# Citizens Online

OneDigital

Citizens Online Project Evaluation Report

Phase 2: June 2017 to May 2020

COMMUNITY FUND

Introduction

This evaluation covers Citizens Online's delivery of One Digital Phase 2 between June 2017 and May 2020. It seeks to assess whether the targets and intended outcomes were achieved, and what the impacts were of different elements of our work, across a range of projects delivered in different locations across England and Wales: Carrying forward the principles of One Digital Phase 1, we sought to assess the Effectiveness, Scalability & Sustainability of Digital Champion (DC) approaches within:

1. Digital Brighton & Hove and Digital Gwynedd (referred to as 'Deep Dive' projects)
2. Switch projects (shorter term projects in an intended 20 locations)
3. The Switch 'whole system' model for tackling digital exclusion:
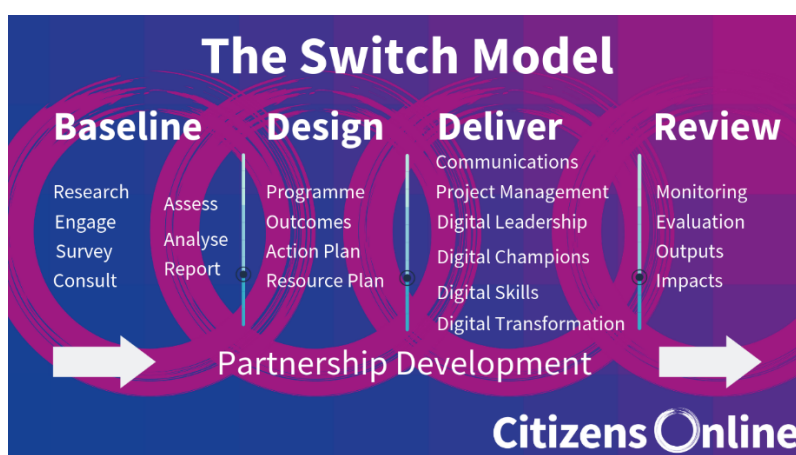
In supporting further insights, we also join up and draw on findings and statistics from Phase 1 and Extension Phase of One Digital (September 2015 to May 2017), where we had previously operated four 'Deep Dive projects, including Brighton & Hove and Gwynedd, that carried on into Phase 2.

This Summary Report contains the key findings and Key Performance Indicator (KPI) summary for our programme of work. The more detailed insights about different projects and elements of the evaluation are contained in the appendices, listed at the end of this summary. An evaluation of Digital Champion approaches within the Switch model was undertaken by an independent external evaluator (Appendix 1). The remainder of the evaluation was self-assessed by Citizens Online (Appendices 2-10)

Key Findings

DIGITAL CHAMPIONS

"Digital Champion approaches work"

The Switch approach to Digital Champions works: the Brighton and Hove and Gwynedd Deep Dive projects, where this approach has been most extensively deployed as part of the One Digital programme, have been able to deliver large volumes of interventions efficiently, by tapping into local resources and networks. Through recruiting a wide cross-section of organisations, the projects have been able to reach a diverse range people in these areas in need of digital skills and support.

"Digital Champions helped 10 people a week on average and as many as 24 in a single day"

Our Digital Champion Activity Snapshot showed that champions were reaching a significant number of people each week. Ten learners supported is the average across all types of DC (Professional, Embedded and Volunteer). Professional employed Digital Champions record more help sessions than anyone else (as we'd expect)

"Developing Embedded Digital Champions (EDCs) must be a priority for any future project"

On average, Embedded Digital Champions (EDCs) help three times as many people as Volunteer Digital Champions. Being embedded within a local organisation places those champions in an ideal position to deliver digital support at a relevant time in a relevant situation. The support of the host organisation also makes the activity sustainable beyond the end of any specific project and allows for development of wider partner networks. Developing EDCs must be a priority for any future project; they offer a very effective and potentially more sustainable means of achieving digital inclusion.

"The title 'Digital Champion' may be a disincentive to engaging with digital inclusion work"

The title 'Digital Champion' and classification of champions should be reviewed in order to find titles that people providing digital skills assistance associate themselves with more closely, and help project managers understand how, when and where they deliver inclusion support. Interviews emphasised how the role had become an integral part of what frontline personnel do and describing it as a separate role was potentially confusing.

"Professional Digital Champions are more likely to help learners who live in more deprived areas"

Employed Digital Champions were generally more able to run targeted sessions and to be more consistent and frequent in recording their activity. Their role is a fully focused, trained and supported one, and as a training resource our professional Digital Champions were deployable where they were most needed – a crucial part of having flexible support that can real those most digitally excluded (often correlating to those people living in the most deprived areas).

"52% of all Digital Champion help sessions included Foundation Digital Skills"[1]

The majority of support offered through our programme included Foundation level digital skills such as learning how to switch on a device, connect to the internet and search for information online.

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/essential-digital-skills-framework

BASELINE EVALUATION

"Creating an evidence base for digital change can be valuable and sometimes essential to the success of a digital inclusion network"

For the small number of organisations that directly benefit from the research and evidence-based approach to tackling digital skills, a baseline evaluation was highly valued and in some cases was a key factor in leveraging strategic support and funding to enable digital inclusion work to go ahead. Direct beneficiaries were in most cases the 'lead local client' or commissioning partner. It formed the business case for change and investment in digital inclusion programmes and was adopted and linked to corporate strategies for local authorities and housing associations.

"Creating an evidence base and a Digital Inclusion Evaluation Report is not always a cost-effective approach to tackling digital exclusion"

There is no avoiding it: research takes time and costs money. Delivering surveys and interviewing key partners, undertaking literature reviews, meeting with network members, analysing data and creating digital exclusion heat maps is a resource heavy approach and accounted for a significant amount of our time and energy in the shorter-term Switch projects. In some cases, this work was not valued by local partnerships because reports were not read, adopted in strategy and policy or acted on.

"Bespoke signposting websites for digital access and skills are not an essential part of a system of digital inclusion"

Projects should seek alternatives to a signposting website[2] that are lower cost and effort but still allow onward referral to formal training for the minority of learners that seek it. A

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[2] [Brighton & Hove](#) and Gwynedd both had resource and signposting websites in place for One Digital Phase 2

simple printed contact sheet shared with partners would meet a large part of the need. It was also noted that if partners were encouraged to add appropriate metadata tags to their online content then other search engines could probably provide a more cost effective and improved service than our bespoke websites.

"SWITCH" PROJECTS

"Success relies on a local 'super champion' and project sponsor with time and energy to deliver on digital inclusion"

Citizens Online could effectively provide the start-up materials and information to begin a collaborative approach to digital inclusion – however the Switch projects that we consider more successful, all had a common factor – a local project coordinator. This person did not need to be employed by Citizens Online (as was the case in our Deep Dive projects), but they did need to have skills and capacity to be able to manage the message locally and be a continual influencing factor on the success of a project – encouraging others and nudging organisations and Digital Champions into action. Our Switch projects were managed at arm's length, with resources and information being supplied from our central team. Without a local 'linchpin', it some cases was hard for the results of a baseline evaluation to get traction; it was a significant challenging to encourage local organisations and individuals so sign up to the Digital Champions Network and it was more difficult to support a local partnership network to collaborate on tackling issues.

"Shorter-term 'start-up' projects aren't as effective as longer term 'deep dive' projects"

We delivered shorter term "Switch" projects in multiple locations around England. From One Digital Phase 1 'Digital Resilience' learnings, we knew that we were advocating a minimum three-year investment in a digital inclusion programme of work and encouraging local organisations (usually the local authority) to invest in a project team. Digital inclusion takes time and resource. With shorter interventions that behaved more like 'start up' projects, we had hoped and expected that a proportion of the Switch projects would transform into 'Deep Dive' projects that Citizens Online might be involved

in the delivery of – in reality, none of them did. We learnt that on their own these short term interventions were not enough leverage longer term work, although in four areas (Dorset, Epping Forest, Whitehill & Bordon, and Town & Country Housing in Kent, our work did influence and support the local partner to recruit a local project manager or digital inclusion service which continued and outlasted our 'Switch' intervention. We consider these to be successes, however they didn't bring through performance indicator outputs to our own One Digital efforts.

THE DEEP DIVE PROJECTS

"If you want your digital inclusion project to have an impact, invest for success – long term resourced projects work"

They were more expensive and took longer to deliver but the results speak for themselves. There is no substitute for a fully funded local project team working on digital inclusion and skills every day and encouraging organisations to collaborate and work together to tackle exclusion. Our Deep Dive projects in Brighton & Hove and Gwynedd are both excellent examples of a fully functioning digital inclusion 'ecosystem' at work – the statistical and anecdotal case studies and results showcase the best of what can be achieved when digital inclusion work is well resourced. Details on Phase 2 Deep Dive projects are fully explained in Appendices 5 and 6.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI)

As part of our contribution to the One Digital Programme, Citizens Online operated two "Deep Dive" projects – Digital Brighton and Hove (DBH), and Digital Gwynedd (DG) – and delivered local projects in in new locations across the UK (planning for 20 new projects). We worked towards three Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

These KPIs[3] were:

1. **Recruit** a total of 925 Digital Champions
2. **Support** at least 8,500 individuals (Unique End Learners (UELs) / Learners)
3. **Engage** a total number of 1,250 organisations in digital inclusion activity

We met the Digital Champions target, and substantially exceeded our target for the number of people supported – despite engaging only around half the number of organisations we expected to (figures 1 and 2). The lower number of Organisations Engaged relates to difficulties with contracting new Switch projects, and ambitious expectations of our ability to engage organisations without employing staff in these areas as was the case in our Deep Dive projects.

We imagined that engaging organisations was the first step of the process toward recruiting sufficient Digital Champions, and thereby helping End Learners. Hence, while we are disappointed not to meet the Organisations Engaged KPI[4], we are pleased to learn that our other targets could be met through a smaller network of organisations. From this finding we can adjust our expectations and targets for future work. It is worth emphasising that we know that not all Digital Champions record the help they provide on the Digital Champions Network (DCN), and not every person helped is recorded by those that do use the DCN (see our Activity Snapshots evaluation in Appendix 4). In short, the Unique End Learners helped output is an underestimate.

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[3] Targets for Phase 2 included the cumulative outputs from Phase 1 Digital Gwynedd and Digital Brighton & Hove projects.

[4] We believe the total number may be higher than we have reported here, but Covid-19 has restricted the time we have had available to delve into our engagements with organisations to ascertain any that have been missed from recording. Some Digital Champion training that did not lead to DCN registrations may not have been recorded, though we have included DCs trained in this way for both the DBH and DG projects.

Figure 1: Target, Actual, and Proportion of Target met – KPIs (One Digital Phase 2)

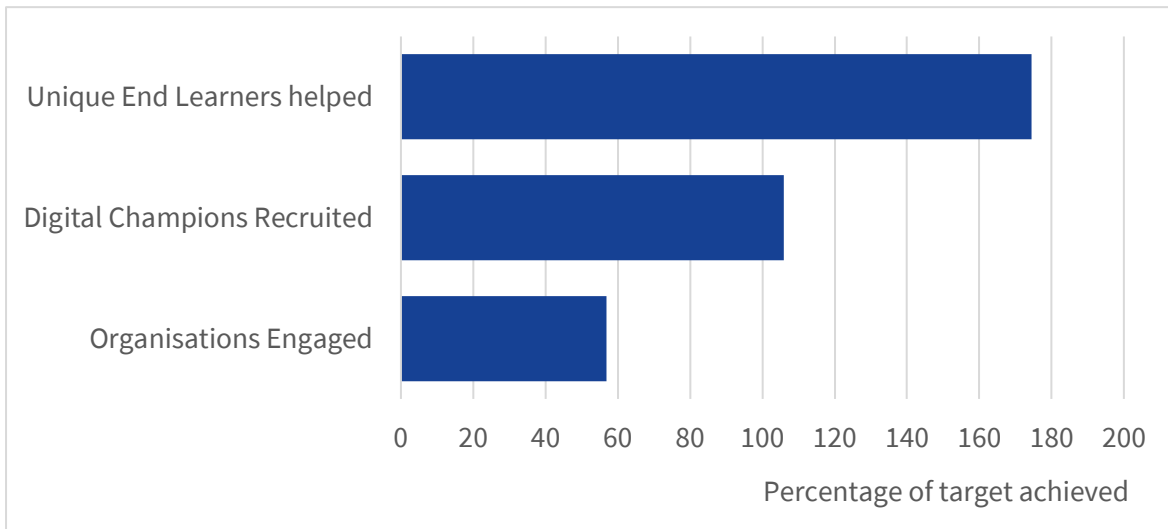| Metric	Target	Achieved	Percentage of target met
Digital Champions recruited	925	979	105.8
Unique end learners helped	8,500	14,826	174.4
Organisations engaged	1,250	711	56.9

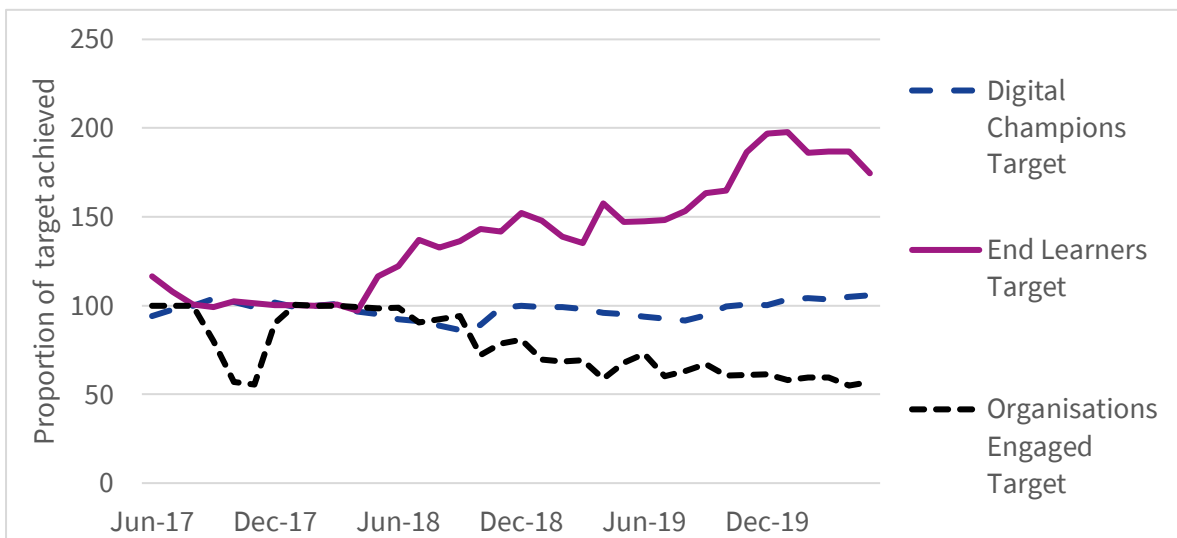Figure 2: Actual numbers Vs Target: KPIs

Figure 3: Percentage Monthly Progress Target Reached

ORGANISATIONS ENGAGED

Figure 5 and 6 break down the 711 Organisations Engaged during the course of the OD programme by project and Phase/Year. The share of organisations is largely split between the DBH project (310, 42.6%) and the Switch projects (327, 46.3%). Individually, the Switch projects themselves are more similar to the DG project – with Epping Forest (65, 9.2%) coming close to the number achieved in DG (70, 9.9%).

Figure 4: Organisation Engaged by project and phase/year (bar chart)
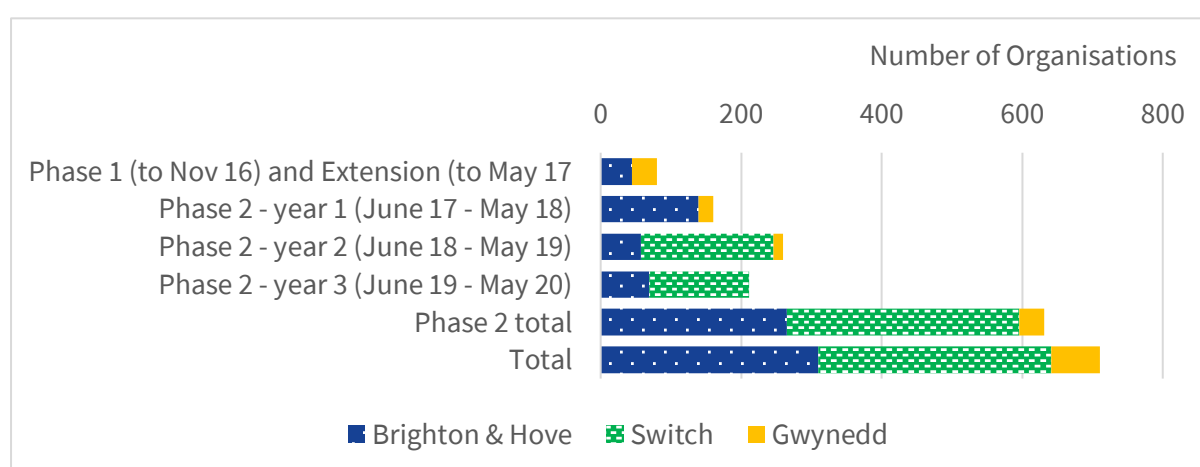

Figure 5: Organisations Engaged by project, phase/year (table)

Orgs Engaged	Brighton & Hove	Gwynedd	Switch	Grand Total	%
Phase 1 (to November 16) and Extension (to May 17	45	35	0	80	11.3
Phase 2 - year 1 (June 17 - May 18)	139	21	0	160	22.5
Phase 2 - year 2 (June 18 - May 19)	57	14	189	260	36.6
Phase 2 - year 3 (June 19 - May 20)	69	0	142	211	29.7
Phase 2 total	**265**	**35**	**331**	**631**	**88.7**
Total	**310**	**70**	**331**	**711**	
%	**43.6**	**9.8**	**46.6**		

Figure 6 shows that progress toward meeting our Organisations Engaged target stalled towards the end of August 2018 – as monthly targets associated with our plan for contracting Switch projects ramped up but sign up and delivery of them continued to be

slow. Our actual numbers show that organisations were engaged at a fairly consistent rate, but we underestimated the time involved in signing up projects and overestimated the extent to which we would be able to engage organisations in new areas.

Figure 6: Cumulative Organisations engaged by month: target Vs actual, Phase 2
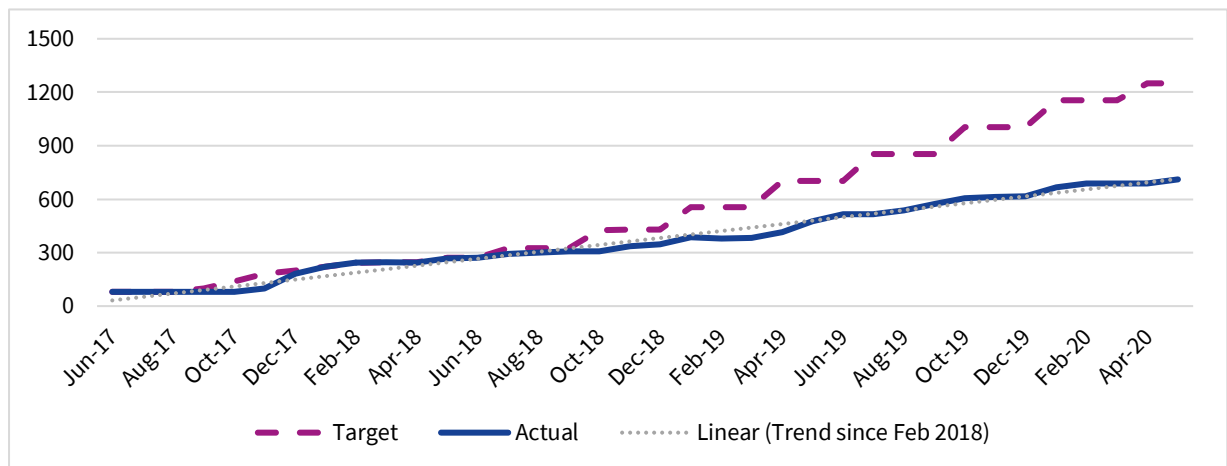

Figure 7 shows the breakdown of Organisations Engaged by Switch project. Each project engaged at least 20 organisations, with larger and more successful projects engaging twice or even three times as many organisations. While levels of engagement by Organisations varied, we hope that digital skills and inclusion work will continue in these areas, on a more informed basis than would have been the case previously.

Figure 7: Organisations Engaged by Switch project and year
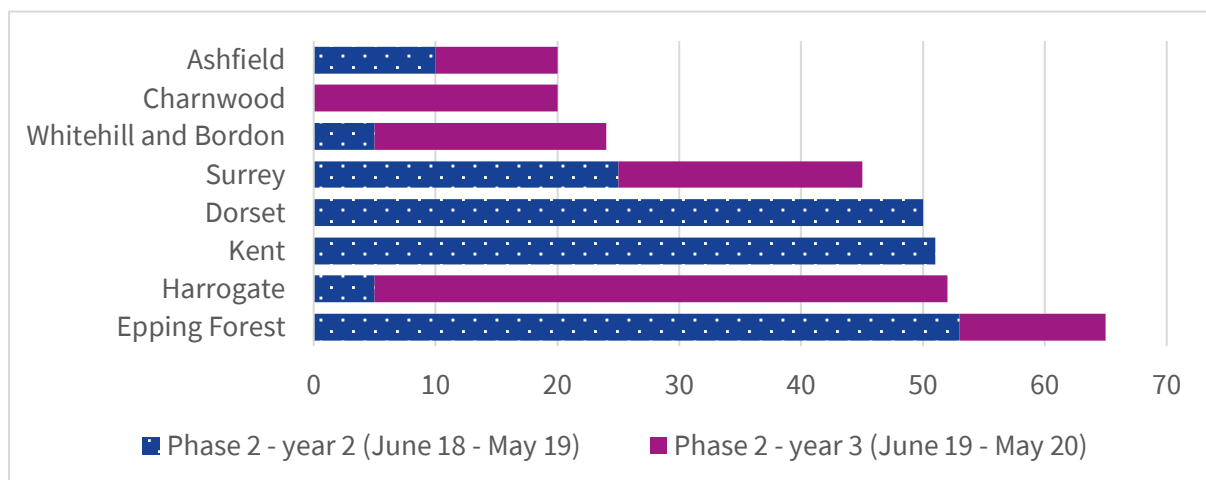
DIGITAL CHAMPIONS

In total, we recruited over 1,000 DCs during the course of the One Digital programme (1,152). Of these, 675 were recruited in Phase 2 (the 976 that exceeds the target includes 301 DCs recruited in the DBH and DG projects in Phase 1 and Extension Phase, included in the targets for Phase 2). Recruitment largely met our expectations – with fluctuations due to differing levels of project activity and seasonal variations in the Deep Dive projects (as shown in figure 8). Together the Deep Dive projects accounted for over two-thirds of DCs (800, 69.4%). In both cases, the highest numbers of DCs were recruited in the first year – with diminishing returns in the years afterwards, as expected.

Figure 8: Cumulative Digital Champions recruited by month: target Vs actual, Phase 2
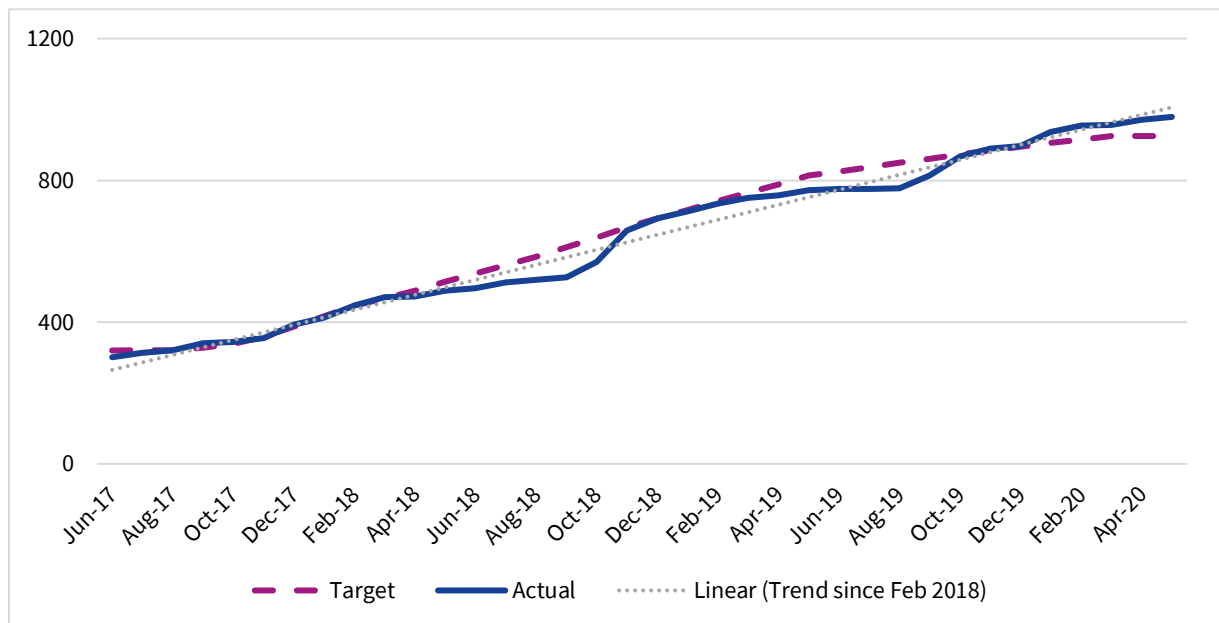
The 176 DCS recruited in Switch projects amounts to just 15.3% of the total recruited during the project, but 35.7% of those recruited during the relevant time period (the last 2 years of Phase 2). Nearly half of these (47.7%) are associated with one project: Epping Forest (figure 9). We attribute this to the presence of an effective local coordinator. No DCs have yet been recruited for the Ashfield and Charnwood projects, but these projects are both ongoing. In Dorset, and to a lesser extent in some other project areas, existing DC programmes were running which in part explains a lower level of recruitment than we might expect (this then has a knock-on effect on reporting of activity within our systems

and the numbers of UELs covered below. In Dorset for example, we excluded the 50+ Digital Champions that Dorset Council had registered as volunteers on their own management system, but were not signed up to the Digital Champions Network.

Figure 9: DCs recruited by Switch project and year

**Phase 2 - year 2 (June 18 - May 19)** **Phase 2 - year 3 (June 19 - May 20)**
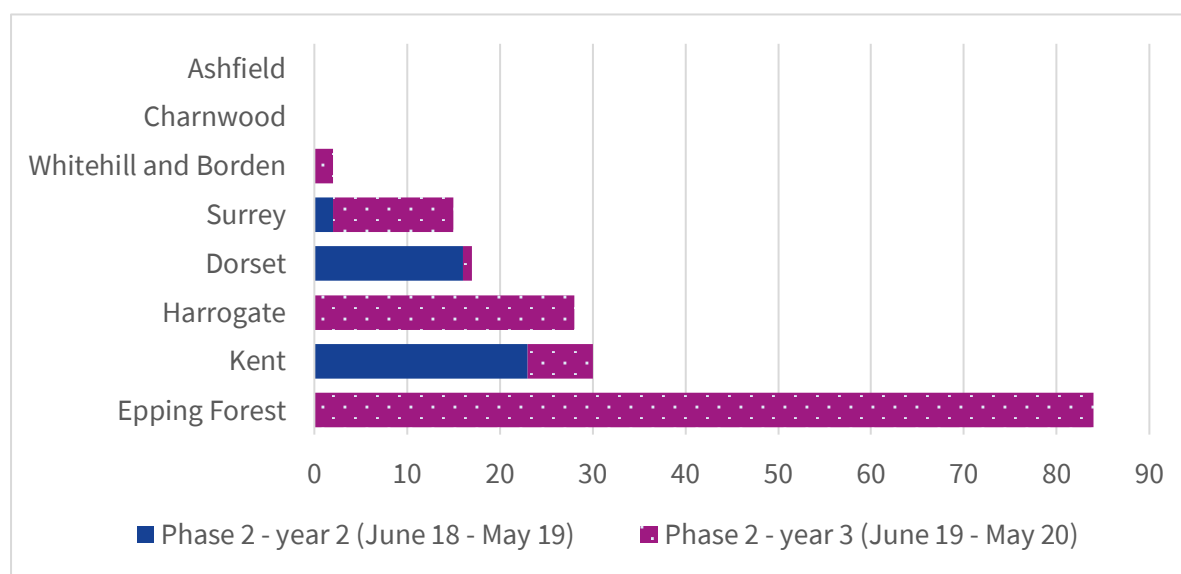
UNIQUE END LEARNERS

In total, we estimate at least 18,338 individuals have been helped during the One Digital Programme, at least 12,853 during Phase 2. Figure 10 shows how numbers began to exceed target around April 2018 in particular – in part because of new Switch projects being added, but also because of the inclusion of additional estimates based on submission of session records via means other than the DCN such as library services in Gwynedd and Revenues and Benefits service in Brighton & Hove.

While we have significantly exceeded our targets, even with the inclusion of non-DCN estimates, we believe the total numbers are an underestimate of activity (hampered by monitoring systems that DCs can be reluctant to engage with). Our Activity Snapshot system and analysis provides us with much higher estimates of the volume of activity being conducted by DCs associated with our One Digital projects.

We believe Digital Champions in the Brighton & Hove, Gwynedd, Plymouth and Highland projects alone helped at least 47,000 people during 2016, 2018 and 2019 (see report elsewhere in this evaluation for details of the methodology around this estimate).

Figure 10: Cumulative Unique End Learners helped by month: target Vs actual, Phase 2
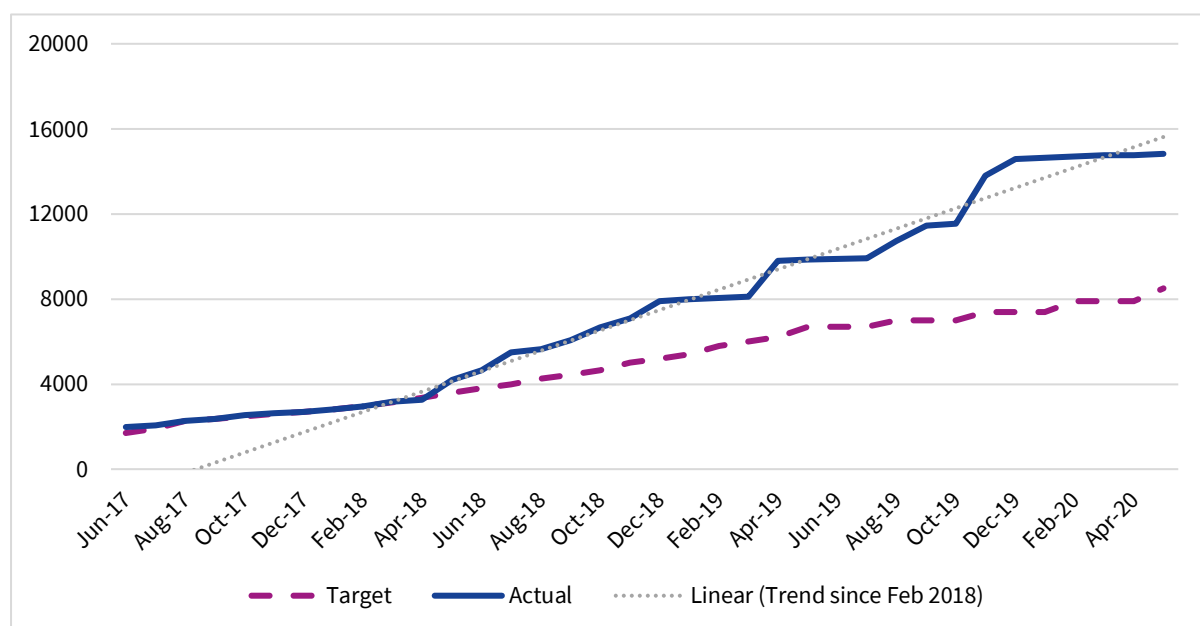
Figures 11 and 12 break down a total of over 18,338 Unique End Learners helped during the One Digital programme work. Above, we refer to 14,826 UELs – this is the total for Phase 2 of the project, plus the numbers from the Brighton and Gwynedd projects in Phase 1 and Extension Phase (1,973), which were included in the targets for Phase 2.

Even without including these Phase 1 outputs, we would have exceeded the Phase 2 UEL target by 4,353 (151.2%).

Over half of the 18,383 UELs are associated with the DG project (9,354 or 51%). Nearly three-quarters are associated with Phase 2 of the project (12,853 or 70.1%), from June 2017 to May 2020.[5]

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[5] It is important to note that while the differences in proportions likely reflect actual variations between projects and time periods, we know that the also reflect differences in reporting – some projects utilised different reporting methods to ensure activity was captured even if not reported directly to the DCN. Where we had data from the DCN we ensured records were associated with unique names, but for data about sessions submitted by third parties, we have made estimates about the number of UELs involved.

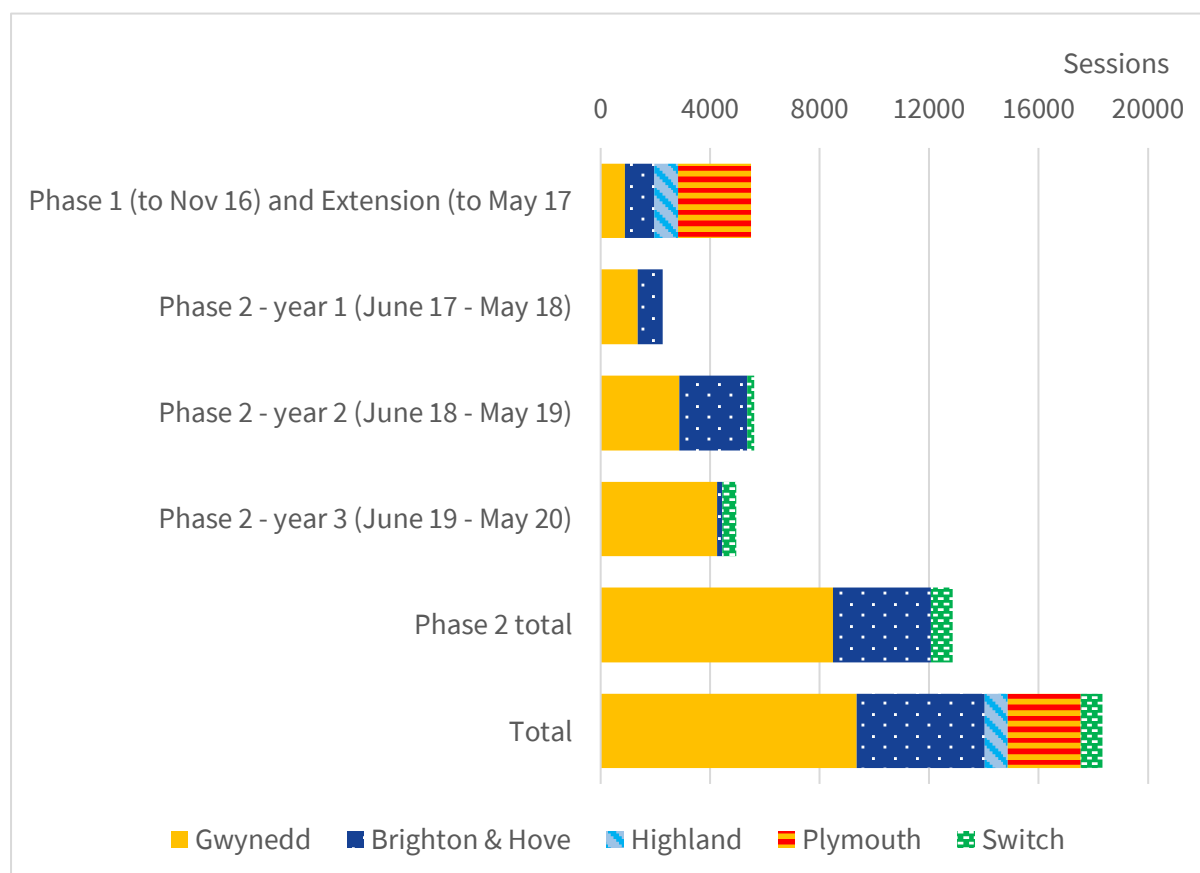Figure 11: Unique End Learners by project and phase/Yyear (bar chart)

Figure 12: Unique end Learners by project and phase/year (table)

UELs	Brighton & Hove	Gwynedd	Highland	Plymouth	Switch	Grand Total	%
Phase 1 (to November 16) and Extension (to May 17	1,095	878	850	2,662	0	5,485	29.9
Phase 2 - year 1 (June 17 - May 18)	929	1,346	0	0	0	2,275	12.4
Phase 2 - year 2 (June 18 - May 19)	2,479	2,867	0	0	270	5,616	30.6
Phase 2 - year 3 (June 19 - May 20)	174	4,263	0	0	525	4,962	27.1
Phase 2 total	3,582	8,476	0	0	795	12,853	70.1
Total	4,677	9,354	850	2,662	795	18,338	
%	25.5	51.0	4.6	14.5	4.3		

The 795 UELs recorded associated with Switch projects represent just 4.3% of the total OD UELs, though a higher proportion – 7.5% – of the final two years of the project (a fairer comparison). However, the vast majority of these are associated with just two of the Switch projects: Epping Forest (where 429 individuals have been helped since September 2019), and Kent (where 298 individuals have been helped since June 2018, figure 13).

No sessions have been recorded by Digital Champions associated with the Ashfield, Surrey or Whitehill & Borden projects (yet). In the case of Ashfield, the initial report is still being finalised at time of writing and as with other recent projects (Charnwood, Harrogate) we can expect further UELs to be reported. However, reporting of UELs relies on engagement with the DCN or undertaking Activity Snapshots. We have struggled to achieve engagement with the DCN and monitoring as part of the shorter-term Switch projects in Phase 2.

The decline in the number of UELs helped in Kent between year 1 and year 2 is disappointing, though we can hope it reflects a change in levels of reporting rather than necessarily a reduction in activity. In general, we have learned that effective monitoring of activity is much more likely where we have an employed Project Coordinator / Manager able to explain the benefits of monitoring and regularly support DCs. Without this, we find many champions prefer to spend their time on activity and view monitoring as an inconvenience.

Figure 13: UELs helped by Switch project and year
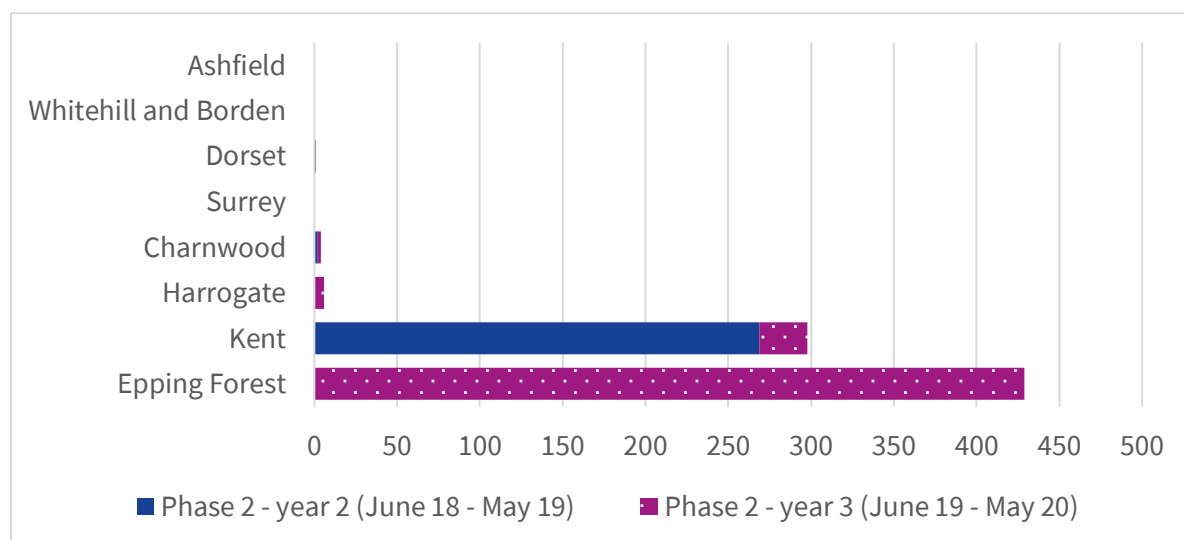
SESSIONS

While it was not a KPI, the DCN records for Unique End Learners are themselves largely based on individual session records (and some 'tally' or group session records).[6]

Figures 14 and 15 break down a total of over 25,000 sessions recorded since Citizens Online work with the One Digital programme began (25,283). Over half of these (13,365 or 52.9%) are associated with our longest running project – Digital Gwynedd.

Another quarter are associated with the Brighton & Hove project (7,238 or 28.6%). Just 3.5% of sessions were associated with the new Switch projects which only became operational in the second year of Phase 2 (890), though we believe this is as much a function of lower levels of reporting as of lower levels of activity.

While again we believe this represents recording of only a fraction of total activity, we are proud of the scale of support provided.

Figure 14: Sessions recorded on the Digital Champions Network, by One Digital phase, and project

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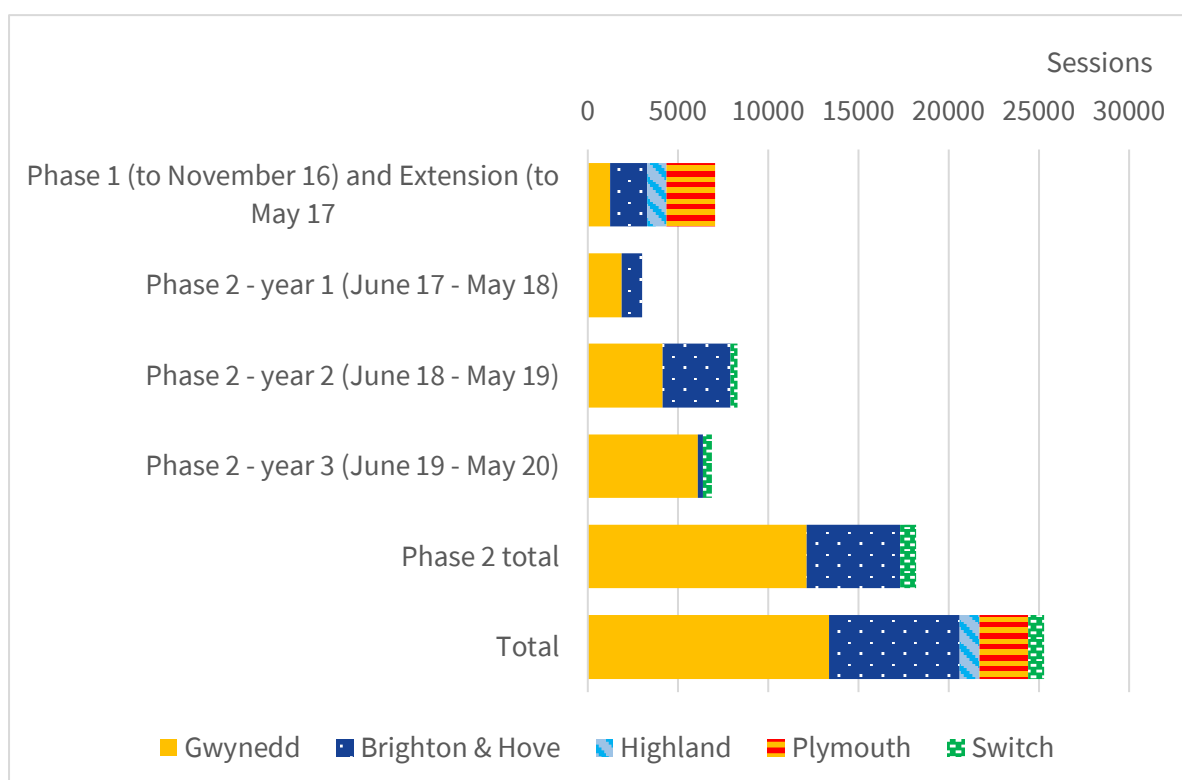
[6] Sessions for Switch projects include tally records, sessions for other projects are based on individual session records alone – the true total number of sessions is higher for these projects.

Figure 15: Sessions recorded on the Digital Champions Network, by One Digital phase / year, and project

	Brighton & Hove	Gwynedd	Highland	Plymouth	Switch	Grand Total	%
Phase 1 (to November 16) and Extension (to May 17	2,032	1,251	1,091	2,699	0	**7,073**	**28**
Phase 2 - year 1 (June 17 - May 18)	1,160	1,863	0	0	0	**3,023**	**12**
Phase 2 - year 2 (June 18 - May 19)	3,752	4,160	0	0	389	**8,301**	**33**
Phase 2 - year 3 (June 19 - May 20)	294	6,091	0	0	501	**6,886**	**27**
Phase 2 total	5,206	12,114	0	0	890	**18,210**	**72**
Total	**7,238**	**13,365**	**1,091**	**2,699**	**890**	**25,283**	**100**
%	**28.6**	**52.9**	**4.3**	**10.7**	**3.5**	**100**	

SWITCH PROJECTS

We aimed at the start of the three-year programme to sign up and deliver in 20 new project locations with local lead partners. Our original plan was to have all of these completed by May 2020, however we learnt along the way that lead in times and sign ups was going to take longer than we'd expected based on previous experience.

This left us with a series of 'late starters' for switch projects and a burst of activity at the end of Year 3 (Q12), just at the same time as the COVID-19 situation was developing.

SWITCH PROJECTS IN REVERSE ORDER OF SIGN UP AND COMMENCEMENT

Our Switch project number is noted in brackets after each project (1).

Phase 2 Year 3

- Hyperoptic: Tower Hamlets (17), Hackney (18) and Camden (19)
- Barking & Dagenham (16)
- North Yorkshire County Council (14-15 large scale project)
- Hyperoptic: Brent (13)
- Ashfield District Council (12)
- Charnwood Borough Council (11)

Phase 2 Year 2

- Whitehill & Bordon / East Hampshire District Council (10)
- Harrogate District Council (9)
- Epping Forest District Council (8)
- Dorset County Council (6-7 double project due to large scale)

Phase 2 Year 1

- Surrey County Council (4-5 double project due to large scale)
- Kent: Housing provider consortium of three projects:
  - Town & Country Housing - Tunbridge Wells Borough (3)
  - Golding Homes – Maidstone Borough (2)
  - Orbit Housing Group – Thanet District (1)

ONE DIGITAL LEGACY

From March 2020 the world changed with COVID-19 pandemic affecting the whole of the UK and Citizens Online's ability to complete the final tasks planned for Q12, which included much of the wrap up of our evaluation process. That said, we had already achieved our collective programme targets and two of the three targets for Citizens Online were delivered – with 'Organisations Engaged' being the area in which we were unable to evidence reaching our intended numbers.

We had to focus on our organisational response to Covid-19 which included:

- Digital Brighton and Hove project re-orienting to local Covid-19 response, including distribution of devices from the Devices Dot Now initiative, with wraparound DC support
- Running a series of online events on digital skills every Thursday at 11am, and also hosting two sessions at Local Gov Camp
- Pulling together a list of recommended resources to help you stay in touch with family, friends or colleagues during the pandemic – or to help you to help others
- A blogpost about the need for organisations contacting and supporting people who are shielding or self-isolating to ask about people's digital capability
- A call on government to "*Make the internet free during the Coronavirus pandemic* to ensure essential access to the online world for everyone in the uk"

- [Submitting evidence to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration](#), question "[What can we learn from the COVID-19 crisis about social connection with isolated groups?](#)"

Our focus as a business is our own security and continuity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic which has had an impact on our next set of new projects and 'legacy' projects from One Digital that continue to be supported. The other activities we focused on were supporting our One Digital projects through the developing COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions with lockdown. We were drawn in to support organisations both with mapping of digitally excluded communities with specific consideration of COVID-19 risks, and also with practical help to ensure Digital Champion activity could be provided remotely and that services could access digital equipment and coordinate volunteer resources.

CONCLUSION

One Digital has undoubtedly been a success for Citizens Online – the numbers of people we estimate to have reached and the digital champions we're recruited, trained and supported are a marvellous testament to the efforts of a small team enabling big changes in localities around the UK.

We've thoroughly tested our 'model' of digital inclusion support – the concept we called our "Systemic Approach" and then "Digital Resilience" and latterly "Switch". We've tried out all aspects of digital inclusion support and way to manage and show impact. There are some significant learnings from this and elements of our approach that we know need to change – it's a big shift and a learning curve. We have moved from a position of saying "for digital inclusion success you ideally need all of these elements in your delivery model" to suggesting more of a 'menu of options' based approach.

It all comes back to user needs and user design – what problems are local people trying to solve? What assets already exist in an area? Where can beneficial connections be made? It might be that what's really important for a local area is ensuring that there is at least one service available where the small number of people who need digital help can get what they need. We're sure that Digital Champions (helpers, advocate, friends) are part of that.