

# One Digital observational and practice-based learning report Year 2 (June 2017-18)

## Section three: Partnerships and engaging organisations

The interest in **working in partnership to develop basic digital skills** is high both within [One Digital](#) and for other partners. This is evidenced by the success of the [SCVO](#) work with Third Sector organisations in Scotland and the strength of attendance at partnership events run by [Citizens Online](#) in Brighton & Hove and Gwynedd. [Clarion Futures](#) and [Digital Unite](#) have also run events for One Digital partners which have been well attended. Evaluation of these opportunities to work in partnership, especially to develop practice and share learning, is usually very positive.

The benefits of partnership working for end learners and for the partner organisations is not yet fully evidenced. Early observational learning of the benefits arising from networks and partnership activity in localities is that they are valuable in:

- Developing local understanding of
  - where digital skills support needs to be provided and information on any hyperlocal or community specific skills needs
  - which local communities should be prioritised,
  - which organisations are best placed to provide support
- Building greater understanding about the most excluded communities and what type of skills and learning opportunities would be most likely to be effective for them.
- Celebrating local successes of digital skills support projects to build up numbers of trained Digital Champions.
- Sharing good practice between partners (in general)
- Sharing information about how to more effectively deliver digital skills support – for instance for particular groups of learners
- Sharing information about organisations offering digital skills support – so that all organisations are better able to signpost learners. For instance, the local housing team would know that there is a project provided by a local Age UK which specifically supports older people and is more suited to their learning needs. Or an organisation providing employment support would know where they can send their learner who now has basic digital skills to gain an advanced qualification.
- Reducing duplication of effort and ensuring that new projects benefit from existing knowledge and experience.
- Plugging gaps in the delivery of digital inclusion support in particular localities.
- Enhancing digital inclusion provision that already exists by developing expertise.

- Progressing the digital maturity of engaged organisations through sharing of learning between organisations and individuals of the use of tech.
- Motivating engaged partners around a common cause – creating energy and action around the digital inclusion issue

One Digital will look to better understand and evaluate this and share experiences in 2019.

There is interest in this work from:

- One Digital – particularly from Citizens Online
- Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) in England through their creation of the Digital Skills Partnership (DSP) and piloting of Local Digital Skills Partnerships providing support to digital skills in the local economy (through Local Enterprise Partnerships)
- Digital Communities Wales
- Good Things Foundation who are actively involved in a number of local partnerships
- Independent partnerships such as Go ON Worcestershire or Digi-Ren – based in Renfrewshire in Scotland.

One Digital offered an opportunity for partners to discuss the evaluative priorities for partnership work through the ‘Measuring the impact of Digital Inclusion’ event held in November 2018. The resources relating to partnerships – background paper and workshop notes can be found [here](#) on the One Digital website – under Workshop 2.



## The stages of engaging new partners

Engaging new partners into digital inclusion work has similarities with the engagement of any organisation into a new project/delivery phase. A model shared by [Age UK](#) was discussed by the partners and found to be useful in identifying and better supporting organisations on their journey to offer digital skills support. Partners also were able to recognise that this journey can be lengthy for some organisations as digital inclusion projects need to be fully embedded into the wider digital strategy of the organisation. The stages identified were:

- Awareness of the issues around digital inclusion and the offer of One Digital partners to provide support to deliver digital skills training
- Engagement of the partner in learning about how they can address the issues, particularly linked the groups they are working with
- Action within the organisation to gain the necessary tools, skills and knowledge to deliver a successful project
- Sustainable independence – where the organisation is delivering independently and competently.

## Collaborative benefits and learning from working as a partnership through the Community of Practice

One Digital has had a [Community of Practice](#) to support both internal learning within the One Digital formal collaboration and also to share learning arising from other digital inclusion projects. This has involved the Community of Practice offering a range of activities. A full evaluation of the impact of the Community of Practice will be carried out. Initial reflections from the Learning Facilitator are highlighted below.

The action learning based approach used has provided dedicated time for reflection and learning. It has been useful for:

- Developing/challenging on-going practice
- Facilitating quick and more in-depth changes in practice
- Providing opportunities for partner led identification of collaborative learning topics
- Enabling both one on one and multi-partner contributions/engagements.

Negatives are that inevitably not all topics are of interest to all partners, and that the different stages of project development meant that topics are not always relevant at the same time.

Inputs from external partners are valuable to broadening learning.

It is useful to ensure good quality inputs are collated ahead of the learning set and that partners have time for preparation work.

A negative overlap between community of practice collection of project learning and partner evaluation plans was identified and has placed some limitations on the role of the Community of Practice.

Identifying where learning arose and following it as it develops on the journey of partner inputs, reflections and modifications, implementation of the practice and further evaluation and change is complex. Partners have come to recognise that this is the case and that this is an experience of many especially in the digital world of multiple, fast changing information sharing.

Capturing the learning and recording it has proved challenging partially because of the multiple locations/projects within which learning can take place.

Developing an effective themed knowledge base (of learning materials) to share with external partners is only achievable with a clearer insight into the audiences and what would be the most beneficial to share, as well as raising questions about the format for sharing the learning.

Good practice on case studies was developed collaboratively and recognised that it was important to be flexible and not be too prescriptive in the form that case studies should take.

Practice based learning developed in partnership requires partners to be clear on what process will be followed before learning is shared externally.

More needs to be done to define audiences for good practice materials and to be clearer about what form these can most usefully take for external partners.

The time commitment for the Community of Practice in the set up phase of projects made it challenging for partners.