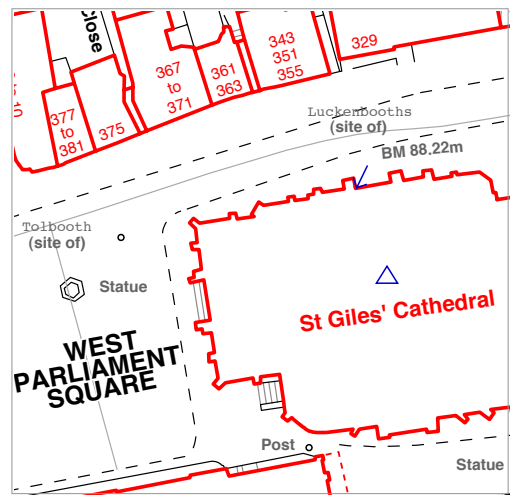


Supporting EDINA Digimap



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Introduction

High quality end-user support and training have been identified as key priorities for the success of the EDINA Digimap service.

Experience with the Digimap service has demonstrated that there are two types of user who will need local support:

- The low-skilled user who has had little or no experience with computing in general but has been set a goal to obtain a map from the Internet.
- The highly skilled user who needs specific information on the data or its usage.

(See the Business Case and <http://edina.ac.uk/digimap/access/case/case.html>.)

Although a significant amount of support is provided for users online, local support within institutions subscribing to the service is also crucial to the success of service delivery.

What is different about EDINA Digimap?

EDINA Digimap is a **multi-disciplinary**, non-traditional type of service and an extremely useful resource for teaching, learning and research. However, the Ordnance Survey (OS) data provided are, by their nature, **complex**.

Successful uptake of the service means not only facilitating access to the data, but also ensuring that all users who have a need to use the data, can do so effectively. Service success is therefore about ensuring both **accessibility and support**.

The Digimap user community is large and **heterogeneous** in nature. A wide range of backgrounds is represented, both in terms of subject disciplines and in terms of prior knowledge of digital map data. There are differences in abilities in:

- general computing skills
- use of the Internet
- mapping experience
- use of Ordnance Survey maps and data

What needs do users have?

As a consequence of our past experience, we have identified five key areas for which user support is required:

- Data-related (information about data available, data format, data importing and data use)
- Printing-related (information on local facilities and printing formats)
- Help and tutorials
- System-related (technical enquiries)
- Application-related (case studies and ideas on data usage).

Some of these needs can be addressed by **online support and educational materials** and the Digimap team have put together a comprehensive package, available at the Digimap website.

However, many users desire **assistance from local support staff**, as well as wishing to use online methods of support. Both have their place in a comprehensive support strategy.

What support will be required from local support staff?

Site-based support is a key part of the overall EDINA Digimap support strategy. There are **three major functions** of local support staff:

- establishing the service locally, through setting-up the internal administrative and technical structures, e.g. making colour printers accessible for users;
- supporting the operation of the service so that it runs effectively at their site, by registering users, liaising with Digimap staff, representing their institution in matters such as selection of data, providing feedback on use of the service, ensuring data is used within the agreed terms of use, and maintaining local web support pages;
- providing support to users of the service by relating the user's own tasks to the data available from Digimap. Unlike the Digimap Helpdesk, they are locally accessible to users and can provide support in an institutional context.

Because of the wide variety of use to which Ordnance Survey data can be put, it is unlikely that one or two formally appointed individuals will be able to help all users with all questions. As a consequence of these considerations, we have identified **four site support roles**:

- User registration/administrative
- Technical expert/computer support
- Subject expert: data use and content expert
- Local support expert: department level expert, or someone responsible for a suite of public access machines.

Experience shows that a **small team** of individuals combining the above roles has given the most effective site support. Of course a single individual could take on more than one role and the same role may be played by more than one individual in a site.

While it is up to individual institutions to decide on the support team available to take on the above roles, EDINA will assist by providing organisational case studies, based on the support models adopted at other sites. EDINA will also offer advice where requested.

Because HE and FE institutions are themselves heterogeneous in their organisational nature, we do not offer a prescriptive model of how to support Digimap users. However, it is extremely important that user support is effective. Without it, users will not gain the full benefits of having access to this valuable data resource. That being so, we are only too happy, within our resource constraints, to assist your institution in setting up local support.

What do you mean by 'subject expert' and who are the best people to fill this role?

For the EDINA Digimap service, **map librarians** (where they exist in institutions) are recommended as the obvious subject experts, for the following reasons:

- They have the **cartographic skills** necessary to assist users, although some may need training in computer skills and digital map data. This can be provided by EDINA;
- Map libraries already have a **multi-disciplinary** remit, under which they provide maps of every kind for many subject areas.

EDINA Digimap is **complementary** to the map library. It does not replace many of the services offered there: for example, the Digimap service cannot

provide a soils map or a bathymetric map, and has only limited data for outside the UK. Supplying answers for such enquiries is the map library's daily function. It has a lively role independent of the services offered by EDINA Digimap.

EDINA Digimap **adds to the map library services** by providing access to digital data that can be used in Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and various drawing packages, and also access to some data no longer available in paper format. Digimap also provides access to a wider geographical spread of GB map data than any single institution is likely to hold. On top of all this, the user can produce customised map plots centred on their points of interest.

It is worth stressing that, just as fewer than 20% of Digimap users are geographers, so **use of Geographical Information Systems goes far beyond the Geography department**. For example, GIS systems are also to be found in Archaeology, Business, Geology, Computer Science, History and Planning departments. These are just a few of the other disciplines that have a need for spatial data that can be manipulated in a variety of settings. Map librarians are increasingly being asked by users across their institutions for assistance in using GIS.

Indeed, this is likely to be an area of increasing growth, as map librarians in the USA and Canada have found, with greater exposure to the availability of digital map data in these countries. They have successfully carved out roles as **digital mapping data consultants** with the steady growth in importance of spatial data skills in their institutions and the outside world.

Map librarians who have been supporting Digimap have successfully combined the registration/administrative and subject expert roles discussed above. Some have found that the high profile of the Digimap service has alerted users within the institution to the other services offered by the map library and therefore increased the numbers of users of the facility as a whole. Others have found that Digimap has made no difference to the already high levels of use of the map library across many subject areas, although providing much needed opportunities to add to the services already offered.

EDINA Digimap will provide a complementary service to those already offered by the map library in many institutions. We would suggest that map librarians, where they exist, are a good choice as subject experts for the support of the service.

What do you mean by 'local support expert' and who are the best people to fill this role?

Within the context of the Digimap service, individuals other than the site representatives have been taking on the role of providing additional support to end users. In essence, part of the support function has been **devolved to faculty and departmental level**. Because such individuals play an important role in providing 'point of need' support.

Local support experts are often already **recognised local experts**, e.g. lecturers or researchers working in a pertinent area such as GIS. We have found that these local experts have assisted in the establishment of localised technical infrastructures for running the service, as well as providing context specific information such as how the data can be used in a particular discipline or application area.

Indeed, for those institutions that do not have a map library or that have a map library based within an individual department, these local support

experts may be the best people for the institution to approach with regard to establishing support for local users.

The likelihood is that **formal recognition** of local experts as providing support across the institution would have to be backed financially by the institution. Where an institution has decided to split its subscription to the EDINA Digimap service across departments, one option might be that the department nominated to provide the support could have its contribution paid by the other departments IT services.

How will EDINA help local support staff?

Local support staff will themselves require training and assistance in dealing with support matters. EDINA will assist as much as we can within the resources we have available to us. The equivalent of **four members of staff** are available to provide support to local support staff and to answer specialised questions from users.

As well as extensive online support, a **Helpdesk** is available which will act as the primary point of contact for enquiries concerning the EDINA Digimap service. Initially it provides hotline support to site representatives and support staff during the setting up of their local infrastructure. Subsequently, the Helpdesk becomes available to end users, although they are strongly encouraged to use online help and contact their respective site representatives or local support staff in the first instance. The Helpdesk continues to act as a point of contact for helping local support staff after the service becomes operational.

EDINA runs training courses at regular intervals each year. These courses are intended for support staff in subscribing institutions.

The training courses cover:

- Ordnance Survey product awareness training;
- Training on the various Digimap clients and administration issues;
- Elective sessions on cartographic concepts and use of spatial data;
- Elective sessions on topics such as training trainers to teach use of spatial data, data importing and downloading, and introductions to Geographical Information Systems and other spatial data application packages.

Local support staff are provided with service news, information and publicity materials. These are made available in a variety of formats on the web, on paper and by mailing lists. Local staff will be able to **customise** a number of support materials for use in their own institution, including paper and web-based resources.

EDINA also provides **case studies** of possible local support infrastructures. These will be based on the different support models adopted by other Digimap service sites.

What will EDINA provide as support for end users?

A combination of delivery methods for support has been implemented by EDINA, including face-to-face, e-mail, online and paper-based resources. The development of a **supportive community** of users, with opportunities for communication and the sharing of knowledge and experiences through meetings, workshops, e-mail and discussion lists, is seen as a key element of the support strategy.

In line with one of the key elements of our support philosophy, we wish to promote accessibility to the service and we see the provision of substantial **online support** as being central to this. This provides back-up for remote users and distance or part time learners, who cannot always access on-site help in the shape of local support personnel, as well as providing support for users who are studying on site.

The resources available at the Digimap website include:

- Tutorials for getting started
- Quick-start instructions
- Extensive online help facilities
- A teaching support area, with templates and case studies, and links to sources of useful information on the web
- Case studies of applied use of the data in teaching and research
- Online discussion groups
- Online glossary
- Information about Ordnance Survey products and product use
- Educational materials (including explanations of the principles behind the use of spatial data, as well as cartographic concepts such as scale and map projection).

Mailing lists are used as a means of communication between support staff and users, and between users.

Conclusions

The ultimate purpose of Digimap is to make OS data accessible and usable by those in academia. Considerable care is being taken to address issues of accessibility, outreach, interoperability, user-centred development, sustainability and collaboration with outside agencies in the development of the EDINA support model for the Digimap service.

It is the responsibility of each institution to initiate and provide local support for users of the EDINA Digimap service. However, EDINA provides high-quality support for local staff, as well as assistance for end users. We hope that you will join us in working together for the benefit of our end users and the promotion of this exciting resource in UK Higher Education.