

## Innovation

Livetech is a not-for-profit Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) refurbishment and recycling service run by young people who are studying for their IT Practitioners NVQ. The Livetech project weaves together applied learning practices with a computer recycling service which is both environmentally and economically sound. Livetech students provide a computer repair service as well as refurbishing and recycling unwanted computer equipment. The organisation supplies refurbished computers to community projects both locally and internationally for a low cost.



## Background

Livetech was set up in response to the shortage of work placements that were available to vocational learners in the IT sector. Pete Eason from Sheffield City Council was successful in his bid to the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) to fund the WEEE recycling service for three years. The funding depreciated each year with the aim for Livetech to be a self sufficient business by April 2010.

Livetech had to acquire three licences from the Environmental Agency before it could begin recycling computer equipment. Project Coordinator, Tom Ward successfully applied for and obtained an Exemption Licence, a Waste Carriers Licence and a Site Premise Licence. The process of doing so took four months.

Initially, Livetech offered its services to local schools and City learning Centres (CLCs), where computer systems were regularly replaced and disposed of. The company began to receive requests for computer repairs and, as the students had experience of troubleshooting, they introduced a repair service for a fixed rate of £20 on a 'No-fix-no-fee' basis.

## Technology

Students at Livetech are trained to diagnose faults, take apart and rebuild computers, fully data wipe the machines, install new operating systems, set up servers and networks and quality control the process from start to finish, keeping full written records which can then be used as part of their assessment.

Tom estimates that the equipment Livetech receives for repairs and recycling is three years behind the latest technology. However, any money made above their quota which is not used to cover the cost of essential warehouse space, is spent on buying new kit for the students to familiarise themselves with.

## Teaching and Learning

The employees of Livetech spend one full morning a week with their tutors Mick Cook and Mark Jones completing their NVQ portfolios in a classroom based lesson. The remainder of their week is spent in the workshop or out on a collection and this, believes Tom, is what sets Livetech apart:

**"The students don't just learn how to build and fix computers; they also have to learn how to build a business and none of this can be taught without actually having them do it. The theory must be put into practice."**

The students deal with customers on a day to day basis which helps them to develop self confidence and increases their employability.

## Impact

Since its launch over two years ago, two groups of students have completed their Level 2 IT Practitioners NVQ at Livetech. The majority of students from the first year have passed through to IT related careers. One student is now working at Fujitsu and another has recently become an engineer with the RAF. Having learnt valuable lessons about setting up a business at Livetech, one past student is now running his own design company.

Project Leader, Thomas Dimelow remained at Livetech to complete the Level 3 qualification and now supports the new Level 2 students.

The community benefit has also been significant. Through an existing partnership with Vestry Hall, Livetech has provided 80 computers for a fee of approximately £5 per machine. Vestry Hall has passed these machines on to members of the community who do not have access to a computer.

Livetech is also working closely with Pan Af (Interactive Foundation) on a project named 'Technology for Africa' which aims to supply 10,000 recycled computers to communities throughout Africa.

In the near future Livetech is hoping to provide a technical support service to small companies at an affordable price. The benefits from this span from broadening the students' skills base to making technical support more accessible to small companies who can't afford expensive support contracts.

## Challenges

During the initial stages of setting up Livetech, the biggest challenge faced was obtaining the licences. Livetech was a new concept and as a result, the Environmental agency had no experience of dealing with such an organisation and nothing to base their application on.

Through the links that Livetech had established with local schools, some students were offered positions in the technical support teams once they had finished their NVQ. However, the Building Schools for the Future programme has resulted in new specifications and different job roles. This, combined with the current recession may mean that there will be difficulties in placing students in the future.



## Adoption

Livetech operates in line with a recommendation made in the Digital Britain Report, for schemes that: "provide affordable access for excluded citizens and have a positive impact on the environment."<sup>1</sup> Therefore a wider adoption of this programme, in conjunction with local councils, would have benefits to the environment and to the community whilst providing young people with a unique learning experience and invaluable 'on the job' training.

Time must be invested into researching the legalities and ensuring that the correct licences are obtained in advance. There should also be a clear plan as to how the funding would be used and as the organisation would be charitable, if based on the Livetech model, how the profits could be invested back into the company.

## System Outcomes

Engaged and empowered learners  
Technology confident, effective learners

## Key Words

Applied learning; Employability; WEEE recycling; Community benefits.

## Organisation Description

The 14-19 program is managed by the 14-19 team which is part of the Lifelong Learning and Skills section. The work of the team has been nationally recognised and in 2008 won a prestigious Beacon Award.

1 BIS/DCMS (2009) Digital Britain, Retrieved July 29th 2009 from <http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/digitalbritain-finalreport-jun09.pdf>

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