

## Public Sector News

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### WiFi hotspots in public libraries

MLA (the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, previously Resource) has teamed up with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and The Countryside Agency to provide WiFi 'hotspots' (Wireless Fidelity) in ten public libraries serving rural communities. The £60,000 pilot project will enable local people to log on to the Internet in their local public library, using their own wireless-enabled laptops or there will be WiFi equipment for loan from the library.

The 10 public libraries taking part in the pilot are: Ayton, North Yorkshire; Barnard Castle, County Durham; Belper, Derbyshire; Brewood, Staffordshire; Chatburn, Lancashire; Launceston, Cornwall; Lyndhurst, Hampshire; Potton, Bedfordshire; Princetown, Devon and Sandwich, Kent.

Brian Wilson, Programme Director at the Countryside Agency, is quoted as saying: "fast broadband access to the internet is not yet an option for many rural businesses and communities. These pilots will provide access at public libraries, with 24/7 access in five cases. We want to see how rural communities use this innovative facility and what benefits it brings." For the full press release see:

<http://www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk/news/pressrelease/article.asp?id=313>

The BBC also covered this development, see "Wireless internet for bookworms":

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3565603.stm>  
(BBC News. 27 March 2004)

### Inspiring Learning for All (ILA)

ILA is an online toolkit designed to guide museums, libraries and archives through the process of cultural change as learning becomes a core function. The ILA toolkit took three years to develop, and it includes an assessment framework which focuses on 4 key principles: People, Places, Partnerships, and Policies, Plans and Performance. The ILA has been piloted in a number of library services including Essex and Warwickshire. For full details see:

<http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk>

An article called Inspiring learning for all by Jonathan Douglas was published in the April edition of the CILIP Update. [Update, Vol. 3 (4), April 2004. pp.36-37.

## Culture Online - new projects

Four new projects for the 'Culture Online' project were announced in March 2004. 'Culture Online' is a £13m project which aims to utilise ICT to bring arts and culture to people who do not normally participate in these areas.

The new projects are:

**SoundWorlds:** which will enable young people to explore and experiment with a range of musical sounds, styles and genres.

**City Heritage Guides:** which will create 10 online City Guides featuring highlights of local culture

**Artisan Cam:** which will enable people to watch professional artists and craftspeople at work in their studios creating work, and take part in online master classes;

**World War Two Remembered:** which will help older people create an online archive of their wartime memories.

Ten projects have now been agreed. See:

<http://www.cultureonline.gov.uk>

### E-government: Directgov replaces UK Online

'Directgov' < <http://ukonline.direct.gov.uk> > has now replaced the 'UK Online' government information portal set up by the Office of the e-Envoy in 1999. 'UK Online' used a 'life episode' approach to organise and present information to the general public. However, this proved unpopular and information on the new portal is arranged by topic or theme e.g. 'the over 50s', 'parents' and 'motoring'.

Andrew Pinder, the e-Envoy (until May 2004), is reported as using a 'daring analogy' at the launch of Directgov in March 2004, when he compared Directgov to Disneyland. Both offer all you could possibly need in a single site – whether this be government information or a family holiday.

The Office of the e-Envoy wants 'Directgov' to become a strong brand name. The site is aimed at the 'casual user' and will have a strong customer-focus, and be easy to use. Content is gradually being added including local government information as councils deliver about 80 % of services to the public.

[Sources: e-Government Bulletin, Issue 156, 5 March 2004 and 'The direct route' newsfeature in Government Computing magazine (published by Kablet: April 2004, p.13.)

## **'Better Connected' – survey of council web sites**

'Better Connected' is an annual survey of local authority web sites from the Society of IT Management (Socitm - <http://www.socitm.gov.uk>). Socitm describe the council website as "a core strategic tool... offering the public a wide range of self-service options and enabling front-line staff in contact centres and one stop shops to increase dramatically the service offered to the public. For local authorities, which handle some 80% of government to citizen transactions, it has never been more important".

The survey is of considerable interest to councils as it enables them to benchmark their progress in implementing local e-government, and to compare their sites with those of other local authorities. This year the survey found that a third of sites had moved up a rank in status, and 23 sites achieved transactional or 'T' status. Achieving a transactional website is the ultimate goal, as this indicates that the authority is on target to make all public services available electronically by the end of 2005 in line with the Government's e-Government objectives.

However, website accessibility remains an issue. Many sites cannot be accessed by blind and visually impaired users using screen reading software. The Government is urging local authorities to work towards 'AA' compliance (World Wide Web Consortium/Web Accessibility Initiative (W3C/WAI) guidelines). Socitm found only 18 councils were compliant with level 'A' of guidelines, with many failing as a result of failing to provide meaningful 'alt' text tags for images. 'Text-only' alternative sites did not fare much better – of the 143 web sites with a text-only alternative, only seven achieved level 'A' standard overall.

[Source: SPIN Bulletin No. 81: 5 March 2004. Published by the Society of Public Information Networks: < <http://www.spin.org.uk> > email: [bulletin@spin.org.uk](mailto:bulletin@spin.org.uk) and < <http://www.socitm.gov.uk/> >]

## **Adaptive Technology paper**

An issue paper entitled: Adaptive Technologies in Public Libraries has been published by the Networked Services Policy Task Group (NSPTG) – an expert forum on policy for the People's Network programme < <http://www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk> >. The paper is available on the UKOLN website at: < <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/public/nsptg/adaptive-technologies/> >

## **Online training from the National Library for the Blind (NLB)**

The National Library for the Blind (NLB) has developed a series of free online training courses called the 'Access technology primer'. The courses are aimed at library staff and support workers, and they cover the basics of access technology < <http://atp.nlb-online.org/> > Initial sections are: Introduction to access technology; Training visually impaired people to use computers; Changes you can make to your computer without access technology; Windows keyboard commands; JAWS; Supernova; and Zoomtext (screen reader/screen magnification software).

[source: e-Access Bulletin. Issue 51. March 2004 . A free monthly email newsletter. Editor - Dan Jellinek. Website: < <http://www.headstar.com/eab> > and personal email communication from David Owen, Executive Director, Share The Vision, National Library for the Blind. 23 March 2004. ]