportunities provided by ICT in this process. This study suggests, however, that there are significant opportunities to build on the findings presented as a means of further supporting access to ICT for BME groups. In particular, there is a need for additional research into the 'soft' outcomes achieved by many projects to examine how these can best be captured at the individual project level and subsequently communicated to project funders. In addition, the need for a greater knowledge base with regard to the number, location and type of community based ICT projects, which exist, is recognised as being vital to encouraging collaborative working. Finally, more effective monitoring of the uptake of ICT by black and minority ethnic groups is vital if there is to be any real understanding of the impact and achievement of initiatives which seek to support access by such groups.

RESEARCH		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
6.1	Establish a research project to identify the most effective mechanisms for capturing non-quantifiable or 'soft' outcomes specific to ICT projects.	High
6.2	Develop a standardised checklist of good practice against which projects can be quality assured for forward planning and funding purposes. This should seek to include some form of value for money assessment combining costs with both 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes.	High
6.3	Establish an ongoing system for bringing together the information available on the uptake of community based ICT provision by BME groups in deprived areas.	Medium
6.4	Conduct a mapping exercise to examine the extent of ICT provision and content that is focused on minority ethnic groups across the UK to feed into a national network of projects (see recommendation 7.3).	Medium

7 Sharing good practice

The innovative process by which this research study has been carried out, together with the knowledge which has been built up with regard to ICT access for BME groups, means that there are a number of important lessons to be shared if the positive outcomes of the study are to have a wider impact. In particular, there is a need for both effective feedback to be given on the results of the study and opportunities for ongoing involvement to be provided for those who have been directly involved in the research. Projects and community researchers alike may be considered to have a role in this process, being able to advise not only on the future delivery of ICT but also on the process of engaging communities in research activity. Providing feedback, not only to the Department for Education and Skills, but also to other government departments, regional bodies and other relevant agencies is also important. Finally, establishing the mechanisms through which this exchange of good practice can take place will be paramount to joining up initiatives across government departments and delivering real benefits to black and minority ethnic communities over the longer-term.

SHARING GOOD PRACTICE		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
7.1	Hold a number of dissemination events to provide feedback on the results of this research to those involved and other interested parties.	High
7.2	Draw on the capacity and skills of those involved in this study to build on its achievements and advise on implementing the recommendations of the research, taking into account the planning for UK online, Learndirect , and other ICT Government initiatives (eg. e-government targets). This could take the format of a BME Advisory Committee or Working Group on ICT and should include representation from key funders, such as the Learning and Skills Council as well as those involved in Neighbourhood Renewal.	High
7.3	Establish a network of black and minority ethnic ICT projects to promote the exchange of good practice, encourage the development of joint funding applications and service delivery partnerships, and facilitate capacity building amongst BME communities.	High

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The project

1.1.1 Background

This report presents the findings of a research project commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) on *Supporting Access to ICT for BME Groups in Deprived Areas*. A consortium comprised of CLES Consulting, Manchester Council for Community Relations (MCCR), and Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations (CEMVO) were appointed in March 2002 to act as Research Managers for a project which involved co-ordinating the activities of eleven individual researchers undertaking a case study on a local ICT project within their area. This document draws together the individual case studies to provide a comprehensive report of the overall findings of the research and the emerging lessons for supporting access to ICT for BME communities, referring throughout to the specific case study examples as appropriate.

1.1.2 Aims and objectives of the study

The research seeks to identify models of good practice in promoting the use of ICT and the potential role of community champions in increasing uptake of ICT by minority ethnic populations. The research brief issued by the Department identified the following objectives, in particular:

- to study a number of existing community projects which already provide ICT access and services including training to ethnic minority groups in order to understand the projects' rationales, implementation methods, delivery issues, and identify good practice messages for developing current and future provision;
- to assess the role or potential role of community leaders or champions within these projects, in increasing the uptake and usage of ICTs by ethnic minority populations.

Alongside this study, two other pieces of research have been commissioned by the Department⁴. Collectively, these projects seek to build on the earlier findings of the Policy Action Team 15 report, 'Closing the Digital Divide', and provide evidence to support more effectively the uptake of ICT by black and minority ethnic communities.

1.1.3 Terms and definitions

Prior to any further consideration of the methodology adopted for this research study or the results found, brief reference must be made to the definitions used and key terms which appear throughout.

Firstly, it is important to clarify what is meant by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in this context. Our definition mirrors that used by PAT 15 and relates to 'any product that will store, retrieve, manipulate, transmit or receive information electronically in digital form, for example, telephone attached to modem, fax, computer or digital television'. As will become apparent in reviewing the findings of the research, in practice the results tend to relate primarily to the use of computers.

Clarification is further warranted with regards the definition used for 'Black and Minority Ethnic' communities. This varies considerably across different types of research activity, although in this instance, reflects an inclusive definition in which all minority ethnic groups are counted (although not for example, Irish or European minorities), including refugees and asylum seekers.

⁴ The other studies commissioned by the Department within this programme of research are a survey of 'The use of and attitudes towards Information and Communication Technologies by people from minority ethnic groups living in disadvantaged areas' and 'Scoping the availability of software in ethnic minority languages'.

Finally, it should be noted that the community groups or individuals appointed to undertake the case study research are referred to as 'community researchers' throughout the remainder of the research report.

1.2 The research process

1.2.1 An innovative approach

The methodology adopted for this research study represents a somewhat radical departure from the way in which the Department typically commissions research. As a direct response to the principles outlined in the Government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal⁵, the methodology selected places local community members at the heart of the research process and recognises the valued contribution that those living and working at the local level can play in contributing to our understanding of how best to support and further develop ICT projects which are accessible to minority ethnic groups. Indeed, in their research brief the Department state:

'In order to ensure high quality results, which will be owned by the communities to which they refer, the Department has designed the study to be carried out by local community groups who will have both detailed knowledge about developments in their own locality and existing relationships with and understanding of the local community.'

As such, the innovative process by which this research report has been brought together should be commended. Indeed, many lessons and best practice findings have emerged in relation to engaging and involving local communities in research and consultation exercises, in addition to the study reporting on its more explicit objectives as stated in the original brief. Such process outcomes are highlighted at appropriate points throughout the report and are given more detailed consideration at Appendix 1. We hope that by sharing the lessons learnt through this research exercise we are able to help inform the commissioning of future research programmes by government departments and agencies seeking to deliver on their commitment to the National Strategy. First, however, further explanation of the detail of research process is necessary.

1.2.2 The selection process: researchers and projects

In commissioning the research, the Department sought to appoint a number of community groups to carry out 'a small scale case study of a successful project in their area which supports access by ethnic minority groups to ICT'. Advertisements were placed in a number of publications⁶ and community groups invited to reply with an expression of interest which provided a brief description of their own organisation, together with an example of a local project which they deemed to be effective in providing ICT facilities to minority ethnic communities and who would be willing to co-operate with the research. It was initially envisaged that approximately 8 projects/researchers would be selected from a shortlist covering England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Approximately 30 expressions of interest were returned to the Department. From these, the Steering Group, which included representatives from BME groups, took responsibility for the selection process and, whilst some case studies took longer to confirm than others, agreed a total of 11 case studies for inclusion in the research. It should be noted that in a limited number of cases, a decision to actively pursue the inclusion of certain types of projects was taken in order to achieve greater diversity in the areas covered and the type of BME groups represented (see Appendix 1 for additional commentary on the process). Further detail is provided on each of the projects (see chapter 3), although the following table indicates the areas in which the case studies were based and the specific project selected.

⁵ A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan (SEU, 2001)

⁶ The advert was placed in publications including Voice and New Start in December 2001.

Table 1: Case study projects

Project	Location
Bangladeshi Youth Organisation (BYO)	Bradford
Computer Assisted Learning and Training Centre (CALTEC)	Bradford
First Step NE	Newcastle
Jamia Educational & Cultural Trust	High Wycombe
Kelvin Media Productions (KMP)	Sheffield
Minority Ethnic Women's Network (MEWN) Cymru	Cardiff
Moss Side and Hulme Women's Action Forum (MOSHAAF)	Manchester
Naari Lets	Leicester
People 1st	Belfast
Resource and Outreach Community Centre for Information Technology (ROCCIT)	East London
SheBytes	East London

The above table indicates that a Scottish presence was lacking from the research. This is not to suggest that successful project examples are not to be found in Scotland, merely that none were brought forward in response to this particular research exercise to be able to be included within the given timetable. This was the case despite an additional search being made. It is hoped, however, that opportunities to undertake similar research in a Scottish context may present themselves in the future.

The individuals and/or organisations responsible for undertaking the research were awarded with contracts outlining the nature of their responsibilities and each were awarded £5,000 for completion of the fieldwork and the production of a final case study report. A period of 3 months was available to each community researcher for completion of the case study. The ICT projects under study did not receive any remuneration for their involvement. Whilst a number of mechanisms were put in place to maximise the participation of project representatives throughout the study and a welcome degree of involvement was achieved in practice, it became apparent that any future work of this nature should give further consideration to this issue as a means of maximising the potential for involvement among all interested parties (see Appendix 1 for further commentary on this issue).

1.2.3 The role of the Research Manager

Recognising the challenges involved in co-ordinating the efforts of a number of individual community researchers based in different locations throughout the country and with varying support needs, the appointment of a 'Research Manager' was built into the methodology from an early stage. CLES Consulting, MCCR and CEMVO NW were collectively appointed to undertake this role. Together, this team offered a complimentary blend of skills and experience and added value to the research process as a whole.

From the outset, the Research Managers developed a programme of activities and support mechanisms to help guide the 11 community researchers in their case study research. It is important to emphasise at this juncture that the primary purpose of the mechanisms established were to provide guidance and support rather than to dictate the precise way in which each individual case study should be researched and presented in its final format.

The key mechanisms put in place to co-ordinate and support the work of those involved in the case study research are discussed below:

➤ **Research Advisor**

Each community researcher was allocated a Research Advisor from the research management team to act as the first point of contact for any issues arising over the duration of the study. Initial site visits were conducted to the ICT project by the designated Research Advisor and a scoping questionnaire completed with the community researcher, as a means of finding out more about the skills and competencies of those undertaking the case studies to help inform the nature of the

support and guidance likely to be required. Ongoing contact was maintained between the community researcher and Research Advisor over the duration of the study.

➤ **Research Guide**

A written Research Guide was produced and distributed to the community researchers to act as a reference tool throughout the research, highlighting the type of issues the case study should cover, providing guidance on different research methods which they may seek to use, and suggesting an outline report structure which they could follow.

➤ **Glossary**

Recognising the wide range of roles performed by those involved with the study and the use of terminologies such as community researchers, project co-ordinator, ICT projects and so on, a glossary was developed to act as a reference point for all of those involved in the study⁷

➤ **Training and research development days**

A total of three meeting days were held with the research management team and researchers. Project representatives were also invited to attend as were those involved in the other Department funded research projects on ICT and ethnic minority communities. These sessions enabled full training to be provided to the researchers based on the content of the Research Guide, for issues and difficulties to be addressed on a regular basis, and for projects and researchers alike to share experiences and learn from each other.

➤ **Email Forum**

The Email Forum was established to enable all those involved in the research project to place questions, enter comments or exchange information.

➤ **Guidance and feedback on case study reports**

The research management team collectively reviewed and provided detailed feedback on each draft case study report, highlighting areas for improvement and further development prior to the final report being submitted. Individual visits to provide one-to-one support on the preparation of the case study reports were also undertaken where necessary.

Following submission of the completed case study reports by the community researchers, the research management team's final role was to pull together the findings into a single report as represented by this document.

1.3 This report

The report is structured into a further 6 chapters as well as including appendices on each of the individual projects included in the research. The following chapter provides the context to the study, outlining the emergence of the debate with regard to the role of ICT in addressing social exclusion and the specific needs of BME groups. Further context to the study is provided in Chapter 3 which gives an overview of the eleven case study projects included in the research, highlighting the key features which should be taken into account when reviewing the report's findings and recommendations.

Chapter 4 on 'measuring positive outcomes' turns its attention to considering the ways in which success and good practice can be measured in relation to the provision of ICT for black and minority ethnic communities. In doing so, it recommends that a combination of both 'hard' and 'soft' indicators should be taken into account.

⁷ The glossary used in this context was tailored to meet the needs of the specific study although draws on the CLES handbook *'The Language of Regeneration: Glossary'* published in 2002.

Chapter 5 presents the key elements of good practice identified through the study in supporting access to ICT for BME groups in deprived areas. Each factor is illustrated by drawing on relevant examples from the case studies. This analysis of good practice is followed by examination of the role of community champions in supporting the access and take-up of ICT by minority ethnic groups. This can be found at Chapter 6.

Finally, in Chapter 7 the report makes a number of recommendations to build on the findings of this study and further support access to new and emerging technologies by black and minority ethnic groups.

2 THE CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of the debate surrounding the use of ICT both as a tool for addressing social exclusion and contributing to wider regeneration objectives. It also examines the findings of the earlier PAT 15 report with regard to the provision of ICT for BME communities, thus providing the context to the research results outlined in this report.

2.2 ICT and social exclusion

2.2.1 Emergence and development of the debate

Social exclusion has been at the forefront of the Government's agenda since 1997, crystallised in the creation of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU). One of the first activities requested of the Unit by the Prime Minister was to initiate 18 Policy Action Teams, each with a remit to examine social exclusion in relation to a specific issue. The approach taken by the SEU reflected the integrated nature of the problems and how they cross-cut departmental boundaries.

PAT 15 was tasked with addressing the issue of access to and use of ICT by people living in the poorest neighbourhoods. The overall goal for PAT 15 was to develop a strategy to increase the availability and take-up of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for people living in these poor neighbourhoods.

The impetus for PAT 15 and subsequent work was borne out of a recognition that the Information Age is having a profound effect on the way we live our lives and interact with one another but that low levels of access to and take-up of ICT among more deprived communities may lead to a 'digital divide' between the information rich and information poor. Reversing this trend, PAT 15 argues, is vital if people living in low income neighbourhoods are to gain and exploit ICT skills to enable them to participate fully in the local and national economy. Thus, their report states:

“the arguments for social inclusion and for economic development in the Information Age are mutually reinforcing.” (DTI, 2000, p.12).

The emphasis placed on establishing the mechanisms to enhance access to ICT for those in deprived areas has not only taken place as a means of providing benefits to the individual but also due to the role that ICT is considered to play in the wider regeneration process. The Government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, launched in 2000, identifies ICT as a key mechanism in the drive to reduce the number of people living in deprived neighbourhoods throughout the country. Further evidence of its potential role in regeneration terms is reflected in recent work by the Planning Exchange⁸, which identifies a number of ways in which ICT can help achieve regeneration objectives.

⁸ DTLR, 2001 'Using ICT to Help Achieve Regeneration Objectives – A Good Practice Guide'

THE ROLE OF ICT IN SUPPORTING REGENERATION

The key ways in which ICT can support regeneration are identified as:

- improve access to information;
- assist personal development;
- access education and training opportunities; developing new skills or updating existing ones;
- improve the image/perception of an area;
- access employment opportunities;
- reach groups suffering from social exclusion, such as the disabled, ethnic minorities, and young people excluded or truanting from school;
- support local business development;
- overcome geographical or social isolation;
- encourage community development, strengthening networks within local communities, improving participation/citizenship.

(Source: DTLR, 2001)

2.2.2 Barriers to access and take-up

Whilst available data on the take-up of ICT in deprived neighbourhoods is limited, the findings of PAT 15 show that people living in poorer communities face a number of barriers to accessing ICT. These are grouped into seven main themes as shown in the box below.

PAT 15: BARRIERS TO ACCESS TO ICT AMONG DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES

- Lack of joined-up approach
- Poor promotion
- Unattractive or unsuitable content
- Access problems – centres, facilities and equipment
- Lack of appropriately skilled staff
- Fragmented funding
- Costs

The significance of breaking down such barriers is the vital role that ICT can play in poorer neighbourhoods with regards to enhancing skills development and employment, promoting self-development and creativity, and helping communities work. The role of ICT in this context, the report emphasises, is in facilitating positive developments such as those mentioned rather than constituting an end in itself.

2.2.3 Supporting access – UK online centres

In response to growing concerns over a Digital Divide in the UK, a key plank of Government policy has been the development of ICT Learning Centres, now known as UK online centres. Funded as part of a wider programme supported through the Capital Modernisation Fund, the aim was to establish a number of new ICT centres throughout the country, with the objective of enabling those with either very limited or no access to ICT to have the opportunity to use the internet or email. The key target groups were to be those from disadvantaged communities. In addition, the Centres were intended to be located in places people visit every day, with convenient opening hours to offer easy access.

From their inception, the UK online centres have become a central component in the Government's drive to ensure accessibility to ICT for all. Whilst efforts had already been made to provide ICT courses and improve adults' skills in this area through the establishment of **learnirect**⁹ centres, it was recognised that many groups continue to face barriers and that a targeted initiative such as that of UK online was needed. A total of 700 UK online centres were initially planned over a three year period, although as the initiative has developed a revised target of 6000 centres has recently been met.

Recent research on the UK online programme found that the Pioneer and Pathfinder projects were successful in overcoming many of the barriers people traditionally faced in accessing ICT¹⁰. In the study, barriers frequently reported with regard to other learning environments were explored – such as childcare costs and availability, logistical problems in accessing provision, timing of courses, formal college tuition – and an evaluation made as to the extent to which UK online centres help to overcome these barriers. The text box below highlights some of the key reasons identified as to why the Centres have been able to break down these barriers and support access to ICT. The study also found that some centres had taken additional steps to break down barriers, such as offer free childcare at or near the Centre, provide effective promotional literature, and undertake outreach work in the local neighbourhood.

UK ONLINE CENTRES: BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Reasons identified as to why the Pioneer and Pathfinder projects have generally been able to overcome barriers to people accessing ICT are as follows:

- opening times that are flexible or scheduled around school hours;
- courses were offered in small increments, often with accreditation at each stage, and staff counselled learners on the best approach to meeting needs and interests through progression as needed;
- most computer centres helped casual enquirers with the basics of getting around a computer or answered specific questions without signing people up for a course unless they felt they were ready for one;
- staff were welcoming, patient and respectful and used to working with people who have been out of education for a long time;
- Centres were located near where people live so commuting was drastically reduced;
- the Centres were filled with a mixture of "people like me".

(Source: Hall Aitkin Associates, 2001)

Following on from the initial evaluation results, more recent research has sought to build on these findings by providing an update on the usage of UK online centres by different groups and by drawing on survey data with users and Centre Managers.¹¹ These results suggest that the Centres have a positive impact on raising confidence and improving access to further education, training or employment. They also indicate, however, that whilst the proportion of users from the programme's key target groups (eg. lone parents, disabled people, ethnic minorities, those with learning and numeracy difficulties) have increased since its establishment, the Centres have generally been unable to support access by the

⁹ **learnirect** is aimed at all adults whether they are in work, seeking working, considering returning to work or retired. **learnirect** centres are located throughout the country and offer a much wider range of skills provision, spanning a broad range of levels, to that available at UK online centres.

¹⁰ Hall Aitkin Associates, 2001 'ICT Learning Centres (UK online): Formative Evaluation of Pioneer and Pathfinder Projects'

¹¹ Hall Aitkin Associates have published two additional reports in 2002 entitled 'Evaluation of Pioneer and Pathfinder UK online Centres: Follow-up Study' and 'Evaluation of CMF-funded UK online centres: initial report'

hardest to reach groups within these communities. As a result, it is recommended that additional support mechanisms are put in place to encourage take-up by such groups and to monitor the extent to which such measures achieve a positive effect.

2.3 ICT and black and minority ethnic communities

2.3.1 Background

Black and minority ethnic groups are more likely than the rest of the population to live in poor areas, be unemployed, have low incomes, live in poor housing, have poor health and be victims of crime.¹² As a result of the level of exclusion faced by such groups, all of the Policy Action Teams were asked to give specific consideration to BME groups within their work, including that of PAT 15.

One of the key messages to emerge from the work of PAT 15, with regard to supporting access to ICT for disadvantaged BME groups, was the paucity of research which then existed in this area. This lack of understanding (albeit in terms of research evidence as many working closely within BME communities will undoubtedly have a wealth of experience and knowledge in this area) means that a thorough understanding of the current take-up and barriers to ICT use among black and minority ethnic communities at the time of PAT 15's report was limited. The research programme commissioned by the Department, of which this project is a part, is an attempt to respond to this.

2.3.2 PAT 15: barriers and recommendations

Notwithstanding the above comments regarding the lack of research in this field and the general levels of social exclusion experienced by BME groups, PAT 15 suggests that a number of additional barriers to ICT for those from black and minority ethnic communities can be identified. In its report, it refers specifically to language difficulties and different cultural needs. As a result, PAT 15 advocated:

“For ICT programmes to be successful they need local ICT champions and mentors who are drawn from the same background as the community they serve. They should also ensure that local provision reflects the cultural background of the neighbourhood, for example, by providing home access in communities where women find using public access difficult. There is also a need for more software for teaching English as a second language and a need to improve the availability of software in minority languages and more software based in non-textual representation.”

Its specific recommendations are identified in the box below.

PAT 15 RECOMMENDATIONS: BME GROUPS

4 key recommendations were made:

- local management of ICT facilities to encourage local champions and mentors from within the community, taking cultural background into account and avoiding discrimination;
- review software for teaching English as a second language to ensure adequate provision;
- review availability of software in minority languages, and explore partnerships with companies to develop software applications;
- encourage software developers to provide non-textual information.

¹² Social Exclusion Unit, 1998 'Bringing Britain Together – A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal'

2.3.3 Examining effective ways of supporting ICT access for BME groups

Whilst the development of UK online centres (at least from the evaluation of the Pioneer and Pathfinder projects) shows that they appear to be making a positive contribution to breaking down the barriers to accessing ICT, the extent to which they are able to meet the specific needs of BME groups is as yet unknown. The evaluation work carried out to date highlights that the Centres have some way to go in meeting the needs of the most excluded communities and that, whilst there appears to have been increasing take-up by BME groups (from 2% of all users to 13%) in the evaluation surveys, it is not known to what extent this mirrors patterns across the country.

Until now, our level of knowledge regarding the types of provision and methods of service delivery which provide the most effective means of supporting access to ICT for BME groups has remained largely unknown. This report, together with the findings of other commissioned research in this field, hopes to address this lack of understanding and provide a clearer basis from which to meet the needs of black and minority ethnic communities.

3 THE CASE STUDIES

3.1 Introduction

The eleven case studies on which this research study has been based offer a qualitative insight into the everyday working practices, challenges and opportunities facing community ICT providers and the key features which contribute to the achievement of positive outcomes for BME groups. As such, the detailed findings from the study contribute significantly to our understanding of the barriers facing black and minority ethnic communities in the uptake of ICT and the measures which are necessary to support access. This is not to suggest, however, that other features of good practice do not exist or that all black and minority ethnic groups experience the same barriers to accessing ICT. Indeed, a much larger scale study based on sophisticated sampling mechanisms would be required to ensure that a wider, more representative range of ICT projects, were included.

In considering the results and recommendations of this study, it is important that the specific characteristics of the case study projects included within the research are taken into account. This is important for understanding the context in which the projects operate and the factors which enable them to have a successful impact. To this end, this chapter provides a brief overview of the key features of the eleven case study projects. Further details on each specific case study can be found in the summaries included in the appendices, or by referring to the individual case study reports produced by the community researchers (see Appendix 3 for how to obtain the individual case study reports).

3.2 Geography and location

The projects included in the research study were drawn from a number of locations around the country. Nine of the projects are based in England, whilst one each from Northern Ireland and Wales are also represented. More specific project geographies are shown in Table 2, indicating both the community location from which the project operates and the town or city in which they are based. The key point to note with regard to the areas from which the projects are drawn is that they are all urban areas and, in most cases, inner city districts. This is likely to reflect the higher concentration of black and minority ethnic populations in such areas.

Table 2: Geographical location of case study projects

Project Title	Community Location	Town/City
Bangladeshi Youth Organisation (BYO)	Manningham	Bradford
Computer Assisted Learning and Training Centre (CALTEC)	Manningham	Bradford
First Step NE	Newcastle West	Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Jamia Educational & Cultural Trust	Castlefield	High Wycombe
Kelvin Media Productions (KMP)	Upperthorpe/Netherthorpe/Langsett	Sheffield
Minority Ethnic Women's Network (MEWN) Cymru	Cardiff Bay	Cardiff
Moss Side & Hulme Women's Action Forum (MOSHWAF)	Moss Side	Manchester
Naari LETS	Belgrave	Leicester
People 1 st	Finaghy	Belfast
Resource & Outreach Community Centre for Information Technology (ROCCIT)	Spitalfields	London
SheBytes	Bethnal Green ¹³	London

¹³ SheBytes delivers ICT services through community organisations across East London. The case study focuses on its work with an organisation based in Bethnal Green.

It can be seen clearly from the table that many areas of the country are not represented in the research. For example, there is no representation from regions such as the South West, the West Midlands, or the East of England, whilst Scotland is also excluded. Moreover, this area coverage of projects does not necessarily reflect the geographical pattern of BME communities throughout the UK.

3.3 Target groups and users

Any assessment of good practice with regards ICT provision for BME groups must clearly take into account the nature of the selected case study projects in terms of the profile of BME groups targeted by the project. In this study, it is important to emphasise that there is some bias towards ICT projects serving Asian communities, albeit a diverse range of groups within those communities. Despite this, representation is also found by Afro-Caribbean groups, as well as refugees and asylum seekers. It is also important to note that, whilst some projects attract users from specific BME groups due to the nature of their local populations, many of the ICT providers seek to encourage participation by all ethnic groups.

In addition to the ethnic profile of the project's target groups, a number of other factors are important to note when considering the results of the research. All of the projects identify the 'socially excluded' among their target communities, with some targeting specific groups such as the unemployed. In addition, six of the eleven projects are women-only ICT providers.

The key target and user groups relating to each case study project are shown in Table 3. The distinction between those targeted and those currently using ICT services has been made to highlight the inclusive approach taken by many ICT providers and to illustrate the local BME context (generally reflected by the user profile) in which the projects operate.

Table 3: Target and key user groups of case study projects

Project	Target Groups	Key User Groups
Jamia Educational & Cultural Trust	Kashmiri (Pakistani) community in Castlefield	Kashmiris of mixed age
SheBytes	Women of all ethnic origins in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets	African, Afro-Caribbean & Bangladeshi women
First Step NE	Women from all BME groups in the West of Newcastle-upon-Tyne	Bangladeshi and Pakistani women
ROCCIT	All socially excluded ethnic groups in Tower Hamlets	Bangladeshi, Black African and White men and women. Unemployed groups
BYO	Bangladeshi residents in Manningham and nearby areas	Bangladeshi men including new arrivals and young people
People 1 st	Chinese community in Belfast	Chinese men and women of all ages
Naari LETS	Women from all BME groups within the project's locality	South Asian women aged 35 and over
MOSHWAF	Women from all ethnic groups in Moss Side and Hulme	Afro-Caribbean women
MEWN Cymru	Women from all BME groups aged 14 years and over	Somali women. Diverse range of other groups
Kelvin Media Productions	Women from all BME groups in the local area	Yemeni and Somali women, including refugees
CALTEC	All ethnic groups in local area	Pakistani community

3.4 Date established

Reflecting relatively recent trends in the growth of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), all of the projects selected for review have a history of providing ICT services of no more than 10 years and in the majority of cases, no more than 5 years. In some cases, ICT provision has become a more recent addition to the services already provided by the community organisation as it strives to keep pace with changing demands and needs within its local communities. It can be suggested that the decision of some organisations to introduce ICT services may also reflect patterns of funding availability.

The table below illustrates when both ICT specific services and the community organisation as a whole were established for each of the case study projects. This shows that seven out of the eleven projects started life as organisations which provided non-ICT related services to their local communities and have only more recently developed the information and communication technology side of their work.

Table 4: Date ICT projects were established

Project	ICT set-up date	Date organisation was established
BYO	1999	1982
CALTEC	1992	1992
First Step	2001	1990
Jamia	1997	1994
KMP	1997	1986
MEWN Cymru	2000	1994
MOSHWAF	1995	1992
Naari LETS	Not known (after '94)	1994
People 1st	2000	1994
ROCCIT	1999	1999
SheBytes	1999	1999

3.5 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the key features of the case study ICT projects selected for research in terms of when they were established, the geographical locations in which they operate, and the main groups they target and currently work with. These factors are important in providing context to the research and should be taken into account when considering the report's findings and recommendations.

4 MEASURING POSITIVE OUTCOMES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the different ways in which the achievements of ICT projects can be measured. It highlights the need for policy makers and funding bodies to recognise that both 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes are important with regard to supporting access to ICT for black and minority ethnic groups and that additional effort and resources should be channelled into establishing more effective ways of capturing the positive achievements of projects.

In reviewing the contents of this chapter, it is important to bear in mind that the focus of the case study work was on identifying good practice rather than on each researcher undertaking a specific project evaluation. As such, whilst the chapter is able to provide an indication of the outcomes being achieved by the case studies, it is unfair to suggest that these outcomes reflect the full activities and outcomes of each project.

4.2 Establishing the criteria

Identifying the extent to which ICT projects are successful in encouraging access and take-up by BME groups must take into account a wide range of contextual factors and a variety of outcomes. The nature of the BME communities the project seeks to serve, the resources available to the project, and the project's aims and objectives will affect both the type of outcomes sought and the success with which they are achieved. Indeed, what may be deemed successful for one project may be different for others if they are seeking to meet different needs.

What is clear, however, is that any measurement of impact and value for money assessment must take into account a blend of both 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes.

4.2.1 'Hard' outcomes

Access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has traditionally taken the form of college-based provision, whereby participants enrol on courses often with a view to achieving some form of accreditation or certification. Whilst such forms of ICT provision continue to attract users, they are less successful in engaging the hardest-to-reach groups. As a result, many in the Further Education sector have worked hard to establish closer links with the communities they seek to serve and now deliver a number of their courses at the neighbourhood level. For providers such as these, the success or otherwise of their services is primarily measured through the take-up of courses and the academic or vocational results obtained.

Many of the case study projects included within this study currently provide college accredited courses in ICT. For these, output data relating to enrolments, qualifications and so on form an integral part of their management information systems, or if not collated directly by the project, fall within the remit of the college's monitoring procedures. Some projects also maintain their own monitoring records with regards the use of open access terminals and non-accredited learning, although the extent to which these are able to identify 'hard' outcomes achieved (such as entry to employment) is variable.

Some of the key outcomes achieved in terms of course completions, qualifications attained, take-up of further training and entry to employment among the case study projects are identified below. Whilst these help to provide an indication of the outcomes achieved, it is important to emphasise caution in viewing these results. Only a selection of projects are featured, whilst the analysis draws on only a limited range of outcomes. The aim of the commentary is to therefore give a flavour of the type of outcomes achieved rather than to provide comparative data across the case studies:

➤ **People 1st**

Targets the Chinese community in Belfast recording over 150 users since November 2001. Encourages participants to enrol on courses and has successfully supported users in the attainment of a wide range of qualifications, recording an accreditation rate of over 90%. Qualifications have been attained in OCN Introduction to Computers, CLAIT, IBT2, ECDL, and OCR Internet Stage 1.

➤ **CALTEC**

Targets ethnic minority participants in the inner wards of Bradford recording over 600 users between September 2001 and June 2002. Offers a high number of courses and progression routes, many of which are accredited, including RSA word processing, CLAIT and IBT2. Qualifications are achieved by over four-fifths of users enrolling on accredited courses.

➤ **MOSHWAF**

Working with a diverse range of communities in Manchester, the project supports up to 80 users in ICT skills each week. Courses run for up to 12 weeks at a time with many offering qualifications. All courses are fully subscribed.

➤ **BYO**

Works with the Bangladeshi community in Bradford and supports users in the achievement of qualifications through its FreshStart programme. Course completion rates are recorded to be over 80%, whilst the project is also successful in encouraging the take-up of additional learning opportunities and entry to employment.

4.2.2 'Soft' outcomes

An overriding feature of all of the case studies involved in this research study is the achievement of a range of 'soft' outcomes. For many BME participants, contact with the ICT project was found to represent the first step into adult learning and skills development and achieved much more than simply improving an individual's proficiency in the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Positive outcomes were noted across a range of quality of life indicators including those pertaining to personal development such as confidence, aspirations and self-esteem. Meanwhile, other users felt their communication skills and ability to access information and services had improved through their involvement with the project. The potential role of ICT in contributing to wider social and community regeneration objectives must also be noted. Qualitative research with project participants also revealed, for example, that a number of projects helped to provide opportunities for social interaction and, in some cases, encouraged participation in other community activities.

The key non-quantifiable outcomes identified through the study are identified in Table 5. This shows the particular significance that access to ICT opportunities can have in building confidence, raising people's aspirations, and providing a valuable mechanism through which people can socialise and network with others.

The potential benefits of encouraging access to ICT for BME groups clearly includes more than the achievement of 'hard' outcomes such as qualifications and employment. Indeed, the outcomes identified above reflect the holistic approach taken to addressing the needs of BME communities by the case study projects. Moreover, it is important to recognise that the process of engaging communities is a long one and that the value of the 'soft' outcomes achieved should be recognised within their own right, as well as the potential they provide for leading to more quantifiable outcomes in the future.

Table 5: ‘Soft’ outcomes achieved by case study projects

‘Soft’ outcomes	No. of projects in which ‘soft’ output is clearly achieved
Increased confidence	11
Raised aspirations	6
Improved ability to access public services and information	5
Opportunities for social interaction and networking	5
Enhanced communication and understanding of activities with children	4
Reduced apprehension regarding learning new skills and ICT	4
Better inter-personal skills	3
Enhanced involvement in community development activities	3
Higher self-esteem	3
Increased feelings of empowerment	3
Social integration	3
Decreased sense of isolation	2
Increased sense of ‘ownership’ of the project by members of the local community	2

4.2.3 Value for money

As the focus of the case study research was neither to undertake an economic assessment or a full blown evaluation of the projects, reporting on the extent to which the case studies achieve value for money is not possible within this context. However, the findings do enable a number of general comments to be made with regard to the measures used for assessing value for money and the types of provision which appear to be most cost effective.

Firstly, examples such as that of the Naari LETS project in Leicester highlight that some forms of community based ICT provision can offer particularly good value for money even though they represent non-traditional ICT projects. Based on the exchange of skills and expertise between members, costs are limited to overheads such as staff salaries and premises. This highlights the importance of recognising that less formal or traditional types of provision, even if provided on a one-to-one basis as many of Naari’s services are, do not necessarily perform less successfully in value for money terms.

With regard to value for money assessments, the research also suggests that measures based simply on the calculation of costs, coupled with ‘hard’ outcomes, fail to reflect the full benefits of community based ICT projects. The study clearly identifies the role of ICT in contributing to a number of ‘soft’ outcomes for BME users. Broadening the definition of ‘value for money’ to encompass outcomes such as these must therefore take place if ICT projects working with BME communities are to achieve success in securing funding through bodies such as the LSC.

4.3 Measuring and monitoring outcomes

4.3.1 The rationale

An analysis of the current practices of ICT projects with regard to measuring and monitoring both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ outcomes reveals that there is significant scope for improvement. Whilst some projects have already put in place management information systems to capture their performance with regard to ‘hard’ targets, particularly if required to do so by funding bodies, others do not systematically set output targets or review progress achieved. Moreover, whilst the research evidence gathered from users through this study shows that much more than ‘hard’ outcomes are being achieved, methods of capturing ‘soft’ outcomes are even more limited at present.

Developing these systems, however, is undoubtedly of value for ICT projects. Firstly, it can help to provide greater feedback to the project on its performance with regard to reaching its target audience and achieving a range of positive outcomes, ultimately providing a means of better informing future

provision. In addition, the development of more sophisticated methods of collating and monitoring management information may well enable the project to occupy a more advantageous position in seeking resources from funding bodies as the project is better able to demonstrate achievements and value for money.

Some of the key 'hard' and 'soft' targets which we would recommend that projects seek to measure and monitor are identified below. In making this recommendation, we are not wishing to place an onerous demand on community ICT providers and believe that many of the necessary procedures can be put in place without the need for substantial investment of time or resources. Indeed, the case studies involved in this research study would suggest that assessing many of the indicators proposed would simply require formalising the current practices of many ICT projects.

4.3.2 'Hard' targets

The following indicators are recommended for measuring the quantifiable targets specific to ICT projects. Within this context, an assessment of the proportion of participants from the project's target communities and a breakdown by gender would also be recommended.

RECOMMENDED INDICATORS FOR MEASURING 'HARD' OUTCOMES

- Number/percentage of ICT users from BME groups
- Number/percentage of users enrolling on ICT courses
- Number/percentage of users gaining ICT qualifications
- Number/percentage of ICT course participants entering further training or education
- Number/percentage of ICT course participants or users entering employment
- Number/percentage of clients using ICT drop-in services (and/or other services such as lap-top loans)

4.3.3 'Soft' targets

The following represent the main non-quantifiable targets, which we would recommend community ICT projects seek to measure. Whilst the inherent difficulties in attributing the achievement of many of these outcomes directly to the role of an ICT project are recognised, the following measures can be used to give an indication of the 'soft' outcomes that participation in ICT learning can have. For many of the suggested indicators, user surveys at the start and/or end of a course may be considered to constitute the most effective method of measurement.

RECOMMENDED INDICATORS FOR MEASURING 'SOFT' OUTCOMES

- Self-defined rating (scale 1-5) of level of confidence
- Self-defined rating (scale 1-5) of level of self-esteem
- Self-defined rating (scale 1-5) of apprehension in using ICT
- Self-defined rating (scale 1-5) of apprehension in learning new skills
- Number/percentage of users reporting improved access to public/community information and services
- Number/percentage of users wanting to take-up learning/training opportunities
- Number/percentage of users seeking employment
- Number/percentage of users participating in community and voluntary activities

4.4 Summary

The results of the case study research reveal that supporting access to ICT can bring a wide variety of benefits to BME communities. These range from quantifiable outcomes such as the achievement of qualifications, the take-up of further training and entry to employment as well as a host of non-quantifiable outcomes linked to quality of life aspects. It is apparent, however, that the systems currently used by many projects do not enable the full blend of positive outcomes to be captured and, in turn, communicated to potential funders. Efforts must therefore be made to examine how this issue can be addressed further and to build the capacity of organisations to develop the management information systems required. It is also important that the value of projects focusing on the achievement of 'soft' outcomes is communicated to policy makers and funding bodies, such as the Learning and Skills Council, so that greater emphasis is placed upon non-formal learning opportunities at the strategic level and is, in turn, reflected in the funding criteria set for projects. Indeed, it is advocated that further research about the potential funding models, delivery mechanisms and unit costs relating to ICT projects is undertaken to better inform the Treasury of the role of 'soft' targets on increasing take-up and contributing to positive outcomes. Furthermore, it should be recognised that such outcomes do not only represent positive achievements in themselves but have the potential to lead to more quantifiable outcomes in the future, as long as the appropriate support mechanisms and progression opportunities are provided to BME users.

5 SUPPORTING ACCESS TO ICT FOR BME GROUPS: KEY FEATURES OF GOOD PRACTICE

5.1 Introduction

This research study has sought, through a case study approach, to identify locally based ICT projects, which are successful in supporting access by minority ethnic groups and to identify the key features of good practice. What it has found is that there is no one model of success with regards ICT provision for BME groups; one size doesn't fit all. The reasons for this are many and, as one would expect, reflect the diversity which exists within BME populations as well as the variations in the local social, cultural and economic contexts in which ICT projects operate. What the research has found, however, is that there a core set of factors which, when brought together, maximise access to ICT for BME communities and play a central role in encouraging take-up. These factors fall into three main categories:

- ❶ service delivery functions;
- ❷ core support functions;
- ❸ management functions.

This chapter considers these factors in turn, drawing on specific case studies where appropriate to exemplify each point.

5.2 Service delivery functions

Good practice elements in this category relate to the delivery of ICT provision itself. This covers factors such as the type of services on offer, where and at what times services are provided, and the skills and competencies required for the effective delivery of ICT training and provision.

5.2.1 Holistic approach

As recognised within the work of PAT 15 and supported by the findings of this research study, ICT alone is not a panacea for addressing social exclusion. The complex nature of social exclusion, and the specific issues faced by black and minority ethnic communities within this context, render providing access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) of limited value unless coupled with a wide range of social, recreational, and welfare related services. All of the projects involved in this study reflected this holistic approach to ICT provision to some degree. In detailing the way in which this is evidenced, it is important to recognise that different projects adopt different approaches to holistic ICT provision. However, the characteristic which binds them together is that the approach taken engages users and integrates the provision of ICT within a much broader context which focuses on reducing social exclusion.

In many cases, ICT courses and drop-in services are provided alongside a diverse range of other activities including ESOL, cookery and sewing classes, sports activities, welfare advice and so on. In this sense, isolating the involvement of BME users in ICT can be misleading, as first and foremost many users were found to have been attracted to a project by the desire for language acquisition or for social interaction, for example, and only once finding themselves in a safe, non-threatening and comfortable environment were they attracted to the new technologies. Such examples relate closely to the nature and remit of the provider organisation as many are long-established community organisations serving the needs of their local population in general with the provision of ICT services having become only a more recent dimension of this role. This is reflected in Table 4 referred to in Chapter 3.

First Step NE is a registered charity based in West Newcastle-upon-Tyne, which provides a diverse range of learning and leisure activities to women from BME communities. Whilst ESOL, leisure and community development opportunities dominate the organisations' programming, First Step has evolved to now also provide various opportunities for participation in ICT related learning activities. Whilst ICT does not therefore necessarily represent the primary driver for many women coming into contact with the organisation, it has found that once they are there and are presented with access to ICT services in a safe and familiar environment, the take-up among BME communities is increased. Indeed, many of the first users of the project's UK online centre were those with whom the project had already established contact. In this sense, activities as diverse as cookery, fine art, creative writing, language development, environmental awareness, and ICT training cross-pollinate one another and 'share' participants. Access to ICT, particularly for BME users who lack confidence with regard to the new technologies, is therefore supported by a holistic approach to service provision in which various other activities act as the hook to encouraging participation.

Naari Lets in Leicester represents a local exchange scheme which works on the principle that every individual who joins the scheme has a set of skills which she can exchange or offer in return for the skills they want. Using a non-monetary currency for undertaking the trading transaction, scheme members have access to a directory, comprising a wide range of sought after skills with which they can exchange their own expertise, including traditional Asian skills such as Mehindi painting, Indian massage, and cookery. With advances in the role of new technologies at home, in the workplace and for leisure purposes, there has been increasing demand for ICT development by Naari members in recent years and, as a result, the project has drawn on the abilities of its members to exchange skills in areas such as basic ICT training, how to use the internet, and accessing Asian language packages for typesetting in Gujarati, Urdu and Punjabi. In this case, ICT provision therefore takes place in a very non-traditional way, alongside a wide range of other activities and in a setting in which equal value is placed on each of different activities.

For other projects, the holistic approach relates less to a vast range of activities being offered and more to the provision of ICT as a core function which is backed-up by a number of support or complimentary services. In this setting, recognition is made of the wide range of factors which can militate against the social inclusion of black and minority ethnic communities and the limited impact that ICT alone can have on addressing such problems. In addition, the actions required for supporting access to ICT and maintaining the involvement of many BME users within learning environments are recognised. These include, for example, language support, immigration advice, counselling, and welfare services. Whilst it would be misleading to suggest that all of the projects involved in this study had the means to provide each of these services directly, those which didn't had established valuable linkages with other agencies to which they could refer ICT learners as necessary.

ROCCIT (Resource and Outreach Community Centre for Information Technology), based in East London is committed to taking a holistic approach to the needs of its users and strongly believes that the high retainment rates of BME groups on its courses is linked critically to the ability of the project to approach its users first as individuals and only second as ICT learners. Targeting a wide range of users including political refugees, new arrivals, the unemployed, and the homeless from a diverse range of backgrounds, ROCCIT recognises that the realities of life for many of its users means that their access to ICT learning can be hampered by various social and welfare needs. In response, ROCCIT employs staff who are qualified teachers experienced in working with adults from socially excluded groups and are able to provide a tailored package of social and welfare support to those who require it. The importance of this approach is exemplified by a quote taken from one member of staff who states: ***"If you want to reach people who are socially excluded, you have to give them more support than simply point at the keys on a computer. Socially excluded people often have, by definition, a wide range of problems which militate against their social integration – the project does what it can to counter these."***

Addressing the holistic needs of BME communities is essential if efforts to engage users in ICT are to be successful. The complexities of social exclusion and the specific barriers facing many black and minority ethnic groups means that a multi-faceted approach is required in order to encourage access and take-up. The case study research has shown that this holistic approach is reflected both in the provision of support services and a range of complimentary activities whereby ICT becomes a tool for reducing social exclusion and encouraging Neighbourhood Renewal rather than the solution.

5.2.2 Responsive and flexible services

The ability of ICT projects to respond and adapt to their target communities' needs is a key factor in enabling many users from black and minority ethnic communities to access and benefit from the new technologies. Many of the case study projects were found to be effective in attracting BME users due to the research they had undertaken into the needs and requirements of those they were seeking to serve and the mechanisms they had put in place to respond to this. Importantly, recognising that these needs vary within BME communities is vital to developing services which are responsive to all potential users and do not act to alienate those from particular ethnic groups or cultural backgrounds.

Conducting needs assessment exercises need not involve large scale research. Many projects were found to have built up an in-depth knowledge of their target clients' needs through the outreach activities of the project whilst others utilise feedback from current learners (eg. through user satisfaction surveys) to continuously inform the planning and development of services.

The importance of ICT providers being responsive and flexible in the way in which they offer services was found to be particularly significant with regard to the times at which training courses are held. This often reflected the specific cultural needs and activities of certain groups of BME users and ranged from reasons relating to religious instruction through to patterns of economic activity. For women, issues pertaining to course provision falling within term times or within the school day also emerged in some cases.

People 1st offers open access facilities and ICT training to a diverse range of users in Belfast. In setting up its course provision for Chinese users, in partnership with the Chinese Welfare Association, the course tutor recognised the need for classes to be flexible in relation to both their time and duration. The predominance of the catering trade (restaurants and take-away businesses) as the primary means of economic activity for those within the Chinese community in Belfast was recognised from an early stage in planning service provision and is reflected in courses being held during the middle of the day. Whilst some projects seeking to support access to BME groups may consider evening provision an advantage, this project recognised that this was not the case for its specific target group and has been able to respond and deliver its courses appropriately. The People 1st project is also characterised by a significant degree of flexibility with regard to the duration of its courses for Chinese user groups. Difficulties with English language skills and the need for the Chinese tutor to translate some of the course material has meant that the ICT classes attended by Chinese participants always take longer than the average number of specified hours on course handbooks, etc. Although largely due to the commitment of the tutor himself, a more informal and non-prescriptive way of learning now takes place and the project partners are aware of the need for longer time periods to be built into delivering ICT training for this specific target group.

The **Bangladeshi Youth Organisation (BYO)** in Bradford also realised the need to respond to the employment patterns of its target users by providing courses which did not run either during the evenings or early mornings and therefore clash with those from the local Bangladeshi community who worked in the catering trade (restaurants and take-aways). In response, courses are currently run during the afternoons and at weekends, with course participants reporting that this is a key contributory factor to their take-up of ICT learning.

Ensuring responsiveness to the diverse needs and requirements of the communities which locally based projects are seeking to serve is an ongoing necessity. The needs, structure and composition of black and minority ethnic communities within any given locality rarely remain static and will undergo particular fluctuations depending on people's economic circumstances, family responsibilities, and local patterns of in- and out-migration. A related consideration to the need for ongoing awareness of local demand with regards ICT provision is so that projects can continue to attract users when faced with competition from other local providers. In a number of regeneration areas, the availability of a wide range of funding streams has initiated the development of a multitude of projects offering access to ICT and placed increased demands on some providers to compete for learners and participants. Those projects which have been able to respond to this growing competition by researching their clients needs, targeting their services accordingly and in, some cases, creating a niche market for themselves are those who have been most successful.

5.2.3 Accessible, localised provision

Access to ICT for black and minority ethnic groups is supported considerably by providing easy to reach services at the neighbourhood level. The case studies included in this study reveal that many users are reluctant to travel beyond their local, familiar environment in order to become involved in or make use of ICT courses or facilities. The reasons for this are varied and relate in some cases to a reluctance to travel for cultural reasons, in others to the costs incurred. For those projects seeking to maximise participation by users from outside the immediate area in which the project is based, accessibility to cheap, reliable and efficient public transport also becomes important.

The provision of ICT facilities in areas in which local BME groups already come together can offer particular advantages for attracting users. This may be in terms of an established community facility, a youth centre or other prominent venue serving the local BME sector. The advantages to be gained here are that local people are already familiar with the location in which ICT is being offered and, the research suggests, are more likely to view it as a safe, welcoming environment in which to learn.

Jamia Educational and Cultural Trust was established in 1994 as a voluntary organisation based in the Castlefield area of High Wycombe. It was initially set up to provide cultural and language (Urdu and Arabic) teaching primarily for the local Kashmiri community who are estimated to represent one-fifth of the area's population. Having already established itself as a focal point within the local community, in 1997 it successfully secured SRB funds to deliver ICT training in partnership with a local college. The fact that this provision took place in a location which was already familiar to potential learners is recognised by the Project Manager and users as being key to participation. The isolated nature of the local community meant that this local level of provision, whereby the college delivered ICT through a familiar neighbourhood centre, was vital.

Not all projects have the luxury of operating from established and well-known community venues of course, and many based in premises which are less visible have to work hard to create an environment which is attractive to potential users or develop alternative forms of provision (such as home based learning with the use of laptop). What is clearly apparent in case studies included in this study, however, is that community based provision in the local area in which the BME groups reside is favoured significantly over a college based learning environment. This was not only an issue of accessibility, but also due to the perceived position of community organisations as places which are able to give greater attention to the individual learner in a more relaxed and informal setting.

Prior to establishing a partnership with the ***People 1st*** centre in Belfast, the Chinese Welfare Association (NI) had tried to support access to ICT among its members by enrolling them at a number of institutes of further and higher education. This strategy did not prove sustainable, however, as many of the Chinese learners left the courses prior to completion deeming them unsuitable due to a range of reasons including 'a lack of individual support', 'the pace was too fast', 'being made to feel uneasy about asking questions', and 'classes being held at unsuitable times'. As a result, the CWA (NI) worked hard to identify suitable community based provision and has managed to establish an effective partnership with the People 1st centre where learners report a high level of satisfaction.

In summary, some of the key good practice findings with regard to the location in which ICT is provided are as follows:

- located in the heart of the community it serves;
- an accessible location with good transport links;
- based in a well established community venue or facility;
- a visible presence within the local area.

5.2.4 Skilled and professional staff

Recognising and supporting the requirements of those involved in the delivery of ICT provision represents an important dimension of supporting access to BME groups and encouraging the ongoing take-up of services. In addition to many users citing the necessity of having friendly and approachable project workers, the importance of skilled and appropriately trained staff was also found to be paramount.

Good practice suggests there is a range of key skills, which those involved in the delivery of ICT for black and minority ethnic communities need to have. This is not to suggest that all members of the projects' workforce ought to display such qualities, but that there is an adequate blend of competencies across the staff and management team. These include:

- fundraising;
- administration (including management information systems);
- financial management;
- people management;
- marketing and external relations;
- training and education;
- outreach.

Further commentary on many of these qualities can be found elsewhere in the chapter. Despite many good examples among the case study projects, it is apparent that there is scope for many ICT Project Managers and staff to develop skills in these areas, but the lack of resources and support mechanisms currently restricts such a process of upskilling from taking place. It would thus appear that additional funds which can support a process of ongoing capacity building among ICT providers would help support the development of professional, needs led services and provide projects with a more sustainable basis from which to attract users.

In addition to the task oriented functions identified above, the existence of multi-lingual staff who reflect the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of those the project serves, and staff with wider social support skills also act as important contributors to ensuring positive ICT outcomes for BME groups. This links closely to the good practice elements of language support, cultural sensitivity and ethnic diversity, and a holistic approach which are detailed elsewhere in this chapter. In particular, the following qualities can be identified as being important:

- Project Managers and staff drawn from the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds as the target communities;
- multi-lingual skills;
- social support skills (eg. welfare advice);
- friendly and approachable staff.

5.2.5 Progression routes

Central to efforts to engage socially excluded groups in ICT and to address the needs of such communities on an ongoing basis is the provision of opportunities for progression and continuous skills development. Many BME users first become introduced to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in a non-formal, sometimes unplanned, way. For example, some users may have initially been attracted to community projects to boost language skills or for participation in a specific leisure activity, whilst participation among others may have been stimulated by opportunities to use open access terminals for browsing minority language newspapers on the internet. The research indicates that the role of this holistic and flexible approach to supporting access to ICT cannot be underestimated, particularly for encouraging many BME users to take a first step into learning. Indeed, the research data on 'soft' outcomes shows that for many, even very informal learning opportunities can play a significant role in contributing to improved self-confidence, self-esteem and personal development. What is important, however, is that learners at all entry levels are provided with the opportunity to develop their skills and pursue a process of ongoing learning.

Many of the case studies involved in this research displayed a positive approach to providing progression routes for those involved in the project. This had been recognised by Project Managers as an important dimension with regard to the ability of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to help address social exclusion over the longer-term. Supporting access to ICT on the one hand, but providing barriers to progression and take-up on the other, were deemed to be highly detrimental to achieving positive outcomes both at the individual and community level.

CALTEC, an ICT provider based in the Manningham area of Bradford, runs a wide range of ICT courses in an effort to encourage participation at all entry levels and provide opportunities for incremental progression. Courses range from short taster sessions to basic skills in IT to accredited RSA and CLAIT courses at a variety of levels. Its ability to provide a diverse range of programmes is supported significantly by the strong partnerships which have been established with external agencies, as well as the project now having a number of community locations to which it can direct learners as they move through the learning curriculum. Whilst CALTEC therefore provides a positive example of a project which offers progression for its clients, in terms of the incremental acquisition of qualifications, it also recognises that formal learning opportunities alone are unable to break down the barriers to access for many BME users. In response, the project has worked hard to offer alternative forms of provision (such as home-based lap top loans) and has recently been successful in achieving UK online status. By providing more informal services in this way the project hopes to be able to attract a greater number of first-time users from the local BME community and gradually introduce them onto a considered path of learning and progression.

The importance of providing opportunities which enable an incremental process of learning and skills development to take place is clearly instrumental in helping to address the long-term needs of black and minority ethnic communities. This is not only important in terms of providing learning opportunities per se but also for the future potential it offers for translating such opportunities into benefits such as entry to employment. In doing so, however, important issues regarding the ability and extent to which projects are able to link their services to the needs of local labour markets emerge. For those users who are at an advanced stage of learning and have aspirations to enter employment, the ability of projects to offer recognised qualifications and valued skills amongst local employers is vital. Whilst it did not constitute a specific focus of the case study work, this linking between ICT provision and the demands of the local labour market was mentioned in only a few cases and it is recommended that efforts to join-up these two dimensions within the Neighbourhood Renewal process are undertaken.

The necessity of providing recognised ICT qualifications and skills to black and minority ethnic users was particularly recognised by those projects which were operating in close proximity to clear employment opportunities in these areas. The London based projects stand out as particular examples in this context due to the wealth of opportunities which the City of London and its environs offer to those with ICT skills.

ROCCIT is based in the Spitalfields area of Tower Hamlets, East London, and is only too aware of both the employment opportunities which exist on its doorstep and the high levels of unemployment experienced by residents in the Borough. Bordering both Shoreditch and the City of London, a key objective of the project is to provide socially excluded residents, including those from black and minority ethnic communities, with the skills to access these local employment opportunities. An extract taken from the community researcher's case study report highlights these tensions particularly well:

“In Shoreditch, the design and IT economies are prevalent as it is historically an area rich in creative industries and still hosts a large proportion of the capital's architects, designers and IT professionals. All of these fields now use ICT intrinsically and so the need for basic and advanced ICT skills is a pre-requisite for entering work in the area. The City is the country's financial base and work in the area also requires IT skills at a range of levels. The pattern of employment in the City includes a high concentration of administrative staff, ICT consultancies, financial analysts and IT consultants... Parts of Shoreditch and most of the City of London employ people on the highest salaries in the country and yet a stone's throw away, people are unable to access basic posts due to their lack of relevant ICT skills.”

The courses provided by ROCCIT therefore attempt to respond to this problem by developing ICT skills which meet the demands of the local labour market and increase levels of employability for users. The opportunities provided include those in e-commerce and web-design. Whilst a lack of outcome data restricts any assessment of the extent to which the project achieves these objectives, the case study research shows that a key attraction for users was that courses were very 'of the minute' in terms of their relevance to current employment trends.

5.3 Core support functions

The good practice elements identified within the category of 'core support functions' reflect factors which are less concerned with actual service provision and more to those elements which attract BME users to take-up services and to achieve a range of positive benefits in doing so. Included within this section are a number of factors specific to BME users, such as language support, cultural sensitivity and ethnic diversity within the project team, as well as those which are vital for supporting access by all socially excluded groups such as effective outreach, childcare provision and free or low cost provision. All of these factors are central to supporting access to ICT and should be considered of equal significance to both service delivery functions and management functions.

5.3.1 Language support

For many people from black and minority ethnic communities, and particularly for first generation immigrants, English does not represent their main language. Whilst proficiency in the language may be adequate for day-to-day activities, difficulties with both verbal and written communication can place BME users at a disadvantage when learning new skills and can have a significant effect on restricting the take-up of learning opportunities in the first instance. The case study research shows that projects which are able to provide language support to those accessing ICT services represent good practice and have an increased ability to attract and retain learners from BME groups.

The case studies reveal that this language support can be provided in a number of ways. These include the employment of multi-lingual staff, the provision of ESOL courses, the translation of course material into community languages, and the use of software in minority languages. The most effective examples are those which both support the development of English language skills, whilst at the same time enabling BME users to learn about and use ICT in their own language.

The **People 1st** centre in Belfast works in partnership with the Chinese Welfare Association (NI) to deliver training in basic ICT skills to the province's Chinese community. One of the key motivating factors cited by course participants for their attendance is the fact that the project has a tutor who can speak both English and Chinese. It is estimated that at least three-quarters of the resident Chinese population of Northern Ireland are first generation immigrants and, as such, have a high level of need with regard to English language tuition. According to the project's participants the benefits of having a bilingual tutor are that lessons can be structured to enable more efficient and effective learning, difficult and technical concepts can be explained in Chinese and additional one-to-one support can be provided as required. In the absence of specialised software or learning tools in the minority language, the current tutor also translates much of the written course material into Chinese to assist the learning process. The role such support plays in encouraging the take-up of ICT service is perhaps best exemplified by one learner who has now completed four different ICT courses: ***"I wanted to grab the opportunity to learn with a Chinese tutor as there might not be such an opportunity again in the future."***

First Step (NE) is a community organisation in Newcastle-upon-Tyne which provides a wide range of services with a view to improving the quality of life of all women. Part of its remit is to provide accredited and non-formal ICT learning opportunities through supporting access to its UK online learning centre and other home and community based provision. As a matter of course, First Step translates all relevant course materials into the predominant community languages of its user groups – these being primarily Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, Arabic and Farsi. Provision is also made for translation into other languages on request. Comprehensive language support is also available to participants through the use of interpreters for all of its courses, many of whom are already learners who undertake this work in a voluntary capacity. In addition to its efforts to address the language difficulties of its users for courses conducted in English, First Step also provides a wide range of mother tongue activities as a means of encouraging participation in new learning opportunities. With regard to ICT provision, a wide range of minority language software is provided which is used not only for training in information and communication per se but also for a range of other activities including translation services.

The case study findings support those of PAT 15 in recognising the significant role which language plays in affecting the access and take-up of ICT among BME groups. The findings suggest that language issues need to be built into the planning of ICT services from an early stage and an appropriate range of support mechanisms put in place reflecting the profile of the local BME population and the nature of language support required. It is also important that issues surrounding the language needs of BME participants in ICT learning are recognised as being integral to the achievement of positive outcomes for certain groups and, as such, reflected in the type of funding which is available to projects. Best practice appears to be particularly identifiable in those projects whose managers, staff and volunteers are able to offer multi-lingual skills to aid the process of learning, as in the case of projects such as First Step NE and MEWN Cymru. Sharing the good practice lessons displayed by such projects and placing greater emphasis on the importance of language skills for those involved in the delivery of ICT training may be considered paramount to increasing future take-up.

5.3.2 Cultural sensitivity and ethnic diversity

Of key significance in supporting access to ICT for black and minority ethnic communities is the ability of projects to respond to the cultural sensitivities and diversity within their target communities. For many, this was found to involve managers, staff and volunteers being drawn from the ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds of those the project seeks to serve as a means of providing positive role models and a shared understanding of the needs and challenges facing specific communities. More often than not, users from a wide range of BME groups cited the existence of people from the same ethnic backgrounds within the project itself as a key contributor to their participation.

The example of the **Bangladeshi Youth Organisation (BYO)** in Bradford reflects the importance that many users attribute to ethnicity in encouraging the take-up of ICT services. Drawing its client base from the local Bangladeshi community, the presence of a tutor from the same ethnic background was reported to represent a key factor in supporting access to ICT by both young Bangladeshis from the local area and new arrivals. To some extent, the presence of a Bangladeshi tutor was found to have a particular attraction due to the support which could be provided in terms of language issues. However, the case study also demonstrates that being from the same ethnic background, the tutor served to act as a positive role model as 'he himself is an immigrant who came from Bangladesh and has achieved a high status in employment and the community'.

In addition to reflecting the diversity of its local population, the ability of ICT providers to respond to the cultural needs of its target audience was also found to be a key factor in supporting the take-up of ICT learning opportunities. Many of the projects included within this research study sought to address social exclusion experienced by ethnic minority women and had recognised the specific cultural needs of these women in planning service delivery. For example, in some cases this included an all female staff compliment whilst in others, non-traditional forms of provision such as home-based learning were offered. Projects which took account of other cultural needs, such as religious activities, can also be considered to represent good practice.

MOSHWAF (Moss Side and Hulme Women's Action Forum) takes a holistic approach to meeting the needs of BME women in the Moss Side and Hulme area of Manchester by providing a range of courses, activities and services which reflect the cultural needs and identities of its target groups. An ethnically diverse staff team, women-only service provision, and 'culturally appropriate' services all act to encourage ICT users and create a positive learning experience. Some of the comments made by ICT participants and partner organisations, which illustrate the importance of such factors, are included below:

"The Forum provides the space and time for women to be themselves and to focus on their own needs, in a relaxed and culturally diverse setting."

"I would not come if it was mixed. Some women are not allowed by their husbands to come to mixed classes."

"It is good that it is black run. I feel free to express myself here."

"I have referred some of my Muslim friends to the Forum as it is women only. They love it there and the staff are all great."

The importance of culturally sensitive and ethnically diverse Project Managers, staff and volunteers is ranked highly among the key factors which help to support access to ICT by BME groups. This is not to suggest, however, that projects must concentrate on delivering ICT provision to specific minority ethnic communities, or that those from other ethnic backgrounds are unable to play a valuable role in the learning environment. Indeed, many successful examples were found of truly multi-racial projects, which simultaneously challenged prejudice and exclusion while celebrating and encouraging diversity. The key, therefore, is recognising that different cultural needs exist within any given community and that organisations must seek to respond to these collective needs on an ongoing basis.

5.3.3 Effective outreach

Reflecting the barriers many BME groups have previously been found to experience in accessing public services, it is understandable that traditional forms of advertising and promoting ICT learning opportunities are not always able to reach out and attract potential users to ICT. The particular reasons for this with regards supporting access relate to a range of factors, from promotion material which is in English only, to the inability of advertising to address barriers such as people's fear of entering an unfamiliar learning environment or knowing what to expect from the learning experience.

Whilst it would be misleading to suggest that promoting ICT opportunities through methods such as leafleting, advertising at community venues, and holding exhibitions at community events are ineffective, the case study analysis reveals that such methods are best used alongside a process of outreach within the target communities themselves.

The majority of the projects involved in this research saw outreach activity as a key driver in supporting access to ICT for BME groups. Outreach workers were typically drawn from the communities they are seeking to serve and were found to hold varying positions within the project, ranging from those who were employed on a sessional basis, to part-time and full-time employees. Such an approach was found to bring wide-ranging benefits to projects seeking to target black and minority ethnic participants with the value of outreach activity being experienced across a diverse range of BME groups. Some of the key reasons why effective outreach can be considered to represent good practice are as follows:

- outreach workers facilitate word-of-mouth advertising which is found to be one of the most effective in attracting users to ICT;
- outreach workers, often being from the same ethnic or cultural background as target groups, provide a role model to potential users and play a key role in building trust;
- outreach activity can challenge people's negative perceptions of ICT and help to overcome barriers such as a fear of learning or perceptions that other participants will have more advanced skills;
- outreach workers typically offer an effective means of communicating with the target groups by being able to overcome any language difficulties;
- outreach work can play a vital role in researching and better understanding potential clients' needs and thus help to inform the planning and delivery of ICT services by the project.

MEWN Cymru, a women's organisation based in Cardiff, has developed a clear strategy with regard to both the process of outreach activity and its individual outreach workers. It currently employs two main outreach workers on a part-time basis to work with the local Somali community (which make up 50% of the projects' current ICT participants) and Arab communities. These outreach workers have a dual role, in that whilst employed to represent the project with a view to attracting new users in, they are also ICT learners themselves. Thus, they share a sophisticated understanding of many of the concerns and barriers faced by potential users and are able to build trust and encourage take-up within the target communities by acting as clear role models. In addition to recognising the important role that outreach work can have in encouraging the take-up of its ICT provision, MEWN Cymru are also committed to investing in the personal development of its outreach workers. All are provided with training in areas such as community development (3-day course), first aid and risk assessment to enhance their abilities in undertaking outreach as well as being taught how to develop exit strategies both for themselves and for increasing community ownership of the project.

Outreach has been a key component of the activities of **ROCCIT (Resource and Outreach Community Centre for Information Technology)** in Bethnal Green, East London, since its establishment in 1999. Recognising the barriers to accessing public services faced by many within the project's target communities in Tower Hamlets, outreach workers form an integral part of the project's staff team and are paid and trained accordingly. Outreach activities take place on a weekly basis and are typically carried out by at least 3 tutors who visit local estates, nearby businesses and key community organisations and spaces. Workers are employed from a wide range of backgrounds reflecting the culturally diverse nature of the target communities with their activities being supported by written publicity material (currently available in three community languages) and attendance at a wide range of local events.

The significance of effective outreach with regards access to ICT for BME groups is reflected in the fact that many community researchers identified outreach workers as key project champions within the case studies examined. This relates to their ability to build up trust with the target communities, provide positive role models to those of similar cultural or ethnic backgrounds, overcome language barriers and the like. Further exploration of outreach workers being considered in this capacity can be found in Chapter 6.

5.3.4 Childcare provision

For many women, access to participation in a range of voluntary, community and public activities is severely hampered by a lack of adequate and affordable childcare provision. This barrier to participation cuts across ethnic divisions and, as such, must represent a key consideration in efforts to support access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for women of all ethnic groups.

Within the case study projects, the significance of childcare needs in supporting access to ICT had been recognised by many of the community providers. The nature of childcare support provided to ICT users was found to range from those who had on-site crèche facilities (eg. First Step, SheBytes through its partner organisation, Account 3, ROCCIT, CALTEC) to others who were able to support childcare needs by organising activities such as holiday play schemes. Other projects which are currently unable to provide any form of assistance did, however, acknowledge the huge role childcare provision can play in supporting women's access to ICT, although most felt constrained in their ability to address the issue due to insufficient space and resources. One project, MOSHWAF, is currently seeking to overcome these constraints by bidding for funding through the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative for the development of a 50 place nursery, with the aim that more women will be able to participate in ICT training and learning.

Whilst the provision of childcare support may be considered by some as an 'added extra' to a community project's core business of ICT, such a perception significantly underestimates the role that childcare needs play in determining women's access to and take-up of new learning opportunities. It is paramount that the importance of this inter-relationship continues to be communicated to those seeking to support access to ICT and is reflected in the funding opportunities available. By addressing the childcare needs of all parents in this way, access to ICT by black and minority ethnic communities will be maximised.

5.3.5 Free or low cost provision

Black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to experience higher levels of unemployment, poverty and low incomes than their white counterparts. In view of this, the cost implications of accessing ICT provision in terms of encouraging take-up among BME users cannot be ignored.

In the majority of cases, the decision to charge or provide free services will depend on the funding and resources available to the particular project. This is particularly the case with regard to ICT courses, which run for a specific duration and tends to relate less to open access or drop-in facilities. However, whilst there is a valuable debate to be had as to whether some level of charge helps to increase commitment and retention among learners, the research evidence from this study shows that low cost, if not free provision, plays a vital role in supporting access for BME groups.

ROCCIT (Resource and Outreach Community Centre for Information Technology) provides a range of ICT services from its base in Tower Hamlets, East London. Its target population, of which an estimated 65% are from BME groups, experience high levels of deprivation. Unemployment in Tower Hamlets currently stands well above the national average, whilst 17 of the Borough's 19 wards are among the most deprived 5% in the country. In response to the local context in which it operates, providing free access to ICT therefore represents a key priority for ROCCIT, and the project works hard to secure funding to enable it to continue to do so. With over four-fifths of its clients being unemployed, users also mention the fact that courses and access to ICT facilities are free as a critical reason for their involvement.

Naari Lets in Leicester represents perhaps a more unique way of providing access to ICT for BME users at no financial cost. Here, women members of the local exchange scheme trade skills with each other in non-monetary currency, in this case motis (pearls). This enables members to run up negative balances without being considered in debt and as long as each trader balances their account over time, does not matter whether they are in 'credit' or 'commitment'. As a result, the funding requirements of the project are therefore limited to overheads such as staffing to manage the organisation on a day-to-day basis, premises, and ICT hardware.

The provision of free or low cost services is clearly an important factor for encouraging access to ICT for socially excluded groups, including many BME communities. It may be considered to be particularly important for those who are new or returning to the learning environment as it minimises financial risk and supports users in taking the first step to accessing Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

5.4 Management functions

Four good practice factors have been identified within the category of 'management functions'. These relate to practices which help drive the establishment of ICT projects targeted at BME groups and which enable those projects to meet the needs of their target communities in a sustainable way.

5.4.1 Vision and leadership

The establishment of many ICT projects serving BME groups is closely linked to the presence of an individual or group of individuals who drive the initiative forward and create the momentum for it to become operational. Across all the case studies involved in this research, the qualities of vision and leadership were recognised as being instrumental in providing black and minority ethnic communities with access to services, including ICT, which were able to meet their needs and help reduce social exclusion.

In a number of cases, the visionary was identified as a key individual from within the BME community. For them, the impetus for driving forward the development of a community based organisation targeting the needs of BME groups was related to a desire to address gaps in existing service provision and break down the barriers to access for those within the BME community. In some cases, these individuals were also found to be professional workers who were able to draw on a wide range of knowledge and skills in transforming their vision into a reality.

Naari LETS in Leicester was established in 1994 when one of the City Council's Economic Development Officers obtained funds from ESF and the National Lottery Charities Board to develop a LETS scheme specifically for Asian women. Recognising the barriers facing many women from her own ethnic background in being able to access a range of services and opportunities, together with the skills and expertise which existed within that community, the LETS scheme was established. The location of the project's founder within the City Council meant that she was in a position to develop and operationalise the project as well as bring key individuals into it at various stages of development. Her position also meant that she had access to information in terms of policy and funding matters and used this to benefit the project. Whilst the project, which now includes an increasing emphasis on ICT provision, is managed on a day-to-day basis by employed workers, the initial founder continues to provide leadership by occupying a seat on the project's 10-strong Management Board.

Coupled with the initial drive for the provision of services for black and minority ethnic users is the need for effective leadership skills once the project is up and running. In many cases, as the above example demonstrates, those who were initially involved in the project's establishment continue to play a role in determining how the project progresses, either by taking on a direct management role or through continued input as a board or committee member. Indeed, the composition of Management Boards may be seen as a key component in providing ICT projects with the leadership required to successfully meet the needs of their target communities and to do so in a professional, sustainable way. However,

whilst based only on a small sample, the research would suggest that the level of capacity of those involved in providing direction and leadership to community ICT providers varies significantly.

MOSHWAF (Moss Side and Hulme Women's Action Forum) has a voluntary Management Board of eleven women, the majority of whom are Afro-Caribbean women reflecting the key target group of the project. Several of the founder members of the organisation are represented on the Board. The project states that Board Members are selected for both commitment to the mission and aims of the organisation and for their specialist skills and experience. Many are professionals holding senior positions in private, public and voluntary sector organisations, whilst the majority are also considered to be influential and active in the wider community. The professional approach taken by the Board, with regard to the leadership role it provides for the project, may be reflected in the fact that all members have 'job descriptions' which set out their roles and responsibilities as Board Members with annual strategy development days being held to review progress and devise a clear business plan to guide future activity.

5.4.2 Effective partnership working

Developing partnerships both with private sector ICT deliverers and with public agencies who are able to refer users can bring significant benefits to community based ICT projects.

The case studies included in this research clearly demonstrate the value that effective public/private partnerships can have with regards ICT provision. This primarily reflects the complimentary skills of the different organisations in being able to fully meet the needs of the target users across a wide range of dimensions. These include, for example, access to up-to-date hardware and software, trained and qualified tutors, language support, and access to social and welfare services. Within this context, however, it is important to recognise that partnership arrangements with regard to ICT delivery can, and do, take very different forms and that the methods of joint working which are put in place will need to reflect each organisations' capabilities and the specific needs of the target communities.

SheBytes is a private company based in Tower Hamlets (East London), which provides consultancy, training, and development support to organisations and individuals seeking to learn more about Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Established in 1999, the organisation sees itself as a technology enabler; rather than re-inventing the wheel, the organisation works to establish long-term partnerships with community groups and publicly funded bodies that exist to serve a particular client group. It then works closely with that organisation to identify local needs, and the extent to which these needs are already being met by existing ICT providers, in order to ensure non-duplication of effort and the development of bespoke training courses. Employing a pool of freelance ICT trainers primarily from the commercial sector, SheBytes keeps its overheads to a minimum by relying on the partner organisation to provide the necessary ICT hardware and course location.

One organisation the company currently works closely with is Account 3, a not-for-profit organisation working to support and enhance the opportunities available to marginalized women, many of whom are from black and minority ethnic communities, in Tower Hamlets. Working within the community for over 10 years, Account 3 has a sophisticated understanding of the needs of the diverse population it serves and undertakes regular outreach to support access to a wide range of services, including ICT. Its base in Bethnal Green is equipped with a modern ICT suite, from which SheBytes is able to deliver its courses and support services such as crèche facilities, language development, and welfare advice is also available. Whilst SheBytes provide the expertise in course design and ICT delivery, Account 3 offers a non-threatening, supportive learning environment to socially excluded groups. The partnership therefore works to combine the strengths of each organisation and to deliver a more targeted and holistic approach to meeting the needs of its users.

The role of partnership working as a means of supporting access to ICT is not only evident with regards public/private delivery, however, good practice may also be recognised in the way in which locally based ICT providers link with other community, voluntary and public organisations in order to attract users and respond to their specific needs. For example, many of the case study projects had forged valuable links with local colleges to deliver ICT training at the neighbourhood level, whilst others worked closely with employment, welfare support and advisory agencies for client referral purposes.

MOSHWAF (Moss Side and Hulme Women's Action Forum) in Manchester has established good relations with key local agencies and mutually beneficial partnerships with training providers. Based in a prominent regeneration area, the Forum is involved at the strategic level in local regeneration activity and has worked hard to establish networks, which enable the organisation to contribute to a joined-up approach to addressing the needs of disadvantaged women within the local community. Training and support to clients is provided by a combination of in-house staff, external agencies, partner organisation and freelancers. For example, partnerships have been established with local organisations such as the WEA, Manchester Women's Electronic Village and Adult Education Service, to deliver ICT training whilst MOSHWAF also links with local Housing Associations (eg. Arowak, Moss Care) and economic regeneration agencies (eg. Moss and Hulme Agency for Economic Development) for the purposes of two-way client referrals.

5.4.3 Forward planning and sustainability

As with any community or voluntary sector initiative, efforts to identify local needs, plan service provision in response to these needs, and secure the appropriate level of funding to meet these needs is an ongoing process. The changing population dynamics of local communities coupled with continuous advances in new technologies makes this process all the more necessary for those seeking to support access to ICT for black and minority ethnic groups. Thus, if projects are to be successful in their aims they need to have a well-developed understanding of the barriers to take-up among specific local target groups, a clear interpretation of potential users demands with regards ICT provision, (whether this is in terms of hardware, software or service requirements), and have the capacity to deliver.

Those projects, which have a forward-looking approach to service planning and delivery, therefore represent particularly good practice in supporting access to ICT for BME groups. This research study has found that the skills and capacity of Project Managers and staff plays a vital role in this process and that those projects which achieve most success in this area may be considered to have undergone a process of 'professionalisation'. This is reflected in their ability to not only meet current demands but also in their flexibility to respond to changing needs and ensure sustainable service delivery.

Among the case studies, the extent to which projects have adopted a forward-looking approach with regards service planning and sustainability is variable. For those who displayed least success in this area, a lack of capacity among the management team appears to be of particular significance and suggests that it is likely to be an area in which skills development and capacity building is required for other projects. Despite this, some community ICT providers have clearly developed detailed forward strategies and business plans and serve to act as positive role models in this area.

First Step (NE) has a long history of successfully securing resources and delivering a wide range of services to disadvantaged women in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Funds from the Community Fund, ESF, Department, DETR, Home Office and NOF, amongst others, have been secured over the organisation's 12 year history, with fundraising representing an ongoing activity. For example, bids worth over £250,000 for revenue and capital spend over a three year period are currently pending and the organisation continues to think strategically about its future funding and sustainability strategy. In being able to respond to this funding climate, the organisation has acknowledged the need to continually evolve, to react to changing needs, and to adequately train and support its staff in being able to identify and respond to new opportunities. This has provided First Step with a secure financial base from which it is able to provide a responsive service to the needs of its target groups.

SheBytes, a commercial company working in partnership with community based organisations to deliver ICT services in the East London area, is involved in an ongoing process of development and change in order to meet client demands and achieve progress against its organisational objectives. It continuously strives to both contribute to the development of, and make use of, emerging technologies as a means of closing the digital divide and to offer bespoke ICT solutions to its female target group. Its future plans already include the development of shorter, modular based courses to enable participants to pick and choose learning appropriate to their needs as well as the development of bilingual ICT training leading to a professional qualification. The organisation is committed to a forward looking approach which centres on it being able to respond to flexibilities in the demand for ICT learning and which helps to ensure its future sustainability through niche marketing. As the project's co-ordinator states:

“Providing access to the most deprived is only a first step towards closing the digital divide. New technologies are emerging as fast as we grasp the old ones, so ICT providers need to keep abreast of developments and harness them in order to offer smarter, cheaper solutions for their client groups.”

Forward planning and sustainability are key to the success of any community based service provider. With regards ICT provision this is important, not only in terms of having adequate funds to resource the project's current activities, but also for ensuring an ongoing flow of information takes place to enable service planning to respond to changing demands and keep pace with changing technologies.

5.4.4 Access to core funding

Whilst this may be the luxury of the few in practice, there can be little doubt that access to core funding plays an important role in enabling ICT providers to focus their efforts on service delivery functions and on encouraging take-up among 'hard to reach' groups. Central to the aforementioned good practice of forward planning and sustainability, the ability of projects to draw on core funding for costs such as premises, salaries of key staff members, and course provision provides a welcome degree of security and a foundation or platform from which the project can target its ICT services. It can also serve to assist during times of fluctuation, perhaps due to changes in local demand or increased competition from other ICT providers, whilst it may also be used to ensure ICT hardware is upgraded on an ongoing basis. This latter issue is one of particular concern and one which emerged throughout the case study research, in that all of the projects outlined the need for ongoing funding to enable them to keep pace with the rapidly changing technologies and to continue to meet the demands of their users.

As one would expect, not all of the case study projects involved in this study enjoyed the benefits of core funding. However, some good practice examples were found to exist in this area and are considered by the projects to have assisted significantly in enabling additional resources to be channelled into attracting users from the target communities and for expanding services to meet growing demand.

CALTEC, providing a range of ICT services to BME communities in Bradford, has been able to draw on significant levels of core funding since its establishment in 1992. The original rationale for CALTEC came about after Bradford College identified a gap in provision for a group of parents from within the local BME population. Unable to fill the gap themselves, the college supported a successful bid for funding from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) who provided direct funding for CALTEC until April 2001. Following changes in the structure of the sector, CALTEC has been successful in maintaining a high level of core funding for its services, with 75% of its current costs being met by the LSC and an annual allocation of funds being provided by the local authority's Lifelong Learning Service. As a result, the majority of project staff are maintained through core funding.

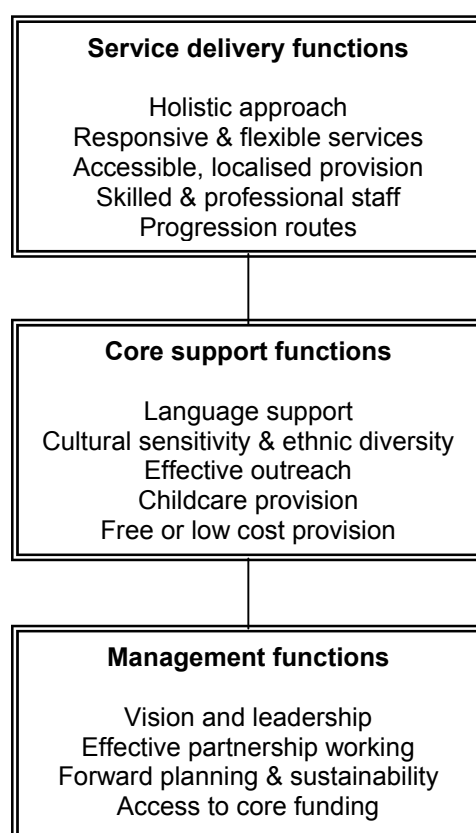
The advantages to be gained by ICT projects, which are able to draw on core funding, are clearly apparent. This is reflected not only in those projects who are currently successful in doing so, but is also demonstrated by those who are perhaps established with the use of core funding only for it to be withdrawn later. The Sheffield project, Kelvin Media Productions, provides a particular example of this scenario. Here core funding, which had previously been provided by the local authority, was withdrawn

upon re-organisation of the City Council's Youth Services Department. Whilst the project has since been successful in securing smaller amounts of funds from sources such as SRB, the impact that the loss of core funds has had on the ability of the organisation to deliver its aims, has been significant. It is vital, therefore, that continued efforts take place to highlight the good practices of many community based ICT providers to funding bodies, such as the LSC, who are in a position to channel funds into these organisations and provide them with a greater level of financial stability from which they are able to meet the needs of their local BME communities.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the key features of best practice with regard to the provision of ICT for black and minority ethnic communities in deprived areas. These features are summarised in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Key features of good practice in supporting access to ICT for BME groups in deprived areas



In considering these findings, it is important to highlight that equal weighting is placed on all of the good practice functions identified and that a blend of the different elements are required if projects are to achieve positive outcomes in supporting access for BME groups. The challenge now is to ensure that these good practice findings are used to inform the future planning, funding and delivery of ICT provision at the strategic level.

6 THE ROLE OF CHAMPIONS IN SUPPORTING ACCESS TO ICT FOR BME GROUPS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the work of PAT 15 by examining the role played by ‘community champions’ in supporting access to ICT by black and minority ethnic communities. Key to the discussion is the need for greater clarity among policy makers, ICT providers and local communities with regard to what is meant by the concept of champions and the different roles they can perform. With regard to supporting access to ICT, adopting terminology to that more consistent with the work of PAT 15 is advocated whereby emphasis is placed on ICT or project specific functions rather than on champions who represent local communities at large. In doing so, a distinction is made between two main types of champion with this chapter also giving brief consideration to the key roles performed by each.

6.2 Defining the concept

6.2.1 Community leaders and community champions

The concept of community champions is not one that all members of black and minority ethnic communities subscribe to. In examining the concept through both the available literature and the opinions of those involved with the research, particular difficulties in the use of the term when referring to BME communities appear to stem from its juxtaposition to that of community leaders and the often interchangeable way in which the two concepts are used. Whilst it would be misleading to suggest that community leaders arouse negative connotations amongst all BME groups, it was often felt that this term was linked to older generations and that it has decreasing resonance for ethnic minority communities today. In being used inter-changeably with community champion, many therefore see this term as also being one that is unconstructive and difficult to define.

Community leaders is a concept which has particular connotations with regard to BME communities and dates back primarily to the late 1970s and 1980s. At this time, the infrastructure available to support the BME sector was limited and many first generation immigrants experienced particular difficulties in being able to access a range of services and opportunities. In response, many BME communities witnessed the emergence of key activists who would often work tirelessly in an attempt to reduce the barriers facing black and minority ethnic groups. In this regard, such activists came to be seen as community leaders who could provide a voice for the BME sector in both local and national debates. Indeed, many community leaders can be identified today with the term often being equated with those seeking to represent particular faith groups. Whilst the impact and achievements of such individuals in promoting equality and increasing the opportunities available to those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds should not be underestimated, changes in the experiences of BME communities since the term was first used has led many to suggest that it is now an increasingly outdated concept. In addition, the diversity which now exists both within and between BME communities has led many to question the ability of specific individuals to represent all of these needs.

The term ‘community champion’ is one that has a more recent history and is particularly linked to the Government’s Neighbourhood Renewal Agenda. In this context, community champions are seen to relate less to representing the needs of their local community and more to encouraging other members of that community to play an active role in addressing issues of local concern and participating in community activities. Community champions in this sense therefore act as the enablers to the wider objectives of community participation and involvement. The term is also one which is used in a broad sense and is not necessarily linked only to BME communities. Support for the community champions concept is reflected in the establishment of a Community Champions Fund by the Department for Skills and Education ‘to help support and develop the work of local people who are involved in, or who want to be involved in, changing their local communities for the better’. For these purposes, a community champion is characterised as follows:

“A community champion is committed to helping members of their community to have a greater say in the decisions that affect them. In particular, he or she needs to be able to support community activity by adopting an entrepreneurial approach – which means making things happen and overcoming barriers. He or she must also be skilled in helping people to help themselves. Community champions are forward looking people who are persistent enough to see things through. Finally, it is essential that he or she is good at networking and sharing ideas.”

(Department, Community Champions Fund web-site)

6.2.2 Project champions not community champions

Despite the significance placed on the potential role of community champions in Neighbourhood Renewal, the research undertaken with BME communities through this study suggests that it is a concept which is not universally supported. In outlining the aims and objectives of the case studies at the outset of the research process, project representatives and community researchers expressed a genuine unease with the concept. This related to both the difficulties of defining and capturing the roles performed by a community champion as well as concern over issues of representation and the extent to which anyone is able to champion the cause of a whole community. From the debate which ensued, coupled with the findings of the research itself, it is proposed that ‘project champions’ represent a more accurate term to reflect the actions of those who play a particular role in supporting access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

6.3 The current role of ICT project champions

The research suggests that whilst evidence of project champions can be found amongst many community based ICT providers, they do not characterise all projects nor represent a pre-requisite for success. Importantly, a clear distinction can be made between the different roles and functions performed by project champions. In general terms, the research findings indicate that two main types of ICT project champions can be identified. We have referred to these as ‘visionary champions’ and ‘delivery champions’.

6.3.1 Visionary champions

In this context, champions are identified as those who provide the initial vision, drive and commitment for the development of the ICT project. Typically from a minority ethnic background themselves, these champions show a commitment to improving the quality of life of BME groups by establishing community based provision which target their needs and recognises the specific barriers faced by many BME communities in accessing services and opportunities, such as those provided by ICT. In many cases, visionary champions do not necessarily set out to provide ICT per se but to address the needs of BME communities in a holistic way. However, by often maintaining a level of involvement in the development of the project, many visionary champions continue to play a role in directing the community organisation’s activities, in this context responding to growing demands for ICT provision. Moreover, this continued involvement can take a variety of forms from representation on the project’s Management Board to involvement as a Project Manager or staff member. The visionary project champion therefore links particularly closely to the good practice finding relating to vision and leadership identified in the previous chapter.

“It is indisputable that without the initial energy and vision of two individuals (now the Project Co-ordinator and Treasurer/Project Manager) twelve years ago, First Step would not exist in its current state, if at all. It is equally fair to suggest that for the first half of its life First Step was very much personnel reliant. Had it not been for the continued efforts and strategic vision of these two individuals and a small group of active and enthusiastic volunteers, the seed of community activity which has now blossomed into a highly effective and financially sustainable organisation would have fallen on barren ground.”

First Step NE, Newcastle upon Tyne

6.3.2 Delivery champions

Delivery champions are identified as those who play a key role in affecting the day-to-day operation and effectiveness of the ICT project. Typically involved in the capacity of a Project Manager, member of staff or volunteer, champions in this context perform an integral role in attracting participants from the target communities and supporting the process of learning once it begins. Performing more than simply a job role, delivery champions have a sophisticated understanding of the needs of their target groups and are able to respond in a supportive and flexible way. This may take the form of combining ICT training with a much broader range of social support skills and a commitment to help potential users break down the barriers to access (eg. by advising on childcare options). Often reflecting the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of their target communities, delivery champions may also act as role models for their target communities. Some projects identify a number of delivery champions. Project delivery champions are linked closely to the good practice findings pertaining to both effective outreach and skilled and professional staff.

“The general impression was that there was no one individual that could be identified as being responsible for promoting ICT. Credit had to be given to a number of people including project staff, tutors, home school liaison officers, Project Managers, head teachers, teachers and students. All these groups of people are considered to be pushing at different levels and in different ways to (raise) awareness of ICT within the community. They do so through their respective roles and responsibilities. They spread the word when involved in recruiting, training, networking and mentoring. They are perceived as ambassadors selling a way of learning and not just a curriculum topic.”

CALTEC, Bradford

6.3.3 Key characteristics of ICT project champions

Drawing together the roles identified through both the visionary and delivery champions, a number of key characteristics of ICT project champions can be identified. This is not to suggest that these characteristics are displayed by all project champions, but merely reflect the wide ranging attributes which were discovered across the case study projects involved in this research.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF ICT PROJECT CHAMPIONS

- Visionaries, recognising local needs and the actions necessary to address them.
- Innovators, setting out new ideas and new ways of addressing local problems.
- Enablers or motivators, encouraging community involvement and participation.
- Ambassadors for the project, ‘championing’ the cause.
- Energetic and enthusiastic, based on a genuine interest and strong belief in the work of the project.
- Trusted and well-respected members of their local community, often reflecting the ethnic and cultural diversity of the target groups.
- Strong interpersonal skills, being able to relate to individuals on a personal level.
- Invest time and effort and show a commitment to the project.
- Skilled and professional workers who have the ability to ‘get things done’.

6.4 The potential role of ICT champions

The above distinction between visionary champions and delivery champions helps to identify the different roles performed by those involved with many community ICT projects. In doing so, it recognises that some projects will reflect evidence of both types of champion whilst in others the balance may lean on one side or the other. For others still, evidence of either form of champion may be non-existent.

Identifying the type of functions performed by ICT project champions is important if efforts to support the development of community ICT provision for black and minority ethnic communities are to succeed. Indeed, a reliance on older generations to perform roles akin to those of a community leader or community champion can not only cause tension within communities but can make it difficult to know how best to build on the positive roles identified and share good practice between projects.

The research findings of this study indicate that project champions rather than community champions do have a potential role to play in supporting access and take-up of ICT for BME communities in deprived areas. However, it also demonstrates that there is a clear need for capacity building to take place and additional support to be provided if many projects are to reap the benefits. This may be considered the case with regard to both visionary and delivery champions. Whilst efforts to develop the role of champions will vary between projects, some of the key areas in which there appears to be a particular need for additional training and support are as follows:

- increasing knowledge of potential funding streams to enable innovative ideas to be developed;
- developing the skills of Management Committees/Boards across a range of dimensions (eg. fundraising, marketing, forward planning);
- training for outreach workers (eg. methods of outreach, how to engage, health and safety);
- training in the delivery of ICT, particularly for more advanced courses;
- increasing awareness of the wider context in which the project operates and providing the skills for project champions to work in a strategic capacity (eg. networking, representation on local partnerships, knowledge of the local regeneration agenda).

6.5 Summary

This chapter has suggested that the term 'project champion' as opposed to 'community champion' is more applicable when identifying the positive roles performed by those providing ICT to black and minority ethnic communities. The distinction made between visionary champions and delivery champions is an important one, in enabling the specific functions of project champions to be captured and for providing a greater understanding of how the potential of project champions can be harnessed and supported in the future. Providing capacity building for projects in relation to the specific functions associated with project champions, rather than relying on the actions of particular individuals, is felt to provide a more sustainable basis from which ICT projects can better meet the needs of their target communities.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) offer a valuable tool in the drive to reduce social exclusion for black and minority ethnic communities. Whilst it would be misleading to suggest ICT represents the panacea to addressing the needs of individuals and communities in deprived areas, supporting access to ICT can contribute to a range of positive outcomes, including access to education and training, improved employment prospects, increased access to goods and services, improved community development and cohesion, and enhanced quality of life. Ensuring that the opportunities afforded by the new and emerging technologies are accessible to all groups in society and deliver real benefits to black and minority ethnic communities requires a co-ordinated approach both within and across government departments and agencies. To this end, this chapter makes a number of recommendations to policy makers for supporting access to ICT for black and minority ethnic groups in deprived areas. In making these recommendations it particularly targets the Department for Education and Skills, Prime Minister's Office (including the No.10 Policy Unit), Social Exclusion Unit, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Cabinet Office (including Office of the e-Envoy), Home Office, and the Learning and Skills Council. The recommendations are also targeted at ICT projects and project funders.

In addition to the lessons which have been learnt regarding supporting access to ICT, the innovative process by which this research study has taken place contributes valuable findings to the debate on the role of community engagement and participation in Neighbourhood Renewal. From this, a number of practical recommendations on how government departments can best involve local communities in future research activity are made. These are included within Appendix 1.

7.2 Recommendations

Twenty-one recommendations are made in total. These are grouped under the following seven headings:

- ① funding;
- ② provision;
- ③ champions;
- ④ effective partnership;
- ⑤ community engagement;
- ⑥ research;
- ⑦ sharing good practice.

① Funding

In the majority of cases, funding for community based ICT providers is on a short-term basis with projects required to draw upon a myriad of different sources in order to sustain service provision. In terms of revenue funding, this presents particular difficulties for projects regarding forward planning with the continual use of short-term funding threatening sustainability. It is also apparent, however, that greater coherence is necessary with regard to the funding opportunities available to projects if they are to effectively increase access to ICT for BME groups. For example, co-ordinating funds which enable the ongoing training and development of ICT project staff, and the development of support services alongside the provision of ICT hardware is central to offering a holistic approach to ICT and maximising take-up. In addition, there is a clear need to recognise the achievement of 'soft' outcomes in the provision of ICT services and to communicate the benefits of non-formal learning opportunities to potential funders. Finally, if community based ICT providers are to offer high quality provision and engage users, there must be a shift away from one-off capital investments in ICT facilities to funding which enables projects to make ongoing upgrades to ICT hardware and to take advantage of new technologies as they emerge.

FUNDING		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
1.1	Provide funding which supports ongoing upgrades to ICT hardware and access to emerging technologies (eg. broadband).	High
1.2	Provide revenue funding on a longer-term basis to enable more effective forward planning by ICT providers.	High
1.3	Increase co-ordination of funding at the local level to enable core support services to be provided alongside ICT services.	High
1.4	Prioritise the release of additional public funds to support capacity building for community-based ICT Project Managers and staff.	High
1.5	Work with funders to communicate the benefits of non-formal ICT learning for BME groups and to establish mechanisms to better support projects focusing on 'soft' outcomes (eg. re-entry to learning, increased community involvement, improved access to services).	Medium

2 Provision

The case study research shows that a number of good practice lessons can be identified with regard to providing ICT for black and minority ethnic groups. In particular, it highlights the need for both policy makers and funders to look away from the sole provision of formal learning opportunities delivered through designated ICT centres to consider a broader range of services and types of provision. For example, this may include providing a laptop loan service to enable home-based provision or the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into other project activities or wider neighbourhood services. Adopting new approaches to ICT provision may be considered of particular benefit for addressing the needs of BME communities by enabling more targeted and culturally sensitive services to be provided. In addition, there is a need to recognise the particular barriers to ICT experienced by those with language difficulties and increase access to ICT software in minority languages.

PROVISION		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
2.1	Increase the provision of non-formal ICT learning opportunities (eg. home-based provision, one-to-one support) for those requiring targeted provision in areas of deprivation.	Medium
2.2	Increase access to ICT software in minority languages by building on the results and recommendations of the scoping study.	High
2.3	Link ICT provision to the wider Neighbourhood Renewal Agenda as one of the many mechanisms for addressing social exclusion (eg. by supporting neighbourhood provision of ICT services, by ICT providers being represented on local area partnerships).	High

3 Champions

Champions can play an important role in the success of community based ICT projects. However, the research suggests that project champion, as opposed to community champion, represents a more accurate term when identifying the positive roles performed by those providing access to ICT for black and minority ethnic groups. Providing capacity building and training for projects in relation to the specific functions associated with each type of project champion, rather than relying on the actions of particular individuals, is advocated to represent a more sustainable basis from which ICT projects can better meet the needs of their target communities.

CHAMPIONS		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
3.1	Refer to project champions rather than community champions when working with BME communities and commissioning any further research in this field.	Low
3.2	Undertake to identify effective mechanisms and relevant funds to support the development of activities performed by project champions and provide ongoing staff development for those undertaking such roles.	High

4 Effective partnership

The reliance on short-term, limited resources places significant constraints and challenges on the ability of many community based ICT projects to adequately meet the needs of their target communities and to provide a professional, locally embedded service. Whilst many community providers are successful in supporting access to ICT and addressing social exclusion at the individual project level, the study shows that significant advantages can be gained by developing effective partnerships with other projects and organisations. Effective partnerships are based on mutually beneficial working relationships and enable the complimentary skills of different organisations to be brought together to achieve a common purpose. There is a particular need to encourage the development of network relationships between community based projects to promote the exchange of information, share facilities and equipment, and enable users to access a wider range of services and learning opportunities. Similarly, the study suggests that advantages can also be gained by developing effective partnerships with the private sector and better linking ICT learning opportunities to those in the local labour market.

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
4.1	Increase linkages between ICT learning opportunities and employment by encouraging private sector involvement in ICT management and delivery and maximising opportunities for progression (exemplified by the SheBytes case study).	Medium
4.2	Facilitate the development of effective partnerships between ICT service providers and other community based projects to achieve mutual benefit (eg. client referrals, networking, access to specific hardware/software).	High

5 Community engagement

The principles outlined in the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy formed the basis of the research methodology adopted for this study. The appointment of community researchers from across the country, and the programme of support which was put in place by the Research Managers, represents an innovative and challenging approach by the Department for Education and Skills. As such, the research process serves to highlight a number of good practice lessons with regard to effective community engagement and illustrates the benefits of involving local groups and communities in research activity. It is important that these lessons are now communicated effectively to all government departments and the mechanisms put in place to maximise community engagement in future research activities.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
5.1	Ensure that the results of the research process inform the future planning and commissioning of research undertaken by the Government.	High

6 Research

This study, together with the two complimentary projects commissioned by the Department, have contributed significantly to our understanding of ICT with regard to meeting the needs of black and minority ethnic communities. At the time of the PAT 15 report, the paucity of research in this field was recognised and recommendations made for additional work to take place in this area. The fact that a specific programme of research has taken place is testament to the commitment of the Government to address issues of social exclusion faced by BME groups and to harness the opportunities provided by ICT in this process. This study suggests, however, that there are significant opportunities to build on the findings presented as a means of further supporting access to ICT for BME groups. In particular, there is a need for additional research into the 'soft' outcomes achieved by many projects to examine how these can best be captured at the individual project level and subsequently communicated to project funders. In addition, the need for a greater knowledge base with regard to the number, location and type of community based ICT projects which exist is recognised as being vital to encouraging collaborative working. Finally, more effective monitoring of the uptake of ICT by black and minority ethnic groups is vital if there is to be any real understanding of the impact and achievement of initiatives which seek to support access by such groups.

RESEARCH		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
6.1	Establish a research project to identify the most effective mechanisms for capturing non-quantifiable or 'soft' outcomes specific to ICT projects.	High
6.2	Develop a standardised checklist of good practice against which projects can be quality assured for forward planning and funding purposes. This should seek to include some form of value for money assessment, combining costs with both 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes.	High
6.3	Establish an ongoing system for bringing together the information available on the uptake of community based ICT provision by BME groups in deprived areas.	Medium
6.4	Establish a monitoring programme which measures the level and value of Neighbourhood Renewal and Learning and Skill Council funds which are channelled into community ICT projects.	Medium
6.5	Conduct a mapping exercise to examine the extent of ICT provision and content that is focused on minority ethnic groups across the UK to feed into a national network of projects (see recommendation 7.3).	Medium

7 Sharing good practice

The innovative process by which this research study has been carried out, together with the knowledge which has been built up with regard to ICT access for BME groups, means that there are a number of important lessons to be shared if the positive outcomes of the study are to have a wider impact. In particular, there is a need for both effective feedback to be given on the results of the study and opportunities for ongoing involvement to be provided for those who have been directly involved in the research. Projects and community researchers alike may be considered to have a role in this process, being able to advise not only on the future delivery of ICT but also on the process of engaging communities in research activity. Providing feedback not only to the Department for Education and Skills but also to other government departments, regional bodies and other relevant agencies is also important. Finally, establishing the mechanisms through which this exchange of good practice can take place will be paramount to joining up initiatives across government departments and delivering real benefits to black and minority ethnic communities over the longer-term.

SHARING GOOD PRACTICE		
No.	Recommendation	Priority
7.1	Hold a number of dissemination events to provide feedback on the results of this research to those involved and other interested parties.	High
7.2	Draw on the capacity and skills of those involved in this study to build on its achievements and advise on implementing the recommendations of the research, taking into account the planning for UK online, Learndirect , and other ICT Government initiatives (eg. e-government targets). This could take the format of a BME Advisory Committee or Working Group on ICT and should include representation from key funders such as the Learning and Skills Council as well as those involved in Neighbourhood Renewal.	High
7.3	Establish a network of black and minority ethnic ICT projects to promote the exchange of good practice, encourage the development of joint funding applications and service delivery partnerships, and facilitate capacity building amongst BME communities.	High

7.3 Summary

Supporting access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) requires a concerted and multi-faceted approach. A large number of social, cultural, language and economic barriers has meant that many BME groups have been unable to take advantage of traditional forms of ICT learning and have relied instead on more responsive, community based provision to meet their needs. There is a need, therefore, to continue to support the development of localised provision based on the features of good practice identified through this study as a means of further supporting access and increasing take-up by BME groups. It is vital, however, that this takes place in the context of a more strategic approach to addressing the needs of BME communities and in a funding climate which allows for greater flexibility in meeting these needs.

APPENDIX 1

The Research Process

Appendix 1: The Research Process

1 INTRODUCTION

The Department for Education and Skills has taken an innovative approach in the preparation of the brief for the research study, representing a somewhat radical departure from the way in which the Department (and other Government departments) typically commission research.

It has aimed to target the following key priorities:

- to focus on the key recommendations of the PAT 15 report;
- to engage and involve the community in its approach to the work and in delivery of the research;
- to support this process by providing a framework of community support to enable this level of engagement, i.e. capacity building, training and one-to-one support;
- to provide some benefits to the community by creating a mechanism for the exchange of information and networking.

This was a challenging departure from tradition, and the research process has proved to be highly successful in its outcomes, especially in achieving the engagement and involvement of community organisations in the process and in capacity building local individuals to deliver the research. Its success was based in dealing constructively with a range of challenges as they emerged throughout the process. This appendix therefore highlights some of these pertinent issues and is intended as a helpful guide for the Department and other Government departments intending to follow this type of research process in the future.

2 *THE PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY*

The Steering Group, through a national open tendering process, made the selection of the projects for the study and of the Project Managers to manage the whole process and produce a final report.

The Department called for expressions of interest from local community organisations to carry out research on projects that support ICT provision for black and minority ethnic communities. In doing this, the Department recognised that local organisations within the community already possessed the knowledge, experience and relationship necessary to gather good quality local information.

A number of expressions of interest were received and a selection process took place, whereby a Steering Group including representation from the voluntary and community sector was engaged in the process of selection. Due to some under-representation among the expressions of interest received (in terms of geographical areas and ethnicity) some work was undertaken to ensure a wider range of projects were included from the outset of the study.

Following this process, a total of 11 projects from across England, Wales and Northern Ireland were selected (no expressions of interest were received from Scotland and a project could not be identified for inclusion in the research within the given timescale).

The researchers appointed to undertake the case study research were drawn from a wide range of backgrounds. This is in terms of ethnicity but also with regard to their previous experience in undertaking similar research. In addition, the extent to which the community researchers already had knowledge of, or contact with, the ICT projects they were contracted to study varied between the eleven case studies.

Through an open tendering process, MCCR in partnership with CLES Consulting and CEMVO, were appointed as Project Managers. The role of the Project Manager was to co-ordinate and facilitate the

contributions of the individual community groups, working in close consultation with them to ensure their outputs were consistent and carried out to a high standard of research methodology, which could then be combined into a final coherent report.

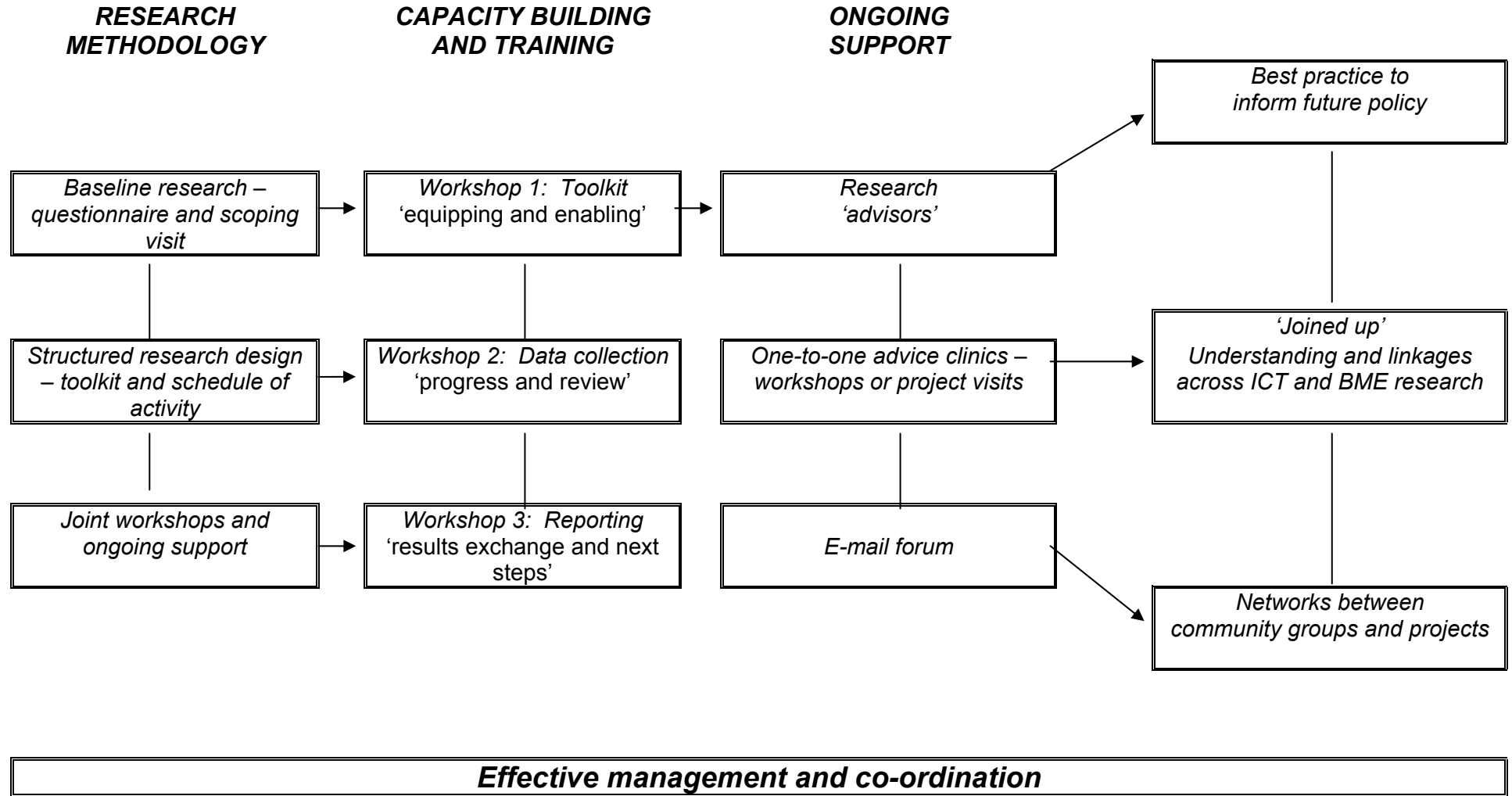
In addition to this project, the Department commissioned two other related pieces of research:

- a survey of attitudes towards, and use of ICT, among BME groups;
- a project to scope the availability of ICT and web services in ethnic minority languages.

Table 1 outlines the process that was followed, with careful thought being given to the involvement of community organisations and community researchers appointed to carry out the local case studies.

PROCESSES

OUTCOMES



3 KEY INNOVATIVE FACTORS

There are a number of key innovative factors related to the way in which this research was planned, designed and delivered which are exemplary and directly reflect the principals outlined in the Governments National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal placing local communities at the heart of the research process and recognising the valued contribution that those living and working at the local level can play in contributing to our understanding of how best to support and develop ICT provision to BME communities.

The research methodology was carefully designed to enable the project team to provide as much support as possible to the community researchers throughout the process. It was a challenging process requiring a great deal of coordination and resourcing. A wide team was employed throughout the process to ensure that adequate support was given to the community researchers and projects involved in the research project. The methodology outlined above demonstrates a number of key innovative factors of the whole process and these are:

- The research and management team in its consortia approach added valuable breadth of expertise needed to deliver this project focusing on key skills and expertise namely, research and consultancy, training, knowledge and experience of community engagement and involvement and in particular knowledge of BME communities and groups
- The programme of guidance and support activities was extensive:
 - Each member of the project management team were appointed as a research adviser to each project to ensure one-to-one contact and support throughout the whole period.
 - Scoping visits were undertaken by the research advisers to each area, meeting the project and the community researcher with the objectives to establish a working relationship, understand the needs and to acquire an overall understanding of the project being researched. This added a great deal of value to the objectivity of the end product.
 - A toolkit, the 'research guide' was produced to assist the community researchers with the work they were commissioned to carry out.
 - A number of workshops were organised to assist in the process of support to the community researchers. The first workshop supported by the research guide aimed at building capacity in research skills, followed by two research development workshops planned at appropriate periods during the research phase to provide advice and support on particular stages of the work.
 - At an early stage a glossary of terminology was agreed and defined to help gain a better understanding of key regeneration and other terms as they may apply to this work.
 - An E-mail forum was set up and operated throughout the course of the project to give everyone involved in this project a chance to communicate, use the forum to raise questions and discussion points as well as exchange useful and relevant information with each other.

One of the key benefits of bringing people together from different parts of the country was the exchange of experience and networking which would not have otherwise taken place.

The workshops were planned primarily for the community researchers but early on in the research it was agreed that there would be a lot of mutual benefit to having attendance by the community projects being studied as well. This would add value and accuracy to the work as well as giving local projects an opportunity to meet other similar projects from other parts of the country, exchange experiences and learn lessons of good practice. It was also an opportunity for the community projects to participate in this work. The Department covered the expenses of any project representatives who wished to attend and this was crucial, as they may not have otherwise attended due to lack of resources.

4 LEARNING FROM OUR EXPERIENCE

The whole process has been challenging and at the same time exciting as new ways of commissioning and delivering research has proven to be achievable. The research design and methods have proven to be successful and we can see ways in which it could be improved in the future. As with any piece of innovative work there are always lessons to be learnt and improvements for the future. So what are the key elements that worked well?

- Setting up a national steering group was crucial in supporting the Department with the design of the research, bringing expertise to the table and providing a representation from relevant BME organisations. However, the coordination, administration and financial resource implications of supporting a national steering group must not be underestimated.
- At the onset the tendering process seemed complex involving a 2-tier approach in the appointment of community researchers and project managers but it was successful in appointing both. It is a good model for involving people from local communities. The tendering process was open and this did pose a few difficulties at the start in terms of the number of selected projects aimed at similar target groups however this was resolved immediately with some targeted work to fill any gaps so that the selected projects were as representative as possible.
- It does take more effort and time to achieve actual community involvement and this project showed that with the appropriate investment in time and resources it is an achievable task.
- The research and developments days proved to be very successful and effective. In addition to their main purpose of transferring skills and knowledge they delivered other (soft) targets of exchange of experience between projects from different parts of the country and the networking between individuals and projects was incredible and in itself useful in building capacity and knowledge. Again to achieve this a great deal of time, resource and effort was used to bring people together from a wide range of geographical locations.
- The one-to-one support provided throughout by the project management team was invaluable and contributed to the effectiveness and efficiency of the whole project. The complexities of providing this level of support to people from varied backgrounds and from lots of different locations outweighed the substantial added value achieved in the project of engaging local people and projects and in producing a research report that has been produced substantially by people from the local communities.
- The e-mail forum set was very useful in the exchange of information and has all the potential of development towards the setting up of a national network of communication for BME ICT projects who may not otherwise communicate with each other. It was an efficient way of communicating quickly with everyone involved in the process.
- The consortia approach employed by the project managers whilst challenging and complex to manage proved to be very effective in pooling the various expertise and knowledge required in delivering this type of project.

Overall it must not be underestimated that in designing and planning research like this it requires:

- a great deal of commitment as it takes time and effort to reach people and organisations in the community on a national basis.

- it requires extra resources both in term of staff resources from the point of view of the client but also additional resources to enable the engagement of communities i.e. costs of bringing together projects and people from different parts of the country. Without this level of investment it would not happen as individuals and projects in the community and voluntary sector would have found it difficult if not impossible to fund their participation. It is useful to note on this point that similar research should take this issues into consideration and find ways in which to create incentives (financial and other) for engaging the community sector.
- It must be recognised that if the aim is to engage and involve the community then there must be adequate investment in time and the timetable for research must reflect this crucial point.

5 BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY

The key question is how do we set up sustainable capacity building, which will add value to the local community and make real measurable differences and ensure that lessons learnt from research like this are developed and addressed. A few suggestions as to how this could take place are suggested below:

- The initiation of joined up work with other key departments and Government initiatives, ie. NRU community advisers, NRU community consultants training programme, etc.;
- link community researchers with NRU community advisers and community forum and any other relevant initiatives;
- link the community researchers to further training opportunities and skill development;
- the NRU should set up a register of community researchers which can be tapped into by other Government departments wishing to engage in this way;
- the work of community researchers should be published so as to give them credibility, recognition and confidence;

The following comments from one of the community researchers involved in the project depicts the points made on the process very well:

“The successful administration of the research was made considerably easier by our existing relationship with, and knowledge of First Step .Having delivered capacity building training and various evaluative consultations for the organisation over the last five or six years we know the personnel and the systems intimately and we are familiar with the organisations developments and aspirations .More importantly perhaps ,First Steps users know our faces and they are aware of our practice In essence we have been deemed ‘safe’. The strength of these relationships cultivated over years ,has meant for an openness and honesty throughout the research process. It’s an earned privilege ,a result of ADAPT being seen as both credible and unthreatening.

External researchers are often parachuted in, often lack a rudimentary awareness of geography, demography and history of the communities they are engaging with and the time limits of the consultation process are rarely, if ever, long enough to cultivate relationships on first-terms let alone allow for the development of mutual trust and respect necessary for an organisation to be frank honest and forthcoming as First Step have been form day one of this research.

ADAPT in Partnership wholeheartedly endorses this approach of employing local researchers to administer ‘real’ hands-on community consultation.”

Paul Summers

APPENDIX 2

Case Study Summaries

Case Study

Bangladeshi Youth Organisation (BYO)

The Bangladeshi Youth Organisation (BYO) operates in the Manningham area of Bradford and provides a range of social, cultural and educational services primarily for Bangladeshi men from the local area. Initially established to meet the social and recreational needs of the Bangladeshi youth community, the organisation has evolved to now also provide education-based training, including that of ICT. BYO's current ICT courses focus particularly on attracting disaffected young people who have left the education system with little or no qualifications whilst the organisation also works with new arrivals from the Indian sub-continent, introducing them to ICT as a means of increasing confidence, improving language and communication skills, and reducing their potential exclusion from mainstream society. It provides an example of a holistic approach to addressing the needs of the Bangladeshi community in the Manningham area of Bradford in a culturally sensitive way.

Key features of good practice

- Community based provision, located in the heart of the local Bangladeshi community.
- Effective outreach work to attract people to the project and encourage potential users to attend open days to find out more about the ICT provision available.
- Innovative mechanisms developed to encourage users to the project, including the use of incentives.
- Recruitment of users aided by a range of social and cultural activities at the Youth Centre in which the project is based which 'draw people in'.
- Essentially a male organisation delivering targeted ICT provision to men. The presence of a young Bangla tutor also helps to encourage take-up of services and is able to respond to cultural sensitivities and language requirements as necessary.
- Provides free provision for the user and offers value for money in unit cost terms.
- The timing and flexibility of courses are responsive to the cultural needs and patterns of employment among the local Bangladeshi community.
- Delivery of some ICT courses takes place in partnership with other local providers (eg. Bradford College) and offers the opportunity for users to gain qualifications.

The context

The Bangladeshi Youth Organisation (BYO) was established in 1982 and is located in a local Youth Centre in the heart of Bradford's Bangladeshi community in the Manningham district of the city. A range of courses are currently on offer at the Organisation's newly equipped computer suite, although for the purposes of the case study research two specific initiatives are examined, in particular: New Arrivals; and FreshStart. Both of these projects were established two years ago as a response to the findings of a local research study which identified language and ICT needs as the most significant among young Bangladeshi's in the area.

Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the Bangladeshi Youth Organisation is to serve the local Bangladeshi community by helping to create better living standards, improve people's welfare, and address the social and economic exclusion suffered by young people. Within this context, the ICT facet of the organisation's work seeks to have a particular impact on addressing the social and economic exclusion experienced by the Bangladeshi community by using the new technologies to improve communication and language skills and provide skills necessary for the workplace.

In overall terms, the ICT objectives of the BYO can be summarised as:

- to improve basic IT skills among the local population;
- to increase young people's confidence by using ICT as a learning tool;
- to help prepare young people for the workplace;
- to improve communication and language skills;
- to reduce social and economic exclusion.

Target groups

Located in the Manningham district, the BYO focus their activities on young people who generally live either in Manningham itself or in nearby Girdlington. Although the minority ethnic population of Bradford as a whole is just over one-fifth of the total population, the Bangladeshi community are a small minority group estimated to total just under 6,000 residents in 2001. Whilst the organisation primarily serves the young Bangladeshi community, some of its ICT provision (eg. New Arrivals course) is also targeted at the adult population in order to reduce feelings of isolation, enhance language skills and support the process of social integration.

In the case of the New Arrivals project, the target group is recent arrivals from the Indian sub-continent. This is a growing community in the area of Bradford in which the BYO is based and relates to the practice of marriages taking place abroad and partners subsequently joining their spouses in this country. It may be considered to represent a particularly valuable form of ICT learning as it enables new immigrants to access ICT and begin the process of social integration soon after their arrival. Other types of providers, such as some local colleges, require details such as National Insurance numbers prior to enrolling participants on their courses. Currently, the target group for this project is male only. Whilst a female course is hoped to be established in the future, cultural and religious reasons dictate that men and women must be taught in separate rooms, which is currently not possible.

The FreshStart project works with young people between the ages of 16 and 21 years who are generally excluded from mainstream society. The project primarily targets school leavers whom have little or no qualifications or achievements and live in disadvantaged communities, such as Manningham.

Project management and funding

The Bangladeshi Youth Organisation obtains its funding through a variety of mechanisms and funding streams. Whilst some support is provided by Bradford City Council's Youth Service, including the funding of a full-time Centre Manager, a range of other funding streams are also used. These include the New Opportunities Fund and European Social Fund, with some funding also provided by Bradford College.

The FreshStart project is managed by the BYO in partnership with the Bradford and Northern Housing Association. Whilst the BYO are involved in the day-to-day delivery of the project, the Housing Association take responsibility for overseeing the financial elements, with project funding being drawn from the European Social Fund (ESF) and Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF).

A £90,000 project, the ICT module of the project represents one of five on offer to young people with the annual cost of provision estimated to total £2250.

The New Arrivals project is run in conjunction with, and funded by, Bradford College. Total funding for the projects amounts to £3,200 per annum with the course being offered free to students on benefits, of which the majority are.

The BYO employs only one designated ICT worker. This post is funded by Bradford City Council, with the male worker employed as a Training and Support Officer through the Council's Social Services Department. Of Bangladeshi origin, this tutor delivers training both on the FreshStart and New Arrivals project. However, other ICT trainers are, at times, brought in through partnerships with other agencies, such as the Bradford Youth Development Partnership, whilst the BYO also make use of volunteers (currently three) to assist in the delivery of its ICT services.

ICT provision and services

The Bangladeshi Youth Organisation provides access to a computer room comprising nine PCs. A laptop, scanner and laser printer are also available. A number of other PCs are also used throughout the organisation for administrative and office functions. The hardware available to the BYO has been acquired over a number of years and through a variety of funding mechanisms. The specification of many of the PCs are fairly low and the organisation would benefit significantly from the receipt of funds to enable it to upgrade its current equipment.

Depending on the specification of the PC, either Office 2000 or Windows 95 software are those primarily in use. The project also provides Bengali software for the purposes of drop in sessions, although does not use this for delivering any of its ICT courses.

The ICT courses provided by the BYO focus on the development of basic skills. Introductory courses which enable learners to use Microsoft Word and Excel as well as access the internet represent a key area of provision, whilst courses provided in conjunction with Bradford College link ESOL and ICT learning.

Outcomes and challenges

The project demonstrates a range of positive outcomes for its users. Whilst the number of people enrolled on BYO courses is not as high as for other community providers, such as CALTEC, for example, this appears to be as much a function of the organisation's size as its ability to attract participants.

Output data from the FreshStart course for November 2000 to May 2002 shows that 50 young Bangladeshis have been involved with the course. Of these, 44 have gained IT qualifications whilst 30 are thought to have entered employment or training and another 10 gone on to further education.

In addition to the quantified outcomes, both the FreshStart and New Arrivals projects demonstrate positive impacts across a range of soft targets. These include:

- increased confidence;
- social integration;
- improved access to services;
- improved communication and understanding of activities with children;
- better inter-personal skills;
- reduced apprehension regarding learning new skills and ICT.

Furthermore, the project also recognises the important role that it can potentially play in addressing social problems, such as those manifested in the recent riots within the area. Indeed, initiatives which help to engage young people and achieve a range of soft outcomes, whether through projects based around ICT learning or initiatives such as youth parliaments, are considered to offer a valuable contribution to addressing wider social concerns.

BYO essentially provides an effective route into ICT for many within its target communities. Whilst the organisation does not appear to be experiencing any particular difficulties at present, it recognises that to continue to meet the demands of its users, more advanced and accredited ICT courses will need to be offered and further work undertaken to encourage all members of the Asian community to identify the benefits of lifelong learning and take-up the opportunities provided.

In addition, the project may also need to address issues pertaining to its ICT hardware as much of this is now out-dated and can support only a limited range of applications.

Summary

The Bangladeshi Youth Organisation combine the delivery of recreational and social activities alongside that of educational learning. ICT is used as a tool which cuts across these activities with many users being introduced to ICT only after having become involved with the youth organisation for other purposes. The BYO is a small provider, essentially targeting Bangladeshi men. It does so in a culturally sensitive way and through its staff and volunteers can provide appropriate language support where required.

Whilst the project appears to be content with the level and type of ICT services it currently provides, there is scope for the BYO to work more closely with other local providers (eg. CALTEC) so that it can better target its provision and ensure its future sustainability. Given the proliferation of community based services in regeneration areas such as Manningham, this need to remain competitive and responsive to user demands may be considered to be particularly important.

Case Study

CALTEC

CALTEC (Computer Assisted Learning and Training Centre) provides access to ICT for adult learners in the Bradford District. Operating from the inner city location of Manningham, the project runs a range of accredited and non-accredited courses which are delivered through a network of neighbourhood venues, including community centres and local schools. Its key user group are women from the local Pakistani community. Recognising the significant barrier that language can play for many of its users, CALTEC provides a number of language support mechanisms for its users whilst also taking a flexible approach to service delivery. Established in 1992, the project benefits from receiving valuable core funding from the local authority and Learning and Skills Council and, in terms of outcomes achieved, represents value for money. Indeed, the project may be considered to represent a good example of mainstreaming. Having recently been awarded UK Online status, CALTEC now also hopes to attract harder-to-reach, first time users to ICT and to support them on an incremental path of learning and development.

Key features of good practice

- Combines the delivery of formal ICT courses with community based provision.
- Benefits from drawing on a significant amount of core funding from the Learning and Skills Council and Bradford City Council. As such, it reflects a good example of mainstreaming and enables the project to enjoy a level of financial stability.
- Achieves a high number of outcomes and supports users in attaining a diverse range of recognised qualifications.
- Courses are offered at a range of times and locations which helps to support access, particularly for many women users.
- Provides a number of progression routes for clients and supports them in an incremental process of learning and attainment.
- A skilled and professional staff and management team.
- Effective partnerships established with a range of community organisations and local schools which works to support access and take-up.
- Responsive to specific cultural needs and uses multi-lingual tutors where necessary.
- Language support and training offered alongside ICT provision.

The context

CALTEC (Computer Assisted Learning and Training Centre) was established in 1992 following recognition that existing ICT provision at that time was not adequately reaching the BME community within Bradford. Originally located in a local school, the project represents an early example of how ICT was used as a tool to aid learning and skills development, including the integration of ICT with ESOL and basic skills training. Since its initial establishment CALTEC has moved to a base within the Manningham district, whilst the project has also grown to provide access to ICT from a wide range of community venues and has recently received UK Online status.

Project aims and objectives

The primary focus of CALTEC's activities is to provide basic skills education for adults experiencing social and economic disadvantage. In doing so, the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is built into as many of its programmes as possible whilst, due to the needs and profile of the local population, the project aims to target BME groups in particular.

The overriding aim of the project, reflected in its mission statement, is

“to promote and underpin the local economy and the social fabric of Bradford by providing training in information technology and basic skills in line with local needs.”

Its more specific objectives are to provide various levels of training in ICT and ESOL and to establish effective delivery partnerships wherever possible. Within its annual report, it identifies the following objectives in particular:

- to provide first rung basic computer training for the local community and Bradford district, together with internal progression routes and impartial exit guidance to external progression;
- to provide basic skills programmes for the community including 16-24 year olds, and family learning programmes in partnership with Education Bradford and the Bradford Lifelong Learning Partnership;
- to provide basic education (ESOL - English for speakers of other languages) for Asian men and women in the local community;
- to participate in out-of-school provision for school children by providing ICT training through homework clubs;
- to maintain an effective computer laptop loan programme for Bradford district;
- to maintain strong links with adult and community learning organisations in the Bradford district and strategic partnerships.

Target groups and users

CALTEC targets its ICT provision and services at residents within a number of disadvantaged wards in Bradford. University, Undercliffe, Toller, Holmewood and Newlands represent areas in which the organisation is particularly active. These areas represent some of the most deprived districts of Bradford and three of these wards (University, Undercliffe and Toller) rank within the most deprived 10% of wards in England.

Whilst access to the project is open to all ethnic groups, approximately 80% of its current users are drawn from black and minority ethnic communities with Pakistani women accounting for a particularly high proportion. Such patterns of ethnicity among the project's key user group reflect those at the City level where the Pakistani community represent the largest BME group accounting for 16% of Bradford's total population.

At times, CALTEC also offers more targeted provision for specific groups. For example, it has recently worked with the Frontline Community Initiative whereby basic computer training was provided for African Caribbean men, it has supported an Asian women's Cancer Support Group and the Drug and Alcohol Abuser's Project through its laptop loan programme, whilst it has also targeted ICT and ESOL provision aimed at Asian mums through linking in with local schools.

Project management and funding

CALTEC benefits from receiving a substantial amount of core funding. Originally drawing on resources through the FEFC, the project now receives core funding from the LSC. This funding is provided on a contractual basis and annual allocation is subject to CALTEC meeting its targets set by the funding body. In addition, CALTEC receives an annual allocation from the Council's Lifelong Learning Service.

This funding is originally derived from the LSC and then gets re-directed through the local authority as the Student Access Fund and is used to subsidise exam fees for eligible students. The local authority also provides resources for staff development. In addition to these core funds, CALTEC has drawn on a range of other sources for funding purposes. These have often been used for short-term projects or those which target specific socio-economic groups and include ESF and SRB monies.

In terms of project management, CALTEC is directly responsible to Bradford Council. Whilst the project is not a statutory service, it falls under the responsibility of the Council's Community Development Service of the Directorate of Community Development and Lifelong Service. Day-to-day responsibility for the project lies with the Project Manager. It is a full-time post. A further eight core staff are employed by the project (6 part-time, 2 full-time). At present, two of its core staff members are from a BME background whilst the rest are White. In addition, between 25-30 part-time tutors are employed to deliver the various courses and programmes. Approximately one-third of the tutors are from a BME background.

ICT provision and services

In delivering its training in ICT, CALTEC makes use of both its own facilities and those of its partner organisations (eg. school ICT suites). The project itself has 2 fully equipped ICT suites:

- ❶ Thornbury Centre – a community centre in the Newlands area of Bradford with 17 PCs and using Microsoft software;
- ❷ CLC and UK online centre – brand new ICT suite containing 34 PCs, printers and scanners and using Office 2000 software.

In addition, the project also owns 80 laptops which operate on a loan arrangement.

A wide range of courses are delivered through CALTEC and the organisation places emphasis on providing appropriate progression routes for its clients. To date, CALTEC has specialised in offering accredited training courses, although with its successful application as a UK online centre now also hopes to attract less experienced clients for whom non-accredited ICT services, at least in the first instance, is likely to be more appropriate.

Examples of its course provision include short taster sessions, basic skills in IT, courses covering the OCR syllabus, RSA Stage 1,2 and 3, CLAIT and ECDL. Students are required to register if enrolling on accredited courses for a fee of £5 (free if receiving benefits) and to pay a £75 exam fee (£60 for those receiving benefits).

The programme also offers more targeted programmes for BME groups depending on the demand and availability of funding for such courses. Two examples in this area include:

- ❶ Cancer Support Centre – ICT classes are provided through the use of laptops to Asian women suffering from breast cancer, based at Bradford Infirmary;
- ❷ Frizinghall Primary Community ICT Learning Centre – combines ESOL and ICT training for a group of mothers, primarily from the South Asian community.

Outcomes and challenges

CALTEC clearly provides a wide range of courses and supports access to ICT through a number of venues and settings. This is reflected in the fact that over the period 2001-2002, it ran a total of 12 programmes in 30 different venues, to approximately 500 students. Over 300 of these students were involved in accredited training with the project reporting an overall achievement rate of 86%.

In addition, the project contributes to the achievement of a range of non-quantifiable outcomes. These are identified as:

- improved self confidence;

- improved interaction with family (especially children) as a result of new skills and knowledge gained in ICT;
- meeting other people;
- improved ability in English;
- more awareness of how they wanted to progress and develop skills in the future;
- more informed about services and opportunities.

CALTEC's prospects for sustainability are positive. Courses are currently over-subscribed and the project exceeds its target outcomes, which would suggest that the core funding it currently benefits from is relatively secure. However, the project has recognised the need to place increasing emphasis on 'harder to reach' groups if its aims and objectives are to be fully realised. Greater targeting of its ICT provision towards BME groups currently under-represented in the take-up of services (eg. Afro-Caribbean), combined with additional staff with multi-lingual skills, represent particular areas for development in the future.

Summary

CALTEC displays a number of best practice features in delivering ICT to BME communities. In particular, skilled and professional staff, strong project management, effective partnerships, and opportunities for progression have enabled the project to have a positive impact and to offer an increasing array of facilities and services to its users.

Case Study

First Step NE

First Step North East is a charitable organisation based in the West of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Its overriding objective is to address the discrimination and deprivation experienced by women, particularly those from the ethnic minority communities, through providing access to a wide range of learning and leisure opportunities. Established 12 years ago, the organisation was founded by a small group of community educators and activists and has since undergone a gradual process of growth and development into the professionally run organisation it is today. The development of ICT learning opportunities has been vital to the growth and strength of the project, with the organisation reflecting a holistic approach to the provision and use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Effective language support initiatives together with a multi-racial and culturally diverse staff team further contribute to the success of the project.

Key features of good practice

- A professionally run organisation which has a skilled management and staff team.
- Good sustainability prospects reflected in the organisation taking a forward looking approach with regard to funding opportunities and managing its resources effectively.
- A holistic approach to addressing the needs of disadvantaged women, providing a diverse and responsive programme of activities which encourages take-up of ICT.
- A wide range of extended support mechanisms, including crèche facilities, dependent care provision, and subsidised travel.
- Effective language support for participants ranging from the translation of course materials to the encouragement of mother tongue activities.
- The location of the Centre, in the heart of the ethnic minority population, means that it is easily accessible plus the project benefits from good public transport links.
- An informal, friendly learning environment. This has helped to create a sense of ownership and feelings of security among the project's participants.
- An ethnically diverse staff team reflecting the multi-racial nature of the project and the wide ranging communities the project seeks to serve.
- Effective outreach activities which help to support access and encourage take-up.

The context

First Step North East is a registered charity established in 1990. It is a multi-racial project based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne providing a diverse range of learning and leisure activities for women from all ethnic backgrounds.

The origins of the organisation are grounded in the work of a small number of 'champions' who recognised the need to address the gaps which existed in local service provision, particularly for black and minority ethnic women. Once having established that a need for additional provision existed, First Step focused its activities on

home-based support and non-formal learning opportunities. It was not until 2001, however, that the organisation developed its ICT capacity and began to link its existing services and activities to the use of new technologies.

Project aims and objectives

First Step aims to improve the quality of life for individuals and groups living in and around Newcastle-upon-Tyne by sustaining a multi-racial project which challenges inequality, disadvantage, poverty, intolerance and lack of opportunity – thus enabling social and economic inclusion'. This is the vision which drives the project.

In achieving this vision, First Step seeks to encourage an understanding and appreciation of the diversity of cultures by providing a blend of home and community based learning opportunities. Alongside supporting the achievement of positive outcomes at the individual level, the organisation also seeks to promote a broader process of community development and to contribute to the reduction of discrimination and exclusion at the strategic level.

Target groups and users

The project is predominantly aimed at potential users in the wards of Elswick, Fenham, Benwell, Moorside, Wingrove and West City. Four of these wards are in the top 10% most deprived wards in the country (DETR, Index of Deprivation).

As a multi-racial project, First Step targets women from all ethnic backgrounds. Indeed, there is substantial ethnic diversity in the area in which the project is based, with the case study identifying at least sixteen different ethnic groups among the ICT users. The most prominent of these user groups is the Bangladeshi community whilst Pakistani women are also heavily represented. Other groups making use of the project's ICT facilities and courses include Iranian, Indian, Jordanian, Libyan, White, Eastern European, Saudi Arabian and South American.

Project management and funding

First Step is run through the combined efforts of its Management Committee and a conglomeration of paid members of staff and volunteers.

The Management Committee consists of eight people, all of whom have benefited from the work of the project either in the past or currently. The people who sit on the Committee reflect the diversity of the communities the organisation serves, with some members having been involved for many years.

A team of 2 full-time and 7 part-time staff carry out the daily work of the First Step project as a whole. Across the team they have extensive experience of working in the community sector with specific reference to Newcastle. Responsibility for the team is with the Project Co-ordinator. The Co-ordinator has 20 years experience in community development, 10 of which have been in a multi-racial environment. In terms of ICT provision, the project employs a part-time ICT Co-ordinator and a part-time ESOL and ICT worker, as well as appointing sessional tutors to deliver ICT courses as required.

Whilst the extent to which assistance is provided is not known, with regard to the project's ICT activities, First Step is also served by a total of 39 volunteers.

Fundraising activity constitutes a central component of First Step's activities. The bulk of the organisation's fundraising is performed by the Project Co-ordinator and the volunteer Project Manager/Treasurer. Through the efforts of such staff the project has been extremely successful in securing resources from a range of funding streams and, as such, has achieved an encouraging level of financial stability. Funds currently available to the organisation include those drawn from:

- European Social Fund (£46k over 2 years);
- Community Fund (£34k over 2 years);
- Home Office (£39k over 1 year);
- LSC (£61k over 2 years);
- New Opportunities Fund (£30k over 2 years);

- Children's Fund (£68k over 2 years).

It should be noted that these resources relate to all of the organisation's work, not just those pertaining to ICT. In addition, the organisation does have access to some specific ICT funding through its status as a UK online centre.

The organisation also has a number of bids pending, including those for funding from SRB, New Deal for Communities, Sure Start, Active Communities and Neighbourhood Renewal Funds.

ICT provision and services

First Step has only recently begun to provide access to ICT. Before gaining UK Online status in November 2001 the organisation's ICT usage was solely administrative. However, now the project can offer 4 networked terminals as well as three laptops and a wordprocessor. The current server has the potential to accommodate 12 networked computers should the project wish to expand its ICT provision in the future. In addition, the project has access to laser and colour printers, a digital camera, a camcorder, video-conferencing cameras and a scanner.

The project uses a fairly standard array of software for the majority of its activities, such as Microsoft Office. However, it also provides access to software in a range of minority languages. Global Office allows usage in Urdu, Arabic, Bengali and Farsi whilst Leap Office is currently used for Hindi and Punjabi.

In terms of service provision, First Step currently provides:

- drop-in facilities;
- non-accredited basic ICT skills course;
- NEOCN accredited ESOL with ICT course;
- NEOCN accredited digital imaging course;
- BBC Web-wise sessions.

An interesting aspect in the delivery of the programmes is that the project offers women the opportunity for home based learning through the use of its laptop loan system. It also recognises the need to support access to ICT at a range of entry levels and to promote the use of the technologies for other purposes. For example, the project has the ability to undertake translation work through the software packages which have been installed and has recently enabled the project to tender for translation contracts from Sure Start and New Deal.

Outcomes and challenges

First Step quite clearly provides access to a wide range of services and activities for women in the target areas in which it operates. Since its establishment 12 years ago, the organisation has undergone an incremental process of growth and development. This is reflected in the fact that in its first year of operation the organisation encouraged participation among 61 users and today records over 300 participants.

Moreover, the organisation succeeds by being responsive to the changing demands and needs of its target groups. ICT has become an increasing feature of the project's services in recent years with over 130 women having already been supported in accessing the project's static ICT resource since November 2001.

First Step is particularly effective in supporting access for those who are first time learners and for whom language and cultural barriers restrict them from accessing more formal learning opportunities. The project's home-based provision is vital in this process. The result is that the project not only provides access to accredited courses but also supports the achievement of a range of non-quantifiable outcomes such as those identified below:

- increased confidence;
- increased feelings of empowerment;
- enhanced involvement in community development activities;

- promotes a sense of ownership of the community project;
- raised self-esteem;
- reduced apprehension regarding new learning opportunities.

First Step has been remarkably successful in establishing a secure financial base from which it can move forward in the future and continue to address the needs of women. However, it recognises that fundraising is an ongoing activity and that efforts to secure resources for the organisation will be vital if the project seeks to continue to grow its ICT provision in the future. In addition, the organisation is seeking to relocate premises in the coming months and is currently awaiting the outcome of various funding applications to enable this move to go ahead.

Summary

First Step represents a successful example of a project which combines ICT provision with a range of other activities and services. Its success can be attributed to a range of factors and links particularly to the organisation's awareness of its target communities needs and aspirations, the relatively secure financial foundation from which the project has been able to expand its services to respond to these changing needs, and the ability of the project to put in place a range of support systems to support the take-up of its services from childcare provision through to language support and culturally sensitive learning opportunities.



Case Study

Jamia Educational & Cultural Trust

Jamia Educational and Cultural Trust is a faith based organisation serving the Muslim Kashmiri (Pakistani) community living in the Castlefield area of High Wycombe. Established as a voluntary organisation in 1994, Jamia's primary aim is to provide religious and cultural training for its target group and to represent a focal point for the local Kashmiri community. Following a successful SRB bid in 1997, the organisation has also provided ICT by offering both drop-in facilities and college-run courses from its ICT suite. Whilst many users report positive experiences with regard to accessing Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) through Jamia, the project has found it increasingly difficult to draw down funds to enable consistent course provision and has encountered difficulties in raising awareness of its services and attracting users to the project. As such, although users can continue to access the ICT suite as a drop-in facility, there are currently no ICT courses being delivered through the project. Issues pertaining to the use of professional and skilled staff (all current staff are volunteers) and management capacity constitute particular areas of concern if the project is to remain viable in the future.

Key features of good practice

- The premises from which the ICT project is run are owned by the Jamia Trust.
- The organisation is well known and highly respected within the local Asian community, helping to encourage access.
- Accessible and localised provision.
- Language support is provided alongside ICT, including teaching in Urdu and Arabic.
- Access to ICT is supported through initiatives such as providing online access to Pakistani newspapers. In this sense, ICT is used as a tool for engaging participants.
- Provides a culturally sensitive environment for users seeking to access ICT.

The context

Jamia Educational and Cultural Trust is a voluntary organisation established to serve the Castlefield area of High Wycombe. The area is one of a high concentration of minority ethnic groups with many of its residents experiencing high levels of social and economic deprivation.

The organisation was established in 1994 originally to provide educational services to the local Kashmiri (Pakistani) population. Language and cultural teaching represented the organisation's particular focus. In 1997 Jamia successfully secured resources through a local SRB programme which enabled it to develop an ICT suite and expand its activities to offer drop-in services and training courses in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

Project aims and objectives

The first and foremost aim of the Jamia Educational and Cultural Trust is to provide a focal point for the local Asian population, particularly those of Kashmiri background. Through education and the use of ICT the organisation attempts to remove the exclusionary barriers faced by the local Asian population and improve the quality of life for BME groups in the Castlefield area.

The project has six main objectives:

- ① to provide access to ICT;
- ② to develop basic ICT knowledge and skills;
- ③ to improve ICT skills among secluded communities;
- ④ to bridge gaps in service provision through linking with local colleges;
- ⑤ to support access to further education and learning opportunities;
- ⑥ to improve employment prospects.

Target group and users

The aims and objectives of Jamia predetermine, to a certain extent, their target group. Basic religious and cultural education forms the basic principle for all of the group's work. As such, the project targets the Muslim Kashmiri population of Castlefield. This includes residents of any age and gender.

The primary target group of the project reflects, to a large extent, the profile of the local BME population. Approximately 22% of the Castlefield population is estimated to be accounted for by Asian groups, with the Kashmiri population being the most significant within this context. Other BME communities are also to be found in the local area, such as Afro-Caribbean groups, although these groups have not been targeted by the project to date.

The area in which the project is based and operates is one of high levels of deprivation and the project undoubtedly targets socially excluded communities.

Project management and funding

Jamia is relatively small in personnel terms with no paid members of staff. It is solely reliant on the use of volunteers and on the work of its founder member, a local community activist of Kashmiri heritage. Now the Chairman, the project is extremely reliant upon the commitment of this 'champion' who is the only person who works on a full-time basis. An additional four people volunteer their time to help the organisation, each offering approximately 10 hours per week. However, as these volunteers are employed elsewhere, any courses which are run have tended to be of an evening and at the weekend. The volunteers also help to provide ICT maintenance support.

Previously, Jamia had established a partnership with the local college (Amersham and Wycombe College) for the purposes of delivering its ICT courses and, through this, was able to draw on two college tutors. However, as outlined below, this has now ended so the project has to rely on the use of volunteers for teaching purposes.

Jamia has only very limited funds available to support its activities. The majority of the work the organisation has undertaken to develop its ICT provision in the last five years has been dependent on funding from the SRB Castlefield Challenge Grant. This was for £62,000 and contributed to the development of an ICT suite as well as providing revenue funding for course provision. However, this funding came to an end in June 2002 and the organisation has not secured additional resources to enable it to offer a consistent ICT training programme. The partnership, previously established with Amersham and Wycombe College, has now come to an end with Jamia currently being solely reliant on the contributions of local community members.

Recently, the group applied to the Learning and Skills Council for funding to support an e-learning initiative, although they are still waiting on the outcome of this bid.



Jamia is clearly in a weak position with regards resource availability. However, compared to some community based providers, it enjoys at least some level of stability through its ownership of its current premises in Castlefield. Whilst this provides a relatively secure base for the organisation it does not, however, ensure that access to ICT is maximised for the Trust's target communities.

ICT provision and services

In terms of the hardware Jamia has available it is rather limited and dated. At present they have eight PCs with a single printer. These are located in a first-floor room at the Trust's premises in Castlefield. All of the equipment is connected to a local area network. These PCs were bought in 1998 from an individual with close ties to the organisation. This technology is now a little outdated and in need of upgrading, although supports most applications used by current participants.

All of the PCs have standard Microsoft Office software comprising Word, Excel, PowerPoint and so on. An Urdu word-processing package is also available.

The only ICT provision currently provided through Jamia is the use of the ICT suite as a drop-in facility. This is used by learners for a variety of leisure and educational purposes. The organisation offers limited internet access (linked to the costs incurred) although sees this an important element of its provision as it enables users to browse Pakistani newspapers online. In this way, Jamia supports access to ICT for those who may not otherwise make use of the new technologies and hopes to provide a stepping stone to further education and learning.

Previous ICT services offered by Jamia include those provided in partnership with Amersham and Wycombe College and those provided by an independent IT consultant. The College offered basic courses in word-processing and spreadsheets including providing instruction on how to create CVs. These were free of charge to all users. The independent IT consultant offered more advanced learning opportunities for a nominal fee. Most of these courses offered the opportunity for certification although the initiative received limited support and take-up among the target communities.

Outcomes and challenges

As an organisation which provides a focal point for the Kashmiri population of Castlefield in High Wycombe, the Jamia Educational and Cultural Trust clearly succeeds. However, it is also clear that the project's ability to provide an effective ICT project to its target communities has been inconsistent. The total number of beneficiaries, whilst not monitored closely, has been fairly limited. The project reports that between 8-20 users per year were supported through its partnership with Amersham and Wycombe College. Meanwhile, levels of awareness regarding the ICT suite and drop-in facilities currently available appear to be limited within the local community.

Despite this, for the small number of individuals who have come into contact with the project's ICT services, a variety of positive outcomes can be identified. The following are those which are particularly apparent:

- decreased sense of isolation;
- improved ability to access public services and information;
- reduced apprehension regarding learning new skills and ICT;
- increased sense of ownership of the project by its target community.

To be able to maintain service provision in the area of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Jamia clearly has to address a number of areas. Issues pertaining to the capacity of the organisation's management appear to be particularly key in enabling it to secure appropriate funds, establish effective partnerships and deliver a professional service to its target users. Additional revenue funding is paramount to enabling courses to be run and additional staff to be appointed but the capacity of those managing the project must also be raised if such resources are to have a real effect on supporting access to ICT. Furthermore, upgrades to existing ICT hardware and a more effective outreach and marketing strategy will be paramount to the future success of the project.

Summary

Jamia Educational and Cultural Trust represents a valuable and well-respected organisation among the local Kashmiri population it serves.

The establishment and development of the organisation has been based on the efforts of key individuals from within that community who have sought to reduce the barriers to service provision and levels of social exclusion experienced by those within their community. Whilst this is to be commended, there is now a clear need to couple this vision with a more professional approach to service delivery if the project is to maintain a viable ICT element to its activities.



Case Study

Kelvin Media Productions (KMP)

Kelvin Media Productions (KMP) is a small ICT provider located in an inner city area of Sheffield. Since its initial establishment, the organisation has undergone a change in its focus and now works with disaffected young people and with women from the local Yemeni and Somali communities. The focus of the case study is on its ICT provision for women. KMP is a not-for-profit organisation, managed by a voluntary Management Committee, which uses paid staff to deliver its training in basic ICT skills. The project succeeds by providing a 'safe' and friendly learning environment for its target groups, although it is clear that its courses remain under-utilised and that the project has experienced difficulties in responding to the changing profile of the local population in delivering its services. Moreover, community ICT provision represents only a small component of the organisation's activities and it would appear that both the focus of the project, and the expertise of many its staff, relate more closely to youth provision. However, the potential for further developing the community side of the project's work does exist. Ensuring that appropriate support is provided to the organisation in enabling it to better respond to the needs of local BME communities and encourage take-up will be key to its future sustainability.

Key features of good practice

- Women only provision targeting refugees from the Yemeni and Somali communities.
- Provides a 'safe' learning environment, offering targeted provision for specific groups.
- A dedicated Project Manager and a professional, skilled female tutor.
- Flexible provision which is organised around school hours and during the evenings to encourage participation.
- Achieves a number of soft targets, including increasing confidence, social interaction, personal development, and access to new services and opportunities. These are particularly significant given the project's target communities.
- An informal and friendly learning environment which encourages take-up and retainment.
- Focuses on basic skills provision but offers a number of progression routes for those who want it.

The context

Kelvin Media Productions (KMP) is a community based ICT provider working in the Upperthorpe, Netherthorpe, and Langsett areas of Sheffield. Initially established as Kelvin Music Productions in 1986, the organisation has since undergone a change in focus renaming itself as Kelvin Media Productions in 1997 to reflect this. The organisation now works with two main groups. Its key target group are young people aged 14-18 years who have either dropped out of school or who have been excluded from school, offering activities such as video editing, music technology and web-site design. The second group are women from the immediate area,

primarily from the Yemeni and Somali communities, for which short courses in ICT are provided. The ICT provision targeted at this latter group forms the focus of this case study.

Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of Kelvin Media Productions have recently been reviewed to reflect the organisation's changing emphasis and area of work. Following this period of review, the organisation aims to provide IT, arts and media courses to young people and the local community to improve people's quality of life. In particular, the organisation seeks to fulfil its aims in the following ways:

- building confidence and improving life skills;
- engaging community groups;
- enabling users to improve their prospects by developing skills and improving basic education;
- engaging individuals in learning.

Target groups

The area in which the project is based is one characterised by high levels of deprivation. Recent research conducted in the area suggests that it suffers particularly from high levels of unemployment, low incomes, a high degree of child poverty, poor public transport and low car ownership, and few job opportunities. As such, the organisation's work both with young people and local communities typically focuses on those experiencing high levels of social exclusion.

The key groups the project works with in delivering its community ICT provision are women from the Netherthorpe, Uppethorpe and Langsett areas of the City. It is intended that the ICT courses offered by KMP appeal to beginners, women lacking in confidence, and women for whom education was not a positive experience. Reflecting the nature of the local population in this area, the project particularly targets refugees and economic migrants from the Yemeni and Somali communities.

The current target groups represent a significant change from those the organisation sought to work with when initially established as Kelvin Music Productions in 1986. At this time, the organisation focused its work on young Afro-Caribbean men from the nearby Kelvin Flats, providing a range of IT and music technology courses and activities.

Project management and funding

KMP receives strategic direction from a voluntary Management Committee of five people. These are drawn from the management and staff team as well as including members from the local community. In terms of the day-to-day running of the organisation, a total of eight permanent staff and one sessional worker are in place. The project does not make use of any volunteers.

Whilst project management for both the youth and community provision comes from the Team Leader and Project Manager, there is currently only one sessional worker in post to deliver the ICT training for Yemeni and Somali women. This post is currently filled by a woman tutor who is contracted to deliver short courses in basic ICT whenever funding is available through the project to do so. Whilst the tutor is skilled in delivering ICT courses, she does not speak Arabic and has had no training in cultural issues relevant to Yemeni and Somali communities.

In terms of project funding, limited resources are currently in place to enable the organisation to deliver its community-based ICT provision. Excluding those resources which have been secured for its youth provision, the project reports that £5,000 is available (over the course of a year) to deliver ICT courses for women in the local area. Moreover, previous funding secured through the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) which enabled specific provision for Yemeni and Somali women has since come to an end.



Support for women's ICT training was also previously provided through the Community Education Grant Aid, but this has now also been cut whilst the organisation as a whole, which previously received core funding from the local authority, has since experienced growing levels of financial instability following its withdrawal.

ICT provision and services

KMP currently has a small training room for providing ICT services and courses to the local community (excluding youth provision). The room is equipped with a total of five PCs and has little space for additional computers or other hardware to be brought in should this be desired. Course provision therefore has to be carried out on a small scale, typically involving groups of five learners and one course tutor.

Each of the PCs have been purchased as new rather than having been donated or bought second hand and runs Windows 2000 software. Word, Paint and Internet Explorer represent the applications most in use for teachers using basic ICT skills. The project does not have access to any software in minority languages.

In terms of the courses provided, these are designed and delivered entirely by the course tutor. KMP offers courses accredited by the Open College Network (OCN), which means that learners who complete a course and can demonstrate competence in a range of key areas gain a certificate. They have to produce a portfolio of evidence demonstrating that they have covered the syllabus, and can independently (with some help if necessary) produce a range of work on the computer. The 'Basic Introduction to IT for Women' course is rated as Entry Level, One Credit. The key areas covered within the basic skills syllabus include an introduction to programmes and applications, word processing, file management, and use of email and the internet. Learners can, if they wish, accumulate credits from a variety of courses, to work towards Access level for Higher Education. All course materials and handouts are produced by the sessional tutor directly.

Outcomes and challenges

KMP currently face a number of challenges in being able to meet its objectives and deliver ICT services for women in the local area in which the project is based.

Whilst the organisation as a whole has been successful in securing funding in the past, many of these funds have now come to an end and there is a need for the project to secure additional resources if its community based ICT provision is to continue.

The project has experienced particular difficulties with regard to its premises, currently being based in 'temporary' accommodation which is space limited, not soundproofed and provides limited accessibility to disabled users. As a Council owned building, the project has also been unable to place any signage or advertising on the exterior to raise levels of awareness of KMP within the local community and encourage access. Despite its unsuitability for training purposes, the project has been based in these premises since August 2001 and is involved in ongoing negotiations regarding relocating.

Despite the challenges faced, KMP does achieve a number of positive outcomes. As part of the City Council's evaluation and monitoring of quality of provision, learners are asked to state their intentions to go on to do further courses, engage in formal qualifications, enter employment, or start their own business. From this monitoring, 30% of learners who have benefited from IT courses at KMP have indicated that they have gone on to further training or education, whilst an additional 5-10% are thought to have entered employment.

In addition, the project identifies a range of non-quantifiable outcomes among its achievements. These are considered to be particularly significant given the high levels of social exclusion experienced among its target groups and barriers faced by many women accessing ICT. The key soft outcomes identified through the case study research are as follows:

- social interaction;
- increased confidence;
- networking opportunities;
- access to information about further education and training;

- personal development;
- possible routes to employment.

These achievements are considered to be particularly significant, given the project targets those who typically experience high levels of social exclusion and who are often new to the learning environment. Whilst the project has been under-utilised, in terms of the level of take-up among the local community, its role in supporting access to ICT, even if for only a small group of Yemeni and Somali women, should therefore not be underestimated.

Summary

KMP is a small community ICT provider targeting Yemeni and Somali women. The origins and continued focus of its activities are on serving young people in the area in which it is based, with efforts to support the wider community constituting a much smaller facet of its activities and spend. Whilst KMP clearly provides a safe, friendly environment in which women can learn, the organisation has found it increasingly difficult to respond to changes in the external environment in recent years. This is reflected in a lack of funding to continue to provide ICT training to those within its target communities and difficulties in attracting users to the project. Efforts to support the role of the Management Committee in identifying potential sources of funding, establishing partnerships with other training providers, increasing outreach activity, and more closely addressing issues of language needs and cultural sensitivities are necessary to sustain this project over the longer-term.



Case Study

MEWN Cymru

MEWN (Minority Ethnic Women's Network) Cymru is a women's network which operates across Wales with the aim of empowering black and minority ethnic women and increasing their access to a wide range of opportunities and services. Whilst the network was set-up in 1994, ICT services have only more recently become a key dimension of the project's work and have been integrated with existing services to constitute a holistic approach to addressing the needs of BME women. The network, co-ordinated from a base in Cardiff, is run on a membership basis and seeks to link together women from a wide range of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Central to this process is the project's sophisticated outreach strategy and the innovative way in which ICT is used to encourage interaction and provide learning and employment opportunities. Furthermore, strong leadership and project management ensures that the project adopts a forward looking approach and remains responsive to the needs of its target groups.

Key features of good practice

- Flexible and responsive provision based on research into local needs and focusing on the non-duplication of ICT services.
- A network approach to addressing the needs of BME women which is able to draw in users from a diverse range of ethnic groups and geographical areas across Wales.
- An effective outreach strategy whereby workers are both employed by the project to encourage take-up as well as being ICT learners themselves.
- Strong leadership and project management which ensures a forward looking approach to service provision.
- A holistic approach in which access to ICT is supported through a range of other activities and services.
- Innovative use of ICT through the network to encourage interaction and increase opportunities for learning and employment.
- Culturally sensitive and ethnically diverse staff team.
- Language support provided through the appointment of multi-lingual staff and the use of software in minority languages.

The context

MEWN (Minority Ethnic Women's Network) Cymru was established in 1994 to serve the needs of black and minority ethnic women across Wales. Operating from a base in Cardiff Bay, the network seeks to support a process of lifelong learning and personal development for its members by supporting access to a wide range of services and activities. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have become an increasing feature of these services over the last two years with the project now providing courses at a variety of entry levels.

Project aims and objectives

MEWN Cymru have a number of clearly stated aims and objectives. Its key aims are:



- to provide a platform for the views of minority ethnic women within Wales;
- to enable minority ethnic women to extend their knowledge and skills, and to encourage them to participate fully in local and national affairs, as well as in voluntary activities and employment;
- to provide each other with mutual support, sharing each other's expertise and experience;
- to encourage the development of initiatives and policies to overcome such barriers.

Within this context, the project seeks to meet these aims through empowering women, representing them in policy forums and campaigns, and promoting anti-discriminatory practices. In doing so, the importance of providing free support services and meeting the needs of BME women in a welcoming and safe environment are recognised.

Target groups and users

MEWN Cymru specifically targets women from ethnic minorities. Membership to the network is available to females from the age of 14. For the most part, however, members tend to be aged between 25 and 50 years. As it operates across Wales, members are also drawn from a wide range of geographical areas and from diverse ethnic groups.

In considering the profile of its current user groups, approximately 50% of members are of Somali origin.

The remaining 50% are split between a wide range of different groups, including Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Chinese, African and Afro-Caribbean communities. Indeed, over twenty different minority groups are identified from the project's monitoring records, including a number of refugee and asylum seeker communities. Reflecting its primary target and user groups, the project works closely with those for whom English is not a first language. At present, 80% of the women using the ICT facility are non-English speakers.

The two target groups identified as being particularly important to MEWN Cymru, in terms of future provision, are asylum seekers and young people.

Project management and funding

MEWN Cymru currently employ seven staff. Three of these work on a full-time basis, one is part-time and the remaining three are sessional workers. The National Co-ordinator is responsible for the day-to-day management of the project. This includes fundraising, strategic planning of projects and identifying new opportunities for the expansion of the network. The Co-ordinator is supported in this role by the networks Chairperson and All Wales Management Board, which provides strategic direction for the organisation.

Other staff members include a Development Worker, responsible for developing the community projects as well as expanding the membership base of the organisation, and a full-time Administrator. In addition, the project employs three sessional outreach workers. These act as the front-line service providers for the project, attending community events and encouraging uptake through 'word of mouth'. The groups targeted most specifically by these workers at present are the Somali, Arabic and Chinese communities. Finally, MEWN Cymru also relies on the help of volunteers for basic office duties and marketing and some outreach activity.

In the main, funding for MEWN Cymru's ICT related services comes from the Welsh National Assembly. A budget of £25,000 was secured in 2000, which has been used to pay for the project's necessary hardware and software. The project also receives some funds through the Community Fund as well as from SWITCH (South Wales IT Communications Highway Project). Furthermore, partnership development with ITEC has enabled the network to obtain access to trainers and course materials for free.

In addition to the specific resources obtained for the delivery of ICT services, the costs incurred for running the network as a whole are supplemented by the fees of its members. Depending on the circumstances, the membership fee ranges from £1 for the unemployed up to £25 for groups/organisations.

ICT provision and services

MEWN Cymru are in a strong position as regards the equipment they have at their disposal. The organisation both owns the majority of its computers plus has access to up-to-date equipment. In terms of the hardware which is used in the delivery of their services, the project has 2 laptops which can be hired out by network members, 10 PCs, 4 printers, and 2 digital cameras.

MEWN primarily uses Office 2000 software and is also able to offer a number of applications in minority languages. It currently has software in Arabic, Punjabi, Gujarati, Urdu, Chinese and Bengali.

Various ICT courses are offered ranging from Basic, Elementary to Advanced level. This provides an effective structure through which participants can work and undertake an incremental path of learning. Courses currently provided include:

- Microsoft Word;
- internet and web use;
- learning toolkits – this provides the member with the opportunity to access and learn online;
- driving theory;
- CV assistance.

For those members who are not wanting to attend formal courses there is also the opportunity to use the facilities on a drop-in basis.

Outcomes and challenges

MEWN Cymru has established itself as an effective project since introducing ICT to the organisation's activities just two years ago. At present, the network has in the region of 220 members drawn from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, age groups and geographical locations. However, it should be noted that MEWN works particularly closely with residents from the Cardiff area and with women in the 25-30 year age bracket.

Whilst the case study research was unable to draw on quantitative data to demonstrate the project's outcomes, there is little doubt that MEWN has successfully woven ICT into its wider activities and service provision and, as such, brings a range of positive benefits to its users. This is not only in terms of providing them with ICT skills per se, but also by supporting the achievement of a number of 'soft' outcomes and contributing to the empowerment of black and minority ethnic women. In particular, the following outcomes can be identified among the project's users:

- increased confidence;
- raised aspirations;
- enhanced communication;
- better understanding of activities undertaken by children;
- increased feelings of empowerment;
- opportunities for social interaction and networking.

In addition, the project has also contributed to the employment of women through providing opportunities for translation and interpretation work through the network. This has been particularly important for those members who are geographically isolated.

To date, MEWN Cymru has achieved clear success in supporting access to ICT and other services for a range of BME women. However, its provision of ICT services is a recent addition to the network's activities and the

project is still in the process of building up its services and activities in this field. Central to this process is the need for the organisation to ensure that it is in a position to secure adequate funds over the forthcoming years to meet the growing demand for ICT among its users. Moreover, the ability of the organisation to expand its services to attract a greater proportion of users from outside the Cardiff area will be important if it is to effectively serve BME women across Wales. This issue is currently being given consideration by the organisation with plans to open offices in Newport and North Wales, funding permitting, already in the pipeline.

Summary

MEWN Cymru represents both an innovative and holistic approach to addressing the needs of black and minority ethnic women experiencing social exclusion and inequality.

At its core, the project seeks to empower women and provide them with the opportunity to access education, learning and employment opportunities thus reducing social and economic disadvantage. The project's success is grounded in the effective outreach it undertakes to support access for its target communities and in its responsive programming and non-duplication of ICT services.



Case Study

MOSHWAF

MOSHWAF (Moss Side and Hulme Women's Action Forum) is a community organisation based in an inner city area of Manchester. The aim of the organisation is to provide women with the opportunity to fulfil their potential by offering access to education, training and employment. ICT represents just one of the mechanisms through which the project seeks to achieve this aim, with the organisation recognising the necessity of taking a holistic approach to addressing the inequality and exclusion faced by many women, particularly from BME communities. MOSHWAF succeeds by having a strong management and professional staff team, by working closely with other local organisations to provide a complete package of support for its users, and by maintaining its roots as a black-led organisation which serves the needs of black and minority ethnic groups from the heart of the community.

Key features of good practice

- Strong management and leadership both from its Board of Directors and Project Manager coupled with qualified and professional staff.
- A holistic and flexible service which means the project is able to operate as a one-stop-shop for advice, training and support.
- Decisive management and excellent organisation which manifests itself through having a clear mission and business plan, as well as project management and monitoring/review processes in place.
- Effective marketing and outreach strategies which enable the project to attract users and encourage the take-up of ICT services.
- Strong networks with a range of local agencies to build mutually beneficial and productive partnerships.
- A black-led organisation that is rooted in the local community it serves. This has given the project credibility and encouraged take-up among its target groups.
- Clear progression routes for clients, ranging from basic skills provision through to advanced ICT courses. In addition, service provision seeks to maximise employability skills with service planning being based on regular feedback from local employers.

The context

The Moss Side and Hulme Women's Action Forum (MOSHWAF) is based within the communities located to the south and west of Manchester city centre. The work of the project is aimed solely at women in the local area, and in particular women from the BME communities who make up a significant proportion of the local population.

Established in September 1992, MOSHWAF was launched on the back of a series of discussions between prominent local professional black women and other agencies who sought to address the disadvantages experienced by BME women in the fields of education, training and employment. Initial set-up and running costs were covered by the Moss Side and Hulme Task Force with the project becoming a registered charity in June 1994.

From its establishment, MOSHWAF has provided a wide range of training and services for its clients. As the organisation has developed, ICT has become an increasingly important dimension of its service provision and now represents one of MOSHWAF's core functions.

Project aims and objectives

The mission of the Forum is to support women, especially black women, in fulfilling their potential by accessing education, training, employment and enterprise. MOSHWAF aims to do this either by providing these services directly or signposting women to other suitable providers. In particular it seeks to enable women to:

- find employment;
- be more confident;
- increase skills and learning;
- raise their standard of living;
- go on to further education;
- improve their English language skills.

Target groups and users

The Forum, due to the profile of the local population and the needs of the different communities, targets all women, irrespective of age and ethnicity, who live in the communities of Moss Side and Hulme. However, there is a particular focus on black women. Over the period 2000-01, for example, 49% of MOSHWAF's clients (not exclusively ICT) were from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds, 15% were African and 9% Asian. Whilst the level of uptake of services by such groups shows an over-representation when compared with the population profile of the area, it is unsurprising given the Forum's mission to address the needs of black women in particular.

Many of MOSHWAF's target groups and users are those experiencing high levels of social exclusion. Within Manchester, the wards of Moss Side and Hulme are ranked 5th and 1st respectively on the Governments Index of Deprivation. Government statistics also show that 54% of school leavers have no qualifications, a significant majority of households are in receipt of social security benefits and the unemployment rate currently stands at around 17%.

Furthermore, evidence from work by the Forum indicates that Black women in Moss Side and Hulme suffer disproportionately at the hands of the deprivation in the area. This work suggests that these women face discrimination on three counts – race, gender and postcode.

Project management and funding

MOSHWAF has a voluntary Management Board, consisting of 11 women. This plays a pivotal role in the work of the organisation. Each Board Member has a 'job description' which sets out their roles and responsibilities. Whilst Board members are selected for their specialist skills and experience, many are professionals holding senior positions in private, public and voluntary sector organisations. The overarching role of the Board is to provide leadership, support and guidance for the staff. It is also a source of continuity with several founder members still sitting on the Board.

It is the responsibility of the Project Director to fulfil the day-to-day duties within the organisation. She has vast experience in community centre management and projects for women. In doing so, the Director is supported by three permanent, full-time members of staff and an array of volunteers and secondees from partner organisations.

Whilst initially set-up through funds provided by the Moss Side and Hulme Task Force, MOSHWAF has since had to rely on an ongoing process of fundraising in order to support its activities and service provision. The main source of funding for the Forum is the National Lottery Community Fund with the organisation currently holding a grant for approximately £400,000 for three years (up to 2004). In addition, in the past the organisation has been able to draw on smaller amounts of funding from the European Social Fund and Learning and Skills Council. In terms of its ICT provision, the organisation has to date received funding from the European Social Fund and the National Organisation for Lifelong Learning, whilst some of its ICT equipment has been donated by other local organisations.

Additional funds are currently being sought to enable the organisation to provide a 50 place nursery as well as increase its provision of ICT training courses.

While MOSHWAF is, for the most part, dependent on receiving funding, the fact that it owns part of the building in which it is based gives the organisation a level of stability as well as potential source of rental income.

ICT provision and services

Whilst MOSHWAF was established in 1994 it was not until 1995/96 that it began to offer any kind of ICT provision. The facilities the Forum currently have at their disposal enable them to provide ICT training for up to 10 users at any one time. All of the organisation's PCs offer broadband internet access and email, although the specifications of many are fairly low. MOSHWAF also have three laptops.

There are currently five IT specific courses which run for 12 weeks on a rolling programme basis. All the IT specific courses, with the exception of Computers for Pleasure, lead to the award of a recognised qualification at the end of the 12 weeks.

The construction of the courses allows the women to follow a progressive path depending on how far they wish to go and at a pace that suits them and their commitments. The starting point is the FAST (Foundation Accreditation in Science and Technology) course followed by CLAIT (Computer Literacy and Information Technology) and the IBT 2 (Information and Business Technology) course.

FAST offers the women a basic introduction to the use of computers and word-processing. Once they have mastered the basics, the next level is the CLAIT course. The aim of this course is to offer a knowledge of hardware and software as well as the use of different applications. CLAIT is a vocational qualification, and is a well-recognised accreditation in the practical use of IT skills. IBT 2 is to be introduced in September 2002, but is subject to funding. The content of this course is aimed at people seeking to further their education or improve their career prospects. It broadens the knowledge of the user in the application and integration of the main applications. Additional courses are available in web publishing, whilst the project seeks to integrate ICT into many of its other activities and courses such as ESOL and job search.

Much of the formal ICT services are delivered in partnership. External tutors are currently drawn from the following organisations:

- Manchester Women's Electronic Village Hall;
- Manchester Adult Education Service;
- Workers Education Association;
- Interactive College.

Outcomes and challenges

On average 380 women pass through the doors of MOSHWAF, which is a significant number considering the limited resources available. In addition to the clients able to access the organisations services there are a further 50 people on a waiting list wanting to get on to the courses. These numbers are indicative of the overall success of the MOSHWAF project.

Based on information from interviews with a range of people associated with the organisation, it is evident that they benefit greatly from the work the Forum does. The key messages from the client base for choosing the Forum are that:

- it is the women only and ethnically diverse environment;
- the professional and empathetic qualities of the staff;
- the availability and quality of advice and guidance;
- its location;

- its low cost.

Examples of soft outcomes include increased confidence, higher self-esteem and reduced apprehensions regarding learning new skills and ICT.

The Forum has been extremely successful to date, yet it continues to develop opportunities that will allow it to grow in the next few years. While there is definite funding until 2004, the Forum is already looking beyond that and is also seeking to establish a 50 place nursery. The organisation is also attempting to enhance the ICT training.

For all the success the project has enjoyed, a number of potential threats remain. As with many community based projects, the Forum will be required to continue to secure funds on an ongoing basis if its current level of service provision is to be maintained. Moreover, some of the project's ICT hardware is now outdated and it will need to think about upgrades to this equipment if it is to keep pace with changing demands and technologies. In addition, whilst MOSHWAF has been a successful project, too rapid expansion in the future could jeopardise the project's ability to 'connect' with its users.

Summary

The Forum is an excellent model of a community-driven organisation that understands the needs of its clients and offers a high quality service to meet those needs. Central to the organisation's success is a professional and forward looking approach to service provision.

Case Study

Naari LETS

Naari LETS is a women's project operating in the Belgrave area of Leicester. It particularly serves the local South Asian community. Based on the principles of exchanging skills among its members, the project encourages users to share their expertise across a wide range of areas from cookery to sewing to ICT. ICT therefore represents just one, albeit growing, dimension of the project's holistic approach to addressing the needs of Asian women. The project represents good value for money as skills are exchanged using non-monetary currency whilst by recognising the attributes and expertise of Asian women, it encourages a range of positive outcomes at the individual level. Naari LETS is a small project providing access to ICT in a non-traditional and culturally sensitive way. Building on its success and recognising the importance of supporting access to ICT for its target group, the organisation has recently secured UK Online status to enable it to roll-out its ICT provision whilst still maintaining the LETS principles.

Key features of good practice

- A non-traditional and flexible approach to ICT provision which responds to the needs of its users on an ongoing basis and achieves a range of positive outcomes.
- A holistic approach to addressing the needs of Asian women in which ICT is provided alongside a range of other activities and support services.
- Both initial and ongoing support provided by Leicester City Council with key professionals from the local authority playing an instrumental role in driving the project forward.
- Particularly successful at engaging older women (35+) who are traditionally 'hard to reach'.
- Supports access to ICT in a culturally sensitive, informal environment through the use of laptops for home-based learning.
- A small project in terms of ICT hardware and facilities, yet one which works with a high number of women.
- Training and support is provided on a one-to-one basis.
- Successful development of ICT has taken place as an incremental process, being added to the project's wider activities and remit to reflect increasing demand for provision, and culminating in a successful bid for UK Online status.

The context

Naari LETS was established in 1994 following a successful bid for funds through the European Social Fund and the National Lottery Charities Board. The main drive for the development of the project came from a local activist from within the Asian community who was also employed by the City Council. LETS (Local Exchange Trading Scheme) was considered to constitute a particularly appropriate model for supporting the needs of Asian women as it provided a forum in which skills, knowledge and expertise could be shared in a culturally sensitive environment and without the need for individuals to pay for services. Using a non-monetary currency, the scheme operates by members joining for free and having access to a directory comprising a wide range of

sought after skills with which they can exchange their own expertise. The project is based in the Belgrave area of Leicester.

Project aims and objectives

There are three principles which serve to inform the work of Naari LETS. These core principles are:

- ① equality;
- ② inclusion;
- ③ lifelong learning.

In working towards these principles, Naari LETS focuses its activities primarily around education, learning and skills development. These are considered to be key in addressing the needs of Asian women and increasing the opportunities available to them. As the project has evolved, ICT has become increasingly central to these objectives with the demand for those with skills in this area having grown significantly among the scheme's members in recent years.

Target groups and users

The Naari LETS scheme was primarily set-up to address the needs of South Asian women in the Belgrave area of Leicester. Leicester itself is home to the largest South Asian population in Britain, with a high proportion of this ethnic group residing in the project's target area. Although the project focuses on this target group, it should be highlighted that membership is also welcomed from other ethnic groups. For example, the project currently includes representation from Chinese and Afro-Caribbean communities from within the local area.

In working to meet its aims, the project particularly seeks to target those women who feel isolated and at the periphery of the community in which they live.

Those who experience language barriers to accessing similar services elsewhere or developing skills in a more formal learning environment represent those most commonly served by the project. In addition, whilst the opportunities for skills development and lifelong learning are available to all women within the target communities, the project's key user group are women aged 35 years and over.

Project management and funding

Naari LETS, as a constituted voluntary organisation, is managed by a 10-strong Management Committee. Many of those involved in the initial establishment of the project have a continued involvement through occupying a seat on the Committee and provide strategic direction for the project on an ongoing basis. This includes those holding senior positions within the local authority as well as local women who joined the scheme as members and have since been involved in an incremental process of learning and development.

On a day-to-day basis, the organisation is run by 2 part-time members of staff and a melange of sessional workers and volunteers. It should be noted that these cover all of the organisation's activities, not just those pertaining to ICT.

The core posts are those of Project Development Officer and Administrative Assistant. The former post involves co-ordinating the work of the organisation, marketing the project, liaising with external agencies, dealing with funding issues and overseeing the work of the administrator and volunteers. The administrative assistant is responsible for updating the exchange database, producing and distributing the organisation's newsletter and organising the administrative aspects of the training provision.

A lack of funds ensures that the project is currently unable to appoint full-time workers. Additional workers are therefore employed, as necessary and when funds allow, on a sessional basis. Moreover, due to the nature of the organisation itself, the project is heavily reliant on the use of a large number of volunteers to exchange skills and contribute to the overall operation of the project.

Linked to the provision of ICT according to LETS principles, funding requirements for the project are limited compared to many other community projects. However, overhead costs such as those for premises and

staffing, still have to be met and for these the project has successfully secured funds through ESF and NLCB. These currently run until 2003.

In addition, smaller amounts of funding (such as SRB) have been secured to deliver short-term projects whilst the project has recently been successful in securing funds, subject to finding suitable premises, for the development of a UK online centre.

ICT provision and services

The development of the ICT capability of Naari LETS has been a gradual process over the past few years. This has reflected both growing demand for ICT training among the scheme's members and the increasing ability of others to offer these skills.

Naari LETS delivers its ICT training and services through the use of just two computers. One is located within the project's premises and is used for both teaching and administration purposes whilst the other is a laptop computer which is provided on a loan basis for home-based learning.

The demand for ICT provision and the subsequent services which have been offered can be grouped into three main areas. These reflect both the growing demand for ICT skills in the workplace as well as the increased use of ICT for leisure pursuits. These are:

- ❶ education - basic skills, ESOL and the Internet;
- ❷ recreation - email, newspaper archives and the production of magazines in community languages;
- ❸ job search.

Initially, ICT was listed as a 'want' in the LETS directory and those members who could 'offer' skills in this area were asked to provide a simple introduction to computers and IT. Following the success of this approach, the organisation sought to access additional funds to expand its ICT services and, in some cases, has established partnerships with other local providers to assist in this process. For example, the project has linked with Leicester College to provide access to accredited courses such as Introduction to Basic Technology (IBT) whilst it has also secured funds from the Learning and Skills Council to run courses in basic computer skills, introduction to the internet, and introduction to Asian language packages.

More recently, Naari has taken steps to further bolster its ICT provision by applying to become an accredited UK Online Learning Centre.

Known as the TargIT project, the UK Online bid was developed in partnership with Leicester City Council and is due to start once the organisation secures appropriate premises. This will double the number of computers Naari currently have from two to four, plus also provide a printer and Internet access. In particular, the project seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- provide 100 Asian women with access to the Internet;
- train 50 Asian women in Asian language packages enabling them to typeset documents and undertake translation work;
- provide volunteers with opportunities to use their community languages, such as Gujarati packages.

Naari's approach to achieving these aims differs from other training providers in that its own trainers would be recruited periodically from the LETS directory propagating the skills swap concept.

Outcomes and challenges

Naari LETS has achieved a range of positive outcomes since its initial establishment in 1994, with membership of the organisation having grown to over 450 members. The structure and manner in which the project operates has provided an environment which encourages many women to participate in activities they would never

previously have envisaged and has been instrumental in the development of ICT skills among Asian women aged over 35. Moreover, the project has done so in a way that is culturally sensitive and which addresses the language needs of users alongside ICT and other skills development.

Whilst the organisation does not currently collect any monitoring data on the uptake of its services or the hard outcomes achieved, a range of positive outcomes can be identified.

Those most clearly identified through the research are as follows:

- increased confidence;
- higher self-esteem;
- increased feelings of empowerment;
- enhanced involvement in community activities;
- increased sense of pride and self-worth.

While the story of Naari is essentially one of success, the project does face a number of challenges. The most important and immediate challenge the project faces is resolving the issue of premises. The existing premises do not encourage participants to access the services provided by the project, whilst the need to relocate has become more urgent since UK Online status was attained. In identifying and moving to new premises, however, the project has to be careful that it does not become dislocated and geographically isolated from its core user base. As with many community projects, ensuring that adequate funds are secured to enable Naari LETS to co-ordinate its activities and continue to meet the needs of its users will be an ongoing challenge for the project.

Summary

Naari LETS represents a small scale project which provides access to ICT in both a holistic and cost effective manner. Its non-traditional and culturally sensitive approach has enabled the organisation to grow its membership base and to achieve a number of positive outcomes for its users. The vision and commitment of key individuals has been central to the success of the project.

Case Study

People 1st

People 1st is a private ICT provider located in the Finaghy area of Belfast. As part of the Dairy Farm Open Learning Centre, the organisation offers ICT courses and services for a diverse range of clients. The particular focus of the case study is on its partnership with the Chinese Welfare Association (NI), a community organisation established to serve the needs of the local Chinese population. The partnership arrangement, which has been in place since November 2000, combines the provision of up-to-date hardware and premises on the part of People 1st with the outreach expertise and cultural awareness and sensitivity of the Chinese Welfare Association. The skilled, bi-lingual tutor who delivers a range of ICT courses is part-funded by each organisation. The project represents a rather unique example of ICT provision being targeted at a minority ethnic group in Belfast and currently enjoys limited competition from other providers. The implication, however, is that the cost to users is significantly higher than some other community ICT providers.

Key features of good practice

- An effective partnership between a private ICT provider and community organisation which enables access to up-to-date technologies coupled with a sophisticated understanding of the needs of the target group.
- Flexible and responsive provision which is tailored to meet the needs of the client group (eg. timing of courses, the pace at which courses are run).
- The provision of language support through the use of a bi-lingual tutor and the translation of course materials into Chinese.
- Effective outreach activity by the community organisation which helps to break down the barriers to access and encourage take-up.
- A culturally sensitive learning environment.
- A skilled and friendly course tutor who is from the same ethnic background as the target group.
- Provides access to ICT for a particular target group in a location in which similar provision is extremely limited.
- An informal learning environment that encourages a high degree of peer education and support.

The context

The focus of this case study is on the partnership between the People 1st Centre in Belfast and the Chinese Welfare Association (NI). People 1st is a private sector human resource management and training consultancy located in the Finaghy area of Belfast. It was established in 1994 by its parent organisation, the Dairy Farm Open Learning Centre. People 1st have up-to-date ICT facilities and currently provide a wide range of ICT learning opportunities, including the delivery of training courses to private companies. The partnership project with the CWA (NI) therefore represents just one element of People 1st's work.

The project between People 1st and the CWA (NI) has been running since November 2000 and is aimed at providing ICT training and services to the Chinese community of Belfast.

Project aims and objectives

The overall aim of the partnership arrangement between People 1st and CWA (NI) is to provide opportunities for the local Chinese community to access Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and to receive training in the use of ICT.

As the main support organisation serving Northern Ireland's Chinese community, the CWA have a mission which aims to:

“secure the future of the Chinese community in Northern Ireland within a framework of racial equality and enable all sections of the community to fully participate in both the development of the community and in the wider society”.

Recognising the significant demand for ICT learning within the local Chinese community coupled with the wide-ranging benefits that the take-up of ICT can bring, the CWA (NI) consider:

“partnerships, such as those with People 1st, as being key to the organisation achieving its mission.”

The People 1st Centre aims to target its ICT provision to a wide audience, including private sector companies, community organisations and the general public. Its partnership with the CWA (NI) enables the organisation to contribute to these aims and, through its links with the Dairy Farm OLC, to help support access to employment routes outside of the traditional Chinese catering trade.

The Dairy Farm OLC offers job skills, open learning and community employment through its Job Club.

Target groups and users

The target group for the project is the Chinese community of Northern Ireland. Access to the courses is open to all sub-sections of this community although, at times, more specific ICT training has been offered, such as women only courses, men-only courses and training for the over 50s. Based within the inner suburb of Finaghy, the project's clients are drawn from a range of areas including Newry, Fermanagh, Lisburn, Newtownards, Comber and Holywood.

The Chinese community represent the largest minority ethnic group in Northern Ireland. Estimated to total between 7-10,000 residents, this group accounts for approximately half of all BME residents in Northern Ireland. The majority of the Chinese population descend from the new territories of Hong Kong whilst others are from Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and China. It is estimated that at least 75% of the Chinese population in Northern Ireland are first generation immigrants.

Project management and funding

Project management is undertaken jointly between the two organisations. The People 1st Centre, as a whole, is managed by a Co-ordinator who is supported by a Development Officer and an Administrator. In terms of the case study project, it is the role of the Development Officer to liaise with CWA's Community Development Co-ordinator regarding the development and delivery of the project, such as timetabling the bookings for the ICT suite. Meanwhile, course enrolment, recruitment of the tutor and project administration are performed by CWA (NI).

The delivery of ICT courses for Chinese learners is undertaken by a part-time course tutor. The tutor is Chinese and is a qualified trainer registered with People 1st. The project has not made use of any volunteers.

Funding for the project is derived from the CWA, People 1st and fees from the course participants. The part-time tutor's post is funded jointly by the two organisations. People 1st pays the tutor at a rate equivalent to approximately half of what is currently paid by colleges of further and higher education whilst public funding, secured by CWA (NI), is then used to supplement the tutor's fees.

The public funds secured by the CWA (NI) are also used to supplement the course fees paid by the participants, although clients are still required to contribute to the training undertaken. For example:

- CLAIT
 - ❑ Total cost = £165/participant
 - ❑ Cost to participant = £35
 - ❑ Cost to CWA= £130

- ECDL
 - ❑ Total cost = £196/participant
 - ❑ Cost to participant = £50
 - ❑ Cost to CWA = £146

ICT provision and services

All of the project's training courses are held at the People 1st Centre where there is an ICT suite comprising 12 networked computers. This equipment is owned by the Dairy Farm OLC and is less than 18 months old. Basic trouble-shooting is carried out by people within the organisation, whilst a contract is also held with an external company for maintenance purposes.

The ICT suite has recently introduced Office XP software to all of its PC terminals. This provides access to a range of programmes including word processing, spreadsheets, database, email and the internet. There is currently no use of software in any other language than English, although the organisation has expressed an interest in acquiring Chinese language software.

In terms of service provision, the Chinese learners involved in the project have undertaken a variety of accredited and non-accredited training courses. These include:

- OCN introduction to computers;
- CLAIT;
- IBT2;
- ECDL;
- OCR Internet Stage 1.

Whilst People 1st also offers open access terminals, little use has been made of these by the Chinese client group. This is thought to relate to a lack of both confidence and competence to do so among many of the learners at this stage. Indeed, the course tutor recognises the difficulties faced by many users in understanding 'some of the words on screen' and therefore provides handwritten translations for many of the instructions used on the training courses. Without this, the tutor states that people:

"would not have progressed/completed the course or been motivated to keep learning."

Outcomes and challenges

The partnership between People 1st and the CWA (NI) achieves a number of positive outcomes. These are particularly significant given the lack of suitable alternative provision in the area and the barriers which many from the target communities face in accessing services such as ICT.

In terms of quantifiable outcomes, the project records a total of 151 users since its establishment in November 2000. Of these, 137 have achieved qualifications representing 91% of all course participants. A breakdown of these outcomes by type of course are provided below:

- OCN Introduction: 32 enrolled, 31 qualified;
- CLAIT: 48 enrolled, 45 qualified;
- IBT2: 35 enrolled, 26 qualified;
- ECDL: 28 enrolled, 28 qualified;
- OCR Internet Stage 1, 8 enrolled, 7 qualified.

In addition to these 'hard' outcomes, the project also supports the personal development of course participants in a number of ways. The research indicates that for the vast majority of learners, the case study project represents the first time that participants have gained experience in the use of ICT. By bringing such users into a comfortable and supportive environment, many reported that their apprehension in using computers and embarking on training courses in the future had been reduced. Other non-quantifiable outcomes are identified as:

- increased confidence;
- 'bridging the generation gap';
- opportunities for social interaction and networking;
- improved ability to access public services and information;
- improved skills and ability to access employment opportunities.

The key challenge for the project partners is ensuring that the appropriate mechanisms are put in place to sustain these achievements. Whilst the project is well managed and is staffed by a skilled and committed tutor, it currently appears to be heavily reliant on the efforts of CWA (NI) to raise sufficient monies, promote the project to potential participants, and organise the administration and co-ordination of activities.

Moreover, efforts which help to encourage existing or previous learners to develop the skills to become tutors themselves may also be considered particularly necessary, in order to reduce the threat to the project's sustainability should the current tutor decide to leave.

Summary

People 1st, through its partnership with the CWA (NI), represents an effective and well received ICT project targeting the Chinese community. Key to its success is a recognition of the specific cultural and language barriers faced by its target groups in accessing more traditional forms of ICT learning and the ability with which the project has been able to respond to these needs in a flexible manner. It is advocated that the best practice lessons learnt from this project are used to help establish other similar projects targeting the BME sector in Northern Ireland.

Case Study

ROCCIT

ROCCIT (Resource and Outreach Community Centre for Information Technology)

is based in Tower Hamlets, East London and is part of a wider charitable organisation called ELATT (East London Advanced Technology Training). Established in 1999, ROCCIT provides a range of ICT courses, services and basic skills training with a view to reducing social exclusion through enhanced educational attainment and employability skills. It works with diverse client groups, also reflected in a multi-ethnic team of staff and volunteers, and focuses particularly on the needs of the local unemployed population. Key to its activities and success is an extensive outreach strategy, which seeks to break down the barriers to access and encourage new users into the learning environment.

Key features of good practice

- A holistic approach to service provision recognising the social, cultural and welfare support needs of socially excluded groups for supporting access to ICT.
- A multi-ethnic staff team with extensive linguistic ability which enables them to support access for a range of BME groups from the local community.
- Targets the unemployed and places particular emphasis on developing employability skills to support the progression of clients into work.
- Offers free ICT provision to the majority of its users, others can access training at low cost.
- An effective outreach strategy whereby outreach workers are employed to visit local estates and link with other local organisations to encourage take-up among the target communities. Many of the outreach workers are drawn from the same cultural and ethnic backgrounds as the target groups.
- Accessible and welcoming location, which helps to encourage access.
- On-site crèche facilities.
- Clear progression routes for clients with a range of ICT services offered, including drop-in facilities, basic skills courses and more advanced learning opportunities

The context

The Resource and Outreach Community Centre for Information Technology (ROCCIT) is located in the Spitalfields area of East London and was set-up in 1999. It is part of a wider organisation, the East London Advanced Technology Training (ELATT), which was established in 1984 with the aim of addressing the training needs of unemployed people in Tower Hamlets. The decision to establish ROCCIT was taken following a successful bid for SRB funds and a recognised need to target socially excluded groups through outreach activities if access to ICT was to be supported. The juxtaposition of Tower Hamlets to areas such as the City of London and Shoreditch, both key centres of employment with a strong bias towards those with ICT skills, also provided an impetus to the establishment of the project.

Project aims and objectives

ROCCIT's aim is:

"to draw socially excluded groups and individuals into the Information Society".

Tower Hamlets is an area of high deprivation and social exclusion, ranked first within the Government's Index of Deprivation, and ROCCIT sees its task as supporting local residents in gaining the necessary employment skills that will enable users to 'improve their prospects' in the labour market.

The key objectives of ROCCIT are identified as follows:

- to provide people with basic skills in literacy and numeracy that will open up opportunities to them;
- to support users who have limited English language skills;
- to support the development of ICT skills to enable people to access the thriving labour market within their area.

In delivering ICT training and improving the employability skills of the local population, the project aims to do so in a way that 'serves the local community from the heart of the community'. Key to delivering on this aim is the use of people from within the local community to act as both ICT trainers and to play a key role in encouraging other community members to the project through undertaking outreach work. In this sense, the project aims to marry the requirement for skilled ICT trainers with those who have an understanding of the needs of the local community.

Target group and users

ROCCIT provides access to ICT for all communities within Tower Hamlets. The overriding aim of the project is to work with people experiencing social exclusion, particularly the unemployed. However, given the profile of the local population within Tower Hamlets, many of its clients are drawn from black and minority ethnic communities. A total of 65% of its current users are from BME groups. Of these, the Bangladeshi community represent a particularly high proportion of users.

The area in which ROCCIT predominantly focuses its work is one of the most deprived areas in the country. The high levels of economic activity and wealth generated by its neighbours – the City of London and Shoreditch – magnify the depth of deprivation in the area. High levels of exclusion are derived from poor educational attainment, low income, poor quality housing (often exacerbated by overcrowding) and, for many, a lack of confidence. For many BME communities, the depth of their exclusion is exacerbated by poor language skills and restricted access to services and opportunities.

Whilst set-up to address the needs of all groups experiencing such problems in the Borough, ROCCIT also, at times, targets more specific groups in delivering its ICT provision. For example, in the past the project has worked with people who are HIV positive and with visually impaired residents. ROCCIT has also run women-only courses for Bengali and Somali groups.

Project management and funding

ROCCIT is managed on a day-to-day basis by a skilled manager who is both familiar with, and committed to, changing the local area for the better. Having managed the project since its establishment, the manager works closely with ELATT to discuss future funding applications and to review the progress of the organisation. In terms of overall strategic direction for the project, this is provided by ELATT's Board of Trustees.

In addition to the Project Manager there is a team of seven IT tutors and outreach workers plus administrative staff and a fundraiser, bringing the total up to ten employed staff. The decision to appoint a fundraiser represents a fairly recent decision by the project but is considered to be key to ensuring that it attracts sufficient resources to meet the needs of its target groups in the future and remain sustainable. The staff vary in age, gender and background and may be considered to represent both a skilled and committed team.

To date the Single Regeneration Budget and European Social Fund have been the main income providers for the project. These sources have, to date, made up most of ROCCIT's annual income of £71,000. It states that in terms of unit cost, this has enabled the project to achieve a rate of £130 per user. Whilst ESF is secured for another two years its SRB funds have come to an end and the project has had to increasingly source new funds. These have been drawn from a wide range of funding streams comprising a mix of European, national and local monies. However, the project recognises that being based in Tower Hamlets it faces significant competition from other local organisations in terms of fundraising, with many also bidding for monies to address issues of deprivation and social exclusion within the Borough.

ICT provision and services

ROCCIT offers a wide-ranging ICT programme which is grounded in providing effective progression routes through which participants can move at their own pace and build up their skills as an incremental process.

The project recognises that for many in its target group, take-up of ICT may represent the first step into adult learning and, as such, opportunities for more informal, short courses are important. In addition, however, the provision of accredited courses which provide users with sufficient skills to enable them to enter the workplace and meet the demands of employers are also recognised by the project. Moreover, by ensuring that courses are provided at a range of levels and for users at a range of entry points, the project maximises its ability to retain course participants and encourage an ongoing process of learning and skills development to take place.

ROCCIT has excellent and up to date facilities which invariably encourages users to the project. In total, the project has 50 computers each with the most up to date programmes and vast array of applications. It provides a drop-in facility and, overall, there are 11 IT based courses which the project offers, including:

- Beginners into IT;
- RSA CLAIT;
- RSA Internet Technologies;
- ICT Training for the Visually Impaired;
- English and Communication Skills with ICT;
- European Computer Driving Licence;
- Introduction to Web Programming.

In addition to those opportunities provided directly through ROCCIT itself, the organisation has established a close working partnership with another local project, the LINK project, for the purposes of service delivery. Through this partnership ROCCIT is able to offer its users CV and job search facilities, thus enhancing the linkages it seeks to create between the take-up of ICT and entry to employment.

Outcomes and challenges

Amongst the users of ROCCIT, attitudes towards the project are extremely positive. The project monitors the views of its users through the use of online questionnaires which, together with the focus group research, reveal that the project achieves a number of soft outcomes. These are identified as follows:

- pride and sense of achievement;
- increasing accessibility to learning opportunities and employment;
- creating a sense of belonging;
- encouraging integration;
- reducing isolation.

The project also achieves quantifiable outcomes, particularly in supporting people to gain qualifications. Recent figures suggest that three-quarters of its ICT users complete courses to a standard required for achieving certification.

Essentially, ROCCIT is a strong project which achieves a number of positive outcomes. However, the project recognises that it also faces a number of difficulties and that these cannot be ignored if the project is to remain sustainable. ROCCIT currently faces a particular challenge from a similar project based within the same building also offering ICT services. Although initially targeting a different market to those ROCCIT seeks to attract, there has been growing convergence with regard to each of the project's target groups in recent months. As such, it is recognised that ROCCIT needs to capitalise on its strengths and possibly begin to specialise in the types of services it offers and the groups it targets.

At present, ROCCIT is also operating at maximum capacity. Demand for its services currently outstrips supply and it has to make a decision as to whether to maintain its current level of provision or expand its services.

Such a decision represents a particular challenge, given increasing competition within the local area and uncertainty about the project's future ability to remain competitive and attract users.

Summary

ROCCIT provides a positive example of how ICT can be used to help encourage BME communities into the learning environment and provide a path for ongoing skills development to take place. Key to ROCCIT's success is that the project is a highly accessible and well supported service, drawing in people from a range of local communities and offering a diverse array of ICT learning opportunities. Its ability to reach out into its target communities and address their needs in a holistic way ensures that it remains popular among users, whilst a skilled and committed team of managers and staff means that the project enjoys a degree of financial stability, is able to forward plan and adapt to changes in the market, and delivers a professional service.

Case Study

SheBytes

SheBytes is a private sector ICT provider based in Tower Hamlets, London, which aims to provide training, advice and support to organisations and individuals who, through lack of access to and understanding of emerging technologies, would otherwise fail to fully exploit the benefits of the digital revolution. Rather than seeking to identify potential users directly, SheBytes occupies a unique position in that it delivers its services in partnership with community organisations who already have a sophisticated understanding of the needs of BME communities in their locality and who are positioned to compliment the ICT expertise brought by SheBytes with a range of more general support services. This symbiotic relationship is therefore one in which ICT is seen as the enabler – a learning tool which can help to engage BME communities and support the needs of BME populations in a holistic way.

Key features of good practice

- A holistic, partnership approach to ICT training provision in which ICT is integrated with other skills provision and activities of the community organisation.
- Effective outreach – SheBytes uses the effective outreach strategies of the community organisation in targeting traditionally hard-to-reach groups.
- Flexible, informal approach to ICT provision including the development of bespoke training courses according to client needs and demands.
- Workers and trainers that fully represent the population profile of the target audience and who can provide language support as required.
- Professional tutors drawn primarily from the commercial sector who are trained ICT workers and have access to cutting edge technologies.
- The provision of training and support in a localised setting at the community organisation thus providing an easily accessible, non-threatening environment for learners and often with the advantage of support services such as crèche facilities.
- The development of training courses for users at a range of entry levels, from basic skills provision to more advanced courses for those seeking to develop their careers or start their own businesses.
- A strong emphasis on forward planning and sustainability assisted by ongoing research into clients needs and a business-led approach to service delivery.

The context

SheBytes are a private company based in Tower Hamlets, London, who focus on delivering ICT services in partnership with community organisations already working with groups and individuals from BME communities. For the purposes of this study, the research focused particularly on SheBytes' work with host organisation, Account 3, a women's organisation based in Bethnal Green (Tower Hamlets) which seeks to enhance women's training, employment and enterprise opportunities and improve quality of life by promoting self-help and offering a range of social, cultural and linguistic support services.

SheBytes first delivered ICT training in April 1999 when it was contracted by one of London's biggest training providers to design and deliver workshops and training courses in Internet and Web Development for young people from minority ethnic groups in Tower Hamlets. SheBytes has since established strong working partnerships with a number of community organisations that are committed to providing for people from socially excluded groups and have been delivering training courses through Account 3 since August 1999.

Project aims and objectives

The overall aim of the Account 3/SheBytes partnership is to provide ICT services, training and support women in Tower Hamlets to enhance their skills, support their business needs, increase their ability to network and improve their quality of life.

Shebytes believes that, in order to achieve success in introducing ICT to those people who are less likely to use it, activities and programmes should compliment the services already provided by Account 3. Thus the objectives of the Partnership focus on meeting the needs of women in a holistic way rather than on the sole provision of ICT training:

- to find innovative ways of improving the status of women through the provision of ICT consultancy, training and development support;
- to build and maintain an online community of women's organisations (SheBytes.com);
- to relieve poverty and enhance women's training and employment opportunities through the provision of information, support and advice;
- to pursue a holistic approach to inclusion.

Project management and funding

SheBytes is primarily run by a Project Co-ordinator/ICT trainer who manages a pool of freelance trainers mostly from the commercial sector. The Project Co-ordinator is a woman of Afro-Caribbean heritage who has professional experience of working within the internet and telecommunications industries.

SheBytes co-exists with its sister company, qbfox, and as such has access to an extensive range of skills in addition to those provided by its own administrative staff and trainers. As SheBytes' founding company, qbfox, also offers in kind support in the form of rent free office space and technical expertise.

SheBytes also receives additional revenue funding by providing bespoke training courses to individuals and organisations as well as the provision of original editorial content on matters involving women and technology.

Target groups and users

SheBytes state that:

"as long as women remain the group least likely to embrace the benefits of technology, SheBytes will continue to service this priority group with no particular emphasis being placed on colour or ethnicity."

In working in partnership with community organisations, SheBytes relies on the host organisation to define the target group that is most in need of training and support. In terms of its relationship with Account 3, its target audience therefore becomes the socially excluded population of Tower Hamlets and, in turn, comprises a significant emphasis on the needs of BME women in the Borough.

Tower Hamlets itself is an area of high deprivation with an ethnically diverse population. In the Government's Index of Deprivation the Borough ranks as the most deprived local authority district in England, with over two-thirds (44%) of its population of minority ethnic origin.

As a result, Tower Hamlets has received a huge amount of regeneration funding and there are now a plethora of organisations and projects providing ICT services within the local area. SheBytes recognises the need to respond to this and provide tailored, responsive ICT services if it is to survive in an increasingly competitive market.

Reflecting the Borough profile, the user groups SheBytes most commonly works with in delivering courses through Account 3, are found to be women of Asian, Bangladeshi, African and Afro-Caribbean heritage. Interestingly, when considering SheBytes' work with all of its partner organisations collectively, which span a number of London Boroughs, its users are predominantly African and Afro-Caribbean women.

ICT provision and services

The delivery of ICT training and support services in partnership with community organisations means that SheBytes utilises the technologies available to them through the host organisation. In the case of Account 3, recent development of a modern ICT training suite at its base in Bethnal Green provides access to 12 networked PCs as well as a file server and a trainers PC. Additional hardware and materials are supplied by SheBytes if required for specific courses, including digital cameras, scanners and CD writers.

The services and courses provided by SheBytes, through its host organisation, can be grouped into 3 main categories:

- ❶ basic skills provision;
- ❷ support for unemployed women looking for work;
- ❸ support for women's micro-businesses.

The basic skills courses provided by SheBytes include 'Introduction to computers and the internet', a 30 hour course aimed at people with little or no ICT skills, as well as CLAIT courses which provided accredited training in a range of Windows applications. Such courses compliment the other basic skills provision offered by Account 3 in areas such as literacy and numeracy and beginners ESOL.

In devising ways of helping job seekers to develop their technology skills while looking for work, SheBytes developed the TechnoDivas programme.

This programme aims to promote the internet as an excellent resource for exploring the job market and researching specific companies and organisations. The programme consists of a series of 2 day workshops in which participants are guided through a range of activities (eg. search engines, web-based job listings, online recruitment agencies) to assist them in their job search activities.

Support for women's micro-businesses represents the final area in which SheBytes delivers services. Its e-divas programme was designed specifically with the needs of its target groups in mind and to compliment the business support services already provided by Account 3 through its Women's Enterprise Project. E-divas thus involves a series of training programmes for users interested in using the internet as a research and marketing tool for their small business idea, in some cases helping women to launch a web-site relating to their business initiatives.

Outcomes and challenges

Feedback from the users and clients of SheBytes' services is overwhelmingly positive. The research undertaken on the courses delivered in partnership with Account 3 discovered that all consultees believed that their confidence had increased since attending the courses, with many going on to undertake additional training courses and others entering employment.

In addition to the achievement of a number of quantifiable outcomes, the project was found to have a positive impact with regard to the following 'soft' outcomes:

- increasing confidence;
- raising aspirations;
- improving inter-personal skills;
- providing opportunities for social interaction and empowerment.

Some of the key factors cited by both current and previous clients in contributing to their positive experiences were the useful and professional course materials, the approachability of the trainers, the provision of vital support services such as crèche facilities, and the accessible and welcoming location at which courses were delivered.

In addition, the linguistic skills offered by the trainers and staff working at the host organisation, together with the positive role models provided by a number of trainers being from the same cultural backgrounds, was highlighted. The role played by community enablers or reformers (terms preferred to that of community champion) was also thought to have played a significant role in attracting users to the project in an outreach capacity and in driving the project forward internally.

Despite its successes, SheBytes is committed to ongoing development of its services in order to meet client demands and achieve progress against its organisational objectives. Its future plans already include the development of shorter, modular based courses to enable participants to pick and choose learning appropriate to their needs as well as the development of bilingual ICT training leading to a professional qualification. Ensuring that the project continues to stimulate and meet latent demand among those within the local BME community who continue to remain socially excluded are also ongoing priorities.

Summary

SheBytes represents a successful example of a private company working in partnership with community organisations to combine expertise in the field of ICT with a detailed understanding of the more generic needs of black and minority ethnic women. SheBytes is at the forefront of providing access to new and emerging technologies to BME women. Key to its success, however, is the recognition that for minority groups to fully benefit from the information revolution, a broad strategy of inclusion must be followed.

APPENDIX 3: CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROJECTS AND RESEARCHERS

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APPENDIX 4: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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