



External Evaluators Report

Remote Assessment Project London (RAPL)



2006 – 2008



Evaluation report on the AbilityNet RAPL project, 2006 – 2008

Paul Ticher, November 2008

Contents

Summary	2
Background	4
Project outputs	5
The evaluation process	7
Centres' experience of the project.....	9
How the project worked	9
Problems encountered.....	11
Consequences of the different settings for the project	11
Extensions to the project.....	13
The input from AbilityNet	15
The kit of equipment and software	17
The on line assessment tool.....	18
Impact on beneficiaries	21
The individuals who responded.....	21
The assessment and its immediate outcome.....	22
The difference made to individuals	23
How permanent are the effects?	28
The effect on staff	28
Legacy of the project	30
Appendix A: Questionnaire to users	32

The evaluator

Paul Ticher is an independent consultant, working in the voluntary sector. He specialises in research and evaluation relating to ICT and is also a leading expert on Data Protection. He can be contacted at: paul@paulticher.com and previous publications can be found at: <http://www.paulticher.com/articles/>

Front Cover Artwork

Wave by Javie

Coral Jane and Sarah Ives

Jo Greenwell met Coral through RAPL when asked to give Coral some advice on assistive technology

Summary

Overall, this has been an extremely good project, well conceived, well planned and well executed.

It has reached a large number of people – the records show it working with over 12% more than originally planned – in every London borough. The project probably under-counted the number of people who benefited, perhaps significantly.

The project has brought important benefits for many individual users, ranging from small improvements in the ease with which they can use computers, to changes which enable them to participate in activities (such as training) or carry out tasks (such as e-mail) from which they had been almost totally excluded.

The project has also significantly raised the awareness of staff in the centres (and others they have been able to influence) about the possibilities of making computing more accessible through adjustments and adaptations.

The project has also highlighted significant accessibility problems in many public access computer systems, and has enabled these to be ameliorated in several boroughs.

The training and support provided by AbilityNet has been excellent, with universal praise for the work of the staff member who was most directly involved, and almost no negative comments at all.

The kit provided to each centre was used more extensively in some centres than others, but has been an important part of the package.

The on line self assessment tool has also been an important element in the package. However, the tool itself has had a mixed reception; while it has provided a useful framework and been a distinctive focus for the project, many centres found that they did not use it so much once they had gained experience and were able to home in quickly on the relevant adjustments and adaptations without the tool's assistance. The printed results, in particular, and the way they are provided to users, are probably worth further development.

Despite its success, the project was never intended to cater for the whole of London, and has only really scratched the surface of need. No centre appears to have been able to provide a service in the whole of its borough (although at least one probably came close) and at the same time reach the full range of possible users, from people on public IT courses who would benefit from minor adjustments to users of disability-focused centres whose needs are often more extensive.

There seems to have been an understandable difference of approach between the centres providing public IT courses and those with a disability focus. The latter – because of both the nature of their users and the underlying philosophy of their work – appear ready to make more effort with each individual; the former sometimes appear to feel under time pressure which might prevent them from spending so long with any one individual.

However, the public IT courses – especially when provided by a library service at many points in the borough – potentially reach a greater number of people. Both approaches should therefore be provided in every borough, in order to bring accessible computing to the widest number of people who could benefit.

Much of the effect of the project will persist, at least in the short term, as many centres are keen to continue delivering the service. However, many centres would need at least some continued support from AbilityNet, and some way of keeping up the level of knowledge and awareness as staff change and as existing IT equipment and software becomes obsolete.

The views of interviewees and questionnaire respondents are quoted throughout this the report. The one that best sums up the impact of the whole project is probably:

The most important thing is that people gain confidence. They can feel left behind if they can't access the PC. Once they do the assessment, they realise that they have options and that it can be accessible. Also the process of adjusting it for them is seen to be investing in their interests and making them feel more wanted. This is an important first step; even if it seems small, it leads on to them learning more quickly, improves their attendance on courses, and therefore increases their employment prospects.

Background

RAPL is one of three similar projects run by AbilityNet:

- RAPS (covering Scotland) – 2 years to November 2007
- WRAP (covering Wales) – 3 years to July 2010
- RAPL (covering London) – 2 years to October 2008

There are estimated to be 1 million people in London (one in twelve of the population) who would qualify as disabled under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Many of these people are unable to use standard computers easily, effectively or, in some cases, at all. There are, however, a number of simple adjustments, as well as a wide range of specially-designed hardware and software, which can enable them to carry out tasks that many people take for granted. AbilityNet has developed an on line self assessment tool which takes users through a series of questions designed to work out exactly which adjustments, hardware adaptations or software would help that individual.

Many people – both potential computer users and those who provide community computing facilities – are insufficiently aware of what can be done to make computers more accessible. RAPL aimed to tackle this by training staff from organisations in the local community and providing them with practical support, so that they could provide facilities, and support if necessary, for users to carry out assessments using the on line tool. Users and the staff supporting them could also get support from AbilityNet by telephone and receive supported assessment over the internet, via direct access to the user's computer.

The project aimed to help not only people who specifically asked for help but also those not obviously struggling or asking for help but who could benefit. Of all those with disabilities, only a very small proportion would identify themselves as disabled (or necessarily be identified as such by a centre providing computing facilities or training).

This evaluation was commissioned in May 2008. This report is based on data collected by AbilityNet on the outputs of the centres, along with additional material collected by the evaluator.

Project outputs

The project set out to recruit one participating centre in each London borough, and to embed in them:

- awareness of the issues,
- access to AbilityNet's on line assessment tool,
- access to remote assessments,
- awareness of and access to AbilityNet resources.

Centres were recruited in a phased programme. As a result, some were unavoidably involved with the project for much longer than others. By March 2008 a centre had been recruited in each of London's 33 boroughs (including the City). Two centres (in Newham and Lambeth) have subsequently closed, with their equipment being relocated to other centres, while four boroughs – Croydon, Kingston, Southwark and Westminster – had two centres each.

Some centres were already known to AbilityNet, others responded to advertisements. They deliberately covered a range of types, including:

- libraries (4),
- disability charities (about 5),
- adult education institutions,
- community centres.

Some are also UK Online or Learn Direct Centres.

Each centre received:

- half a day of training for staff at no cost (finishing 9 July 2008);
- a kit of equipment – theirs to keep after they had delivered the programme;
- access to the AbilityNet on line self assessment tool (which is not available to the public through the AbilityNet site);
- help from the central AbilityNet advice & information line;
- access to remote training;
- access to remote assessment, either by remote control ("barrier free") or through a home visit by AbilityNet staff or by meeting at a centre;
- access to the RAPL project manager for support and advice;
- a quarterly newsletter;
- access to the AbilityNet e-learning site.

The target for RAPL was to assess 1217 people, mainly at local centres, using the on line tool but also through remote supported assessment. Centres were each given individual targets. As well as recruiting their own clients, centres were expected to provide assistance to people referred by AbilityNet. By the end of the project, the target had been exceeded by over 12%: there had been 1269 on line assessments plus 42 supported assessments over the internet, in centres and at home. In addition, three centres not able to record online statistics gave advice and assessment help to 39 people and 17 individuals received phone consultancy not requiring a full assessment. This brought the total to 1367. There are indications that this is likely to be an underestimate of the number of people benefiting directly from the project.

There were significant differences between centres. The typical centre did just over 30 assessments (median 32, mean 35.8), but the two who did fewest only managed four or five, while two centres did over 80. This was not entirely due to the length of time they were involved with the project. The mean number of assessments for those recruited in the first year of operation was 40, and for those recruited in the second year only slightly lower at 30. One of the two with the fewest assessments had been recruited in year 1, while two of those recruited in year 2 did over 50.

These numbers could easily be a significant under-estimate. The main tool for keeping track of the numbers was the on line self assessment tool, which recorded automatically the numbers completing it from each borough. Some additional statistics were also recorded. However, many centres (as described further below) found that after a while they did not need to carry out the assessment with everyone; experience enabled them to recommend appropriate adjustments or adaptations without going through the full assessment. Many of these interventions were not systematically recorded. There is no way of knowing how many people were helped in this way, but it would appear that the number is significant – and could conceivably even be greater than the number recorded as having done the assessment.

An important output of the project was training. AbilityNet carried out training for about 310 centre staff (140 in year 1, and 170 in year 2), with a further 25 trained over the internet.

As the project developed, AbilityNet made some adjustments in the light of feedback from centres, and intervened where necessary to keep the project on track. These activities included:

- Centres that were not able to use the on line assessment tool were given an alternative way to record their work.
- The on line was tool re-designed so that it was possible to change the font size, style and colour before proceeding. More pictures were added and the printed report simplified.
- An on line tool specifically for people with learning difficulties was developed.
- Fact sheets were simplified and adapted for centres that needed this.
- AbilityNet staff helped IT staff in four boroughs to understand why and how to make their computers more accessible to the public.

Additional targets in the work plan – not included in the evaluation – covered:

- increased usage of the AbilityNet web site and phone line;
- awareness-raising through presentations and articles;
- regular reporting by centres and monitoring of their activities;
- a regular newsletter for centres.

Many of these areas of work are discussed further below.

The evaluation process

The aim of this evaluation has been to assess which aspects of the RAPL project worked well, and which worked less well, and to draw lessons for the future. It has not set out to assess the individual performance of anyone involved with the project, whether at AbilityNet or in any of the centres. Nor is it concerned with value for money. Given that the intended results have been largely achieved and that the budget has not been exceeded, it is assumed that the results are felt to have justified the money spent.

This evaluation has made use of data collected in a number of ways:

- The evaluator has had detailed discussions with AbilityNet staff, and been provided with factual information on the history, objectives and outputs of the project.
- Six representative centres were identified for visits, where relevant staff were interviewed for between one and two hours.
- Other centres were invited to comment on the project by e-mail, and six responses were received.
- Centres were invited ask users they were working with to complete a short questionnaire. This could be done on line or on paper. Eighty responses were received, 30 electronically and the remainder on paper. Most had been completed with the assistance of centre staff.

The work was carried out between July and October 2008, just as the project was nearing its end.

The centres (both in face to face interviews and by e-mail) were asked to comment on four broad areas:

- Their experience of the project.
- The input they had received from AbilityNet on:
 - staff training,
 - the assessment tool,
 - the kit of equipment,
 - telephone and other support.
- The impact the project had had on their clients and their staff.
- The legacy of the project – what its lasting effect was likely to be.

Users were asked 12 questions, most with multiple-choice answers plus the option to add non-standard responses. These were (paraphrased where necessary):

- Where did you receive information or help on accessibility adaptations from?
- How easy was it to understand the information you were given?
- Which of the following accessibility adaptations were useful to you?
- Have you been able to use the computer more easily or more comfortably after getting advice or using the on-line assessment?
- Can you do things now with the computer that you couldn't do before?
- Did finding out about accessibility make a difference for you or your family?
- Please tell us more about any difference accessibility adaptations have made.
- If you use a computer at a library or centre, how easy is it to take action or make changes to the computer you use?
- If you use a computer at home, how easy is it to take action or make changes to the computer you use?

- What [sorts of things] do you use your computer for?
- If you would like to add any comments about the service, please do so here.
- Which borough do you live in?

The full survey questionnaire and responses can be found at Appendix A.

Responses came from most of the boroughs, although 12 did not return any. The reasons for this were not pursued, since it was felt unlikely that the location *per se* would affect the responses significantly, and the numbers from each borough were in any case too small to permit this to be investigated. It should also be noted that the survey had to be carried out during August and September, when many people are on holiday and some centres were not providing their normal level of service or are busy with enrolment for the new academic year.

Barking and Dagenham	5	Hammersmith and Fulham	0	Newham	1
Barnet	1	Haringey	3	Redbridge	0
Bexley	1	Harrow	3	Richmond	1
Brent	5	Havering	10	Southwark	0
Bromley	1	Hillingdon	0	Sutton	3
Camden	5	Hounslow	5	Tower Hamlets	0
City of London	0	Islington	0	Waltham Forest	0
Croydon	5	Kensington and Chelsea	1	Wandsworth	1
Ealing	1	Kingston	5	Westminster	0
Enfield	9	Lambeth	0	Outside London	0
Greenwich	4	Lewisham	10		
Hackney	0	Merton	0		

Two thirds of the respondents (54) had received help or information from staff at the centre, while half (39) had used the on line assessment tool. (The reasons for the tool being less frequently used are discussed below.) A quarter (19) had received help or information from AbilityNet staff. (Respondents could pick more than one option.)

The response of 80 is a reasonable number in the time available, and enables us to draw useful broad conclusions about the impact of the project on the respondents. However, this only represents 6% of those who are known to have benefited from the project during its existence, so it is important not to over-interpret the figures in the discussion below.

The evaluator would like to thank all those who gave their time to provide information about their experience of the project and to help the evaluation in other ways.

Centres' experience of the project

In general, the response to RAPL of all those who provided information was positive, even when the project in their centre or borough did not work as well as they had hoped. No one disagreed with the underlying premise of the project, and all were complimentary about the role and activities of AbilityNet.

How the project worked

The project worked quite differently in different centres. One factor was clearly the nature of the centre, and how RAPL complemented its other work. In other cases local circumstances played a big role in determining the outcome.

The centres can broadly be divided into two groups:

- those whose main focus is on disability, and who were interested in providing better access to IT for their clients; and
- those whose main focus (for the purposes of this project, at least) is on providing IT training or access to the public, and who were interested in improving the way they meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Four examples indicate the variety in approach.

In **Brent** the RAPL centre was the library service, where the project was run by two staff with responsibilities for disability and Lifelong Learning – including IT training for over 50s.

A lot of work concerned awareness-raising, among staff in the borough, disability organisations and library users. When the project was introduced, staff were encouraged to do their own assessment, and many found minor adjustments that could improve their computer experience. Posters and information were made available in all libraries, staff in all libraries were introduced to the technical options, and the service was promoted at the Disability Forum. People were also signposted directly to AbilityNet, and a link to the assessment tool was placed on the council intranet and public web site. The RAPL kit is held at the Town Hall library, and has been lent out to other libraries.

People came into the library to do the assessment, as well as being told how to do it at home. Many people did the assessment as part of their induction onto the over-50s IT courses. They were encouraged to do it on their own as far as possible, although help was obviously available. The borough quickly met its initial targets and eventually reached a total of 60.

In **Ealing** the Centre for Independent Living (ECIL) took on the role, and the project was run by the staff member whose main role is as an advocate for a core group of 24/7 care users and ad hoc care users. He is not an IT person.

The main source of people for RAPL has been self-referrals in response to a mailing sent out to 450 people who were already in contact with the centre. In addition ECIL's information and advice service has been a source of referrals. Before RAPL, ECIL would occasionally have referred someone to AbilityNet or contacted AbilityNet on their behalf, but would not have been able to do an assessment, and would not have thought about suggesting IT options to people.

Most people (probably 90%) needed support in doing the on-line assessment. Typically the assessment has taken up to two hours, and then given rise to additional questions – such as where to get cheap computers or funding for equipment. By the end of the project ECIL will have done about 40 assessments. However, they have not always used the on-line assessment tool. As ECIL's experience grew it was often fairly obvious what hardware or other adaptations were relevant to any particular person, and therefore it became less worthwhile to do the full assessment.

In **Sutton** the RAPL centre was the Crescent Resource Centre (CRC), which is run by the council and works with people below retirement age who have physical disabilities. The main staff member involved was an IT tutor

Most of the people assessed have been participants in the computer classes, which all users of the centre are able to sign up to. In addition, a few people came in specifically for an assessment and a few were referred from other agencies. One or two people also used the CRC computer that is fitted with a web cam (which was part of the equipment supplied for the RAPL project) to have a remote assessment carried out for them by AbilityNet staff. In total over 30 assessments were made.

People joining a computer class were normally assessed unless there was no doubt at all that they had no need of adjustments or adaptations. Something like 90% of the course participants were assessed, of whom perhaps 70% – 80% turned out to benefit from some adaptation. All assessments are carried out by a member of staff or a volunteer going through the assessment with the client.

Recently the RAPL service has been extended to an additional location in another part of the borough. Some outreach work has been carried out – in libraries, for example – and some clients have received help in setting up their own computers at home.

In **Southwark** the RAPL centre is the Peabody Trust, which is mainly a housing provider. The RAPL service was run in conjunction with Skills for Life training and employment support.

Almost all the assessments were done with clients on the training programme, most of whom come from within walking distance as they cannot afford to travel. Initially, assessments were done with all trainees. With experience it settled down to:

- new trainees whose induction questionnaire suggested that they might benefit – because they have sight difficulties or dyslexia, for example;
- people who were obviously not comfortable using the computer;
- people who asked for changes to be made to their computer.

This selective approach appears to have been adopted in most of the centres where RAPL was offered in conjunction with IT training.

Peabody staff did the assessment with people, taking about 20 minutes each and in total carried out 'hundreds' of assessments, although only 30 show up on the AbilityNet statistics. A high proportion of assessments led to adjustments – often minor, but important for the user, such as changes in font or screen background colour.

Problems encountered

In a surprisingly high proportion of boroughs the RAPL project was slow to get off the ground, because of difficulties in making the publicly-accessible computers adjustable.

Typically, in order to prevent casual users from tampering with the system, computers were 'locked down' – denying access to the Control Panel where many adjustments can be made, and preventing any software from being installed (or only by the IT department through a cumbersome and not always effective procedure).

In some cases AbilityNet intervened, and managed to get a more flexible approach. In other cases this was achieved internally – in at least one case (which took six months) by pointing out that denying the option for making adjustments could well be a breach of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). In that case the restrictions were eventually relaxed by the IT department (not only for publicly-accessible systems, but also for the computers used by staff). However, it was still not possible to download software onto the library computers; all software had to be installed by the IT department, and even then there was a specific problem with Penfriend software, which couldn't be installed even after 12 copies were bought.

In at least one case, even the DDA argument was unsuccessful. Despite a lot of effort at lobbying all levels of the council, the IT Department persisted in arguing that accessibility could not be provided as it was not specified at the time the system was set up, and that the corporate image took priority. In this borough, the only assessments that were carried out were for staff (whose computers can be adjusted).

Consequences of the different settings for the project

One issue which the project recognised was the need to provide RAPL services locally. Many potential beneficiaries are likely to be restricted in their transport choices through physical limitations, cost, or both. This was the reason for spreading the project throughout London by establishing one centre per borough: the centres provided a local service to existing and new service users.

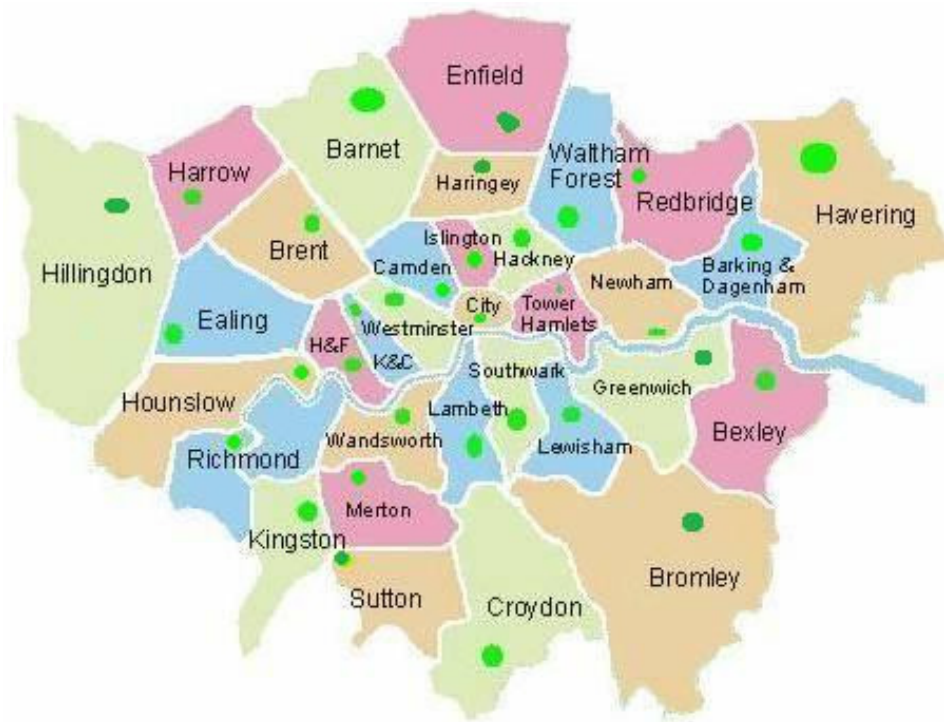
However, it is clear that this is not really enough. It is difficult to cover a whole borough from just one location – as indicated by the comment above from Southwark that most of the people they work with live within walking distance of the project.

In some boroughs the RAPL centre was able to extend its service quite broadly – for example in Brent where all libraries participated. In others, for a variety of reasons, this was not possible, and the reach of the service was therefore restricted. Many of the RAPL centres did attempt outreach – by taking information to voluntary organisations in the borough, in particular – but in most cases this was more about publicising the service than actually delivering it at a wider range of locations.

There are good technical reasons why this should be so – the need to have suitable computer equipment, and the need to have the kit of hardware and software available, for example – as well as organisational ones: there is no point in doing an assessment and identifying adaptations if they are not going to be available to the person from then onwards, preferably at the same venue. There really is little substitute for a locally-based, fully-equipped RAPL centre:

I have done some outreach work – in libraries, for example – which has sometimes shown up the disadvantages of doing the assessment at a less-well-equipped venue.

For an indication of the limitations on geographical coverage, see the map below.



Where the centre was unable to commit additional resources to RAPL, this made a difference to the service they were able to provide. A typical comment is:

As no funding came with the project, it was difficult to commit time to it as funded projects and other work took priority.

In other cases, however, the lack of funding was not an obstacle:

We joined the project out of enthusiasm, even though there was no funding package attached, and found it worthwhile even though we did not recover our costs.

Another factor is that the range of people who could benefit from RAPL is enormous, and each centre (as seen from the descriptions above) tends to reach only a limited clientele. This suggests strongly that much still needs to be done to raise awareness of accessible computing and to make it possible for something like RAPL to be delivered from a wide variety of settings as a matter of course. RAPL has demonstrated a way of meeting the need but has only scratched the surface in terms of meeting it.

Although each centre had its individual approach, there are indications that there is a pattern of difference between those whose starting point is IT training and those whose starting point is disability. Where IT training is the priority, there were suggestions that the

centre might seek to reduce the amount of effort it had to make – asking users to carry out the RAPL assessment on their own, or carrying it out only with selected users, for example. All the respondents interviewed were strongly committed to RAPL, but some reported varying degrees of commitment among their staff, a small minority of whom claimed to find the whole process too time-consuming to be worthwhile.

Disability-focused centres, however, gave the impression that they were prepared to invest as much time as necessary in each individual – at much higher cost, obviously, in terms of staff time. Even where the assessment took up to two hours, the resulting enhancement of a person's life – by being able to send their own e-mail for the first time, for example – made the investment worthwhile.

This should not be taken as a criticism of either approach. Many people who could benefit from minor adjustments to their computer would never be likely to come into contact with a disability centre; their needs have to be met in other settings – and in many cases it might be realistic to expect them to do more for themselves. The lesson, therefore, is not that one or other approach is right and the other wrong, but that a range of approaches need to be taken if everyone's needs are to be effectively met.

Extensions to the project

Some centres were able to go beyond the remit of the RAPL project and offer additional services to their users.

Several commented on the difficulties faced by users who want to make adaptations to their own computers beyond what is already available in Windows. Several reported a need to be able to give advice on where to get equipment or software – and where to get the money to pay for it. One centre's experience sums it up:

About the only other problem has been raising expectations. After been shown Guide, many people have said 'great!' then been shocked to find that it costs £350 – the most expensive piece of software in the kit. The Intellikeys keyboard costs £200. The centre has found it relatively easy to raise money for its own hardware, but needs more advice from AbilityNet on where to suggest people go for funding. One woman did get funding for a laptop and keyboard, with the help of social services, so it is possible.

Awareness raising was perceived to be important, although the amount carried out varied from centre to centre, depending on their staffing levels and priorities. Two commented:

People with disabilities don't ask for an assessment because they think "I can't use a computer". The awareness isn't there and needs building.

One service which ... might be useful, is a service to promote adjustments more widely – through group sessions where people are shown how to do it, and a service to support people at home with setting up their own computers. Some people would even pay for this.

One respondent did report helping a few people to set up their own e-mail after they had done the assessment, while another helped a user to set up the computer they bought, but was subsequently not able to help further when minor problems developed.

Another said:

[It was a] good experience. [I] don't think we used it enough, but [it] did raise awareness among our learners.

The input from AbilityNet

The RAPL package as a whole was very positively received by all respondents. Each of the elements is now considered in more detail.

There was almost universal, and very enthusiastic, praise from respondents for the support and training they received from AbilityNet. The training was described, among other things, as 'good', 'first rate', 'very clear', 'really good' and 'a fantastic eye-opener'. This applied both to the initial half-day on site and to the remotely-delivered follow-up training. Even where someone did have a good idea about the sorts of hardware available, the training was useful: he learned in more detail about the hardware but particularly about the range of specialist software available in addition to the options in Windows.

Several respondents commented that the main problem was their lack of time. For example:

The training [was] all very informative The only problem ... was the amount of time WE could make available. All staff said that a longer training session would have been so worthwhile but with our current work loads this was not possible. We were very impressed with the delivery and content of the training [and] all staff taking part felt that they took something away

A minority view was that the training did not go far enough to give the staff the confidence that they needed:

The AbilityNet training was OK as far as it went, but we needed much more practice. People forget things when they are not using the assessment a lot, and get people with different disabilities, which they are unfamiliar with. The staff have learned a lot themselves, however.

Respondents were equally enthusiastic about the support offered by AbilityNet, finding it 'great', 'excellent', 'very accessible', 'very supportive and encouraging – 100%'. For example:

The advice from AbilityNet has been great. The response has always been prompt, and I have been impressed by the excellent advice. Knowing that they have such a good knowledge of everything that is out there – especially software – definitely saves time, as I would otherwise have to do the research myself.

[The support was] very, very helpful, especially when I got stuck on a more complex assessment and was able to phone up during the assessment itself.

One respondent felt that the personal touch in the support from AbilityNet had been the reason why they stuck with the project, and that it was better and more sympathetic than the assessment tool. Another commented on how much difference it makes when someone appreciates "the difficulties we as a small voluntary sector organisation face with regards to carrying out some of the project objectives but supporting us so that we achieved what we set out to achieve."

Some comments from the survey of individuals are also worth quoting here:

Jo [from AbilityNet] was very helpful, she explained things clearly and if I didn't get it the first time she would make sure I did the second time. She was friendly and cheerful too which helps a lot!

Excellent team at AbilityNet with lots of enthusiasm!

This service has been most helpful. Due to the fact that some of my learners are visually impaired, it would be helpful indeed if the service could keep me informed of new accessibility adaptations, particularly with reference to blind and partially sighted.

I think it is an excellent service and one that I recommend as often as I can.

Several respondents commented that they had not needed to call on support that much.

Several had passed on AbilityNet's contact details to individuals, and/or brought AbilityNet in to do assessments on site. These interventions also received a positive response:

The people who have been put straight through to AbilityNet have been very satisfied. On one occasion there were a lot of technical problems beforehand getting the remote connection set up. The person had very high impairment and came with a personal assistant, so the session lasted over two hours, but the connection held out and the outcome was very satisfactory.

A few comments were also made to the effect that the AbilityNet web site and information sheets were very useful – and that the information sheets are suitable for many users, whether they have disabilities or not.

Although it was not commented on specifically by many respondents, an important aspect of the project was the fact that much of AbilityNet's support was provided remotely, by telephone and over the internet (as in the example quoted immediately above). This clearly enabled a much higher level of support to be offered for a given amount of staff time, as it avoided the need to travel so extensively. The experience AbilityNet has gained in over-coming the technical problems which can arise in providing remote support will undoubtedly be valuable for the future.

The kit of equipment and software

Every centre was provided with a kit that included hardware and software. This played an important role as part of the overall package.

Most centres found that they used some parts of the kit more than others, or that they didn't actually use it much at all. Much of this appears related to the differences in the client groups between centres; it is not surprising to find that they had different needs.

The evaluation process has not collected enough data to give a definitive report on the extent to which the different items were used. On the hardware side tracker balls, keyboard stickers and key guards or replacement keyboards were mentioned several times, while Pen Friend, and Screen Tinter Lite were among the software products mentioned.

Whether or not the kit was heavily used, however, it appears to have had an important effect in opening the eyes of staff to the possibilities, and giving them confidence that there was likely to be a solution for any of the needs that emerged during the assessment. Comments included:

The equipment is used regularly (some more regularly than others). We have key staff who are aware of the equipment's usage, and staff felt more aware of the needs and ways to resolve particular student barriers/needs.

The kit has been worth having. It was great to be able to demonstrate something tangible. There was a lot of interest in the hardware at the Disability Forum.

The kit has been very useful, especially some of the hardware. The most useful items in the kit have been the keyboard stickers and occasionally the track ball, while changing the font size has been the most useful software adaptation. The centre has made almost no use of software in the kit, because people find adaptive software frustrating when they are new to IT.

Having the equipment has been very important, and pretty much all of it has been used. It has been good to see the range available – for example with tracker balls. One of the most valuable things has been [the demonstration version of] The Guide, which acts as a screen reader and a front-end for applications. Several people have been getting on like a house on fire with it.

The kit has been good, but under-used. Two students use the tracker ball and small keyboard, and the Pen friend has been used, but we have not made much use of the [other] software.

It is also worth noting that a number of centres had – as a result of their exposure to the kit, and awareness of what was possible and available – invested in additional equipment for themselves, to expand the range of what they could offer.

The on line assessment tool

The remote assessment tool was a core feature of the project, and a key part of the package. This was recognised by respondents. At the same time, there were some concerns about its practical use in everyday situations. These were reduced, but not eliminated, by changes that AbilityNet made to the tool in response to feedback from centres.

The concept behind the tool – especially when staff were being introduced to accessible computing – was widely welcomed, and for many it worked well. It addressed the issue systematically, comprehensively and in the necessary amount of detail to find individual solutions for individual needs:

The assessment tool was very thorough in finding exactly what users needed to assist them.

Having the assessment tool is essential because it gives a focus and goes through things systematically.

The remote assessment tool worked well: it puts everything order and makes sure you don't miss anything.

The assessments are good, very easy to access and have made an impact.

The assessment tool is very quick and easy to use, and there have been no problems at all.

The assessment tool was very user-friendly and easy to use. Feedback from all staff was good. Also appreciated by staff were the links to further information and the factsheets, which were really useful in their work.

The tool [was] the most innovative part of this project, and a wonderful idea. Although some slight design issues were had, once relayed back ... we felt confident that they had been taken on board.

The RAPL tool is much more in depth than the Windows Accessibility Wizard.

However, the tool did not suit everyone. Some found it cumbersome, and some found that it took a long time. This ties in with the comments above about the differing situations in different types of centre. Typical comments included:

The on line assessment tool didn't seem to be very user friendly. The concept was good but it did require substantial tutor time to take learners through the process. With sessional tutors, such as myself, spare time was the one thing we didn't have for anything other than our normal duties.

The on line assessment tool is laborious and wordy. Before starting to use RAPL the centre was already using the UK Online MyGuide system. This is more user-friendly than RAPL, which often goes into too much detail and depth. MyGuide also stores user preferences for screen colour and font size, so that

when they log on again the computer is reset automatically. [Note that MyGuide is the web portal for UK Online. Its accessibility feature only covers certain adjustments that can be made on a standard computer and it does not deal with hardware or software adaptations.]

The online assessment was cumbersome and difficult to do with a class with only basic IT skills.

The tool itself was great except for two things: [it is] too wordy – more visual aids to explain would be better. I work with a number of deaf students and they found the wording off putting and difficult to follow. [Also] the process of having to return to the top of the page to proceed was a little confusing.

Although users in some centres were encouraged, or expected, to go through the tool on their own, in most centres a member of staff or volunteer took them through it.

As all our students were guided through ... we could show them how to navigate but, for anyone navigating on their own it would be [a problem].

Most people (probably 90%) need support in doing the on-line assessment. DIY is not a realistic option. Even many of those who could get through it on their own would not get the full value without one-to-one support. Many are not computer literate enough to do it themselves at all, or need the computer adjusted in the first place before they can even start doing the assessment. (The modification to the tool by AbilityNet earlier in 2008 did make a difference to this.) I also had to be there to show people the hardware.

The staff do the assessment with the person, as most trainees are new to computers and would not be confident doing it on their own.

All assessments are carried out by a member of staff or a volunteer going through the assessment with the client. Some people need help physically, at least with setting the computer up at the beginning. All users feel more comfortable if there is someone to explain things as they go along.

This is amazing, but if I was dyslexic or had real problems with seeing I might find the amount of help overwhelming without someone to sit down with me and help. Thinking about this in a library context I think we would need to allocate people to assist the use of this assessment so that people get the best results.

As a result, many respondents reported that after a while they stopped using the tool in all cases, relying on the experience of a staff member to take people more quickly to what would make a difference for them:

It is less relevant to a more experienced adviser.

it doesn't need to be on line. Because the assessments are all done with a member of staff or volunteer, a paper checklist would work just as well.

We have not always used the on-line assessment tool. In a few cases people have only been interested in specific equipment or adaptations.

As my experience grew I often found that it was fairly obvious what hardware or other adaptations were relevant to any particular person. I would therefore tend to show them the obvious things first, then go on to do the assessment, even if it meant going over old ground at times.

We don't go through the whole assessment; we just make our own judgement about what to suggest.

One particular aspect which gave rise to comments was the printed version of the results. The aim of this is to provide the user with a reference – both for themselves and for anyone setting up a computer for them to use – of the adjustments and adaptations that they need. However, some respondents found the print-out too comprehensive, while others struggled with the fact that it had to be e-mailed to the user:

The main problem has been with the report, which gives too much detail. There should be a short summary along the lines of: 'This is your favourite font size, this is your favourite background colour' and so on.

Sometimes I printed off the AbilityNet report and posted it to people if they had no access to e-mail, or only limited access.

The report at the end of the assessment tool is too long; the staff member or volunteer makes notes as they go of the key preferences or requirements of the user, and this is a more useful record.

Initially, when people did it for themselves, they often couldn't retrieve the results sent to them by e-mail (or didn't have e-mail access), or didn't know what to do with them. Now, the staff can point out to them the main things they have highlighted, so they get clearer feedback.

From the comments above it is clear that some centres took people through the assessment tool in a group, but most did it individually. One commented:

Doing it for a group would not be practical, because everyone's needs and pace are different, although the two AbilityNet remote presentations to groups stimulated some requests for assessments.

Overall, then, the assessment tool was a distinctive and valuable part of the RAPL package, but could perhaps benefit from some further development as and when funding for this is available.

Impact on beneficiaries

Many centres reported that the level of previous IT experience among their users was very low, and that their ambitions were often modest – perhaps even just to be able to use e-mail and the web. (This is one reason why many found it necessary to go through the assessment with people rather than getting them to do it on their own.) One commented that only one person turned up for the assessment already knowing about the accessibility options in Windows.

One centre gave a good explanation of the likely reasons for this low previous level of IT experience:

There is a big gap between those who can and can't use computers. For our service users the obstacles are:

- *financial: no money for a computer means no opportunity to get experience using one, and therefore they never learn;*
- *mobility: it's not so possible just to drop into an internet café;*
- *accessibility: not being able to use the mouse, see the screen, etc.*

These all add up to people never having used a computer.

As part of the evaluation, the RAPL centres were asked to assess the impact of the project on beneficiaries, and the individuals themselves were asked to report on their own experiences through a short questionnaire survey. The number of questions was kept deliberately low, in recognition of the fact that completing the questionnaire was likely to be a fairly onerous task for many people. This does mean, however, that some information which could have been useful and interesting was not obtained. Where the views of 'individuals' are reported below, these are taken from the 80 responses to the survey.

The individuals who responded

From the comments in the questionnaire responses, it appears that a few were received from staff at the centres, rather than individual service users. It was not possible to investigate whether this was because staff themselves had benefited from using the RAPL assessment tool, or whether they misunderstood the purpose of the questionnaire. This might, however, have skewed the response slightly. The responses indicate that over a quarter of respondents use a computer at work; the message from centres is that very few indeed of their assessments were carried out with people who are in employment.

What do you use your computer for?

Personal and family things	65
Running my life (for example banking, shopping and communicating with official bodies).....	27
Participating in voluntary organisations or working as a volunteer	17
Paid work for an organisation	20
Self-employment	2

One centre did comment on people in work, suggesting that the service they got from the centre was likely to be better than an employer's:

People assessed are normally not working. Even where they are working, the centre's expertise and equipment is likely to be much better than most employers'.

It must also be remembered that the questionnaire respondents were largely self-selected, and certainly not a controlled random sample. Their responses therefore give a picture of the potential impact of the RAPL project; they cannot be scaled up and applied to the total number of those assessed (or supported in other ways).

The assessment and its immediate outcome

Individuals generally found the assessment easy enough, but only a third found it very easy. This probably reflects their general lack of IT experience rather than any fault with the assessment tool or process. Only one in ten had serious problems.

How easy was it to understand the information you were given?

Very easy	27	Not very easy, but I managed in the end	8
Easy enough	45	Too difficult	0

The individual respondents had found a wide variety of adjustments and adaptations relevant to them – reflecting a similar pattern to the use of the kit reported by the centres.

Which of the following accessibility adaptations were useful to you?

Making text easier to see on the screen	53
Making the mouse easier to use	38
Changing the screen colours	38
Making the keyboard easier to use	28
Using a trackball	17
Using a keyboard with stickers on it	15
Using a different keyboard	12
Getting the computer to talk to you	10
Text prediction on the computer	8
Voice recognition	1

Many people found more than one adjustment or adaptation useful. For example, out of the 15 people who now use a keyboard with stickers on the keys to improve the contrast, 14 also make the text easier to see on the screen and 13 make the mouse easier to use. Of the 17 who now use a trackball, 12 also make text easier to see on the screen, and so on.

One of the centres commented that most people who do the assessment find something to help them and one found that most of the people assessed would benefit from more than just the Windows tools – a more sophisticated on-screen keyboard, for example. Another felt that there is great resistance to devices such as large keyboards and trackballs; they felt that learners seem to prefer to use the less obvious aids.

The type of person using the centre obviously makes a big difference to the adjustments and adaptations that are relevant. Those on the public IT courses are likely on the whole to need less elaborate support than those attending disability-related centres, but for them even a small change can be crucial. Typical comments were:

For some people it makes the difference between being able to take the course and not. Generally the adaptations they need are small, such as changing font sizes.

[We have] incorporated the on line tool as part of the introductory 'get to know your computer' sessions held at the beginning of each intake. This helps us identify ... barriers earlier, such as language and sight problems ... which students in the past have attempted to hide through embarrassment. By picking up on the barriers earlier on we are able to support them better from the beginning of their training.

The difference made to individuals

Most of the individual respondents reported that the assessment had led to them being able to use computers more easily and, to a slightly lesser extent, to do more with them than they previously could.

Have you been able to use the computer more easily or more comfortably after getting advice or using the on-line assessment?

Yes, it's a lot better now 31 No, it's about the same 8
 Yes, it's a little better now 28 Don't know, or it's too soon to say 8

Can you do things now with the computer that you couldn't do before?

Yes, I can do a lot more 24 No, but the adaptations have made it easier 13
 Yes, I can do a little more 31 No, it hasn't made any difference 6

This bears out the reports from centres that most people doing the assessment found at least some areas where they could benefit.

Although the numbers are small, there is some indication that people who were helped to carry out their assessment (either at a centre or by AbilityNet) gained a bigger improvement than those who did the on line assessment. About half of those who were helped found that using a computer was now a lot better, compared with a third of those who used the on line tool. This suggests that the centres took the right approach in working through the assessment with people. Other factors may come into play, of course, but this is something which might warrant further investigation in future.

Have you been able to use the computer more easily or more comfortably after getting advice or using the on-line assessment (by source of advice)?

		The on line tool	Staff at a centre	AbilityNet staff by phone	AbilityNet staff in person
	73	35	52	5	10
Yes, it's a lot better now	31 (43%)	12 (34%)	27 (52%)	3 (60%)	5 (50%)
Yes, it's a little better now	26 (36%)	17 (49%)	16 (31%)	1 (20%)	4 (40%)
No, it's about the same	8 (11%)	5 (14%)	2 (4%)	1 (20%)	
Don't know, or it's too soon to say	8 (11%)	1 (3%)	7 (14%)		1 (10%)

There is also some variation in the outcome depending on the adaptation or adjustment which people found relevant. For example, whilst 43% of people overall felt that using a computer was a lot better as a result of the assessment, this rose to 56% for those now using a trackball, and for those who needed the computer to read things back to them. These differences are not significant enough to draw any specific conclusions, but may be worth investigating in future.

It is also interesting to note which of the adjustments and adaptations allow people to do more with the computer than they were previously able to. Text prediction, followed by the trackball and getting the computer to talk made the biggest difference. Some of the simpler adjustments, such as keyboard stickers, didn't make such a dramatic difference – perhaps because the users are already managing to use a computer to at least some extent. This data is interesting, but does not mean that any particular adjustment is more worthwhile. The whole point is to make the adjustments and adaptations that most suit each individual, and any improvement in people's ability to have more equal access to computing is worth the effort.

Can you do things now with the computer that you couldn't do before (by type of adjustment or adaptation)?

	A lot more	A little more
Text prediction on the computer	50%	25%
Using a trackball	41%	35%
Getting the computer to talk to you	40%	40%
Making the keyboard easier to use	32%	43%
Making text easier to see on the screen	26%	32%
Using a different keyboard	25%	42%
Changing the screen colours	21%	39%
Making the mouse easier to use	21%	53%
Using a keyboard with stickers on it	20%	47%

About half a dozen of those who said that things were easier or that they could do new things said that this had not made a difference to them or their family, but nearly three quarters of respondents said that it had made a difference. Where the assessment had not made a difference, there was no opportunity for respondents to explain why not.

Did finding out about accessibility make a difference for you or your family?

No..... 19 Yes 58

Many individuals gave more details about the effect of the assessment. Some were general:

Knowing that there are ways to make the computer work the way YOU want it to!

I can now use the internet and play games like solitaire.

I have found the tool more useful to pass info onto others i.e. disabled friends, elderly relatives.

Makes life easier to use a computer

Many explained more about the adaptations they had found useful. It is worth quoting all the responses, because they illustrate the range of adaptations that are available, the way individuals all have different needs, and the value of even quite small changes:

I find it easier to follow the mouse pointer around the screen when it has a trail behind it.

I was not able to use a standard mouse due to the shaking of my hands.

I used a smaller keyboard as I only use one arm. I found using the sticky-keys very useful.

Less pain in my arm, shoulder and hand because of easier use.

I have a visual impairment and using Screentinter Lite makes it easier for me.

I can now type more easily using sticky keys and use a trackerball mouse for the internet.

I now use the Intellikeys keyboard to type documents.

My husband is now able to read text more easily.

Different colour text and background helps me type more easily.

I use sticky keys and a large font size with double line spacing to type my work.

I am blind and find using Guide has allowed me to type documents and use the internet.

By using a large font and double line spacing I am able to type much more easily.

Easier to see screen using different colours.

Enabled me to use PC more on my own.

It is easier to read the screen.

Easier to read text that was previously too small.

It really has helped as I have eyesight and dexterity problems – I don't have to strain my eyes any longer.

Just two mentioned continuing problems:

A little easier but still difficult due to eyesight deterioration

I have no access to a computer – have to one finger type at library. Need help applying for funding for a computer.

The centres also gave examples of how the assessment and other support had helped people:

The people who took part in the ... assessment have been given the access to discover the many opportunities that using a computer can bring. It demonstrates how people with a disability who would not have access to computer technology can, with the help of the internet and specialist equipment, open the door to opportunity.

Some students have changed the set up of their PCs (at home) since using the on line tool, and a couple have either shared this site or shared their learning with other family members or friends.

One of our readers has been very pleased with the skill sheets for Mouse - Using the Keyboard and Keyboard Shortcuts. She has also used the tracker ball and is considering getting one for herself. She has RSI and is also interested in a foot mouse.

A customer who is vision impaired now regularly alters mouse pointer, cursor and size of text to suit her own requirement.

A small class of four or five young people with disabilities and their carers asked to come and use the library facilities. They were invited to make use of the computers, but the assessment was not felt to be practical. It was obvious what they needed, and most found adjustments that enabled them to use the computer on their own for accessing the web, for example. This is significant progress and enables them to feel included. They had only come in to use the library facilities, and were surprised to find the equipment available. Using the IT has been why they keep coming back.

One regular library customer who was previously having to balance the keyboard on her lap was able to work much more comfortably using the special keyboard and key guard.

Many people on the over-50s courses have needed the screen colour or font size changed, and some have benefited from the track ball. Mostly they use the computer for e-mail and internet, with some going on to Word. Once they have used the tool and learned what adjustments they need, they are then able to make these for themselves whenever they come in (or wherever else they have the opportunity to use a computer).

One person, who had lost the use of one arm, was only interested in Windows sticky keys. He didn't have much IT confidence, so we gave him some general IT support and a step-by-step guide to getting the computer started up. He was over the moon with this, as it made all the difference to his ability to use the computer.

One woman was able to take on a study course after completing the assessment. Another had her life transformed through a foot switch and software that now allows her to compose e-mails at a rate of knots. She, too, is starting a course. We helped her apply for money for the switch.

Several people who were already computer literate have got an enormous amount from the project. One man who had had a stroke was having problems with communication and the use of his hands, but had previous IT expertise. The one big thing for him was a little keyboard with a key guard. He gets on so well with it that he is producing good quality work after only four or five lessons – which would hardly have been possible without the kit. He is now planning to get into e-mail. The other thing that will benefit him is slowing the mouse right down. The overall outcome is that he gets a lot of communication possibilities back.

Another man, who is blind, has been really enthused. He also has quite a technical background and could already touch type. Using Guide, he was recently able to use the internet and Google for a whole two-hour lesson without any assistance. He will now be able to get out to the library, too.

A woman who has lost the use of her fingers manages to type by holding knitting needles in her knuckles. She was already quite advanced when she came to the project, but has also benefited from the support.

Even small changes, like setting the background to green, can make a big difference when the computer is being used for a three-hour job search, for example.

One person in part-time work has reported back that she adjusts the computer she shares with another person each time she goes to work.

One 82-year-old, after doing the assessment, was able to use the centre daily for doing e-mails – to the extent that they bought a laptop for themselves.

Some of the centres also point out how important it is that the project gives people a new confidence:

RAPL is a good first step, and gives people the confidence to realise that they can use computers.

All who went through the assessment had their perception of their ability to use a computer changed. They previously thought that their use had to be limited; their ideas have changed now that they know help is there from AbilityNet.

Most people coming for an assessment don't know about the options within Windows. They say 'I can't use a computer because of ...' and don't realise the possibilities. Once they have done the assessment, many people find that they can use a computer after all, and a lot are more confident as a result. For example, they can now go into a library and ask for something like sticky keys

to be set up on the computer (or do it themselves). For people who don't have many opportunities to get out, this is a big improvement.

One of the individual respondents echoed this:

I found it gave me so much more confidence. I'd had a bad experience before with another organisation and thought I would not be able to learn computing again. I have now had the confidence to move on and learn with another company and have gained a qualification.

How permanent are the effects?

One of the issues for many of the people who take the assessment is that they do not have their own computer (although some do acquire them, as seen from the comments above). Where people are dependent on using other computers, they need to be able to set them up appropriately each time. Most individuals reported that this was now possible:

If you use a computer at a library or centre, how easy is it to take action or make changes to the computer you use?

The staff are able to make the changes for me	19
I am able to make some changes for myself.....	33
I am not able to make the changes I need	2
I don't know, or I haven't tried yet.....	18

One centre commented on the importance of having staff support available:

People can't always remember how to make the adjustments for themselves, and some have to have the computer readjusted for them each time.

For those who do have access to a computer at home, the picture seems to be that most can make the necessary changes (well over half of those who had tried). Disappointingly, four of our respondents weren't able to make the changes at home:

If you use a computer at home, how easy is it to take action or make changes to the computer you use?

I am able to make all the changes I want	35
I am able to make some changes but not everything I want.....	15
I have not been able to make the changes I need.....	4
I don't know, or I haven't tried yet.....	20

The effect on staff

Many of the centres stressed that the project had had a direct effect on staff, through raising their awareness, improving the service they could offer and also, in some cases, enabling them to make their own adjustments:

As an IT Tutor (volunteer) I found the assessment process very informative and I will encourage my students to try it.

The main benefit of the project has been that a lot of staff now have all the skills they need to carry on promoting accessible computing, with minimal support.

RAPL provoked us to think about IT for that minority of service users where it was relevant, and to focus on providing a specific service. We would not have done this without the project; although we had a general awareness we wouldn't have thought of this for ourselves.

One positive outcome has been that staff (and others such as families and social services staff) have learned a lot about accessible computing, and have also learned that you don't need to be an IT professional to make a lot of useful adjustments for people. That good basic stuff alone has been valuable.

The biggest impact has been on staff with a visual impairment; RAPL has been really beneficial.

Some of the comments from the individual survey were clearly from course tutors – but nonetheless illuminating:

I teach computer skills to older people Many of my learners have disabilities and they have benefited from the accessibility adaptations I have introduced as follows: a) Track ball mouse helps learners with restricted hand control; b) Large stickers and keyboards are helpful for visually impaired.

I teach older people how to use the internet. The remote access tool has helped me and my team of volunteers become more aware of the accessibility options that are available which in turn has enabled us to provide a better service.

As a tutor I can now make the screen more accessible for others.

I have an increased awareness, especially when enrolling or giving advice to learners who want to join an IT course.

Legacy of the project

Although the RAPL project has now officially finished, many of the centres indicated that they would be able to continue providing a service – especially if support from AbilityNet was still available:

While online assessment is available we shall continue to use it at our centre for the benefit of our students. We are in the process of seeking funding to continue with our computer training centre; if we are successful we aim to further enhance the training we provide and would look forward to working in partnership with AbilityNet in the future.

The hope is that we are able to continue using the on-line tool as an additional practical assessment tool.

Without the project, people in the library service and more widely in the borough would not have known what was possible. We now intend to continue – ideally with continued support from AbilityNet, although we will be able to do a lot on our own.

We would definitely like to carry on offering assessments as part of our service. They are only relevant to a small minority of our service users, but make a big difference to those individuals.

The next move will be to incorporate accessible computing into all staff training – it is just as important as other IT issues, and needs to be embedded so that it is not dependent on just a few people.

The project has been valuable enough to carry on, and we intend to continue providing assessments as part of the service. There is a lot more mileage in it, and many people in the borough who have not been reached.

One centre even envisages extending its work, in collaboration with other organisations in the borough and, ideally with AbilityNet.

Among the potential obstacles to carrying on that respondents envisaged were:

- Change of staff. One respondent would be anxious to train a replacement if he were to leave, but feels that none of the other staff have his experience of advising on accessible IT.
- Loss of support from AbilityNet. Although for many the assessment tool is perhaps not the most important part of the package, it provides a framework. More important is the availability of back-up support from AbilityNet.
- Obsolescence. If equipment becomes obsolete or superseded, or if changes elsewhere (Vista, for example) mean that software has to be updated, the centres' equipment and expertise might no longer be relevant.

Some feared that they would not be able to continue:

In the short term we are likely to continue providing the service, but might not be able to do so in the long term without specific additional support from AbilityNet (training for new staff, updating equipment, etc).

The centre's staff do not feel that they have enough experience to manage on their own, and would need continued help from AbilityNet. We would, at least, need training for new staff and volunteers and we would need someone at the end of the phone to help with issues we have previously never come across. Sometimes we just don't have the experience and need a live person to talk to.

Staff have become much more aware of the scope for making adjustments, and will continue to do it ad hoc, as and when there is a need, but in the absence of target numbers from AbilityNet they will probably be less consistent about it. As a result of being more aware, they now ask more pointed questions with new students, to make sure that their computer is set up appropriately.

Several centres mentioned that the kit of equipment and software would continue to be useful:

We have the equipment and will use it when appropriate.

The equipment provided is the obvious other legacy with people who use our computer room and suite able to either use them to aid their learning experience or to try out with view to adapting their IT equipment at home.

We may also try to budget for more kit of our own, because the project has improved our knowledge of what to buy – even when it was not in the kit, there has been information from AbilityNet, for example about Dragon.

Finally, and not to be ignored, the organisational changes provoked by the project will continue to benefit a large number of users of publicly available computers:

Another big impact has been the pressure that the project has enabled the library to put on IT to unlock the system, even though it has not yet been successful. Before the project came along, I wasn't even able to ask the question.

The legacy for us is that I have used the advice and information ... to work with our IT department on improved accessibility options for users of our public PCs. We now have a dedicated accessibility tab on the menu on public PCs and windows options that were previously not available have been opened up allowing users to use all the features to customise any of the settings to suit their needs.

Appendix A: Questionnaire to users

RAPL user survey 2008

AbilityNet has been supporting centres across London with their work on helping people to make computers more accessible. We want to know a little about the people who have used this service, and find out what they think about it.

There are 12 questions. You can skip any questions where you do not have a view, or which don't apply to you.

Your answers are confidential. We will not ask for, or record, your name.

- Q1 Did you receive information or help on accessibility adaptations from:** (Tick as many as apply)
- 54 Staff at a centre, a college or a library
 - 39 The AbilityNet on-line self assessment tool
 - 7 An AbilityNet staff member, by telephone
 - 12 An AbilityNet staff member, in person
 - Other (Please describe)
- Q2 How easy was it to understand the information you were given?**
- 27 Very easy
 - 45 Easy enough
 - 8 Not very easy, but I managed in the end
 - 0 Too difficult
- Q3 Which of the following accessibility adaptations were useful to you?** (Tick as many as apply)
- 53 Making text easier to see on the screen
 - 38 Making the mouse easier to use
 - 38 Changing the screen colours
 - 28 Making the keyboard easier to use
 - 15 Using a keyboard with stickers on it
 - 12 Using a different keyboard
 - 17 Using a trackball
 - 10 Getting the computer to talk to you
 - 8 Text prediction on the computer
 - Other (Please describe) Voice recognition
- Q4 Have you been able to use the computer more easily or more comfortably after getting advice or using the on-line assessement?**
- 31 Yes, it's a lot better now
 - 28 Yes, it's a little better now
 - 8 No, it's about the same
 - 8 Don't know, or it's too soon to say

Q5 Can you do things now with the computer that you couldn't do before?

24 Yes, I can do a lot more

31 Yes, I can do a little more

13 No, but the adaptations have made it easier

6 No, it hasn't made any difference

Q6 Did finding out about accessibility make a difference for you or your family?

19 No

58 Yes

Q7 Please tell us more about any difference accessibility adaptations have made:

I was not able to use a standard mouse due to the shaking of my hands.

I used a smaller keyboard as I only use one arm. I found using the sticky-keys very useful. Less pain in my arm, shoulder and hand because of easier use.

I find it easier to follow the mouse pointer around the screen when it has a trail behind it.

Knowing that there are ways to make the computer work they way YOU want it to!

I teach computer skills to older people at a UK Online Centre which is located at a Day-Centre for Older People. Many of my learners have disabilities and they have benefited from the accessibility adaptations I have introduced as follows: a) Track ball mouse helps learners with restricted hand control. b) Large stickers and keyboards are helpful for visually impaired.

I teach older people how to use the internet. The remote access tool has helped me and my team of volunteers become more aware of the accessibility options that are available which in turn has enabled us to provide a better service.

As a tutor I can now make the screen more accessible for others

A little easier but still difficult due to eyesight deterioration

I have a visual impairment and using Screentinter lite makes it easier for me

I can now type more easily using sticky keys and use a trackerball mouse for the internet

I now use the Intellikeys keyboard to type documents.

My husband is now able to read text more easily

Different colour text and background helps me type more easily

I use sticky keys and a large font size with double line spacing to type my work

I am blind and find using Guide has allowed me to type documents and use the internet

I can now use the internet and play games like solitaire

By using a large font and double line spacing I am able to type much more easily

Easier to see screen using different colours

Enabled me to use PC more on my own

It is easier to read the screen

I have found the tool more useful to pass info onto others i.e. disabled friends, elderly relatives

Easier to read text that was previously too small

It really has helped as I have eyesight and dexterity problems - I don't have to strain my eyes any longer

Makes life easier to use a computer

I have no access to a computer - have to one finger type at library. Need help applying for funding for a computer.

I have an increased awareness, especially when enrolling or giving advice to learners who want to join an IT course

Q8 If you use a computer at a library or centre, how easy is it to take action or make changes to the computer you use?

- 19 The staff are able to make the changes for me
- 33 I am able to make some changes for myself
- 2 I am not able to make the changes I need
- 18 I don't know, or I haven't tried yet

Q9 If you use a computer at home, how easy is it to take action or make changes to the computer you use?

- 35 I am able to make all the changes I want
- 15 I am able to make some changes but not everything I want
- 4 I have not been able to make the changes I need
- 20 I don't know, or I haven't tried yet

Q10 What do you use your computer for? (Tick as many as apply)

- 65 Personal and family things
- 27 Running my life (for example banking, shopping and communicating with official bodies)
- 17 Participating in voluntary organisations or working as a volunteer
- 20 Paid work for an organisation
- 2 Self-employment

Q11 If you would like to add any comments about the service, please do so here:

I found it gave me so much more confidence. I'd had a bad experience before with another organisation and thought i would not be able to learn computing again. I have now had the confidence to move on and learn with another company and have gained a qualification.

Jo was very helpful, she explained things clearly and if I didn't get it the first time she would make sure I did the second time. She was friendly and cheerful too which helps a lot :)! Excellent team at Ability net with lots of enthusiasm!

This service has been most helpful. Due to the fact that some of my learners are visually impaired, it would be helpful indeed if the service could keep me informed of new accessibility adaptations, particularly with reference to blind and partially sighted.

I think it is an excellent service and one that I recommend as often as I can.

Good aid for teaching IT

Very good

Only problem with the online tool was that you needed to go back to the top after completing a page which was confusing

We found penfriend very useful which was recommended by AbilityNet

Ealing Centre for independent living has no facility for training on DNS - only on one computer.

Thank you for the training session. My role has changed and I am more involved with supporting learner with difficulties and disabilities. Please add me to you mailing list to keep me up to date so that our learners are fully supported.

Q12 Which borough do you live in?

- 5 Barking and Dagenham
- 1 Barnet
- 1 Bexley
- 5 Brent
- 1 Bromley

5 Camden
0 City of London
5 Croydon
1 Ealing
9 Enfield
4 Greenwich
0 Hackney
0 Hammersmith and Fulham
3 Haringey
3 Harrow
10 Havering
0 Hillingdon
5 Hounslow
0 Islington
1 Kensington and Chelsea
5 Kingston
0 Lambeth
10 Lewisham
0 Merton
1 Newham
0 Redbridge
1 Richmond
0 Southwark
3 Sutton
0 Tower Hamlets
0 Waltham Forest
1 Wandsworth
0 Westminster
0 Outside London
0 Don't know

Thank you very much for answering these questions.