ICT related skills and life-long learning: case studies from France, Germany, Italy and the UK

By Helmut Apel, Pierre Concialdi, Sandro Clementi, Simone Dahlmann, Dietrich Engels, Giulio Riangetti, Solveig Grimault, Michael Haile, Ursula Huws, Antonio Lettieri and Marco Zanotelli

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ABSTRACT

This report has been produced by the restructured Labour Market Changes and Welfare Perspectives in Europe (LAW) project which aims to examine the connection between the Information Society development as reflected in the labour world and the resulting impact on welfare systems.

The recent development of dynamic knowledge-based economies, while offering new societal working and participating opportunities, at the same time poses novel requirements regarding, among others, the demand for highly skilled personnel and the necessity of a widespread use of ICT tools, hence, a broad scope of digital competences. The rapidity of the changes and the increasing demands for broad digital literacy raise the risk of a failure to adapt to the new requirements in time - and this is expected to happen especially to the groups classified as weak or disadvantaged on a socio-economic basis (‘groups at risk’).

In Workpackage 1 of the project’s second phase research was carried out on the changes taking place in European labour markets in association with the introduction of ICTs. The ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ from this process were identified, the characteristics of the welfare systems operating in each of the countries under study and the ways in which they have succeeded or failed to adapt to the restructuring of labour market were analysed. The workpackage also summarised the policy debates about the future of welfare systems in the light of the European Lisbon agenda of proceeding towards a knowledge-based economy.

Workpackage 2 took this work a stage further by analysing the ways in which each national welfare system currently addresses the needs of the groups at risk in the current restructuring of labour markets, the national policy debates and future plans. It focused particularly on ways in which ICTs can make a positive contribution to improving the delivery of welfare services and increasing social inclusion.

Workpackage 3 adopted a case study approach in order to investigate good practice in the use of ICTs to address these challenges in the participating countries. This report summarises the results of this work as regards the acquirement of ICT skills and competences in line with life-long learning initiatives. It is one of three reports produced as part of this workpackage. The other two reports focus respectively on eGovernment and on initiatives developed to address the digital divide in New Member States.

The findings from the case studies on eLearning presented in this report focus on potential of eLearning to reduce digital divide. A case study approach was adopted to investigate IT training projects and courses offers in order to assess their ability to support people being threatened with social exclusion coping with the increasing demands of the Information Society. In doing so, the scope of the research was restricted to two important fields of lifelong learning: the acquisition of general ICT literacy; and ICT training for the unemployed or those at risk of becoming unemployed.

The results from the national case studies were then subjected to a concluding comparative evaluation. This final analysis is based on the different SWOT analyses undertaken for the particular eLearning initiatives under study. The final section of the report draws some conclusions about what can be learned from the studies, in particular which features of the projects are most successful and under what conditions can eLearning be appraised as an effective and promising means of supporting the combat against the digital divide.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background EC

The European Commission’s Lisbon Strategy set a strategy to make Europe the most competitive and socially inclusive economy in the world by 2010. Education and training was a key component of the eEurope Plan. The strategy also recognised that existing traditional education systems in Europe might need additional help with modernisation; thus an eLearning Initiative was proposed. The implementation of eLearning mechanisms was linked to the development of ICT skills so that workers and citizens can be better equipped to face the challenges of the knowledge-based society.

A critical review remarked that learning ICT skills and learning through ICT was such a natural combination that eLearning became a favoured topic of the years 2000 and 2001, with little evidence that the strategy would really work. The same review by the European ODL Liaison Committee recognises both strengths and weaknesses in the approach that the European institutions have adopted towards eLearning in recent years (ODL Liaison Committee 2004).

Positive developments include:

- Strong mobilisation effect of national authorities, higher education, industry and several other stakeholders
- Massive networking activity at European level; many projects containing eLearning elements were supported and this not only as part of the eLearning Action Plan and the neighbouring MINERVA Action but also through Leonardo da Vinci, ERASMUS, IST and EQUAL programmes
- A substantial contribution to the evolution of the rhetoric of eLearning away from just computers, connectivity competitiveness and cost-effectiveness, and towards contents, context, collaboration and learning communities, so facilitating the integration of eLearning and ICT in the processes of endogenous innovation of education and training

Negative developments include:

- Lack of persistence on the concept and practice of the eLearning Initiative: real co-ordination of the EU intervention in this domain has been given up and much less than optimal use of resources is made and replication and lack of sustainability of initiatives become serious risks;
- Lack of real integration of the eLearning discourse into the lifelong learning agenda, as if the two ‘movements’, one originated by the eEurope strategy and the other more ‘endogenous’ to education and training policy, were separate

1.2 The LAW project’s specific focus

The LAW project’s focus on the interdependence of ICT developments and welfare systems in advanced information societies is twofold:

- Firstly it looks at the general changes in the European labour markets induced by the broad diffusion of ICT in production and service industries and its consequences for labour organisation, employment conditions and the welfare systems.
- Secondly it aims to identify the people most affected by these developments. Particularly it is focussed on the ‘losers’ of the ICT-driven labour market changes (‘groups most at risk’) and in search of strategies that are effective in supporting those people coping with the negative effects of the so called digital divide, i.e. the danger of being excluded from labour market participation.

The second focus is also directly related to welfare. There is sound evidence that ICT competences are highly positively related with individuals’ competitiveness on the labour market, and this in turn
has a bearing on both the individuals' welfare (social protection situation) and the welfare system as a whole.

Recent evidence on the interrelation between ICT skills and individual welfare has come for instance from the STILE project, which has shown, that on the one hand side workers in the ICT sector, who predominantly possess high ICT skills, normally have well paid jobs with high social protection provisions. Concurrently they represent an important pillar of the welfare systems. On the other hand side there is likewise manifold evidence that it is the lack of currently required qualifications, that carries with it the greatest risk of being excluded from labour market participation. And in information societies the most demanded qualifications are intrinsically tied to ICT related skills and competences.

A growth in the workforce being excluded from labour market participation does not only augment individual harm, it imposes - apart from the demographic development - the greatest burden to our welfare systems as well. Therefore, endeavours reducing the digital divide have a big and decisive share in improving our European information societies. They do not only raise welfare and quality of life for those concerned, that is to say, diminishing social inequality - which is an important value in itself. They also contribute to establishing stable and competitive welfare societies. For this reason, efforts to reduce the digital divide are to be considered as societal investments in improving human capital, necessary for efficient and running 'information economies'.

Hence, the specific LAW project’s focus, as shortly outlined above and underlying the work presented in the deliverable in hand, can be summarised as:

Reducing digital divide as a decisive prerequisite of stable welfare systems in advanced information societies.

This particular view and appraisal highly coincides with the recently published report ‘Rethinking the European ICT Agenda’, elaborated by PriceWaterhouseCoopers on behalf of the Netherlands’ Government, during the Netherlands Presidency of the European Union. This report specifies ten theses (‘breakthroughs’), necessary to reach the Lisbon goals. The last of these theses refers to the acquisition of ICT related skills and competences (‘Shift e-inclusion policy form 'access for all' to 'skills for all’’ (see box below).

### The ten breakthroughs of the Netherlands’ report ‘Rethinking the European ICT Agenda (2004)’

1. Shift the e-Business and e-Government policy from connectivity to uptake of complex ICT applications
2. Standardize ICT environments in Europe to trigger and enable new business
3. Accelerate the introduction of disruptive technologies
4. Realize the vision of 'any content, anytime, anywhere, any platform'
5. Go for global platform leadership in the ICT industry
6. Develop a strategic response to job migration to low-wage countries
7. Remove barriers for the development of an innovating European electronic communications sector
8. Move to a new and flexible model of spectrum allocation
9. Enforce real solutions for consumer confidence and security
10. Shift e-Inclusion policy from 'access for all' to 'skills for all'

**Source:** Netherlands’ Ministry of Economic Affairs (2004): Rethinking the European ICT Agenda

Since the Netherlands’ report represents one of the most recent studies on the European ICT development issue, which furthermore is depending on excellent empirical basis, some of its decisive paragraphs referring to the digital divide and ICT training are briefly summarised below - in
order to put the LAW project’s focus and work, presented in this deliverable, in a broader context, base on sound European expertise, deriving from additional external research.

As regards reducing the digital divide the authors of the Netherlands report conclude their findings as follows:

‘One of the main Lisbon goals is ‘to create an Information Society for all’. Dependency of citizens on the Information Society is rapidly rising, and is adding an ‘information divide’ to the existing ‘financial divide’. ICT can provide for the access to information and the communications which are considered necessary to fully participate in the Information Society but there are specific groups within society that are not sufficiently able to connect and benefit. This is not always caused by a lack of availability of computers and communication facilities but also by a lack of education and skills to use them and the willingness to actually use such new technologies.

The digital divide that is growing at present is however not only about computer deployment and access to infrastructure, but has much more to do with the education, skills, motivation and the actual use of ICT.

There is a serious risk that e-Inclusion is treated as non-critical and does not get the fundamental policies it deserves. The breakthroughs that are required to turn e-Inclusion from an ‘intention’ to a commitment are:

• To redefine the current Universal Service Obligations; and
• To focus on skills development and the use of IT by investing in education/training.’

(The Netherlands’ Ministry of Economic Affairs (2004): ‘Rethinking the European ICT Agenda, pp. 59; accentuations by LAW.)

For these reasons, outlined above, the LAW project made it its business - among other things - to explore the vast field of lifelong learning for proper and promising learning initiatives, that are capable of giving effective support to people coping with the digital divide. This report showcases and analyses cases which have been identified by the LAW project as exemplary. These examples chosen had been elaborated in the form of case studies, based on the analysis of available documents and personal interviews. The research was undertaken in France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom.

1.3 How best to reduce the digital divide? The determining factor of appropriate learning possibilities. Rationale of research scope

Basically societal efforts aimed at reducing the digital divide can be allocated to two different activity fields:

• Promotion and provision of broad, easy, obstacle-free and inexpensive access to the Internet and a computer. This refers to the more technical side of the eInclusion process.

• Promotion and provision of adequate learning and qualification possibilities in order to generally improve the citizens’ and workforce’s ability and competence using ICT. This aspect basically embodies the ‘educational side’.

Both activity fields are equally important: Without technical support, particularly disadvantaged people would not find sufficient access to ICT; without educational support they wouldn’t either; at least there would not be not enough reasonable and competent utilization of the available technology.

1 The empirical basis underlying: The Netherlands’ ICT report consists among others of 85 interviews, conducted with European high level experts, representing e.g. IT companies, national ministries, the European commission, universities and other research centres.
The LAW project has been dealing predominantly with the latter aspect without denying the high importance of the former. From the LAW project’s point of view it remains beyond doubt that further achievements on the technical side are still indispensable requirements in order to reach the aspired aim of a digitally non-divided Europe.

Even if public efforts aimed at developing and providing appropriate ICT-related learning initiatives may not be the most important prerequisite for overcoming the digital divide and for the sustainable strengthening of the European welfare systems, these efforts constitute essential accompaniments to that process. As previously mentioned with reference to the Netherlands’ ICT report, there is a risk of overlooking the importance of the educational aspect of the still necessary struggle against digital divide. It has to be borne in mind that a predominantly technological orientated supply with ICT facilities that fails to take these educational aspects into account, could unfortunately even be counter-productive, producing an aggravation and the consolidation of this gap.

If we look for learning and qualification initiatives that can effectively meet the claim of reducing digital divide, they must fulfil - at least some - compensatory function. In practical terms this means that those learning and qualification initiatives taken into consideration by the LAW project have to be targeted towards participants from those social groups which have already been identified in our earlier research (described in deliverable D2.1 as ‘risk groups’). In other words, they should be designed for people with low labour market chances and/or in danger of being excluded from common welfare benefits.2

Taking an overview of the activities, projects, programmes and approaches undertaken, promoted or initialised by the national governments of the European member states on the ‘educational side’ in order to foster ICT competences, we can broadly divide such activities into three main areas:

- Activities fundamentally improving the acquirement of ICT related skills and competences in the frame of the general education system (schools, colleges, universities, vocational training) including particular schemes designed to attract female students to ICT subjects
- Supporting the development of ICT-related qualifications in the area of further education, which can be relayed to the labour force, both employed and unemployed
- Support for ICT-related learning initiatives beyond the area of labour force qualification, aiming at generally broadening the citizens’ overall competence regarding ICT utilisation, particularly targeted at special groups like women, the elderly, immigrants and poorly educated people.

The LAW project has concentrated on the two latter areas, because they are more directly linked with its focal points: labour market participation, social inclusion and welfare. Since the two selected areas ‘further education’ and ‘citizen’s overall ICT abilities enhancement’ were still too broad to allow for rigorous research within the constraints of the project’s time and resources, the project decided to further focus them alongside the project’s ‘risk group’ line as follows:

Within the further education field the project singled out the topic:

► ICT qualification initiatives aimed at the unemployed and those threatened by it.

The citizen’s overall ICT abilities enhancement issue was restricted to

► Broadening digital competence and ICT access for specific target groups (e.g. immigrants, women job returners, the elderly, the poorly educated etc.)

2 In order to avoid misconceptions: ICT training for highly skilled persons is very important matter as regards maintaining and strengthening the competitiveness and welfare of the European information societies. Overcoming the prevailing skill gap in the IT sector is one of the most crucial tasks of the European labour market and education policy. But since the LAW project is mainly concerned with the effects of the ICT developments on the welfare systems and our welfare systems are mainly suffering from the high share of unemployment, that is caused by low qualified work force, the project has concentrated on the compensatory aspects within the great variety of ICT related learning and qualification offers.
1.4 Case study methodology

After intensive discussion about the most suitable and fruitful way of dealing with the selected issues, the LAW project decided to elaborate exemplary case studies, being presented and analysed in the form of best practice examples. This approach had been chosen in order to meet best the following requirements:

- Findings should be based on empirical research
- Research activities had to fit in the project's time and financial frame
- Results first and foremost should enable for practical policy recommendations, helping decision-makers deciding about which types of learning and training projects primarily should be supported

Hence, the following work programme was agreed among the involved project partners in order to facilitate the common search for exemplary ICT related learning and training offers:

- Stock taking: which approaches, programmes and projects have been undertaken in the countries under consideration in order to reduce the digital divide through learning and training initiatives?
- Selection and identification of the most promising ones
- Presenting and analysing them in form of detailed case studies, based on interviews with relevant stakeholders and other available documents
- Final evaluation based on the principles of SWOT analysis, particularly as regards transferability
2. FRANCE

2.1 Introduction

Successful entry into a knowledge economy and optimal access to education and learning is a key challenge today.

In France, e-learning is not as much developed as in other countries. However, e-learning is spreading out very rapidly in various areas.

This report presents some experiences that have been successful in this area:

- the APP network, which is not specialised in e-learning but makes extensive use of ITCs in its courses;
- the Cyber@anjou case: this is a very recent experiment that brings ITCs resources close to people who do not have access to these technologies, especially in rural areas, so helping to reduce the digital divide;
- an experience of e-learning for disabled people (to qualify ‘outside the walls’);
- the certificate « surfing the Internet » (NSI) which is mostly intended for the unemployed.

All these experiences show that the use of ITCs and the development of e-learning can greatly help to favour social cohesion by bringing new opportunities to disadvantaged people. These experiences are not designed specifically for unemployed people. However, there is a vast majority of unemployed among the public who attends these courses. Overall, it seems difficult to draw a clear borderline between highly targeted actions and more general ones, especially for people who are in precarious or very precarious situations, in their professional status and/or in their personal life.

This report is mainly based on key interviews (see list at the end of the report). We would like also to thank our colleagues at IRES who have greatly helped us during this study.

2.2 Self-training and E-learning: the network of the APP

Description

The personalised education centres’ network (réseau des ‘ateliers de pédagogie personnalisée’, APP) were created in 1983. They provide training courses which are organised according to several principles. The most important of these principles is that each training course is specifically designed in order to fit the expectations and competences of the people participating. The keyword in this network is ‘self-learning’. Training courses make use of a variety of resources and ITCs are a very important tool, even if not the only one. Within these courses, e-learning has been developing over the years (see below).

The App’s network provides training courses in the following areas:

- General courses: French, mathematics, basic skills...

- basic technological culture: initiation to Internet, ITCs ...

The following table shows how the structure of these training courses has changed since the beginning of the 90’s. Over the years, training courses in ITCs have become the most important area.
These training courses make extensive use of ITCs and e-learning even if other pedagogical resources are used.

**Target groups**

There are no target groups for which training courses provided by the APP are designed. However, there is a clear overrepresentation of unemployed people. These unemployed people represented 54% of the clientele of the APP in 1991 and 65% in 2002.

**Table 2 – Status of people when they enter training courses**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage earners</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The educational level of the people who attend the courses organised by the APP is rather low (table 3). In 2002, 63% of these people had the lowest educational levels (6 and 5). However, this proportion decreases over time and people who attend the courses are more and more educated. With the development of the Internet introductory course, more and more people from level 4 come into the APP’s units in order to get training in computer skills.

**Table 3 - Educational level of people who attend the courses**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De 6 à 5</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 et +</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the beginning of the 1990s, a majority of trainees were young people (below 26). This has been changing very rapidly over time and in recent years, 3 out of 4 people who attend the courses are above 26 (table 4). Women are very much represented among the clients of the APP. They make up 70% of all people attending the courses and this proportion has increased in recent years.

**Table 4 – Sex of people who attend the courses**

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 26</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 and over</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Costs and funding**

Funding of APP’s activities comes from a variety of sources: the State, local authorities, enterprises and Egalitarian institutions in charge of vocational training. Since the mid 90s, the contribution of the has been diminishing: it decreased in real terms in the 90s. At the same time, funds coming from regional local authorities have increased (table 5). However, it should be noted that there is a
great variety among regional local authorities. In some regions, the contribution coming from local authorities is much greater than the average whereas in some others, there is practically no contribution from this partner.

### Table 5 – Sources of financing (as a % of training hours)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Enterprises</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Project outcome and impact

Table 6 shows the situation of people who have attended the courses 3 to 6 months after the conclusion of the course.

### Table 6 – Situation of trainees 3 to 6 months after the course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>Training course</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NB:** Those figures are based on approximately 50% of people who have attended the courses.

If we compare these figures with those presented in table 2, we can see that 30% of the clients are no longer unemployed. These people are either following another course, in which case, the APP is a step in a training trajectory, or they are employed, even if it is a precarious employment (according to their teachers). However, one can note that these results are obtained with a rather small period of training (less than 100 hours on average).

Some surveys carried out amongst the applicants show that:

- 60% of them think that they have reached their objective;
- 29% think that this objective has been achieved partly;
- 11% think that they did not reach their objective.

Some people have passed examinations: 69% of them succeeded. That is a very encouraging result.

As regards the management and evaluation of the programme, each APP has to present an annual report to the various institutions that fund the projects (see above).

### 2.3 The bus ‘Cyberanjou’ (Cyber@njou)

#### Description

Formaction 49, an APP located in a rural area, has developed an innovative service, in addition to the ‘classical’ APP units previously described.

A touring bus, named ‘Cyberanjou’ travels from one village to another, around all rural areas of a whole ‘département’ (French administrative territorial division).

The objective is to get closer to the people who cannot easily travel to a centre, and who have no services available in the place where they live. For these people, the bus Cyberanjou simply replaces the ‘traditional’ services of an APP. But the bus can also attract some people who may be
reluctant to go to an APP unit and who would be unlikely to travel to acquire information and
benefit from the services of a ‘classical’ APP. Therefore, according to Formaction 49, the
Cyberanjou bus can help some people enrol on a training course that they would not have taken
otherwise.

One of the weaknesses of the APP system is, for example, that some of the people who are offered
an Internet introductory course don’t even have Internet access at home. That is the reason why
the ‘Cyberbus’ is first considered as an Internet access point.

The bus is equipped with 10 computers with webcam and headphones, 1 portable and a screen. It
ero also gives access to teleconferencing facilities, Numeris (France Telecom’s digital communications
system), ADSL and satellite connections.

Three teachers are in charge of the training courses. They also drive the bus. Another person
coordinates and organizes all the bus journeys in the area.

The services offered in the Cyberanjou are:

• Internet access (to consult websites, to use search engines, to create websites),
• an Internet introductory course (with the possibility to get the NSI certificate),
• the creation of one’s own mailbox and e-mail address (access to the mails),
• courses concerning some basic software and some CD ROMs,
• individualised support for people who are looking for a job (including advice about producing
  a cv, writing a letter of application, job interviews etc.),
• possible assessment in different fields (French, mathematics, English, biology, accountancy,
  psycho technical tests).

The Cyberanjou bus was launched on the 1st April 2005.

Target groups

The bus Cyberanjou targets all the people who may be targeted by an APP. However, according to
Formaction 49, 95% of the people concerned here are unemployed.

Costs and funding

This project has been developed by Formaction 49, an APP located in a very rural area in France.
The financing is assured by the European social funds (FSE, 47%), the State (5%), local authorities
(26%), and a variety of other partners.

Because this experiment is very recent, we were not able to obtain detailed quantitative
information concerning funding or controlling, but only some qualitative assessments of the project.

As in all the other APP units, there will be in the future some follow up of the outcomes of the
project according to several indicators (did people find a job? what kind of job? etc.) and
satisfaction surveys.
SWOT Analysis

**Strengths**
- According to Formaction 49, the local representatives are well aware of the fact that ITCs can be very useful, especially in rural areas. Local representatives are therefore very interested in this innovative project and that is the reason why they give this project some financial support.
- The main strength of the project is the fact that the bus can reach people who are isolated and who wouldn’t go by themselves to an APP.
- For the moment, all the services proposed in the ‘classical’ APP are not available in the bus. The most important service offered seems to be the access to the Internet: one of the strengths of the bus is to be complementary to APP’s services, and especially to Internet introductory courses.

**Opportunities**
- The financing of some APP fixed local units is more and more in question. If some of them were to be closed for financial reasons, the bus might be used as a kind of ‘mobile APP unit’.

**Weaknesses**
- The manager of Formaction 49 insists on the fact that ITCs are a very useful tool. However it is also very important that people involved in APP courses also maintain and improve their basic skills (writing abilities for instance). There is a risk that these may be neglected.

**2.4 e-learning for disabled people: to qualify ‘outside the walls’**

**Description**
Disabled people currently represent 7% of unemployed people in France (230,000 persons). However, only 10,000 of them have benefited from vocational retraining. Despite the efforts of the vocational training centres (the association for adult vocational training - AFPA - has doubled its disabled trainees within the last two years), the proportion of disabled people that acquire some qualification is still far below the proportion of equivalent able-bodied people. This arises from the lack of specific support services in the standard training centres. Consequently, many standard training centres are only accessible to slightly disabled people, whereas other more severely disabled people are oriented to special centres, named professional rehabilitation centres (‘centre de rééducation professionnelle’, CRP). The professional rehabilitation centres are specifically dedicated to disabled persons’ training. Those centres offer special training courses that are much longer than traditional training courses, with medical and social support provided by doctors, psychiatrists or nurses, and social workers. But the CRP training supply for disabled people is limited: these centres enable only 5,000 to 6,000 persons to switch to a new type of employment each year.

Furthermore, for historical reasons, this training supply is spread all over the national territory, outside of the towns. As a result, disabled people sometimes have to stay away from their home for a very long time. This distance may be a real barrier for people who are ‘newly handicapped’ or for people suffering occupational diseases. Because it would be necessary to break off with their family, their friends and their habits, some disabled people simply give up any training project.
Some ‘proximity solutions’ have to be found for people who are heavily handicapped or in very precarious situations, very dependent on their care network or their family. The training system offered to disabled people must therefore be improved, in order to provide a service that is better suited to their specific difficulties.

Thanks to ICT, some original solutions have been found that mix the efforts of both standard and specialised training networks. The programme ‘to qualify outside the walls’ (‘Se qualifier hors les murs’, SQHM), created in 2001, is one of them.

The project is based on the idea that the current legal framework concerning vocational training generates discrimination. The traditional training system based on full-time courses, exclude all those who cannot attend such courses for a whole day for of health reasons, familial constraints or because they need constant physical therapy. Thanks to ICT and the creation of a joint network between specialised and traditional training centres, the program ‘to qualify outside the walls’ aims at providing an additional source of training for the disabled. This program offers proximity solutions that are more flexible and better adapted to each person. When the program was launched, it was expected to provide 200 disabled persons with training courses.

The training courses offered by this programme are individualised, and are based on the following principle: no more than 50% of the training course should take place in the training centre. This proportion depends first on the mobility of disabled people and on their health constraints. The other part of the training course consists of e-learning and also includes some periods in one or several firms. These periods of on-the-job training can also be accomplished at home, by teleworking, if needed.

The network of all professional rehabilitation centres and their e-learning resources (an equipped platform where people can train by themselves with the assistance of teachers) enables disabled people to access a large choice of training courses, even if they have mobility problems. People can also follow courses in other types of local associations which are not CRP. The aim of these organisations is to contribute to the social and vocational reintegration of disabled people by providing computing resources and information; in these organisations, disabled people can also share their experiences with other people.

For example, a disabled woman living in Brest (in the West part of France), with four children, would like to follow a training course to become a tourist agent. All courses offered by the standard training centres in the surrounding area are full-time courses and she cannot attend such courses. Neither is there any CRP in the neighbourhood which offers this specific training course. With the help of ADAPT (‘Ligue pour l’Adaptation du Diminué Physique au Travail’) this woman was able to follow a course by using e-learning. A CRP managed by the ADAPT in Paris could provide the necessary training course. At the same time, this woman received support and medical help from a centre called ‘Mediasources’ in Brest. Finally, she has on her own initiative found a firm that has agreed to give her on-the-job training for half of the total training time required by the course.

Some experiments between trainings centres (CRP) are being developed. For example, Hélène lives near Paris and would like to qualify as a medical secretary. But the professional rehabilitation centre that serves Helen in Paris does not offer the required training. Furthermore, this person cannot travel far from her home, for several reasons. A CRP located in Evian (very far from Paris!) does however provide the training course. Thanks to e-learning, this distant centre can offer Hélène the medical part of the training course that she cannot directly find in Paris. This person, for this part of the training, as well as for all the other parts which are proposed in Paris, can therefore remain in the CRP near the place she lives.

**Costs and funding**

Different partners support the project: the network of the professional rehabilitation centres (CRP); several groups working for the integration of handicapped people (GIPH, ‘Groupement pour l’insertion des personnes handicapées physiques’); private firms (ADIA, Suez, Air France, EDF...); and, finally, some organisations that have an expertise in training systems (particularly ICT) such as Algora. L’ADAPT (‘Ligue pour l’Adaptation du Diminué Physique au Travail’), a national association working for the social and professional reintegration of disabled people, is the main partner of the project.

The training centres provide the training courses and all teaching tools which are needed. Twelve CRPs take part in the project. The 12 CRPs have committed themselves to carry out 200 individual
“outside the walls” training courses. L’ADAPT manages ten of the medical rehabilitation centres (it also manages nine special centres for people suffering from a cranial trauma, and 17 other training centres for disabled people).

The groups for the integration of handicapped people (GIHP) are local operators which contribute to information and social measures for disabled persons. They assure the provision of a “proximity service” when it is lacking.

ADIA and Suez are also partners of the project and manage the links with firms. At least 30% of the training course must be carried out on placement in a firm.

Lastly, the Algora association puts its e-learning engineering at the disposal of all partners. For example Algora is in charge of providing training to the teachers, who are themselves trained within an e-learning system. But it can also be in charge of a range of different forms of coaching for all the project participants.

The central actors are the CRP. These centres welcome the trainees, create and manage the training courses, and liaise with the other partners.

**Project outcome and impact**

The project ‘To qualify outside the walls’, which organises the first training courses leading to a qualification for disabled people began in 2002. Since then, 216 qualifying training courses have been carried out. Most of the persons who attended these courses (60%) are women and 12% are people who are heavily handicapped.

The reasons for choosing this training system were: 43% for medical reasons, 24% because of familial constraints, and 16% because this project mixes traditional training courses and on-the-job training.

According to L’ADAPT, these figures do reflect the original aim of the project: to promote access to qualifying training for disabled people who have difficulty in accessing standard training courses, by adapting the courses to each person’s capacities.

**Controlling**

A special committee has been created to follow up the 200 training courses. This committee includes representatives of the participants in the network and two representatives of the people who have taken part in the project to follow the training courses. This committee gives its own assessment at each major step of the development of the programme.

An orientation committee has also been set up, in which two specialised Directorates of the Ministry of Employment (the Directorate for social affaires, DGAS, and the Directorate for Employment and Vocational Training, DGEFP) are represented. This committee is an external authority that approves the main strategic decisions of the project. It tries to solve the administrative and institutional problems that may arise within the implementation of the ‘outside the walls training courses’. This committee also works for the official recognition of the skills acquired during these courses. The orientation committee is also the authority that can decide to perpetuate the project.
### SWOT Analysis

#### Strengths
- Network and proximity are the two key words that sum up the advantages of this innovative project: the existence and the mobilisation of the local network is a major advantage of this program.
- The program should generate some changes in the organisation of the professional rehabilitation centres (CRP), by promoting a network organisation and favouring some pooling of resources between the training teams.

#### Opportunities
- The program ‘To qualify outside the walls’ aims, in the long run, at changing the training system for disabled people, so that all of them can access a training course leading to a qualification so that physical, geographical and personal constraints no longer engender supplementary discrimination towards people with disabilities.
- According to L’ADAPT, the project is successful and has reached a sort of ‘no return’ point: the educational changes that occurred in the CRP which took part in the project are bound to last; they can be rolled out across the entire CRP network. More generally, they can contribute to a larger renewal of the vocational training supply for disabled people. That is why L’ADPAT has decided to continue the project.

#### Weaknesses
- E-learning seems to be well adapted to the groups addressed by this program. However, some qualitative assessments made by the people who are the target of these courses show that social support of the persons is very important as well.
- That is why some groups for the integration of handicapped people (GIHP) have been associated with the program, acting as partners of the project from its very beginning. But despite the will of a number of CRP and of some groups for the integration of handicapped people (GIHP) to promote the role of some ‘proximity support centres’, these are still the weakest link in the chain. For some reasons that are still difficult to clarify, these centres that should provide social support to disabled people are not always well integrated into the training project.
2.5 The certificate ‘surfing the Internet’ (NSI)

Description

The programme ‘surfing the Internet’ (NSI, ‘Naviguer sur Internet’) has been set up by the Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Cohesion, on the occasion of the Interministerial Council of Information Society (‘Conseil interministériel de la société de l’information’ - CISI) that took place on July 2000. The CISI has confirmed, in 2003, the NSI programme.

It consists of a short introductory course to Internet skills (about 14 hours) for unemployed people. The aim is not to develop the skills of the persons, but their ability to use this new tool; at the end of this introduction, each person should be able to surf, communicate and search on the Internet.

The introductory course is created and run by training centres or other structures, on the basis of a list of specifications set up by the Ministry that is in charge of this program.

After a test concerning people’s abilities to surf the Internet, the certificate 'NSI' is awarded by the Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Cohesion. The certificate is defined at the national level and is signed by the manager of the training centre that organises the course. An agreement between the Ministry of Employment and the Ministry of Education introduces some links between the NSI certificate and the B2i ('Brevet informatique et Internet') which is a certificate delivered by the Ministry of Education. People who have succeeded in getting the NSI certificate get part of the B2i. However, the NSI certificate is not considered as a qualification like those that are recognised, for example, in the collective labour agreements.

The introductory course can be longer (28 hours) for people with special integration difficulties.

Target groups

Since 2001, this introductory course has been offered systematically to unemployed people who follow a training course in the following organisations: adults' training association (AFPA, ‘Association nationale pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes’), the personalised education centres' network (réseau des 'ateliers de pédagogie personnalisée', APP), and some local agencies dealing with employment. These organisations may also offer the NSI to other people; in this case, it is financed by other official bodies (local authorities, etc.).

The National Agency for Employment (ANPE, ‘Agence Nationale pour l’Emploi’) also offers this introductory course to unemployed people if they do not follow it in the above organisations.

Employers can also propose this introductory course to their employees. In that case, the employers finance the training cost.

An assessment of the program was made in 2004. It showed that 57% of people who get the NSI certificate are women. 64% of the certificates delivered in 2004 were awarded to people aged between 26-49 years and 13% to people over 50 years. In 2004, the education level of most of the people (63%) who got the NSI certificates was below upper secondary school.

Costs and funding

The Ministry of Employment asked the adults’ training association (AFPA), the personal education centres’ network (APP) and the National Agency for Employment (ANPE) to propose the NSI certificate. But no additional funds have been given for that. Therefore, the financing of the NSI certificate is not supported by the State but by the organisations that are in charge of the program.

All the centres in charge of this Internet introductory course must comply with the conditions set up by the Ministry of Employment concerning the goal of the training, its technical and educational conditions, and the conditions for issuing the certificate. An official text was published in June 2005 in order to specify these conditions.
In 2004, four out of ten introductory courses were financed by the State through the AFPA subsidised programme. A quarter of them were financed by the National Agency for Employment (ANPE), 8% by local authorities, 8% by the State through a special employment integration course (‘stage d’insertion et de formation à l’emploi’, SIFE), and 6% by the personal education centres’ network (APP). Employers financed the training of 2,000 people in 2004.

Project outcome and impact

Five years after the beginning of the program, the results are not as good as originally expected and the initial objective of one million people concerned has not been reached. However, more than 400,000 certificates have been delivered since the creation of the NSI certificate.

In 2004, 106,000 people were awarded the certificate. The AFPA delivered about 52,000 of them, the APP 20,000, and private organisations more than 21,000.

In 2004, the length of the introductory courses was, on average, 15 hours per person.

According to a circular published by the Ministry of Employment in April 2005, the objectives for 2005 were the following: 40,000 NSI certificates issued by AFPA, 50,000 by the APP, 40,000 by the National Agency for Employment (ANPE), 50,000 by local agencies.

The Ministry of Employment has just started an online study obtain more information about the people concerned by the NSI certificate in the latest year: the NSI website (linked to the website of the Ministry of Employment www.travail.gouv.fr/nsi), which was created for users and professionals is being used for this online study. More than 2,000 answers are expected. The results of this study should be available by the end of the year and should deliver both quantitative and qualitative information about the program. These results should provide better information about the uses of technologies and provide assessments of the program, in order to improve the NSI certificate for the coming years.

Management

The circular (April 2005) states that the project has to be regularly followed up by the local services of the Ministry of Employment, in particular in quantitative terms.

Furthermore, the list of all local organisations authorised to deliver the NSI introductory courses must be set up and managed, at the local level, by each local service of the Ministry of Employment. The aim is to enhance the complementarities of all actions carried out within a single given territory.

Lastly, the AFPA, which has been designated as the leading organisation to support the program, is in charge of making all technological tools available to training centres. For example the AFPA manages the NSI website of the Ministry of Employment (www.travail.gouv.fr/nsi); the edition of the NSI certificate through a specific dedicated server (Netcertif); statistical follow up of the program; educational and other services. The Netcertif server makes it possible to recognise the centre in charge of the introductory course, and to deliver the NSI certificates. This server also provides statistical information. Each month, the AFPA send all data to the statistical office of the Ministry of Employment (DARES). This statistical office publishes each month a set of tables concerning the categories who have followed the program and some information on the financing and the type of providers. This information is available at the local and national level.

The same procedure applies to all training centres that deliver the NSI certificate even if it is not funded by the Ministry of Employment. Finally, a copy of the agreement set up between the financing structure and the training centre must also be transmitted to the local Service of AFPA.
3. GERMANY

3.1 Introduction: lifelong learning and further education in Germany

Estimating the situation concerning the entire range of lifelong learning in Germany is a very complex task. Indeed, the 'Bund - Länder Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion' has recently (2004) presented a comprehensive policy paper, depicting the relevant current and planned strategies supporting lifelong learning in Germany. This paper extensively analyses and describes the changes and efforts which need to be made within the different educational fields (schooling, professional training, university, further education) in order to let lifelong learning become a matter of course in each learning biography. But the current state of affairs concerning lifelong learning activities cannot be gathered from this report. Furthermore there are no other reliable sources available which could describe the status of lifelong learning in Germany.

The field of professional and general further education, however, has been researched and documented soundly in Germany. Since 1979 the Federal Ministry of Education and Research has published comprehensive reports on the further education triennially. Some of the most relevant findings from the recent report, published in 2005, are presented below. Doing so may at least serve to depict the situation of one of the most important field of lifelong learning: further education.

Table 3.1: Participation in further education in Germany (in% of population aged 19-65 years)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Further education, in total</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
<td>among: professional training</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>general, non prof. education</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>among: computing, Internet</td>
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<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>languages</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>health related issues</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<td>5%</td>
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<td>financial issues</td>
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<td>practical knowledge</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>art, literature, religion</td>
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<td>science and techniques</td>
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<td>political issues</td>
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Source: German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2005): Berichtssystem Weiterbildung IX

As table 3.1 shows, participation in further education has, viewed in the long run, strongly increased in Germany. Within the past 20 years it has almost doubled (1979: 23%; 2003: 41%; share of those who have participated in at least one further education measure in the relevant year, referring to population aged 15 - 64 years).

However, further education activities in Germany have regressed during the past five years. In 1997 the further education rate hit its peak at 48%. The recent decline of further education activities took place both in professional and in general, not job-related, further education. At present, attendance rates similar to those that were seen ten years ago are being re-achieved in both further education sectors.

Examining the topics that feature in Germany’s general further education activities it becomes clear that ICT-related issues play a relatively important role. This subject was not included until the survey of 2000, but since then has maintained the highest values (7%, 5%), followed by participation
in language courses (2000, 2003 each with 5%). However, we must not lose sight of the fact that with percentages of 7% and 5% - even if they are the highest - the demand for ICT skills offers is still not that dominant within the general frame of further education. The amount of professional further education activities applying to the ICT sector is not accounted for. However it is likely that it is of specially high importance in this sector.

When it comes to the perpetuation or reduction of social disparities - i.e. the digital divide question - it is in the first instance of importance who partakes in the further education that is being offered in Germany.

Table 3.2: Participation in (both general and professional) further education by age, educational level, nationality in Germany (in% of population aged 19-65 years)

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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19 – 34 years</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 49 years</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 64 years</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Schooling level</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>middle</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<td><strong>Professional education level</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>no vocational training</td>
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<tr>
<td>vocational training (apprenticeship)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<td>master craftsman and similar</td>
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<td>university degree</td>
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<td>immigrant</td>
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Table 3.2 is unequivocal: it is young people, those with higher general and vocational education who are by far the most frequent participants in further educational courses. In 2003 almost half (46%) of the youngest age group took at least one further educational course, compared with barely a third of the oldest age group.

The difference according to the educational level turns out to be even more serious: 59% of those who have higher, secondary education (university-entrance diploma), but only 28% of those with minor education (no graduation or secondary school leaving certificate / CSE) applied for further education during this year.

This difference is paralleled by the difference in participation in further education according to professional education (no vocational training: 18%; university degree: 51%).

The influence of nationality on further educational activities completes this picture: 27% of Germans active in further education compared with only 13% of immigrants (2003).

Considering the whole process, an 'elevator effect' becomes visible. The above-mentioned differences between contrasting social groups have been observed for decades in other fields of education. Here, we can see them replicated at a higher level of activity. Those who are already socially or professionally privileged are able to consolidate their advantages still further through their participation in further education, and are able to use these measures in order to continuously enhance their skills and knowledge and to comply with new occupational requirements.
3.2 Broadening citizens’ general ICT access and competences: The ‘citizens-go-online’ qualification offensive of the city of Esslingen

Background and funding

The project ‘citizens-go-online’ (‘buerger-gehen-online’ - bgo) is part of the comprehensive eGovernment pilot project ‘MEDIA@komm Esslingen’ that was funded by Germany with roughly €8 million from 2000 to 2002. In addition, more than 20 organisations were integrated into the project via public private partnerships and contributed roughly another €7 million. The following research institutes, associations and organisations participated in the overall project MEDIA@komm Esslingen under the guidance of the city of Esslingen.

Institutes

- Fraunhofer IAO (Institut für Arbeitswirtschaft und Organisation - Institute for labour economics and organisation)
- Research centre for information technologies Ltd. IPSI (Institut für Integrierte Publikations- und Informationssysteme - Institute for integrated publications and information systems)
- Research centre for information technologies
- Steinbeis- transfer centre MediaKomm Esslingen
- Research centre for information technologies Ltd. IBE (Innovationsberatung und Entwicklung - Innovation consulting and development)
- Institute for applied research (IAF - Institut für Angewandte Forschung) of the engineering academy Esslingen

Associations

- Stadtjugendring (City Youth Ring) Esslingen
- Wirtschaftsförderung Region Stuttgart GmbH (Economic promotion of the region Stuttgart Ltd.)
- Union MediaKomm Esslingen, registered association

Organisations from the Service Sector

- Alcatel SEL plc.
- Esslinger Stadtmarketing GmbH (City Marketing Esslingen Ltd.)
- Gemplus Ltd.
- Ginit
- IBM Germany
- Sercon Ltd.
- VHS Esslingen (Adult Education Centre Esslingen), as well as
- about 17 smaller organisations from the region.

From the beginning of the project, the promotion of media competencies and access to media for the broad levels of the population were important aspects of this entire eGovernment pilot project. In order to reduce the digital divide and the exclusion of deprived groups, especially migrants, the qualification offensive ‘citizens-go-online’ was created as a (partial) project.
The staff of this 'qualification offensive' comprised a regular project manager and other regular coordinators who were employed by institutions based in diverse locations (as for example, schools, the city library, youth clubs, institutions for senior citizens, mothers' centre, health insurance customer offices, educational centres, foreigners' office). They adopted project work in line with their services. Another roughly 70 volunteer mentors worked for the project. As consultants and supporters, they took care of persons interested in and using the citizen-PC at the 20 locations.

Offers and target groups

The concept of the Esslingen project 'citizens-go-online' that promotes digital integration rests on four important pillars:

- Provision of citizen-PCs especially appropriate for broad utilisation including Internet access at strategically selected public locations,
- Support and qualification by volunteer mentors, as well as
die Betreuung und Qualifizierung durch ehrenamtliche Mentoren sowie
- Supply of courses (linking of language and computer courses).

Citizen-PC

Citizen-PCs are distributed over the entire city area at 20 locations. The citizen-PC is a publicly accessible computer including Internet access and signature-card readers. Users have the possibility to access communal information and use online-services of the virtual town hall via the Internet from all locations. In addition, other legally binding transactions can be conducted by using the electronic signature.

All Citizen-PCs are equally equipped with standard software (word processing, spreadsheet, presentations, etc.) so they can be run like a classic home or office PC. In order to guarantee smooth operation for a continuously changing number of users, the devices are equipped with extra components and particularly configured. Even inexperienced citizens can therefore try out the device 'without danger' since the system is available in its original state after every reboot.

The Esslingen Citizen-PC offers important advantages compared with traditional public Internet access points. The crucial advantage lies in guaranteeing data security and anonymity for its users. Upon login, the user enters a system in its original state - without meeting data traces from the previous user - and after a proper logout, he leaves the system again in original state - without leaving his own data traces. Every user receives a personal ZIP-cartridge that remains his property. Besides personal desktop configurations (browser configuration, bookmarks, etc.), personal data are saved on this data carrier. Owing to these mobile data carrier, the user has access to his configurations on all Citizen-PCs and can therefore archive and edit his own documents.

In addition, all Citizen-PCs are suitable for professional users who own a personal computer with Internet access. There they can train in the important usage of signature cards for eGovernment and, if necessary or desired, be assisted by mentors (see below).

Mentors

In order to facilitate the usage of the Citizen-PC, a mentors' network of roughly 70 trained volunteer mentors was created; they are employed at the Citizen-PCs’ locations. At the beginning of the project, they were mainly parents from the participating pilot schools as well as seniors. Due to comprehensive advertising efforts, a wide range of people could be involved during the course of the project. In the meantime, mentors from a wide variety of profession and age groups, even the first foreign female mentors, were recruited.

An important motive for applying as a mentor is, first of all, to personally receive a comprehensive ICT-qualification. The 'qualification offensive' includes a comprehensive training concept for
volunteer mentors. Moreover, they are introduced to a social network of diverse activities, responsibilities and possibilities for communication.

During opening hours, mentors work at the locations. They support users, if needed. Further, they are included into the organisation of courses being run by the co-ordinators working at the locations and assume additional tasks, if needed, as for example in the field of local advertising for locations or preparation and implementation of individual events. Mentors are not necessarily ‘computer specialists’ but people who want to share their personal experiences with others and who are open for personal learning processes. Based on this approach, the following are included in a mentor’s tasks:

- Instructing and supporting users when being introduced to the usage of PCs
- Stimulating personal questions and the development of learning targets
- Motivating users to engage in self-contained and self-determined learning
- Counselling and supporting users in independent worksteps
- Promoting mutual support of users
- Motivating and acquiring future mentors
- Readiness for regular mentor activity (objective: minimum once per month for three hours)
- Take responsibility for opening and closing of rooms (on a voluntary basis)

Combined Language and Computer Courses

The foreigners’ office in co-operation with the city’s educational institution created special qualification offers for citizens with a migrant’s background that combines language training with computer courses. Courses are being conducted by bilingual tutors, with German as the basic course language and additional explanations in the mother tongue, if needed. The following qualification-related courses exist:

- Beginners’ courses with fixed curriculum (‘start and click’), mainly for Turkish citizens. A course comprises of 16 units each 45 minutes, on four appointments.
- Courses for Russian resettlers to receive the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) with a fixed curriculum (syllabus.3.0)
- Follow-up courses with mutually determined topics
- An open group with participants from very different language areas.

Conceptual approach

Problem

Besides the opportunities opened up by an extension of ICT, especially in the field of eGovernment, the main risk seen in this development is the fact that certain population groups are excluded from this possibility of social participation. In reference to a research from Booz, Allen & Hamilton (Digitale Spaltung in Deutschland Ausgangssituation, internationaler Vergleich, Handlungsempfehlungen, 2000 - 'Digital Divide in Germany: Initial Situation, International Comparison, Recommended Actions’), the following negative outcomes of the increasing digital divide are observed:

- Fewer job chances even in the fields of low-qualified employment
- Restricted possibility for utilisation of private services
- Endangering equal opportunities in education
- Reducing of participation in public life
**Approach to Solution**

In order to counter the problem of the digital divide, *media access* and *media competency* of the broad population should be promoted. Media competency is defined as the ability to handle the new possibilities of information processing fluently. It includes communicative and acting competency as well as, in particular, the competency to critically check media.

A hands-on learning-orientated approach was chosen for implementing these pedagogic media targets; this method of *practical every-day-life applications* is oriented at the 'learning persons' and not primarily at the content of media. As a result, the recipients are taken from their role as consumers and regarded as subjects who are able to systematically use media. With regard to this, the project explicitly adopted the idea of *life-long learning* and created a setting to support *self-directed learning processes*.

The participating persons are therefore supported by voluntarily engaged citizens according to the *mentoring approach*. Unlike course systems, the visitors here decide upon both content and time budget themselves; they also guide the learning tempo and the degree of intensification when dealing with new issues. The combination of Citizen-PC and mentor support makes an 'open-door' approach possible. It reaches citizens who are usually not attracted by educational initiatives such as courses and training, or who are restrained by the necessity of a binding registration, by fixed hours and duration of participation, or by the present form of knowledge transfer.

Regarding *public relations work* to win the announced target groups, a mix of activities was employed, comprising the following actions:

- Continuous reporting in the *local press*
- Comprehensive information about the project’s *Internet platform*
- Preparation and distribution of site-related *'visiting-cards'* to the population
- Flyers to win mentors at the project’s beginning
- Development of a self-contained *corporate identity* by professional *logo*.
- Preparation and distribution of *posters and flyers* including the opening hours and further information
- Preparation of an *information paper* to inform the expert audience
- Project introduction by *radio and TV*
- Project introduction at several *events*

However, word-of-mouth advertising was most important for the project. Usually only the direct contact to other visitors, mentors or multipliers or attendance at another event at the same location led to usage.

**Project outcome and impact**

From August, 2001 to September, 2003 roughly 8,900 visitors were registered. The number of visitors increased continuously from roughly 50 persons at the beginning to lately 600 - 800 users per month.

According to a user survey at the locations of Citizen-PCs, most of the users of Citizen-PC had no (48%) or little experience (31%) in using the Internet. The support by mentors, however, was also

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1 Mentoring is a special support concept for the individual development of personnel, based on a personal relationship between a professionally experienced and a less experienced person. Mentoring programmes are not only employed for developing personnel of large organisations but also as inexpensive training means for persons in a situation of change or crisis. The European Commission also supports mentoring programmes, especially with regard to developing and promoting women’s networks.
requested by persons who own a PC home but had problems operating it. As a result, the digital divide cannot be seen one-dimensionally as divide between those who own PCs and those who do not. Media competency - understood as an ability to use the PC systematically and in many ways for one’s own purposes - has to be included as another important dimension.

As intended, the project mainly addressed persons affected by the digital divide. The majority of visitors were older persons (aged 56-65 years: 38%; aged 66-75 years: 19%; aged 75 and more: 8%). The percentage of women amounted to 54%. The locations that especially targeted migrants (as for example, certain schools and youth centres) showed an equivalent high percentage of foreigners.

Altogether, the open, supportive and educational approach of self-organised learning had a positive resonance. Yet it has to be stated that this open approach cannot single-handedly solve the access barriers and fears of the unknown for target groups. Especially at recently created locations without the occasional customer from other courses at the same place, long start-up periods and a creative public relations work are necessary to motivate the target groups to make use of the courses and facilities on offer.

The individual support by mentors is much appreciated by visitors when their questions and problems are dealt with directly and in a comprehensible manner. Especially older visitors are thankful for not being rushed and able to proceed at their own pace.

The decentralised distribution of locations throughout the entire urban area proved efficient. Locations outside the city centre, in particular attracted a high percentage of users from the surrounding district. The creation of unsupported locations with long opening hours also proved successful. This infrastructure was increasingly utilised by the citizens.

Each location had its particularities and was affected by the special conditions of the agency, the institution, the district and the possibly much addressed target groups; the course and basic conditions therefore needed to be individually tailored to local circumstances. The special potential of the project’s decentralised structure, however, lies within its diversity; yet it also illustrates the demand for co-ordination on the spot. The co-ordinators play an important role as ‘local motivators and driving forces’. An important backing for this task is continuous support by the project’s management that also prevents a ‘drifting-apart’ of the network.

The Citizen-PC developed in the project’s scope has fulfilled all expectations anticipated when it was conceived. The devices operate failure-free at all locations. Almost no administrative efforts have to be set in place. Furthermore, the procedure for updating the software proved practical. Since all devices are uniformly configured and no data is saved locally, a procedure that exchanges devices on site can be used; they are immediately available again. If needed, replacement devices can thus quickly be implemented in case a breakdown occurs due to hardware failure.

Mentors from a very varied range of backgrounds and ages were recruited for the project. Unlike in other ‘socially’ oriented volunteer projects for citizens, several men of younger and middle age applied to be as mentors. Obviously, the ‘technical’ part of this job attracts persons from this group to engage here. The comprehensive qualification courses comprising primarily methodical and didactic issues, then regular and more specialised follow-up training, made sense and were useful.

Lessons learned

The project 'citizens-go-online' successfully contributed to promote media competency in the selected model commune. The basis of its success is the citizens’ commitment of roughly 70 volunteer mentors who originate from a variety of professional and age groups and participated with much enthusiasm in this project. Their involvement made a high contribution to the community and helped to prevent the 'digital divide'. The project is being carried on by the commune under self-direction.

A most important result of this pilot project is the finding that 'open-door’ access has to be created in order to address the target groups who are most affected by the digital divide. The combination
of an easy access to a simple PC that can be handled ‘without danger’ and offers Internet access with the support by 'trained laymen' (mentors), if needed and desired, who can also offer courses with fixed curriculum proved very successful. The volunteer mentoring concept in particular is a very promising approach to promoting a broad acceptance of and competence in the use of media.

The transferability of the project to other communes is possible at any time; as for smaller communes, an association of several communes that form a mutual network to efficiently use resources and to reach the required size for project implementation seems sensible. The technical and personnel infrastructure – existing or having to be organised – has to be taken into consideration. Choice of appropriate locations also is of great importance and has to be analysed within the context of the commune’s basic conditions.

A decisive factor for success is to secure the continuous support of committed citizens. They perform unpaid work; their effort, however, is not completely free. They need appropriate support. They need secure and good conditions, diligent preparation by training, specialist instruction and support, working material, offices as well as financial resources. The persons responsible for the locations and the project’s management therefore have to allow a far-reaching participation in decision-making processes from the beginning; however, the limits of these possibilities for co-determination have to be kept transparent and explained, if need be.

### SWOT-Analysis

#### Strengths

- Citizen-PCs including mentor support are accepted and positively evaluated (high quantitative and qualitative value).
- Target group of persons with little PC and Internet experience (esp. women and elder persons) is addressed (high attainment of this group)
- Project organisation including regular project management, regular co-ordinators at the location’s institution and volunteer mentors proved good.
- High integration of the citizens’ commitment as the project’s basic pillar. Volunteers have much leeway to co-determine and to assume responsibilities.
- Good supply of qualifications and therefore high utility for mentors working as volunteers.
- Hardware and software of the Citizen-PC run faultlessly and allow a ‘fearless’ utilisation of PC and Internet.
- The especially generated bilingual courses combining language and PC training are accepted and implemented with success.

#### Weaknesses

- Despite great contents and publicity efforts, the particularly critical group of persons with a deficit in education and with migrant background could not be sufficiently addressed.
- Low usage of the project’s offerings during the initial phase.
- The follow-up project ‘MEDIA@komm-transfer’ with the aim of transferring the results from the overall eGovernment project ‘MEDIA@komm’ onto 20 other communes did not include the integration project ‘citizens-go-online’. No project transfer of experiences from this qualification and integration offensive has been carried out.

#### Opportunities

- The concept of an ‘open-door’ offer to increase acceptance and competencies of media for deprived citizens and migrants (Citizen-PC plus mentor support) shows much potential. Could pay an important contribution to decrease the digital divide.

#### Threats

- Integration efforts are no financial ‘fast-selling item’. Kick-off financing is not enough; they have to be financed continuously (hard- and software, managing and co-ordinating functions, acquisition and continuous qualification as well as support of mentors.
• Mentoring concept and PC offers are very appropriate for promoting citizens’ involvement, especially for persons who do not typically get involved in voluntary work (men of middle age).

• The positive experience of ‘citizens-go-online’ can be transferred to other communes without any problems.

• Possibilities for public-private-partnerships should be searched; these are the best, and maybe sole, possibilities to implement the project’s approach on a broad basis.

• High demands for flexibility and diversity: measure has to continuously be adapted to altering needs and has to intensively and individually create local and target group specific offers; this demands a great deal from the project’s professional management. As a result, the decrease of the digital divide by Citizen-PC and mentoring is cost-intensive.

3.3 Reducing the digital divide: Experiences from the Women’s Computer Centre Berlin

Background and funding

The Women’s Computer Centre Berlin (Frauen Computer Zentrum Berlin - FCZB) is the oldest IT centre for specifically re-training women in Germany. It started in 1984 with the first women-only IT re-training course called ‘No Fear of Computers’. This was directed towards women from office and administrative occupations who planned to return to employment after familial time-out from the job. In the meantime, more than 700 women participated in this training course that is still being offered; many more IT qualification projects from the field of IT training for women were added subsequently.

From the beginning, the FCZB was and still is far more than ‘merely’ an institution for further education targeting women. It claimed to make a contribution to create equal opportunities for men and women on the labour market by offering exclusive IT training for women and a growing number of activities (esp. gender mainstreaming). At the same time and besides its efforts on the labour market, the FCZB has tried to counteract the exclusion of certain target groups among women from the Information Society (digital divide). Up to the present, the access of women and girls to IT professions and employment fields faces high barriers, and often they do not have the required media competency to equally participate in the information society.

From the beginning, the FCZB’s work has focussed on basic training for unemployed women and women returning into their jobs; up to the present, this is still much in demand. Since 1997, the FCZB implements has offered specific courses for female migrants. At the same time, training in media competency is offered for a growing number of diverse target groups, as for example, female inmates of Berlin prisons, women who have experienced violence, female students etc. The qualification-linked courses of the FCZB are therefore directed to women with very diverse cultural and educational backgrounds.

In 2004, the FCZB again applied new methods for further education by launching the SelfLearnCentre-IT (SelbstLernZentrum-IT - SLZ). The SelfLearnCentre (SLC) offers a learning environment for variable and flexible use that enables female participants to freely choose the content and form of learning as well as to combine the personal type, rhythm and need of learning accordingly: self-organised learning on site, eLearning, training modules or practically oriented workshops. For various target groups, the pilot project offers inexpensive possibilities to precisely cover their need for training - especially for women who can no longer expect any financial support from the Federal Employment Agency since the reforms of labour market policy. The services offered include, among others, learning consultancy and support, standard IT-applications, attainment of the European Computer Driving License (ECDL), professional orientation, key...
competencies, and specific courses for the target groups of female migrants, girls, female teachers, students, seniors and employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

In order to achieve its political targets, the FCZB - besides its own training courses - increasingly provides didactic material for third parties, carries out studies and provides consultancy, as for example with regard to gender-'compatible' eLearning-criteria, organised conferences with the subject of women in managing positions, or designs gender training for female employees of institutions and partner organisations.

### The Most Significant Training Offers and Activities of the Women Computer Centre Berlin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAINING AND OTHER LEARNING SERVICES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge management - training in modules for unemployed and working women</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Intercultural information society - Qualification as IT-trainer for female migrants and multipliers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Media competencies for female migrants, girls and multipliers of pedagogical work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Training and working material for female teachers (LeaNet et al., in co-op. with SAN reg. ass.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• E-Learning modules and Internet training for girls (LizzyNet et al., in co-op. with SAN reg. ass.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• SelfLearningCentre-IT</td>
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<tr>
<td>• No fear of computers - for women from office and administrative occupations returning into employment</td>
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<td>• Office communication - part-time training for women from office and administration jobs</td>
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<tr>
<th>CO-OPERATIONS AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING ACTIVITIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Co-ordination of EQUAL-EP: ‘Gender Mainstreaming in the Information Society’</td>
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<tr>
<td>• e-Lis - Electronic Learning for prison inmates. Part of the project media competencies for female inmates in Berlin, implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy of EQUAL-EP</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Development of gender-'compatible' eLearning offers as well as training and consulting of partners within the educational net of Berlin in order to implement eLearning (learning region)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• DIAplus - development of gender-adequate career service modules in the field of IT (Leonardo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• GemCITE - implementation of gender mainstreaming in IT-related further education (Leonardo)</td>
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<tr>
<th>CONFERENCES, STUDIES, IT-PROJECTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• TOwardsPower - women in leading positions in economics. Conference and website directed by order of the Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and Youth, <a href="http://www.towards-power.de">www.towards-power.de</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>• European data bank - women in leading positions, <a href="http://www.db-decision.de">www.db-decision.de</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Internet communications' platform for EQUAL EP - Gender mainstreaming within the information society, <a href="http://www.gendermainstreaming-it.de">www.gendermainstreaming-it.de</a></td>
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During recent years, the FCZB has expanded considerably due to its extended field of work. Up to 1994/95 the personnel of the FCZB included eight employees; at present, 24 regular employees are working at the FCZB besides several volunteers. Each year about 1,200 to 1,500 female training participants come to the FCZB.

At present, the FCZB is financed by the following institutions or budgets, respectively:

- Senate Office for economics, labour and women, Berlin
- Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and Youth
- Federal Ministry of Education and Science
- Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung
- Federal Employment Agency, Social Security Agencies
- European Social Funds, European Regional Funds
• Initiative EQUAL, GI employment-NOW, Leonardo da Vinci
• Fifth social program of the society to promote equalisation of women and men, fourth medium-term action program on equal opportunities for women and men
• Organisations, institutions, NGOs, individual persons (training, consulting)

Some Important Conclusions from two Decades of IT Training for Women

As a result of its long-time activities, researches and examinations in the field of IT training for women, the FCZB has gathered much experience, seen diverse trends and even co-ordinated some. From its present viewpoint and regarding the present situation, the most important conclusions can be described as follows (The summary of findings of the FCZB are a result of the interview conducted by the ISG with the management of the FCZB in September 2005 in Berlin):

► IT-training is most effective when applied to work on concrete institutional tasks

The practice of the FCZB has revealed that implementation of ‘pure’ computer courses without concrete reference to the matter only served to learn certain IT-skills and software-programmes, as for example courses for Internet, word, excel or power-point, and altogether showed little lasting success - regardless of whether they achieving certain minute-stepped goals. As a rule, IT-related competencies can best be achieved when being learned in context of content and practice by working on concrete topics or tasks that are either of actual importance to the learning person herself or to a real institution/a real organisation. Because then, IT-knowledge has to be acquired in combination with other competencies. Within this context, the FCZB refers to an interface-approach where IT-related and technical fields of competencies meet and have to be worked on or learned in co-operation. This is illustrated in a recent example of the IT qualification course on ‘Knowledge Management’.

Example: IT-training ‘Knowledge Management’

| Background and objective: In many sectors of society awareness is growing that the success of business and organisations depends on their ability to learn and to understand the importance of knowledge as a resource. Knowledge management has become a keyword for the consulting sector and large enterprises but also national and international NGOs. Universities and education and training organisations are facing the challenge to mobilise and utilise knowledge of their staff members more effectively. These developments create opportunities and career prospects for women, since ‘knowledge management’ as a new job profile combines skills in communication and organisation with IT know-how. Responding to this situation the FCZB designed a project which is targeted in principle at unemployed women and those threatened by unemployment, predominantly at unemployed academics. |
| Training approach: The training programme combines recent knowledge management concepts, procedures and methods with their practical implementation in companies or organisations. In order to permit an intensive integration into concrete workplace requirements, the FCZB looks for and acquires in companies and organisations appropriate tasks, issues or problems to be treated or solved by the training participants. Due to its practical approach - elaboration of real existing issues in companies or organisations - the training provides the necessary expert knowledge (knowledge management techniques, business management and psychological aspects as well as the necessary IT know-how on structuring and systemising knowledge) in combination with key competencies (teamwork and communication). |
IT training has to be applied to the individual’s existing competencies

Another important principle of the FCZB says that the individual requirements of female participants in qualifications have to exactly be taken into consideration. The FCZB is convinced that every woman already brings along specific competencies which are relevant for the learning target, competencies on which the training can be based and which it can supplement. A one-size-fits-all course that all female participants have to complete in the same way and with the same intensity should be avoided. This also prevents wasting the time or boring those female participants who already know what is being taught. For these reasons, preference is given to a module-based curriculum.

In order to offer training that is as individually co-ordinated and modular as possible, the FCZB has discovered that extra personnel are required for consulting, individual co-ordination as well as attending to the actual learning experiences. Due to the positive experiences of the FCZB as regards this kind of learning settings, however, this extra effort is more than justified by the sizeable success of the approach.

eLearning is important but only part of ‘blended learning’

FCZB’s approach to training, rooted in an individual, self-organised, module-shaped, flexible learning, can only be solved by the intensive application of IT-based learning media. According to the FCZB, electronic learning, especially by applying interactive and web-based technologies, enormously improves the possibilities to learn.

As its name suggests, according to the FCZB, eLearning gives the opportunity to take into account the individual’s need for learning and the time constraints under which learners have to operate. The use of eLearning gives female participants more freedom and flexibility regarding the preference of learning time and media; mutual exchange processes of learning persons can take place beyond rigid time and local boundaries. Therefore, eLearning perfectly matches the present concept of education and economic policy of people who in future have to learn in a more self-organised way, and this for their whole life.

As a result of their experience and a research project carried out only to analyse this question, however, FCZB have concluded that often only combined forms of eLearning and presence learning (‘blended learning’) make sense. The attending, motivating and supporting function of the lecturer’s personal presence can not be replaced by elaborated eLearning courses. An important and consciously maintained tradition of FCZB learning, especially when applying electronic learning media, involves incorporating parts of the courses within a team framework and hence creates a good learning atmosphere for the team. According to the FCZB, learning in a team with a productive learning atmosphere represents one of the success factors as regards IT-qualification for women; without this, even good eLearning courses would not be successful.

The SelfLearnCentre (SLC) - the Most Recently Implemented IT-Training Concept

In mid 2004, the FCZB launched its latest project, the SelfLearnCentre (SLC), drawing on to decades of experience, both methodological and conceptual. This centre bundles together its most significant experiences and perceptions concerning optimised application of eLearning, self-directed learning, and ‘interface-concept’ as well as individual and module-based learning processes. The most significant elements are presented in the box below.

At present, the SLC is supported with comprehensive funds by the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Fund for Regional Development (Europäischen Fonds für regionale Entwicklung – EFRE) and the Senate of Berlin so it can be offered very cheaply.
Since July 2004 IT-subjects, key competencies and occupational orientation are offered at the SLC in combination with new teaching and learning methods. Various target groups, especially female migrants, women returning into employment and employees from SME can gain knowledge of learning contents via innovative learning methods. The self-organised learning and the competencies required for it determine the project’s approach. Besides workshops and training, individual learning processes are being considered and supported by consulting and attendance of learning, coaching and eLearning. Offers include, among others:

- IT-standard applications (office, Internet, photoshop ...)
- Occupational orientation, assessment, profiling, application techniques
- Key competencies (self-reflection and self-assertion, self-organised learning, time management, etc.)
- Target group-specific offers for female migrants, girls, female teachers and seniors, among others
- Co-operation with small and medium sized enterprises, as for example a subscription for flexible further education of employees
- Bilan of competencies
- European Computer Driving License (ECDL)
- Conflict and complaint handling
- Project management

As for usage of flexible learning methods, 28 multimedia PCs and exclusive or especially developed learning material are at hand.

The SLC-concept has its particularity in a combination of self-learning offers and regularly offered basic IT-modules and practical IT-workshops that either deal with specific topics or are directed at particular target groups.

For a directed increase of self-learning competencies, workshops are provided with the topic of self-organised learning as well as support when developing ‘learning tandems’ or learning teams. In addition, the usage of individual consulting and attendance of the learning by mentors of the FCZB is possible at any time.

This makes it affordable for many women who can fund themselves to make use of the qualifications offered by the SLC. Major parts of funding, however, are being discontinued due to a general withdrawal of the public authorities (Bund, communes and the Federal Employment Agency) from financing qualification measures in the scope of an active labour market promotion in Germany (see ‘Excursus on the Present Situation of Labour Market Promotion’, following chapter 3.4). In addition, the - up to now - clear insistence of the European Commission regarding the strengthening of the gender mainstreaming principle within the scope of the European Employment Strategy (EES) and the ESF that so far has been an important basis for the public financing of the FCZB has recently been eased. For this reason, the FCZB attempts at present to extend the SLC initiative - in addition to its other IT qualification measures - and extend its portfolio of IT training in the future from merely being directed at the specific subgroup of women to a more general range of training for employees of small and medium sized enterprises and other institutions. Thus the era of more than two decades of exclusive IT re-training for women ends; this can, however, be seen as a positive effect of gender mainstreaming and as sign that there has been a reduction in the gender dimension of the digital divide.
3.4 ICT qualification and training offers for unemployed: The Job Promotion Centre Essen (Berufsförderungszentrum Essen)

Background and funding

The Job Promotion Centre of Essen (Berufsförderungszentrum Essen - Bfz Essen) was founded in 1968 against the background of the great German structural crisis of steel and coal industries that brought considerable numbers of people in the Ruhr Basin into unemployment. The association aimed at upskilling the laid-off steel and mine workers so that they could seek work in other employment fields. At that time, upskilling for unemployed workers was pioneering work. Except for the field of occupational rehabilitation, almost no particular curricula and concepts existed for job-related adult education. In several, pilot projects, some of them quite wide-ranging, concepts for upskilling and further education as well as curricula were implemented that to some degree can still be found in the German Standard of Occupational Further Education. Significant concepts were implemented especially in the fields of micro-electronics, automation techniques and IuK-technologies. Currently, new concepts of further education are being implemented for the service sector, especially for logistic services.

Founder members that also financially supported the work of Bfz Essen were, among others, the Federal Employment Agency, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the City of Essen and the Land North Rhine-Westphalia. At present, the following institutions are members of the Bfz Essen:

- Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour of North Rhine-Westphalia
- City of Essen
- Confederation of German Employers’ Association (Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände)
- Federation of German Trade Unions (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund)
- Industrial Union of Mining, Chemical Industry, Energy (IG-Bergbau, Chemie, Energie - IGBCE)
- ver.di (trade union united services)
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) for Essen, Mülheim/Ruhr and Oberhausen; in Essen
- Chamber of Trade Düsseldorf
- Diocese of Essen
- Protestant Churches of Essen
- BOV pc.
- Savings Bank Essen (Sparkasse Essen)
- RWE Rhine-Ruhr
- RWE Systems pc
- District Craft Trades Association Essen (Kreishandwerkerschaft Essen)
- TEC Ltd.

The members only contribute a limited amount to the financing of the Bfz Essen. For the most part, the Centre is self-financed by acquired and performed measures and courses.

Excursus on the present situation of job-related qualification for unemployed persons in Germany

As all agencies for job-related qualification measures in Germany, the Bfz Essen is concerned by massive financial cuts as consequence of basic re-structuring of the German labour market promotion by the latest labour market reforms (Hartz-reforms). Among others, the labour market is affected by a retreat - almost a paradigm shift - of the German labour market promotion away
from the support of long-term, annual and biennial qualification measures towards small, punctual qualifications to compensate partial deficits ('training measures', as for example, application training, word and excel courses, instruction of basic commercial knowledge, orientation measures and screening test measures). These qualifications take, as a rule, one to three months, sometimes only a couple of days. As consequence of this re-orientation of the German Labour Market Policy, the Bfz Essen’s returns decreased to about one-third (!) from 2002 to 2005; and from the roughly 340 regular employees in 2002 only about 60 will remain by beginning of the year 2006. It has to be explicitly pointed out again that the above-described development of the Bfz Essen is no singular case but an example for the present re-structuring of the professional further education scene that so far has been financed by contributions of the unemployment insurance and by tax money.

The aforementioned drastic reductions in support for qualification measures have substantial reasons. It, however, has to be mentioned that the granted and financed qualification measures for unemployed persons of the past were altogether not very efficient in Germany. Several expensive and comprehensive measures, especially in the computer and IT sector, were implemented and hardly led to any success or chances on the labour market. Whilst noting that there exist many individual good and successful IT qualification measures, it can be stated that in general, the usual qualifications show the following deficits:

- Content surpasses the actual need of the labour market
- Imperfect match to persons participating in the qualification
- Frequently mere standard office-applications mostly word and excel courses
- Poor quality of implementation
- No intervention efforts by the educational institution

These findings based on empirical evaluation of the past years lead to a general loss of confidence in qualification measures that are financed by public means and caused the above-described withdrawal of the Federal Employment Agency from financing qualifications, including IT qualifications. As for this reason and in the scope of the LAW-project, it is very important to find and analyse significant and good examples from this field to demonstrate under what specific conditions and with what kind of specific qualities IT qualification can be a success. As the course offered by the Bfz Essen presented here perfectly corresponds to this purpose, it is described below.

Services offered and target groups

The range of services offered by the Bfz Essen that belonged to the great players in the field of further education, upskilling and adult education far into the 90s, covers more or less the whole spectrum of professional qualification fields. Especially in the field of IT-related qualifications for unemployed persons and those threatened by unemployment, the Bfz Essen at present offers the following courses leading to qualifications. These include - if not already apparent from the occupational title - a high number of IT-related qualifications.

Biennial professional training with CCI-vocational qualification

- Merchant in industry, commerce and services
- Clerk
- Electronic technician for industry, commerce and services
- Mechatronic (a recently introduced new occupational title for mechanics whose skills have been upgraded to include some advanced electronic skills)
- Expert employee for media and information services
- IT upskilling with MCSA certificate (Microsoft Certified Systems Administrator)

Annual further education with CCI-vocational qualification

- Industrial clerk including SAP-introduction and certificate as Call-Centre-Agent CCI
• Female clerk with introduction SAP and SAGE KHK (part-time further education, 18 month)
• Electronic technician for automation techniques
• Mechatronic
• Certified design engineer, in the field of mechanical engineering

**Other Education**

• Systems Engineering (48 weeks, Bfz-certificate)
• Service technician for automation systems (10 months; CCI-certificate)
• Practical automation training for electrical engineering technician (12 months; Bfz-certificate)
• Practical automation training for metal technicians (12 months; Bfz-certificate plus CCI-certificate)
• Service technician for medical devices (9 months; Bfz-certificate)
• Office and secretariat assistant (6 months; Bfz-certificate)
• MS Office for users (3 months; Bfz-certificate)
• Call-Centre-Agent with CCI-certificate (10 weeks, Bfz-certificate and CCI-certificate)
• Application Development (6 months; Bfz-certificate)
• Network Administration (6 months; Bfz-certificate)
• Control engineering for electrical and mechanical engineering technicians (6 months; Bfz-certificate)
• Electronic and communications systems for building specialists (6 months, Bfz-certificate and CCI-certificate)
• CNC - turning or -milling for metal technicians (5 months; Bfz-certificate)
• 3 D CAD - users (6 months; Bfz-certificate)

**Identifying four success factors**

When analysing the diverse qualification-related courses on offer, four success factors can be identified. Each is, per se, an important characteristic for the quality of good IT qualification but the combination of these different aspects can lead to immense success. For certain qualification measures, up to 90% of the graduates already have a confirmed work place the day after exams. In other fields high integration rates of far more than 70% are usual as well. This extraordinary success can be attributed to the following factors in synergistic combination:

► **Regional Integration and Linking: The ‘Consensus of Essen’**

An important factor for the successful integration of unemployed persons by qualification is the regional integration into the economic region. Educational institutions have to remain in continuous exchange, not only on levels of institutional linking but also on personal levels with relevant actors of the labour market. Although this may seem to be a platitude, in practice many educational institutions, however, do not meet this criterion. The new practice of the Federal Employment Agency to put qualification measures out to big supra-regional tenders in order to 'buy' most inexpensively mitigates strongly against this, as is undisputed amongst experts, and these negative effects have been manifested within the short time since the beginning of restructuring the Employment Agencies in 2003.

In Essen, it was realised at an early stage that the regional linking of main political and economic actors is an important key to a successful labour market policy in order to overcome structural unemployment and this realisation was acted on accordingly. In order to meet the challenges of structural changes within the region, the association ‘Consensus of Essen’ was launched at the beginning of the 1990s and attracted much attention in Germany. The ‘Consensus of Essen’ is an informal network of authorities from politics, economics, administration, educational institutions and further organisations who aim to co-ordinate the reduction of unemployment and creation of employment opportunities. Since then, a regional network has developed comprising - as well as the
For years, this strong interweaving between political actors from the labour market has constituted the first important success factor of qualification measures offered by the Bfz Essen.

► Continuous Acquisition of Projects and Vacancies from Organisations

For many years, the Bfz Essen has made it a policy to keep continuous contact with organisations within the region in order to note first-hand current trends and need for qualification in the branches that are important for the work of the Bfz. This contact also serves to continuously acquire practical courses and trainee jobs within the organisations for course participants. Bfz Essen at all times pays great attention to a most intensive integration of qualification measures into occupational practice.

In recent years, Bfz has further implemented and intensified this approach of integration of educational training into occupational practice, using the keyword ‘learning spot workplace’ and especially in the scope of the trainee model described below. Basically, the Bfz does not offer any further courses in a given qualification if a sufficient number of organisations do not express an interest in it, or if insufficient practical courses or trainee jobs are available.

► Anticipating Search for New Labour Market Developments in the Region

In line with the continuous contact with important labour market actors of the region, the Bfz Essen also tries to anticipate the development of new qualification needs as they arise, for example, by noting announcements of the establishment of new organisations and projects for industrial relocation into the region.

At present, there is a need for specialists resulting from an influx of new logistics centres in the region and an expansion of existing ones. As a result, Bfz Essen has been contacting personnel managers in the region in order to exactly evaluate the up-coming need for specialists, to meet the need for corresponding qualifications with appropriately trained labour from the region as soon as the need becomes acute.

This approach makes it possible to avoid what has happened in the recent past in particular to the important industrial settlements in the new Federal Länder. Here, it was a common occurrence that enterprises, often supported by generous public financing, opened a new production location and were celebrated as milestone of regional job security. However there was a failure to ensure that there was a timely supply of appropriate training for region’s jobseekers, and, as a result, there was a failure to meet the requirements for the newly created jobs failed from amongst the local unemployed populations. As a result, the required specialists had to be enticed away from other organisations in the region or recruited from distant regions, although a high unemployment rate prevailed there. Such qualitatively bad planning counts for a great deal in a region characterised by high structural unemployment. For this reason, the conscious, self-active and anticipatory assessment of future labour requirement within the region, practiced by Bfz Essen in the centre of the Ruhr Basin, is of particular and noteworthy importance.

► The Interactive Approach: the Trainee Model as Example

The approaches described above (i.e., the individual factors of success) and long-term experiences of Bfz Essen are brought together in the recent qualification concept of the Bfz Essen: the trainee model for self-directed, interactive IT-based learning, mostly at the ‘learning spot workplace’. This concept was implemented in 2000 and since that time has been applied especially in the fields of IT qualifications. The important features of the trainee concept are described in the box below.
Main characteristics of the Bfz Trainee Model

► High workplace integration: The integration of the qualification into the 'real' workplace in an enterprise plays a decisive role for the trainee model. A 24-months training includes:

- 12 months presence phase at the Bfz
- 12 months trainee phase at a partner organisation

During the trainee phase, working hours within the organisation amount to 70% and training hours amount to 30% of the total time. An organisational share of 50% in a further educational measure is extraordinary for the present situation in Germany.

► Interactive individually determined learning: For both, the presence phase at the Bfz as well as the trainee phase, learning is interactive. i.e., content, schedule and methods of learning are co-ordinated and agreed between the three involved partners: the learning person, the organisation and Bfz, each according to necessity and possibilities, in a triangular relationship

1. The Learning Person decides depending on his individual professional and personal prerequisites especially upon content of learning or not learning. T Bfz lays great importance in a modular education that considers what knowledge and work experience the learning person already has. It is the BFz view that the learning person should not have to re-study topics he already knows; it compiles a curriculum individually tailored according to the specific professional knowledge of each individual and starting from the present competencies of the learning person. The conceptual credo of the Bfz is: Each participant in a qualification is competent and brings specific experiences from his previous working practice.

2. The Organisation decides largely upon learning and working conditions during the trainee phase. Starting from its concrete need for work or problem solving (for example, the compilation of a company website, the development of a corporate design or installation of the Internet), the organisation exerts a significant influence on the targets and content of learning during the organisational trainee phase. i.e., the learning comprises - only - those topics the organisation needs for that particular workplace. This has advantages and disadvantages (see below).

3. The Educational Institution decides especially upon learning content in relation to the examination requirements. In accordance with the individual prerequisites, abilities and interests of the learning person as well as the needs and possibilities of the organisation, the educational institution co-ordinates, procures and attends the entire learning process and ensures that all exam-relevant learning content are taken into consideration sufficiently.

The educational institution abandons much of its usual control and influence possibilities for this interactive approach where the learning persons and the organisations exert significant influence on the course of the education; the institution alters its role and function. It no longer is the 'classic' teacher who decides upon content, tempo and methods of the entire educational period. It changes into being a trainer and coach who supports and moderates. Among others, the professional competency of teachers that was the dominating qualification for professional teachers in the classic field of job-related educational training and further education partly moves into the background. The pedagogic capabilities especially regarding the instruction to self-learning become more dominant. This change in role and qualification that resembles a paradigm shift within the occupational further education is sometimes difficult for older staff to adapt to (see below).

► IT-based 'blended' learning: The above-described interactive further education measures that are specially tailored to the learning person’s individual, time and local particularities would not be possible without a basic usage of electronic media and computer-based learning means. A wide range of currently available forms of technology are used including electronic learning support (CBT and WBT) virtual classrooms, chat, e-mail, usage of forums, learning portals and programmes as well as learning modules. A key factor of success, however, is seen in the supplementation and combination of the electronic learning environment with personal presence on-the-spot on the premises of the educational institution. Bfz Essen have found that eLearning can only be successful in sophisticated and comprehensive further educational contexts when a mixture of classroom presence and application of electronic media is utilised in the sense of blended learning. The importance of a communicative, in particular always motivating and personally consulting aspect of the further education and educational training should not be underestimated. Personal coaching by teachers or attendants cannot be replaced by electronic media. The success factor of blended learning is the explicit responsibility of a contact person whom each learning person can contact at any time, personally on the spot, by phone or via Internet (chat, virtual classroom, forum, etc.)
Such a comprehensive interactive learning context in which the learning person has considerable freedom to individually organise his learning process, of course, entails specific demands for controlling the learning target. Besides the continuous support and attendance, the educational institution (as represented by its teachers, trainers and lecturers) also has to perform continuous management and monitoring of achievement and regular assessments in order to make sure that the learning persons make adequate progress or to make timely interventions, if necessary, where there is underperformance.

Within this context, the fact that many of the unemployed qualification participants do not necessarily have the ability to be self-organised or self-dependent in their learning is an important topic to be taken into consideration and to be integrated into the organisation of the whole learning arrangement. To 'learn learning' became a crucial element of this trainee model. First of all, it is necessary to successfully perform and complete the training; second, it represents an important additional qualification in its own right. Self-dependent acting and learning became a significant 'soft skill' being increasingly demanded by employers, especially in the highly-qualified fields of the IT-branch.

The enormous potential for organisations to influence the content of occupational further education due to the annual trainee phase within the institution has, as already mentioned above, its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include that, in fact, qualifications and experiences are acquired which are actually demanded by the market. Disadvantages arise when merely one-sided experience and knowledge are acquired that only co-ordinate with the specific need of a single institution. According to the experience of the Bfz, however, the positive aspects of institutional influencing and practical definition of the learning subjects prevail. As a rule, they lead to the acquisition of market-driven and practical qualifications, i.e. demand-oriented qualifications. Therefore, the new employee no longer has to first get acquainted to working within the organisation after completing his qualification measure, as has often been the case so far. The phase of working-in can be omitted if the same organisation employs the trainee. For this reason, the employment rates for persons participating in a qualification according to the trainee model are very high. The organisation has 12 months in which to get to know the potential new employee and to qualify him according to its specific institutional needs with the support of an educational institution.

Lessons learnt

The advantage of this interactive IT-based trainee concept that so far has been applied mainly in the field of job-related qualification for IT-jobs is obvious: a very practical and market-driven qualification is now possible that strongly increases the chances for new employment of the formerly unemployed participants in qualifications. The integration rates, so far, reach between 70% and 90%. The reason for this high chance of succeeding is that the course participants can prove themselves during a long trainee period within the organisation and can gain specific and individual working know-how besides the general specialist technical qualification. As a result, both sides benefit from a win-win situation: The participant in qualifications gathers specific, non-exchangeable working know-how and the organisation obtains optimised personnel recruitment. Moreover, due to the individually organised and IT-based setting of learning processes and outcomes, the competency of self-directed learning is also acquired from which again both parties benefit.

Above all, the most significant success factor is the continuous contact and the co-ordination process with organisations of the region. Basically, they have to be strongly integrated into the co-ordination of the arrangement of training modules. As a rule, the organisations specify what basic knowledge Bfz has to teach and what specific skills and know-how the learning persons are acquiring during the trainee phase within the organisations.

However, the numerous advantages of this concept also face some risks that have to be taken into consideration in order to develop the above-described strengths when applying the concept onto
other contexts. The practical adaptation of the trainee concept illustrates the following problems and risks:

- Especially older and experienced employees sometimes experience difficulties in their new role because they lose the kind of control over the learning processes that they have been used to in the past. Fears arise that they may not pass the exams when wide parts of the qualification are taken out of own hands and put under the responsibility of organisations. Moreover, the transfer of responsibilities onto organisations is also seen as loss of control by the teaching personnel. In addition, the comprehensive use of IT-based self-learning media reduces their possibilities of direct control and influence compared with their traditional teaching habits in classrooms.

- The participants in qualifications have to possess or quickly adapt a high degree of self-responsibility and self-discipline because wide parts of the trainee model depend on the concept of self-directed learning. Unemployed people are often not very well equipped or prepared for this.

- The available electronic learning material is not perfect. Especially for specific institutional problems that have to be dealt with, often no eLearning material exists. As a result, few possibilities exist to control the obtained or necessary learning progression.

- The necessary learning progress only develops when the learning process is attended and supported by a good combination of controlling and coaching.

- The teaching personnel have to be open to change and supportive of the new developments: it can now be said that the most important ability of a teacher has become the ability to support self-learning. i.e., the pedagogic competencies of the teaching personnel come to the fore in this concept and become more important than specific professional competencies. A methodologically well-trained coach who sees his job especially in the role of an ‘educational manager’ can have more success in this learning concept than a teacher who although he has excellent engineering or IT know-how does not know how to support learning persons in their individual self-learning process.

### SWOT-Analysis

**Strengths**

- Demand-oriented and anticipating qualification for the regional labour market
- Market-oriented qualification by strong integration into the institutional production process
- Individual arrangement of curricula in co-ordination with personal conditions and present knowledge of the participants in qualification
- High degree of self-determination of the learning process by the learning persons
- High flexibility in time by comprehensive use of IT media
- Very high rates of employment or integration,
- Self-directed learning is an important additional qualification
- Organisations gain specifically trained and already inducted personnel

**Weaknesses**

- To some extent, problems of adaptation and identification with their new role as educational manager and coach, especially for the older lecturers
- Reduced possibilities of influencing learning processes for the educational institution / the lecturer due to long training phases within organisations
- Learning successes depending on the ability to of the learning persons to engage in self-directed learning
- High personnel deployment because of the need for continuous contacting of organisations in order to acquire training placements and trainee jobs
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Reduction of unemployment within the region by anticipating qualification</td>
<td>Success of learning can be put at risk by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The organisation’s need for specialists can be precisely tailored and in time</td>
<td>• insufficient engagement of the organisation to offer adequate learning possibilities during the trainee phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Economies in transfer costs by reducing the duration of unemployment</td>
<td>• too little willingness / ability of the learning persons to learn in a self-directed way (self-discipline and learning plan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increase of competitiveness for organisations by qualified employees who perfectly match</td>
<td>• insufficient ability or readiness of lecturers to adapt and complete the role as coach and educational manager</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• inadequate learning concepts that do not sufficiently support the 'learning to learn' approach</td>
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4. ITALY

4.1 Introduction: the dimension and role of eLearning in Italy

Preface

As we have observed in the course of the LAW project, the Italian labour market is characterised by deep gaps across the three macro-areas of the peninsula (North, Centre and Mezzogiorno). These gaps concern women, the long-term unemployed, and the precariousness of work, principally regarding the weaker segments of the Small and Medium enterprises (SME), which are a predominant part of the Italian economic structure. In this context, it is very important to take into account the impact deriving from the introduction of ICT.

It is evident that training strategies and, within their framework, eLearning can play an important and growing role, in particular in relation to the most vulnerable social groups.

eLearning is therefore an important instrument, from the point of view of the digital divide as well as the social divide. This demands an increasing effort aimed at the development of IT training.

The expenditure in the field of eLearning is first of all increasing on the side of enterprises. However, this commitment principally concerns the needs of the major enterprises and only a limited portion of employees. In Italy only 24% of firms organise training. This Italian figure is also explained by the widespread presence of small enterprises, which everywhere in Europe, with the exception of Nordic countries, show a low tendency to be engaged in employee training. In fact the above figure decreases to 8% if we consider enterprises with less than 20 employees. This is also related to the fact that, because of economies of scale, training costs per head are higher for these enterprises than the average.

eLearning within the system of enterprises

According to the Observatory ANEE/ASSINFORM, the aggregate market value of eLearning in Italy (software, hardware, services and consultancy) reached 256.3 million euros by 2003, equivalent to 8.2% of all professional training. Thirty four per cent of this value comes from training delivered internally, while the rest comes from training provided externally. The public sector financed projects accounting for 22.1% of eLearning in Italy. It is estimated that the financial output cost of eLearning, will be worth approximately 428.8 million of euros by the end of 2004.

Enterprises are the engine that drive the increase of eLearning. In fact, not only do they represent the leading actors in terms of expenditure, but their weight in expenditure has increased from 82.5% to 87.4%. Their drive has become essential in terms of investment in the market place. In terms of supply, providing packages of content has become an important sector of the market, as it is, by itself, covers 40% of the whole revenue market, followed by services at 21.2%, technological hardware at 20.8% and consultancy at 18.0%.

Basically, the evolution of eLearning in the market place has produced two clear scenarios of development. With regard to technological hardware, which was the first phase evolution and also represented the first generation of investment, we can observe a decline, while at the same time observing the increasing importance of the development of higher added value activities, linked to the production of software contents and delivery of services.

It is also true that a tendency of progressive integration of competencies and skills, with the aim to deliver clients or users key solutions towards challenges is now taking hold.

Currently, the so called Global eLearning service providers can guarantee their clients capabilities that range from training processes to development of technologies, consultancy contracts, and the design of future products.

There is a progressive concentration of eLearning training both from the demand and the supply side around a few big actors.
Regarding the professional status of eLearning users, a survey conducted among firms involved in this practice, shows that major numbers of eLearning users are personnel who work in the back office (36.%) and clerks (32.1%), but there is also an increasing involvement of middle managers (16.3%) and executives (14.7%).

Summing up, from the standpoint of the labour market and social and digital divide, we must remark that important groups of women, youngsters, workers of SMEs are particularly at risk of unemployment or under-employment.

In this landscape, it is interesting to examine some experiences of eLearning that are specifically directed to some of these groups. Our presentation will pinpoint an experience directed towards women, primarily employees, but also including women who are not economically active (housewives) as well; a second case focused on employees of SMEs, and a third, the Giano project, which is particularly interesting because of the involvement in its promotion of the three main Italian Trade Union Federations.

### 4.2 The Giano Project: a project promoted by the Trade Unions

**Project outline**

The main characteristic of the Giano Project is that it was promoted and supported by the three main Italian labour unions, and implemented by three associations specialised in training which work closely with the same labour organisations. It is a prime example of the importance given by the trade unions to the enrichment of the IT skills and competencies of workers. The training courses have been organised so as to initiate or improve workers’ skills and knowledge in the English language and in the use of ICT tools.

It is interesting to also note that in both subjects, the training approach draws a clear advantage from the methodologies linked to eLearning. So, the method and the contents become homogeneous and synergistic. The workers involved in this project were employees of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), established in the Lazio Region and operating either in the manufacturing or in the services sector.

Once the aims and the objectives of the program were set and defined, a module was designed based on individualised analysis of the needs and requirement of the employees on the one hand, and the requirements of the firms on the other, always taking into account the shape and dynamics of work organisation. In other words, the training process, from the standpoint of method, as well as of contents, was aimed to reconcile the interest of the two parties, with an added value for both, particularly for the workers, either for their career development within the firm, or in the case that they wish to move elsewhere, either from necessity or spontaneously.

The following is a schematic exposition of the methodology and the contents of this experiment in eLearning.

**Objectives and implementation of the Project**

The main objective was to implement a model of training which was flexible, close to individual needs, and agreed upon between management and employees, so as to match the requirements of both, always taking into account the specific needs of SMEs.

Thirty three firms associated with Federlazio - the enterprise association of the region - were involved in the project. The sectors where these firms operate are metalwork, printing and editing, the chemical industry, information services and services for persons and firms.

The project was articulated in various phases, with some phases running in parallel.

First, the project’s targets were defined. Then, specific methodologies were adopted to analyse and map the needs of the firms established in the region. This particular research was carried out to analyse the type of competencies and qualifications that the firms might need.
This research was particularly useful for those who had to program the project, so they could identify the most adequate and purposeful training for the workers and firms. In fact, to attain the required competencies and skills, managers and employees were interviewed separately. This method made it possible to be aware of the different needs and perceptions of each party, thus improving the effectiveness of the methodologies and the training strategies. Thirty-two entrepreneurs and 192 employees were interviewed. After all the data was collected, analysed and matched, it was possible to reach a synthesis.

This phase was extremely important, because it made it possible to identify the requirements of the enterprises, alongside the preferences indicated by the workers, which ultimately became the guidelines for the definition of the specific training plans. The definition of the training plans demanded a rather intense and burdensome effort because it was difficult to match the needs indicated by the enterprises with those expressed by the employees. Consequently, in a number of cases, it was necessary to redefine previous schemes, which had already been agreed upon between the partners, elaborating new training programmes. The structure of delivery of the Long Distance Training was the result of this complex process.

The end result of the research and surveys carried out was a training program that was formed by a combination of classroom and online training. The average number of participation hours for each participant was of 100 hours. In parallel with the training activities, users were required to attend project-based work, which lasted 20 hours, ended to use specialised notions related to the courses.

The design of the long distance learning

Within the framework of the Giano project, the online training was delivered by the Association SMILE by utilising the web. The goal of the eLearning plan was to use the latest Internet training oriented technologies, so as to facilitate the involvement of the participants. The eLearning method was based on self-learning, on-line tutoring provided by experts, and cooperation and exchange amongst the users.

Self-learning is principally developed through the study of theoretical and practical topics, designed and implemented by the experts, and provided to participants on digitally supported instruments. The user can make use of a portal area through a personal password, which allows access to the overall training resources and to a forum dedicated to the contents of the programme.

The tutor and the expert are constantly in contact with the user, updating the themes and discussing the issues, which are frequently asked questions (FAQ’s), and subjects that are not immediately understandable to participants.

The design of the personal eLearning related to IT and the English language, was primarily directed to acquiring basic generic competences, independently from the sectors in which the workers were employed or the enterprises they were connected with. The total duration of each course was 35 hours, of which 30 were done online and 5 dedicated to the classroom. The online courses were divided into modules, according to different topics, and each module was divided into different classes, called learning units (Unità didattiche - UI). During the course, users could regularly communicate with the tutor. The tutor helped users to access the portal and clarify the contents within, going through each step of the course. Each user had the possibility to be in contact with the tutor via e-mail, through a forum, or within a chat room linked to the course.

IT and English language courses

The English course is articulated in three levels:

- Entry Level
- Pre-intermediate level
- Intermediate level

Participants are assigned to one of the levels depending on their language skills.

The courses were made up of four modules each of which is made of five classes consisting of denominated learning unities (Unità didattiche). Each class involves dialogues and texts, directed to introduce concepts and vocabulary, through listening, terminology and elements of grammar, which thereafter are analysed in depth through practical activities and exercises. At the start of each module there is a diagnostic test to evaluate the level of knowledge acquired.
To make learning easier the learning units are all structured along a fixed scheme:

- Presentation: goals and contents of the unit;
- Dialogue: A section introduced by English speakers, in which terminology and grammar rules are studied.

**IT Courses**

IT courses are structured along three levels, each of which lasts for 30 hours divided into modules and learning units.

The classes that make up the learning units are organised through different texts, images and animations that allow the user to follow step by step the different processes to obtain a specific result.

At the end of each module, the user is invited to a take test aimed to verify whether some items must be repeated or if it is possible to proceed.

By evaluating the initial level of knowledge through a test, each candidate is selected to participate in one of the three levels.

In the first level the basic notions concerning the structure and the functioning of a PC are analysed and the basic activities needed to work with it are studied, including the operations needed to create and format documents, along with the main functions related to mathematics and elementary statistics, with reference to the use of Windows XP and basic levels of Word and Excel.

The second level develops the themes related to the use of the web for the research of data and documents and the use of the electronic mail. The related applications are Internet, Outlook Express, and the advanced levels of Word and Excel.

The third level is designed around the main concepts involved in building databases and the use of research tools, as well as the creation of materials for presentation to different audiences.

**Project outcome and impact**

At the start of the training activity the number of persons applying was 57. In the end, the participants were 47, of whom 22 were enrolled in the IT courses, 21 in English and four in both of these courses. They were assigned to the different levels within the two areas was as follows:

- Within the IT field, 73% of the candidates were assigned to the first level and 23% to the second, no one being assigned to the third level.
- In relation to the English course, 36% of candidates were assigned to the first level, 48% to the second, and the 16% to the third.

The training courses started in February 2005, and ended in April 2005. During this period eLearning services were implemented from Monday to Friday, from 8 am to 6 pm.

During this period users were assisted online by a tutor, experts and a course coordinator.

During the implementation of the courses, some of the participants never kept in touch, even though there were various attempts to contact them by e-mail and phone calls. So the number of the effective participants was reduced to 40.

At the end of the courses the participants were given a final evaluation recorded in the personal training documentation which is given to participants.

Eighty five per cent of participants achieved a positive evaluation; the remaining 15 per cent did not gain any evaluation because they had not spent enough time on the training activities or had not completed the required tests.

The number of users who dropped out was rather higher than anticipated. However, the proportion of participants able to achieve a positive evaluation was also high. An important role was played by the tutors and experts who constantly helped and monitored the activities of the users. They were also engaged in the support of two days dedicated to orientation and two days dedicated to laboratory work.
The days dedicated to orientation were useful to create a positive environment for the online activity, as was demonstrated by the fact that 76% of the participants achieved a positive final evaluation. The days dedicated to laboratory work made it possible to improve the situation of some users who risked being left behind or being excluded from the final evaluation.

Lessons learnt

These results confirm what is largely agreed in the field of training. That is, first of all, that eLearning is a valid methodology for firms and workers, if it is assisted by moments of collective participation aimed at improving the social dimension, typically by being linked to classroom activity as a prerequisite for activating an effective learning process.

SWOT analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The analysis conducted to draw attention to the requirements of both the enterprises and workers</td>
<td>• A model of co-involvement of management and workers through the initiative of trade unions which stimulates the interest of firms toward IT performance. Meanwhile, in parallel, it enhances workers’ competencies in relation to the development of work organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analysis conducted to see which skill sets were those required in the region</td>
<td>• The improvement in the employability of workers both in their current employment and in relation to general labour market mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexibility over how workers could access the teaching contents</td>
<td>• A balanced mix of web-based and class room activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A balanced mix of web-based and class room activities</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The number of small enterprises that participated was less than planned</td>
<td>• The risk is always present that some small enterprises, as well as their employees, feel that they are less involved in technological innovation so less interested in developing IT and related skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A number of workers that said they would participate didn’t start the program, while a few others who started subsequently dropped out, showing the low importance given by some to the objectives of the program.</td>
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</table>

4.3 IT Emancipation: a project directed towards women

Project outline

The objective of this project is to implement the use of the computer as a tool to enhance the professional profile and support the development of equal opportunities, particularly focused on women. The proposal was promoted by the Lazio Regional authorities.

It is specifically addressed to women, taking into account the importance of the digital to improve their employability, at the same time bettering the chances of equal opportunities and of a better quality of life. In this framework, the project is addressed to women who are unemployed, to those who have lost their employment, and to economically inactive housewives.

The project stems from the conviction that the use of IT in Italy is now growing remarkably, even though in the past its use in Italy was below the European Union average.

The number of PCs in Italian households is increasing rapidly. The widespread use of PCs and the related software’s in Italian workplaces and schools is also increasing fast, with the effect that a
very large and growing number of Italians has been convinced of the need to buy computers for their children or for the use of the whole family.

However, going beyond the new generations and those who use computers for work reasons, the use of computers is still not so widespread as an effective and real tool to improve the quality of life, to enhance communication, or as a method of work, and there are still many who are not taking advantage of the potential value of using the world wide web.

In this context, housewives, (or other women who stay at home and are without employment) form an important group of those who have the potential to make more use of IT to improve their participation as citizens, their employability, or their general quality of life.

Since digital literacy is increasingly becoming a form of knowledge delivered by schools or by other means of life long learning, unemployed women and housewives alike are amongst those who have the least chances to learn the use of any type of digital tools.

Objectives and implementation

In this framework, the project aims to respond to this particular challenge, by adopting a strongly focused learning process: the use of computers as instrument in fields such as:

- Improving the professional profile so to facilitate the return into the labour market;
- To emancipate participants and improve their social position so that they are better able to exercise their rights to equal opportunities.
- Improving the quality of life by developing channels of information and communication;

The programme lasts for 120 hours and each course is for 20 women who are unemployed. It is expected to be repeated three times.

The following steps were taken in the implementation of the programme:

- Promotion of the programme through the construction of network in the territory with actors who work in public administrations, associations, civil society who work in the field of Equal Opportunities
- Selection of candidates through a process aimed to identify the best beneficiaries of the programme.
- Action to evaluate their skills prior to enrolling in the programme (as indicated earlier)
- To plan in detail, and optimise the learning process of the group
- To involve local networks to help the training process (in developing methodologies on learning and best technical and professional practices, in providing the best studying tools etc...)
- The learning process, in macro phases-
  - Criteria regarding the workings and maintenance of hardware
  - Software: MS Windows
  - Office applications
  - IT as a job
  - IT and family
  - A test halfway and at the end of the programme.
SWOT analysis

**Strengths**
- The main importance relies on the fact that the program specifically targets women, a group that is particularly weak in Italy, from the standpoint of unemployment and precariousness.
- Enhancement of awareness of equal opportunities and social inclusion.

**Opportunities**
- The evolution of programs targeting women not only towards employability but also the reconciliation of family and working needs as a goal.
- The possibility to stimulate housewives’ involvement in the labour market through IT training.

**Weaknesses**
- A weak capacity to involve effectively an important segment like housewives; it is evidently easier to involve in the program women who are employed, and also belong in a network, stimulating each other.

**Threats**
- If there is no specific planned effort to target women who are unemployed or inactive, there is a risk that women who participate in programs that deliver IT training are those that already have a better position in the labour market.

4.4 FADI: a project for small and medium size enterprises

Outline of the project

The project FADI- ‘Formazione a distanza nelle imprese per le nuove tecnologie della Comunicazione e dell’Informazione’, ‘Long distance learning for enterprises regarding new telecommunication technologies’, aims to pilot a new model of life long learning for workers who are employed in working for small and middle sized enterprises (SMEs).

This experiment is especially important in a country like as Italy where small and very small enterprises are widespread in the manufacturing as well as in the service sectors. These workers are particularly at risk, because of to the strong dependence of this type of enterprises on the variability of the market, the outsourcing to bigger firms, and in some cases, their competitiveness (or lack of it) in global markets.

In such an environment, it is evident that workers need to improve, consolidate and accredit their skills, either to keep up with changes in work organisation, or to be able to find a different job, if or when unemployed.

The project presents also a second interesting aspect: that is the involvement of owners or managers of these small enterprises. This means that the training program, the methodology and the objectives to be attained are discussed and agreed both with the workers and those responsible for running the firms. This methodology brings a reciprocal commitment, which gives the importance of training a greater profile within the relationship between workers and management.

It is not a coincidence that the FADI project has been developed under the initiative of the Labour Ministry, and, under the direction of SMILE, with the participation of two associations, respectively of a big northern region (Lombardy), and one of the smaller Centre-south regions (Abruzzo).
Objectives and implementation

The FADI project has been implemented in six provinces in Lombardy and one province in Abruzzo (Pescara), involving 37 enterprises in different sectors with a total of 207 workers.

The principal aim is to work out a permanent life long training infrastructure, which starts from an analysis of training needs of workers, enterprises and the region in which they are located, using ITCs as innovative methods for delivering continuous training, and also to deliver contents to increase SME workers’ competencies in new information technologies. This program will also help directors and managers to work out strategies on how to best use these technologies.

This training module is particularly suited for a country such as Italy, with an economic structure strongly characterised by the presence of SMEs which have a particular need to continuously adapt to innovations alongside the need to anticipate market trends.

This initiative made use of a round table of workers and managers to build the permanent training module. The basis of the training method has at its heart an analysis of the requirements of the workers, of the enterprises, and a commitment to personalise everyone’s training need taking account both of their attitudes and aspirations and of the requirements of production. Social and institutional partners were also consulted in this process.

The project is built in phases;

- Market survey
- Analysis of training requirements
- Training the trainers (tutors, in-house trainers)
- Assessing everyone’s competencies and skills
- Organising training material inside FAD and in the enterprises
- Piloting of the training module and of all relevant phases inside the enterprises
- Informing other actors in the region
- Monitoring and assessment (Quality control)

Long distance training

The analysis of the worker’s and enterprises’ training needs suggested that nine types of personal training courses would be useful, across four ITC themes: Office Automation, Internet, E-commerce and Security, and also in a field defined as workplace security, which involves all those themes, specifically designed by SMILE and Finmatica. These were as follows:

I. Office Automation operator- Basic level
II. Office Automation operator - Intermediate-level
III. Systems and Internet services operator- Basic level
IV. Systems and Internet services operator - Intermediate-level
V. E-commerce systems operator- Basic level
VI. E-commerce systems operator - Intermediate-level
VII. E-Security Systems operator
VIII. Co-ordinator for Internet clients and e-commerce services
IX. Workplace welfare and security

Every user is permitted to enrol in or more of these classes, or onto the whole programme.

The users were involved in the program through access, by use of a given USER ID and PASSWORD, at the website [www.progettofadi.it](http://www.progettofadi.it). The courses are based on a method of self learning.

Every course has two types of tests: at the end of the course and at the end of the program.

The website platform is also equipped with instruments that are available as support to the learning process, the aim being to guarantee an adequate level of content and interactivity.
The SMILE association took care of the design and implementation of FADI platform, with regard to Office Automation and Workplace welfare and security. Finmatica developed the fields regarding the Internet, e-commerce and systems security.

These two associations also took care all tutoring, technical and training assistance activities.

The participation of the users was mainly oriented towards the fields of ICT. The basic level Office Automation course was chosen by 48%, whilst 29% chose Office Automation at the intermediate level. Furthermore, 16% decided enrol in the course regarding workplace welfare and security.

These data suggest that the SMEs that were involved are still at an early stage in the use of new technologies and that the firms and workers recognise the value of acquiring this knowledge as a starting point for their future development.

Project outcome and impact

Overall, the obtained results can be deemed satisfactory. There were 2,353 didactic hours completed by FAD, this being a requirement of the programme.

The majority of users satisfactorily concluded their course, while those who subscribed but failed to finish were 16%.

There was a positive response to FAD from users, with 57.26% saying that they found the method to be effective and satisfying, 67.52% of the interviewees saying that the method adopted was considered satisfactory when asked about the level of participation and involvement in a new method of acquiring working skills, and 69.23% found the contents of the programme interesting. This is reflected in the high success rate, with 70% of participants passing their final examination at their first attempt.

The majority of successful test were in the fields of Office Automation and workplace welfare and security. There were however difficulties registered in Systems Security, which is a new field for many and was therefore for many an unknown and complex territory. But generally speaking, there was an overall appreciation of the program and attainment of its aims.

Lessons learned

Despite the positive response, objectively there were some problems encountered, especially in the way some people reacted to the method adopted, which is very different from the classical form of training. In fact 37.61% of participant found the methodology only partially effective and satisfactory, stating that some courses would have attained better results in the format of classic classroom teaching. This position is also reinforced by the final survey carried out specifically related to positive evaluation given to those phases of the program when tutors and teaching support staff were present.

The timing of the courses was also noted to be only partially adequate. As a requirement, the FAD program was rolled out during working hours. 31% of users, due to their inflexible working hours, found the hours they dedicated to the program unsatisfactory, while 31.62 found the hours satisfactory.

The difficulty that workers met were often overcome with the help of tutors, about whom 79.50% of users said they competent and useful.

In conclusion, programs like FAD can be useful training tools for SMEs, but careful attention must be given to the analysis of the needs and requirements, and they should be implemented in a mixed type of training methodology.

Furthermore, any type of long-distance learning, to attain a better involvement of all participants and good results, must do more to satisfy needs such as; ‘flexibility’, which means to have open access the program’s training material, overcoming the limits imposed by time and place; ‘interactivity’, meaning setting out all of the services and support materials in a manner to help users to interact between themselves and themselves with training staff and tutors; and ‘quality’, principally meaning always using materials that are highly qualified and constantly updated.

SWOT analysis
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The involvement of the Regions in strengthening the IT abilities of the employees if the weaker SMEs combined with piloting a training model in both a strong region like Lombardy and a weak one in the Mezzogiorno, like Abruzzo</td>
<td>• The adoption by local authorities in plans that are specifically focused on SME workers in ICT learning, helping them stay abreast of technological innovations. By funding this type of program, the local authorities could help SMEs deliver training, because for reasons of economy of scale, training expenditure is on average higher for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The enhancement of the employability of workers who work in SMEs, being the ones who are most at risk regarding mobility processes.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Insufficient flexibility in managing work duties and teaching and training materials that lack flexibility.</td>
<td>• A poor awareness from a number of small enterprises of the importance of IT as an instrument of a more effective work organisation. In parallel, from the standpoint of some workers, poor recognition of the importance of improving their own skills, taking into account the pervasiveness of IT in the working world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For a substantial segment of workers there was a poor balance between online and class room activities.</td>
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</tbody>
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5 UNITED KINGDOM

5.1 Introduction

The UK’s life-long learning strategy emphasises the need to shift from ‘job for life’ to ‘employability for life’. The Skill Strategy White Paper (DfES 2003) identified the following gaps: the UK has low level of productivity in terms of output in relation to the US, France and Germany; over 7 million adults in the workforce do not have a level 2 qualification and some groups in the workplace, e.g. women in part-time job are still facing exclusion from training and professional development opportunities.

The diagram below describes different routes into qualifications. Level 1 and level 2 qualifications relate to gaining fairly basic skills, and from level 3 qualification reflect learning at the degree level.

Routes into qualifications in the UK

![Diagram of routes into qualifications in the UK]

Source: DfES website
Otherwise the proportion of level 2 and level 4 qualifications amongst people of working age is fairly equal, with the number of level 4 qualification holders slightly higher. This is shown in the two tables below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2001/02 Level 2 Qual</th>
<th>2002/03 Level 2 Qual</th>
<th>2001/02 Level 4 Qual</th>
<th>2002/03 Level 4 Qual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East Region</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands Region</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West Region</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England Region</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and The Humber Region</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands Region</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West Region</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Region</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Region</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>23.9</td>
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</table>

Source: DfES Statistics

The strategy envisaged an active infrastructure of eLearning delivery by developing Learning and Skill Councils and Regional Development which work on improved lifelong learning delivery on local and regional levels.

The strategy recognises the importance of ICT in learning. The UK has a skill gap in basic skills (literacy, numeracy & use of IT) and intermediate skills at apprenticeship, higher craft and technician level but at the same time the UK compares well with Higher Education qualification levels.

The strategy for employers and employees aims to develop access to business support services and life-long learning, improve training for management and expand the network of trade union learning representatives.

For individual learners the strategy promised to create free tuition for any adult to receive training in basic skills, increase support for higher level skill qualification (technicians & crafts associates), encourage adult learning through local delivery of services and develop a learning infrastructure for young people, in particular those aged 16 - 19.

Several crucial steps have been taken to ensure that the strategy will be successful:

In order to guarantee successful implementation the Skills Alliance was formed with representatives from four key government departments, the CBI (Confederation of British Industry), Trade Union Congress (TUC), the Small Business Council and Learning and the Skills Council.

A variety of initiatives to support the roll out of the learning strategy have been implemented:

Tackling barriers to learning in the workplace, the 'Employer Training Pilot' programme was initiated in 2002 to help employers, in particular SMEs, to use life-long learning in their companies to get the right skills and improve the employability of their staff. In addition, the Government initiated 'Businesslink' which delivers advice on training and learning to employers through a website portal.

The Adult Learning Grant provides support to adults studying full-time for a level two or three qualification. The Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) strand provided free access channels to access advice on learning and access to online courses.
5.2 The Digital Divide in the UK

People with low literacy, language and numeracy skills are up to five times more likely to be unemployed or inactive. The employment gap for those with low skills has widened since 1997.

Disabled people are three times less likely to class themselves as being in good health as people who are not disabled.

Lone parents with health problems are less likely to participate in New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), or gain jobs afterwards.

Disabled people have an employment rate of only 49% compared with an employment rate of 81% for those who are not disabled.

Fewer than one in four people with mental health conditions work.

Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are 11 times more likely to live in overcrowded conditions than whites.

48% of black young people finishing a Modern Apprenticeship gain jobs, compared with 72% of white young people.

Source: Social Exclusion Unit, DWP, 2004

Having recognised the link between low qualifications and social exclusion, the UK government made the development of life-long learning a policy priority. ICTs were seen as making a major contribution to this policy through the development of eLearning.

UK eLearning policy

The UK governmental eLearning strategy is supported by various Higher Education and Further Education Institutes. The Open University (OU) invested £30 million in their eLearning strategy with the aim to widen access to higher education. The OU hosts an eLearning research hub, a Knowledge Media Institute, which develops future on-line learning tools; moreover, the Institute of Educational Technology, a research centre investigating open and distance education, life-long learning, the use of technology and the students’ experience of these approaches, is associated with the OU. UK e-Universities (UKeU) is an initiative backed by the government with £55 million funding, UkeU was established in 2001 to deliver online and worldwide the best degrees and degree-level learning that UK universities can provide. UkeU mainly offers under- and postgraduate courses in business management, science and technology, health, English language, teacher training, environment and law. However, they have also implemented foundation degrees, for example a Foundation Degree in Hospitality with the University of Derby.

However the UkeU has failed to achieve high take up. It was reported that only 900 students in 38 countries worldwide enrolled between the launch of UkeU and November 2003. It was also reported that £32.6 million have been spent to support the creation of an eLearning infrastructure, a further £7 million of the funding was used to set up the project and various eLearning programmes in higher education institution, adding up to an investment of £39.6 million which implied £44,000 per student.

National Health Service University

The Department of Health (DoH) announced plans to start an NHS (National Health Service) owned University (NHSU) in 2002; the NHSU was officially launched in November 2003. The NHSU forms a crucial part in the wider context of the Government’s 10 year strategy for the modernisation of the NHS. The NHSU promises to make a key contribution to the fulfilment of the NHS plan by:

- Developing learning programmes to meet the immediate and urgent needs of the NHS;
- Designing learning services and programmes to support team working and enable staff to work more effectively across traditional occupational, professional and organisational boundaries

The NHSU aims to improve the provision of education and training and sets out to reach more than 2 million people working in the NHS and social care.
A Virtual Campus can be accessed through the NHSU website and will deliver on-line training and provide access to research and development through links with electronic libraries, online registration and facilities to host discussion groups. The campus allows for separate sections for tutors, managers and learners.

The NHSU’s eLearning strategy includes short ‘bite-sized’ learning modules that do not require formal enrolment, information and guidance about learning opportunities, online and telephone support services, including e- tutoring, e- mentoring and learning kiosks, skill assessment tools and access to curriculum pathways that support the NHS skills escalator.

UK trade unions have also been very active in implementing eLearning strategies.

The Union Learning Fund (ULF) provides funding to help trade unions use their influence with employers, employees and others to encourage greater take-up of learning at work, and boost their capacity as learning organisations.

In the next sections of this report we present four case studies of eLearning initiatives in the UK: Learndirect, UK Online, Age Concern, and the Lambeth eLearning Foundation. These cases were selected in order to illustrate the range of eLearning initiatives undertaken in the UK. Learndirect and UK Online are major national programmes, designed to complement each other, with the former focused on encouraging further learning leading to employment and the latter aiming to encourage participation in the information society. By contrast the latter two cases involve local projects aimed at particular target groups at particular risk of exclusion.

The first of these, run by Age Concern, is targeted at older people predominantly in rural area.

The second, the Lambeth eLearning Foundation, targets children in a deprived multi-ethnic inner-city area.

The Age Concern project could be regarded as a top-down initiative, although it relies strongly on local volunteers for its success, whilst the Lambeth eLearning Foundation is a bottom-up initiative, grounded in local community-based projects.

5.3 Broadening digital competence and ICT access for specific target groups: four case studies

Case Study 1. Learndirect

Description

The University of Industry (UfI) was established by the government in 1998 and sets out to promote eLearning to all UK citizens. UfI established the ‘Learndirect’ information, advice and eLearning network in 1999. Learndirect’s adviceline and network of Learndirect provision aims to improve individuals’ employability and organisations’ productivity and competitiveness by:

- inspiring existing learners to develop their skills further
- winning over new and excluded learners
- transforming the accessibility of learning in everyday life and work

Target Groups

Target groups which are hoped to benefit the most from Learndirect are:

- people who need help with basic skills
- lone parents
- people from minority ethnic groups
- unemployed people
- people with disabilities
people who are over 60 and not involved in learning activities

SMEs

Project outcome and impact
Learndirect operates throughout England, Northern Ireland and Wales and offers courses on basic skills (e.g., a national certificate in Adult Literacy & Numeracy), IT courses, business and development, languages, and advice on modern apprenticeships.

2000 Learndirect locations target individuals but also work in partnership with employers. This service is called Learndirect Business which offers online learning solutions for organisations of all types and sizes. There also are a number of regional premier business centres whose staff advise employers on their training needs and also offer IT access facilities.

Learndirect has established links with further and higher education to offer various routes to accredited qualifications.

Most learning materials are on-line based (80 percent), but can also be supplied on other multimedia (CD-ROM) and some training is work-based.

Learning can be carried out in 2000 local Learndirect centres, from work or from home with a secure password that enters the Learndirect website.

Courses are provided in ‘bite-sized’ chunks and can be completed at the learner’s own pace.

A person interested in taking up a course can contact a telephone advice line service which aims to provide information on courses available, qualifications and learner paths. The other alternative is to walk into a local Learndirect centre to ask for direct advice.

Courses

**Home and office IT:** basic skills, Internet and emailing, word processing, spreadsheets, databases, web design, desktop publishing.

For example, a level 1 word processing course is free, takes around 12 hours to complete and teaches basic word processing skills like simple text formatting, learn to print, etc., level 2 and level 3 word processing courses need to be paid for by the learner (which can be done online). The costs are around £80 per course and take around 13 hours to complete.

Learndirect courses are not linked to the national qualification system but can be used as stepping stones in order to gain a proper qualification. However, it is possible to gain qualifications like the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) at Learndirect centres which have formed a partnership with the British Computer Society which is the awarding body in the UK.

**Skills for life course:** literacy and numeric courses, work-related courses which teach how to write CVs, appropriate behaviour at interviews, etc.

Other courses are a range of foreign language courses and business management, business start up courses, customer care courses, etc.

### Learndirect progress to date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress categories for individual learners</th>
<th>Numbers of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learndirect learners since April 2000</td>
<td>approx 1,770,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learndirect course up-takes since April 2000</td>
<td>approx 4.07m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Learndirect courses available</td>
<td>578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learndirect courses delivered exclusively online</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of online tests taken since April 2003</td>
<td>approx 115,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Learndirect, 2005

An analysis of the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) found that over half of their respondents were aware of Learndirect, and five percent of their respondents had made use of Learndirect’s
advice line. Awareness was strongest amongst active learners, younger people, employed people and women. The same research found that individuals who take up a course with Learndirect are more likely to be older, female and less qualified when compared with the overall population of learners.

An evaluation study investigating the impact UfI/Learndirect has had on the learning market found that Learndirect ‘is attractive because it’s affordable, provides a safe environment because people can learn in their own pace and can seek support from tutors in local Learndirect centres’ (Tamkin, Hillage et al. 2003).

Interestingly, the access to a personal tutor who is present at Learndirect centres is crucial for beginners. A Learndirect location manager remembers that in the beginning phase in 2000 take-up of the purely virtual learning from home was very low and Learndirect learners tended to come into centres to seek advice from the present tutor. Now five years on members of this first generation of learners have matured in their IT skills to a level where they can make use of online materials at home.

Individuals who participate in a Learndirect course often have little experience with learning. Most learners stated that they would like to take up further learning after completing one course but not necessarily with Learndirect. Generally, learners express high levels of satisfaction: learners felt that they had gained IT, job-related skills, problem solving skills, the opportunity to progress onto qualifications and self-confidence. The evidence to what extent Learndirect helps individuals to move into (better) employment and gain key skills is less clear.

An evaluation (Tamkin, Hillage et al. 2003) concluded that Learndirect can break down psychological and physical barriers to learning and learning with Learndirect can act as a ‘stepping stone’ but is less successful in helping people into new employment.

Research on learners’ satisfaction shows a high rate of satisfaction: 25 percent of learners said they would not have engaged in learning without Learndirect, 84 percent stated their desire go on to further learning, 48 percent of learners feel that learning will improve their employment situation and 82 percent felt that their ability in using computers had improved.

A follow-up evaluation survey in 2004 found little evidence of higher qualifications gained; the majority of users gained a Level 1 qualification (Tyers & Sinclair 2004).

The same study found perceived improvements on the employability dimension: 46 percent of respondents stated that they had experienced a job-related change.

The study concluded that Learndirect facilitates entry into learning, especially for the learning disadvantaged. Learndirect also helps individuals to progress to gain important skills but has little impact on enhancing the employability of individuals.

An impact evaluation in 2001 noted the low level of take up with employers, both SMEs and large organisations: the identified barriers related to issues of technical compatibility, tying learning goals in with business goals and the commitment of a company to life-long learning. In addition, the pure eLearning methods were described by managers as not always suitable with blended learning being industry’s favourite approach to be used in organisational life-long learning strategies.

### Progress categories for SMEs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SMEs engaged with <strong>Learndirect</strong> since April 2002</td>
<td>approx 176,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Learndirect</strong> course uptakes from SMEs since April 2002</td>
<td>approx 570,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Learndirect</strong> course uptakes for Sectors from April 2001</td>
<td>approx 320,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Learndirect, 2005

More recently there have been increased efforts to market Learndirect courses to organisations. A key informant involved in the strategic planning of this initiative stated that the low take-up may be attributed to employees’ greater knowledge and Learndirect courses may not offer what most businesses need, namely more advanced tailored training. Some research is now planned into exploring different learners profiles - i.e. a comparison of the learning needs of an unemployed
person with those of an employee in a SME company who is fairly skilled in using IT but not interested in learning languages.

**Programme costs**

Learndirect is managed by the University of Industry and unfortunately they are unable to give accurate figures of the costs involved in running Learndirect.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is the source of the largest element of Ufi’s income - £147m in the 2004-5 financial year and £159m in 2003-4. The LSC funds Ufi’s learning centres in return for delivery of a locally agreed number of learning units. Ufi receives a proportion of this income via its local hubs as a result of charging for the use of the Learndirect educational materials.

Ufi is also financially dependent upon the DfES because the Department funds the difference between Ufi’s annual income and expenditure up to an agreed ceiling (£64.87m for the 2004-5 financial year).

**Lessons learned**

The fact that Learndirect is more useful for disadvantaged and disengaged learners shows that the programme has been successful in reaching out to people who might not have approached learning and gaining IT skills at all. There certainly have been many beneficial outcomes for Learndirect learners.

At the same time, Learndirect receives a substantial amount of financial support to offer elearning solutions to many groups in the UK and at this level it is more doubtful how successful they are. There are no clear figures available showing what type of courses have the highest take-up rates and how they benefit particular groups at risk.

Lastly, even though Learndirect has been working in partnership with many other training providers in the UK such as the NHSU there is a question whether their learning solutions need to be more comprehensive to enable more advanced learners amongst groups at risk to make progress.

**SWOT analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Engage disadvantaged individual in learning, gaining basic skills for life and IT skills</td>
<td>• Learndirect commission regular evaluations of their work and are aware of their weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have programmes available in other languages</td>
<td>• the biggest opportunity is to design courses that will involve more advanced learners and leaning groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Most learning is free and can be assisted by a personal tutor</td>
<td>• One great opportunity is to move into the SME/large organisation market which has not been very lucrative up to date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have local learning centres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offer a range of eLearning products</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• ELearning products only reach a lower segment of the UK learner market</td>
<td>• The UK eLearning market is competitive: institutions like the NHS have started their own learning institutes, the Open University is very well established in the market. Thus for Learndirect to enter into the more mature learners market they have to design very good products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To date there has been increasing but little involvement of organisations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The costs of Level 2 qualifications onwards appear very high which may put people off</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CASE STUDY 2. UK ONLINE

Description

The Department for Skills and Education introduced UK Online centres to provide computer access to people in various communities and thus help them to acquire new skills. There are now 6,000 centres located in libraries, community centres and schools. Initially there were about a thousand centres around the country; now in 2005 there are 6,000. Like Learndirect, UK Online is run by the University of Industry and the two concepts are supposed to complement each other.

This initiative aims to facilitate the political goal whereby everyone in the UK is to have access to eGovernment services by 2005. UK Online centres can thus be seen as emerging networked community learning entities, which are playing an expanding role in formal and informal community-based learning.

Every centre provides access to computers and the Internet to help people of all ages develop computer skills. There are trained staff and volunteers available to give advice and support. Access to the Internet is free or low cost, depending on each centre’s management.

Target group

UK Online is targeted at:

- people who need help with basic skills
- lone parents
- people from minority ethnic groups
- unemployed people
- people with disabilities
- people who are over 60 and not involved in learning activities

Project’s outcome and impact

There are 6,000 UK Online centres across England, of which:

- 41% are located in public libraries
- 25% are located in FE college based venues
- 7% are run by private training providers
- 27% are located in voluntary and community organisations

According to UK Online records:

- around 130,300 adults used the Internet a first time in a UK Online centre
- around 127,000 adults were helped by centres to re-engage in learning
- around 272,000 adults have learnt new skills they would not have gained otherwise
- 25,500 feel that OK Online centres helped them to secure a job to some extent

Case study evidence shows that clients’ experience with UK Online centres is positive overall and satisfaction levels with the support and services received in centres are high. The study followed 222 users in 10 centres and in general they feel they have gained in confidence and have acquired important IT skills. This experience inspired them to seek further training opportunities, i.e. enrol in a Learndirect course.

However with respect to the idea that using UK Online centres will help with employability or finding new employment, less success has been reported. The results show that only 8% of the sample found new employment (Wyatt et al 2003).

In another study (Cook & Smith 2002) centre users and centre managers were interviewed and found to have a very large number of goals that they wish to achieve. The range of goals that motivate users and staff for self improvement and the collective improvement of others in the community were found to be various and powerful. These goals may be the core ingredient that makes a centre
work and so understanding them becomes relevant in the context of building models of successful practice that can be cascaded by the community to new start-ups, thus building up sustainable capacity.

**UK Online Users, 2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of UK Online users quarter ending March 2004</th>
<th>65,759</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of new users for Quarter ending December 2004</td>
<td>20,653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total number of users from target groups</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of users progressing in to further learning</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: UK Online*

An evaluation (Wyatt et al 2003) investigated

- whether users have increased their ICT skills
- the extent to which users achieved short-term and longer-term positive gains from their increased ICT skills
- the broader impact on communities

Results from this study showed that over 60% UK Online centre users were from the programme’s six socially excluded target groups and even more (74%) were ‘digitally excluded’ by lack of access to computers and the Internet and/or lack of skills. Many people had computers at home that they did not know how to use.

Centre users liked their experiences at the centres. They recommended the centres to others and most did what they expected to do whilst many achieved more than they expected.

Most respondents (84%) to the initial user survey said that they learned new skills they would not have gained otherwise. Six months on, users’ experience with various ICT activities had improved markedly.

Half of all users who stayed at centres for six months or more went on to do learning that earned them a certificate (whether externally verified or not). Many progressed to college or Learndirect courses.

The longer users stayed at a centre the more likely they were to progress. And staff advice and encouragement resulted in more people progressing to further learning. Almost all users said that their confidence had improved to some extent since coming to the centre. For many this was a significant result. Meeting new people was a major benefit for nearly half of all users.

Community and voluntary sector centres attracted higher proportions of socially excluded and digitally excluded users. They also used a much greater number of volunteers – often people who had first been users. They played an important role in engaging the more excluded groups.

The report’s recommendations are:

- The future focus for UK Online centres should be on the levels where the programme has succeeded so far – encouraging interest and developing skills.
- Preserving the community and voluntary sector role should be recognised as a key policy goal.
- Whatever the future funding regime, more funding should be targeted on the successful informal services that many UK Online centres have developed to attract excluded groups and those not involved in learning.
- The continued success of UK Online centres in reaching the more excluded groups and helping them to progress should be carefully monitored.
- Further links should be developed between UK Online centres and both colleges and Learndirect to help build on the success so far.
Programme costs

A DfES-commissioned report estimated that 45% of all UK Online centres are run through the community and voluntary sector with an average running cost of £76,760 (£47,300 for staff costs and the remaining costs for running the centres).

There is additional DfES capital funding of up to £10,000 a year in the form of a grant that centres have to apply for.

From August 2004, funding for Ufi and the Learndirect network is be channelled through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), rather than through the DfES. Ufi assumed responsibility for the disbursement of the funds to the Learndirect network and is going to enhance the existing regional structure to ensure closer working with the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) in order to meet the regional skills priorities.

To sustain their services, centres need to look for funding from a range of sources, for example other funding institutions such as the New Opportunities Fund. For small voluntary organisations this means a great risk of an unsustainable future and many of these centres are run with the help of volunteers.

Lessons learned

UK Online has developed into a widespread network and established good links with communities. Research evidence seems to suggest that people benefit from using UK Online centres, have positive learning experiences and, through informal learning, gain IT skills which they use to improve their life situation. An important side-effect of the centres is probably that people gain the confidence to use computers and the Internet in a supportive environment.

SWOT Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Large network of small centres accessible for free or at low cost</td>
<td>• Build on links with communities and voluntary organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide supportive learning for people to learn basic IT skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interlinked with Learndirect and thus able to give advice to continue learning</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Little measure of success and progress</td>
<td>• Many centres have to secure their own funding that may stop them developing or implementing improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No needs assessment - is the UK Online approach working for all disadvantaged groups?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CASE STUDY 3: AGE CONCERN

Description

Age Concern is a charity that supports all people over 50 in the UK. Age Concern provides a variety of services such as day care and information. They also campaign on issues like age discrimination and pensions, and are involved in contributing to Government policy making.

A survey commissioned by Age Concern showed that whilst 65% of the UK’s population have used the Internet but only 15% of those over 65 have done so. Age Concern believes that for older people, in
particular for individuals living in rural areas or in residential care, it can be difficult to access new technology. As a response Age Concern has developed a number of initiative which support the inclusion of this groups and their exposure to ICT use and ICT skills.

Age Concern has a strong commitment to making the benefits of technology available to more older people. Outreach programmes and drop-in sessions help to conquer isolation, empower individuals and bring people with shared interests together. Through Age Concern older people can use IT in several ways: the charity offers computer access and training at different Age Concern locations some of which can lead to professional qualifications.

Many Age Concern groups and organisations around the country offer Internet and computer taster sessions in activity centres, day centres, and other community locations.

Age Concern has developed two mobile computer training initiatives:

**Mobile Internet Taster Sessions (MITS)** centre around the idea of bringing ICT training to elderly people who are unable to come into Age Concern centres. The MBT equipment is portable and can therefore be brought to day centres, residential care homes and sheltered housing. This service also reaches out to the carers of elderly people who can be seen just as isolated and includes them too.

**‘Computer Explorers’** is a service that offers IT equipment and specialist training which is located on a bus with the idea of creating awareness and offering taster IT training to people locally in Barrow-in-Furness and District, Leicester and its surrounding area, Derbyshire and Staffordshire. The buses are wheelchair accessible.

In the South West region a second project has been launched with the financial help of Microsoft’s Unlimited Potential programme, a global initiative designed to promote life-long learning through community-based technology and learning centres (CTLCS). The Mini-Explorer is a small vehicle with a trainer who will bring its learning and Internet taster sessions directly to older people.

**Target group**

The project is targeted at people over 50 without access to ICT and ICT skills.

**Outcome and impact of the programme**

MITS seems to have been successful. Even though Age Concern does not have accurate impact statistics available, the estimation is that the programmes have reached their targets. The MITS sessions reached hundreds of elderly people in isolated places and the programme has been extended to other locations with renewed funding from Microsoft. An evaluation of the MITS programme showed that on the user sites there were few problems, but some issues were raised about the software used (unfamiliar to some centres), and the lack of IT readiness in some of the venues visited (e.g. no telephone available to connect to the Internet). It was also concluded that Age Concern venues that are planning to set up MITS may need clearer, better structured information on the lessons learned from other MITS projects and to be surer what training they need to offer to their staff (often volunteers) to hold MITS.

One Mini-Explorer bus carries eleven laptops and additional equipment such as printers and scanners. The Mini-Explorer buses visit community centres, residential care facilities, sheltered housing and nursing homes. People taking part in the taster sessions will be shown how to set up an email account, browse the Internet and research hobbies or pension-related issues. The course tutors have developed learning materials in the form of hand-outs. There is a great sense of usefulness of this project as their clients appreciate the opportunity to learn about new technologies and some care homes have installed a PC in waiting areas as a result of being inspired by the project.

The project hopes to reach 1,000 people a year in the South West region using 4 buses. One worry from programme management is the sustainability and funding of the scheme. The three-year project period will come to an end soon and the project will need to renew funding to keep buses and equipment in safe running mode.
Programme costs

Age Concern’s IT learning programmes are mostly funded through private sponsors. Each MITS programme received a grant from Age Resource of £20,600 and altogether an additional £100,000 funding from Microsoft.

Barclays Bank dedicated around £800,000 to the development and implementation of the Explorer buses.

Lessons learned

The IT projects seem to be successful and have made progress in helping to advance the UK learning targets. There is great inspiration within Age Concern to extend programmes to other regions and come up with new ideas about how ICT can benefit elderly people. One of the biggest issues which can be found often with voluntary organisations is the lack of resources regarding proper evaluations and cost-benefit analyses. So information on progress is based on anecdotal evidence more than systematic figures.

SWOT analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Programme is successful and run by inspired staff</td>
<td>• Considering that both type of programmes are working very well, there is great scope to extend to other centres and regions where more sponsorship is available to sustain the programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Older people, in particular those living in isolation without close family nearby, can access the Internet, learn new skills and gain information about pension Tax Credits and pensions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Little systematic monitoring</td>
<td>• Programmes will need continuous funding or develop mechanisms to devise a self-sustaining strategy, e.g. charge for the services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CASE STUDY 4: LAMBETH eLEARNING FOUNDATION

Description

The Lambeth e-Learning Foundation provides support to disadvantaged children’s and adults’ educational and vocational skills, confidence and quality of life through technology based projects.

Lambeth is one of a ring of thirteen local authorities which constitute Inner London. The London Borough of Lambeth is the largest inner London borough with a population of around 260,000. Lambeth is a very culturally diverse borough - 34% of Lambeth’s population are from ethnic minorities - the seventh highest figure for a London borough. Approximately 132 languages are spoken in the borough and after English the main languages spoken are Yoruba and Portuguese. 12.4% of the population are aged over 60 and 22.2% are aged under 18.

Lambeth performs poorly on three important indices of exclusion, ranking high on crime and disorder, low on income deprivation affecting children and low on general income.
LeLF key aim is ‘to empower individuals who are socially excluded, while increasing their educational achievement and employability’.

The charity was set up in 2001. LeLF works on a series of technology-based programmes with a strong emphasis on local partnerships.

LeLF is a very small charity managed by a Chief Executive and supported by a handful of part-time staff responsible for delivering projects.

**Target group**

One of LeLF’s key aims is to create opportunities for hard-to-reach groups in the borough (elderly people, individuals with mental health problems, families from a refugee or asylum seeking background, etc).

The key challenge is to make people aware of opportunities and help them understand the benefits ICT can have for their lives.

Most programmes involve children or young adults from poor family backgrounds, providing facilities to use ICTs outside school as many families have difficulties affording computers at home.

However, other initiatives target anyone from the area to invite them to begin using ICTs to improve their lives, in particular the socially isolated.

**Outcome and impact of the programmes**

With the support of trainers, the Link Up programme developed two community websites tailored to the needs of residents on two very deprived housing estates (Hemans Estate and Hainthorpe Estate). Estate residents were actively involved in the process of designing the sites and acquired new IT skills in the process. In addition, ‘resident champions’ have been elected; these are individuals who edit and update the local website which highlights the idea of local ownership and empowerment in decision-making which LeLF believes is the best way of engaging individuals living on the estates. The website features a section about learning resources, training courses and lists of adult education establishments.

Link Up also created access to the local UK Online centre for residents from the Hainthorpe Estate. UK Online operates in the daytime from nine to five and the Lambeth e-Learning Foundation hires the centre’s facility after 5 pm. This is thought to benefit those who work or have children to look after in the daytime.

Learning is informal: people can ask advice or request more structured training if required. LeLF’s manager believes that people do not necessarily want structured or accredited ICT training but benefit most from learning how to use the Internet or emailing. Many estate residents may have left education very early and should therefore not be forced to participate in very structured learning. Thus, by creating the opportunity for free access to learning people can develop ICT skills and acquire greater interest to move on to more formalised learning.

Because of the lack of resources there has not been a systematic programme evaluation or more systematic tracking of individual learners’ progress but the initiative seems to attract great interest. The ‘resident champions’ maintain interest and the computer facilities are always fully booked in the evenings, with around 300 individuals a month having access to the computers.

Another interesting initiative has been set up in partnership with parents and community groups in deprived areas of Lambeth where children’s access to computers and the Internet is extremely limited outside school. The aim is to give children the opportunity to use computers at home but also to educate their parents about the benefits to them and their children’s education.

There have already been some pilot projects hiring out laptops to households but some problems occurred regarding maintenance and durability. LeLF is currently engaged in talks with suppliers and ISPs to negotiate discounted rates for parents.

**Programme costs**

The Lambeth e-learning Foundation, as a charity, is reliant on external funding. Initiatives like Link Up have been supported by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (OPDM), the local council, and
some corporate donors. The costs of Link Up, including staff salaries and running costs, amount to around £250,000. Fundraising is a continuous activity and there is a strong sense that with more resources the programme could expand its project work.

Lessons learned

Programme management admits that it can be difficult to reach the right people. Their initiatives are most successful with young children and adults who are already familiar with computers. To reach other groups more effort needs to be invested to raise awareness and highlight the usefulness of ICTs. To achieve this some groundwork has to be done before the learning become a factor. For example, a questionnaire distributed at local housing estates resulted in a very low turn-out. After adopting the strategy of carrying out face-to-face interviews with tenants of the estates asking about their ICT use and needs, Link Up was able to identify the gaps in existing local training provision and was then successful in engaging people in ICT use and learning.

SWOT analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Programme is trying to engage hard-to reach groups which may even be excluded from mainstream ICT training</td>
<td>• LeLF’s initiatives are successful and with more resources and funding could be easily expanded to other locations</td>
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<td>• Putting the users’ needs first: the initiative attempt to identify gaps in provision and the needs of groups at risk instead of providing structured, accredited training</td>
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<td>• Strong emphasis on partnership working in the borough</td>
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<td>• Programme has high relevance to all groups at risk</td>
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<tr>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Threats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Programmes may not be able to target all relevant groups in particularly those with language barriers</td>
<td>• Programmes are heavily reliant on external funding. Programme’s sustainability is therefore at risk if funding runs out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

National value of ICT learning programmes

In recent years the national governments and authorities of the EU have attached increasing value to the problem of the digital divide and to eLearning as an appropriate means to diminish ICT related qualification gaps. This be seen as a result from the European Commission’s eEurope 2005 Action Plan, launched at the Seville European Council in June 2002 and various other initiatives.

The UK provides a clear example of a case where there are fairly high budgeted governmental eLearning strategies and programmes, aiming to support ICT-related further education. For instance the Open University (OU) invested £30 million in their eLearning strategy. Furthermore the UK government backed the e-Universities (UKeU) initiative with £55 million funding. Even if there were critical voices raising the question whether that money has been spent well, it is nevertheless apparent that authorities throughout the European Communities are willing to strongly support the European Commission’s eEurope initiative. This comprises, among others, strategies to overcome severe competence gaps concerning ICT skills and literacy.

Despite this, it must however be admitted that the financial support particularly for those projects and programmes aiming explicitly at reducing the digital divide by addressing marginal groups like immigrants, low qualified or otherwise deprived people, is currently being reduced or even abandoned altogether. As we have learned from the case studies undertaken, most of them are more or less fighting for financial survival.

Given the sustained shortage of the public budgets a general withdrawal from programmes fostering low privileged labour market participants is to be observed at the moment. Complaints about current or future financial insecurities to a greater or lesser extent were a continuing message from almost all the projects interviewed. This mirrors the current general pattern of adjusting both the European and the individual national employment strategies. Facing the persisting weakness of the European Communities’ economies, political strategies in favour of supporting the ‘winners’ instead of the ‘losers’ of the labour market changes, seem presently to be considered more helpful.

This overarching political paradigm shift cannot be appraised within the scope of the LAW project’s work. But it is necessary to refer to the fact that this public withdrawal from funding programmes as presented in this report, appears to be aggravating lessening the concern for eInclusion’ which undoubtedly is still an important strand in public policy, as has been pointed out by the already mentioned Netherlands’ ICT strategy report (‘Rethinking the European ICT Agenda, 2004). One clear finding from the analysis of the data and interviews carried out in this research was that if policy makers wish to continue with their endeavours to further reduce the digital divide it will be necessary to provide ongoing funding and support to programmes that are aiming directly at empowering people who are lagging back from competent ICT utilisation. These results support the conclusion (quoted below) reached by the high-level expert eInclusion advisory group that the exhaustive provision of infrastructure, such as broadband coverage, whilst an important precondition, does not of itself ensure progress in reducing the digital divide.

Since this conclusion represents an important result of the LAW project’s work referring to the e-learning issue, we quote here the relevant passage from the recent report, elaborated by the eEurope Advisory Group on behalf of the European Commission:

‘The Working Group quickly became convinced that the focus on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) access characterised by most of current policy action on the information society fails to capture the real challenge: e-Inclusion is essentially about social inclusion in a knowledge society. Access to ICT tools, networks and services, and even digital literacy, are merely preconditions for e-Inclusion. Beyond that, the real issue is whether ICT makes a difference to an individual’s ability to take an active part in the different spheres of society, i.e. work, social relationships, culture, political participation, etc. The issue is one of empowerment rather than access. Empowerment is not an automatic consequence of access. In some cases, the development of online services and communications can produce or deepen isolation and exclusion; in others, communities are empowered by ICT even when each individual does not make personal use of ICT tools and services.'

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e-Inclusion and social inclusion are highly correlated. This helps explain the apparently paradoxical results of surveys measuring relative differences in ICT penetration and usage between socio-economic groups, which point out that despite the dramatic growth of ICT penetration in all groups of society, the 'digital divide' remains as large today as it was in the late 1990s. e-Inclusion is a moving target: On the one hand, several underprivileged communities tend to develop creative ways of using ICTs, either individually or collectively; on the other hand, technological innovation constantly creates new gaps, and growing use generates new professional and social requirements that are difficult to meet by large parts of the population.

By focusing almost exclusively on quantitative targets of ICT penetration, an opportunity has thus been missed for these technologies to contribute to a more inclusive society.


The table below summarises the main findings from the case studies conducted by the LAW partners. It condenses particularly the results of the several SWOT analyses and serves as starting point for the final conclusions.
## Summary of selected and researched eLearning case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Objective/ Contents</th>
<th>Actor/ Organisation</th>
<th>Target Groups/ Addressees</th>
<th>Approach/ Methods</th>
<th>Outcome/ Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1. Self-Training and E-Learning</td>
<td>Autonomous learning of French, mathematics, basic technological skills (initiation to Internet).</td>
<td>APP (ateliers de pédagogie personnalisée)</td>
<td>No specific TG, but overrepresentation of • unemployed, • low skilled, • 73% over 26 y., • 70% women.</td>
<td>Training course is specifically designed to meet the participants’ expectations and competences.</td>
<td>• Reduction of unemployment/ enhancement of employment and participation in advanced training, • 69% passed examinations, • 60% reached their objectives.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Bus ‘Cyberan-jou’</td>
<td>Mobile training centre in rural regions, aimed at reaching marginal groups (in a regional and a social sense).</td>
<td>APP / Formactive 49</td>
<td>• Marginal groups in rural regions. • 95% unemployed.</td>
<td>Going to / Individualized support for those who generally are not being reached by traditional training centres.</td>
<td>No evaluation up to now, because recently launched; • by improving ICT-skills, participants also improve basic skills.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Qualifying outside the walls</td>
<td>Social and vocational reintegration of disabled people by additional training supply, flexible and well adapted courses, partly based on e-learning, to avoid long-term stay in traditional rehabilitation centres far away from home.</td>
<td>Joint network between ADAPT, several groups working for integration of handicapped (GIPH), specialized and traditional training centres (CRP), and private companies.</td>
<td>• Seriously handicapped, strongly dependent on their care network resp. on their family, • 60% women, • 12% heavily handicapped.</td>
<td>Individualized training courses, 50% of the training course in the training centre, 50% consists in e-learning and periods of on-job training in several firms or at home (teleworking).</td>
<td>Since 2002, • 216 qualifying training courses have been carried out • in several cases leading to employment (figures not available); • first step to a structural change of training system for disabled people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
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|         | 4. Surfing the Internet (NSI) | Short time introduction to internet (about 14 hours; 28 hours for people with special integration difficulties), aiming to develop computer and internet competence (NSI certificate). | Ministry of employment, labour and social cohesion / Interministerial council of information society (CISI) / APP / National Agency for Employment (ANPE) | • Unemployed people; in 2004:  
  • 57% women;  
  • 23% aged under 26 y.  
  • 64% aged 26-49,  
  • 13% over 50 years;  
  • education level mostly (63%) below upper secondary school | The aim is not to develop personal skills, but the ability to use this new tool: each person should be able to surf, communicate and search on the internet. | • More than 400 000 certificates since 2001 (even though less than the expected 1 million);  
  • evaluation study is being conducted by end of 2005 |
| Germany | 1. 'Citizen go online' | Promotion of digital integration, resting on three pillars: Provision with citizen-PCs, including internet, Support and qualification by volunteer mentors, offer of courses (linking of language and computer courses). | City of Esslingen. Project is part of comprehensive eGovernment pilot project 'MEDIA@komm'. In addition, more than 20 companies and organisations were integrated (Public Private Partnership) | • most users with no (48 %) or little experience (31 %) in using the internet.  
  • Major part is elder persons (aged 56-65 y.: 38%; aged 66-75 y.: 19%; aged 75 y.and more: 8%).  
  • Good half women (54%).  
  • locations especially pointing at migrants (e.g. certain schools and youth centres) showed high percentage of foreigners. | Hands-on learning approach; solving real everyday life problems. Recipients are taken from consumers' role and regarded as subjects able to systematically use media. Creation of settings supporting self-directed learning processes. Support by voluntarily engaged citizens (mentoring approach). The combination of Citizen-PC and mentors' support made an 'open-door' offer possible. | • From August 2001 to September 2003 8,900 visitors were registered. The number of visitors increased continuously from 50 persons at the beginning to lately 600 - 800 users per month.  
  • Decentralised distribution of locations proved efficient. Especially locations outside the city centre revealed high percentage of users from the respective district.  
  • Mentors from most various groups of persons and ages could be won. Unlike other 'socially' oriented
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country Project</th>
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<th>Approach/Methods</th>
<th>Outcome/Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. The Women's Computer Centre Berlin's 'Self-LearnCentre'</td>
<td>Countering gender driven disadvantages at the labour market by particularly developing and conducting ICT related qualification means at all qualification levels. Gender mainstreaming and reducing gender related digital divide are two essential focal points of their work.</td>
<td>FrauenComputerZentrum Berlin (FCZB) - Women's Computer Centre Berlin</td>
<td>Target group specific IT offers for female • migrants • girls • teachers • seniors • work returners • unemployed academ- ics</td>
<td>Wide range of methods, basic principals are as follows • IT-training has to be possibly applied to work on concrete institutional tasks • IT-training has to possibly regard and incorporate individual preconditions and experiences • eLearning has to be embedded in 'blended learning' (personnel accompaniment and support is essential) Recent launch of a Self-LearnCentre, based on various elaborate multimedia eLearning mod- ules</td>
<td>• In the 'initial' IT course 'no fear of computer's designed for women job returners, started in 1984, about 700 women have participated. • In the meanwhile about 1,200 to 1,500 female training partic- ipants attend the FCZB per year. • High integration ratios as regards the IT qualification courses for unemployed academics, like 'knowledge management'</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1. Giano Project</td>
<td>Improve workers’ skills and knowledge in the English language, ICT tools and using the internet; based on self-learning, on-line tutorship provided by experts, and cooperation and exchange among users</td>
<td>Supported by the three main Italian labour unions, implemented by three associations specialised on training, performed in 33 firms</td>
<td>Employees of small and medium enterprises (region of Lazio); 47 participants (22 in IT-course, 21 in English-course and 4 in both)</td>
<td>E-learning module based on individualised analysis of needs / requirements of the employees as well as requirements of the firms (assessment-based); 35 hours, of which 30 done online and 5 in the classroom (blended learning)</td>
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<td>3. ICT qualification means for unemployed</td>
<td>Development and conducting ICT related further education aiming at reintegrating unemployed into the labour market</td>
<td>Job Promotion Centre Essen</td>
<td>Unemployed and those threatened by it with former work experience (in particular people made redundant).</td>
<td>Regional integration and linking, Continuous acquisition of projects and vacancies from organisations, Anticipating search for new labour market developments in the region, Interactive approach: developed best within the trainee model’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. IT Emancipation - A project directed towards women</td>
<td>Improve employability, the chances of equal opportunities and of a better quality of life: working and maintenance of hardware, use of software, IT as a job, IT and family.</td>
<td>Lazio Regional authorities</td>
<td>Unemployed women and housewives; 20 participants</td>
<td>Embedded in a regional network (public administration, associations, civil society organisations), the 120 hours course is adapted to individual competences (basic assessment); tests halfway and at the end.</td>
<td>Improvement of employability and reconciliation of family and working needs. (It showed to be difficult to include housewives.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. FADI - Long distance learning for enterprises regarding new telecommunication technologies</td>
<td>Improvement of ICT-skills, either to keep up with changes within the work organization, or to be able to find a different job, if unemployed</td>
<td>Labour Ministry, SMILE project, regions of Lombardy and Abruzzo; common performance by employers and employees</td>
<td>Employees of small and medium enterprises (SME), and unemployed; 207 workers in 37 enterprises</td>
<td>Assessment of employers’ and employees’ needs led to 9 types of personal training courses (4 ITC themes, office automation, internet, e-commerce, system security, and work place security); method of self learning, tests halfway and at the end.</td>
<td>Satisfactory results: 2,353 didactic hours completed; successful completion by 84%, drop-out 16% of participants; 57% of users found the method to be effective and satisfying; 68% appreciated the involvement in a new methodology to learn working skills, 69% found the contents of the programme interesting; 70% passed final examination on first attempt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Project</td>
<td>Objective/Contents</td>
<td>Actor/Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1. Learndirect</td>
<td>Learndirect’s adviceline and network of Learndirect provision aims to improve individuals’ employability and organisations' productivity and competitiveness by IT-courses</td>
<td>University of Industry (established by the Ministry)</td>
<td>People who need help with basic skills, lone parents, minority ethnic groups, unemployed people, disabled, people over 60, SMEs; 1,770,000 Learndirect learners since April 2000, more likely to be older, female and less qualified than overall learning population</td>
<td>courses on basic skills (e.g. national certificate in Adult Literacy &amp; Numeracy), IT courses, business &amp; development, languages, and advice on modern apprenticeships</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. UK Online</td>
<td>Provides computer access to people in various communities and thus helping them to acquire new skills</td>
<td>Department for Skills and Education, University of Industry</td>
<td>People who need help with basic skills, lone parents, minority ethnic groups, unemployed people, disabled, people over 60, SMEs</td>
<td>Centre provide access to computers and the Internet (free or low costs) to help people develop computer skills; trained staff and volunteers give advice and support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Age Concern</td>
<td>Provides a variety of services such as day care and information; computer access and IT training for elderly people</td>
<td>Age Concern (charity)</td>
<td>People over 50 without access to ICT and ICT skills</td>
<td>Portable computer equipment (Mini-Explorer bus with 11 laptops and additional equipment such as printers and scanners) can be brought to day centres, residential care homes and sheltered housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country Project</td>
<td>Objective/ Contents</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Lambeth e-Learning Foundation</td>
<td>Provides support to disadvantaged children’s and adults’ educational and vocational skills, confidence and quality of life through technology based projects</td>
<td>Local authority (inner London district, population of around 260,000)</td>
<td>Hard-to-reach groups in the borough (elderly people, individuals with mental health problems, families from a refugee or asylum seekers background, etc)</td>
<td>Deliver innovative ICT learning opportunities tailored to people’s needs, providing a more flexible approach (e.g. by offering ICT access at people’s homes or in the evening)</td>
<td>No systematic programme evaluation; computer facilities are always fully booked in the evenings, giving access to around 300 individuals a month (Programme management admits difficulties to reach the right people; initiatives are most successful with young children and adults who are already familiar with computers)</td>
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</table>
Main findings and conclusions

The general findings and conclusions from the 14 case studies examined by the LAW project may be summarised as follows:

► eLearning is most effective if related to dealing with real matters and problems

One of the nearly universally reported experiences from the interviewed eLearning experts is, that ‘plain’ ICT training, like e.g. text processing, spreadsheets or databases courses, is much less successful as a training strategy than designing learning situations where ICT skills may be acquired on the basis of treating real-life problems or demands.

As regards broadening general ICT literacy and basic skills, apart from specific job qualifications, ICT training offers can be combined e.g. with language issues (e.g. for immigrants or business English, as the Italian Giano project shows), or it may be integrated in eGovernment-related training, as the German ‘citizen go online’ project shows. The Age Concern project reported from UK as well takes its starting point from helping the elderly to gain access to Internet information, precisely because the are rather cut off from access to other information sources and participation opportunities that younger and more mobile people can have.

As regards job-related ICT training it became obvious that the more these courses are integrated into dealing with real companies’ internal issues, the more successful they are. Illustrative examples for this interrelation are the reported experiences from the Women’s Computer Centre Berlin or the ’trainee model’ developed by the Job Promotion Centre in Essen. A similar result can be observed in the Italian FADI project, where the long distance learning project started with a comprehensive initial phase, investigating the concrete training and qualification needs expressed by the companies within the region concerned.

► Successful eLearning initiatives are adapted to regional particularities

Another striking finding from the studies was that almost all successful projects feature a specific regional, at least a decentralised approach. The UK Learndirect programme, for instance, has been organised on the basis of about 2,000 local learning centres. And the Lambeth eLearning foundation shows a kind of bottom-up community or street work approach, when they go to disadvantaged families in the Lambeth borough to motivate their children and provide them with ICT access and utilisation. The ‘Cyberanjou’ bus project also features a strong ‘on the spot’ approach, driving to remote rural or disadvantaged regions and trying to pick up and motivate in particular the unemployed or people otherwise fallen behind.

Above all, the quality and success of job related eLearning depend strongly on a regional or local embedding. Only if job related qualification offers exactly meet the actual work force demand emerging in the nearer region, are they able to support labour market integration. As the Job Promotion Centre in Essen has shown, this task requires continuous liaison with the local employers, in order to assess the current and, particularly, the region’s future work force demand. As experience from labour market research shows, many unfortunate further education measures have demonstrated that providing qualifications on the basis of historical demand, even if this existed quite recently, does not necessarily meet the actual market demand in the present – even if these qualification measures were very successful in the past. For this reason, job related eLearning offers need to be designed in a very close contact to local companies, chambers of commerce etc. and flexible enough to respond rapidly to change in the local labour market.

As a lesson learned we can conclude that there is little demand for universally valid ICT qualification and skills, but rather for specially shaped ones.

► eLearning must take account of and incorporate individuals’ preconditions and competences

In the same way that ICT related qualification must be specifically shaped in order to meet the demands for skills, it is also necessary to take account of the supply side, that is, more precisely speaking, the experience, aptitudes and aspirations of the individual. Successful eLearning opportunities pay...
attention as much as possible to the specific experiences and competences the participants bring along. It has been reported repeatedly that disregarding the individuals’ preconditions and particular (working) experiences leads, as a rule, to discouragement and waste of money. There are few exceptions only, when one-fits-all solution can be looked upon as appropriate and reasonable. Normally eLearning programmes should be designed on a modular basis, so that the individual precondition, interests and abilities can be taken account of and respected appropriately. This important finding on refers on the one hand to the design of the eLearning setting and on the other to an emphasis on the importance of individualised support, supervision and coaching, as described below.

► eLearning needs personnel assistance: it must be part of ‘blended learning’

Reviewing all fourteen presented case studies it turns out that none of the eLearning initiatives could succeed without personnel assistance. Regardless of target group or training content all interviewed eLearning experts have emphasised the important role of - at least partial - personnel presence and advice. The essential keyword is ‘blended learning’, explicitly referred to by almost every interview partner.

Rather demanding ICT qualification courses, like the Italian Giano project, targeted among others at SME managers, as well as projects with lower technical aspirations, like the French ‘Cyberanjou’ bus project or the Learndirect programme from the UK have emphasised, either the crucial importance of the presence of personnel tutors, or the necessity of a well-balanced combination of classroom and online training. Most notably the recently launched Self Learn Centre of the Women’s Computer Centre in Berlin, which is fundamentally based on elaborated, interactive modular designed ‘high-tech’ self-learning tools, has impressively proved the importance of ‘blended learning’. Without the continuous alternation of self learning and tutorial phases, most of the Self Learning Centre’s attendees would have given up their courses.

The latter point shows quite plainly that means, programmes or courses aiming at reducing the digital divide, are dealing in the first instance with people that are not experienced in self learning. They are to a considerable extent not capable of getting along with computer-aided self-learning programmes on their own, although this may be the case for well skilled ICT experts, attending high level training courses. As already repeatedly quoted, successful, effective and efficient ICT training means addressing rather disadvantaged people and needs to consist of more than providing for the technical side, comprising hard and soft ware. The “personnel side” concerning teaching, backing and motivating is decisive as well. If this report has contributed to underpin this aspect and put forward this idea to national and European decision-makers, being responsible for implementing eInclusion action plan and other initiatives alike, the LAW project’s work on the eLearning issue would have been worthwhile.

E-Learning strategies for groups at risk in the Information Society

The four concluding points discussed above present a summary of key conclusions from the LAW project’s case study analysis in the area of life-long learning. These factors should be looked at as general success factors of effective eLearning initiatives, especially designed to support the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups at risk. Importantly, these conclusions represent basic quality-assurance criteria which can be drawn upon if, for example, decisions about the continuation of funding for eLearning initiatives have to be made.

These key points can be seen as useful recommendations for policy makers as they can help to assess whether, or to what extent, eLearning programmes have an impact on the reduction of levels of social exclusion. Reduction of social exclusion and thus reducing the digital divide via efficient eLearning initiatives is a relevant matter that concerns our welfare systems and sustainable solutions. For practitioners in the field of lifelong learning it is clear that there is a direct relationship between supporting such initiatives and the stability of welfare systems.

In order to relate these success factors more directly to the particular risk groups which have been identified at the beginning of the LAW project’s second phase (see D.2.1), the different impacts of these factors on these groups are described below:
Assessing the impact of elearning on each of the identified risk groups can only be done in a limited sense because the advantages of different learning approaches do overlap and there is no point in repeating advantages for all groups at risk. In addition, figures on the eLearning initiatives that have been made available to us do not necessarily offer a breakdown of impact by specific group but commonly target their initiatives to a range of disadvantaged groups. Nevertheless, in an attempt to describe different impact of the eLearning success factors related to the specific target groups see the table below:

### Impact and importance of eLearning approaches (success factors) by risk groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups at risk in Information Society</th>
<th>Real life reference</th>
<th>Regional embedding</th>
<th>Individually shaped</th>
<th>Blended learning (personal teaching and backing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low qualified</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young adults</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older worker</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women with children</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Migrants</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XXX</td>
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</table>

XXX = decisive importance  
XX = high importance  
X = still significant importance

#### The low qualified

As we have learned from the examples of UK LearnDirect, the Women’s Computer Centre Berlin, the Italian Giano project and the AAP (ateliers de pédagogie personalisée) in France, a combination of individually shaped eLearning settings and a well balanced blend of personal and computer based learning surroundings are the best preconditions for successful and effective eLearning for low qualified participants. Particularly because low qualified persons are not often used to self -learning, the supportive and coaching role of tutors and teachers are predominantly important here. Almost equally important is individualised design. Low qualified persons normally bring negative experiences from previous learning. Thus eLearning must be tailored to their individual skills, abilities and experiences in order to avoid frustration or a repetition of negative experiences. This is confirmed by the commonly high dropout rates from the standard qualification and training courses (e.g. standard basic PC courses), which are usually offered to the low qualified unemployed.

eLearning for low qualified persons normally aims at providing basic ICT skills in order to enable them to use computer and the Internet, thus the demands of regional labour market are not very important in this context. Since training ICT specialists and skilled experts do not play a role in these initiatives, taking account of the specific regional workforce demand can be considered as secondary.

#### Young adults

Young adults, as one of the most important groups at risk, often have negative experiences with schooling or other training. Therefore the most important feature of promising learning and training opportunities to youngsters with fragmented learning biographies needs to take a different form creating a non-academic, ‘standard’ learning environment. Thus the more eLearning initiatives succeed in creating non-school, effective learning environments, the more they are able to give early school leavers and other dropouts an opportunity to cope with their impending social exclusion. Naturally, the earlier in life exclusion is experienced, the more harmful and irreversible it is, which in turn has a negative impact on welfare systems.

Successful eLearning for young adults does not aim at providing purely official academic qualifications but concentrates more on the acquisition of specific job-related skills and
Here, the close observation of the regional labour demand is essential, too. Initiatives offering young people job-related training and qualification should be required to give high importance to the development of training concepts that are directly relevant to the local labour market.

**Older workers**

A couple of things have to be said regarding occupational training and further education addressed in particular to older workers who have been made redundant in relation to the demands of regional labour markets. Older workers’, in particular, must be given qualifications that meet the current and future needs of local businesses. This is because of older workers’ low regional mobility (caused by potential obligations to family). Additionally, employers are often not interested in employing older workers. For these reasons older workers do have greater chance of entering new employment if their qualifications and skills exactly fit into the local businesses’ labour demand. Suitable work experiences from former job(s) often constitute a further advantage for older job seeking people. These need to be built on and, if necessary, adapted to the requirements of new employers.

In relation to eLearning, this means that successful ICT training for older workers requires training concepts which address individual job experiences and link them with the actual labour force demand. This has been demonstrated by the Job Promotion Centre Essen with its trainee concept.

Individually tailored teaching solutions, including references to real life situations (for motivational reasons) are of great importance. Older worker seeking new work normally do not require specific personal support. They are experienced, willing and able to learn. Furthermore learning approaches should include custom-tailored qualification, related to local companies’ demands and a praxis-related hands-on approach.

**Women with children**

With regard to the eLearning requirements of women with children it is important to note that they are not by any means a homogenous group. The greatest area of similarity between them is that they normally need a high degree of flexibility. A training concept providing flexibility is probably the most important feature of successful eLearning opportunities for women with children. Thus this is a target group where eLearning can reveal all its advantages by offering much more flexibility than many other more traditional approaches.

For women job returners it has been shown that the provision of a convenient, non-stressful learning atmosphere is of great importance.

For immigrant women or those from other disadvantaging backgrounds personal assistance and support becomes more important. This was another important conclusion from the German Women’s Computer Centre in Berlin.

Job experiences and skills of women with children, in particular those of job returners, are often a little bit out of date. Here it is important to design ICT training that meets the current demands of the local labour market. The local aspect is of great importance because women with children are almost completely geographically immobile.

**Migrants**

eLearning solutions for migrants require consideration of language barriers and the design of products in different languages. Thus very intensive, personal teaching and support, ideally bilingual, is of most importance for this target group. This group of course includes people who are disadvantaged at different levels (e.g. asylum-seekers or refugees). Thus the learning solutions offered to them must encompass social and motivational support. For these reasons eLearning targeted at specific migrants’ needs essentially need to be highly blended with a supportive approach. We found that the most appropriate and successful eLearning settings for migrants are those combining ICT training with language courses.
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