

## Millions invested to create new wave of silver surfers

Nearly 20,000 people living in sheltered housing will be switched on to the internet under £2.9m plans being developed by the Government to boost the number of silver surfers Communities Minister Lord McKenzie and Minister for Pensions and the Ageing Society Angela Eagle announced today.

With two thirds of those over the age of 65 in sheltered housing without online access, the new 'Get Digital' programme will help them become internet savvy and enjoy the wider social and economic benefits of the digital world.

'Get Digital' – to be delivered on the Government's behalf by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and Digital Unite - will provide these people with access to computers and the training they need to make the most of the new technology on offer. Local schools will also link up with sheltered housing schemes so that young and old can learn together.

Digital Unite's experience on previous programmes suggests that learning digital skills can transform the lives of older people in sheltered housing, bringing residents together as they discover new shared interests and passions.

Alongside the huge social benefits, more and more services are going online so the new programme will mean that the thousands in sheltered housing are not isolated and left behind.

By the end of March 2011, *Get Digital* will:

- work with 195 sheltered housing schemes nationwide, including 81 schemes in rural areas providing around 7,800 residents internet access;
- extend internet access to a further 300 schemes and up to 20,000 residents in total;
- develop communal IT facilities in sheltered housing schemes making technology easily accessible to the 600,000 people who live in sheltered housing as well as others in the local community;
- provide resources including expert Scheme Support tutors to boost computer literacy. Fear of fraud and online jargon are cited as barriers to older people going online. The training on offer will increase their confidence using the web;
- promote and support 'Get Digital partnerships' between sheltered housing and local schools and other groups of young people for 'intergenerational learning activities'. This work is intended to develop greater trust between younger and older people and it is hoped that this will lead to a decrease in fear of young people in a neighbourhood – something acknowledged to be a main source of insecurity for older people; and
- provide a wide range of support materials for Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to enable them to set up and sustain facilities for

residents. This will include advice and guidance on appropriate equipment and connectivity, free training and resources for residents, extensive advice and guidance on working with local organisations to sustain digital literacy activities and Small grants to set up communal PC facilities.

Lord McKenzie said:

“For thousands of people this programme could be truly life changing. Older people who currently don’t have access to the internet miss out on the benefits that millions of us enjoy everyday.

“Technology has changed so fast that it has left many over 50s feeling left behind. This programme is about bridging the digital divide. A little training will make going online a possibility for everyone. The internet will make it easier for people to keep in touch with their families, shop online and access a wide range of services.”

Angela Eagle, Minister for Pensions and the Ageing Society said:

"Digital Services are an increasingly important part of our society. Get Digital will help thousands of older people in sheltered accommodation and rural areas become part of the digital age.

"The project will work alongside the digital inclusion taskforce helping older people benefit from internet access and a new national network of digital mentors to give them the skills and confidence to use the internet safely and effectively."

The Get Digital programme has the capacity to transform individual and collective lives. It will build on the successful work in this area already delivered by Get Digital partners, illustrated by feedback from scheme managers in Somerset, Bristol and Buckinghamshire (2009):

*“The digital literacy programme for residents has helped transform the atmosphere at this scheme. There is always someone using the computers and people passing by the door stop to chat and then get interested in what the residents are up to and sometimes offer to help if they're stuck.*

*“I believe it has enhanced the quality of life for those who took part. We invited other supported housing residents (members of our Sheltered Housing Group) to an open day this year to evaluate the project and the feedback was positive.”*

*“One of the best comments I have had from my most keen user is that it has been life changing.”*

The cross-government initiative is part of the ongoing drive to tackle social and digital exclusion and will involve close working with housing organisations to both improve their delivery of housing services as well as improving the lives of the older and vulnerable people in their care.

Martha Lane Fox, Champion for Digital Inclusion said:

“More than 10 million adults across the UK have never used the internet, and worryingly 4 million of this group are also socially excluded. Of this group 39% are over the age of 65 and missing out on the many opportunities and cost efficiencies that the web has to offer.

“The 'Get Digital' project will give older people in sheltered housing the skills to fully participate in modern technology and it's exactly the right approach to make sure one of the most digitally excluded groups are not left behind.”

### Notes to editors

1. For further information about the 'Get Digital' Programme, please email: [getdigital@niace.org.uk](mailto:getdigital@niace.org.uk)

2. NIACE and Digital Unite have worked together in this field for many years, most notably on the Silver Surfers programme which includes Silver Surfers Day in Adult Learners Week, the UK's largest and longest running learning campaign. NIACE and DU have also been involved in the Estelle Morris review of ICT Skills that led to the development of Online Basics. Digital Unite have over 7 years experience of delivery digital literacy programmes within sheltered housing environments.

Silver Surfers' Day (SSD) is the biggest, and only, annual, national campaign promoting the benefits of digital literacy to older people. SSD has been running since 2002 and is on the Friday of NIACE's Adult Learners Week in May. In 2010, SSD will be Friday May 21<sup>st</sup>.

3. The £2.9m funding will be used to set up facilities, provide free training for residents, and ongoing advice and support for housing associations.

4. The programme will be nation-wide and 195 schemes across the country will have benefited from direct intervention and the Get Digital training and support programme by March 2011. The programme will include urban and rural areas. Get Digital will work with landlords and other stakeholders to build the capacity of the sheltered housing sector to ensure that the offer of communal computer facilities is well integrated and supported by advice on how to enable residents to work with other local groups and agencies, as well as schools, on digital skills programmes.

5. Building Society for All Ages, the Government's strategy to help Britain prepare for ageing society was published in July 2009 – [www.hmg.gov.uk/buildingasocietyforallages](http://www.hmg.gov.uk/buildingasocietyforallages) . This included plans to improve access to digital technology for older people.

6. A national network of digital mentors has been set up to give those who are unfamiliar with new technology the skills they need to use the internet. This is led by the Media Trust and is now called Community Voices ([www.mediatrust.org/communityvoices](http://www.mediatrust.org/communityvoices)).

7. The Digital Inclusion Taskforce will help disadvantaged people benefit from the new technologies and increase the number of people who use the internet. Martha Lane Fox is the Champion for Digital Inclusion, and Tom Wright, Chief Executive of Age Concern and Help the Aged represents older people on the Taskforce.