



e-mpirical supports Berkshire Learning and Skills Council

In May 2003, the Berkshire Learning and Skills Council (BLSC) chose e-mpirical Ltd to develop a policy and funding framework. It was to allow UK online centres and other similar centres to access funding to engage with "deprived communities" to deliver basic skills, thereby becoming Neighbourhood Learning Centres and improving their sustainability. An intensive study documented for the first time all 54 UK online centres in Berkshire and also identified other providers of training and support that could help the UK online centres.

Primarily the policy and funding framework is aimed at the equitable distribution of Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities funding (NLDC), but with e-mpirical's help, it now reaches into centres that do not fall within the strict definition of "deprived communities". The framework also allows centres to tap into other funding regimes in a coherent manner.



This policy framework was produced by e-mpirical Ltd after an extensive 4 month consultation process with key stakeholders including Lifelong Learning Partnerships, Local Education Authorities, learndirect and UK online centres and was formally approved by BLSC in September 2003. At the same time, the BLSC established a formal partnership, the Berkshire Neighbourhood Learning Centres (BNLC) between the 6 LEA's, the learndirect hub as the lead body, and e-mpirical Ltd as strategic consultants, to implement the policy and to distribute funds to Neighbourhood Learning Centres and UK online centres. This partnership is the first of its kind in the UK.

"e-mpirical has enabled us to create a new partnership, uniquely bringing UK online Centres together with learndirect and the 6 Berkshire Unitary Authority LEAs'. In one step we have been able to realise a comprehensive network of provision in the communities offering one door through to the world of Information, advice and learning services, the key to delivering Skills for Life"

Jon Thompson, Access and Inclusion Manager, responsible for the Neighbourhood Learning Centre Programme

e-mpirical are very pleased to be working with the BNLC partnership and are proud to be associated with an innovative and far sighted programme which:

- Seeks to improve sustainability of centres by maximising new investment fairly across Berkshire;
- Is creating networks of common interests and support and which also addresses the basic skills agenda;
- Is pioneering new ways of supporting each other thus raising skill levels, capacity and capability and helping to maintain sustainable centres.

Since the partnership has been formed, it has secured another £200,000 of ESF funds for delivery of Basic Skills in the UK online centres. e-mpirical Ltd wrote the bid on behalf of the partnership. This, added to NLDC funds for 2004/05, will put the Berkshire centres in a strong position to press ahead with their programmes.



peoplebeforetechnology

About e-mpirical

Berkshire LSC chose e-mpirical as partners in this venture because of their unrivalled experience in the community ICT market. Having set up 17 centres in Slough and 20 centres in Reading, the e-mpirical team were expertly placed to develop a Pan Berkshire approach.

e-mpirical have over the past 7 years implemented community based ICT programmes throughout the UK and Europe. The e-mpirical team have not only trained over 200 centre staff, but also run centres and delivered training to over 5,000 people.

This unique experience enables e-mpirical to address the complex issues involved in running a UK online centre as it includes real life experience of working with technology phobic people, and addressing the sustainability issues that persist once the "pump priming" funding has run out. The ability to relate to the issues that will face the centres greatly enhances e-mpirical's ability to deliver sensible working solutions in community locations.

Berkshire Neighbourhood Learning Centres



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