Comment on Scottish Executive’s Digital Inclusion Policy Review  
by ACE IT  
December 8 2005

*“The relentless advance of technology is being paralleled by the phenomenon of the ‘greying population’. If older people are not helped to catch up and use the technology, we will be faced with a serious ‘digital divide’, whereby a growing proportion of those whom technology would help to remain independent and ‘connected’ members of the community, become instead isolated and disenfranchised”*


ACE IT’s Computer Training Project for the 50+ Group

**Brief overview**

Started in May 2001, the project aims to encourage new and non confident users, specifically in the 50+ age group, to learn basic computer skills, Internet access and email thus broadening education, offer other leisure interests and find information on many issues and topics. The computer, as a means of communication, provides an opportunity to keep in touch with family and friends locally, nationally and internationally whilst also providing the tool to make new friends and widen the social circle. Accessing online shopping and banking services are of particular interest for the future housebound.

- 1200 learners have benefited from ACE IT’s training programme to date
- 60 per week are currently being trained
- 194 on the (constant) waiting list

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ACE IT is a company registered in Scotland Number:SC279749 Scottish Charity Number: SCO 036315
**Identified benefits**

- Social inclusion through greater independence and confidence
- Digital inclusion through overcoming a fear of technology
- Alleviating isolation, whilst still remaining independent but ‘connected’ members of the community, especially for the future housebound.
- Active citizenship and empowerment
- Overcoming intergenerational and international barriers.
- Mental stimulation enabling an active and fulfilling later life
- Personal development through the use of ICT

**Identified barriers to the older learner**

Lack of encouragement and expectation from family and society in general

Formal training environments

Costs

Transport

Specialist equipment/assistive and adaptive technology requirements

Technical jargon

User unfriendly web sites – web designers should be more aware of older people’s needs when accessing sites - particularly those from whom they are seeking specialist information

**Problem areas – digital exclusion for the older learner**

ILA’s are only available at accredited centres ie more formal settings. Older learners prefer an informal setting so that they can work at their own pace and not get “lost” in a classroom environment

Retail packages wrongly suited to older learners

Installation, technical support and back up is crucial to the older learner. Often many have invested in their new found skills by buying a computer but they soon lose confidence when confronted with these problems

Lack of supervision or help in many libraries (many with restricted access too)

**Potential solutions for consideration**

Home computing initiative – this could be extended to older people as yet again they are being excluded by not being in paid employment and being able to take advantage of this sort of scheme. Perhaps a voucher system could be put into place or being able to buy at
Scot Exec approved retail outlets at a greatly reduced priced (having been subsidised by the Exec)

Ensure projects such as ACE IT are able to receive/have access to funding – (without lengthy form filling!) In particular revenue funding, as pc’s do not work themselves and need paid members of staff as we cannot entirely rely on volunteer involvement)

Given the knowledge gleaned in the past 4.5 years, ACE IT is developing a retail computer package in response to older people’s needs and lack of suitable and overpriced market products

**Improving health for all**

We are all living longer and healthier lives However, projections \(^1\) show that there will be fewer people to look after older people. Therefore it is important to improve the quality of life for people in care homes or indeed to help keep people to stay at home longer. Using computers helps older people by alleviating isolation, whilst still remaining independent but ‘connected’ members of the community, especially for the future housebound

\(^{1}\) **Demography**

The number of older people will be critical in determining the likely future demand on a full range of services. We can be reasonably confident about the demographic projections over the next 20 years for the older population since these are based on well-established methods used by the General Register Office. The changing demographic composition of the population will have a direct impact on both the requirements and costs of service provision for this cohort of the population. The following table provides population data and projections for Scotland from 1998 to 2026.

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<td>Total (All Ages)</td>
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(1) Source: General Registrar, Scotland and the Office for National Statistics.

- By 2022, 42% of Scotland’s population will be aged 50+ (Source: Scottish Executive 2002)
- While 62% of the UK population have used the Internet, only 17% of those aged 65 and over have tried it. Reasons may include cost, difficulties with vision and hand movements, or a perception, if the older person did not have the opportunity to use computers at work or school, that the internet is not relevant to them.
- However, Age Concern research shows that of the 34% of people 55 years and over who are computer users, 66% feel it has had a positive impact on their lives.

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Jenny Ridge
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ACE IT
9 December 2005