Learning and Influencing

Evaluation of One Digital partnership activities 2017-20

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Executive summary

Background

Millions of adults in the UK do not have the digital skills they need to make the most of the online world, whether that's applying for jobs, keeping in touch or managing their money.

The One Digital partnership was an innovative response to this problem. The five collaborating organisations – Age UK, Citizens Online, Clarion Futures (part of Clarion Housing Group), Digital Unite and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations – all had a mission to promote digital participation as a route to greater social inclusion and wellbeing for people and communities. Partner delivery approaches were diverse, but each had in common the concept of using intermediaries – known as Digital Champions – to help people improve their essential digital skills.

Following the success of a 'test and learn' phase in 2015-6, the partners received a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund for a three-year programme (ending June 2020) to expand and develop its work in two areas:

- Frontline delivery: to engage with local organisations across the UK to support digital inclusion and participation, including through the recruitment and training of Digital Champions to support individuals to improve their Essential Digital Skills.

- Knowledge dissemination and influencing: to share the learning and expertise gained, within and beyond the partnership, to contribute to knowledge about 'what works' in Digital Champion approaches, and to influence digital inclusion policy and practice.

The partners commissioned an evaluation of their knowledge dissemination and influencing activities, and this report presents the findings.

Key findings

Sharing learning between partners
The evaluation showed that, as intended, the One Digital core partners did share knowledge, expertise and experience with each other. Partners varied in their levels of sharing, but all made specific contributions to the common pool of knowledge, and all reported benefits, whether in terms of increased expertise within teams, or improvements in planning and/or delivery. For some partners, the One Digital experience has also resulted in a less tangible but highly prized sense of synergy and an appetite for future partnership working.

Partners reported that the most effective learning happened as an integral part of the shared reporting all partners did on a monthly basis, both at project management and strategic level, and also on a spontaneous and ad hoc basis, as and when a knowledge gap or challenge arose.

The programme had a formal Community of Practice (CoP), managed by a Learning Facilitator, part of whose role was to facilitate internal knowledge sharing through learning sets and other structured events with partners. This mechanism proved less effective for promoting internal sharing than anticipated, partly due to differing perceptions of the primary purpose of the CoP, and partly due to

the inherent challenges of trying to formalise and make explicit processes of knowledge exchange that are often spontaneous and tacit.

Notwithstanding this, the One Digital partnership demonstrated the net benefits of collaboration and in doing so furthered a collective pool of expertise about tackling digital exclusion.

Influencing policy
One Digital was recognised for its novel approach to partnership working, and the individual partners were recognised for their pre-existing reputation in the sector, but the partnership itself was not considered to have added any value to the influencing power of core partners on their own. The diversity of the core partners' agendas – different organisational missions, different business models, different beneficiary groups, different intervention points in the digital inclusion impact chain, and with One Digital being a larger or small element of overall organisational activity – made it hard to agree what the key policy message for the overall partnership was. Added to this, the ubiquity of the digital inclusion issue – arguably every organisation in every sector has an interest in it – made it hard to define policy stakeholders and targets for influence with enough precision.

Influencing practice
The promotion of good practice in frontline support for essential digital skills was the third strand of activity through which One Digital sought to have an impact, and it had success in this area. We found evidence that external organisations:

- increased their knowledge and awareness about digital inclusion as a salient issue, and

- gained a better understanding of the potential of Digital Champion models as a means of addressing it.

The practical, task-focused learning resources on the Digital Champions Network (DCN) – an online learning service from Digital Unite which was cascaded by all One Digital partners to their delivery chains – were an important contributor to One Digital's effectiveness in this area. Over 6000 DCN resources were accessed by more than 1800 Digital Champions, and evidenced positive impacts on confidence, understanding and skills at both organisational and individual level.

In addition, One Digital, in particular through the networking efforts of the Learning Facilitator and through the Community of Practice public events, had to some degree managed to disseminate knowledge about digital inclusion practice beyond 'the usual suspects' in the digital inclusion world, for example to voluntary and community organisations working on behalf of disadvantaged groups.

Key recommendations to inform any future initiatives included:

- Partnerships for influencing: Decide on the essential aims of any policy influencing effort, and thereby the essential message for which the partnership will advocate; recognise that this may influence the make-up of the partnership

- Partnerships for internal knowledge sharing: Recognise that much information sharing takes place within the natural flow of day-to-day collaboration on shared activities or outcomes; communities of practice are born not made, and rely on high levels of mutual trust

- Partnerships for external resource dissemination: Conduct an audience analysis to gain a deep understanding of who needs what kinds of learning resources and why. This will ensure that the many organisations seeking guidance about using Digital Champion approaches are able to get the information they need for their own particular circumstances.

Background and methodology

1. Background to the One Digital partnership

1.1 History of One Digital

Millions of adults in the UK do not have the digital skills they need to make the most of the online world, whether that's applying for jobs, keeping in touch or managing their money.[1]

The One Digital partnership began in 2015 as an innovative response to this problem. The five collaborating organisations – Age UK, Citizens Online, Clarion Futures (part of Clarion Housing Group)[2], Digital Unite and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) – all had a mission to promote digital participation as a route to greater social inclusion and wellbeing for people and communities.

Partner delivery approaches were diverse, but each had in common the concept of using intermediaries – known as Digital Champions – to help people improve their essential digital skills. The partners had received a grant from the then Big Lottery Fund to conduct a year-long 'test and learn' programme that combined frontline delivery to diverse groups in the community with shared learning between partners.[3]

Following the success of its 'test and learn' phase, the partners received a further grant from the National Lottery Community Fund for a three-year programme (ending June 2020) to expand and develop its work.

1.2 Aims of the One Digital Programme 2017-20

The One Digital programme 2017-20 had two broad aims:
- Frontline delivery: to engage with local organisations across the UK to support digital inclusion and participation, including through the recruitment and training of Digital Champions to support individuals to improve their Essential Digital Skills. See Appendix 1 for narrative pen portraits of the individual partners' projects.

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[1] *Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index* puts this figure at 11.9 million in 2019
https://www.lloydsbank.com/banking-with-us/whats-happening/consumer-digital-index.html

[2] Affinity Sutton housing association, an original partner in One Digital, subsequently merged with Clarion housing association to become Clarion Housing Group (CHG). Affinity Sutton's digital inclusion programme was incorporated into Clarion Futures, the charitable foundation within CHG, and continued to be a core partner of One Digital.

[3] See https://onedigitaluk.com/our-activity/evaluation-reports/programme-evaluation-reports/
for the summative evaluation of One Digital Phase One.

- Knowledge dissemination and influencing: to share the learning and expertise gained, within and beyond the partnership, to contribute to knowledge about 'what works' in Digital Champion approaches, and to influence digital inclusion policy and practice. It is this aspect of the programme which is the focus of this report.

Defining key terms

- Essential Digital Skills

One Digital used the UK Government's Essential Digital Skills Framework as a core reference point. This framework defines the digital skills adults need to "safely benefit from, participate in and contribute to the digital world".[4]

The framework specifies 'Foundation Skills' – typically required by people who have never used a digital device – and then five categories of 'Essential Digital Skills':
  - communicating
  - handling information and content
  - transacting
  - problem solving
  - being safe and legal online.

These five skills categories are then further refined into digital skills for everyday life and digital skills for work. Latest estimates show that 11.9m people (22 per cent of the UK population) do not have all the essential digital skills needed for day-to-day life.[5]

- Digital Champions

The One Digital collaboration partners were united by their use of Digital Champion approaches. Put simply, a Digital Champion is an individual who helps others engage with and reap the benefits of using digital technologies. Champions are 'trusted people in local places', who can pass on digital skills in an informal, but safe and effective way. They need not be technical experts – many are not – but Champions are all people with an enthusiasm for using digital technology in everyday life, and an aptitude for helping others to do the same.

1.3 Structure of the One Digital programme

The One Digital programme operated on a distributed model as shown on the schematic overleaf. Each of the five core partners was responsible for the design and delivery of their individual project. Their project outputs – numbers of organisations engaged, Digital Champions recruited and beneficiaries reached – contributed to an aggregated set of programme outputs reported to the funders.

Overarching the individual partners' five frontline projects were three cross-partnership elements:
- The Programme Management Office (PMO), hosted by Age UK, had two full-time staff, a Programme Director and a Project Support Officer.[6] The Director was responsible for

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[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/essential-digital-skills-framework/essential-digital-skills-framework
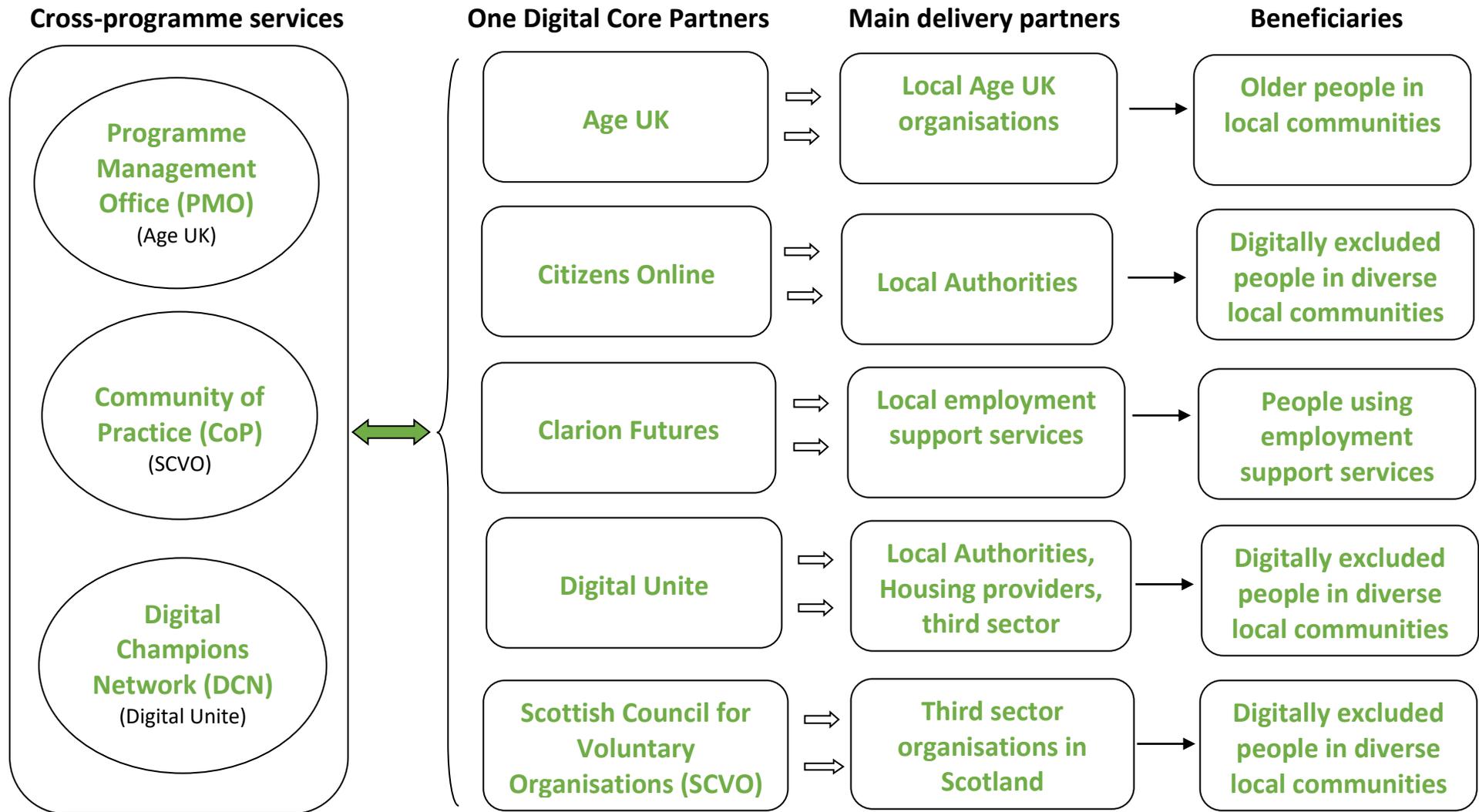
[5] *Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index* 2019
https://www.lloydsbank.com/banking-with-us/whats-happening/consumer-digital-index.html

[6] There was a full-time Director between January 2018 and June 2019. Thereafter the role was taken over by a senior manager from Age UK.

reporting to the Lottery, the disbursement of funds to partners, and leading on external policy and advocacy. The Director's role was overseen by a Programme Board consisting of strategic leads from each core partner, alongside oversight from external members with senior experience in digital inclusion. An Advisory Panel of independent experts also gave informal input, and included a representative from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

- The Community of Practice (CoP), hosted by SCVO, had two full-time staff, a Learning Facilitator and a Communications Support assistant, responsible for facilitating the sharing of learning about Digital Champion projects between partners and with external audiences. The CoP was overseen by SCVO.

- The third cross-partnership element was the Digital Champions Network. This online learning and support service for Digital Champions, run by core partner Digital Unite, was offered free of charge to all One Digital core partners to cascade to their delivery partners.

Figure 1: One Digital Programme structure

Cross-programme services

- Programme Management Office (PMO) (Age UK)
- Community of Practice (CoP) (SCVO)
- Digital Champions Network (DCN) (Digital Unite)

One Digital Core Partners

- Age UK
- Citizens Online
- Clarion Futures
- Digital Unite
- Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

Main delivery partners

- Local Age UK organisations
- Local Authorities
- Local employment support services
- Local Authorities, Housing providers, third sector
- Third sector organisations in Scotland

Beneficiaries

- Older people in local communities
- Digitally excluded people in diverse local communities
- People using employment support services
- Digitally excluded people in diverse local communities
- Digitally excluded people in diverse local communities

2. Overall approach to the programme evaluation

The programme evaluation ran between 2018 and 2020 and had three consecutive strands, one formative and two summative:

- In 2018 an internal process evaluation focused on the *first year of the Community of Practice*. This took a consultative approach, comprising surveys and informal interviews with all key informants within the partnership, to identify the successes and challenges of the CoP set-up, and provide recommendations for refinements as the programme moved into its second year.

- In late 2019 a summative case study evaluation took advantage of the access the One Digital programme afforded to delivery in practice to *identify and distil learning about Digital Champion approaches* to digital skills support. It focused specifically on the embedded Digital Champion model. The report "The use of embedded Digital Champions to support essential digital skills: lessons learned" was published in November 2019.

- In early 2020, in order to evaluate *how effectively One Digital collaborative activities achieved their identified outcomes*, a mixed methods summative evaluation focused on the partnership's collaborative activity i.e. shared learning and influencing. This report presents the findings from this work.

2.1 Methodology

We began by working with the One Digital programme management office (PMO) to develop a logic model (see overleaf). This logic model provides a summary of the assumptions underpinning the partnership's collaborative activities, by identifying their main components, how they relate to one another, and their intended effects.

An outcomes and indicators framework (see Appendix 2) was derived from the logic model. The purpose of this framework was to breakdown the high-level aims into discrete elements – indicators – which could be measured to assess progress towards outcomes.

A set of evaluation instruments was then designed to best achieve a rounded and mixed methods assessment of these indicators. The instruments included:
- Baseline interviews with external stakeholders
- Observation of One Digital external events (face-to-face and virtual)
- Observation of internal learning events (face-to-face and virtual)
- Follow-up interviews with external stakeholders
- Summative survey of external stakeholders
- Summative interviews with strategic leads and project leads from core partners
- Documentary review of programme and partner reports
- Website and social media analytics
- Bibliometric research and analysis.

The full dataset on which this final report draws consists of:
- 18 baseline and follow-up interviews with external stakeholders (2018 and 2020)
- 25 summative surveys of external stakeholders (2020)

- 8 observational reports on CoP events (internal and external) (2018-20)
- 28 baseline and follow-up interviews with key informants from core partners and PMO (2018 and 2020)
- Documentary review:
  - Programme documentation and reports (2017-20)
  - Programme management workflow on Slack (2017-20)
  - Community of Practice internal reports and published outputs (2017-20)
  - Bibliometric analysis at five timepoints (2018-20)
  - Partner project documentation (2017-20)
- Supplementary data from summative mixed methods evaluation of the Digital Champions Network (conducted for Digital Unite 2019)
- Supplementary data from summative case study evaluation of four embedded Digital Champion projects (conducted for One Digital PMO 2019).

Qualitative data analysis took a thematic analysis approach. Data was coded using specialist software, and an outline coding scheme was developed from the logic model. The coding matrix was then used to interrogate the data to identify overarching themes. Quantitative data quoted in this report was analysed using standard statistical formulae including sum, mean and median. Cross tabulation and comparisons were made where the breadth and depth of data justified.

Methodological challenges

- Conceptual challenges

When looking at external influence, it has been challenging to separate the influence of individual partners from the influence of the partnership as a collective entity. The boundaries are fuzzy, partners inform the partnership and vice versa, so linear categorisations are not possible. As a result there is occasional uncertainty around the plausible attribution of effects, most particularly in areas where there is little documentary evidence to bring to bear. The impact of the partnership as an entity is the focus of this report, and where an effect or outcome is more plausibly associated with individual partners, this is flagged.

- Practical challenges
  - While our participant samples for external stakeholder research were designed to include as wide a range of key informants as possible, 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 One Digital, partner organisations, and/or the evaluators (the Hawthorne effect[7]). We sought to minimise bias by purposive sampling to cover a range of informant types with a range of views.
  - Identifying and tracking the sharing of learning was challenging. Synchronous recording of learning experiences – for example partner learning logs administered by the independent evaluators – was an option, but demands on partner staff time were considered too high. Some more or less synchronous data was gathered by the programme staff during Community of Practice activity, and in monthly programme management reports, and this is included in the overall dataset alongside retrospective data.

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[7] McCambridge et al. (2014) Systematic Review of the Hawthorne Effect *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*

- The response rate to the summative survey of external stakeholders was disappointing, (25 completed returns from a contact list of 420+ and 1000+ Twitter followers). Conclusions drawn from this small dataset are necessarily tentative, though it does serve as triangulation for data from other sources.
- Bibliometric analysis, while a key source of quantitative data, was hard to scope. The focus on digital inclusion policy and practice necessitated searching grey literature sources; the lack of a cohesive body of digital inclusion literature made this a challenging task. We used keyword searches in standard search engines, searched the websites of key stakeholders, used pearling techniques (looking through reference lists of relevant publications), and hand-searched the contents of publications. While considerable effort was put into this strand of data collection, we cannot be sure that all bibliometric evidence has been uncovered.
- The One Digital website analytics are not truly representative of the reach of the partnership's digital information, due to a change of web hosting platform, and the loss of legacy usage data.
- The final phase of surveying and interviewing coincided with the 'lockdown' period resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. This likely lowered the response rate for the external stakeholder survey and impacted on some interviewee availability.

Nevertheless, we are reasonably confident that the overall evaluation effort – in terms of range of data types, the range of perspectives gathered through interviews, and the combination of baseline and follow-up data collection phases – has enabled us to identify the most salient themes and draw plausible conclusions from the data.

Acknowledgements

3. The One Digital Programme 2017-2020: Logic model for cross-partnership activities

The five Core partners in One Digital:

Age UK, Clarion Futures, Citizens Online, Digital Unite, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

Delivery mechanism	Activity strand	Outputs	Short term outcomes	Medium term outcomes	Long-term impacts
- Programme management office - Community of practice	Sharing learning (internal)	• Core partner learning events (x6) • Core partner knowledge sharing (Slack, ongoing) • Project lead meetings (mthly) • Strategic lead meetings (mthly)	Core partners are better informed about good practice in digital inclusion projects	Core partners deliver more efficient/effective DI projects	National DI policy is improved More effective DI programmes nationally
	Influencing policy (external)	• Contributions to relevant forums • Presentations at relevant events • Articles in relevant publications • One Digital web & social media • One Digital public events	One Digital is a recognised & respected voice within the UK digital inclusion sector	DC approaches from One Digital are recognised at UK policy level	
- Digital Champions Network (DCN)	Influencing practice (external)	• Subsidised membership to DCN • DCN courses accessed • DCN resources accessed	External organisations are better informed about good practice in DC approaches	External organisations are better able to use DC approaches to support beneficiaries	Reduced digital exclusion
			External organisations' DCs are more confident in their role		

Three cross-partnership delivery mechanisms:

- Programme management office, administered by Age UK, consists of Programme Director, Project Support Officer
- Community of practice, administered by SCVO, consists of Learning Facilitator, Communications Support Assistant
- Digital Champions Network, run by Digital Unite, is a learning and support platform for Digital Champions

Findings

The findings from our research are grouped under the two main strands of cross-partnership activity:
- sharing learning internally, and
- external influencing.

4. Sharing learning internally

4.1 Sharing learning: Activities and outputs

The five core partners shared knowledge and learning accrued through delivering their One Digital projects throughout the term of the programme. The mechanisms for sharing knowledge and learning internally were threefold:

- Group project reporting as part of management of partner delivery
  Principally through monthly written reports on delivery activities, shared by each partner, and followed by group calls for project leads and for strategic leads. Also a quarterly aggregated reporting process for the funder.

- A dedicated Community of Practice
  Overseen by a full-time Learning Facilitator, a series of topic-based 'learning sets' involving either face-to-face or virtual meetings, principally attended by project leads, with other team members on an ad hoc basis and occasional external contributors.

- Ad hoc sharing
  Throughout the term of the programme, there was ad hoc knowledge sharing between partners outside of the formal channels. This was spontaneous rather than planned and was usually a dialogue between two partners rather than multi-partner discussions.

4.1.1 Programme meetings
The core partners all reported positively about the natural exchange of information and experiences through the monthly and quarterly reports and group discussions. While the primary purpose of these was the management and monitoring of programme delivery, they also acted as constructive spaces for sharing learning, particularly for project leads:

> "I found the project leads calls useful and supportive…. I found it very validating, realising that all projects have similar challenges." ID=24

> "The most useful learning was in the project leads calls because that is where we discussed the projects in real time and where we raised the issues that we needed help with at the time." ID=22

4.1.2 Community of Practice
The Community of Practice (CoP) was established in response to the lessons from Phase 1 of the partnership to enhance the shared learning experience for partners and to share One Digital learning with external audiences, including via events and digital publications.

Our interviewees had mixed views on the success of the CoP in facilitating internal learning. It was regarded as a good idea in principle, and there were positives:

> "You get a lot of learning from doing digital inclusion projects, there are always different challenges, so to have a facilitator whose role it was to pull together the learning was good. I mean you don't have time to do that when you are focused in delivery." ID=24

At the earlier stages of the programme, project leads said they appreciated the CoP meet-ups as an opportunity to understand more about each other's work. Some specific outputs from the CoP – for example a Digital Champion Model infographic, resources about online safety and security – were reported to be directly beneficially to some partners' planning and delivery. However, the CoP threw up some challenges that were not fully resolved during the term of the programme. There were some mismatched expectations early on:

> "There was an expectation that the CoP facilitator would do the work of gathering and synthesising learning, and so partners were not expecting to spend so much time contributing themselves." (ID=18)

A majority of partners felt that having a series of pre-determined themes for learning sets – even if the topics were suggested by the partners – impacted adversely on the CoP's relevance at the point of delivery, and the resulting outputs did not necessarily end up having great utility for partners:

> "By the time knowledge or expertise had been taken into the CoP and then put out again it became too generic, because it has to suit all five diverse partners, to be of much practical use for us." (ID=15)

For a few partners there was an actual conflict of interest generated by the CoP:

> "There was a tension with being asked to provide information or expertise which is part of our business offer, to provide that for free use by the partnership. That was not beneficial for us as an organisation." (ID=26)

Overall, while the CoP provided some useful learning, most partners felt that the benefits did not justify the inputs the structured CoP process required.

4.1.3 Ad hoc knowledge exchange

For the majority of partners, knowledge exchange extended beyond the formal structures of the programme meetings into more informal communications. This was regarded by some as the key benefit of partnership working:

> "We talked to the other partners about particular topics, areas where they had particular experience, or were having particular challenges. We just did that as and when the need or opportunity arose. I also went and visited projects and found out how they were approaching things." (ID=25)

> "[Ad hoc discussions and visits] promoted the kind of flexible and self-directed learning which was what the partners mostly wanted." (ID=20)

Partners spoke of the positive experience of working alongside 'critical friends' and how this could lead to improvements in services:

"We benefited from a wider and deeper pool of feedback about our own service, which was very good for us in terms of improving our offer" (ID=26)

4.1.4 Outputs of shared learning

The table below, while not exhaustive, illustrates the range of themes and topics about which knowledge was shared within the partnership, whether through programme management channels, the CoP, or through informal communications. The Learning Facilitator developed and/or curated a wide range of documentary outputs on many of these topics for partner reference, and some were then turned into resources for external sharing.

Theme	Example topics
Designing projects	- Benefits of local partnerships and collaboration - Embedding digital inclusion across organisations - Different models of Digital Champion
Engagement of stakeholders	- Engaging delivery partners - Digital Champion recruitment and support - Volunteer recruitment and support - Engaging beneficiaries
Delivery approaches	- Supporting digital leadership in organisations - Delivering beneficiary support at home and 1:1 - Accessibility good practice - Learner-centred approaches
Delivery contexts	- Working with local authorities - Working in primary care/General Practice - Working in rural areas
Beneficiary groups	- Older people - Disadvantaged groups - Groups with multiple and complex needs
Beneficiary learning needs	- Verifying digital information sources - Online safety and security
Measurement	- Identifying digital skill levels and learning needs - Monitoring Digital Champion activities - Measuring impacts of Digital Champion support

Table 1: Knowledge shared within One Digital partnership: themes and topics recorded

4.2 Sharing learning: Impacts for core partners

All the core partners reported beneficial impacts for their organisation and for the quality of their service as a result of the cumulative sharing of information the One Digital partnership fostered. They said they increased their knowledge and confidence as organisations:

"It did give us confidence, it was validating for us, in that we understood from seeing the other partners work that the challenges we faced were not unique, and that our approach was overall a valid one and we were going about things in the right way." (ID-22)

And some said it had influenced their practice, at the micro level:

"[Changes] happen incrementally, in small ways, you make small adjustments as you go along because you have access to the learning the other partners are doing as they go along." (ID=24)

And the macro level:

"I think the key pillars of our approach in practice, which is about Digital Champions and about the embedded model, can probably be traced back to the influence of being part of One Digital." (ID=24)

"We improved our service due to partner feedback. I don't think that would have happened in the same way without being part of the partnership structure, it sort of forced us to work together in a deeper way." (ID=26)

Partners identified specific areas of knowledge or expertise contributed by another member of the partnership which they felt they particularly informed their own planning or delivery. The table below, while not exhaustive, identifies some of these contributions:

Contributing partner	Expertise and/or experience contributed to the partnership
Age UK	- Volunteer induction and management - Assessment levels of organisational engagement
Clarion Futures	- Digital inclusion in social housing - Screening for digital skills for employability
Citizens Online	- 'Snapshot' approach to monitoring and evaluation - Place-based partnership working
Digital Unite	- Motivating Digital Champions - Logic model development
SCVO	- Digital inclusion as part of organisational transformation - Measuring essential digital skills in the workforce

Table 2: Knowledge shared within One Digital partnership: examples of contributions, by partner

Less tangible, but felt to be an equally important benefit for partners, was a sense of collegiate support fostered by the exchange of knowledge and experience beyond one's own organisation:

"I think that is quite rare, to feel that there is a group with shared values and to feel peer support from people outside your organisation. The sector overall is competitive, because we all need funding; lots of people pay lip service to the idea of collaboration, but it is not often that people actually do it." (ID=24)

"I think overall the feeling of learning together is incredibly important and will influence the quality of our relationships with most of the partners going forward. That is a very important result for us." (ID=20)

"When we shared conversations one to one with other projects and teams that is when the learning happened. Not necessarily in ways that were obvious at the time, but it became a long gentle conversation that has led to much wider and deeper understanding about digital inclusion and about how to work well with other organisations." (ID=15)

"In comparison with most other digital inclusion projects I have been involved with, I think the legacy of learning and partnership working from One Digital is more profound." (ID=13)

5. External influencing

Influencing the national digital inclusion agenda – at the level of both policy and practice – was always a central ambition for One Digital. Before reviewing this aspect of the partnership's work, it is useful to outline the context in which One Digital has been operating.

The UK government sets out its current policy around essential digital skills in the 2017 'UK Digital Strategy'.[8] This strategy is aligned to the UK government's industrial strategy, the objective of which is to "improve living standards and economic growth by increasing productivity and driving growth across the whole country". The strategy's approach to essential digital skills "mirrors the approach taken for adult literacy and numeracy training", with an overall focus on workplace digital skills and how they can contribute to productivity. Responsibility for delivery of the UK strategy in England is split between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Education. The main delivery mechanism is local Digital Skills Partnerships, tasked with "helping people access digitally-focused jobs at a local level".

One Digital is a UK-wide partnership. Four of the core partners are based in England and operate UK-wide, the fifth partner – the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations – operates only in Scotland. In Scotland, digital strategy is set out in the Scottish Government's 2017 document 'Realising Scotland's Full Potential in a Digital World', whose vision is of Scotland as a "vibrant, inclusive, open and outward looking digital nation".[9] This strategy includes "funding for community digital inclusion projects" and a plan to "get more organisations involved in a national movement to promote digital skills" via the vehicle of Scotland's Digital Participation Charter, which is administered by One Digital core partner SCVO.

5.1 External influencing: Activities and outputs

5.1.1 Networking and advocacy activities

During 2018-19 the One Digital programme team – the Programme Director and the Learning Facilitator – represented One Digital in a range of relevant forums and groups, including:

- Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Digital Skills Partnership delivery groups: member of National Coherence Group and Charity Digital Inclusion Group
- Department for Education's workshop on Basic Digital Skills Entitlement Framework: attended consultation meetings
- Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) consortium on the future of the Essential Digital Skills Framework: attended consultation meetings
- NHS Digital Inclusion Guide: contributed written submissions.

In addition, the Learning Facilitator was an important contributor to the Digital Skills Working Group, a knowledge exchange group of Lottery-funded voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations supporting essential digital skills.[10]

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[8] UK Digital Strategy 2017 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-digital-strategy

[9] https://www.gov.scot/publications/realising-scotlands-full-potential-digital-world-digital-strategy-scotland/

[10] The DSWG meets quarterly and has formal terms of reference. It was instigated by the Lottery to enable three of their digital skills funded programmes, run by RNIB, Good Things Foundation and One Digital, to jointly report. It then became wider to national organisations with an interested in essential digital skills and digital inclusion e.g. Mind, Family Fund, Guide Dogs, Leonard Cheshire. Its aim is to share learning.

5.1.2 Public events

One Digital hosted five public events between February 2018 and November 2019. Table 3 provides summary details.

Date	Title	Location	Approx. no. attendees[11]	Sectors represented
18-02	Delivering sustainable digital skills support	London	80	CVS (50%), Housing Associations (25%), Local Authorities (25%)
18-11	Demonstrating the Impact of Digital Inclusion	London	60	No aggregate data
19-03	Making digital accessible	London	80	No aggregate data
19-07	Developing digital skills in rural areas	Preston	50	No aggregate data
19-11	Embedding and sustaining Digital Champion support for digital skills	Birmingham	50	No aggregate data

Table 3: One Digital public events 2018-19

In addition, three public webinars were held in the autumn of 2019, one on Digital Champion models and two on online safety and privacy. These were attended by a total of 74 people.

5.1.3 One Digital website and social media

Website

The One Digital website was set up and hosted by SCVO and developed by the Community of Practice team. It went through two iterations and the current site presents material on the programme and the individual partners, plus a thematically arranged knowledge hub of materials authored by the Community of Practice team. Formats include standard web pages, blogs and videos.

The most recent statistics for website[12] traffic show:
- Approximately 17k visitors between Jan 2018 and May 2020
- Of these, approximately 11k visitors were from the target UK nations, equating to an approximate monthly average of 650 visitors
- Just over 10% of new visitors return for further visits.

The UK bounce rate (i.e. proportion of UK visitors who leave the site without interacting with it further) was approximately 60% (roughly average for a site of this type).[13] The remaining 40% of UK visitors (approximately 4,400) stayed on the site for an average of 3.1 minutes. Visitors from Scotland spent an average 4.4 minutes on the site, and visitors from Wales spent an average 6.4 minutes. Session duration peaked in May 2018 and steadily decreased.

Most visitors found the One Digital site through organic search (e.g. Google) using terms including 'One Digital', 'One Digital knowledge hub' and 'Essential digital skills'. Visitors were also referred from four of the five core partners':
- Age UK (n=583)
- Digital Unite (n=573)
- Citizens Online (n=175)

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[11] Totals include presenters and organisers

[12] These statistics are for the current iteration of the site; stats for the previous version of the site were not available

[13] https://www.ezoic.com/good-bounce-rate-2020/

- SCVO (n=53).

A small number of third-party sites also provided referrals:
- NHS Digital (n=92)
- Charity Digital News (n=79).

The most popular topics for website visitors were:
- Developing a Digital Champion project
- Digital Champion models
- Online safety and privacy.

Social media

Twitter was the main social media tool used by One Digital. The @onedigitalprog Twitter account had 1119 followers by 1 May 2020. The table below shows numbers of followers, likes, tweets, retweets and impressions (i.e. how many times tweets have appeared in users' timelines).

Twitter analytics Dec 2018 to May 2020	
Followers	1119
Likes	3032
Tweets	1181
Retweets	1473
Impressions	209.5k
Average engagement rate	1.17%

Table 4: One Digital Twitter analytics 1 Dec 2018 to 1 May 2020

The bottom row in Table 4 above, average engagement rate (i.e. total number of times a user interacted with a tweet), is the most commonly used summary performance measure for Twitter and 1.17% is a healthy engagement rate.[14] The most common topic of tweets was a recommendation of the knowledge hub as a good resource for digital inclusion practice.

5.1.4 The Digital Champions Network

As part of the One Digital programme, each core partner was able to offer their delivery partners access to Digital Unite's Digital Champions Network (DCN). Organisations who subscribe to the DCN get licenses to give individual Digital Champions access to a range of e-learning modules, quick guides, toolkits and other resources to help them to support beneficiaries.

During the term of the programme:
- 226 individual organisations – a mix of housing associations, local authorities and voluntary and community sector organisations – joined the DCN
- 1884 individual Digital Champions registered to use the DCN's courses and resources.

A total of 6859 DCN courses were completed by Digital Champions during the term of the One Digital programme. Table 5 below shows the top five most frequently completed courses. Table 6 shows the top five most used information resource pages out of 500+ pages on the DCN.

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[14] https://www.rivaliq.com/live-benchmarks/nonprofits-industry-benchmarks-2019/

	Course title	No. of completions
1	Digital Champion Essentials	993
2	Helping someone with an accessibility need: working with people with learning difficulties and/or learning disabilities	659
3	Helping someone with an accessibility need: working with people with memory loss	552
4	Helping someone with an accessibility need: identifying accessibility needs	519
5	Using your role to help customers get online	477

Table 5: Digital Champions Network: five most frequently completed courses

Page	Page Views
/resources/how-make-most-your-mozilla-open-badges-and-cpd-awards	483
/resources/category/smartphones-&-tablets	322
/resources/1-1-session-plan-template	321
/resources/category/accessibility-needs	312
/resources/category/desktop-computers-&-laptops	291

Table 6: Digital Champions Network: five most frequently viewed resource pages

5.2 External influencing: impacts for external stakeholders

To inform a rounded assessment of the One Digital brand, and its influence on policy and practice, we interviewed key external stakeholders, surveyed the One Digital contacts list[15] and conducted a range of bibliometric and webometric searches. We also spoke to core partners and programme management staff.

5.2.1 Brand awareness
The One Digital programme management office developed a communications strategy that included a set of key messages around the central premise of using partnership approaches and Digital Champion models to promote digital inclusion. A broad typology of target audience groups divided into 'Funders and influencers' and 'Organisations who could benefit from One Digital resources', was also developed (See Appendix 4).

Our interviewees reported that the One Digital brand had achieved a good level of visibility amongst specialists at its inception, and that the fact that it was a partnership was salient:

> "It started out with a profile within the digital inclusion world because of the pre-existing profile of the core partners…I think the message of collaboration rather than competition was a good one for the brand when it started." (ID=6)

We also gained some insights into brand awareness from the One Digital contact list survey.[16] Respondents to this survey – all of whom had either attended a One Digital event or had worked closely with one or more core partners – were offered a number of digital inclusion concepts and delivery approaches, and asked which they associated with One Digital. Figure 2 below shows that champion approaches and digital skills in the community were most commonly associated with the programme, and formal training and digital skills for children and young people were

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[15] One Digital contacts: 424 email list and 1119 Twitter followers; 25 survey responses were received
[16] The small number of respondents to this survey mean this data must be caveated as potentially unrepresentative.

least commonly associated, suggesting that the survey respondents had formed an accurate overview of what One Digital was about.
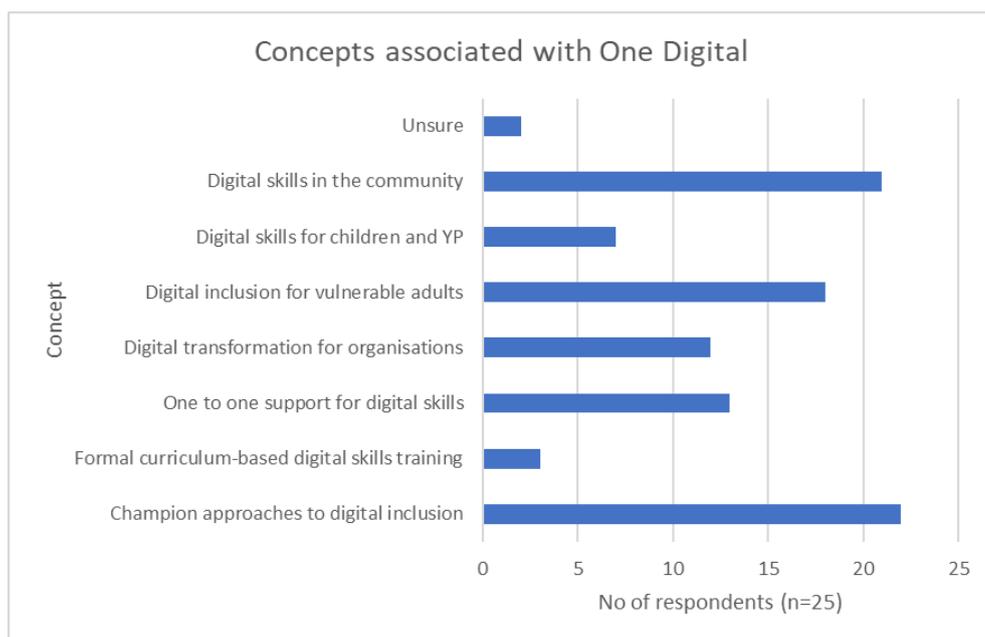
Concepts associated with One Digital

Figure 2: 'Which concepts do you associate with One Digital'
Survey of One Digital contacts May 2020 (n=25)

We also asked survey respondents which organisations they thought were part of the One Digital partnership. Figure 3 below shows their responses. The five partners were correctly identified by many respondents, with Digital Unite the most commonly recognised partner, followed by Age UK, Clarion Futures, Citizens Online and SCVO. However, a quarter of respondents, even though they were closely associated with One Digital, thought Good Things Foundation was part of the partnership, and Lloyds, We Are Digital and BT also got mentions.
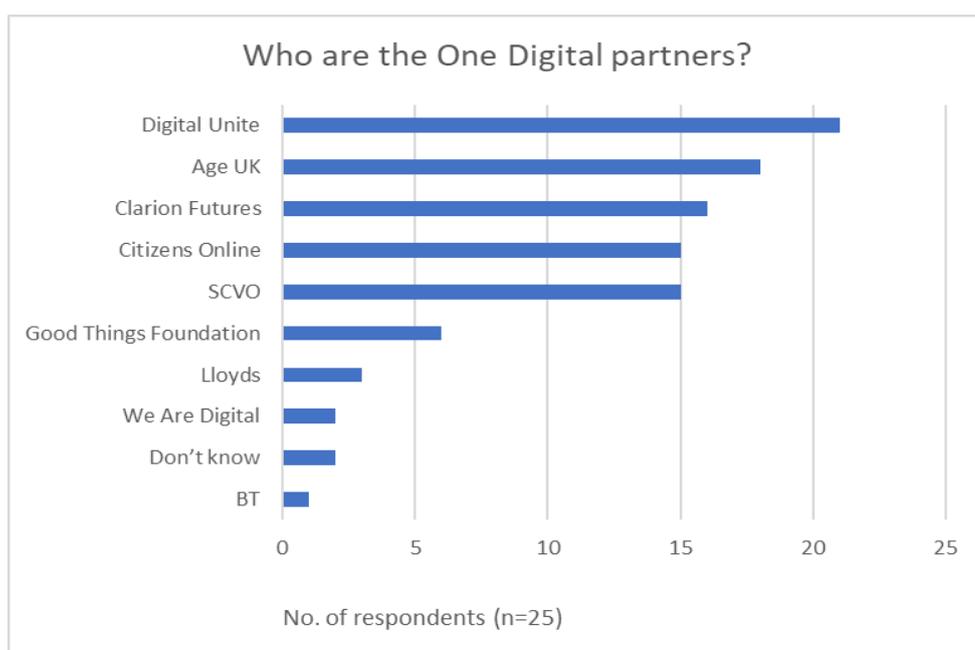
Who are the One Digital partners?

Figure 3: 'Who are the One Digital partners?'
Survey of One Digital contacts May 2020 (n=25)

External stakeholders we consulted considered that brand awareness in broad general audience groups would not be high, and that One Digital had struggled to communicate to audiences what its brand stood for:

"Beyond the relatively small confines of the real digital inclusion specialists, I don't think the brand recognition would be very high at all" ID=6

"Most organisations would not really know [the One Digital website] was there, even the organisations whose work was represented via case studies." ID=13

"I don't think people have a clear idea about what it represents. I see the logo, but I don't know what it stands for." ID=9

"There is nothing distinctive [about the brand] apart from being a federation and sharing learning." ID=8

Our analysis of Google search engine rankings – a useful if imperfect quantitative measurement of relative brand presence[17] -- is consistent with these perceptions, showing One Digital struggling to make an impact online in comparison to a range of related organisations. The charts below show the search results ranking scores for the top ten results for the search terms 'Digital inclusion' and 'Digital Champion' over five timepoints across the term of the programme.[18]
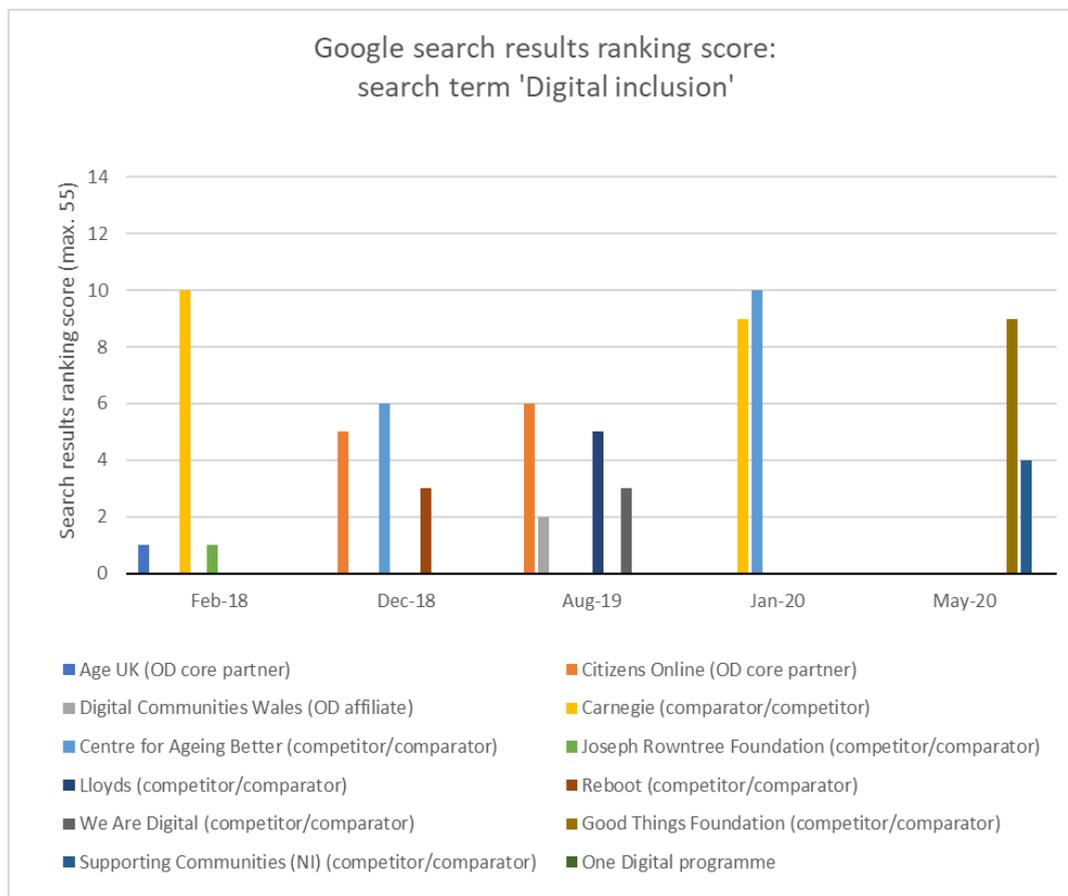

Figure 3: Google search results ranking for search term 'Digital inclusion' Feb 2018 to May 2020; by organisation

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[17] Google search engine rankings are influenced by many factors, and expert search engine optimisation can help an organisation to amplify its rankings more than its real-world reach may warrant. However, rankings are still a useful indicator of the relative reach of stakeholder organisations in the digital inclusion space. To try to ensure accurate comparisons over time, we excluded paid ads, used incognito searches, and compared results across two browsers (Chrome and Brave).

[18] Ranking scores: top of results page = 10, second top = 9 etc. An organisation with a maximum score of 55 would occupy all the top ten spots on the search engine results listing

Figure 3 shows that One Digital did not feature in the top ten Google search engine results listings for the term 'Digital inclusion' at any point during the term of the programme. No single organisation dominates the search results across the period, but the most consistently ranked organisations were:

- o Carnegie Trust
- o Centre for Ageing Better
- o Good Things Foundation.

Citizens Online, a One Digital core partner, appears in the top ten in Dec 2018 and August 2019, and another core partner Age UK make a brief appearance in the top ten search results early in the programme's term in Feb 2018. However, the partnership as such does not appear at all.

Figure 4 below shows search engine rankings for the term 'Digital Champion'. For this narrower term, One Digital is fourth most consistently represented on the rankings list. Core partner Digital Unite is the top ranked organisation in the search results at each timepoint; this is to be expected as Digital Champions are at the heart of Digital Unite's business and the term is contained within the name of their main service, the Digital Champions Network, which will automatically bump it up the rankings. Core partners Citizens Online and SCVO also rank consistently high on search results for this term.
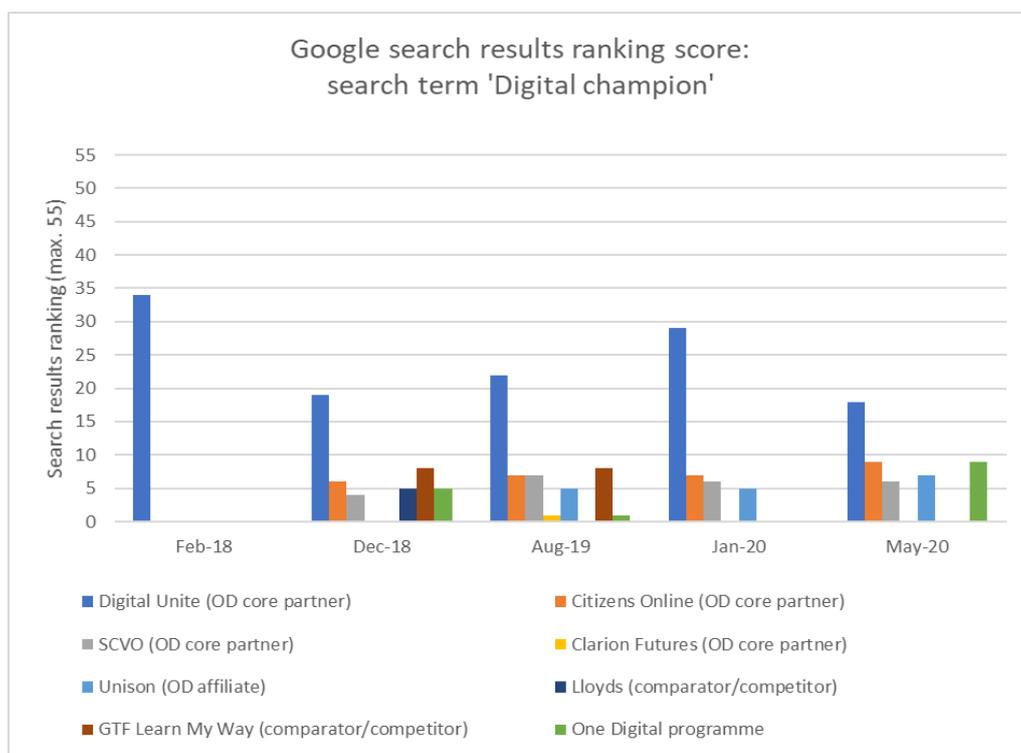

Figure 4: Google search results ranking scores: search term 'Digital champion': Feb 2018 to May 2020; by organisation

Overall, the totality of the data suggests that One Digital did not manage to create a brand that was readily recognised by people beyond a relatively small core of specialists, event attendees and/or people already closely involved with the core partners. The challenges faced by the One Digital brand were succinctly summed up by one external stakeholder:

> "When you don't have a strong collective brand, but you have strong brands in the constituent parts, it is quite hard. Digital inclusion is a sector where there are organisations well established, and unless you can mark out a unique space, you will struggle to get traction." ID=14

5.2.2 Influence on policy

One of the stated aims of One Digital was to influence digital inclusion policy. Our data on effectiveness of policy influence combines interviewee and survey respondents' perceptions alongside bibliometric data.

Interviewees did not feel that One Digital had been able to exert influence on UK digital inclusion policy:

> "I would say One Digital as a programme have had input to digital inclusion policy, but I am not certain there has been any influence." ID=12

> "I am not sure the [One Digital] partnership as such has been influential. I think the individual partners have been influential in different ways, but I am not sure that the partnership really added any value to the influencing of policy." ID=14

> "It should have been a real opportunity for the partners to really make some noise and take leadership of the agenda. I don't see that that happened." ID=9

The key digital inclusion policy influencer in the third sector in England, mentioned by all interviewees, was the Good Things Foundation. Bodies such as Ofcom, NESTA and the BBC were also named, and a number of corporates – Lloyds, Barclays, BT – were seen as influential. Most recently the 'collaboration space' in terms of UK policy influence was seen to have been very effectively occupied by Futuredotnow, "a coalition of leading companies and civil society groups working in collaboration with government to boost the UK's digital skills".[19] (None of the One Digital partners is a member of this.)

In Scotland, Carnegie Trust were seen as highly influential, and most interviewees also noted the strong policy influence of core partner SCVO:

> "In Scotland the government team [working on digital participation] has been more active and influential, with a stable team, and with SCVO very much influential in there." ID=14

> "The influence of SCVO in Scotland which is really considerable where they work closely with policy people and also deliver on the ground" ID=12

Alongside our interviews, we conducted an extensive review of policy documentation, searching for references to One Digital in the websites and publications of key organisations, including those identified in the One Digital communications plan. A summary of the bibliometric search results is in Appendix 4. While we found a few references (n=7) to delivery activity on the ground – evidence of some influence on practice – we could not find any documentary evidence of One Digital's presence in the policy landscape.[20]

A number of informants were keen to point out that any lack of policy influence on the part of One Digital should be understood in the context of a fragmented and challenging policy landscape throughout the term of the programme:

> "It is a fragmented world, digital inclusion in the UK, and has become more so in the time One Digital has been working…. It is hard to be influential when the topic is not a political priority. The topic is seen as politically unattractive, partly because it is intractable – the numbers of the digitally excluded have flatlined,

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[19] https://futuredotnow.uk/about-us/

[20] We also searched for documentation concerning the consultations and groups which One Digital programme staff attended (see section 5.1.1 above), and were not able to identify any – much of this may not be in the public domain however

they are not coming down – so the UK government does not prioritise spending more money on it. The focus for Westminster's attention and spending is on digital skills and how they can boost productivity." ID=9

"There was little impact on policy by the programme directorate, but I think it has been a time when having influence on policymakers is hard. I would not necessarily be critical of the partnership set-up for not achieving that." ID=26

5.2.3 Influence on practice

We did find evidence of the One Digital programme having influence on wider digital inclusion practice. The principal mechanisms for exerting this influence were:

- Community of Practice external events
- Community of Practice digital resources
- Community of Practice advocacy and external networking, and
- the Digital Champions Network.

One Digital Community of Practice events
A total of 124 feedback surveys were received from participants at the five events run by One Digital.[21] The table below shows the feedback scores participants gave to the events. 'Demonstrating Impact' and 'Making digital accessible' were rated 4.25 out of 5 for overall success. 'Developing digital skills in rural areas' and 'Embedding and sustaining Digital Champion support for digital skills' were rated 3.8 out of 5.

Date	Title	Approx. no. attendees[22]	Average feedback score (max. 5)
18-02	Delivering sustainable digital skills support	80	No data available
18-11	Demonstrating the Impact of Digital Inclusion	60	4.2 (n=49)
19-03	Making digital accessible	80	4.3 (n=33)
19-07	Developing digital skills in rural areas	50	3.8 (n=24)
19-11	Embedding and sustaining Digital Champion support for digital skills	50	3.8 (n=18)

Table 7: One Digital public events

Event attendees who gave feedback said they valued:
- general background about digital exclusion and its impacts: for example impacts on disadvantaged groups
- learning about a range of good practice approaches: for example how to motivate beneficiaries by taking learner-led approaches
- signposting to specific resources and tool: for example the Essential Digital Skills Framework Toolkit
- networking opportunities and a sense of common purpose and shared challenges.

Several of our interviewees commented on the wide range of attendees at events:

"The development of the wider partnerships engaging in the CoP has been very successful." ID=16

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[21] Some people were repeat attendees, so the sample size is < 124 individuals.
[22] Totals include presenters and organisers

"The Community of Practice was a fresh input to the digital inclusion sector, which is small and can be inward looking, and it encouraged the sectoral organisations to get involved. And that can only be a good thing. Before that I don't think specialist digital inclusion organisations were necessarily good at being in close touch with their beneficiaries" ID=6

"The collective value added is about the sharing of learning regarding practice. And I think the Community of Practice did bring together organisations for whom digital inclusion has been a quite new area and has provided helpful support for them." ID=13

Table 7 above also shows that the proportion of event attendees providing feedback reduces over the programme term and the overall rating goes down. While the relatively small dataset means we should be cautious about drawing any conclusions from these numbers, it is consistent with some interviewee comments that public events had started strongly but then lost some momentum:

"The early events felt good and fresh because there was a good number of participants and they were from a more diverse range of organisations than we normally deal with. But as time went on, I got the impression that the reach was not getting any wider – it seemed to be the same people coming to all the events, it was not expanding in reach." ID=22

One Digital Community of Practice networking
In addition to convening events, the One Digital Community of Practice had a presence at several national working groups, including the Digital Inclusion Research Group and the Digital Skills Working Group (DSWG). Originally convened by the Lottery, DSWG is a group of third sector organisations with an interest in essential digital skills for diverse communities:

"The conversations One Digital has had are around digital inclusion but more specifically about digital champions, partnership and learning within the sector. A good example of this is the Digital Skills Working Group." ID=18

One Digital Community of Practice digital resources
With regard to the online resources collected on the One Digital website including the knowledge hub, the web metrics described in the previous section suggest a relatively small scale of dissemination given the three-year term of the programme and the potential size of the audience. In our bibliometric research, we found only seven references to One Digital events and resources in other organisations' published outputs (see Appendix 4). Taken together, the quantitative data do not suggest extensive reach for the digital resources developed by the partnership.

Our interviewees felt that the effectiveness of One Digital's website was hampered by some practical challenges:
- The One Digital website was not as visually or functionally engaging as it could have been
- Discoverability on the website was initially not good, though this has improved
- The style of many resources on the website was uniform and text-heavy, lacking in variety
- Although the aim was to encourage a learning exchange, there were no participatory tools such as Slack for external audiences to contribute to a dialogue.[23]

Tracking the use made of the One Digital resources which were accessed was challenging as the website had no registration process and therefore no way of following up with users. We gained some insights from the OD contact

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[23] SCVO's Slack platform for Scottish third sector organisations responding to the digital challenges of Covid-19 is an excellent recent example.

list survey. However, the small number of respondents to this survey mean this data must be caveated as potentially unrepresentative. Of the 25 survey respondents:

- two-thirds said they regarded the website resources as relevant to their work
- just over one-third of respondents said that they had changed an aspect of their digital inclusion practice as a result of information from the One Digital resources
- overall they scored the resources highly (4.4. out of 5) for usefulness and relevance, although less highly (3.9) for uniqueness.

Digital Champions Network

Digital Unite's Digital Champions Network is an established service with a pre-existing reputation in the sector (giving it a 'head-start' on the One Digital website, which was a new brand with a new site). All the core partners offered access to the DCN to their delivery partners, and the reach as described in the previous section – over 6500 courses accessed by over 1800 Digital Champions during the One Digital programme – is considerable.

A separate impact evaluation of the DCN, based on data from over 100 organisation members and individual Digital Champions showed that:

- individual users felt better equipped to support people's essential digital skills after completing DCN courses
- the most commonly reported improvements were:
    o better understanding about the extent and impact of digital exclusion, and
    o better understanding of the 'soft skills' needed for learner-led approaches.
- users surveyed reported a skills uplift during the time they used the DCN. At least half of them attributed at least 60 percent of this uplift to what they had learned from using the DCN courses and resources
- organisations reported that having the DCN training on offer to their staff and volunteer DCs helped them to recruit people who had time to engage and were motivated to learn
- using DCN resources impacted on the 'maturity' of organisations' approaches to digital inclusion in two main ways:
    o Strategic: focusing organisational attention on the need to integrate essential digital skills support being into their overall digital strategy
    o Operational: providing project managers with relevant guidance and support for planning Digital Champion projects, which they would otherwise have lacked.

The core partners confirmed that they got value from the Digital Champions Network:

> "The DCN resources were amazing [for our delivery partners]. They found it one of the most valuable aspects of the support package we gave them. And Digital Unite were very responsive to feedback about their product. We would not have had that [offer for delivery partners] if we had not been in One Digital." ID=25

> "The Digital Champions Network, that has proved its worth in providing a tangible set of resources for DCs to use. I am not looking forward to when that ceases to be free when One Digital ceases." ID=7

The extent of use and value accorded to the DCN varied according to the types of delivery partner and the profile of people in the Digital Champion role:

> "Getting the DCN was a positive experience for some of our delivery partners, although take-up really varied across the different sorts of partners." ID=15

"For [our delivery partners] it has been really good, to have expert resources all gathered together to point people to. Of course there are varying levels of engagement – some embrace it, others just won't use it. But this is true of all the resources we make available to them, not just DCN." ID=18

"We gave the codes to all the organisations we worked with. We did not have separate pages for individual third sector organisations, so I can't say all organisations engaged, but I could see that some individuals were doing a lot of the learning and using the resources." ID=24

Overall, our findings suggest in terms of influencing practice, Digital Unite's DCN was an important contributor to One Digital's cross-partnership impact.

Discussion and recommendations

In this section we summarise the evidence we found about the effectiveness of the One Digital partnership's knowledge sharing and influencing activities and discuss possible reasons for both successes and challenges. It should be remembered that:

- an absence of evidence does not mean that no progress towards outcomes was made, rather that no sufficiently robust evidence to demonstrate progress was found;
- the logic model and its outcomes were focused on the cross-partnership activities of the Programme Management Office, the Community of Practice and the Digital Champions Network, not on the activities of individual partners or their projects.

6. Successes and challenges for One Digital

6.1 "It's very validating": Core partners sharing learning

Sharing learning internally	
Short term	
Planned outcome	**Evidenced?**
Core partners are better informed about good practice in digital inclusion projects	**Yes** - We found evidence that the One Digital partners shared learning between themselves about the effective delivery of digital inclusion projects, including but not limited to Digital Champion approaches
Medium term	
Core partners deliver more efficient/effective digital inclusion projects	**Yes** - We found evidence that core partners had improved aspects of their planning or delivery as a result of shared cross-partnership learning

Our evaluation showed that, as intended, the core partners did share knowledge, expertise and experience with each other. Partners varied in their levels of sharing, but all made specific contributions to the common pool of knowledge, and all reported benefits, whether in terms of increased expertise within teams, or improvements in planning and/or delivery. For some partners, the One Digital experience has also resulted in a less tangible but highly prized sense of synergy and an appetite for future partnership working.

Partners reported that the most effective learning happened as an integral part of the shared reporting all partners did on a monthly basis, both at project management and strategic level, and also on a spontaneous and ad hoc basis, as and when a knowledge gap or challenge arose.

The Community of Practice, the intended channel for supporting shared learning, was not such a successful enabler of internal knowledge sharing. The partnership as a whole did not manage to reach a common understanding about the aim of the CoP. Was it primarily a service to benefit core partners in their delivery work, or primarily a service to benefit the One Digital partnership's brand and external influence, to which the individual partners contributed resource? This unresolved question dogged the delivery of the CoP activities throughout.

The structured approach of frequent themed learning sets – which were built into the KPIs of the Learning Facilitator – did not suit the pattern of core partners' learning needs. This made it hard for the Learning Facilitator to maintain engagement, while at the same time partners experienced participation as a drain on resources. In addition, for those partners whose business is wholly focused on digital inclusion, the Community of Practice presented conflicts of interest if they were asked to share knowledge or expertise which would normally be part of their offer to clients or customers. Nonetheless, the process of convening partners around specific learning topics did lead to the development of resources for external sharing (see 6.3 below).

Taken in the round, and notwithstanding the challenges of trying to formalise a community of practice, the One Digital partnership demonstrated the net benefits of collaboration and in doing so furthered a collective pool of expertise about tackling digital exclusion.

6.2 "A fragmented world": Influencing policy

Influencing policy	
Short term	
Planned outcome	**Evidenced?**
One Digital is a recognised and respected voice with the UK digital inclusion sector	**In part** • We found evidence that One Digital was recognised for its novel partnership approach to delivery, and for using Digital Champion models • However, it failed to establish a distinct voice at policy level
Medium term	
Digital Champion approaches from One Digital are recognised at UK policy level	**No** • We were unable to find evidence that One Digital had successfully advocated for Digital Champion approaches at UK policy level

In terms of tangible evidenced outcomes, this aspect of the One Digital cross-partnership activity was the least successful. One Digital was recognised for its novel approach to partnership working, and the individual partners were recognised for their pre-existing reputation in the sector, but the partnership itself was not considered to have added any value to the influencing power of core partners on their own.

As many of our informants said, recent years have been a challenging time to influence digital inclusion at UK policy level. Essential digital skills have not been high on the agenda and where it has been a priority it has been through the prism of workplace productivity, and so not easy to align with the social justice/inclusion agenda underpinning One Digital. Neither did One Digital's structure and approach mesh comfortably with the policy implementation mechanisms for digital skills in England, namely the regional Digital Skills Partnerships and adult education organisations. In Scotland, core partner SCVO were already an effective influencer, so separate efforts at the One Digital partnership level would not have been appropriate.

There were also strategic challenges. The diversity of the core partners' agendas – different organisational missions, different business models, different beneficiary groups, different intervention points in the digital inclusion impact chain, and with One Digital being a larger or small element of overall organisational activity – made it hard to agree what the key policy message was. As one of our informants said:

> "I never really saw a narrative that linked all of One Digital together, that really explained how the objectives of individual partners contributed to the collective objectives of the partnership" ID=18

As a result, One Digital did not develop a sufficiently clear narrative about itself to communicate to the outside world. The focus on promoting the effectiveness of Digital Champion models was one obvious point of coherence – and our research confirms One Digital was strongly associated with the Digital Champions concept – but this was less impactful than anticipated, perhaps because the concept was already mainstreaming within digital inclusion circles, making it harder to manufacture a sharp and innovative policy message around it. The lack of an agreed clear external influencing agenda had the effect of re-focusing strategic efforts back towards internal programme delivery:

> "The programme quickly shifted to being about delivering the Lottery funding…. this was a difficult dynamic for the Director to manage. They were brought in to develop a longer-term programme of activity – but actually ended up managing a short-term programme." ID=16

Some of our external informants felt that One Digital should have been more creative in looking for 'the next big issue' in digital inclusion – for example the rapid expansion in the Internet of Things and its implications for the inclusion agenda – and used such an issue to carve out a more distinctive niche for itself. Others told us that One Digital could have focused more effort towards influencing corporates in the digital inclusion world – key players anyway, and more so when the UK agenda is focused on workplace productivity.

It was also clear that the partnership did not manage to define its intended audiences with enough precision. This was recognised to be a general challenge for digital inclusion, not just for One Digital:

> "The audiences were not really defined clearly but I actually think that is an existential problem for digital inclusion generally. About once a year we get together as an organisation and try and identify and analyse our audience, but we never really manage to do it." ID=15

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the fragmentation and diffuseness of the stakeholders One Digital wanted to influence, a series of short, targeted campaigns could have been considered, which cohered around either a particular topic – for example Internet of Things – or a particular context, for example housing or health. A segmented stakeholder analysis exercise could then have identified who the partnership was trying to influence, and to what end, and messaging developed accordingly.

6.3 "The collective value-added": Influencing practice

Influencing practice	
Short term	
Planned outcome	**Evidenced?**
External organisations are better informed about good practice in Digital Champion approaches	**Yes** • We found evidence of knowledge dissemination about Digital Champion approaches, principally through One Digital's public events and facilitated access to the Digital Champions Network • We also found some evidence of the Community of Practice reaching organisations who were not previously engaged with digital inclusion
External organisations' Digital Champions are more confident in	**Yes** • We found evidence of Digital Champions increasing their

their role	confidence through use of the Digital Champions Network facilitated by the partnership
Medium term	
External organisations are better able to use DC approaches to support beneficiaries	**Yes** • We found evidence of organisations using DC approaches • We found evidence that the Digital Champions Network contributed to increased organisational capability in supporting essential digital skills, as well as a skills uplift for individual Digital Champions • We found evidence of the Community of Practice reaching organisations not previously engaged with digital inclusion

The influencing of digital skills support at the level of practice was the third strand of activity through which One Digital sought to have an impact, and it had success in this area. We found evidence that external organisations:
• increased their knowledge and awareness about digital inclusion as a salient issue, and
• gained a better understanding of the potential of Digital Champion models as a way to address it.

The practical, task-focused learning and support resources provided by Digital Unite's Digital Champions Network were an important contributor to One Digital's effectiveness in this area. DCN resources were accessed by significant numbers of organisations and individuals, and because their use was trackable we were able to gather evidence of positive impacts on confidence, understanding and skills at both organisational and individual level.

In addition, both our interviewees and the feedback data collected by the Community of Practice showed that One Digital, in particular through the networking efforts of the Learning Facilitator and through the CoP public events, had to some degree managed to disseminate knowledge about digital inclusion practice beyond 'the usual suspects' in the digital inclusion world, for example to voluntary and community groups working on behalf of disadvantaged groups.

There were areas for improvement:
• It was not clear how the topics for the external learning events and the knowledge hub were identified; an initial learning needs analysis – to see what the audiences wanted – and a competitor analysis – to see what if anything was already available – would have been beneficial
• the One Digital website and learning resources did not achieve any widespread reach, hampered by poor discoverability on an interface which our interviewees felt was not engaging
• the potential for overlap in subject matter and target audiences between the One Digital knowledge hub and Digital Unite's Digital Champions Network was not fully resolved and so the two services risked cannibalising rather than amplifying each other's audiences
• a more participatory approach may have been warranted – to create a knowledge exchange with external audiences.

7. Recommendations

The One Digital partnership 2017-20 had an ambitious set of aims around influencing and sharing knowledge to improve the support of essential digital skills in the community. The following recommendations, based on the learning from this evaluation, could inform any future initiatives in these areas:

Partnerships for influencing

1. Identify an issue that is easily explained, which no one else is dealing with, and for which policy levers can be accessed
2. Decide on the essential aims of the influencing effort, and thereby the essential message for which the partnership will advocate; recognise that this may influence the make-up of the partnership
3. Agree who the key targets for influencing activity are, and why
4. Map partners' existing areas of influence, and identify whether and how this individual influence can contribute to the partnership advocacy effort
5. Be open about any potential conflicts of interest and establish mitigating actions.

Partnerships for sharing learning internally

6. Recognise that much information sharing takes place within the natural flow of day-to-day collaboration on shared activities or outcomes; communities of practice are born not made, and rely on high levels of mutual trust
7. Establish terms of reference that define what partners expect to get out of any explicit sharing process and what resources they will commit to putting in
8. If separate shared learning activities are set up – for example learning sets, journal clubs – ensure their priorities are collectively determined by the group and the inputs required to run them are equally shared.

Partnerships for disseminating learning externally

1. Be open about any potential conflicts of interest around brands or ownership of intellectual or tangible assets; establish ways of sharing benefits in proportion to inputs
2. Conduct an audience analysis to define, segment and quantify the potential market for the resources; understand who needs these resources and why
3. Research the learning needs of different segments of the defined audience to identify priority topics and preferred delivery formats e.g. web resources, webinars, online community platforms and so on
4. Analyse the outputs of competitors or other key stakeholders in the space; identify gaps in the current provision of information to avoid duplication
5. Produce a variety of resource types appropriate for audiences with different levels of expertise and different levels of commitment; conduct user testing and adjust accordingly
6. Focus on uniqueness, quality, salience and ease of use for all resources; discoverability is also essential for effective dissemination
7. Wherever feasible, gather data about users, so that outcomes and impacts can be assessed.

Appendix 1: Pen portraits of partners' projects

Age UK

Age UK is the UK's largest charity working with older people. We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to make the most of later life, whatever their circumstances.

Age UK has over seven million interactions with older people every year. Through One Digital, we're embedding Digital Champions into our frontline health and wellbeing services and providing ongoing support for older people to increase their digital skills. Through our volunteers, older people themselves and members of our partner organisations, from banks and supermarkets to rambling clubs, we can reach older people in their local communities to inspire, engage and support them to develop digital skills.

We don't teach digital skills in isolation – we give older people the skills they need to manage their own wellbeing and show them how digital skills can improve their lives and their experience of their community. We put the older person at the heart of every interaction and ensure that our support is tailored around their needs and wishes.

We use our national reach to identify areas with high digital exclusion, and our local knowledge to support those most in need. In this current phase of the partnership, we are working with multiple partners across specific regions to transform digital skills delivery for older people in the areas that need it most.

https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/programmes/one-digital/

Citizens Online

Citizens Online is a UK charity committed to researching, addressing and promoting the issues of digital inclusion. In collaboration with a wide range of partners, Citizens Online has been specialising in digital inclusion, skills and service transformation since 2000.

We help organisations ensure the switch to online doesn't exclude people. We're passionate about digital inclusion. Our approach is based on detailed evidence and strong, local partnerships. We help organisations understand the issue of digital exclusion more deeply and help with strategy and implementation plans. We can also support delivery.

Our flagship digital inclusion offer, called Switch, is based on our years of delivery experience and research, and helps organisations increase uptake of their digital service transformation. We know that there are pockets of digital exclusion everywhere, the problem is systemic and no single organisation can address it alone. Switch is a tried and tested sustainable solution, helping you improve digital access and skills across your community by:

- Pinpointing where digitally excluded people live in your area, using detailed data and mapping tools
- Analysing your local digital inclusion resources and assets and finding out where the gaps in provision are
- Assessing your organisation's capability to deliver a digitally inclusive service and the ability of stakeholders in an area to work together to tackle digital exclusion.
- Bringing together a local, cross sector digital inclusion network with a joint action plan.
- Supporting you to implement a digital champions programme, including free access to the Digital Champions Network

We know that organisations are at very different stages of digital transformation, so we've made Switch flexible. There are many elements that can be tailored to your needs in a bespoke digital inclusion package. Switch is currently match funded by the Big Lottery Fund up to 50%, significantly reducing the costs of a project to your organisation.

We work with our One Digital partner, Digital Unite, to support people to become Digital Champions. Their Digital Champions Network is an interactive destination that provides learning, tools and a friendly community to help people to become great Digital Champions. Through the Network's training and support Digital Champions build their knowledge and confidence so they can go on to empower others with the digital skills they need.

https://www.citizensonline.org.uk/switch/

Clarion Futures (part of Clarion Housing Group)

Clarion Futures is the Charitable Foundation arm of Clarion Housing Group, who are proudly supporting more than 350,000 Clarion residents and their communities, via our jobs & training, money & digital and communities work.

We are a programme partner of One Digital Clarion Futures who recognise the potential of using Digital Champions to support the Essential Digital Skill (EDS) needs of people within employment and training settings:

- Jobs and training opportunities are largely advertised and sourced via digital platforms; the setting is therefore ideal for identifying, supporting and enhancing the digital skill needs of individuals.
- There remain opportunities to further explore and understand the link between digital exclusion and employment. According to the Governments Industrial Strategy (2018) the next two decades will see 90% of jobs requiring digital proficiency and yet 23% of people are still without essential digital skills.
- This setting also provides opportunities to further explore and understand the effectiveness of the Digital Champion Model of support as both an inclusive and cost effective approach for tackling digital exclusion.

In addition to testing this approach to digital inclusion within select Clarion Jobs and Training delivery sites we have provided £20,000 in seed-funding, enabling and supporting 15 other organisations across the UK to replicate this model of digital inclusion work and through close partnership working capture vital learning on the way.

Organisations testing this model include Charlton Triangle Housing, Hexagon Housing, Enable Works Scotland, Action West London, Polar Harca, First Choice Homes Oldham, ComMutual, Barnet Homes, Phoenix Community Housing, Westminster Council, YES Manchester, Bromley by Bow Centre, Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing and A2 Dominion.

Clarion Futures are committed to better understanding the journey of those we are supporting. We are working closely with organisations in order to test and refine an essential digital skills screening and support tool which can be embedded within employment programmes; maximising the potential for organisations to identify, and respond accordingly, to the digital skills needs of the individuals that they are supporting.

http://www.clarionhg.com/charitable-foundation/clarion-futures-money-and-digital/

Digital Unite

Established in 1996, Digital Unite is one of the UK's leading providers of digital skills learning. We are the only organisation that focuses exclusively on vocational training and support for Digital Champions and, with 5.3 million visits a year, digitalunite.com is one of the top rated destinations by Google for digital skills support.

Our Digital Champions Network is an innovative and pioneering learning solution that supports organisations (public, charitable/third or private sector) to realise digitally enabled service transformation through peer learning models. It currently has over 150 member organisations and supports thousands of Digital Champions nationwide with helping others with digital skills.

About our Digital Champions Network (DCN)
"The membership of the Network 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."

The DCN is an open source platform that trains, supports and resources Digital Champions (DCs) to cascade learning within their organisations and to service users. It offers a wide range of self-study online courses to develop a Digital Champion's skillset and meet different learner needs. All of the courses are linked to the national Open Badges schemes to evidence personal and professional development and the foundation training is CPD accredited.

There are over 500 ready-to-use training and teaching resources, an online peer community and a web app enabling Champions to access the Network when they're out and about. It also comes complete with robust and comprehensive programme management tools that allow organisations to monitor, report on, support and evaluate their own DCs directly.

As part of One Digital we are delighted to be able to offer individuals and organisations significantly discounted membership of the Digital Champions Network.

www.digitalunite.com

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) is the membership organisation for Scotland's charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises. Over the past three years SCVO has been leading a national effort to tackle inequality by equipping individuals with basic digital skills.

The people who are most likely to lack basic digital skills are often excluded from other aspects of society. They are more likely to be living in social housing, from lower socio-economic groups and to be older.

The third sector is already likely to be supporting these groups with other aspects of their lives and can use the trusted relationships they already have with people as a springboard to passing on basic digital skills. By developing Digital Champions in charities, community organisations and social enterprises we can help to increase levels of digital participation in Scotland.

- Digital Champions Training

Free local training to create 800 Digital Champions within 100 third sector organisations who will support up to 16,000 clients to get the most out of being online.

- One Digital: Senior Leaders Programme

We want to create a digitally confident third sector. To help achieve this, we facilitate learning opportunities for over third sector senior-level decision makers to help them evolve their organisations and become more digitally confident.

- Digital Check-up

We have developed an intuitive web tool to enable small to medium sized third sector organisations to assess their current digital maturity and take steps for change.

- Events & Networking

A range of flexible follow-on sessions to support existing programme participants in their digital learning and to encourage new network members to get involved.

https://digital.scvo.org.uk

Appendix 2: Outcomes and Indicators Framework

Outcomes Taken from Logic Model	Indicators	Data collection	
		Monitoring data	Evaluation instruments
Short-term outcomes			
Core partners are better informed about good practice in DI projects	Increased knowledge and expertise about DI project delivery amongst partners	Strategic lead reports Project lead reports	• Observation of CoP events • Retrospective interviews with OD partners (PMs and SLs)
One Digital is a recognised & respected voice within UK DI sector	Stakeholder perceptions of: • Awareness of OD name, mission • Perceived differentiators • Perceived authority, relevance, effectiveness	Strategic lead reports Project lead reports Web & social media analytics	• Interviews with stakeholders (before & after) • End-point survey of external stakeholders (OD mailing list) • Bibliometric review
External organisations are better informed about good practice in DC approaches	• Levels of attendance at OD events • Range of attendees at OD events • Organisations report increased awareness of good practice in DC projects	Strategic lead reports Project lead reports OD Event feedback	• Interviews with stakeholders (before & after) • End-point survey of external stakeholders (OD mailing list)
External organisations' DCs are more confident in their role	DCs report: increased confidence, knowledge and skills	DCN Org baseline & follow up DCN DC baseline survey and f/up	• Data from org interviews from DU evaluation • Data from DC interviews from DU evaluation
Medium term outcomes			
Core partners run more efficient/effective DI projects	Changes in approach to delivery of DI projects	Strategic lead reports Project lead reports	• Observation of CoP events • Retrospective interviews with OD partners (PMs and SLs)
DC approaches from One Digital are recognised at UK policy level	References to OD in DI/skills policy-related media		• Interviews with stakeholders (before & after) • Bibliometric review
External organisations are better able to use DC approaches to support beneficiaries	Stakeholder perceptions of: • Intention to change their DC projects • Actual change to their DC projects • Increased capability to support DCs to be effective	Strategic lead reports Project lead reports OD Event feedback	• Interviews with stakeholders (before & after) • End point survey of external stakeholders • Bibliometric review
		DCN Org baseline & follow up DCN DC baseline survey and f/up	• Data from org interviews from DU evaluation • Data from DC interviews from DU evaluation

Appendix 3: Key messages and target audiences

Key messages

To inform its influencing and advocacy on digital inclusion, the One Digital programme team and core partners agreed a set of key programme messages, as follows: [24]

- One Digital works in partnership to make sure more people can benefit from being online, particularly those who are excluded from the digital space.
- We do this through our network of Digital Champions who give personalised ongoing support to help people in their communities learn new digital skills.
- We are experts in delivering quality digital inclusion projects with Digital Champions and in sharing best practice. By working collaboratively, we can have an even bigger impact.
- We have used our expertise and experience to develop flexible and expert Digital Champions models that can be used by different organisations and communities to develop their digital inclusion activities.
- We are funded by the National Lottery Community Fund until 2020 to deliver digital skills training through our Digital Champions and share what we learn.
- The information and resources we develop are helping build effective community-based digital skills projects all across the UK.
- Our approach isn't just changing the way we think about digital inclusion. It's changing people's lives – helping them learn essential skills in a cost-effective way and allowing more people to participate fully in our increasingly online world.

Target audience analysis

As part of its communications planning the One Digital programme team and core partners developed the following target audience analysis:[25]

Organisations that could benefit from One Digital resources	Funders and influencers
Local authorities	Westminster Government departments e.g. DWP, DfE, DCMS,
Charities across sectors including health, physical disabilities, learning disabilities, homelessness, mental health, older people, disadvantaged younger people etc.	Scottish government
Job centres	Welsh government
Current 'secondary partners' e.g. those delivering One Digital Partner projects
Citizens Advice, local Age UK's, libraries	Funders
e.g. National Lottery Community Fund, Carnegie UK
Telecoms companies	Private sector companies e.g. BT, Lloyds Banking Group
Housing associations	Thought leaders
Training providers/community colleges	NHS England, NHS Digital, NHS Scotland, NHS Wales

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[24] One Digital Communications plan 2019
[25] One Digital Communications plan 2019

Appendix 4: Bibliometric search results

Date range	1 jan 2019 to 1 May 2020			
Search term	"One Digital'			
Source	**Reference**	**Relevant quote**	**Pub. Date**	**URL**
Basic Digital Skills Entitlement Framework	Listed in Annex of organisations consulted	N/A		https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/796173/Improving_adult_basic_digital_skills_-_government_consultation_response.pdf
Charity Digital Code of Practice	None found			
Charity Digital News	Council brings in charity to tackle digital exclusion	Article about Surrey CC Switch project with COL; one sentence on OD: "Switch is part of the One Digital progamme developed with organisations including Age Concern and Clarion Futures"	22-Mar-19	https://charitydigital.org.uk/topics/council-brings-in-charity-to-tackle-digital-exclusion-5660
DCMS Digital Skills Partnership Newsletter	None found			
Digital Skills Working Group from DCMS	None found			
Gov Tech Leaders	Epping Forest District Council drives digital inclusion	Article on COL work with Epping Council; One sentence on OD: "The vision is to embed Digital Champions within many organisations throughout the district to help people with digital skills. Switch is funded by Epping Forest District Council and The National Lottery Community Fund as part of the One Digital programme.	28-May-19	https://www.govtechleaders.com/2019/05/28/epping-forest-district-council-drives-digital-inclusion/
Guardian Society	None found			
Lloyds Consumer Digital Index 2019	None found			
Lloyds Consumer Digital Index website	None found			
NHS Digital Inclusion Guide	Who we can work with (p.42)	Age UK has a leading role in the One Digital partnership, working to embed digital champions in local Age UK activities with pilots in Leeds, the Lake District, Lancashire and Hereford and Worcestershire.		https://digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/our-work/digital-inclusion
	Specialist digital inclusion partners (p.47)	One Digital partnership (funded by the Big Lottery) includes Age UK, Citizens Online, Clarion Futures (part of Clarion Housing Group), Digital Unite and SCVO. They are developing a collaborative approach to training and supporting digital champions so they can help people to learn digital skills. The One Digital Knowledge Hub shares different approaches to training and supporting Digital Champions.		
Ofcom: Making sense of Media	One item on the 'latest research' listing	Three lines with link to OD/SDA case study report in Making Sense of Media Network bulletin	Dec-19	https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0030/183828/Making-Sense-of-Media-bulletin-Dec-2019.pdf
	OD community of practice reports	One Digital Community of Practice Year One Learning reports The One Digital partnership has produced a series of reports detailing the learning arising from the first year of the One Digital Community of Practice.	Feb-19	
	Citizens Online Switch but no mention of OD		Jul-19	
	Citizens Online Switch but no mention of OD		Oct-18	
	OD community of practice event	One Digital Community of Practice. The One Digital Community of Practice is holding a free 'Demonstrating the impact of digital	Oct-18	
Third sector	One Digital launches Community of Practice to boost digital inclusion	Article on the set up of CoP	02-Mar-18	https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/one-digital-launches-community-practice-boost-digital-inclusion/digital/article/1458452
UK Authority	None found			
Wired Gov	The One Digital Community of Practice continues to improve digital inclusion for socially disadvantaged groups	Report on 'Making Digital accessible for everyone' event	Apr-19	https://www.wired-gov.net/wg/news.nsf/articles/The+One+Digital+Community+of+Practice+continues+to+improve+digital+inclusion+for+socially+disadvantaged+groups+23042019120500?open
	How can mobilising help energise your volunteers	Article about Age UK using mobiles to encourage volunteering. One ref to OD but not the partnership: "The charity's One Digital programme teaches older people to learn how to use their mobile phones, tablets, and computers. Digital Champions are trained to reach out to older people and explain how digital technology can be helpful, reducing digital exclusion."	20-Jan-20	https://charitydigital.org.uk/topics/how-can-mobilising-help-energise-your-volunteers-6726
Key				
	One Digital programme mention			
	One Digital core partner project mention			