

Community of Practice Year 2 Learning Report

This report provides an opportunity to review learning within the Community of Practice (CoP) during the second year of One Digital project (June 2018 to end of May 2019). A quick overview of the activity that has taken place is included in the appendix to the report. Each section of learning includes the top learning highlights as a summary which can be accessed for the key messages.

Learning

1. Older learners

Local partners are critical to building the capacity of projects supporting the identification of learners, and for recruitment of Digital Champions

Research the types of learning that would suit local older people – groups, 121, or booked appointments

Older people need lots of support to decide on device and connectivity packages

Learning arising from the Age UK projects has been published and highlighted the value of providing opportunities for the project coordinators to discuss how to develop specific elements of their projects. In addition to this, mentoring took place between the phase 1 One Digital projects and the phase 2 projects, building learning through the Lottery funded programme.

Some of the learning has included:

- Prioritising the development of links with local partners when first setting up a digital inclusion project. This allows capacity to be developed by introducing learners to the project and by project partner staff and volunteers being trained as volunteers.
- Digital Champions recruited within local communities are better able to engage local older people. Regular recruitment of Champions is necessary due to the length of time someone is likely to volunteer.
- Learning in groups is supportive for older people, it provides a social activity as well as helping recognition that people have similar barriers to learning. Initial learning may need one-to-one support to build initial confidence.
- Flexing learning to respond to interests is more likely to engage people.
- Low attendance at drop-in sessions means some projects have moved to booked appointments.
- Intergenerational projects have been successful in linking young people with older learners. The need for Digital Champion training suitable for young people led to new resources on the Digital Champions Network.
- Integrating digital skills into existing assessment tools has been effective in establishing which older people need and would welcome digital skills support.

- The tablet loan scheme and connectivity (through support to access a broadband package) offered in South Lakeland has been highlighted as being essential to supporting new learners and materials relating to this shared through the disadvantaged learners work as important to overcoming the costs/access issues for those who are non-users of the internet.
- The role of informal Digital Champions is being explored (for those who do not have capacity to take on a full role). The importance of more informal offers to support digital skills within communities was also highlighted in the work with the Centre for Ageing Better.

Centre for Ageing Better

Learning from the focus groups was shared through the quarterly reports to the Lottery. The final focus and recommendations have led to dedicated pieces of work being taken forward by a group of partners. This has included a commitment to promote better understanding of the barriers and issues around online safety and security and how to best support within projects, and for learners. Also to be progressed are recommendations for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to provide a resource signposting hub alongside other resources they publish to support digital skills. The hub would signpost to resources available from other partners. Under discussion is a training need for supporting online banking through having access to 'dummy' bank accounts.

Brunel symposium: Ageing, digital and everyday life - if you are interested in more details on the research findings from this event please see appendix 2.

2. Informal Digital Champions and communities of learning

Informal Digital Champions support peer to peer learning

Informal Digital Champions within learning communities provide a potential route to sustaining learning following a period of training in digital skills

The focus on the importance of more informal methods of Digital Champion support has been a theme in various CoP sessions during the last year.

It has a parallel with informal volunteering which is usually defined as volunteering to support an individual (often a neighbour) in the local community. The distinction is that this is not supported by a local project or voluntary organisation who would have a more defined and supported volunteer role. Informal Digital Champion work is also apparent from staff surveys carried out by Citizens Online as part of their Switch projects. Staff report having supported colleagues with digital skills in an informal way.

The role of informal Champions could be essential to supporting the development of 'communities of learning'. This form of 'community' is often discussed in educational settings, with Universities, for instance, having an aim to create a learning culture within their institution, these would be classed as professional learning communities.

For digital skills development, a community of learning would most likely have less structure. For instance, it could be within a workplace where colleague to colleague digital skills support was specifically fostered, or might be part of a wider project which seeks to use contacts with customers (especially those who are vulnerable) to support digital skills in an informal way, building this into a learning community say of people who are homeless using a drop-in facility. A community of learning could be facilitated within a sheltered scheme for older people, or could be more dispersed within a range of social or health activity taking place in a rural village. These could provide multiple opportunities for supported digital learning.

The essence of a community of learning is that it involves learning from each other. In this way, it is a relatively simple concept. Observation of practice during the last year has shown how frequently this happens. Understanding how to grow and support a community of learning could be usefully integrated into strategic approaches to digital change. More learning to understand what are the key principles and approaches would be useful to develop for wider sharing. There is little published work in this area.

3. In-work Digital Champions

In-work Digital Champions provide support to colleagues to build their digital skills and confidence

In-work Digital Champions provide essential support in any digital change project

The role of in-work Digital Champions has been highlighted in many projects during year 2. Digital Unite have reported on their research in this area in their year-2 report. SCVO with their focus on the charity sector, have a strong recognition that new Digital Champions who are often in frontline roles working with the most vulnerable groups, need to build their confidence in their own digital skills. An approach which involves peer to peer support is often used.

Charities undergoing digital transformation may also have chosen to develop digital skills support alongside this wider programme of digital change. An example would be the Streetworks project in Edinburgh which concentrated on a switch to G-suite and an internal Digital Champions programme before their work developed (as planned) to incorporate training for the homeless people that the project engages. It is this staged approach to developing digital skills initially in the workplace which is often most useful in embedded projects (see below).

Other partners also highlighted the potential role for Digital Champions in workplace settings. The Citizens Advice Service policy forum in Scotland recognised the potential value especially as part of their volunteer development programme of supporting the digital skills and capability of their advice providers.

Citizens Online in their evaluation (to be published in August 2019) of the Brighton & Hove project identified that:

“Developing the coaching and training skills needed by frontline personnel to help them deliver support was a primary focus of the project. However, it is clear that many embedded Digital Champions also needed training to develop their own basic digital skills and confidence. Although some frontline personnel did have very strong digital skills, many did not and needed significant support before they could support clients effectively. This training seemed to be understood and valued by managers, but did not seem to be resulting in more structured action to recognise and formally develop these basic skills in their personnel. Including skills assessment and training for frontline personnel to develop their basic digital skills as an optional ‘ad in’ for organisations, could be a useful addition to future projects.”

This highlights the need in embedded projects particularly, to develop digital skills and confidence in the staff who will become Digital Champions, and the potential role for peer to peer learning in this setting. A phased approach seems likely to be most effective.

4. Embedded Digital Champion projects

Embedding Digital Champions and digital skills support into key services for vulnerable groups provides a sustainable model

Embedded Digital Champions are likely to focus on a specific digital skills need

Embedded Digital Champions should be encouraged to refer learners for more digital skills training provided by other partners locally.

Embedded Digital Champions provide digital skills support as part of their role. The support provided would be integrated into an already existing relationship between the Champion and the learner. For instance a Champion working as a Link Worker for a substance misuse charity, offers digital support to help someone order an online repeat prescription, or a staff member at Clarion Housing providing employment support screens for digital skills as part of their initial assessment of job searching competency. Training support will then be provided by a professional Champion.

There has been an increasing focus on embedded Champions from all partners during the last year. The holistic integrative approach is valued. There is also a strong potential link to supporting project sustainability. To give an example, Age UK partners recognise the value of integrating digital skills into their needs assessments for the older people they work with. They have also trained staff in a variety of roles to have Digital Champion skills.

The programme evaluation will collect Case Studies of four partners using an appreciative enquiry approach to review how the embedded model is operating and this will develop significant learning for external sharing. Project sustainability will also be topic for a learning set in the final year of the CoP.

A learning point from project visits in the last year, has been the need to ensure not just integration within the projects, but also project integration within localities. Digital Champions in embedded roles will often focus on a specific digital skill, being able to signpost to other learning providers can be essential to support continued development of skills.

This does assume that there is capacity locally to provide digital skills learning opportunities. It also may have the result that the learner joins a more formalised learning environment (such as provided by a local adult education partner). Signposting to a local library for continued access and light support is also often an option.

Encouragement from the embedded Digital Champion, and even direct support for initial attendance may be needed for more disadvantaged groups. Embedded Digital Champions are often in trusted relationships so their role can be crucial during this next stage of learning. It may mean learning will be potentially less informal and learner-led.

The development of a new digital skills qualification [National standards for essential digital skills](#) by the Department for Education may increase the likelihood (once they are used as basis for digital Functional Skills qualification from 2021) of more formal adult education being available.

5. Digital transformation and the Senior Leader Programme

The SCVO Senior Leaders programme has proved to be an essential tool in their digital evolution model for charities

Facilitation skills are key for One Digital project staff who are supporting partners to develop new digital inclusion projects through group based activity.

Digital transformation and evolution is at the heart of SCVO work to support the charity sector in Scotland. Other partners also focus on assessing the digital capacity and capability of the partners that they are working with. Age UK for instance carried our research with all current partners into their digital maturity and the skills and confidence of their staff. Citizens Online also survey organisations and staff on their levels of digital maturity.

The SCVO approach includes the successful Senior Leaders programme. One Digital partners heard about the way that the programme has developed from the external facilitator of the programme and two of the programme attendees at the learning set held in Edinburgh in September 2018.

Facilitation skills was proposed as a learning focus by SCVO with the aim of better understanding 'what does successful facilitation look like'. Most project staff within One Digital are facilitating some form of learning sessions for groups of partners that they are engaging in Digital Champion activities. The session included a look at:

- Logistics for running sessions;
- Building involvement and commitment from a group;
- Managing a challenging participant and winning people over;
- Dealing with feedback and questions.

Learning shared from the Senior Leaders programme included:

- Developing confidence to manage digital for their organisation is a process of 'mind shift' involving a return to considering the fundamentals of the organisation's mission (the why) as part of a new digital approach;
- Looking at operational/organisational changes that would be needed, and the building blocks in a new digital strategy;
- Small pockets of work (digital change) have sometimes been easier to focus on for the Leaders;
- Discussion on specific elements of a digital strategy such as commissioning of new digital tools;
- Slack has been a useful tool to support on-going group communication;
- Full commitment to the programme was key to successful outcomes;
- Building a facilitated space in which open, and honest dialogue can take place has been at the heart of the programme.

Different facilitation techniques used with the group, such as the 'gossip model' and 'six thinking hats', were explored with the One Digital project leads.

6. Working with disadvantaged groups

Disadvantaged groups such as those with disabilities are more likely to lack digital skills and confidence.

Partners are developing specialised learning approaches to working with different disadvantaged groups.

Reaching out to disadvantaged groups and understanding the specific barriers they face is key to offering them Digital Champion support.

Ensuring learners understand the basics of online safety and security is very important for these often vulnerable groups and can be integrated into all learning.

The CoP chose to be more focused on working with particular groups of learners through an event held in March and on-going publication of resources. This allowed the barriers and challenges, plus solutions and resources to be explored with the 21 partners who shared their good practice with the other participants at the event, as well as learning from each other.

A more nuanced approach is increasingly recognised as being important in addressing the specific needs caused often by the vulnerability of the learners and the disadvantages they face in getting online. For instance those with disabilities may

require specific digital interventions and adaptations. Additionally common barriers such as the cost of accessing the internet are preventing engagement of learners (this has, for instance, been identified as a barrier for older learners).

We were asked by the participants – some of whom are running generic projects with a range of learners to identify core learning to share. The section below presents this summarised learning.

Support provision (general)

- Working with disadvantaged groups highlights the need to provide tailored, flexible support in both group and one to one sessions for learners. When setting up a project, it is good practice to consider whether anything is being put in place that might act as a barrier for a particular group of learners.
- Supporting peer to peer learning (for instance for those where English is not first language) is particularly effective for those who need learning to be regularly reinforced or who may find the learning harder to access and retain.
- Having Champions with ‘lived experience’ of a particular disadvantage will support an appropriate learning process.
- Embedding digital into services for vulnerable groups was seen by all contributing organisations as providing good levels of integrated learning support. Staff and volunteers working with the most vulnerable are best placed to support them.
- Providing appropriate tech solutions (for the particular group of learners) that meet their assessed needs and make it easier for them to be able to access a device, or online content is crucial. Solutions in use include learning materials specific to the needs of people with learning disabilities for instance, or tablet loan schemes with MiFi for older people.
- Reaching out to those who are isolated (in a rural area, or because they have limited ability to leave home) is a challenge for many projects who lack capacity to do outreach work. Partnership working to support this becomes critical.

Priorities for learners

- Important to understand that people often have multiple disadvantages and needs that are impacting on their ability to get online.
- Learners should be involved with the co-design of learning materials so they are suited to their needs. Stereotypes about the needs of learners should be challenged through this process.
- Being safe online should be integrated into all learning sessions (so if learning about Facebook, for instance, this should include how to use the privacy sessions). Developing confidence in online safety and security is critical for all groups of disadvantaged learners who are often at much higher risk and who also often have much greater fears.
- Pace of learning and repeat learning is critical to ensuring that people remain online and don't lapse back into being non-users. Informal learning environments are important for all groups.

Digital Champions training and development

- Digital Champion understanding of role boundaries when working with learners is vital so that the Champion is able to avoid 'role creep' in which they begin to provide support other than digital learning. Boundaries are especially important when working with vulnerable learners.
- Digital Champion training needs to be varied and specific to reflect the needs of the individual project/learners. Training should include an opportunity for the Champions to think actively about the barriers and challenges for the particular group of learners they will work with, considering their individual needs and how their disabilities may affect the support that is needed.
- Digital Champions providing very practical demonstrations of tech and how to use it can motivate people to learn more. For instance how to use a camera phone and load up a photo.
- Digital Champions need to be clear about how to support learners with online safety and security. Some of the priority areas would be: use of password vaults; service user privacy and how to maintain it; and how to avoid online scams and privacy risks.

7. Measuring impact

Key learning and more detailed background papers on how to measure the impact of digital inclusion projects on:

- Learners
- Digital Champions
- Partnership working

is available through the One Digital website here and event materials [here](#)

The event held in November 2018 and hosted by Clarion Futures shared learning on measuring the impact of digital inclusion projects. The workshops focused on the impact on learners, the impact on Digital Champions and the impact of partnership working. Learning from the event was shared via the One Digital website and a new section of the Knowledge Hub developed and available [here](#). Learning from the event was shared also in a presentation to the Lottery in December 2018. Background papers sharing learning were published alongside other resources from the event.

8. Working with GP Practices

We published the learning from an internal session on working in GP practices in January 2018 [GP Practices and digital skills](#). The key learning from the session was shared in the CoP quarterly report. Since reporting, Age UK have also developed a toolkit for working in GP practices aimed at local projects.

Conclusion: Partnership working and the developing role of the Community of Practice

The Community of Practice has shifted focus during year-2 of the programme from primarily internal sharing of learning between the One Digital partners to two wider aspirations. Firstly, to share the good practice of a much wider group of partners and secondly, to create an effective knowledge hub to share learning with partners.

Additionally we have seen the expansion of the Community of Practice through the work of the One Digital partners themselves, who have developed their own learning opportunities – working with their specific groups of their project partners. For instance the Clarion and Digital Unite Digital Dialogue sessions, or Age UK partner learning sessions. It should be noted that for Citizens Online and SCVO sharing of learning and experience of partners has been at the core of their approaches.

The widening of the role of the Community of Practice has been widely welcomed by partners such as the Centre for Ageing Better and Family Fund.

The final six months of the project will see the publication of more learning and good practice, plus further activities and events.

Appendix 1: Summary of activity

Learning activity for One Digital partners

Virtual learning sessions on:

- Working with GP practices
- Volunteer management
- Use of the Essential Digital Skills toolkit

Face to face learning sessions on:

- Measuring the impact of Digital Champion projects
- Facilitation skills including the approach taken in the SCVO senior leadership programme
- Support and resources for organisations running Digital Champion projects
- Working with disadvantaged groups (a review of the learning arising from the external event)

Learning activity for/with wider digital inclusion partners

- Digital Skills Working Group - review of project learning with Family Fund, Good Things Foundation and RNIB – this session shared learning across all three Lottery funded projects and led to a presentation to the Lottery in December 2018. There were further discussions as new partners joined the group.
- Digital maturity models with CAST/NCVO/Tech Trust – initial involvement in on-going work led by SCVO linked to the SCVO check-up tool.
- Centre for Ageing Better – facilitation of focus group sessions for practitioners working with older people to better understand the spectrum of Digital Champions – from informal to embedded models.
- Demonstrating the impact of digital inclusion event – large event held to focus on measuring the impact of digital inclusion work with learners, Digital Champions and partnership working.
- Making digital accessible for everyone – large event held with support from BT focusing on learning arising from 21 contributor partners who shared learning on good practice work with the following groups who are most at risk of digital exclusion:
 - People with disabilities / learning disabilities / mental health issues / those with English as a second language / financially disadvantaged / people who are homeless / young people.

Project inputs (One Digital partners)

- Inputs from project activity are vital to the Learning Facilitator and the Community of Practice as they facilitate in-depth knowledge of how digital skills are being developed in a variety of different projects, and with different groups of learners.
- Monthly project leads calls include an opportunity to review project progress and learning arising plus include a focused discussion on specific topics of

interest. In the last year the topics have included: end of year 1 review of learning / use of the Essential Digital Skills Framework / communications planning / learning from Digital Unite-Clarion Futures partner session / embedded/peer to peer Digital Champions / practical review of the 'measuring impact' event / 2019 priorities / the links between digital and financial inclusion / partner engagement / introduction to a computer recyclers project (supporting the focus on providing accessible tech).

Project visits and partner events included:

- Turning Point – Digital Champion training
- Age UK Hereford & Worcester & Go ON Worcestershire partnership
- UNISON project visit
- Age UK learning sessions (virtual and face to face)
- Digital Unite/Clarion Futures Digital Dialogue/partner sessions
- Digitally confident Scotland – focus on third sector digital evolution
- Citizens Advice Scotland Policy Forum – digital inclusion
- Good Things Foundation conference
- Grenfell United – project planning which gave useful insight into the potential for community asset based projects
- Streetworks Edinburgh – homeless project
- Working with vulnerable adults (SCVO) – learning event
- Gwynedd Network Meeting

Research inputs

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport – Research Group – sessions have included a focus on 'in work' digital skills, motivation of learners, and a project support digital inclusion toolkit that is under development.

Ageing, digital and everyday life, Brunel international symposium on work with older people to reduce digital exclusion.

Knowledge Hub – publication of learning

During the year we completely re-built the knowledge section on the One Digital website ([Knowledge Hub](#)) to be more focused on project development and set up phases / sustainability of Digital Champion projects / measuring the impact of Digital Champion projects. There is also a resource bank of external strategic, project and research learning linked to digital inclusion.

Resources on working with disadvantaged groups and in rural areas will shortly be added to the site.

We've also added blogs and case studies from partners during the year, many linked to the learning activity listed above.

Appendix 2 Brunel Symposium: Ageing, Digital and Everyday Life

It was interesting to hear views from international academics focused on research into best practice in digital inclusion for older people (in the UK and Canada particularly). One Digital has a strong focus on supporting inclusion for older people through the Age UK projects, but also through specific projects such as the work of Citizens Online to support Brighton and Hove Council to develop digital skills in their sheltered housing schemes. Research events such as this which was attended by the Learning Facilitator and the Age UK Project Coordinator bring valuable external learning into One Digital. Below are some of the highlights.

Research into the uptake and use of e-health products such as for fitness monitoring was highlighted as having the potential to capture more information about the health of the population (biodata) than would be gained from public health research. Devices would allow older people to take more control of their own health, yet at the same time, the risks of an older person trying to match unrealistic targets for exercise were highlighted demonstrating the need for a more nuanced approach to use.

A project in Canada working with 200 grandmothers, explored their relationships and use of tech particularly to support family relationships. These relationships were described as complex, multi-faceted and contradictory, with concerns around privacy and social norms (for online behaviour) being of most concern to the participants, cost was also a factor for those in rural areas.

Other research focused on a care home project in Bristol that worked on co-design for people with dementia, and involved care home staff in developing a toolkit for engagement through telling life stories with creative use of technology.

Using simplified rather than complex tech to enable people to remain safe at home was also discussed, with cost effectiveness, as well as ease of use being highlighted, this was in the context of European design projects which would often propose much more advanced use of digital devices than was necessitated by the life circumstances of the older people.

Many researchers emphasised the growing inequalities arising from non-digital engagement of older people and how little research has been done in this area to fully understand the levels of social exclusion that are beginning to arise driven by digital exclusion.