

One Digital observational and practice based learning report

Year 2 (June 2017-18)

Section 2: Working with Digital Champions

This section of learning focuses on the One Digital experience of working with Digital Champions supporting others to develop their digital skills.

Developing Digital Champions is essential to the [One Digital](#) model of providing digital skills support. The One Digital projects work with Champions in many organisational settings. One Digital has, as a result of the Phase 1 evaluation work published in 2017, focussed on three types of Champions – volunteer, professional and embedded. More information on the types of Champion can be found in our toolkit [here](#). This approach is flexible and recognises that Champions can be found in many settings and the value of working with Champions is recognised by many organisations.



Citizens Online Digital Champion Rachel with a learner

Activity levels of Champions can be monitored easily through the Digital Champions Network. It's useful to understand how many people are being supported by each Champion.

Activity levels of Champions is something which is monitored by Digital Unite (and One Digital partners) through Digital Unite's [Digital Champions Network](#) (DCN). They have noted during the past year that often volunteer Champions are more active than those in the embedded Champion role – this has been seen in the Waltham Forest District Council project for instance, this [article](#) illustrates this more fully. Digital Unite have also recruited a group of individual Champions directly during the past year (so not directly affiliated to any organisation) who have also proved to be very committed and active members of the project.

Digital skills training that involves a mixture of face to face & online training is most effective.

The most popular training provided by the Digital Unite Digital Champions Network (Hyperlink) was the CPD accredited Digital Champion Essentials course and training to help someone with an accessibility need.

A mix of online e-learning with face to face initial training is effective in developing Champions skills and confidence. Partners have been further refining their training offer during year one demonstrating practice in a variety of different settings ranging from local authority housing teams to small third sector organisations. The [DCN](#) has continued to be developed offering a very wide range of e-learning for training of Champions and great resources to support Champions in their role.

Facilitating Champions to collectively explore approaches to digital skills development – what might work with their specific service users - increases knowledge, confidence and understanding of the barriers and how to address them.

Partners such as [SCVO](#) working in Scotland with the [Mhor Collective](#) have developed an active learning approach to training Champions in charities. The focus is on participants understanding what the barriers are for the often vulnerable groups they work with and developing skills and learning opportunities that will be effective within their service contexts.

General training for Champions on areas such as safeguarding, professional boundaries and confidentiality is being routinely provided and the need for this has been highlighted by partners developing new projects. One Digital projects have reviewed how they provide full volunteer support to Digital Champions and the need for safeguarding is particularly emphasised by Age UK who support volunteer Champions working with older people who can find themselves in positions of trust, for instance supporting older people to access online banking services. Professional boundaries training is important for Champions working in the Clarion Futures programme as the project often recruits Champions who are developing new workplace skills, joining the programme allows them to familiarise themselves with workplace policies, procedures and expectations in general, so supporting them on their journey into work.



Digital Unite Digital Champion and learner

Training & resource priorities – a review of information from the DCN provides the following insights (One Digital data for period June-end May 17/18).

- Digital Champions visited the DCN more than 12,100 times.
- They looked at an average of 19.4 pages in each visit.
- 20% of visits were from new Champions and 80% from Champions who had previously visited.
- 82.7% of visits were from a desktop computer, 9.17% from a tablet and 8.13% from a mobile.
- More than 1520 Mozilla Open Badges and certificates were awarded to Champions.

The 5 most popular courses completed by Champions were:

- Digital Champion Essentials
- Helping someone with an accessibility need: working with people with memory loss
- Helping someone with an accessibility need: working with people with learning difficulties and/or learning disabilities
- Helping someone with an accessibility need: identifying accessibility needs
- Digital fun: using the internet to help people love later life!

Digital Champion Essentials

- Helping someone with an accessibility need: working with people with memory loss
- Helping someone with an accessibility need: working with people with learning difficulties and/or learning disabilities
- Helping someone with an accessibility need: identifying accessibility needs
- Digital fun: using the internet to help people love later life!

The 5 most popular resources used by Champions were:

- A Digital Champion's guide to finding free computer kit
- How to make the most of your Mozilla Open Badges and CPD awards
- A Digital Champion's guide to finding learners
- A4 editable flyer for recruiting learners
- Group session plan: An introduction to using apps on a smartphone or tablet

A self-help approach and a culture of continuous learning helps Digital Champions build the confidence and motivation of their learners to engage with being online. Assessing digital skills training needs can be done through the Essential Digital Skills Framework and Toolkit

Champions are effective when they participate in and facilitate a positive self-help approach to learning new digital skills. The journey through foundations skills, skills for life and skills for work, with an emphasis on champions as practitioners in a dynamic learning culture, is at the core of One Digital's work.

The [Essential Digital Skills Framework](#) and [Toolkit](#) provides a useful tool and focus for Champions to assess the digital skills needs of the people they are working with. The Framework is used by many partners within One Digital to capture learning outcomes.

Digital Champions benefit from having information on other digital skills training opportunities locally so they can signpost learners who want to learn more and develop their skills further

Champions need to know what other digital skills training is available locally to ensure that learners continue to access opportunities to improve their digital skills. This is especially important for embedded Digital Champions who may be delivering a small digital nudge. They need to have the knowledge and skills to enthuse the learner to continue their digital skills journey. Some partners are provided tailored resources for each individual delivery partner.

For instance [Clarion Futures](#) have embedded links into the diagnostic (screening) tool so that Champions have direct, fast access to resources tailored to their client group. [Citizens Online](#) provide and maintain online signposting websites for their Deep Dive projects in [Brighton & Hove](#) and [Gwynedd](#), allowing Digital Champions of all kinds to easily find and refer people to specific help and locations where computers and internet access are free.

Understanding what motivates people and what time they have available to become a Digital Champion is key to running a successful Digital Champion project

Understanding what motivates people to become Digital Champions is key to developing successful projects, especially for those working with volunteers. For those working with Champions within organisational delivery settings (embedded champions operating in places such as charities or public services) it is vital to understand how providing digital skills support can be moulded into day to day working. One Digital prioritises engagement and dialogue with both strategic and delivery level staff as organisations develop their digital skills programmes.

Digital Champions recruiting other Champions is a great way to build capacity and skills in digital inclusion projects

Peer recruitment of Champions is effective in both volunteer and embedded Champion models. The benefits for volunteers of this word of mouth, community based recruitment is that Champions are likely to be closer to the group they will support (adding value through their personal knowledge and understanding). For embedded Champions it is important that colleagues are able to take a lead in surfacing any lack of confidence and concerns about taking on the role. Some staff

in front-line roles are concerned that their own digital skills are not sufficient to be able to provide effective support for others.

Encouraging Digital Champions to reflect on their role helps projects to understand the Champion(s) support needs, improving their impact and satisfaction with their role.

Encouraging Champions to reflect on their role and experiences provides useful insight and a way to tailor support. It can also be used as a way to monitor directly the work of the Champion. Clarion Futures' Champions have been asked to complete a reflective log of their experiences which provides an insight into why they have committed to their Champion role, and what help the organisation can offer to support them. Opportunities for groups of Champions to meet are also often welcomed.

Digital motivators supporting groups of Digital Champions as digital inclusion ambassadors are proving effective in building project capacity

Digital motivators as “super Digital Champions” who have a specific role to support a group of Champions have been vital in some projects and help by offering digital support as well as project development support to other Champions. They also become ambassadors within their organisations for digital skills development.

Informal Digital Champions (families & friends) can play a key role in local communities it can be more difficult to monitor and support them in this crucial role

Informal Champions are more difficult to monitor and support, organisations with volunteer policies and support in place are potentially more effective. Many informal examples of Champions are available and sometimes the approach can be very effective in creating a learning culture – for instance within a sheltered housing scheme or encouraging young people to support family members.

A community asset based recruitment approach to supporting digital in local communities has been shown to have benefits (for example work in the Whitehawk area of Brighton by Citizens Online with the local community to develop a Facebook group has led the group to be digital ambassadors and Champions locally).

Developing part-time paid Digital Champions from volunteer Champions in local communities has potential to build capacity and capability in local communities with high levels of digital exclusion (as evidenced by Clarion Futures work at local centres offering employment support).

There is a divergence of views within One Digital about the role of informal Champions, including what can be expected from someone taking on this role, as well as the potential risks for the informal volunteer of (for instance) inadvertently accessing someone else's confidential information. For instance, Age UK in Blackburn with Darwen are working within sheltered housing for older people and often look to recruit an informal champion within the housing scheme who can continue to provide support to others once structured learning sessions are finished. In contrast, Citizens Online in Brighton & Hove have concerns about the risks to

informal volunteers in sheltered housing if they take on this role (related to safeguarding and potential time commitment). There is no likely formal resolution to this question but within One Digital it has been useful to reflect on how to best develop and support informal community volunteering.



Coffee Pot Computing learners with a volunteer Digital Champion

Embedded Digital Champions, who often work in customer facing roles with groups who are digitally excluded, can be invaluable in improving uptake of digital services. They can find the role challenging needing time to understand how this can work within their service and for the people they support

Organisations that are moving to offer more services online sometimes support this by providing Digital Champion support to their customers or service users. The need for this is one of the core messages of One Digital.

Volunteer Champions (particularly) working in this context have been seen to be reluctant to take on the role of digital ambassadors. They sometimes see this as being in conflict with their primary volunteer role – for instance an Age UK volunteer who provides advice and guidance to older people may be reluctant to offer digital support to access a service online (such as a Blue Badge application). This resistance can be added to if the volunteer lacks confidence in their own digital skills also. Organisations reporting this (Citizens Advice, Citizens Online and Age UK) are re-thinking the way they train and develop their Digital Champions.

Embedded Digital Champions can sometimes also be reluctant to take on the role. This is usually for two reasons, first a lack of confidence in their own knowledge and skills often linked to digital service transformation (competency in using the organisation's new digital systems) both as a staff member and having experience of using a digital service as a customer. Second, time – staff in direct service roles often have concerns about taking on an additional digital support function. Actively engaging with concerns and discussing how to integrate can usefully be built into the training of Champions and opportunities provided for staff to develop an approach that fits with their particular job role.

An example of this was raised by an embedded Champion at a local Council who shared her concern about an older resident who had been very distressed about

being asked to fill in an online form. Digital skills projects need to ensure that Champions get support for the role they are taking on.

Supporting learners who have English as a second language is effective if Champions are recruited from within the relevant community (language) group

Recruiting volunteers with a range of local languages helps support communities where language is a barrier to digital participation. This approach is most effective in helping people to overcome both barriers. An example of this can be seen at the Clarion Futures local centre in Bow in East London.

Recording Digital Champion activity with learners can be completed by using a simple quick tally system linked to one-off, more in-depth reviews (snapshots) of learners' skills development

Often projects report difficulties in engaging Champions in recording activity. The concerns include: not understanding why it is needed to record activity, lack of time, not seeing it as a priority, and complex reporting requirements. This can be an issue for volunteer Champions and also for embedded Champions if digital is not part of their core role. The DCN tally and the snapshot approach (asking projects to record activity for a limited time period) are being used to overcome this. The snapshot week approach is particularly useful for capturing support being provided by embedded Champions. Citizens Online experience has been that volunteers sometimes are resistant to recording activity and that for embedded Champions it may be better to have the recording of 'digital help' outputs embedded into the host organisations' own reporting mechanisms. This will be an area that will be reflected on and experience shared further during the second year of the One Digital projects.

Digital Champions projects within organisations, supporting in-work Essential Digital Skills, are increasingly important as digital change requires all staff to develop their digital competency and skills

Following discussions within One Digital in the Digital Champion learning set, partners recognised that embedded Digital Champions are also increasingly being used within organisations to support digital skills within the workforce. These Champions can provide support to a colleague in accessing a new online HR or pay system. For One Digital these Champions are supporting Essential Digital Skills for work. An example would be the Digital Champion projects being developed with support from One Digital partners with UNISON and in some Scottish Local Authorities.



