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A PROVOCATION PAPER written for Nominet Trust by David Wilcox, Drew Mackie, Steve Dale, John Popham

August 2013

Foreword

Building on existing research, consultation and exploring new approaches is at the heart of Nominet Trust investment programmes. This report is a great example of that process as it brings together a lot that is known about the role digital technology can play in later life, but it also opens up new ways of thinking about the use of digital technology across the lifecourse. By mixing provocations showing ways forward with themes that are well understood, I hope this document is useful to anyone developing practical activities that use digital technologies to support people of all ages, and particularly those in later life.

As always we're keen to hear your responses to this paper and look forward to working with you to build on the ideas presented in this report.

Dan Sutch

Head of Development Research Nominet Trust – August 2013

About the authors

Written by **David Wilcox**, **Drew Mackie**, **Steve Dale**, **John Popham** for Nominet Trust

David Wilcox

David is developing the practice of social reporting, based on past experience as a journalist and consultant on regeneration partnerships, community engagement, and social media. He has written books on participation and partnerships and coauthored Social By Social: Social technology for social impact.

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In practice social reporting involves explorations that use a mix of collaborative online activity and workshops to clarify issues, develop ideas for action, and help build networks. You can find out more about those here, www.socialreporters.net/?page_id=552. David worked with Nominet Trust on an earlier exploration: The Digital Edge - using digital technology to support young people.

Drew Mackie

Drew has spent the last 30 years working with communities throughout the UK to create and help deliver projects ranging from Swimming Pools to whole urban areas. He is particularly interested in:

- The use of games and simulations to map out possible futures (he is an ex Chairman of the International Simulation and Gaming Association)
- Group storytelling to explore perceptions and attitudes
- Social Network Analysis to examine the structure and capabilities of public body delivery

He and David Wilcox have worked together for many years and have recently devised games and facilitated events around the use of social media by communities and agencies. Most of Drew's recent work is concerned with the mapping and analysis of complex networks of individuals, enterprises and agencies.

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Steve Dale

Steve is a passionate community and collaboration ecologist with experience in creating off-line and on-line environments that foster conversations and engagement. His career to date places him at the confluence between knowledge management, people & behaviours and collaborative technologies; getting the blend right is the secret to unlocking the genius in people!

He is both an evangelist and practitioner in the use of collaborative technologies and Social Media applications to support personal learning and development, and delivers occasional training and master-classes on the use of social technologies and networks for improving digital literacies. Steve's consultancy work focuses on helping clients improve knowledge sharing and collaboration, and the deployment of learning networks to promote personal and professional development.

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John Popham

John Popham is a freelance facilitator of using social media and new technologies for social good. His career has encompassed work in local government, the voluntary sector, further education and as a private consultant. He was the originator of #twicket, the world's first live broadcast of a village cricket match, and has managed projects funded by Nominet Trust including Celebration 2.0 and Our Digital Planet. He is a trainer and supporter in effective use of social media for communications, digital inclusion, rural broadband development, and live video streaming. He runs Social Media Surgeries around the north of England and is a frequent speaker and broadcaster on issues around new technologies and social media.

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Introduction

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This paper explores how we can use and develop digital technologies to prepare for and enjoy later life. It brings together past research, and the results of a wide-ranging process to gather experience and ideas from those in the field, undertaken through a workshop and online discussion. We hope the paper and background resources will be useful to anyone seeking to develop projects, and also help those working in the field to see what others are doing. One of the key findings from our exploration was that thinkers, those in support services, and the technically adept were not well connected. We hope this paper will help create some shared understanding.

One of the key findings from our exploration was that thinkers, those in support services, and the technically adept were not well connected

We have used the term 'digital technology later in life' rather than simply 'older people using digital technology' because a strong message is that 'older' isn't a very useful perspective on its own. The ways that people from 55 to 90-plus may use technology is very diverse – and has far more to do with their personal interests and circumstances than their age.

However, in some ways the lessons in designing and using digital technology are similar to those earlier in life. For example, in comparing our findings with those from the **Digital Edge** exploration into young people using technology we identified the importance of starting where people are at; co-designing with users; and encouraging peer-to-peer support.

Differences in the use of technology in later life do, of course, arise because as we get older we may be less able mentally or physically; we may have different experiences that inform how we address new learning opportunities; and may not have used technology in education or work in ways that are becoming the norm for younger people.

We may be unwilling to share personal information and activities with strangers on social networks, be anxious about the security of our data - or simply wary of handling computers and digital devices. There are real barriers and challenges, of which perhaps the greatest is 'what's the point'? And one benefit of age is the wisdom to resist 'it's good for you'.

So if we do believe that there are benefits in helping people use digital technology later in life, we have to recognise that as we get older we may be different in far more ways than we are the same. We have different life histories, families, friends and interests that we have developed along the way - and that's where the opportunities arise, if we are prepared to realise them.

Julia Unwin CBE, Chief Executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, writing about Why we must celebrate - not ignore ageing, said:

"...we need to hear from people who are themselves older, understand their very different experiences, and start to think much more honestly, and much more creatively, about the ways in which we want to shape a good old age, both for ourselves as individuals and as society.

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An ageing society can be one that values difference, and recognises the very rich and different contribution that we will all be able to make. An ageing society can be one that uses all the skills, experience and talents of all of us as we age. It would recognise that older age is not only about loss, there are rewards and excitement too. It would therefore be a society that is better for all of us. It would be one in which frailty is no longer equated with powerlessness, dependence no longer seen as weakness. If we start to see growing old as an important and natural transition in our own lives, we will also be able to build a society that makes this transition in a just, considered and creative way. Such a society will be able to respond to the changing needs of all parts of its population, without hiding behind lazy stereotypes and prejudice. It will structure policies and practice that meet the needs of real people, not just imagined nightmares."

While Julia Unwin's analysis is not specifically about the role that technology can play, it sets the tone for the approach that we are advocating here – using later life as a lens through which to review what sort of life any of us would wish for – and the ways in which technology can help.

While acknowledging the continuing challenge of digital inclusion - providing online access and support - we are not primarily concerned here with how to achieve government aims to achieve digital by default in the use of public services. We do however look at some of the issues this raises for individuals, and hope that insights from the exploration will open additional ways to engage people with digital technology.

Nor have we sought to cover the substantial field of telecare,

and the means by which technologies can help those of us who are becoming frail remain longer in our homes.

The issues of how care services can better use digital technology is the subject of a paper by Shirley Ayres, published by Nominet Trust: **Can Online Innovations Enhance Social Care?**The main focus here is on how individuals might best use digital technology later in life; how friends, relatives and others can help; the importance of learning together; and how the social uses of technology are particularly valuable.

This paper was the result of an extensive process to gather and test ideas, which we have reported at http://dtlater. wikispaces.com. The site includes links to the resources that we curated, and these are also referenced throughout this paper.

Technology in Later Life: The good, the bad, the frustrating and the exhilarating

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The forum on Gransnet, set up and summarised by Geraldine Bedell for our exploration, brought alive the day-to-day experience of older people using technology: the good, the bad, the frustrating and the exhilarating. These experiences and the issues they raise have been reviewed in light of wider consultation and future research, and are distilled here into 10 provocations that can act as talking points and possibly as a focus for project development and investment. The reference material for each of these is provided for further information and deeper exploration.

But provoking new ideas isn't sufficient if we are to develop better ways to support the use of digital technology in later life. There is so much excellent work to build on that in addition to these provocations we have developed some themes that are important to consider in responding to these challenges. It's only a start though. Indeed there are many other themes that could be developed - because we found the exploration to be more about technology and life, than technology for older people.

http://dtlater.wikispaces.com/Introduction

Ten provocations - in summary

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These 10 provocations are developed more fully below, and on other pages with background research. They are the basis for the themes that follow.

1. Look at personal needs and interests as well as common motivations - one digital size won't fit all.

While there are general benefits at any time of life in using digital technology - whether for entertainment, shopping, learning, information - everyone has different priorities and these will be shaped by life experience and current circumstances. The best way to engage people is to start where they are, the particular interests they have developed, and the personal challenges they face.

2. Build on past experience with familiar technology as well as offering new devices - they may do the job.

New devices can be challenging, and recent developments of familiar equipment may offer an easier route for some. Smart TVs and smartphones may provide what's needed without learning to use a computer.

3. Consider the new life skills and access people will need as technology changes our world - using technology is ceasing to be optional.

Public services are becoming digital by default, and new opportunities for employment require at least an email address. It will be important to make the use of digital technology as accessible and easy as possible – or encourage people to act as 'proxies' in helping make the connection with the online world.

4. Turn the challenge of learning about technology into a new social opportunity - and make it fun.

Learning how to use digital technology can be challenging. It takes time, and having someone to help can be important. Loneliness and isolation are a big challenge for some later in life. By getting together so learning becomes a social experience we can achieve benefits on both fronts, and enjoy the experience as well.

5. See digital technology for later in life as a major market - co-designing with users could offer wider relevance.

On the one hand people are living and remaining active longer, and on the other hand facing a wide range of health and social challenges for longer. This will provide a growing market among older people, and an opportunity to design and test technologies for relevance and usability with any users than have diverse interests and capabilities.

The best way to engage people is to start where they are, the particular interests they have developed, and the personal challenges they face

6. Address social isolation and other challenges through a blend of online and offline - they don't need to be different worlds.

Digital technology can enable virtual friendships that lead to meetings, support social learning, and underpin projects for new forms of sharing both on the physical world and online. The greatest benefits may come from blending face-to-face and online activities.

7. Enable carers and care services - both for direct use of technology and to act as proxies.

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More could be achieved by integrating digital technology into services, and supporting carers in their use of technology. This will be increasingly important as older people who are not connected may require 'proxy' helpers to use online public services.

8. Use digital technologies to enhance existing connections of family and friends - and help each other learn.

Free video calls, photo-sharing, email, texting and the use of social networking sites are part of day-to-day communications with family and friends for many people later in life. Family members can help each other learn about digital technologies.

9. Value the role that older people may have in acting as digital technology champions - and providing long term support.

Older people know the challenges of using technology later in life, and may be best at providing the continuing support needed for its adoption. Demonstrations and short courses are seldom enough.

10. Look for ideas among those providing digital training and support - and help them realise them.

Those working directly with users of digital technology will have insights into what works, and where development would be valuable. With some support they could turn ideas into projects.

Themes

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These themes aim to draw out some common issues across our 10 provocations.

OVERALL THEME: DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY WILL BE SIGNIFICANT FOR EVERYONE LATER IN LIFE - AND A LOT OF OLDER PEOPLE MAY BE EXCLUDED FROM THE BENEFITS.

Most people's lives are already heavily dependent on technology through the appliances we use, the ways we communicate and engage with banks, shops and public services. That is likely to increase, and the challenge in later life is to make the best use of technology that we can as our circumstances, interests and abilities change.

Just how technology helps will be different for everyone, because its use is personal. Seeing someone as 'older' isn't a good enough perspective through which to understand what will be appropriate. The mix of life experience and ageing is complex

Digital technology can certainly bring particular benefits later in life. It can help combat loneliness and social isolation, and provide new opportunities for people to connect, learn, develop new activities, and find a new role in life.

In addition, having access to online systems, either personally or through someone who will act as a helper or 'proxy user', will be essential as public services become digital by default.

Because of these potential benefits, and policy imperatives, a great deal has been done to encourage and support use of technology under digital inclusion programmes. However, achieving the benefits, and widespread take-up, has not been easy.

- In May 2012 the Communications Consumer Panel, a statutory body advising Government, reported that 22% of the UK adult population - eleven million people - still do not use the internet at home. In the Panel's view the challenge to increase participation is underestimated; meeting the challenge is underfunded; and people who remain unable to access online services will suffer increasing detriment if the challenge isn't met.
- The panel reported that older and disabled people, and those in low-income households, are much less likely to use the internet at home. In common with many other industrialised countries, the UK is experiencing a slow-down, almost a plateau, in internet take-up.

From our exploration we concluded:

- Inability or unwillingness to use digital technology may or may not be a missed opportunity for wellbeing and enjoyment.
 However, it will almost certainly be a problem for those not online, and government, as public services can increasingly only be accessed online, or with special assistance.
- Just how technology helps will be different for everyone,

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because its use is personal. Seeing someone as 'older' isn't a good enough perspective through which to understand what will be appropriate. The mix of life experience and ageing is complex.

 Because of this, a lot of older people aren't using the internet, and this is for a variety of reasons. They may not see the see the benefit, be anxious about the online world, or find technology challenging. circumstances and interests; co-design with users; encourage peer-to-peer learning and support.

All of our provocations aim to address these issues - with the first being particularly important: Look at personal needs and interests as well as common motivations - one digital size won't fit all. Here are the main themes and insights that emerged from our exploration.

The common lessons that we found for engaging people both early and later in life are: start where people are at, with their circumstances and interests; co-design with users; encourage peer-to-peer learning and support

- Technology could be made more attractive and easier to use
 particularly if co-designed with older people. What's needed is co-design to improve general usability and value, and then help to apply the benefits of technology in specific circumstances
- Computers are only one route online. Tablets, smartphones and connected televisions offer other options.
- One-off demonstrations or courses aren't enough for the less-confident. Digital champions among older people can help each other. Sustaining successful use of digital technology is important to achieve benefits, and deal with life changes.
- The common lessons that we found for engaging people both early and later in life are: start where people are at, with their

THEME 1. DEVELOPING PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP US FEEL VALUED AND VALUABLE.

Changes in family or employment circumstances, perhaps coupled with reducing physical or mental capabilities, may diminish one's sense of personal value and identity later in life. There may be more time to pursue personal interests, but for some people being able to contribute something to others can also be important. Digital technology can support new social as well as personal interests in this regard.

Community and voluntary organisations depend heavily on older people as volunteers, and older people may be willing to participate in innovative approaches to local community building using digital technology, if this is combined with some support. Focussing on how digital technology can enable older people to

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contribute to their community offers benefits for them, and for their communities.

The first five of our provocations provide ideas that are particularly relevant and expand the ideas in this theme, together with Theme 8. Start with friends and family.

http://dtlater.wikispaces.com/Theme+1

THEME 2. CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES AND TRANSITIONS IN LATER LIFE MAY BE TIMES WHEN DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IS MOST VALUABLE.

Change and transitions between different life events provides many challenging times, whether as a result of retirement, health, bereavement, re-locating to live with children or moving into a care home. These cross over geographic and age boundaries, but provide moments where support is most needed to address challenges. It's interesting to note that these moments of transition are also felt by young people – perhaps when homeless, seeking job, becoming a parent. Indeed it may be a key challenge across age groups, though perhaps dealt with differently based upon age, experience and situation.

On the Periphery?, a Nominet Trust research report into young people who are at points of transition, and not able to connect with and use the online world, provides an in-depth analysis of the

issues, people's preferences, and a range of suggestions for support.

During our exploration Gransnet, the online network for grandparents, ran a discussion on people's greatest concerns about getting old, and how technology can help. Gransnet editor Geraldine Bedell summarised the concerns as Ageism, Poverty/hardship, Loneliness, Health and Care, Uncertainty about roles - with technology being both a concern and offering benefits. The spontaneous contributions to the forum gave a lively picture

These cross over geographic and age boundaries, but provide moments where support is most needed to address challenges

of people's day-to-day use of technology, and how this changed as they became older, and how it could change their lives for the better.

Provocations 1,3,4,6,7 offer some ideas for how to make the best use of digital technology during transitions in life.

http://dtlater.wikispaces.com/Theme+2

THEME 3. NEW AND LESS CONFIDENT USERS OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY NEED CONTINUING SUPPORT.

An innovative new device, or a one-off course, may not be

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enough for someone to maintain their use of digital technology – whatever their age. Both research, and discussions with those working in field, confirms the experience we may have when enthusiastically showing, for example, a new website or a smartphone to a new user. The first click-through – or touch through – may be engaging, but then it can be difficult to remember the sequence of actions needed, or how to get from one application to another. Even well-structured courses can leave people frustrated if they find that the computer at home does work in the same way, or they don't have a note of what they did. Even if they have a note, it is easy to get lost if you try something different.

The Communications Consumer Panel report **Bridging the Gap** says "Ready access to informal, ongoing, one-to-one support" is a key driver in not just promoting take up but also, critically, sustaining it.

"This driver often represented the tipping point between lapsing and developing online participation. Help at the start of the journey was critical; in getting started with using the computer and setting up a broadband connection. Ongoing help was equally important to sustain effort and interest to overcome some of the more significant barriers to use. People valued one to-one support, particularly from a friend or relative, and this was often very effective in pushing them forward to a point where they could start to develop their online engagement by themselves."

The Digital Inclusion Group of the Age Action Alliance has developed the idea of digital champions working at different levels: the formal role of the professional, employed to provide

help; the informal helper who has a passion for digital technology; and the spontaneous helper who may be friend or family, helping out when needed.

There is enormous scope to support those who work with, and help older people - and to explore how digital technology can best support them. These may be proxy users helping older people access the benefits of being online, or carers and front line workers willing to innovate.

Provocations 7, 9, and 10 expand on these issues and offer some ideas - particularly in providing continuing support, and training proxy users and those providing care.

http://dtlater.wikispaces.com/Theme+3

THEME 4. BETTER SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE AND RESOURCES COULD FOSTER INNOVATION.

There are many research reports, lots of great examples of the use of digital technologies to support people later in life, and plenty of ideas for development. But you can only find them if you know where to look. We came upon relatively few ways in which people in the field were systematically sharing experience outside London-based events.

For anyone themselves trying to adopt digital technology later

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in life - or help someone else - there is little relevant help, unless they can attend a course or other session, and that may not offer follow-through support. Guides and toolkits may not be updated after initial time-limited funding.

Innovation can arise from joining up as well as inventing, which suggests we need convening for collaboration, as well as competition for challenge funding

This means that research continues to confirm earlier findings and conclusions; projects re-invent the wheel; funders don't know where to focus, and technology users and helpers are baffled. Some of this is important in development phases: research confirming, and giving greater validity to earlier conclusions; locally owned and delivered projects seemingly 're-invent' from a national scale, but are built on local ownership and enthusiasm. However this is not the only process for creating disciplined innovation.

Innovation can arise from joining up as well as inventing, which suggests we need convening for collaboration, as well as competition for challenge funding. The Nominet Trust and other agencies run networking events, and there is scope to build on that activity.

The main recommendation in the Nominet Trust paper by Shirley Ayres; Can Online Innovations Enhance Social Care? is for a knowledge hub:

Community Wellbeing and Social Technology Innovation Hub which brings together all the organisations funding, researching and promoting digital technology innovations and pilots across the wider care sector. This could be an independent organisation or a new remit that falls to an existing one, however it could also be developed 'from the ground up' in a way that takes advantage of the very technology that it reports on. By supporting practitioners, researchers, funders and policy makers to share resources in ways that makes them highly discoverable, we could begin, now, to create this useful hub of knowledge."

We followed up with a blog post linking this to the idea of developing social ecologies of conversations and connections, promoted by Steve Dale.

The Age Action Alliance digital inclusion group (AAA DIG) is now mapping the activities and resources of their members, and recommending members to join the discussion we are running on the Social Learning Network. We'll be exploring the idea of a knowledge hub in more detail there.

The diversity of application and value of digital technology in later life, reflected in our provocations and the related references, highlights how wide-ranging activity and interests are in this field.

"There is a need to explore the potential for developing a

http://dtlater.wikispaces.com/Theme+4

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	IMPROVE USABILITY AND RELEVANCE OF DIGITAL
	TECHNOLOGY LATER IN LIFE.
	Although it's clear that we shouldn't simply use age as a starting
	point for designing interventions, there are some specific
	usability requirements that become apparent at different life
	stages. There are already a range of projects, tools and
	resources that can be useful for people later in life - but the
	challenge is to ensure they are actually usable and relevant.
	Working with a range of people of different ages, interests and
	circumstances should enable us to achieve that in the redesign
	of existing hardware and software tools, or the creation of new
	products and projects.
	We expand on these issues in Provocations 1,2 3, 5 - and
	suggest in 10 that those who are providing training and support
	will have many insights that could provide a good starting point.
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Provocations - in detail

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1. LOOK AT PERSONAL NEEDS AND INTERESTS AS WELL AS COMMON MOTIVATIONS - ONE DIGITAL SIZE WON'T FIT ALL.

While there are general benefits at any time of life in using digital technology - whether for entertainment, shopping, learning, information - everyone has different priorities and these will be shaped by life experience and current circumstances. The best way to engage people with digital technology is to start where they are, the particular interests they have developed, and the personal challenges they face.

Developments of technology for later in life should of course focus on these common motivations, with adaptation to address some of the physical and mental challenges of older age

Connecting with friends and family, and pursuing personal interests and hobbies are common reasons for using digital technology later in life. In addition there's entertainment, savings to be made shopping online, information and discussion about issues of health and finance that may become pressing. Increasingly the internet will be essential to access public services. Developments of technology for later in life should of course focus on these common motivations, with adaptation to address some of the physical and mental challenges of older age. But in all our research and discussions one message came through strongly: digital technology has to be personally relevant, useful, and usable. This is particularly important if

people have concerns about privacy, security and a general lack of trust in the unknown.

Our initial propositions in the exploration provided some ideas for how to address these issues, for example: understand people's life stories for the skills, interests and attitudes they may have developed; help people tell their stories, and explore their interests using digital technology; use digital cameras, audio recorders, ebook readers and other devices that don't require a connection; take concerns about security and privacy seriously.

CHALLENGE - how can we help people later in life - and those who may support them - explore what might suit their individual needs?

http://dtlater.wikispaces.com/Provocation+1

2. BUILD ON PAST EXPERIENCE WITH FAMILIAR TECHNOLOGY AS WELL AS OFFERING NEW DEVICES THEY MAY DO THE JOB.

New devices can be challenging, and recent developments of familiar equipment may offer an easier route for some. Smart TVs and smartphones may provide what's needed without learning to use a computer.

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A number of the research reports – and our discussions – make the point that it may be easier to build on people's existing use of technology, rather than introduce new devices. For example 'smart' televisions are able to connect to the internet, and smartphones offer access previously only available through a computer. Photo sharing online may be the natural extension of a past interest in photography, or further use for a new phone.

Our initial propositions also included the suggestion that in introducing anything new, also consider what friends may be using. Video chats only work if others have the facility; some people among friends and family will favour texting, others email. People's skills in adopting new technology may be influenced by past experience – so using a computer keyboard is easier if you have learned to type. If not, a tablet may be less intimidating.

While it may be tempting to suggest offering a smartphone to, for example, an older relative, a simpler phone that just offers voice and SMS texting may be more welcome. It is relatively easy to upgrade - but more difficult to help people recover from a potentially bewildering engagement with sophisticated devices.

CHALLENGE - what scope is there for using improvements in existing, familiar technologies to meet people needs in later life as well as offering new devices?

http://dtlater.wikispaces.com/Provocation+2

3. Consider the New Life skills and access people will need as technology changes our world - using technology is ceasing to be optional.

Public services are becoming digital by default, and new opportunities for employment require at least an email address. It will be important to make the use of digital technology as accessible and easy as possible - or encourage people to act as 'proxies' in helping make the connection with the online world. Technology is changing our world - the devices we use in our homes, the way we shop, the public services that may no longer be available over the counter. The blog posts and forum discussions that we reviewed showed that for many people technology is problematic - but that it also offers opportunities to deal with the challenges of later life.

The blog posts and forum discussions that we reviewed showed that for many people technology is problematic - but that it also offers opportunities to deal with the challenges of later life.

In summarising discussion on a Gransnet forum, editor Geraldine Bedell wrote that she found a mix of attitudes.

"A fear of 'being left behind by technology'. A very strong sense that tech can't substitute for relationships although it is in politicians' interests to believe it can. A fear of 'life becoming dependent on pressing buttons'. A sense of tech as being alienating. On the other hand, a sense of possibilities and hope of being able to keep in touch with family and

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friends. A feeling that tech may ameliorate, even if it can't cure".

Government plans to make services digital by default - and access to the new Universal Credit online - are raising concerns, and pilots are being developed to explore how to serve those who are not online.

Our propositions and discussion highlighted other issues. More people these days are working past retirement age, and moving jobs in the process. Digital skills may be important right at the start of new employment: JobCentrePlus expect people to have email addresses. Bank and post office branches are closing, with the only alternative being a longer journey, or using their online services. It's clear that we need to yield insights into how to design for the intersection of people's changing needs through life, the personal technologies on offer, and the way technology is changing public and commercial services.

CHALLENGE - how might we chart the challenges and opportunities people may face during later life, in order to inform development and use of digital technology? Can this also be done on an individual basis as part of help and support?

http://dtlater.wikispaces.com/Provocation+3

4. Turn the challenge of learning about technology into a new social opportunity - and make it fun.

Learning how to use digital technology can be challenging. It takes time, and having someone to help can be important. Loneliness and isolation are a big challenge later in life. By getting together so learning becomes a social experience we can achieve benefits on both fronts, and enjoy the experience as well.

It's clear that we need to yield insights into how to design for the intersection of people's changing needs through life, the personal technologies on offer, and the way technology is changing public and commercial services.

The online world can offer new social connections that help combat loneliness and social isolation - but people usually most value some personal contact. Learning about digital technology can be tough on your own - and much research and discussion emphasises the value of learning from each other. The benefits of combining learning and sociability, and of learning from peers is well understood.

This might be done through a formal session, supported by a tutor - or through an informal social media surgery where those with experience help those completely new to digital technology, or wishing to develop new skills. There is research to support this approach, some provision but also a consensus that

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	CHALLENGE - how could more be d	
	and informal approaches to make lead technology a social experience, and of	
	continuing help?	
	5. SEE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY FOR L. MAJOR MARKET - CO-DESIGNING W	
	OFFER WIDER RELEVANCE.	
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The report **Ageing and the Use of the Internet** says:

"There is an evidence base, supported by demographic data, that suggests there is a business case for developing more specific and age-related technology-based products and services. ... Indeed, given the current and projected increase in our ageing society – not just in the UK, but globally, the private sector will have a vested interest in promoting digital literacy amongst what will be a growing consumer market."

The report cites Kohlbacher and Hang, who write that "the silver market is an excellent field of application for new market disruptions as elderly customers will increasingly demand new products and services they had not demanded or had not been able to demand before".

Evidence to a Lords committee predicted that between 2010 and 2030 the number of people aged over 65 will increase by 51% and those over 85 will double during the same period

Our discussions yielded a range of ideas for innovations that would benefit older people, yet have wider application. Funding challenge programmes have recently supported a number of projects and social enterprises in this field - and more innovative ideas could develop from collaborations between those with a deep understanding of the needs of older people, and those understanding the potential of digital technologies.

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CHALLENGE - how might those working with older people help the private sector and social enterprises develop products, services and projects for this growing market?

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6. Address social isolation and other challenges through a blend of online and offline - they don't need to be different worlds.

Digital technology can enable virtual friendships that lead to meetings, support social learning, and underpin projects for new forms of sharing both on the physical world and online. The greatest benefits may come from blending face-to-face and online activities.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has explored neighbourhood approaches to loneliness in four areas over three years, and 'being older' tops the list of factors contributing to loneliness. The research is revealing ideas on how a neighbourhood can support people who are lonely - some of which may be supported by technology.

From evidence elsewhere, a mix of texts, phone calls, online networking, visits and informal get-togethers can help build a social network through which people can provide mutual support.

Contributors on the Gransnet forum say how important virtual friendships can be - while also emphasising the importance of physical presence.

Innovative projects are now being developed that use digital technology to encourage and support local connections.

DropBy online is a supportive online community, with chat rooms and special interest groups that also encourages gettogethers. Other projects use online systems to facilitate meeting and sharing: meals (Casserole Club); accommodation (Room for Tea); cooks' tips and collaborative cooking sessions (League of meals).

Shirley Ayres, whose blog focuses on sharing resources to promote the use of social media in social care, provides an excellent roundup of these and projects showing **How the internet and digital technology can combat isolation**.

CHALLENGE - how can we build on successful personal and project experience so far to scale up the use of digital technology to address problems of social isolation and loneliness?

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7. ENABLE CARERS AND CARE SERVICES - BOTH FOR DIRECT USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND TO ACT AS PROXIES.

More could be achieved by integrating digital technology into services, and supporting carers in their use of technology. This will be increasingly important as older people who are not connected may require 'proxy' helpers to use online public services.

There is great potential for digital technologies to be used to improve care, from helping the helpers develop digital skills and better connecting the social care market, to innovative projects that use digital technology to share caring and provide employment for carers. Similarly older patients using services like Patient Opinion to make their needs known can inform service providers.

The organisation Digital Unite specialises in helping older people use technology, and managing director Emma Solomon emphasises from their experience how important it is to provide the basic starter resources for learners and intermediaries, as well as to innovate. This support is needed on a continuing basis. Emma wrote on our ideas forum that there has been progress in the last decade, however:

"... Some things remain stubbornly persistent; we still meet resistance from scheme staff who don't have the time or the skills themselves to support residents we might be working with. And basic digital skills and digital intermediary skills are not yet, always, hard wired into the organisations they work for. We don't so much need more new technology to get round this as a concerted and sustained push on practical,

comprehensive, basic digital skills and support mechanisms. That may not be sexy or cutting edge, but that doesn't mean it's not important".

CHALLENGE - how can digital technology be used to enable existing care services and carers, and support different models of social care?

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8. Use digital technologies to enhance existing connections of family and friends - and help each other learn.

Free video calls, photo-sharing, email, texting and the use of social networking sites are part of day-to-day communications with family and friends for many people later in life. Family members can help each other learn about digital technologies.

According to Forster Communications, in their Rites of Passage: Helping people make the best of getting older report, nearly half of 55-75 year-olds connect to their friends with either Skype or instant messenger services, with a similar proportion spending up to 30 hours on the internet a week. The fastest growing group of Facebook users is aged 50+.

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Learning about digital technologies, and using them, may bring different generations in a family closer together. Simple email lists, like Google groups, can create new connections with neighbours.

Discussion in the Gransnet forum brought home how important digital technologies can be in later life, as part of family life – and how a lot more could be done to make them easier to use and more relevant.

One participant said: "I never thought I would embrace technology but now I could not be without emails, smart phones, Skype etc. My sister lives in Martinique and we communicate regularly, both having such different lives. I take photos on my mobile of the grandchildren and send them to the family because we live in deepest Devon & they don't very often see them".

But another added: "All of us on Gransnet are computer literate, but out there there are thousands of grans/grandads who are not. I have never sent a text. I have been shown what to do but even with glasses I can hardly read the small digital print and arthritic fingers mean I am clumsy with the small buttons and I am only 66!"

CHALLENGE - how can we co-design digital technologies for later life by looking more closely at the many different ways they are used in home settings, and for communications between family and friends?

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9. VALUE THE ROLE THAT OLDER PEOPLE MAY HAVE IN ACTING AS DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY CHAMPIONS - AND PROVIDING LONG TERM SUPPORT.

Older people know the challenges of using technology later in life, and may be best at providing the continuing support needed for its adoption. Demonstrations and short courses are seldom enough.

Those working in the field emphasise the need for more than a one-off course, making the role of helpers who can provide continuing support doubly important

The report **Ageing and the Use of the Internet** says "Older 'technology champions' may offer an alternative way (to intergenerational learning) to approach the coaching of older users".

The report **Simple Things, Done Well**, commissioned by the Nominet Trust from Policy Exchange, recommends setting up a UK-wide network of older, tech-savvy people who would be paid to go into peoples' homes and community centres to teach them how to use the internet to make digital transactions such as renewing a driving licence or paying a utility bill.

Those working in the field emphasise the need for more than a one-off course, making the role of helpers who can provide continuing support doubly important.

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The Age Action Alliance has developed the Digital Champions Capacity Building Framework for champions working at different levels: the formal role of the professional, employed to provide help; the informal helper who has a passion for digital technology; and the spontaneous helper who may be friend or family, helping out when needed.

Emma Solomon, managing director of Digital Unite, writes in the framework paper:

"The DCCB Framework is not an onerous or complicated concept to implement. It builds on existing programmes and initiatives in the digital skills, digital outreach areas. It collates and extends existing resources, content and collateral. It does not require the creation of anything new - it simply requires the activation, organisation, structuring and support of delivery mechanisms sitting under our noses and inherent in the many and various and diverse organisations that make up our society. Its potential to embed widespread and meaningful digital literacy is enormous".

CHALLENGE - how can we promote and support the work of older people as digital champions in a way that is sustainable?

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10. LOOK FOR IDEAS AMONG THOSE PROVIDING DIGITAL TRAINING AND SUPPORT - AND HELP THEM REALISE THEM.

Those working directly with users of digital technology will have insights into what works, and where development would be valuable. With some support they could turn ideas into projects.

Overall we could make more of what we have, through better networking, and connecting the do-ers, thinkers and developers.

Trainers, tutors and mentors will have powerful insights into what is likely to work - but may lack the time or opportunity to turn these insights into new practical applications.

While some organisations have produced excellent guides, they usually concentrate on standard tools and activities. They may not be maintained and updated as short-term projects end.

There are example of sharing and networking, but still relatively small-scale. The Age Action Alliance digital inclusion group is now mapping the activities and resources of their members, and the Nominet Trust and other agencies run networking events.

Overall we could make more of what we have, through better networking, and connecting the do-ers, thinkers and developers.

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CHALLENGE - how can make more of the insights of those in the front line, and encourage more collaboration among those in the field?

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About the series

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Nominet Trust provocation papers are undertaken by leading thinkers, writers and researchers to provide an alternative view on the existing challenges of digital technology. By reflecting on current research, policy and practice, the authors explore alternative approaches to a topic, in order to stimulate debate and to provide new perspectives on particular challenges.

By providing insight and new ideas, it is hoped these publications will add to the imaginative applications of the internet to drive social action.

As always, we value your comments and suggestions for how to act on the ideas presented within these publications, and how we can build the series so that it is more useful to us all as we work towards mobilising positive social change through the application of digital technology.

We look forward to your comments and suggestions at: developmentresearch@nominettrust.org.uk

About Nominet Trust

nominettrust

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t +44 (0)1865 334 000 f +44 (0)1865 332 314 enquiries@nominettrust.org.uk www.nominettrust.org.uk Digital technology offers a phenomenal opportunity to stimulate new forms of collaboration, to mobilise new communities of interest, and to unleash the imagination of millions of users in addressing specific local and global challenges.

Nominet Trust believes in harnessing the power of digital technology to improve lives and communities.

As the UK's only dedicated Tech for Good funder, we bring together, invest in and support people committed to using digital technology to create social and economic value.

Through our on-going research programme we identify specific areas of need and channel funding towards initiatives designed to make a significant difference to people's lives.

Since our inception in September 2008, Nominet Trust has invested in hundreds of projects, providing business support as well as financial investment, seeking to make a positive difference to the lives of disadvantages and vulnerable people.

To find out more about our work or how you can apply for funding, please visit: www.nominettrust.org.uk