

Channel Shift Case Study

Guidance Area #2:	Getting People Online For First Time
Provided By:	Hertfordshire County Council (HCC)
Sector:	Local Government
Service:	Online School Admissions

The Online School Admissions service is used by parents or carers for applying to Nursery, Primary, Junior (Middle School), and Secondary (Upper School) admissions. In the 2012/13 academic year, the service handled:

- 10,692 Nursery Applications (94% online)
- 14,313 Primary (98.5% online)
- 2,912 Junior/Middle School (97.8% online)
- 12,175 Secondary/Upper School (96.9% online)

This case study - based on actions taken before the development of the Government Service Design Manual and the guidance on Increasing digital take-up - illustrates the importance of *getting people online for the first time*.

What They Did:

Every year HCC writes to all parents or carers, with children of appropriate ages, to advise them about the school applications process. In doing so they *promote the online channel* as the default approach.

The online as default approach is reiterated in local media campaigns (radio and posters) thereby promoting online *through all communication channels*.

It is repeated in the publicity material used by schools so that *delivery partners and other points of contact also promote the digital as default approach*.

All communications and promotional materials stress the advantages to parents of using online applications (ability to change preferences once made, easier to submit supporting evidence, provision of email address for future correspondence).

Paper forms for applications are not routinely made available but can be provided if requested from the HCC Customer Service Centre but staff at the Customer Staff Centre will *make the applicant aware of the digital as default approach*.

In 2012/13 paper based applications were only made for:

- 221 Primary School applications

- 64 Junior/Middle School applications
- 376 Secondary/Upper School applications

Lessons Learnt:

The intention was always to focus on *channel optimisation* and providing an online service for those who wanted to use it.

HCC have learnt that a number of applicant families require additional support to get online and that more needs to be done to encourage or help those requesting paper based forms to use the online channel. They are developing a digital inclusion strategy to address these issues.

Capturing email addresses has significantly cut down on the need to send offer letters - HCC only sends offer letters to those who do not apply via the online channel (2%).

To increase the time frame for making applications, rather than handling all applications within a short time frame, while still allowing time for all choices to be explored; HCC has introduced a new editable in-year application form for 2013/14. This will mean that online in-year applications can be made earlier (and amended as preferences develop) - this is expected to see an increase in earlier online applications.