



# Digital Unite's Digital Champions Network (DCN)

## An impact study

*February 2020*

# Introduction

This Impact Report is an executive summary of the use, effectiveness and impact of the Digital Champions Network (DCN) within the context of the One Digital programme.

The insights will be of valuable to all and any organisation using, or thinking about using, Digital Champions to drive digital skills and inclusion. And specifically, to understand the effectiveness and impact of using the DCN to underpin and support that activity.

## Background

One Digital is a National Lottery and Community Fund collaborative digital inclusion programme. It was developed by five partners: Age UK, Citizens Online, Clarion Futures, SCVO and Digital Unite.

One Digital was first conceived in 2014 and was run for 18 months as a 'Test and Learn' pilot.

After a successful Test and Learn phase it was

extended as a three-year programme which began in 2017 and is due to finish in June 2020.

At the heart of One Digital is the recruitment and training of Digital Champions to deliver essential digital skills support to individuals who are digitally excluded

Digital Unite's role in the programme is twofold, it is to:

- use its Digital Champions Network (DCN) to directly support over 200 organisations to develop and cascade digital skills through champion models.
- to provide the other four One Digital partners with access to the DCN for their own projects and the Digital Champions they and their partners in turn recruit.

### Our approach to evaluation and impact measurement

Digital Unite commissioned [Sara Dunn Associates](#) to conduct an evaluation of the role the DCN in the One Digital programme.

**SARADUNN**  
ASSOCIATES

The purpose of the evaluation was specifically to assess the effectiveness of the DCN for individual Digital Champions and for member organisations. The overarching questions the evaluation seeks to answer are:

1. How effective is the DCN in creating confident and competent digital champions?
2. In what ways do member organisations benefit from using the DCN?

A full Summative Evaluation was produced in November 2017.



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## Why organisations were delivering digital inclusion work

There were three main drivers/ motivations consistently mentioned by organisations when engaging with the Digital Champions Network as part of their digital inclusion work:

- **Business efficiency:** wanting more service users to transact with the organisation via online channels. Often called 'channel shift', organisations regard online interactions as more cost effective and/or more efficient than transacting by phone or in person.
- **Wellbeing for individuals:** some organisations aimed to improve aspects of their service users' wellbeing through digital inclusion, in particular:
  - reducing isolation
  - improving employability
  - improving access to services (including healthcare, welfare, financial and commercial services).
- **Community support:** some organisations wanted to support local community cohesion more broadly.

## The study showed that the DCN positively impacts organisations...

For organisations being part of the DCN has impacted their overall approach to supporting essential digital skills in two main ways:

1. **Strategic:** focusing organisational attention on the need to integrate essential digital skills support being into their overall digital strategy
2. **Operational:** providing project managers with relevant guidance and support for planning DC projects, which they would otherwise have lacked.

*"I can't overstate just how useful that is to an organisation like ours. It allows you to do more and achieve more, with less time spent on administration."*

## ...and their Digital Champions

- 97% of Champions would recommend the DCN training to others
- Around 80% of Digital Champions say completing DCN courses makes them better at the role.
- The use of the DCN courses and resources and the actual practice of supporting beneficiaries are regarded by Digital Champions as the two most important factors in improving their confidence and skills in the role.
- Around 80% of Digital Champions say the most valuable aspect of the role is the satisfaction of helping others; this satisfaction has positive impacts on their own wellbeing.

*"It has given me exactly the right resources to be able to dive in and start planning what I am doing."*

## The changes that happen as a result of the DCN

| Short-term outcomes  |  |
|--|--|
| Planned outcome  | Evidenced?   |
| <b>DCs are better at digital championing</b>                         | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCs' self-ratings immediately following the completion of DCN courses show that they feel better equipped to support people's essential digital skills as a result</li> <li>• DCs' self-ratings of their overall championing skills before DCN registration and after 6 months show a distinct uplift</li> <li>• Better understanding about the extent and impact of digital exclusion, and better 'soft skills' around learner-led approaches were most commonly reported learnings</li> <li>• At least half the DCs we surveyed attributed at least 60% of this uplift in digital champion skills directly to what they had learned from using the DCN courses and resources</li> <li>• DC managers confirmed observable increases in DC confidence following use of DCN courses and resources</li> <li>• The use of the DCN, together with the actual practice of supporting beneficiaries, are regarded by DCs to be the most important factors in improving their confidence and skills in the role</li> </ul> |
| <b>DCs improve own digital skills</b>                                | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCs' self-ratings of their own digital skills before DCN registration and after 6 months show a distinct uplift</li> <li>• At least half the DCs we surveyed attributed at least 50% of this uplift in digital skills directly to what they had learned from using the DCN courses and resources</li> <li>• Skills in problem-solving and cybersecurity/online safety showed the most significant uplift</li> </ul>   |
| <b>DCs provide support to people to improve their digital skills</b> | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCs registered on the DCN under One Digital have run over 7500 sessions for over 5500 learners</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Organisations recruit more DCs</b>                                | <p><b>Yes, in certain circumstances</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DC managers report that having the DCN training on offer helps them to recruit DCs who have time to engage and are motivated to learn, for example volunteers and those using the role to enhance their employability</li> <li>• The DCN was considered to be less effective as a recruitment incentive for staff for whom DC'ing is an extra task</li> <li>• The Open Badges awarded for course completion, and the chance to win cash vouchers for completion of monitoring records incentivised some DCs</li> </ul>  |

| <b>Medium-term outcomes</b>  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Planned outcome</i>   | <i>Evidenced?</i>  |
| <b>DCs have improved wellbeing/life satisfaction</b>                           | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 80% of DCs say the most valuable aspect of the experience is the satisfaction of helping others</li> <li>• DCs reported the emotional benefits associated with helping others, including greater social interaction, reduced anxiety and improved mood.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>DCs enhance their employability</b>   | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCs looking for employment considered the role enabled them to keep their digital and training skills up to date and enhanced their CVs</li> <li>• DC managers, particularly in projects with a focus on jobs and training, reported a double benefit: improvements in employability prospects for both DCs themselves and the beneficiaries they were supporting</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Customer organisations have a more mature approach to digital inclusion</b> | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>Survey and interview data showed evidence of DCN membership impacting on organisational ‘maturity’ in two main ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic: focusing organisational attention on the need to integrate essential digital skills support being into their overall digital strategy</li> <li>• Operational: providing project managers with relevant guidance and support for planning DC projects, which they would otherwise have lacked.</li> </ul> |

# Organisational outcomes

## Outcome: Organisations recruit more Digital Champions

Organisations were asked whether their access to the DCN made the recruitment of Digital Champions more efficient or effective for them. Some respondents felt that it had contributed to their recruitment efforts:

*“I think it made the offer look professional, and that was an aid in recruitment. I worked with our comms team to develop the offer [to staff to become volunteer DCs] and it made the offer look really good.”*

*“We believe in providing opportunities to develop our staff, so it’s a real benefit [to recruitment] that a Champion’s achievements are recognised through CPD, Mozilla and annual awards etc. The courses are easy to follow and very importantly, it saves a learner’s progress as they work their way through, so the training can fit around busy schedules.”*

## Outcome: Organisations have a more mature approach to digital inclusion

Organisations were asked how they rated the ‘maturity’ of their approach to supporting basic digital skills<sup>1</sup> for people they work with and for. This question was asked at the start of their engagement with the DCN, and then again approximately nine months later.

**After joining the DCN there was a distinct shift in the self-rated maturity levels over the term of the organisations’ DCN membership.** The results are shown in Figure 9 below.

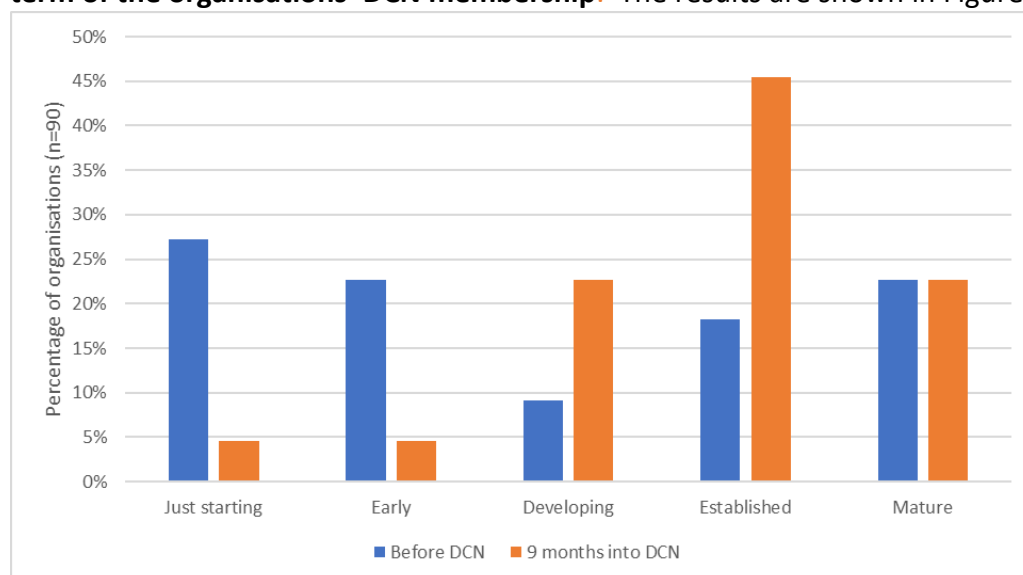


Figure 9: Self-assessed organisational maturity of essential digital skills support

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘basic digital skills’ was current at the time of the evaluation design in 2017, since superseded by the term ‘essential digital skills’. We retain the original term when quoting directly from the survey data.



Source: Organisational baseline and follow-up surveys (1 Sept 2019)

Before joining the DCN - only a third of organisations considered digital inclusion and skills support to be an integral part of their services (i.e. with levels of agreement of 4 or 5). **After joining the DCN - this has risen to over two-thirds (Figure 10).**

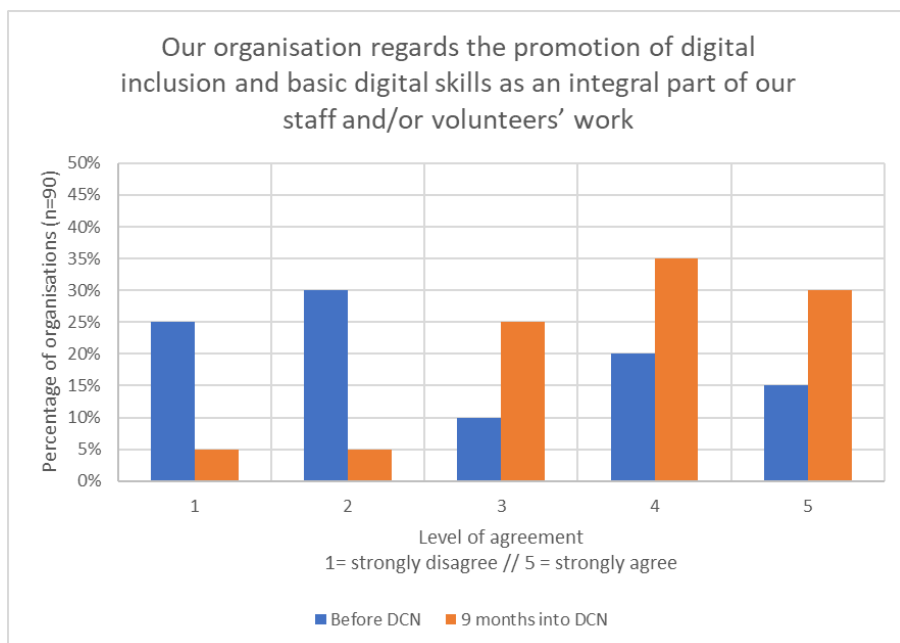


Figure 10: Levels of agreement about integration of DI activities in workplace  
Source: Organisational baseline survey and follow-up surveys (1 Sept 2019)

Before joining the DCN - only 15% of organisations considered that they encouraged and supported staff and/or volunteers to become DCs (i.e. with levels of agreement of 4 or 5). **After joining the DCN - this has risen to over two-thirds (Figure 11).**

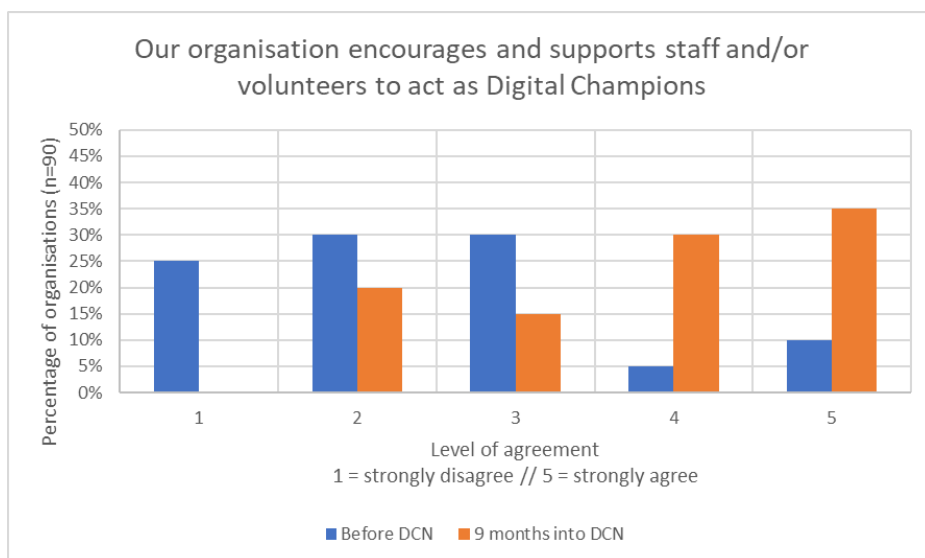


Figure 11: Levels of agreement about organisational support for DCs  
Source: Organisational baseline survey and follow-up surveys (1 Sept 2019)

# Digital skills and inclusion ‘maturity’ outcomes

There were three ways the DCN gave organisations a more mature approach to digital inclusion

## **1. Increasing the management team’s knowledge and confidence about digital skills support generally and about how to implement a DC programme:**

*“Our approach to digital skills support has definitely changed since we joined the DCN. Once I had completed the modules I felt better able to plan the DC programme, I understood better what was required. If I had not had the DCN I have no idea how I would have gone about it. I suppose I would have worked it out, but it would have taken much longer.”*

*“It is like a safety net for me, always there in the background. ... it is the place I can go to find information about running the digital champion project, and being a DC myself.”*

## **2. Helping ‘sell’ the idea within the organisation:**

*“With the DCN I have had the confidence to promote digital workshops throughout the country in our difference regions. This is raising awareness and putting digital at the forefront of what we do.”*

*“DCN has provided resources that I can use to easily promote the importance of supporting people’s move online, by regularly promoting digital skills and our support service within our organisation puts it into the forefront of staff minds so they can signpost customers, even if they don’t formally become DCs.”*

## **3. Helping management to understand the importance of essential digital skills support as part of their overall digital strategy:**

*“The membership of the DCN has helped focus people’s minds in the organisation about the importance of supporting digital inclusion alongside the digital development of services.... It made people realise that the digital skills and confidence of our residents are essential if the digital strategy is to work.”*

*“Being a member of the DCN aligns well with the digital transformation agenda. It enables us to demonstrate and take staff in many cases on their maiden digital learning journey.”*

# Digital Champion outcomes

## Outcome: DCs are better at digital championing

Before starting to use the DCN, just over a third rated themselves as having a ‘high’ or ‘very high’ level of skills in being a DC.

**After using the DCN, over two thirds rated their skills levels as ‘high’ or ‘very high’.**

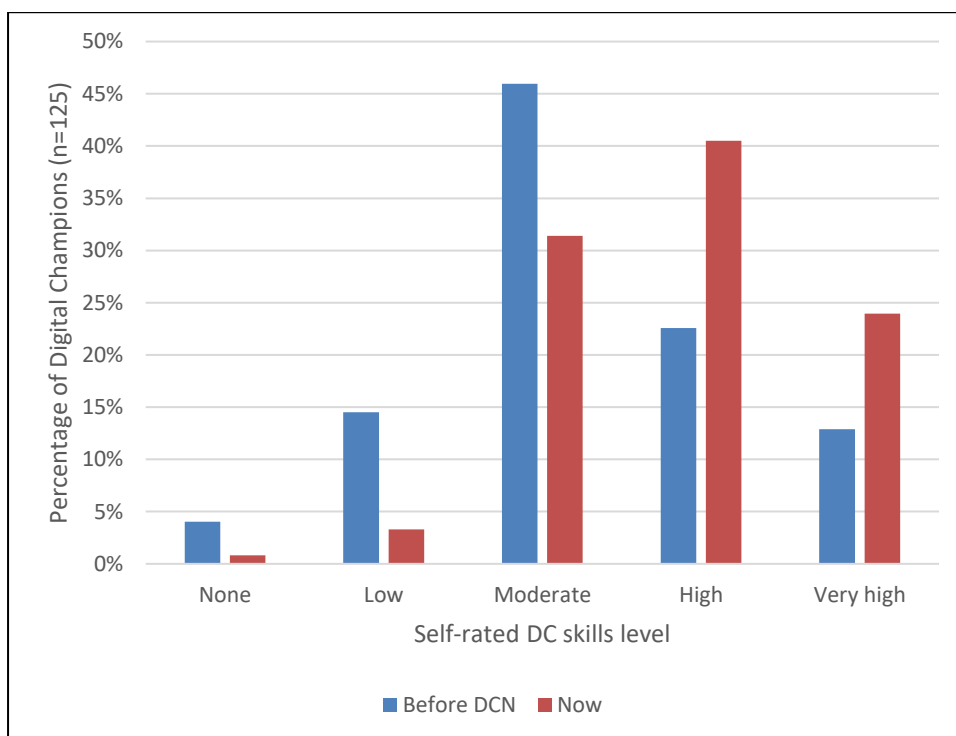


Figure 13: Self-rated levels of Digital Champion skills before and after DCN use  
Source: Follow-up survey of all Digital Champion registrants since Sept 2017 (1 Sept 2019)

## Outcome: DCs improve their own digital skills

Digital Champions were asked to rate the level of their own digital skills in the five areas identified in the Essential Digital Skills Framework<sup>2</sup>, both before and after their use of the DCN. Digital Champions reported increases in all five essential digital skills areas in the time they had been using the DCN, with a discernible shift from low or moderate skills levels to high or very high (see Figure 14 overleaf).

This shift was most pronounced with problem-solving skills and with cyber-security (see Figure 15 below).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/essential-digital-skills-framework>

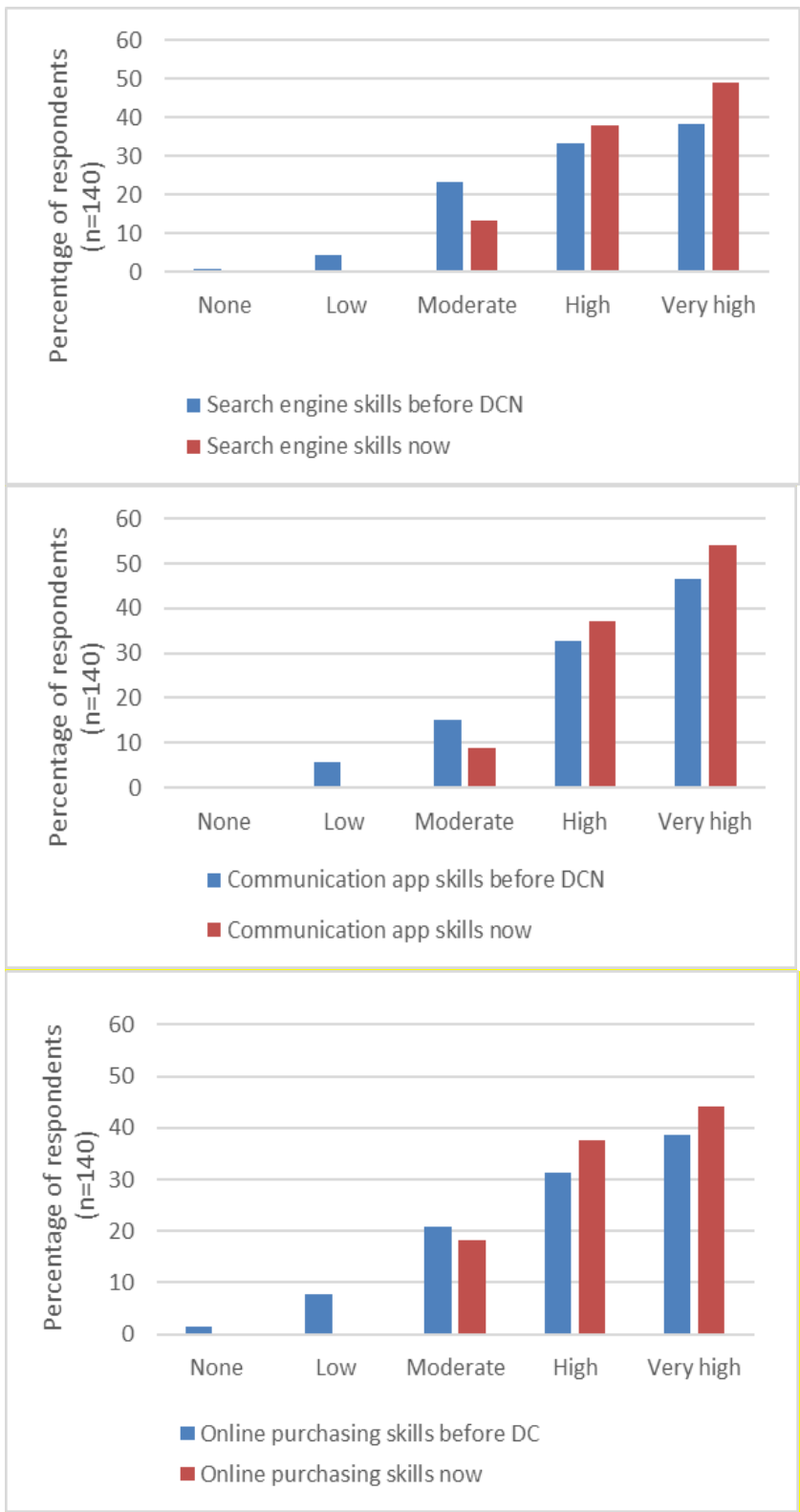


Figure 14: Change in essential digital skills in three areas before and after DCN use  
 Source: Follow-up survey of all DCN registrants since 1 Sept 2017 (1 Sept 2019)

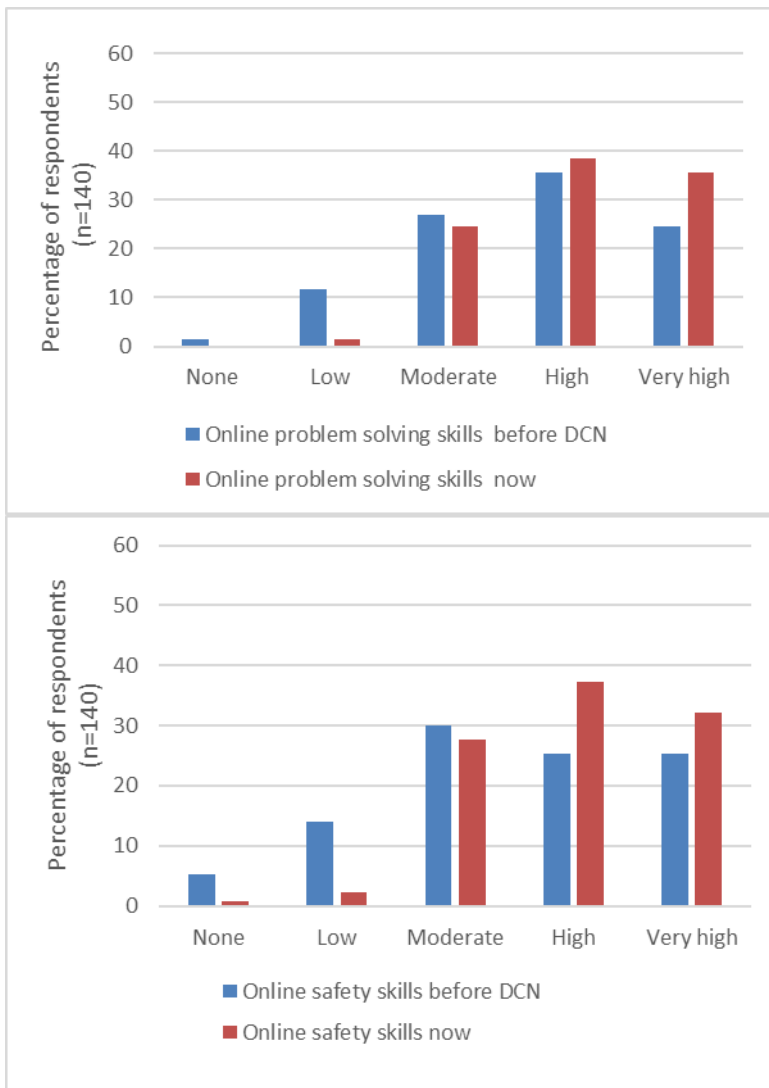


Figure 15: Change in DCs' problem-solving and cyber-security skills before and after DCN use  
 Source: Follow-up survey of all DCN registrants since 1 Sept 2017 (1 Sept 2019)

**All the respondents who reported an increase in either their skills in helping others with digital, or in their own digital skills, attributed at least some of this improvement to the DCN.**

- Over 50% of DCs who said their own digital skills had improved attributed at least half of this improvement to their use of the DCN.
- Over 60% of DCs who said their digital championing skills had improved attributed at least half of this improvement to the DCN.
- 88% of Digital Champions would recommend the Digital Champions Network to other people wanting to improve their digital championing skills, citing the range and depth of resources available as the main reason for using the platform.

*“Before I joined the DCN I was confident in my own [digital knowledge]. DCN has taught me to understand other people’s need and how different people learn different ways and different speeds.”*

*“Because the skills I've learned have not only meant I'm able to help people with their digital skills in various areas of life, but I am also more sympathetic to different life experiences and have practice in finding ways to relate information to people's interests and differing perspectives.”*

*“I have more understanding of the challenges older people face, it made me more empathetic and better at communicating with older people.”*

Managers of DC programmes also witnessed skills changes which they valued from an organisational perspective:

*“All the people who used either the [DCN] e-learning or the lesson plans said they felt better equipped and more confident as a result. It looked professional, the fact that they were getting access to training made them feel that they were being invested in, which really added value.”*

*“It has improved the DCs’ own digital skills as well as their skills in helping people. Even if people have the skills, they still need the [DCN] training to reassure them and to give them more ideas. I know it has helped the DCs with their own personal and skills development.”*

## **Outcome: DCs support beneficiaries to improve their digital skills**

We know from the DCN monitoring tools that Digital Champions have engaged in over 7500 support sessions with over 5500 beneficiaries since September 2017.

*“We saw amazing changes for learners. Huge impacts. We had people who had never used any digital health services starting to do online GP appointments. We had people online shopping for the first time, doing online banking, communicating with friends and family via Skype for the first time. There was also a social benefit for people attending the sessions as a group.”*

*“I have seen people who could not use a computer at all learn to use it and be able to do professional job applications and that is what employers want. I see people once or more a week and I see them grow in confidence and get a job. The impact is then felt in their families and the communities, they can afford to rent a house, the local economy and the local community benefit. It makes a huge difference and it makes me very happy to see it and to help people.”*

## **Outcome: DCs enhance their employability**

Over a third of respondents in our DC surveys cite the motivation of finding employment as very important in their decision to become a DCs. Their recognition of the skills uplift offered by the DC role (see outcomes 3 and 4 above) is an important contributing factor on the road to employability. One DC commented:

“I am unemployed and the DC role means I can keep my knowledge up to date, use my tutoring skills and be part of a team, which I am hoping will all contribute to me finding work again.”

Similarly, managers of DC projects with a focus on employment told us:

“Being a volunteer DC builds confidence, team working, time management skills. It gets added to your CV, voluntary work really helps to secure employment. We help our DCs in the particular areas they are looking to go on and find work, so the DCs are clients of the employment support services themselves as well.”

“It has improved the DCs’ own digital skills as well as their skills in helping people. Even if people have the skills they still need the training to reassure them and to give them more ideas. I know it has helped the DCs with their own personal and skills development.”

## **Outcome: DCs improve their overall wellbeing**

When they first take up the role, over 80% of the Digital Champions on the DCN cite ‘the satisfaction of helping others’ as a very important motivation for wanting to become a DC. We can see that those expectations are realised; when we re-survey DCs after 6 months in the role, over 80% say that the most valuable aspect of the experience has indeed been the satisfaction of helping others.

“The satisfaction from knowing I've actually helped someone when they succeed is amazing. It's improved my self-confidence and done wonders for my anxiety.”

“It gives me a reason to get up on a Thursday morning. Helping people gives me a purpose. I do like helping people. I really like being in [the support venue], it is a nice place to be.... I don't think I am a very intelligent person and I get very anxious when I don't know the answer to things. But I guess we just learn together.... I get treated as one of the staff, that is really nice.”

## Conclusion

The broad consensus from the surveys and interviews was that the DCN provided an entry point, framework and impetus to organisations wishing to support essential digital skills for their own workforce and for their clients. While it is not a turnkey solution – setting up and sustaining a Digital Champion approach requires considerable and sustained commitment and resource from the organisation at all levels – the DCN has been shown to be an effective enabler.

For Digital Champions the DCN's courses and resources were considered to be the backbone of the platform's offer. A very high 97% of 6013 course completions resulted in a positive recommendation.

- "I have done the Essentials course and what I liked about it was the signposting to loads of useful resources which I had no idea about. I also like the information about how to make learners feel comfortable, how to pace a session. Those kinds of general training skills as they apply to digital skills support, that was useful and new."
- "I use the flyers for recruiting DCs, and the guides about how to set up emails, and the handouts for learners. These are really helpful, I always check the DCN first to see if the topic I want to help someone with is there, if it is I always use that – it saves me time."

Additionally, every interviewee was positive about DU customer support, saying that DU staff were prompt, responsive, knowledgeable and supportive. Some of the organisations had received face to face presentations from DU staff, several interviewees had attended DU webinars, and all had been in direct email or phone contact with individual DU staff. None could think of any help they needed but had not got.

### **Acknowledgements**

We are very grateful to all the Digital Champions and project managers who completed questionnaires and agreed to be interviewed for this evaluation. We would also like to thank the team at Digital Unite for their diligence in facilitating our access to such comprehensive data.



## Appendix 1 – Evaluation methodology

Sara Dunn began the evaluation work by working with the DU project team to develop a logic model. This logic model provides a summary of how the One Digital project is intended to work by identifying its main components, how they relate to one another, and their intended effects.

Once the logic model was agreed, we developed an Outcomes and Indicators Framework (O&IF). The purpose of this framework is to breakdown the high-level aims of the project into discrete elements – indicators – which can be measured in order to assess progress towards outcomes. See Appendix 1 for the full O&IF. The monitoring and evaluation instruments designed to assess these indicators include:

- Initial DCN application form for organisations
- Baseline and follow-up surveys of organisations at time of DCN membership registration and at approximately 1 year
- Baseline and follow-up surveys of Digital Champions at time of DCN registration and at approximately 6 months
- Follow-up interviews with organisations and with individual Digital Champions
- Monitoring of use of DCN learning and resources
- Monitoring of DC reports of their activities supporting beneficiaries.

It should be noted that while all DCN members are invited to complete surveys, and our interview sampling frameworks are designed to include as wide a range of interviewees as possible, participation is always voluntary in evaluations of this nature, and all respondents are therefore self-selecting. Participants may not represent all shades of opinion, and there is potential for evaluation participants to be biased either negatively or positively based on their interactions with Digital Unite and/or the evaluators (the Hawthorne effect<sup>3</sup>).

We sought to minimise bias by purposive sampling to cover a range of organisation types, and we conducted follow-up interviews with survey respondents who had expressed a range of views in the surveys. We also triangulated the evaluation data with the totality of the activity reporting and feedback collected as part of normal monitoring activity within the DCN. The full dataset on which this final report is based consists of:

- 1,228 Digital Champion baseline surveys
- 125 Digital Champion follow-up surveys
- 10 Digital Champion follow-up interviews
- 87 organisation baseline surveys
- 21 organisation follow-up surveys
- 12 organisation follow-up interviews
- 6,014 DCN course feedback forms
- Google Analytics data from the DCN website
- DU monitoring data from the DCN website.

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<sup>3</sup> McCambridge et al. (2014) Systematic Review of the Hawthorne Effect *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*