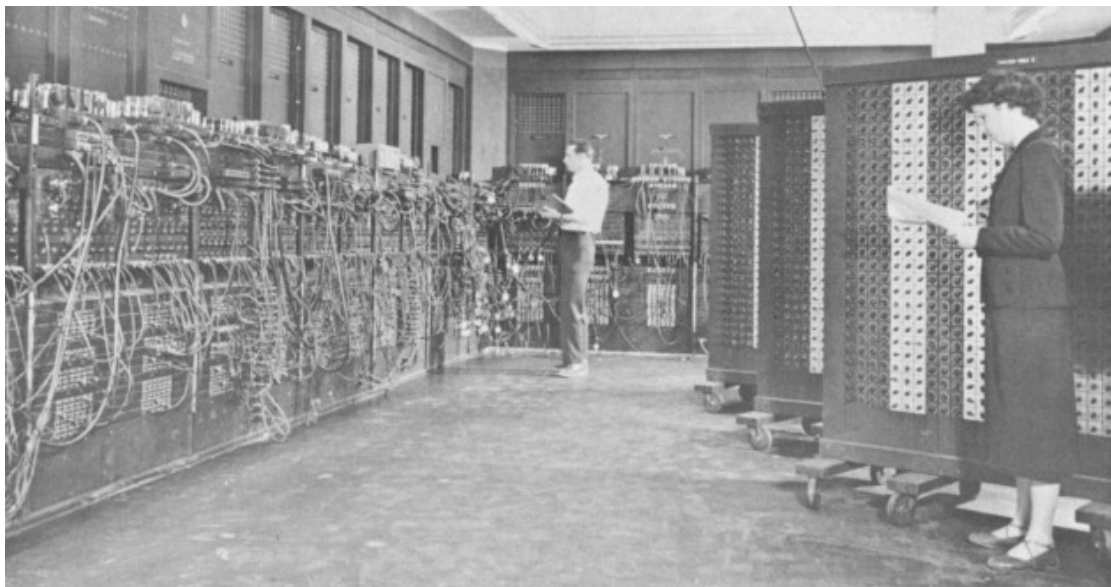


Get t i n g I T R i g h t : V i e w s o n I T c o u r s e s i n H u l l



Jen i E d g e , N i c o l e F u l l e r ,
I a i n S p r i n g a t e

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Introduction

Issues around IT skills and courses have emerged as an important theme across much of the work carried out by the Learners' Forum project. Our initial report '*Learning to Listen, Listening to Learn*' (Springate, 2002) suggested that residents of Hull understood the increasing importance of IT skills both in work and at home, but also that there were issues with some of the basic IT courses available in the city. These included not having enough tutors in a large class, leaving learners to sit and wait for long periods for a tutor; teaching different courses concurrently in the same room; and having poor quality facilities. This data was drawn together in '*Basic IT Courses in Hull*' (Springate, 2003).

The importance of such courses cannot be underestimated. It is becoming more important that people have IT skills, and this is shown by the fact that it is now considered the third basic skill, alongside numeracy and literacy. These courses are a route to such skills for those who have not got them, and it is important that the courses teach people what they need to know effectively. On top of this, our original research (Springate, 2002) suggested that IT courses were those that many took as a route back into learning after a break, and therefore a positive and useful experience was critical to seeing them continue with any kind of learning in the future.

These concerns regarding IT courses emerged from the body of the original research. Consequently they only provided an indication that there could be such issues in Hull, rather than confirming that there were such experiences having a negative impact on a significant number of people. In order to look at these issues in more depth, a questionnaire was designed to investigate basic IT courses in Hull, and see if any of the indications were true.

A questionnaire was used as the issues that were to be investigated were well defined, and it was a more effective way of getting a reasonably large sample. In the end, 239 individuals aged 16 and over filled in a questionnaire, of whom 144 had done an IT course and 95 had not. The research specifically set out to talk to both those that had been on a course and those that had not, to see if perceptions of what courses are like had affected participation amongst those who had not done a course.

The profile of respondents is broadly representative of the population of Hull aged 16 and over. However, it is not exact, as the main issue in the research was the experience people had had of IT courses, and therefore the key factor was whether people had been involved in an IT course in Hull, rather than where they lived. Consequently, some who had been involved in a course and who lived outside the city boundaries, but close enough to travel into the city for a course, were included. Those respondents who had not done a course were all residents of Hull.

However, as most respondents lived within the boundaries, comparing the sample with the demographic profile of Hull is still reasonable. Whilst broadly

representative of that profile, proportionally more women responded, more 16-19 year olds, less retired people and more unemployed people than make up Hull's population. The actual figures for the sample can be found at the end of the report, and need to be borne in mind when reading and considering the findings.

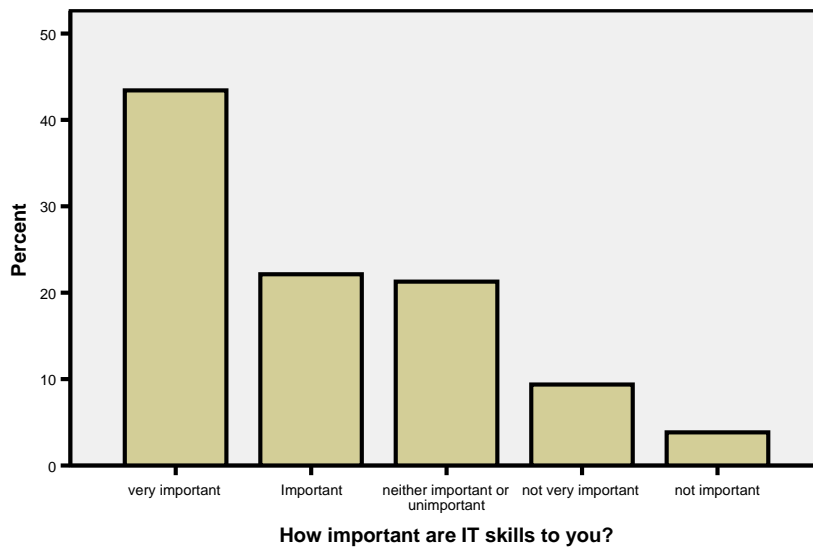
The research was carried out in 2004-5, and the research team mailed out questionnaires to addresses within Hull, gave them to individuals at events across the city, arranged to have them available at public libraries to complete, as well as having a version online.

The findings which follow are split into six sections:

- 'The Importance of IT skills' which looks at how important people thought IT skills were to them, and the reasons behind their views.
- 'Getting Started' which focuses on finding the right course, pre-course assessments, and actually starting the course.
- 'Getting Along' which looks at people's experience of the course itself, and what the good and bad points were for learners.
- 'Getting IT Finished' which examines whether individuals got what they wanted out of their course, and their overall impressions.
- 'Never done an IT course', which looks at those individuals who have not done an IT course, the reasons why not, and if anything could persuade them to do a course in the future.
- 'Conclusions' which draws together what can be learnt from this research.

The Importance of IT skills

IT skills are becoming increasingly important in everyday life, relating both to work and leisure activities. However, whether people recognise this and respond to it is a different matter. The research looked at how important IT skills were to people, and the reasons behind their views.



As can be seen from the results above, the response was largely positive. Nearly half of all respondents saw IT skills as 'very important', and a further fifth saw them as 'important'. Only a minority of 13% saw IT skills as 'not very important' or 'not important' to them.

The results were similar regardless of gender, age or status. Both men and women were positive about IT skills, and had similar views. Across most of the age groups there was no great difference in their feelings regarding IT skills. The only issue to note was that those approaching, or past, retirement age were less likely to see such skills as important to them. In terms of status, those who were unemployed placed less importance on IT skills than those who were employed.

	Done an IT course	Not done an IT course
Very Important	51	32
Important	23	21
Neither important nor unimportant	22	20
Not very Important	3	20
Not important	1	9

'How important are IT skills to you?' taking into account whether respondents have done an IT course

However, there were differences between those who had done a course and those who had not (see table above). As might be expected, those who had done an IT course saw IT skills as more important than those who had not

done a course. Despite this, it is clear that there is no simple dichotomy between the two groups, as significant numbers of those who had not done an IT course still thought that these skills were 'important' or 'very important' to them. This perhaps reflects the fact that not everyone chooses to increase their skills by going on an IT course. Some will choose to learn more informally either on their own, or from others. Therefore not everyone who sees IT skills as important and seeks to increase their own skills will have done a course.

Respondents were then asked to explain the reasons behind their view of how important IT skills were to them. These can be explained with reference to the five categories that they were able to choose from.

Very Important

Those that see IT skills as 'very important' stress the prevalence of IT use for work and leisure, seeing it as essential for being employed or advancing a career, as well as increasingly important for leisure activities. As a group, these individuals give the impression of being people who use IT in many areas of their life, and who recognise its importance for the present and the future. A selection of comments illustrates their perspectives,

"Modern life and work is IT based and a good knowledge is very necessary. Without the IT skills that I have I would not be able to do my job."

"It would be almost impossible for me to function without IT skills - in terms of work/study, social stuff, using the Internet to research & buy things etc."

"It helps me to help my son with his school work."

"Every industry/job requires a level of computer skills."

"IT improves my job prospects."

"...in this world it's very useful to help with our day to day life - work, communicating, homework, information etc, the list is endless, without IT in this century we would be lost."

Important

Those who saw IT skills as 'important' emphasised the importance of IT to work and leisure in similar ways to those who thought such skills were 'very important'. However, they were more likely to talk about using IT in just one area of their life, rather than stressing its importance in every area, or to express some reservations about IT. This is a small difference, and in general the two groups are fairly similar.

"Need to use [IT] everyday as part of job, not interested beyond that."

"They are useful when applying for jobs, make you more employable."

"I need good IT skills for my job."

"They are extremely useful but I'd like to think not essential."

“[They are important] to keep up with my child’s development of IT skills and they are becoming more commonplace.”

Neither Important nor Unimportant

This group of people is different to the two previous ones. Again people recognise the way IT can be useful for leisure and work, but they stress that they just use IT for specific tasks, and not much beyond that. The impression is of IT as a tool for specific tasks, rather than something that is of value in all areas of life.

“I need to use it in my job but I am not that hooked.”

“...I have the computer mainly for the children.”

“I use computers as a tool to make my work easier.”

“It might help with a job.”

“I find I just need to be aware of IT as it plays huge part in today’s commerce and society. I do not access the internet for leisure or business therefore it plays a limited part of my lifestyle.”

“I would not put this at top of importance to me but find it useful to know basic things.”

Not very important

The comments of this group of people were interesting. Despite saying they thought IT skills were ‘not very important’, many saw the usefulness of the skills to them, either in theory or practice. A few did not have to use IT for their job, and others simply did not use computers.

“I don’t have to use one in shop work.”

“It’s useful to have computer skills but I do not have a particular interest.”

“I haven’t got involved with IT skills but realise that you need to have them now.”

Not Important

Only a small number of people thought that IT skills were ‘not important’. Half of these said they were too old for IT skills to be important to them. For others their circumstances meant that IT skills were not important at the present, but if their circumstances were different it is possible that they would view them as more important. In other words, the issue was their circumstances, rather than a feeling that IT skills were not useful to them.

“It’s my age, if I’d been younger I’d have been interested.”

“I am occupied at the moment and staying in a hostel, I would consider and be interested at a later date, once I have my own flat...”

Conclusions

The majority of people understand the importance of IT skills to their lives, and view them as important. Even those who don't think such skills are important still appear to see them as useful and to use IT for some things in their lives. For most people, then, the issue is about degrees of use. Some use IT in all areas of their lives, and some only for specific tasks. However, what is clear is that the message from the Government, employers and educators regarding the importance of IT has got through to people.

Getting Started

All the respondents who had done an IT course were asked a series of questions about their course. The questions were designed to find out what people's experiences of IT courses were right from the point they decided to do a course, through to enrolling on the course, the way they were taught and whether or not they got everything they had hoped for from the course.

This section of the report deals with the beginning of that process; with the reasons why people wanted to learn IT skills, why they chose their particular course, how easy it was to find out about different courses and if they were made to feel welcome when they started the course. Respondents were also asked if their abilities were assessed at any point to ensure that they were placed on the right level of course for their skills.

Why people wanted to learn IT skills

Keeping up with modern technology was the most popular reason for learning IT skills. 69% of respondents said it was one of the reasons why they wanted to learn them. Learning IT skills for a job was also important as 45% of people said they wanted to update their skills for a job they had and 38% wanted IT skills to increase their chances of getting a new job. Interestingly 46% of respondents who had done a course described their status as 'employed' and these results suggest that nearly everyone who had a job thought that IT skills were important for work.

Reason	%
To keep up to date with modern technology	69
To update my skills for the job I have	45
For my own interest	45
I feel it is a skill I ought to have	43
To increase my chances of getting a new job	38
To help with my studies	26
To learn new ways to communicate with friends and family	23
I am unemployed and think it would help me to get a new job	18
To help my children or grandchildren learn	11
To help with my voluntary or community activities	9
Other reason	1

144 Respondents answered. Multiple answers could be chosen, therefore percentages do not add up to 100.

10% of respondents who had done a course described their status as 'unemployed'. However, nearly double this number, 18%, thought IT skills would help with getting a job. This could be explained by the fact that some other groups, for example students and people on incapacity benefit, may also be looking for work. This relatively high figure shows that people do think it is valuable to have IT skills when looking for work.

Other popular reasons were feeling 'it is a skill I ought to have', which 43% of people said was true for them, and 'for my own interest' which 45% also felt was a reason why they did an IT course. These reasons are probably so popular because, like 'keeping up to date with modern technology', they do not involve any particular outcome, and thus can apply to anybody whatever their age and status. They suggest that people are motivated to learn IT skills by the fact that they want to stay in touch with technology and a sense that IT skills are relevant and important to their lives, not just necessarily at work.

Not all the reasons were applicable to everyone and so whilst 'helping with studies' and 'helping my children learn' had low numbers of people agreeing with them compared to other more general reasons, they are significant. For example 13% of respondents who had done a course were students, however, 26% of people - double this number, said that they wanted to learn IT skills to help with their studies. This reason is applicable to people over and above those who describe their status as full-time students.

What made people decide to do a particular course

Finding out how people decided to do a particular course was equally as important as finding out why people wanted to learn IT skills in the first place. Gaining qualifications (43%) and a location that was easy to get to (42%) were the top two reasons why people chose a particular course. Course content (39%) and value for money (30%) were also important. A quarter of people chose their course because it was on at a good time of day/week for them and just under a quarter thought it was important that the way the course was taught suited them.

18% of respondents had their course arranged for them by work. 13% chose the course because it had a good reputation and 9% because a friend recommended it. For just over 10% of people the significant factor was being able to attend their course whenever they could. Only 4% needed childcare facilities, but this figure is dependent on the number of parents with young children who answered the questionnaire, and unfortunately this figure is unknown. Four respondents described their status as 'mother' and if these were the only full-time mums the 4% needing childcare would be all of them.

Why particular course?	%
It led to the qualifications that I wanted	43
It was held at a place that was easy to get to	41
It covered everything that I wanted to learn	39
It was free or good value for money	30
It was at a good time of day/week for me	25
The way it was taught suited me	23
Work arranged it	18
It had a good reputation	13
I could attend when ever I wanted	12
Other	11
A friend recommended it	9
There were childcare facilities	4

142 respondents answered. Multiple answers could be chosen, therefore percentages do not add up to 100.

Finding out about IT courses

This question was important because how people found out about their chosen IT course ought to influence the way IT courses are advertised in the future. A quarter of people found out about their course through work. Another quarter were proactive and contacted a centre to find out what courses were on offer. Word of mouth was an important source of information for 15% of people and 12% of people went to a careers centre, had a leaflet through the door or progressed onto an IT course from other studies.

The internet, television, newspaper and on the adverts on the bus were the least effective ways of advertising IT courses. Providing information through already existing networks was the most effective method; whether that be through the place where people work, or other places where people have contact or would expect the information to be. Some people would seek out the information themselves (in which case contact details of providers need to be readily available) while others would respond to a prompt such as a leaflet through the door. Having readily available literature in key locations as well as using informal 'word of mouth' networks would appear to be the most successful methods.

How found out	%
Through work	25
Contacting centre to see what courses they offered	25
Word of mouth	15
Leaflet through door	12
Careers Centre	12
Progression from other studies	9
Changes – The Learning Shop	4
Advert in newspaper	2
Don't know	2
Advertised on telly	1
Through the internet	1
Advertised on the bus	1
Any other	12

139 respondents answered. Some gave more than one answer.



35% of respondents had tried to find out about more than one IT course. The majority of people (61%) found this task either very easy or easy. 27% of people found it neither easy nor difficult, indicating that they had no problem with this task. However 13% of people found it difficult or very difficult to find out about different courses in Hull.

The majority of the 13% who had found it difficult were either retired or looking after the home which, if they were more isolated with fewer networks and fewer opportunities to get to 'key locations' such as the library or careers centre, could explain why they found it difficult to find out about IT courses.

Assessing ability

It is important to ensure that people are put on the right course and that the standard of the courses matches their skills and capabilities; if a course is too easy people will lose interest and become bored, likewise, if it is too hard people will be put off and may drop out of the course. Assessment helps ensure people are put on the right course initially, and are given appropriate levels of work during the course.

We found that 22% of people did have an assessment before they started their course. This information can be used to place the individual on the right course. Respondents were also asked if they were assessed when they started a course so that the tutor knew what level they were at and what skills they needed to develop and had a benchmark to determine how much they had progressed. More people (33%) were assessed when they had already started a course than were assessed before they started a course.

Some respondents (15%) were assessed both before and when they started their IT course. This means that only 40% of people were assessed either before or when they started a course. Increasing the practice of assessing individuals in the early stages will help to make sure people are always placed on an appropriate programme suitable to their needs.

Welcoming students

First impressions are important and students need to feel welcome when they start a course or they may not return for a second session. The vast majority of respondents were made to feel welcome (87%), shown around the facilities (81%) and given all the information they needed (86%).

A significant number, around 10% in each category, did not feel strongly either way. This could mean that the issues were not important to these people, or it could indicate that improvement needs to be made in the way students are welcomed onto a course. A minority of students disagreed with the statements; the statements that were most disagreed with were at 8%; 'I was shown round all the facilities that I needed' closely followed at 5% by 'I was given all the information I needed'. 3% of students did not think that they had been made to feel welcome. A minority of courses/providers need to improve in these areas.

Statement	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
I was made to feel welcome	69%	18%	10%	2%	1%
I was shown around all the facilities that I needed	55%	26%	12%	6%	2%
I was given all the information that I needed about the course and how it would run (e.g. term dates, exam information, payment details)	64%	22%	10%	4%	1%

136 respondents answered.

Getting Along

Getting Along looks at what happened once our respondents had got started on an IT course. It looks at what courses people did, where they did them, what the facilities were like and whether or not they finished the course. It looks at how the students got along together; whether they were doing the same course and if they all started at the same or different times. It finds out whether it was easier to learn if respondents could ask the other students for help or not. Finally, respondents' views on the way they were taught and their opinions of their tutors are discussed.

Recent courses people had done

As can be seen from the following table ECDL, Clait, non-accredited basic IT courses and learning IT as part of other studies were the most popular IT courses taken by respondents.

Course	% People
ECDL	16
Non-accredited basic IT course	12
RSA exams e.g. word processing/ text processing	10
Clait	10
Learnt IT as part of other studies	8
Excel	4
NVQ/GNVQ	5
Internet/email	4
IBT	3
Access	3
CAD	2
Web design	2
Others	13
No answer or not sure of answer	13

144 respondents answered in their own words, these answers were then categorised as above. Some respondents were doing more than one course.

Where and when respondents' IT courses took place

The majority of respondents (91%) had taken their last IT course in Hull. Courses took place at a variety of different locations, the most popular of which were colleges (26%), Adult Education Centres (16%) and the workplace (15%). See table below for more details.

Some people's courses have lasted one, two or even three years. For the purposes of this report the start date has been taken as the year of the course, this is because some people have yet to complete their course.

The vast majority of people (83%) had taken their last IT course within the last five years between 2000 and 2005. 10% of people had taken their course between five and ten years ago, between 1995 and 1999. A small minority took their course before 1995, over 10 years ago.

Venue	%
College	26
Adult Education Centre	16
Your workplace	15
Community Centre	10
Commercial Training Centre	10
School	6
University	4
Learndirect Centre	3
Library	3
At Home	3
UKonline Centre	1
Any Other	5

136 respondents answered.

That the majority of respondents have taken an IT course in the last five years reflects two factors: recognition by the government and other organisations that IT is the 'third basic skill' and the subsequent increase in IT courses available. Computer skills have been pushed by the government through a number of schemes including Learndirect and UKonline. The second factor is the ever changing nature of IT, resulting in a constant need to update skills whether through a formal course, or informally.

Just over half (54%) of all people who had done or were currently doing an IT course had also completed an IT course prior to the last one they did. This indicates that people have been successfully progressing onto further learning from an IT course.

Facilities where people were taught

It is important that learners are satisfied with the facilities where they are taught. The table below shows that the majority of people were happy with the equipment and facilities provided during their course. The area most people were happy with was having enough computers for everyone. 76% of people agreed strongly with this statement. The area people were least happy with was whether or not the computers always worked; only 56% strongly agreed that they did always work and 10% of people either disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting that this is an area that needs improvement.

Statement	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly
Always enough computers for everyone	76%	11%	7%	3%	3%
Computers always worked	46%	28%	16%	7%	3%
Computers and software were up to date	55%	28%	12%	3%	2%
Comfortable place in which to learn (e.g. chairs, tables, heating, lighting, enough space to work)	63%	22%	12%	2%	2%
I was totally happy with the facilities in the building (e.g. toilets, refreshments)	63%	19%	15%	1%	2%

134 respondents answered.

Although people generally agreed that facilities and equipment were good, there is room for improvement in all areas; a significant number of people neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements and, whilst only a minority disagreed outright, any dissatisfaction in this area could lead to students dropping out of courses especially given the fact that learning IT depends on having equipment that functions! Overall, there was greater dissatisfaction with the computers and software than with the other facilities where people were learning.

What could have been improved?

The majority of respondents did not think that the facilities where they learnt could have been improved. 36% gave no answer to this question presumably because there was nothing they could think of that needed improving. 25% said that they were satisfied and that nothing could have been better. However, 39% of people did have issues to do with the facilities. These issues, whilst not experienced by the majority, are significant as they will have affected the learning of the people involved.

Equipment was the issue that concerned most people; 10% of people thought that the equipment could be improved whether by having more equipment or more up to date software, for example;

“The computers seemed a little older than the ones I usually work on, so they could have been more up to date”

“Computers were Windows NT. They should have been XP...”

Several people also commented that the computers they used had a slow internet connection, which would require an upgrade or change of connection to speed things up.

As well as wanting more or improved equipment, 6% of people thought that the equipment that there was should have been working better;

“Equipment should be properly maintained/replaced...”

“Making sure all computers work, to avoid disruption of having to change desks”

“All attempts were made to keep PC’s working but three had dodgy days e.g. refused to save work but this was constantly changing – one week it would work, another it wouldn’t”

Another issue mentioned by several people was the temperature of the room. 4% of people thought that it was too hot and this affected their learning. Suggestions were made about air conditioning and more ventilation although the restrictions were recognised; **“better ventilation – very hot class room due to security measures in place restricted ventilation – but better to be hot and have computers to work with rather than none”**. The room being too cold was only mentioned by one person.

Having access to drinks or having better food and drink available would have improved things for 4% of people. In some cases, when people were not very

mobile, the place to get a drink was too far away. Having somewhere for students to go that was nice and had enough seating was also important for some people.

Other improvements suggested by people were about the room in which they were taught. Students wanted it to be more comfortable with the correct level of light; bright enough but without glare on the screens. They wanted the room, equipment and toilets to be clean. They also wanted the desks to be at the right height and one suggestion was that the desks be arranged so that people could help one another in groups. More space to move around was mentioned by two people.

Respondents will have been learning in a variety of different places with different standards of facilities and equipment, and so what may be true for one person will not be relevant to another. However, the frequency that equipment was mentioned as needing to be improved or better maintained suggests that this is a significant issue that is affecting the learning experience of a large minority of people.

Tutors and teaching styles

One of the most important parts of any course is the tutor. The quality of the tutor's relationship with a student, the tutor's level of expertise and professionalism, and the time they have available to help a student one to one are all critical to the experience a person has of a course. Of initial interest was the ratio of students to tutors in IT classes.

Tutor to student ratio

Just over three quarters of respondents reported that the number of people in their class stayed relatively the same. The table below shows that nearly half (48%) of the classes where the number of people stayed the same had between six and ten people in them. About a third (34%) of classes had 11 to 15 people in them.

The vast majority of these classes (74%) only had one tutor in them. However, a significant minority (17%) had two tutors or between one and two tutors in their sessions. Other people experienced having up to 10 tutors, however it is possible that they mistook the question to mean during their course (which would be more likely to have a higher number of tutors over time) rather than in each particular session.

The most common ratio of tutors to students was one tutor for every six-ten students with 47% of respondents saying this was the case. Just over a quarter of respondents (28%) had a ratio of one tutor for every 11-15 students. 13% of people had a ratio of one tutor for every one-five students.

Size of class	Respondents %
1-5	4
6-10	48
11-15	34
16-20	7
21-30	7
51+	2

107 respondents answered

No. of students per one tutor	Respondents %
1-5	13
6-10	47
11-15	28
16-20	7
21-30	5
51+	1

From 106 respondents who answered; 'How many tutors were in your sessions?' and 'How many students were in your class (if the numbers stayed more or less the same)?'

The vast majority of people thought that there were enough tutors on their course to meet the demands of the students. However, a significant minority (14%) thought that this was not the case. They thought that there needed to be more tutors on their course. Of this 14%, half had a ratio of one tutor for every six-ten students, 43% had a ratio of one tutor for every 11-15 students and 7% had a ratio of 21-30 students.

Interestingly, other people were happy with these ratios of tutor to students, so, for example, the majority of the 48% who had one tutor for every six-ten students thought that one tutor was adequate for the number of students in the class. Even with the larger class sizes, more people were happy that the tutor could meet the needs of all the students than were unhappy.

This suggests that other factors, such as the confidence and competence of the students, whether they were at the same stages or not, the students' ability to support one another, the class dynamics and the tutor's ability to manage individual problems may be as significant as the actual class size and student to teacher ratio. However, 14% of respondents felt that their needs were not always met by the tutor and that this impacted on their learning in the following ways.

The responses were similar; 38% did not like having a delay when they were stuck or needed to ask a question. The negative consequence of this was that people stopped asking questions or became bored or fed up. One person described how they **"lost interest and just learnt the very basics for what I would need"**. Even those who did not lose interest recognised that more help would have been beneficial:

"Sometimes the tutor was stretched and we had a little wait for help, having extra tutors would have helped"

They also felt that their learning would have been quicker if they had been able to get help sooner;

"Sometimes had to wait too long for help which slowed progress a little"

Several of the students (24%) thought that either they or others in their class would have benefited from more one to one support than the tutor was able to give: **"...Some students could have done with more one to one support"**.

When the tutor was stretched the consequence was that **“they couldn’t help all of us on a one to one basis”**. Inevitably some people did not get the attention they needed and for two people this was because they were relatively more advanced in a class full of beginners;

“Due to two courses being run at the same time and one being a basic level, this meant those students had priority with the tutor and the rest were left to our own devices”

“Because I had some knowledge already (RSA Quals) I felt that asking questions would distract tutor from those who were complete beginners”.

Each respondent will have been in a different situation both in terms of their own skills and level of competence, the number and demands of their fellow students and the way that the tutor was able to deal with these. In some situations it is clear that the tutors were stretched and unable to deal with everyone’s needs.

Although waiting for the tutor’s attention might be unavoidable at times, smaller class sizes, higher ratios of tutors to students, enabling students to support each other (through, for example, appropriate seating arrangements or studying the same course) and ensuring the mix of students in the class allows the tutor time to help everybody, can all help to reduce waiting time. This is important as 14% is a significant number of people to be unhappy with the support they were getting from their tutors.

Keeping the same tutor

Previous research had highlighted frequent changes of tutor to be a problem for students. The majority of respondents in this survey (89%) had had the same tutor for the entire length of their course. The remaining 11% had different tutors throughout their course.

23% of people whose tutor had changed said that their tutor had changed ‘often’. 31% of people gave the middle score between ‘very often’ and ‘not often’, 8% of people said their tutor did not change very often and the greatest number of people – 39% said that their tutor had not changed often.

How this affected learning

Only 12 people commented on how their tutor changing had affected their learning. The majority of these (8) did not think it had affected their learning. Two people had found it a positive experience to change tutors; for one the learning style was better, and the other person appreciated having more than one perspective. Only two people had had a negative experience; one person said they lost interest, and the other person did not have as much confidence in her second tutor as she did her first.

Amongst the people who had the same tutor throughout their course, 42% did not give a response to this question, indicating that they did not feel strongly that it had affected their learning. From the replies that were given the largest group (18%) did not think that having the same tutor had had any effect on their learning.

A significant number however (14%) thought that having the same tutor enabled student and tutor to get to know one another making it easier for the student to feel comfortable asking questions, and more likely that the teacher will be aware of any strengths and weaknesses in each student. Building a relationship based on trust was an important part of the learning experience for these people.

“He knew everybody and he knew what each of us could and could not do so he would practise certain tasks individually with us to make us better”

“It was possible to develop a good relationship with the tutor which made it easier to ask questions”

“Made life easy because it was the same person all the way through”

“In a positive way because you built up trust”

Consistency and continuity was important for 8% of people who thought having the same tutor helped their learning;

”Good for continuity – don’t think I’d enjoy a changing tutor very much”

“It helped having consistency”

“I think this was excellent because its one constant source of instruction not several different ways. I think consistency is very important”

Around 6% of people thought that having the same tutor was generally a positive and beneficial thing, but did not state why.

“Most beneficial”

“Having the same tutor throughout the course was a positive for me”

Nobody who had had the same tutor throughout the course thought that it was a bad thing. Some people thought that it didn’t make much difference and some people acknowledged that whilst it was **‘nice to have the same tutors every week’** they did not think it made any difference to their learning. For many people it was an invisible good that would not be noticed until something went wrong (for example the tutor changing for someone they did not get on with). However, overall it seems that it is better for a significant number of people to have continuity as far as the member of staff teaching is concerned and this is likely to reflect the confidence, competence and preferred learning style of the student concerned. The critical factor is that students are relaxed, comfortable asking questions and enjoying the learning style.

What people thought about their tutor

Overall, people were very positive about their tutors with at least three quarters of respondents agreeing with all seven statements. The largest proportion of respondents agreed that their tutor was knowledgeable about the subject; 78% of respondents strongly agreed that their tutor was knowledgeable about their subject. Overall, 92% of people either agreed or

strongly agreed with this statement. Over 90% of respondents also agreed that their tutor was friendly and helpful and always on time.

Statements about tutor	Agree strongly %	Agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Disagree %	Disagree strongly %
Knowledgeable about the subject	78	13	7	0	2
Always on time	74	19	5	2	0
Well organised	65	22	9	2	1
Friendly and helpful	77	14	6	1	2
Able to talk to the tutor one to one	64	17	11	5	3
Encouraged everyone to get along together and help each other out	59	22	9	8	2
Made my learning very interesting	53	25	10	9	3

133 answered these questions about one tutor, 39 respondents answered about a second tutor as well.

Slightly fewer people (65%) thought that their tutors seemed well organised. However 87% of respondents still either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Only 3% of people in each case disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, indicating that more people gave their tutors the middle score in between agreeing or disagreeing. This suggests that they were not sufficiently unhappy with their tutors' levels of organisation to disagree with the statement, but that there is perhaps room for improvement.

There were also slightly fewer people agreeing when it came to having the chance to talk one to one with their tutor. 64% strongly agreed and 81% agreed overall. The number of people strongly disagreeing or disagreeing was significantly higher. 3% of people strongly disagreed and 5% disagreed with this statement. This reflects the point made under 'Tutor to student ratio' that not everyone was happy they received enough support from their tutor.

The final two statements had the most people disagreeing with them. 10% disagreed that their tutor encouraged everyone to get along with each other and help each other and 12% disagreed that the tutor made their learning interesting. Whilst the total number of people either agreeing or strongly agreeing was over three quarters for both statements this still leaves a large percentage who either could not commit to agreeing with this statement or who wholeheartedly disagreed.

It is possible that even those who did not agree with the last two statements still found the course interesting (and did not need the tutor to make it so) and it is also possible that they got on well with and helped out other students without the tutor necessarily encouraging this. In some cases it may not have been appropriate for the tutor to have encouraged students to help each other and so this is perhaps the least critical of the seven statements.

However, it may be beneficial to see tutors encouraging these aspects more as students say they enhance the learning experience and where tutors are under pressure, encouraging students to help each other out where possible helps relieve that pressure. It is positive to see that over 90% of respondents

found their tutor knowledgeable, friendly and helpful and punctual, and that over 80% found them to be organised and able to give them one to one attention when needed.

The way people were taught on IT courses

The majority (62%) of respondents who had done IT courses were taught by following instructions from a textbook or handout. Just over half had lessons that were demonstrated by a tutor, whilst a quarter followed instructions on the screen of their computer.

Way taught	%
Following instructions from a textbook/ handout	62
Demonstrated by tutor	56
Following instructions on the screen of your computer	25
Other	7

135 respondents answered. Some respondents were taught in more than one way.

What people liked about the way they were taught

Following instructions from a textbook/handout

Many people liked the fact that they were able to go at their own pace when they were working from textbooks or handouts. 36% of people taught this way mentioned this, giving comments like;

“able to work at own pace – not feeling left behind or in a panic if a class was missed”

“...could progress at own rate”.

Whilst there was one person who did not like any interference at all, saying **“I progress much better when left to my own devices,”** just over a quarter of people (26%) liked the fact that they had support from a tutor when they were learning from textbooks or handouts. This style of teaching meant that people could get on by themselves if they wished, and still have input from the tutor when required. Related to this, some of the people who liked support from the tutor also liked being able to go at their own pace saying, for example;

“Could go at my own pace. Could always consult the teacher”

“You were left to practice on your own but were able to get help when you needed it. Also, all of your practice work was marked so you knew where you were going wrong”.

The support and approachability of the tutor was critical to some;

“My tutor was very helpful and gave me full support when I needed it, this gave me an incentive to carry on the course, even though I found areas to be difficult, I passed with no problem”.

People liked it when their tutor was knowledgeable, but also friendly and sympathetic to their needs.

The availability of someone to help was important and the more time that the tutor had for one to one support the better. However, support did not necessarily have to come from a tutor, as is shown in the following quote;

“liked learning from colleagues, better than learning from tutor who had very little time to give each person”.

12% of people mentioned the fact that the lessons were easy to follow and understand, commenting that **“it was very easy to follow”** and several people mentioned that the handouts on their course were good.

Having a relaxed and informal atmosphere was important for 10% of people who liked this aspect the most about the way they were taught. It put people at ease and in a good state to learn as one person put it; **“did not feel stupid about how little I knew”** another person liked the **“informal, friendly atmosphere, treated as an adult, able to approach the tutor, not feeling intimidated”**.

Other advantages of using textbooks and handouts were that in some cases people were able to take them home and practise at home, and one person liked being able to **“...cross-reference and go back to areas of uncertainty”**.

Demonstrated by a tutor

People who were taught by a tutor giving a demonstration to the whole class gave very similar answers to those who followed instructions from a textbook or handout. Some people were still able to work at their own pace **“following demonstrations”** and many liked the fact that they could ask for help and get support from the tutor. For the same reasons as above people wanted to be able to have as much time with the tutor as possible and for this reason small classes were preferred. People also liked it when there was a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

“It was friendly and personal. Because there weren’t many students I got lots of chances to talk to the tutor one to one”

Although not everybody was this lucky; **“you could always ask the tutor although she was very busy”**.

The qualities of the tutor were highlighted more by this group, possibly because they were more important and noticeable if the tutor was leading the class with demonstrations. A range of desirable characteristics were mentioned and people liked it when the tutor was knowledgeable, patient, enthusiastic, friendly and a good communicator.

Finally, people mentioned the actual act of demonstrating the tasks to be learnt. Several people liked this way of learning and found it clear, easy to follow and understand. Some people liked being led by an instructor, rather

than just being told to look at a text book. They preferred to be **“taken through step by step...”**

One or two people did not get on with their tutor and this impacted on their learning experience. One person, when asked what they liked about the way they were taught wrote “I never, the teacher hated me”. This highlights the importance of the tutor and their relationship with the class.

Following instructions on the screen of your computer

There were not really enough people who had learnt this way alone to provide an analysis of what people liked about learning this way on their IT course.

What people disliked about the way they were taught

Following instructions from a handout or textbook

The aspect that was most disliked about being taught this way was not getting enough support from the tutor. 16% of people disliked having to wait too long for the tutor’s help, not getting enough support or attention from the tutor, or in some cases finding out that the tutor was not knowledgeable enough to be able to help.

“Wasted a lot of time waiting for the tutor to get round to everyone if problems arose which often did”

Lack of support was particularly a problem for people with learning difficulties;

“Lack of support for dyslexic pupils. I am still waiting for coloured booklets”

Some people (5%) did not like the way that people were all at different stages, because they were working at their own pace. Other people felt that they were on the wrong level and were waiting for people to catch up, or that there was no differentiation between students who may have been of different abilities with different needs.

“Having to start at low level and awaiting for course to reach my level”

Lack of clarity in the instructions given or being given poor explanations of tasks was disliked by 5% of people. Sometimes the handouts were not comprehensive enough;

“Not enough material in the instruction manual”

“Some tasks were not explained properly and I had difficulty trying to remember how to do it”.

A small minority disliked some aspect of the style of teaching and 2%, for example, felt that sometimes the teacher would be talking and trying to demonstrate things when they would rather be getting on by themselves. Conversely, one person did not like being left to their own devices at all and would have been happier with a different teaching method;

“I prefer a more active course with explanations and demonstration, this course meant you were left to get on with it”

A further 2% were not happy with the way they were taught at all saying that they disliked “**all of it**” and that it was “**dull**”; this however was only a small minority. Equipment failures were disliked by 2% of people whose learning was disrupted by “**crashing computers**”.

In spite of the above problems, many people were happy with the format of being taught this way as 11% of respondents said that there was nothing they disliked about the way they were taught and 29% gave no reply to this question indicating that nothing immediately sprung to mind that they disliked.

Other ways of being taught

The vast majority (67%) of people who were taught in ways other than by following instructions from a handout or textbook either did not answer this question or said that there was nothing they disliked about the way they were taught. As there were not many replies they have been considered together rather than separately by the different ways that people were taught.

Some of the issues that people came up with were very similar to above; 5% disliked the fact they did not get enough support or one to one attention from the tutor. Another 5% did not get on with their tutor. Other issues were only mentioned by individual people; rushing through topics with no time to revisit modules; not being able to hear the tutor at the back of the class; using laptops rather than PC's; other students talking in class; not always being able to make the session and having to catch up; not covering enough in the sessions and feeling “**uneasy**” were issues mentioned by individuals.

The importance of other students

The importance of other students was examined, firstly by looking at how easy it was to get to know other students and ask them for help, and secondly by looking at whether this made it easier to learn.

The majority of students had attended their course at the same time of day (76%) and had started their course at the same time as other students (68%). This theoretically made it easier for students to get to know one another as they took all their classes together. The majority of students (76%) were also doing the same course as one another.

However, whilst these things were likely to have led to students getting to know one another the percentage of students who said they got to know one another is higher at 85% than the number of students who benefited from these things. This indicates that some people were able to get to know each other despite, perhaps, not starting the course at the same time, or even doing the same course as other students.

Same course as other students

- 76% of people were doing the same course as everybody else in the group.

Got to know other students

- 85% of respondents said that they did get to know other students on their course.
- 64% of people were doing the same course as other students and did get to know them. 11% were doing the same course and did not get to know them.
- 20% of people were on different courses to the other students and got to know the other students, whilst 4% were on different courses and did not.

Able to ask other students for help

- 81% of respondents said that they did feel able to ask other students in their session for help.
- 65% of students able to ask for help were on the same course as other students, whilst 17% of students able to ask for help were on a different course.
- 71% of respondents had got to know the other students on the course and also said that they were able to ask other students for help.
- 14% of respondents had got to know the other students on the course but did not feel able to ask them for help.

It was anticipated that getting to know other students would increase the likelihood of being able to ask other students for help. Whilst this generally seems true (71% of respondents had got to know the other students and were able to ask each other for help), there is no direct correlation as 14% of students got to know each other, but did not feel able to ask for help. Conversely, 10% of students had not got to know each other but did feel able to ask for help.

Did the other students make it easier to learn?

The critical point was whether getting to know the other students and/ or being able to ask other students for help made learning IT easier.

Reasons why learning was easier

83% of respondents said that their experience of other students had made it easier for them to learn. In the vast majority of cases people who said it had made it easier for them to learn *had* got to know other students and *did* feel able to ask them for help. Four clear themes emerged from their answers.

Atmosphere

The first of the themes was to do with the atmosphere on the course. 28% of the respondents who thought it was easier to learn said it was to do with the relaxed, friendly atmosphere. This had an impact in several ways; it helped people feel confident enough to ask for help, people found a friendly environment easier to learn in, and when everyone knew everyone else they were less likely to feel silly or stupid asking a question. It made the learning environment more comfortable when everyone was on friendly terms and

because people could talk to one another and ask for help if needed, the whole learning experience was more enjoyable:

“I find it easier to concentrate when I’m in a friendly environment”

“Friendly, helpful atmosphere promotes confidence to ask questions”

“I felt I could talk and ask people in the group due to making friends and having a tea break”

“We could ask everyone for help and no one pick on you”

“You were all made to feel easy and relaxed, everyone was at the same level, no matter what your age you were made to feel welcome”

“Relaxed easy going atmosphere”

Support

The second element was the support that people gained from the rest of the class. 21% of respondents who thought it was easier to learn liked the fact that they could discuss and talk through any problems that they had with other students. This was made easier when everyone was doing the same course:

“Could share mistakes and successes”

“Everyone joined in together and helped each other”

“Being able to help each other helped because in work situations this would happen”

“We supported each other”

“Because we could all discuss informally the problems we may or may not have had and commiserate with one another if we failed an exam”

“We all helped each other out when we struggled with parts of the programme, it meant we were all working at the same pace”

Busy tutor

The tutors were often very busy and this could mean waiting around if people got stuck before they were free to come and help. The third element that people thought made it easier to learn was the ability to ask class mates for help if the tutor was busy and 13% of respondents who found it easier mentioned this issue.

“Because you could ask the person next to you a query if the teacher was busy and then you could move on”

“It’s easier asking the person next to you rather than having to wait until the tutor is free”

Sharing

The fourth element was the way that people have been able to share information and knowledge because they got to know one another and asked each other for help:

“We helped each other and passed information between us”

“Shared knowledge and understanding”

“You could learn different things off other people”

“I was able to understand things better or see it from a different way”

“Because some people understood more and you could ask them to explain it easier”

As well as these four themes there were other comments. When people were all at the same level there was a sense of camaraderie as people helped one another out:

“We are all in the same situation i.e. beginners at ECDL so all have the same problems”

In other classes students had different abilities and those with more experience could help those new to IT:

“All working on the same areas and a lot of us were new to IT - had similar problems therefore it made sense to get heads together esp. as some people were skilled in IT – asked them”

In a few cases the social aspect of the course was most important and these people thought that the learning was easier because;

“you made friends”

“General conversation at tea break”

An IT course had the potential to have benefits over and above what was learnt:

“As I was in a hostel the IT teaching coming into our home was therapeutic on a number of levels”

Reasons why learning was not easier

There were a number of reasons why people thought that their course had not been any easier because of getting to know people, or being able to ask fellow students for help. Some people did not feel that it was important or necessary to have other people in the group in order for them to learn:

“Any major points were checked by an instructor”

“Didn’t need to ask for help”

“I am quite computer literate, and the tutor was there to help and guide me”

“I learn mostly from books and self study, so having other people around doesn’t make any difference to me”

The group dynamic that some respondents experienced on their IT course did not make it easy for people to get support from one another. There was a

sense with some people, that a different group of people might have had a positive impact on their learning:

“Everyone ignored me and talked with everyone else”

“Not a particularly friendly group”

The group dynamic didn’t promote cohesion. The learning was very much on your own”

“They were socially different to me”

“I was more experienced than most of the students”

The way the course was taught could make it easier or more difficult to get to know other students, and sometimes it was impractical or impossible to ask others for help:

“No contact with other students”

“Students only came together for the induction and the exams”

“We all started at the same time but we worked at different speeds so it was not always possible to ask for help”

“You were sat at computer doing different parts of course”

Not only did the way courses were taught vary, but also the preferences, skills and experiences of the people on them. Whilst the majority of people saw some value in getting to know their fellow students and being able to ask them for help when necessary, not everyone needed or wanted this.

Not everybody thought that getting to know other students or asking them for help made their learning easier. For some people being made to feel welcome and comfortable was important, but they didn’t want to be distracted from their own work;

“Feel welcome but aren’t being asked for help which can put you off. The tutor is readily available because the class is fairly small if you need help”

Some people preferred to always ask the tutor for help; **“every time I wanted help I always asked the tutor”**; and some people had no choice – they had to ask the tutor because they were doing a different course to everyone else:

“The tutor answered all questions that I needed answers to (Couldn’t ask others for help as on different courses)”

“There were only two other students doing the same course as me and they sat at the other end of the room; the rest of the group were doing a course one level below mine and therefore were unable to help”

In some courses contact with other students was minimal, and the group dynamic did not always support the sharing of knowledge and experiences between students. However, in the vast majority of cases these things did take place and seemed to make learning easier for the people involved.

Getting IT Finished

This section is about what people got out of their IT course. It looks at whether people enjoyed their course, if they thought it was valuable, the best and worst things about their course and whether or not people finished their course. Also discussed is any further learning that respondents were planning to do.

Completion of course

Of the respondents who had experience of an IT course, 42% had already completed their course, and 44% were still doing their course at the time of filling in the questionnaire. 14% had not completed their course and this group were asked why this was the case. Reasons were varied, but as this was quite a small group did not indicate any particular trend. They included; lack of childcare, financial difficulties, moving, getting a job or other work commitments, illness, getting headaches, one person did not enjoy the course, one person left because they had gained sufficient knowledge for what they wanted to do and in one case a provider withdrew a course once it had started.

What people hoped to get out of their course

Respondents were asked to write in their own words what they hoped to get out of their most recent IT course. Many respondents had similar aims and objectives for their course; a quarter wanted to achieve a certificate, qualification or some form of accreditation. Some people mentioned individual qualifications such as ECDL or RSA's whereas others said simply 'qualifications' or 'a certificate'.

Better general knowledge and skills to do with IT was what 21% of people hoped to get from their course;

“develop and improve current skills”

“Knowledge of how to work computers”

‘knowledge’

‘skills’

A further 11% of people wanted to develop their knowledge of a particular application or applications; word processing, spreadsheets and databases were popular as one person said, for example; **“I hoped to learn a new skill in typing and presenting work”**. Learning more about the internet and email were outcomes people wanted, for example **“how to get on the internet and find what I wanted”**. Other applications mentioned included CAD, OLAP and Adobe.

Several people gave job related reasons for doing the course; either to help get a job, for example **“to be able to learn administration skills that would enable me to get a job temping”**, or to help with a current job;

“The last IT course I attended was organised by my employer. The course Microsoft Excel Intermediate. I hoped to be more competent with Excel than I was before the course and through this to be of extra value to my employer.”

A small minority of respondents (4%) specifically indicated that they wanted to get basic computer skills from their course. This is in addition to those who wanted better general knowledge and those who wanted to learn about a specific application, although it is likely that some of these people were also hoping to get basic skills but did not highlight the fact.

“Basic knowledge of computers”

“A basic intro to the PC”

4% of people wanted to gain confidence from doing their course. This was sometimes specifically confidence with IT, but was also more generally to do with learning. One person said they wanted **“a qualification and confidence to go on to further learning”**.

Only 1% put meeting new people as something they hoped to get out of the course. This was not put as an outcome on its own, but was combined with other outcomes;

“A distinction and a pass at advanced level and some new friends and confidence”

A small minority of people (2%) said that they did not get anything from their sessions.

How much people achieved

Just over half of the respondents achieved everything that they hoped to get out of their course. A further 40% achieved most of the things. A small minority of 6% did not achieve many of the things and only 1% achieved nothing. Overall these figures are good; however there is room to improve for the 7% of people who are not getting what they wanted from their course.

What achieved	%
Everything	52
Most of the things	40
Not many of the things	6
Nothing	1

94 respondents answered.

What people didn't achieve

Three quarters of respondents did not list anything they did not achieve, indicating that the vast majority of people were satisfied with what they got out of their course. However, there were some themes that emerged out of the

comments that were given. 6% of people did not learn all the skills and knowledge that they set out to, as in the following examples:

“never fully understood how you actually launched a website onto the net”

“more in depth knowledge of backend databases”

“improved typing speed”.

A small number of people (4%) were concerned with keeping up to date once they finished the course and about putting into practice what they had learnt in class;

“don’t know whether I’d be able to actually create my own databases”.

However, one person commented on how they were able to use the training manual to revise the skills they had learnt;

“Couldn’t grasp all aspects of training after completion of course but because training manuals were used I have been able to revisit and practise skills learnt”

Another 4% of people did not gain the qualification that they had wanted from the course. It was not always clear whether this was because people failed their exam or whether it was for other reasons, for example one person wrote **“I didn’t get to do my exam”** suggesting that there was some problem outside of her control which meant she could not take the exam.

Not having enough time to practise was a problem for 4% of people. This may have been to practise a particular skill in the sessions, as one person stated they did not always have time to do this thoroughly in a class;

“the course is done in sections so when you have done a unit and passes exam you then move on. Have to consolidate skills yourself.”

In other cases people weren’t able to practise outside of class and this made learning more difficult;

“It was a hard course but remembering everything was difficult due to non use of computer at homework”

Why they didn’t achieve it

As with above, a large majority of respondents (72%) did not answer this question. From those that did answer, the two most common reasons for not achieving the things they hoped was not having enough time (4%) and what they wanted to learn not being part of their course or not covered enough on their course (6%) for example:

“Too much time was given to word processing, less on spreadsheets and even less on databases”

“Length of time of the course”

“I had to go elsewhere to learn about the internet as our course did not include this”

“...tutor could only teach what was in the teaching plan”.

Not being able to attend the sessions was another reason for not achieving their aims and was mentioned by 3% of people, some of whom moved away and could no longer get to the class. One person “**moved on the day of [her] exam**” and this was why she did not achieve her aims.

2% of people lacked the appropriate equipment or software to be able to practise their skills outside of sessions. Other people did not get on with their tutor or did not get enough help from them and this was why they thought they had not done as well as they should;

“**cause my teacher never helped enough**”.

How enjoyable and interesting people found their course

How enjoyable	%
Very enjoyable	47
Enjoyable	29
Neither enjoyable nor unenjoyable	17
Not very enjoyable	4
Not enjoyable	2

136 respondents answered.

How interesting	%
Very interesting	44
Interesting	34
Neither interesting nor uninteresting	15
Not very interesting	4
Not interesting	3

137 respondents answered.

Approximately three quarters of respondents who had taken an IT course found the course both interesting and enjoyable. A significant number of people gave the middle score for both interesting and enjoyable indicating that whilst the course was not really boring and unpleasant, it could have been more enjoyable and interesting. A significant minority of people did not find their course at all interesting or enjoyable. That the scores are so similar for both questions suggests that most people found that how much they enjoyed the course and how interesting they found it went hand in hand.

The best things about the course

When asked for the best things about their course, 118 respondents (82%) answered this question, often giving several things that they liked about their course. Gaining new skills and knowledge in IT was mentioned the most often by 34% of people. Some people had learnt how to use a computer having never used one before and others updated or built on their previous experience. People were pleased to have become more proficient at IT and several people commented that they had found easier ways to do tasks. Out of this group of 34%, nearly a third of people thought the best thing was learning about particular applications (these varied according to the individual) and 9% thought the best thing was learning how to use the internet and send emails.

The social aspect of learning was one of the best bits of the course for 17% of respondents to this question. People liked getting out of the house, meeting new friends and having company whilst learning. Passing the course and

getting a qualification or certificate was important to 12% of people as it gave them a sense of achievement and could help get a job. For some people more than one aspect was important, for example one person wrote the best bit about their course was **“made new friends. Felt good when I passed! Learnt new skills which helped get job”**.

The knowledge and support of the tutor was appreciated by 10% of people who liked the fact they could ask for help if they got stuck. One person commented; **“The tutor was very knowledgeable about the subject and made the learning seem very easy”**. Gaining confidence was thought to be one of the best things about the course for 6% of people;

“Learnt lots of new skills and have found I’m actually quite good at using a computer when previously I felt unsure when using one. Good for my self-confidence”

“Realising that I wasn’t just a wife and mother and that I could achieve given the time and opportunity”

The best bit of the course for 5% of people was the way it helped them with their job. One person said: **“I learnt how to type and present letters, fax and other skills I now use in my present position”**, and another that **“I learnt some useful tricks to make working more efficient, like keyboard shortcuts”**.

Other people commented on the nature of the course itself and 5% mentioned the friendliness and nice atmosphere during sessions as being one of the best bits. Another 5% found that being able to work at their own pace was the best bit about their particular course. Just being able to go on a computer and do a practical activity was the best bit for 4% of people. 3% thought that **‘everything’** was the best bit as they enjoyed all aspects of the course. Location of the course at a convenient place was the best bit for 2% of respondents. Other issues were raised individually by people and will not be discussed separately here.

The worst things about the course

103 people (72%) replied to this question and the largest group of people thought that there was nothing they would describe as the worst thing about their course. Many people put **‘nothing’** or **‘none’** and a few people had small issues that would improve their experience but were not critical:

“nothing, I didn’t like the coffee much”

“Not really anything I didn’t like. Perhaps recycling facilities for waste paper would be an idea. Don’t like throwing it in the bin if I make mistakes.”

“Weren’t really any that were too bad, enjoyed the course, love IT work, and if I had the knowledge would really enjoy teaching it”.

The next biggest issue that people had was to do with the tutor. 10% of people who answered this question thought that they did not have enough one to one support from the tutor or disliked having to wait a long time for the tutor to get round to helping them;

“When you want help you tell the tutor and the tutor says 5 min. They come in 30 min. That was very annoying I could of finished my question by then”.

One person felt that there were not enough facilities for dyslexic students in particular. Another person felt that there was **“not enough help. Too much of a mixture of people at different levels, no assessment, tutors not brilliant”**.

The computers and facilities were the worst thing about the course for 6% of people, 4% of whom found that the computers did not work properly or kept crashing, one person struggled climbing the stairs to get to his class and another did not have enough room to work properly.

“Climbing the stairs. When not in good health it was sometimes too far to walk and lift was too far away from the room”

People reacted to the content of their courses differently, and this is not surprising given the wide variety of different courses and different abilities of people who replied to this questionnaire. 6% of people found their course quite intensive and hard work. An example of what people thought were the worst things included;

“Because I had advanced to a hard level it sometimes took a while to learn”

“Had to learn a lot of things by certain date in readiness for new SAP system”

“I found it a bit over powering”.

Several people also found it difficult to retain information, especially if they missed a session so there was a longer gap in between them coming;

“not retaining the information which became frustrating as I considered my progress slow”

For other people, however, the worst thing about their course was going over things they already knew. This was the case for 4% of people who said things like **“I knew a lot about the software already so a lot of the subject matter was old ground for me”**. Another 3% of people also commented that the course was boring, this may have been because they were going over old ground, or because they did not enjoy the subject or teaching style;

“Very slow at first but picking up. Needs a lot more interaction between students. Course could be more interactive than just going through book”

Other students were a problem for 4% of people with comments like **“people that messed about all the time”** and **“some of the other students”**, suggesting that in some cases fellow students could be a distraction for people who were trying to get on and learn. Related to this, one person thought the worse thing about their course was the fact that there was no group encouragement; another person did not like having no communication with other students although it is not clear if this person was studying alone, or was in a quiet group!

Going to a class after a full day at work and travelling to class in bad weather or on cold nights was the worst thing for 4% of people. This is positive from the point of view that there was nothing wrong with the course itself, but is significant in that people may be more reluctant to attend courses during the winter months, especially if it involves travelling a long way. People studying on a night after being at work will be tired and may not learn as effectively as if the course was earlier in the day.

Some 5% of people found a particular part of the course was their worst bit and in most cases this was learning about databases and spreadsheets. An additional 3% of people found that the worst bit was taking the first step to come on the course and combating any fears they had;

“feeling afraid of destroying computers”

“taking the first step to learn computers and meeting new faces”.

Finally 3% thought that taking exams was the worst part of the course;

“Exams! They terrify me”

Other ‘worst things’ were mentioned by one or two individuals but shall not be discussed here.

Further comment

Respondents were invited to give further comment on any aspect of their IT course. 32 people did give a further comment and as it is such a small number percentages will not be used. 13 people gave positive comments either about the course they had been on and how they had enjoyed it or how beneficial it had been; “Having learnt various different skills on a computer gave me a sense of achievement”.

A testimony to the positive impact of IT courses is that many wanted to carry on learning about IT:

“I hope to continue with computers and gain more confidence using them”

“I hope to go on and do my ECDL course next year, plus text/ word processing. Then a job in an office fingers crossed”.

Two comments were about how good it is that IT courses are generally more accessible to people now;

“...the situation has improved. At last!”

Three people thought that there could be more variety of courses. Whilst basic level courses were easy to come by it could be difficult to find more specialist courses at accessible times and places. One person asked, **“What about the needs of home PC users e.g. digital camera scanners and music creation courses to name just a few”** and another commented, **“I wish the college would deal with more open source applications and operating systems such as Linex, Apache, Perl, Pitian, CX4 and Samba”.**

The different types of courses on offer confused one person who thought that it should be easier to find out the content and relative merit of each. Progression onto the next level course could also be made easier in the eyes of another respondent who said there should be **“a more logical sequence in which you develop IT skills, so when one course finishes you know what’s best to do (generally) or options if you want to specialise...”** Those more skilled should be able to start at a higher level rather than right at the beginning. A further comment by someone was made about the advertising for courses; they appealed for clearer information.

Two people commented about the cost of IT courses; both had had to pay full fees and thought it would have been better if the course had been free or subsidised.

Six other people also gave comments. These ranged from those suspicious about IT courses, for example, **“I don’t trust them, they seem to be a way of getting money for a very limited output to students”**, to those who disliked computers altogether and general comments on how to improve IT courses. Improvements included not having the computers around the outside of the room so that the teacher could stand in front of students rather than behind them; stating the importance of good equipment and the knowledge and communication skills of the tutor; giving more time for people to learn, especially when people do not have computers at home or available at work to practise on. Finally one person’s vision would be **“a place to set up as a drop in centre with very qualified staff who know all about advanced graphic packages e.g. Director, Studio Max, CAD”**.

Further learning

Respondents were given information about further learning they could do in 62% of cases. 57% of respondents indicated that they did have plans to do some learning in any subject over the next year. 18% said that they would possibly do some learning over the next year. 8% did not know whether they would be or not. 17% said that they would not be doing any learning over the next year.

Those who were not planning to do any learning were asked why that was the case. The largest group of ten people did not have any reason for not wanting to do any learning. The most popular reason for not doing any more learning was not having enough time; seven people were too busy to do another course either through work or another aspect of their life.

Five people had not yet found the right course or in some cases they had started a course in the past only to find that it was cancelled. Four people were already doing a course and that was why they would not be doing any more learning.

A range of personal circumstances were the reasons given by four people; this included being too old and waiting for their youngest child to start school. Another respondent was **“focusing on aspects of my life”** and so didn’t have time for more formal learning.

Two people gave cost as the reason why they would not be doing any more learning. Another two people thought that they had done enough learning for the time being. In two cases people would take part in learning under the right circumstances; it being at the right time and place and, for another person, being needed for their job.

Learning planned for the next year

Nearly half the respondents who were planning to do further learning said that they would be doing further learning in IT. Half of those wanting to do more learning in IT said they wanted to do either ECDL, digital photography or more advanced IT classes.

Some of the other trends represented the places where questionnaires were filled in; for example a basic skills course at college and the university were both venues where questionnaires were taken.

Subject	% of people
Related to IT: Total	48
Degree	7
Basic skills	6
Vocational	11
GCSE's/A-Levels	5
Don't know	8
Teach myself	2
Family/ local history	2
Other	12

99 respondents answered.

Whilst the majority of people had an idea about what learning they wanted to do, some people knew that they wanted to do some more learning but were not sure what they wanted to do.

IT skills of respondents who had done a course

The vast majority of respondents who had done an IT course were competent at typing letters (94%), sending emails (81%) and finding information online (84%). This is not surprising as they are basic skills taught by IT courses and as well as being useful at work, are skills which many respondents will find useful in their own lives.

Producing newsletters, managing information on databases and finances on a spreadsheet could be done by over 50% of respondents. A significant number however, could not do these things well or had never tried to do them. Each of these tasks had at least 20% of people who had never tried them. Nearly as many could do the task, but not very well. There were no more than 5% of people who could not do the tasks at all in each case.

Over 50% of people could order tickets online or shop online fairly well or very well, whilst 35% of respondents had never tried to do these things. Approximately 10% of people could not do these things very well or at all.

Just over 40% of respondents could design artwork on a computer or edit a digital photograph. Nearly a quarter of people could not do the tasks very well or at all. Just over 30% had never tried to design artwork or edit a photograph.

A large number of people had never tried to download music (45%), produce music (57%), present information to an audience (41%) or create a website (60%). Nearly half of respondents could present information to an audience using IT, 35% could download music, but just over 20% could produce music or create a website.

IT skills that respondents who had done a course wanted to learn
The least number of people wanted to learn about typing letters (18%), sending emails (27%) or finding information online (21%). This is because the vast majority could already do these tasks.

Similar numbers were interested in learning about ordering tickets (27%) and shopping online (20%). Although fewer people were already able to do these tasks, there was a significant number of people who were not interested in learning how to do them.

Greater numbers of people wanted to learn about producing newsletters (41%), managing finances on a spreadsheet (43%), managing information on a database (46%), downloading music (42%), and designing artwork on a computer (43%). Out of these five tasks, downloading music had the highest number of people who were not interested in learning about it (29%).

Whilst 36% of respondents wanted to learn about producing music, this activity also had the highest number of respondents overall who did not want to learn about it (40%). 38% of respondents wanted to learn about presenting information to an audience. Overall, the most popular activity that people wanted to learn about was creating a website with 59% interested in this.

Never done an IT Course

This section focuses on those respondents to the questionnaire who had not done an IT course, and their attitudes and opinions about IT courses.

In total, there were 95 respondents who had not done an IT course. Amongst these, the levels of interest in doing an IT course were fairly high. When asked, 'have you ever wanted to do an IT course?' 64% of the respondents to the question said yes, with 36% saying no.

Respondents' IT skills

Those who had not done an IT course were asked about their current level of IT skills. They were asked to rate how skilled they were at a number of IT tasks, ranging from the simple (e.g. typing a letter), to the more skilled (e.g. creating a website). Their answers were compared to those of the respondents who had completed a course.

It was found that less people rated themselves as being able to do specific tasks on a computer 'very' or 'fairly well' when compared to those who had done a course. In addition to this, amongst those who had not done a course, there was a smaller number of respondents who had even tried doing most of the tasks asked about in the questionnaire.

Respondents were most confident about doing the most basic IT tasks; 62% felt they could type a letter very or fairly well, and over half (53%) felt they were able to send an email and find information online. Understandably, as the tasks got more technical, less people felt able to do them fairly or very well, and a larger number of people had not tried them. For example, only 21% of people thought that they could manage information on a database fairly well or very well.

This overall trend is unsurprising; it is understandable that those who had not been on an IT course would in general be less skilled than those who have. However, what is interesting is that there is no clear dichotomy between those who have done a course and those who have not. Within the group that have not done an IT course, there are still significant numbers of individuals who have high levels of IT skills. For example, whilst most people (61%) have never tried it, 13% of this group say they are very or fairly good at creating a website. Similarly, 19% say that they are very or fairly good at producing music with a computer, when just over half have never tried it.

This suggests that IT courses are not the only way that individuals gain such skills. They can gain them in other environments as well, perhaps informally on their own or with others.

What respondents wanted to learn to do

Respondents were then asked about how interested they were in learning to do the aforementioned IT tasks. The table below shows how many respondents were interested in increasing their skills in each task.

Task	Respondents interested in learning task or improving their knowledge
Editing a photo from a digital camera	48%
Creating a website	47%
Designing artwork on a computer	46%
Managing information on a database	45%
Producing a newsletter	41%
Producing music	40%
Managing finances on a spreadsheet	39%
Presenting information to an audience	39%
Downloading music	39%
Sending an email	38%
Finding information online	38%
Typing a letter	37%
Ordering tickets online	32%
Shopping online	26%

Interestingly, the top three tasks are those that the most people have never tried and are also functions that are arguably leisure related for most people. Also, whilst the most popular tasks are the more specialised ones, there are still over a third of respondents who are interested in learning about the more basic IT tasks such as typing a letter, finding information on the internet, and emailing.

Therefore, there is a potential interest in a range of different types of IT courses, from basic courses to those teaching more advanced skills. However, those that involve creative activities such as image editing, website creation and artwork may be the ones that will attract more of those who have not been on an IT course.

Respondents who wanted to do an IT course

Those who had shown interest in doing a course (64%) were then asked about their most important reasons for wanting to do an IT course. They were given a list of ten statements, and were asked to select up to three of the most important reasons for them, or to give their own reason for wanting to do a course.

Most of the respondents (67%) wanted to do an IT course in order to keep up to date with modern technology. A similarly high percentage of respondents wanted to do a course for their own interest (66%), and 56% agreed with the statement, 'I feel it is a skill I ought to have'. The popularity of responses such as these suggests that people were interested in learning more about IT for its own sake, and did not want to fall behind technological advances.

A large number of respondents were interested in doing an IT course for work-related reasons. Over half of respondents to the question (53%) thought that doing an IT course would increase their chances of getting a new job. The notion of doing an IT course in order to better one's situation was equally important to those in employment and out of it; 23% of respondents felt that an IT course would update their skills for they job they had, and the same

percentage of respondents stated that they were unemployed and thought an IT course would help them to get a new job. Clearly, we are living in an age where IT skills are essential in many workplaces, and respondents to the questionnaire showed an awareness of this.

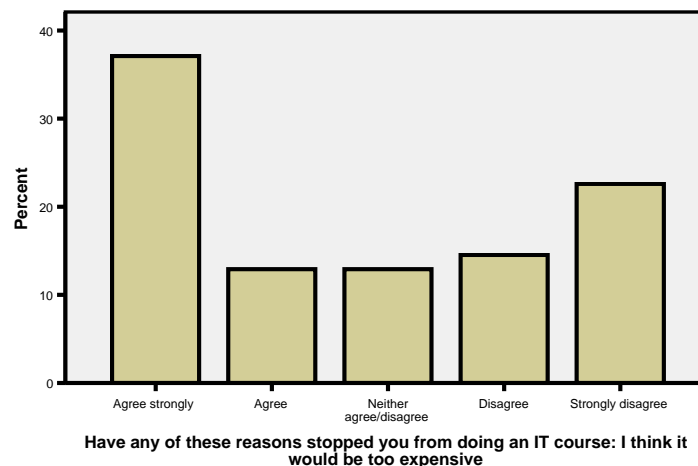
A third of the respondents (33%) who wanted to do an IT course wanted to do so in order to help with their studies.

Other important reasons for wanting to do an IT course involved other people – 38% of respondents wanted to learn new ways of communicating with friends and family, and a quarter of respondents (25%) wanted to help their children or grandchildren learn by having IT skills of their own gained through a course. A smaller number of people (15%) felt that they would like to do an IT course because it would help with their voluntary or community activities.

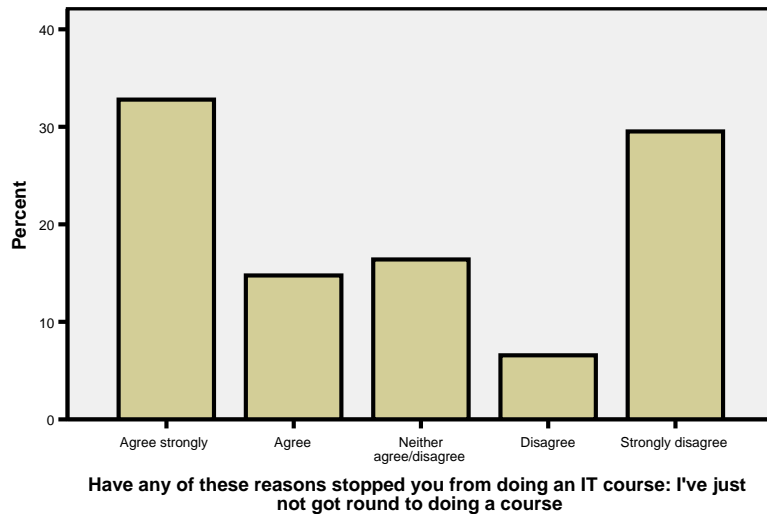
Barriers to doing an IT course

Those respondents who said they had wanted to do an IT course were then asked about the things which had prevented them from having done one. They were given a list of possible reasons and asked to rate them on a five point scale of how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each one. Respondents were also given the opportunity to write their own other reason for not having done an IT course. The results were fairly well spread out, showing that people had been prevented from doing a course by a number of different factors.

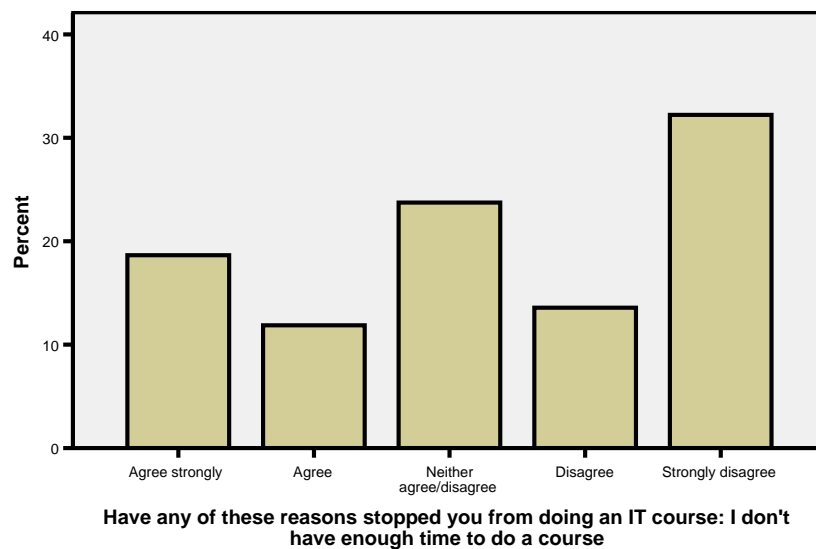
The most commonly given reason for not having done a course was the perception that it would be too expensive; over half (53%) either agreed or agreed strongly with this statement.



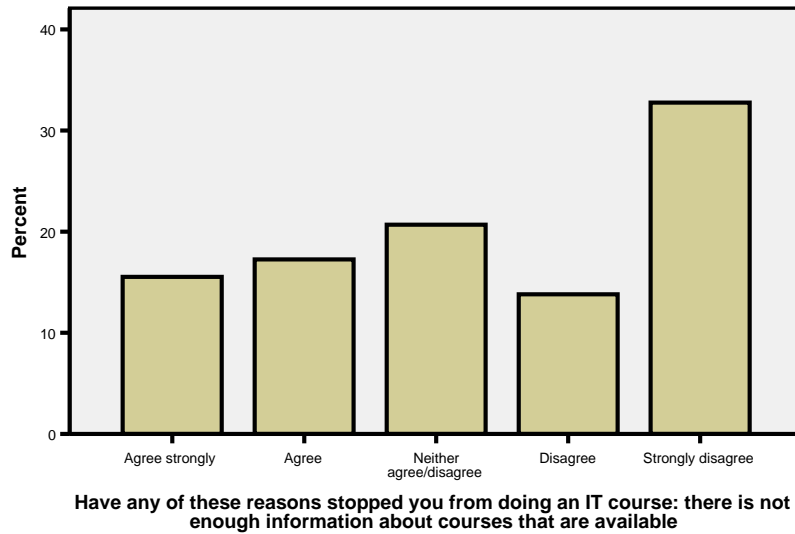
Just over half the respondents (52%) agreed that they had just not got round to doing a course, which suggests that, whilst the interest in doing one might be there, doing an IT course was not a priority when compared to other things in their lives.



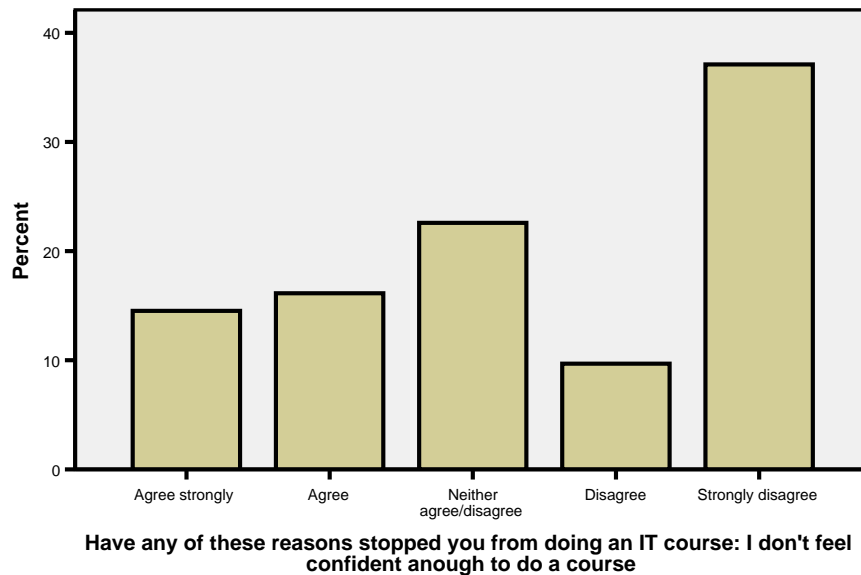
Related to this was the fact that a fair number of respondents felt that they did not have enough time to do a course. In total, 35% either agreed or agreed strongly with this statement. Again, this is to do with people's priorities in their lives. Whilst people may feel that they want/ought to do an IT course, when factoring in the time taken up by work, caring responsibilities, volunteering, hobbies etc., they evidently feel that they do not have the time for a course as well.



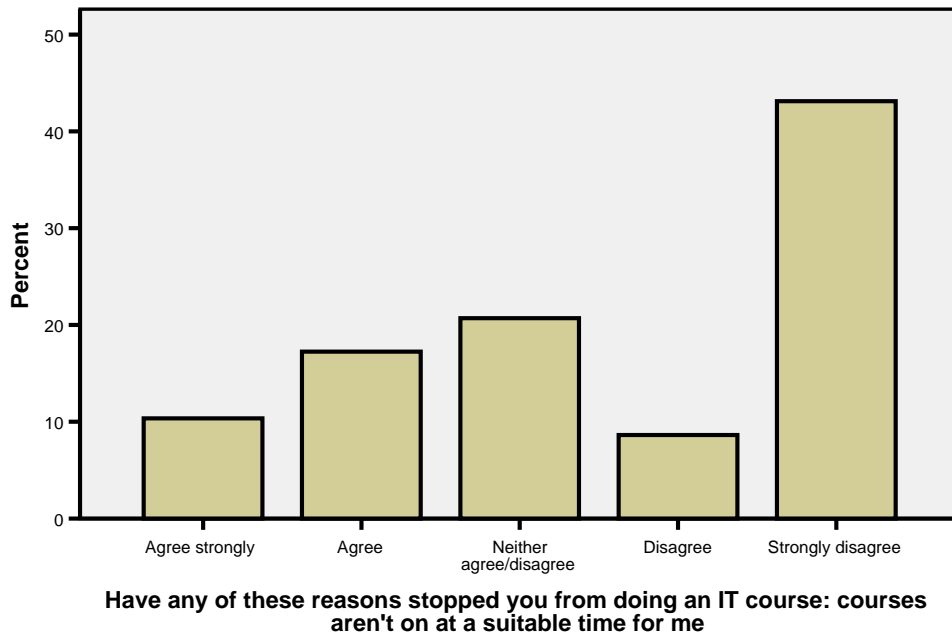
Lack of relevant information is often cited as a barrier to people taking up learning. In the case of this questionnaire, a third of respondents to the question (33%) did not think that there was enough information about courses that were available. Although a large percentage thought there was enough information, it is still evident that there are people in Hull who are not accessing information about courses in the city effectively.



The next most common thing which had prevented respondents to the questionnaire from having done an IT course was lack of confidence – 31% agreed or agreed strongly with this statement. However, on a positive note, a large proportion of respondents (45%) disagreed or disagreed strongly.



Another barrier to people doing an IT course was their perception that courses were not on at a suitable time for them. In all, 28% of respondents to this question agreed with this, highlighting that daytime and evening classes during the week are not appropriate for all learners' lifestyles.



There were also other barriers which had prevented respondents from doing an IT course. A fifth of respondents (20%) said that they had had bad experiences of learning in the past, and that this stopped them from doing a course. A similar proportion of respondents (18%) felt that they couldn't find a course which would teach what they wanted to learn.

Two of the most often cited barriers to learning – travel and childcare – were considered the least important barriers by respondents to the questionnaire. Just 10% said that travelling to a course would be difficult, and 7% stated that they had not done an IT course because there was no childcare available. However, it would be wrong to dismiss childcare as a barrier, as it only affects those with children, which may explain why it only affected a minority of respondents.

A small number had health related barriers to going on an IT course. Their comments centred around how it would be difficult for them to do a conventional IT course because of physical disabilities or conditions; one respondent was **'deaf'**, another said they had not done a course **'due to my dyslexia'**, whilst another still stated **'I would get eye strain if computer is not at eye level'**.

Respondents who did not want to do an IT course

Over a third of the respondents who had not done an IT course did not want to do one (36%). These respondents were then questioned about the reasons behind their lack of interest. They were given a list of potential reasons for why they did not want to do an IT course, and asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each reason on a scale of one to five.

Although the number of respondents in this section is quite low (32 people), their answers still provide us with an indication of the most common reasons why people may not be interested in doing an IT course. There was a similar

proportion of respondents who agreed or agreed strongly with the majority of the reasons for not wanting to do an IT course.

One issue was that some respondents did not want to learn IT skills on a formal course; 38% said they preferred to learn IT skills on their own, whilst 36% preferred learning from people that they knew. People's own learning styles and confidence levels will have a bearing on their preferred mode of learning IT skills if, indeed, this is something they want to learn. This was borne out by the fact that a similar proportion of respondents to the question (35%) stated that they did not feel confident enough to do a course.

For a number of respondents, an IT course was simply considered irrelevant or unnecessary for them. For some (36%) this was because they felt that their IT skills were already good enough. However, it is important to note that almost half of those answering the question (46%) did not think that their IT skills were good enough.

People felt that an IT course would be irrelevant to their lives for other reasons too. Just under a third of respondents (32%) did not feel that having IT skills would benefit them at home. A quarter of respondents felt that they did not need IT skills for the type of work that they did, and a quarter felt that they would not need IT skills for any job they might have in the future.

Other important considerations were time and expense; 36% of respondents who did not want to do a course said they did not have enough time to do one, and 32% thought it would be too expensive.

Lack of interest was a reason for 29% of respondents, who agreed with the statement, 'I'm just not interested in computers'.

On a positive note, there was only a minority of respondents who did not want to do a course because they had been put off learning itself; 17% said they'd been put off learning in the past. In addition to this, only one person did not want to do a course because other people they knew had had bad experiences on IT courses.

Respondents also gave their own other reasons for not wanting to do an IT course. Two people said that in-house training was offered through their workplace, and that they were not interested in learning IT skills beyond that, suggesting that they saw IT skills as only associated with their jobs. Another two respondents felt they were too old to do a course, with one saying, **'I'm "past it"! Not relevant to my lifestyle. Lack of patience'**.

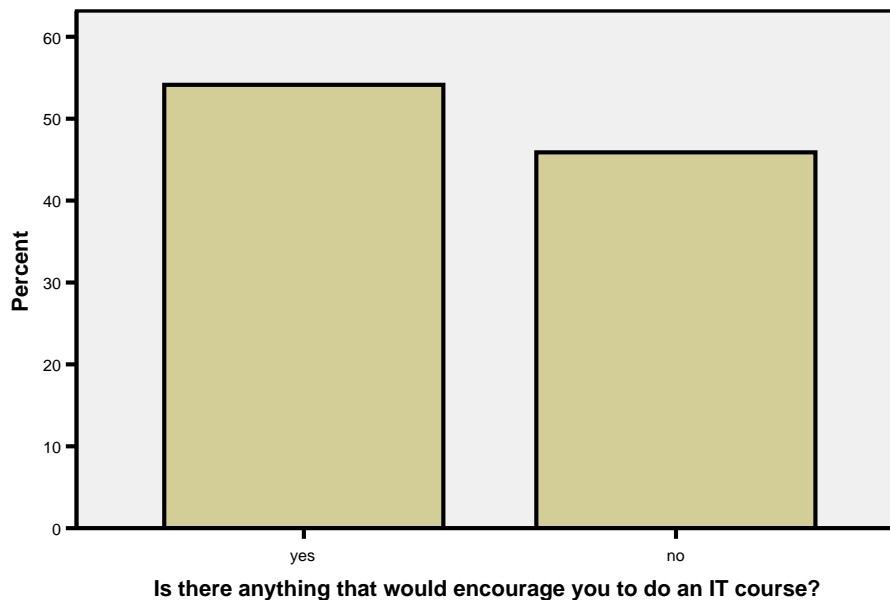
Some felt that an IT course would not be relevant for them; one respondent stated, **'it is not the course where I expect to learn'**, whilst another said, **'I'd think that my needs would be highly individual and that any course would in some way therefore be irrelevant'**.

Cost was cited by one respondent as a prohibitive factor, further explaining that they worked part-time and were very busy. Finally another respondent

suggested that they were actually interested in doing a course: **‘I am interested. I am 39 years old. Once I am settled maybe I will’**, which implies that when this person feels happier with other areas of their life, they may feel ready to embark on an IT course.

What would encourage people to do an IT course?

All of the respondents who had not done a course were asked if there was anything which would encourage them to do an IT course. The split was fairly even, with 54% saying yes, and 46% saying no.



Respondents were then asked about what would encourage them to do an IT course. This highlighted a wide variety of issues which, if tackled appropriately, could draw a larger number of people into learning IT skills through a course. The main points are described below.

Cost

A large number of respondents mentioned the cost of courses, suggesting that if an IT course was either cheap or free, they would be more inclined to do it. Some people had more specific ideas about implementing affordable or free courses; one wanted **‘subsidised Microsoft courses’**, while a student suggested **‘free courses for students, but included in the degree course. A reduction in price for full time Uni students’**.

Learner-centred

Many respondents indicated that they would be more interested in doing an IT course if it was more tailored to their individual needs or personal learning goals. For some, this meant being able to work at their own pace or having a flexible course. For others, it meant having an appropriate level of support, for example for those respondents with dyslexia.

Some respondents were very clear in their desire for a course which would centre around the learners’ skills needs rather than teach a basic, generic curriculum. One suggestion for ensuring that an IT course might be more

suitable for a respondent's needs was if it was **'using one of the top packages, not just Word, Spreadsheets etc but web design or creation programmes'**. One respondent said they would do a course **'if I could be sure that the course started where my current skills ended and that it was subject specific'**, and another said they wanted **'personal aims for skills learnt not set tasks'**.

Another aspect of this was that people wanted to be able to achieve their own personal learning goals; for some this was wanting to pick up new basic skills like **'shopping online'**, while someone else said that **'if the course was quick and gave me a valid qualification that would lead to a fairly well paying part-time job, it would be enough'**.

Information

A number of respondents felt that more information **'about IT courses and more opportunities'** would encourage them to do a course. Most people said that they needed *more* information, but a couple of respondents qualified this need for information by stating it needed to be **'good'**; or for one person, **'just information of the nearest place I can go'**.

Location

Where and when a course is held was important to some respondents.

Whilst some wanted a course to be near to their home (one respondent suggested at local libraries, which does currently happen), others thought they would be more likely to do a course if it was run in the workplace, or at the very least during working hours.

For other respondents, the ability to do a course outside of their working hours was a consideration which would encourage them to do a course.

People

People wanted a supportive learning environment, whether this came from the staff or from other learners.

Some respondents said that they would be encouraged to do a course if there were **'friendly staff'** and a **'friendly atmosphere'**.

In addition to this, other respondents said they would be more likely to do an IT course if there were other people they already knew who were studying alongside them; **'if I had a friend who wanted to do it with me'**, **'if I could do one with my daughter'**.

One suggestion for fostering this supportive environment was made by one respondent, who said they might do an IT course **'if there was a group meeting with possible students and course teachers to discuss what we would be learning and meet other students'**.

Job prospects

For some respondents, the notion of doing an IT course was inextricably linked with employment.

Some of those currently in a job said they would be encouraged to do an IT course if they were '**made to**' do one, or if the nature of their job role changed, for example one respondent said they would do one '**if the need arose for me to do my own administration**'. Another respondent was more positive about the potential benefits, saying they would do one '**if it would help me in my work**'.

Similarly, someone stated that they would be encouraged to do an IT course if the teaching course they were planning to do in the future encouraged them to do it.

Unemployed respondents were more likely to want a job as an end product for having done a course, citing '**work prospects**' as the reason that they would do an IT course. Another unemployed respondent said they might do a course '**if it had real prospects and was not expensive**', suggesting that they did not want to waste their time doing something of little value. Someone else was unenthusiastic about the idea of doing an IT course, but said they might do one '**if it is the only chance of bettering myself in the job area**', thus recognising the need to update their skills in order to make themselves attractive in the job market, however reluctantly.

Did respondents want to do other learning?

Respondents were asked about whether they had plans to do any learning in any subject over the next year. Almost half of those answering the question (46%) said 'yes', and 37% said 'no'. 11% thought they would 'possibly' do some learning over the next year, and just 6% said they 'don't know'.

Those who were positive about doing some learning were then asked what they were planning to do. There was a wide range of responses, but many of these fell under certain categories:

- **Basic skills** – A number of people wanted to improve their literacy and numeracy.
- **IT** – Some respondents wanted to do general IT courses, whilst others were interested in learning to do a specific task such as spreadsheets or using the internet.
- **Continue with current course** – A large percentage of respondents were already studying, and wanted to continue with and complete their current course.
- **Working with children** – Courses that people wanted to do ranged from teaching to childcare.
- **Wanting a job/different job** – Whilst some respondents wanted to go into a particular career (e.g. one person said they wanted to 'do a different course so [they] can become a paramedic'), others simply wanted any good job (e.g.

wanting to do 'anything to improve my chances of getting a good job').

- **More learning** – A few respondents did not have specific courses they wanted to go on, but generally commented that they would like to do more learning over the next year.

Other than this, there was a wide range of learning opportunities which respondents were interested in pursuing. These encompassed subjects such as business administration, Japanese language, counselling and theatre make up amongst many others.

From this, we see that although these particular respondents may not have been interested in learning IT skills through a course, many of them were interested in learning other subjects.

Those respondents who did not want to do any learning over the next year were then asked if there was any reason why not. Four main issues arose from responses to this question:

- **Time** – Respondents simply stated that they did not have enough time to pursue learning. One person explained that it wouldn't fit in with the school run.
- **Age** – Some respondents felt 'too old' to do any learning.
- **Family** – For a number of respondents, their family was a priority over the idea of doing any learning themselves; whether looking after children, having a husband in a care home or preferring to 'spend spare time with the family'.
- **No need** – Whilst some respondents did not feel the need to do any learning due to a sense of contentment with life (e.g. 'Nothing that I really want to learn. I can already do all the things that I enjoy doing'), others were happy to learn in other, more independent ways.

Conclusion

The most commonly given factor which had prevented respondents from doing an IT course was the perception that it would be too expensive. In order to encourage more people into learning, it is essential that courses are set at an affordable price with reductions for those on a low income, and that this information is communicated clearly so that potential students are not put off by perceptions which are not based on fact.

Those respondents who had not done an IT course described a range of things which may encourage them to engage in learning IT skills. However, the vast majority of these ideas and suggestions are easily implemented; indeed, many of them are already a part of IT courses being run in communities across Hull.

The key things which need to happen are twofold. Firstly, it is essential that information about courses is communicated and presented in a concise,

friendly way so that people can easily find out where a course is running, exactly what will be covered in a course, whether childcare is included, etc. It is certainly not the case that the information does not exist, so it needs to be targeted and communicated more effectively.

Secondly, learning IT skills needs to be learner-centred. Whilst it may be appropriate for many people to follow a generic course which gives them an overview of the main Microsoft packages, not everyone wants or needs this level of course. Some respondents wanted something more specific and basic, such as learning how to shop online, whilst others wanted a course which would make them employable in areas other than administrative office work. Pre-course meetings and informal assessments could be used to ensure that individuals are on the right course for them, and that they will get out of it what they want.

Finally, there is a section of the population who simply do not want to do an IT course, and nothing will persuade them otherwise! Whether this is because they prefer to learn IT skills in a different way, on their own or from people they already know, or because they are content with their current level of IT skills, some people just do not want to do an IT course.

Conclusion

The conclusion draws together the main points from this research into IT courses and forms seven themes. Each theme is of relevance to practitioners and learning providers within the field of IT education. These findings are also compared to previous research about IT courses carried out by Volcom.

The importance of tutors

Previous research by Volcom, '*Basic IT Courses in Hull: A Briefing Paper*' (Springate, 2003), concluded that tutors were a key component of a good learning experience, but that some learners found that tutors didn't have a great knowledge of IT, and this compromised the effectiveness of teaching. This research, '*Getting IT Right*', confirms the importance of tutors and the significance of a good tutor-student relationship. However, it was found that the majority of students were happy with their tutor, including their level of knowledge.

The '*Briefing Paper*' also highlighted the problem of tutors changing midway through a course and the disruption this caused to learners. Whilst in this research the majority of people had the same tutor right the way through their course, this was recognised by a significant minority of people to be an important factor. It allowed a good relationship to develop between student and teacher, resulting in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere where students were happy to ask for help. Some people who did not want to do an IT course said it was because they wanted to learn from people that they already knew. This is perhaps because they feared, unnecessarily, that the quality of the student-tutor relationship would be poor.

The majority of people were happy with the student to tutor ratio in their class. The '*Briefing Paper*' had found that there were often too many learners for the tutors to deal with and learners were often left sitting inactive for long periods of time waiting for help. This was found to be true for a significant minority (14%) of respondents in this research who did not get the support they needed from the tutor. However, tutor to student ratio was not the only issue as people were able to learn effectively with high and low ratios of tutors to students. Those who did not get enough support were not only from classes with high numbers of students to tutors.

This suggests that an interplay of the ratio of students to tutors, course factors (e.g. the mix of abilities in the class) and personal factors (e.g. the confidence of the learner) resulted in whether the level of support each learner needed was given. The '*Briefing Paper*' highlighted the drawbacks of having mixed abilities and people on different courses in the same class. This perhaps makes a case for pre-course assessment, as the more information tutors have about students, the more they are able to make sure they have everything they need to make the course successful for the students.

Most people were taught either by following instructions from a textbook or handout, or through the tutor demonstrating tasks. Some people were taught

by a combination of the two methods. When people were taught by tutor demonstrations the qualities of the tutor were more important as the tutor played a larger part in the respondents' learning. When people learnt through textbooks and handouts they liked being able to go at their own pace. Getting the pace of learning right was also a critical factor mentioned in the '*Briefing Paper*'. Other issues to do with the method of teaching were that people preferred smaller classes and that not having enough support from the tutor was a problem.

The critical importance of the tutor is again highlighted in the 'best' and 'worst' aspects of the course listed by respondents. Tutor support was one of the best things about the course, whereas lack of tutor support was one of the worst! Ensuring that students' needs are met in this respect is fundamental to a good experience of any IT course.

About other students

The majority of students thought that it was easier to learn if they got to know the other students on the course and were able to ask them for help. The reasons they gave for this were that it helped create a good atmosphere in the class; students could support one another in their learning; if the tutor was busy other students were able to help; and students could share information and knowledge more effectively.

A minority of people either preferred to work on their own or only wanted to ask the tutor for help if they were stuck. As they were not obliged to take support from other students this was fine. However, another small minority would have benefited from more support from their fellow students but circumstances or group dynamics did not allow it. This detracted from their experience of learning IT.

In '*Learning to Listen: Listening to Learn*' (Springate, 2002), it was found that some people were motivated to learn by the opportunity to meet other people. This was not found to be a major motivation for doing an IT course, although the social aspect of the course was one of the 'best things' about the course mentioned by respondents; whilst people did not set out to do an IT course in order to make friends, it was a positive side-effect of doing an IT course.

Some people who had not previously done an IT course said that a supportive and friendly environment would encourage them to do an IT course. The other people on a course, along with the tutor, play a major part in providing a supportive environment.

Why people wanted to learn IT skills

People's motivations for doing an IT course in both the '*Briefing Paper*' and in this report were broadly similar. To help with a job, or to get a job was one of the main reasons people wanted to learn IT skills. Not surprisingly therefore, people of retirement age were the least likely to find IT skills important. People also thought that it was important to keep up to date with modern technology and that IT skills were skills they ought to have, whether for employment reasons or their own interests.

Whilst people had different degrees of use of IT in their lives, almost everybody agreed about the importance of IT skills, even when they didn't use computers much, or at all, personally. People who had not done a course had similar motivations for learning IT to those who had done a course, but there were several key issues that had stopped them from taking an IT course: cost, lack of information or not being able to find the right course, not getting round to it, a lack of confidence, or a previous bad experience of learning.

Many of the people who had taken a course had clear outcomes they wanted to achieve from the course either to do with their job, or gaining skills and qualifications. Again, this is in contrast to findings about non-IT courses where learners' outcomes have been more social and learning was seen more as a leisure activity. Nearly all (92%) of respondents achieved the things they wanted to from their course. In addition, one of the 'best things' about the course, in the eyes of respondents, was the skills and qualifications gained.

What IT skills people wanted to learn

Two thirds of people who had done a course wanted to learn more technical IT skills such as databases and spreadsheets. Interestingly, despite having done an IT course, one fifth of people still wanted to learn basic IT tasks such as typing a letter or sending an email. The task that most people wanted to learn was creating a website; 59% of people wanted to learn this.

The IT skills of people who had not taken a course were lower than those of people who had done a course, although there were still some highly skilled people who must be learning in other ways. The IT skills that this group of respondents wanted to learn were similar to people who had done a course, although proportionally more people wanted to learn the more basic tasks and fewer people wanted to do the more highly skilled tasks such as databases.

Three quarters of the people who had done a course said that they would either definitely or possibly be doing more learning in the next year; nearly half of these would be doing more learning in IT. The main reasons why people would not be doing any more learning were; not having enough time, not being able to find the right course and personal circumstances, for example one person said they were **'focusing on other aspects of my life'**.

Just over half of the people who had not done a course said that they would definitely or possibly be doing some learning in the next year. The main reasons they gave for not doing any learning were similar to above, but included not seeing the need to take part in any learning.

Just over half of respondents who had done an IT course had also previously done an IT course, indicating that people were progressing onto further learning. This also demonstrates that people's experiences of IT courses must be relatively positive; otherwise they would not come back for more!

Some people had said that they did not want to do an IT course, and there were various reasons for this. One reason was that people wanted to learn either on their own or from people that they knew. Some people did not have enough time to do a course; other people thought that they were good enough at IT already. Some people were simply not interested in learning about IT. This group is likely to be hard to convince to do a course. However, other people did not want to do a course because of the perceived cost, because they lacked confidence or because they did not see any benefit in learning IT skills. This group may be easier to persuade to learn IT skills.

Just over half of the people who had not done a course indicated that they could be encouraged to do an IT course if the following issues were addressed; cost, making the course learner-centred, providing good information about courses, holding courses in convenient locations, providing a supportive learning environment and finally if doing an IT course improved job prospects.

Pre-course assessment

For 10% of people the 'worst thing' about their IT course was the fact it was at the wrong level; either too hard or too easy. In addition 6% said that they didn't achieve what they had wanted from their course because it was not covered by their IT course. 4% did not achieve what they wanted because the course was not long enough and they ran out of time. Pre-course assessments could potentially prevent these issues from arising.

An assessment would provide an opportunity to confirm that a learner is on the right course for their level of ability and also provides an opportunity for a tutor to check what the learner hopes to achieve from the course and whether this is realistic. Tutors can then make the course more centred on the learner's individual needs and ability; this was something that would have encouraged some respondents to do an IT course. Tutors can also ensure that the mix of abilities in a class will allow time to be divided between learners fairly. An assessment was given to 40% of students either before their course began, or at the start of their course.

General views of course

The three main reasons why people chose to do a particular IT course were convenience, utility and value for money. People wanted to learn at a time and place that suited them. They chose a course that covered the things they wanted to learn and offered the qualifications they wanted at a reasonable cost.

The vast majority of respondents were happy with the welcome they received when they started their course. Most were also generally happy with the facilities. Equipment was the only area with which a significant number of people were dissatisfied. A significant minority thought that the equipment used could have been more up to date and well-maintained. However, despite this 61% did not mention anything that could be improved about facilities or equipment. For some people a lack of equipment at home meant

that they had no way of practising in between courses and this was a problem.

Finding out

There were two main ways that respondents had found out about their course. The first was through their own networks and word of mouth, for example at work. A large number of people had been dynamic and contacted a centre to see what courses were available, demonstrating a knowledge of where to ring or possibly of having been to the centre before. The majority of people had easily been able to find out about available courses. Those who had found the process difficult tended to be more isolated, for example retired or looking after the home.

For those who had not previously done an IT course, finding out about IT courses seemed more problematic. Some respondents wanted more information to be available. Additionally, some respondents had not done an IT course because they had been unable to find the right course for their needs. This was also the findings of the '*Briefing Paper*' where IT courses were felt by some to not be advertised well enough and more guidance was thought necessary to help people choose the right course. Whilst many people have been able to find out about IT courses relatively easily, the information is not reaching all those who are interested in learning about IT.

Overall

The overall impression of IT courses in Hull is a positive one. The majority of respondents were satisfied with the teaching and facilities and were able to achieve what they wanted from the course. However, the experiences of a significant minority show that there are some areas to think about, most notably in the area of tutor support.

The response from those who had not done an IT course demonstrates that there are a group of people who, if the right courses are provided, are more than willing to learn IT skills in this way.

Appendix: Respondent Sample

The tables below compare the profile of research respondents to the actual demographic profile of Hull. As mentioned in the introduction, the respondents were all residents of Hull, except for those who lived outside the city boundaries, but had completed a course in Hull. These people made up 13% of the total respondents, and 22% of all those who had completed a course. This proportion is unsurprising considering the placement of Hull's boundaries. However, as most of the respondents were Hull residents it is still reasonable to compare the respondents' profile to the demography of Hull.

All the figures below for Hull are from the 2001 Census, available from the Office for National Statistics (www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk).

Gender

	Respondents	Hull
Male	40%	49%
Female	60%	51%

Figures rounded up to nearest whole number.

Age

	Respondents	Hull
16-19	13%	6%
20-44	54%	46%
45-64	27%	28%
65 and over	6%	19%

Figures rounded up to nearest whole number.

Status

	Respondents	Hull
Employed	42%	53%
Unemployed	13%	6%
Retired	9%	13%
Looking after the home/family	10%	8%
Student	14%	3%
Permanently sick and disabled	4%	7%
Other	8%	4%

Figures rounded up to nearest whole number.

Ethnicity

	Respondents	Hull
White British	91.3%	96.4%
White Irish	3.9%	0.3%
White Other	1.7%	1%
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	0.4%	0.1%
Chinese	0.9%	0.3%
Asian/Asian British Bangladeshi	0.4%	0.2%
Asian/Asian British Pakistani	0.4%	0.2%
Black/Black British African	0.4%	0.3%
Other	0.4%	0.2%

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