Limerick City Community
ICT Steering Group

Identifying ICT Needs in Disadvantaged Communities Within Limerick City

Summary of Research Findings

Commissioned by Limerick City Community ICT Steering Group

April 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Dr. Pat Bogue of Broadmore Research for undertaking the research and writing the full Research Report.
- The families who gave their time to complete the questionnaire;
- The community research team who collected the questionnaires;
- Imy Whelan Breen for coordinating the data collection;
- The community groups who participated in the focus groups;
- Caroline Scott for data coding and inputting;
- Gary O'Brien, former Research and Evaluation Officer, PAUL Partnership.

FOREWORD

The Limerick City Community ICT Steering Group which was formed in 2001 is a network consisting of PAUL Partnership, the City of Limerick Vocational Educational Committee (CLVEC), and representatives from five community centres in socially and economically disadvantaged areas in Limerick City

The Limerick City Community Steering group and The Limerick Employment Pact recognised the need to address the growing digital divide and the exclusion of disadvantaged community groups in Limerick City from what is called 'the information Society'. Dr. Pat Bogue of Broadmore Research was commissioned to identify ICT needs in the disadvantaged communities. LEP kindly funded the research.

This document presents a summary of the Research report by Dr. Pat Bogue. The most startling finding is the gap in ICT usage between advantaged and disadvantaged Communities. The research recommends three strategies:

- Promote relevance of technology to those most at risk if digital exclusion
- Enable access to information technology resources.
- Develop and strengthen education and training provision.

The findings of the research can be implemented only if there is a strong partnership formed between all who are key stakeholders in promoting ICT in Limerick City. PAUL Partnership, CLVEC, LEP and the ICT Steering group are already to the forefront in this proactive networking.

This is a very clear and well-presented report. However its purpose is not just to be admired but to serve as a launching pad to prepare and help especially people of disadvantaged communities to take their rightful place in the age of information technology

Sean O'Dwyer
Chairperson

Identifying ICT Needs in Disadvantaged Communities Within Limerick City

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

It is increasingly recognised that we are living in what can be characterised as an 'information society', where information and knowledge lie at the very core of socio-economic development. Access to and use of new information and knowledge is often mediated by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The gap between those who are frequent users of ICT and those who are not is commonly referred to under the following terms: the 'digital divide', 'digital exclusion' or 'e-exclusion'.

The Limerick City Community ICT Steering Group which was formed in 2001 is a network consisting of PAUL Partnership, the City of Limerick Vocational Educational Committee (CLVEC), and representatives from five community centres in socially and economically disadvantaged areas in Limerick City. The Group was formed in order 'to promote and support collaborative and innovative approaches to the use of ICTs in communities at risk of digital exclusion in Limerick City' (Group Terms of Reference 2001). Limerick Employment Pact (LEP)[1] also recognised the need to address what they saw as the growing 'digital divide' and the exclusion of disadvantaged communities in Limerick City from the information society. As little was known about the exact nature and extent of this form of exclusion locally, the Limerick City Community ICT Steering Group and the LEP commissioned Dr. Pat Bogue of Broadmore Research to undertake research that sought to identify ICT needs in disadvantaged communities within Limerick City and which would propose practical and innovative solutions that might be adopted by the Steering Group and other key stakeholders. **This document presents a summary of the Research Report by Dr. Pat Bogue. The full research report can be downloaded from:**

http://einclusionlimerick.blogspot.com
and
http://www.paulpartnership.ie

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the research were to:

- Identify the form(s) and extent of exclusion from the information society, in a comparable context and using recognised indicators, within spatially disadvantaged communities in Limerick City;
- Assess the needs of those communities and 'at risk' groups within them;
- Recommend practical responses to the range of needs identified;
- Develop a baseline by which positive and negative trends in digital exclusion can be tracked by longitudinal analysis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out in two stages: Phase 1 – survey of households; and Phase 2 – community focus groups. Phase 1 was the primary and most significant element of the data collection. This phase involved a survey of 440 households across 8 communities in Limerick City – 7 of which were disadvantaged communities and considered to be vulnerable to digital exclusion, namely:

Garryowen	Moyross
Our Lady of Lourdes	Our Lady Queen of Peace
Southill	St. Mary's
St. Munchin's	

The final community – Caherdavin (non-disadvantaged) – was included for comparative purposes[2].

The survey team consisted of community members who had recently completed a research methodology course. The data was collected during the period October 2006-January 2007. The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The main characteristics of the survey respondents included:

- 61% female, 39% male (main respondents)
- 38% had primary level only/no formal education (main respondents)
- 48% employed, 26% unemployed, 13% retired and 10% home duties.

Phase 2 of the research consisted of community focus groups. The groups consisted of individuals in the Southill, St Mary's and St Munchin's communities who were involved in: Community Employment Schemes; Over 55's Groups; and Women's Groups. These consultations complemented the data collected in the research survey and helped to focus the research conclusions and recommendations.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

The following is a summary of key findings from the research. Full details of all findings are contained in the Research Report which can be downloaded from http://einclusionlimerick.blogspot.com and www.paulpartnership.ie

The findings are presented under the following headings: 1. Technology Uptake; 2. Home Computer Ownership; 3. Internet Access; 4. Location of Computer and Internet/ Email Access; 5. Perceived Relevance of ICT.

1. TECHNOLOGY UPTAKE

1.1 Use of Technology

The most popular aspects of technology in terms of usage by respondents were the mobile phone and text messages (used by 89% and 78.6% of all respondents respectively). Three quarters of respondents used bank machines (ATMs). Only 8.1% of respondents used internet cafes.

The level of usage of technology was lower in the disadvantaged communities than in Caherdavin (a non-disadvantaged area). Over twice as many respondents in Caherdavin used internet cafes, WAP, broadband and on-line shopping than those in the other areas. It is also significant that all respondents in the non-disadvantaged area were aware of all of the aspects of technology listed (Table 1).

Table 1
Level of Familiarity With Aspects Of Technology (Comparison of Disadvantaged and Non-Disadvantaged Communities)

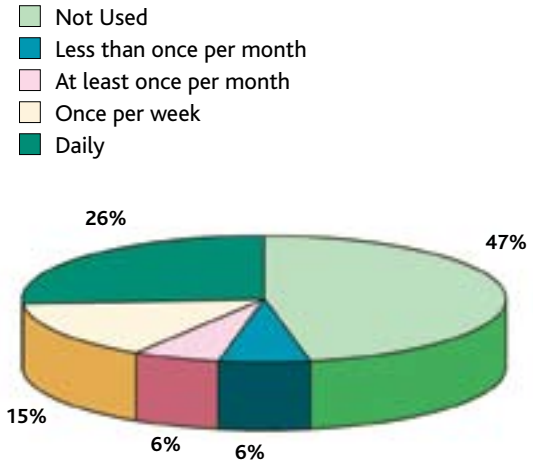
Aspect of Technology	Not Aware		Aware but not Using		Using	
	%					
	D	N-D	D	N-D	D	N-D
Mobile Phone (n=437)	0.7	0	10.8	3.3	88.5	96.7
Text Messaging (n=435)	2	0	20.2	10	77.8	90
Bank Machines (ATMs) (n=435)	4.2	0	23	3.3	72.8	96.7
Digital TV (n=433)	11.9	0	42.9	43.3	45.2	56.7
Personal Computer/Laptop (n=437)	5.7	0	51.6	26.7	42.8	73.3
Digital Camera (n=434)	9.7	0	49.5	23.3	40.8	76.7
Internet/E-mail (n=434)	6.7	0	56.9	30	36.4	70
Playstation/Game cube/on-line games etc. (n=424)	8.8	0	53.9	48.1	37.3	51.9
MP3 Player/iPod (n=431)	14.7	0	55.1	50	30.2	50
Broadband (n=432)	13.2	0	58.7	36.7	28.1	63.3
On-line shopping (n=431)	14	0	73.3	43.3	12.7	56.7
WAP/Internet Access by mobile (n=428)	17.6	0	69.6	73.3	12.8	26.7
Internet Café (n=432)	16.2	0	76.4	83.3	7.5	16.7

D = Disadvantaged Communities; N-D = Non-Disadvantaged Community (Caherdavin)

1.2 Use of Computers

One quarter (26%) of all respondents to the survey used a computer daily. However, 47% never used a computer (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Frequency of Usage of Computers



The use of computers was greater among younger people; those with higher education levels; the employed; and among those who owned a home computer:

- One third (33.1%) of respondents aged less than 35 years did not use a computer compared to four out of five (80.2%) of those aged over 55 years
- 70% of those who had completed a third level or trade course were using computers at least once per week compared to only 16.2% of those with primary education only/no formal education
- One quarter (27.2%) of employed respondents did not use a computer, compared to 61.3% of unemployed, 76.9% of those engaged in home duties and 82% of retired respondents
- Respondents who had a home computer were over four times more likely to use a computer daily than non-computer owners (43.1% versus 10.4%) (Table 2).

Table 2
Frequency of Usage of Computers by Presence of a Home Computer

Frequency of Use of Computers	PC (n=202)	No PC (n=212)
	%	
Not Used	14.9	76.9
Less than Once Per Month	9.4	2.8
At Least Once Per Month	8.4	3.3
Once per Week	24.3	6.6
Daily	43.1	10.4

PC = Respondant/hoseholds with a home computer;
No-PC = Respondant/households without a home computer

Location was also a key factor in terms of the level of computer use:

- **Almost half (49.1%) of those living in disadvantaged communities did not use computers, compared to only one in ten (11.1%) respondents living in Caherdavin (Table 3).**

Table 3
Frequency of Usage of Computers by Location of Survey

Frequency of Use of Computers	D (n=387)	N-D (n=27)
	%	
Not Used	49.1	11.1
Less than Once Per Month	6.2	3.7
At Least Once Per Month	6.2	33.3
Once per Week	14	22.2
Daily	24.5	51.9

2. HOME COMPUTER OWNERSHIP

Less than half (46.7%) of all respondents had a computer/laptop in their household. However, while 44.7% of households in the disadvantaged communities had a computer, almost three-quarters (73.3%) of the households in Caherdavin had one. Again, age, education, and employment status impacted upon the likelihood of a respondent owning a home computer:

- Respondents aged between 35 and 54 years were most likely to own a home computer (56.5%), while only one quarter (24.8%) of those aged over 55 years owned a home computer (Figure 2)

- Respondents with a Leaving Certificate or a Third Level Qualification/Trade were significantly more likely to own a home computer than those with a lower level of education (Figure 3)
- 61.4% of respondents who were employed owned a home computer, while only 31.6% of unemployed respondents had a home computer. Only one fifth (21.4%) of retired respondents owned a home computer (Figure 4).

Figure 2
Ownership of a Home Computer by Age of Respondent (n=436)

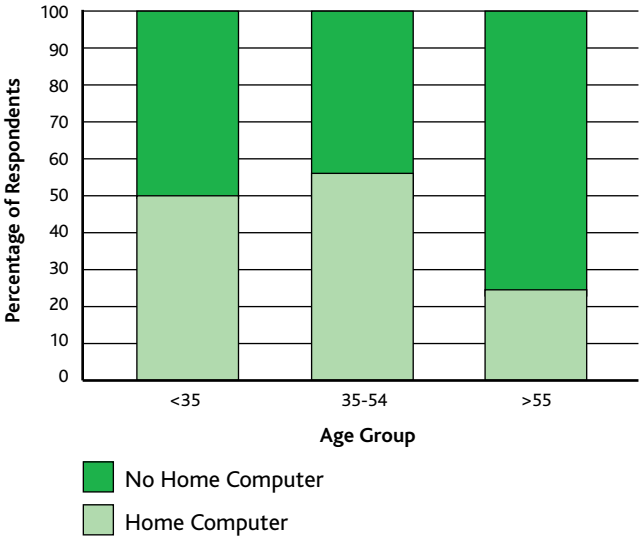


Figure 3
Ownership of a Home Computer by Education Level of Respondent (n=432)

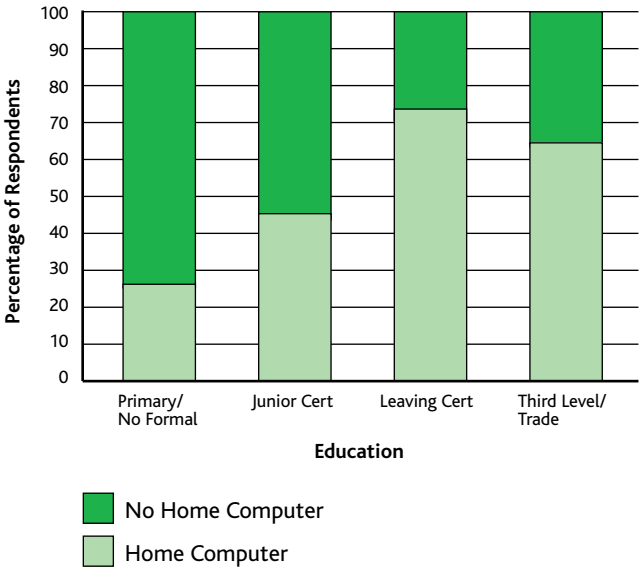
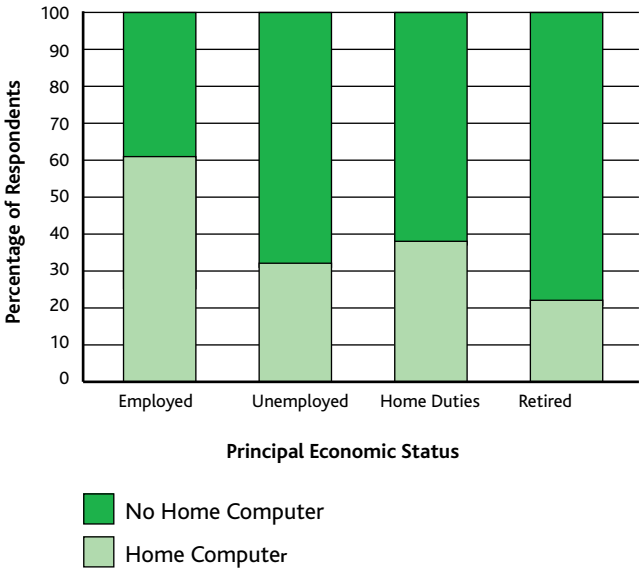


Figure 4
Ownership of a Home Computer by Principal Economic Status (n=423)



3. Internet Access

3.1 Connectivity

Just under a third (31.1%) of all survey respondents had internet access. Approximately two-thirds (68.5%) of those with a home computer had internet access. However, 94.4% of respondents in Caherdavin (non-disadvantaged) who had a home computer had internet access compared to 66.7% of home computer owners in disadvantaged areas.

Similar to the findings for home computer ownership, the proportion of respondents having home internet access increased as the level of education increased. Employed respondents who owned a home computer were also most likely to have internet access (75.8%) and the unemployed households least likely (48.6%).

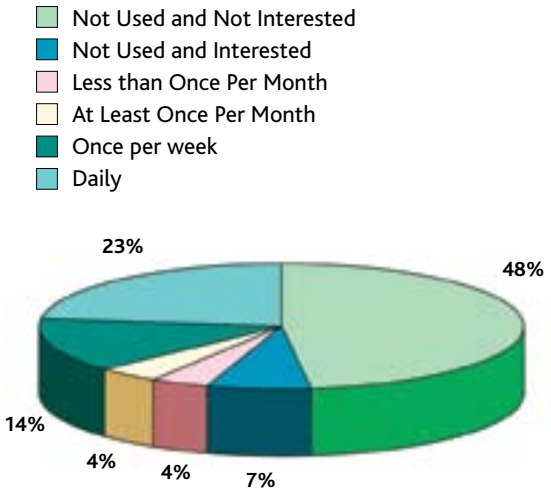
The main reasons identified for having no home internet connection (for those with a home computer) were:

- no telephone line
- no need
- able to access the internet elsewhere
- high cost of internet connection
- lack of interest.

3.2 Frequency of Internet Access

48% of respondents in disadvantaged communities were not using the internet and expressed no interest in accessing it (Figure 5). This compares to a comparable figure of 15% in the non-disadvantaged community. Only 7% of respondents in disadvantaged areas were not using it but were interested in starting to use the internet. 37% of respondents in disadvantaged areas used the internet/email at least once per week, compared to 85% of respondents in the non-disadvantaged community.

Figure 5
Frequency of Internet/Email Usage in Disadvantaged Communities



The frequency of usage of the internet/e-mail by respondents was also related to home computer ownership; age; education level; and principal economic status:

- 64% of computer owners were accessing the internet/e-mail at least once per week compared to only 17% of non-owners
- 85.5% of respondents aged over 55 years were not using the internet/e-mail compared to 40.5% of non-users aged under 35 years
- 72.7% of those who had completed a third level or trade course were using the internet/e-mail at least once per week compared to only 15.6% of those with primary education/no formal education
- Only one third (32.8%) of employed respondents did not use the internet/e-mail, compared to 69.9% of unemployed, 72.8% of those engaged in home duties and 89.2% of retired respondents.

4. Location of Computer and Internet / Email Access

For those who had a computer, 94.2% accessed it in the home (Figure 6), while 85.7% accessed the internet/email in the home (Figure 7). For those without a home computer, the main place of computer and internet/e-mail access was their workplace (62.5% and 63.9% respectively). Only a small percentage of respondents used internet cafés and community centres to access computers/internet (although they were used by a slightly higher percentage of people without a home computer). Very few of the respondents used the library to access the internet (none of those without a home computer used the library for this purpose).

Figure 6
Location of Computer Access by Home Computer Ownership

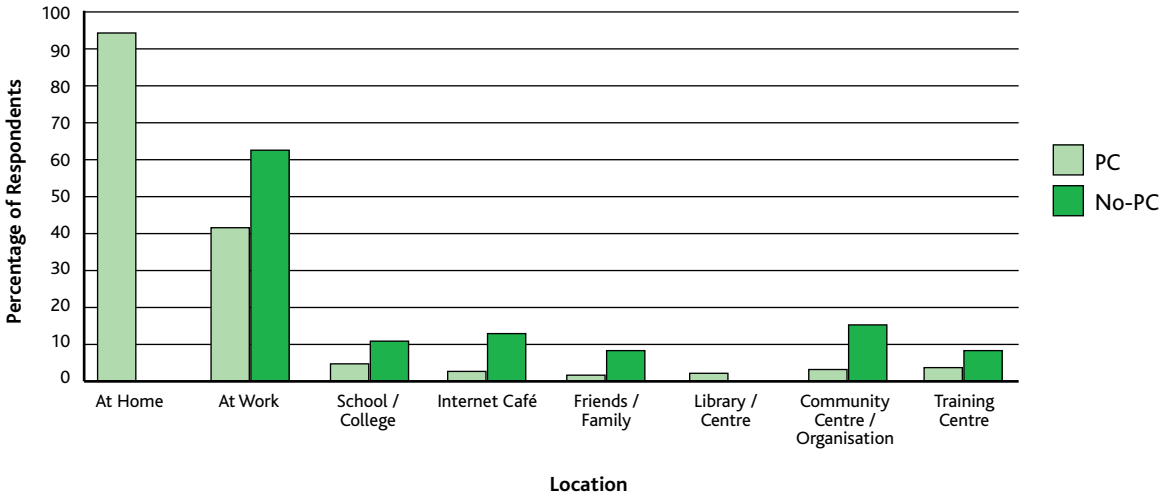
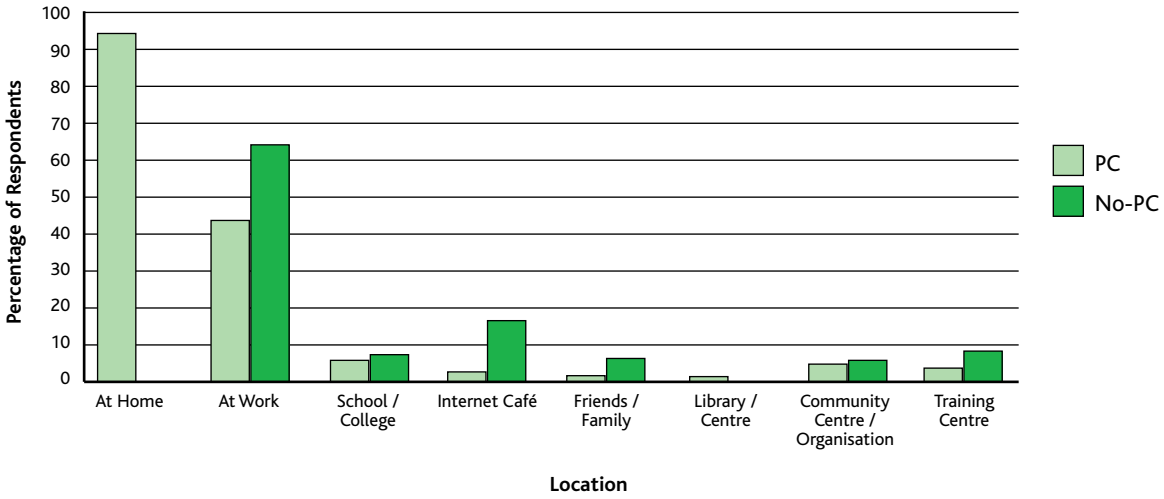


Figure 7
Location of Internet/Email Access by Home Computer Ownership

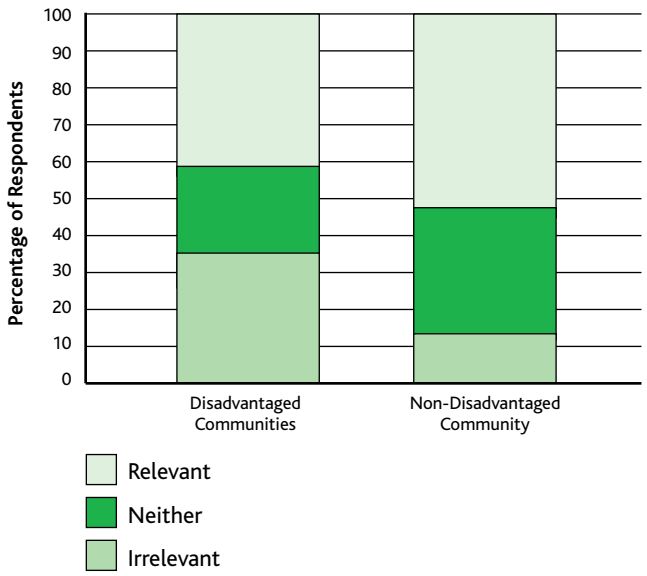


5. Perceived Relevance of ICT

5.1 ICT Relevance

In disadvantaged communities 35% of respondents considered that computers/the internet were irrelevant to their lives compared to less than 14% in the non-disadvantaged community (Figure 8).

Figure 8
Perceived Relevance of ICT by Location of Survey



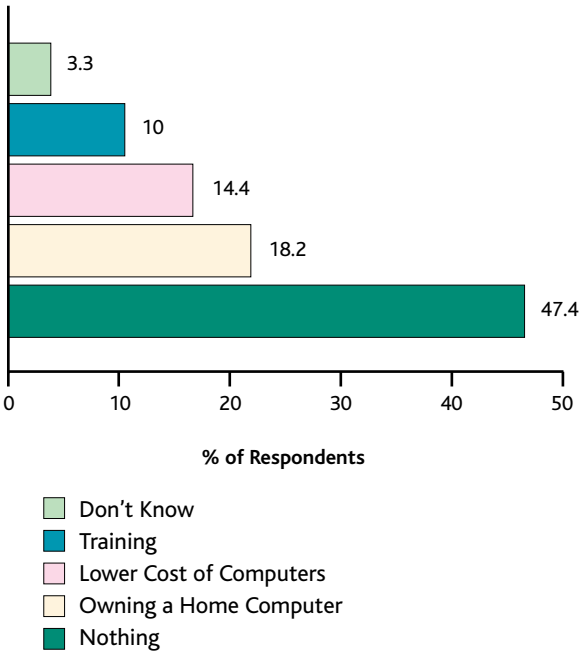
Home computer ownership, education, economic status, age, and frequency of use were also all found to impact upon respondents' perceptions of the relevance of ICT:

- Those who owned a computer were over three times more likely to consider that computers/internet were relevant to their everyday life's than those who did not own a computer (64.5% versus 20.5%)
- The level of respondents who considered computers to be relevant to them in their everyday lives increased as the level of education increased
- Three out of five (60.3%) employed respondents considered computers to be relevant to their everyday lives compared to only one quarter (25.7%) of unemployed and 15% of those engaged in home duties and retired
- Respondents aged over 55 years were significantly more likely to consider that computers were irrelevant to them in their every day lives than younger respondents
- The views of respondents on the relevance of computers/internet to their everyday life increases with the level of use – 87.9% of respondents who used the computer daily considered them relevant to their everyday life in contrast to only 13% of those who do not use them.

5.2 Promoting Greater ICT Use

Almost half (47.4%) of respondents who did not use a computer stated that there was nothing which would encourage them to start to use them. Some 18.2% felt that if they owned a computer themselves, they would use one, while 14.4% stated that a lower cost would encourage them (Figure 8).

Figure 8
Aspects to Encourage Non-Computer Users to Use Computers (n=209)



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The survey and subsequent focus group discussions revealed some interesting findings - the most startling of which is the gap in ICT usage between advantaged and disadvantaged communities. Half the respondents in disadvantaged areas did not use a computer compared to one in ten in the non-disadvantaged area. Equally significant were the low levels of usage among the unemployed, those engaged in home duties and those aged over 55 years. The level of home computer ownership in disadvantaged communities was significantly lower, 45% in disadvantaged communities, compared to 73% in the non-disadvantaged community. The gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged communities in Limerick City is vast, confirming the existence of a significant digital divide.

The majority of respondents in disadvantaged communities were not using the internet/e-mail. Internet connection levels in the disadvantaged areas of Limerick City were 50% lower than national levels. **Significantly the majority of non-internet users expressed little interest in using it, indicating that there is a considerable challenge in convincing late adopters[3] of the relevance of technology to their lives.** Once individuals start to use ICT however, they become aware of the many opportunities that exist for making use of the technology in their daily lives. Most non-users stated that it was not relevant to them and yet, in many cases they were availing of ICT indirectly – 'friends/ family were booking on-line for them, taxing their car or getting general information'.

The availability of computers in community locations was not being fully utilised due to a number of factors:

- People did not know about the location of resources or felt that they could not easily access resources
- People did not see computers as relevant to their lives and expressed no interest in using community resources
- Fear of failure and particularly the fear of beginning to use technology in public open centres.

Generally, the late adopters identified a considerable number of fears which were hindering their adoption of technologies. Some related to their perception of technology itself including the possibility of fraud, lack of security, lack of control and inadvertently accessing inappropriate material. Others related to fears about their own perceived ability or lack of ability with many citing a fear of failure including the fear that they would not be able to use computers due to low levels of literacy. Having no telephone line and cost were significant factors preventing internet usage. Low cost options were still expensive and many were not aware of the options available for accessing the internet in the absence of a landline.

Whilst many learners avail of and benefit from training and education, there are others who felt that training was not sufficiently focused on the needs of the individuals – the focus was on completing a particular course. Many people were also baffled and confused by the ICT jargon – people are put off when they try to purchase a computer. Many do not know what they are buying or what they need to buy.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a **real and urgent need to tackle the issue of digital exclusion in Limerick City**. There is a need for specific targeting of disadvantaged communities and sectors within these areas including: the unemployed; those engaged in home duties; and those aged over 55 years. This report provides much evidence about the nature and extent of the digital divide as it affects those living in socially and economically excluded communities in Limerick City. It also provides baseline information which can inform future planning and help to measure the effect of future practical responses to the issue of digital inclusion.

Given the rapidly increasing pace of change there is a need for immediate action-focused planning. The process of designing these measures should involve all stakeholders and should leverage local and national expertise, but critically needs to be addressed within a short time-frame. The leadership capacity development planned as part of the 'Building Digital Communities'[4] by the Community ICT Steering Group affords an opportunity to

- engage locally with community, voluntary, statutory and other leaders
- bring external expertise to the table,

with a view to developing an effective community strategy to tackle digital exclusion.

These research findings indicate a number of key areas which any future strategy will need to address:

1. Promoting the relevance of technology to those most at risk of digital exclusion;
2. Enabling access to information technology resources;
3. Developing and strengthening education and training provision.

1. Promoting Relevance of Technology to those most at Risk of Digital Exclusion

1. The overarching recommendation that can be made arising from this survey is that approaches to increasing ICT usage and reducing the digital divide should be focused on **simple, straightforward messages which are centred on relevance** and the benefits of ICT usage.

2. The main focus should be on convincing individuals of the relevance of Information and Communication Technologies and benefits of usage in their daily lives. Groups like the Community ICT Steering Group, PAUL Partnership, City of Limerick VEC and community/ voluntary groups have a critical role to play in this area. All stakeholders must commit to working together to encourage increased ICT usage and to convince individuals of the importance and relevance of ICT to them.

3. The fears and genuine concerns that people have about using computers and the internet should be acknowledged. All stakeholders also need to address the issue of 'jargon and techno-speak'. The promotion of ICT usage should be focused on a small number of key practical tasks which the majority of people have an interest in: digital photography; booking flights/hotels/ accommodation; banking; finding information of interest; maps/travel guides; and on-line shopping.

4. Significant effort needs to be placed on convincing individuals of the role of technology in their everyday lives – stakeholders need to develop innovative promotion methods/techniques.

5. Promotion should focus on encouraging those who are most likely to discount themselves from participating in training or learning how to use a computer. Traditional training courses are unlikely to engage these learners and learning opportunities need to be designed with a view to engaging these 'hard to reach'. Integrating technology into project based work, hobby type activities and the completion of practical tasks are some of the strategies which need to be used if this issue is to be tackled.

2. Enabling Access to Information Technology Resources

1. There is need to explore the possibility of encouraging an increase in home computer ownership. Specific schemes may be worth pursuing where businesses could be encouraged to provide computers which are surplus to their requirements. The Home Computing Initiative (HCI)[5] is worthy of consideration by the Limerick ICT Steering Group. There are two main elements of the HCI:

- Specific packages targeted to particular needs;
- Group purchase schemes (through employers, credit union etc.).

2. Access to low cost broadband internet connectivity is critical to promoting the relevance of information technology. The possibility of providing free wireless connectivity using Wi-max technology should be explored.

3. Community groups should explore the provision of a service (possibly supported by a CE or other community scheme) to assist individuals in setting up a new computer in the home i.e. getting it working and providing support with the basic applications.

4. The use of technology to enable learners to self access and self-manage information and learning resources should be developed at community level. The City of Limerick VEC Self Access Information and Learning Centre provides a model for the development of such resources at community level. The Information Kiosks designed and introduced by the ICT Steering Group as part of this initiative provide community based learners with access to comprehensive, up to date information on learning opportunities available locally, regionally, nationally and online. This approach of using technology to access critical information needs to be continuously developed in response to feedback from users and potential users of these resources.

5. There is a need to work with public service providers to increase the usage of their on-line services. This may involve the development of pilot projects to increase the usage of on-line services for car tax, passports, local authorities etc.

3. Developing and Strengthening Education and Training Provision

1. There is a need to encourage and support education and training providers to maximize the use of ICT in their work. Approaches which have a proven track record need to be built upon in the future. The Family Learning ICT model with its 'surf to learn' and 'digital skills' programmes should continue to be offered and promoted in community settings. This tried and tested approach engages with parents of school children who can then be encouraged to learn IT skills in order to provide assistance to their children in the completion of homework.

2. The integration of technology across community based learning needs to be promoted. In particular the on-line provision of course descriptions, class notes and outlines which will encourage individuals to start to access materials on-line. In this regard the use of the moodle Learning Management System for community based tutors (www.learnlocal.ie) is an emerging innovative approach which should be resourced and promoted.

3. The provision of outreach training into existing communities and community groups needs to be maximized – bringing training to them rather than encouraging people to come to the training. The focus of training should be on the needs of individuals rather than the desire to complete a particular course. Many individuals want to learn the basics about computing or the basics about a particular package rather than receive a certificate of completion.

4. There is a need to develop training packages which would allow people to simulate: booking online flights/ accommodation; taxing a car; and banking transactions. The third level sector could be engaged to support the development of simulation software.

5. Computer training should form part of all Community Employment Schemes. This does not have to be mandatory but should serve to encourage participants to engage with ICT.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The Limerick Employment Pact (LEP) was a locally-implemented national programme administered by PAUL Partnership Limerick. It worked with a range of partners and stakeholders to identify and develop ways of increasing and enhancing employment opportunities for people experiencing various forms of disadvantage in Limerick. It operated from 1997 to 2006 (the LEP was viewed as a sub-group of PAUL rather than an independent entity from 2004 onwards).

[2] 410 surveys were completed by respondents living in the 7 disadvantaged communities, while 30 were completed by respondents in the Caherdavin area.

[3] Late Adopters are defined as those: with no internet and not interested in access; with no internet and interested in access; and those accessing the internet less than once per month.

[4]The aim of the 'Building Digital Communities' project is to tackle digital exclusion by building the capacity of 'learners and communities at risk' to use technology in effective and relevant ways. The project targets needs identified by community groups and leaders through three training and development strands: Community Leader Capacity Development; Frontline Network Administration and Hardware Maintenance Training; and Web Content Development Training.

[5] The Home Computing Initiative (HCI) aims to increase the take-up of home PCs in Ireland. The Initiative will also increase computer skills benefiting the community sector and help employers and employees to build skills. It is an Irish Government commitment to the knowledge economy.

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