The case for a systemic approach to digital skills

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Summary

The UK has become a 'digital' nation. Eighty seven per cent of UK citizens have now used the internet with the majority of people accessing the net from home. Soon, most of the nation's adults will also be connected through their mobile devices such as tablets and smart phones.

However, there remains a persistent minority of the population who have never been online and a much larger group of people who only use the internet in a very limited way. [1,2,3] As technology moves forward, some of those who are now online struggle to understand new devices or different ways of doing things and there is a risk of these users giving up and going back to the offline world. In addition there is reluctance from central government to fund digital inclusion centrally as responsibility and funding for public service delivery becomes increasingly localised.

This triple challenge of harder to reach individuals and rapidly evolving technology and a need to identify local funding for digital inclusion mean that a review of how we approach digital skills and inclusion is required. What we need to create are local 'sustainable digital ecosystems' which can provide a joined up experience of ongoing access, active communication, training and support in the community, backed up by further online help.

To achieve this we must focus on holistic and local approaches, taking into account the wider agendas of digital by default and service transformation. The changes must be systemic and integrated into key local services in order to change how 'difficult to reach' individuals perceive and use these skills. This implies the involvement and alignment of all key local public sector service providers – and potentially the private sector - to meet the needs of local communities and make best use of all available local assets and funding. If inclusion is not joined up in this way it simply will not be effective, and money invested will not deliver the desired outcomes.

"Our paper makes the case for a systemic approach to the development of a locally led, sustainable 'digital ecosystem'. We describe the challenges currently faced in the provision of services, our proposed solutions and the evidence base for our assertions. Case studies and stakeholder quotes exemplify our thinking and findings."

Dr Gail Bradbrook and Dr Gerald Power

Twelve years of research, grass roots and cross-sector working lead us to conclude that a systemic approach to digital skills is the only way to achieve a sustainable and flexible outcome. While this is a more complex approach, none of the elements that are needed in delivery are new. They are all tried and tested. It is simply a matter of putting them together with ready-to-go partnerships.

Background

This paper is based on more than 12 years of work in the field of digital inclusion across the UK at grass roots and local partnership level. This includes 45 projects, each lasting three years, delivered through a long-standing and prolific partnership between BT and Citizens Online (The Get IT Together programme being the most recent). Our experience includes supporting government departments, for example, the Cabinet Office, DoH, DWP and DCLG. We have worked with local government on implementing digital services and getting government services online ("channel shift")and with JCP (JobCentrePlus) on achieving 'digital by default'. We also draw on a body of research and case studies, not only directly connected to digital skills, but more widely to partnership and transformational agendas. Finally, our paper is informed by research and interviews with more than sixty practitioners and stakeholders located across the UK.

Digital skills in the UK

The UK is one of the most 'digital' nations in the world. Currently, more than 80 per cent of UK households have broadband and the average UK household now has three internet enabled devices. Access via smart phones is rapidly growing with over 62 per cent of adults owning them and using them to go online. Last year 30 per cent of adults used a tablet to access the internet.[4] The UK also has a long history of promoting and sponsoring digital skills and inclusion. This pro-active approach has positioned the UK as a front runner across Europe. In 2012 the UK was ranked 8th of 31 European nations with about 90 per cent of its population having been online as compared to around 60 per cent in the worst performing (Romania, Bulgaria and Greece) and over 95 per cent in the best performing countries (Iceland, Norway and Sweden).[5]

While the UK as a whole is making increasing use of the internet and digital technology, many excluded groups are being left behind. Typically, these groups face multiple disadvantages and with each disadvantage they become less likely to get online (Fig 1). Although uptake of new devices and services is rising rapidly among the general population, the rate of change in the size of the groups that remain offline is much slower - and appears to be slowing down (Fig. 2.). This 'S-curve' behaviour in the UK is also supported by data from the leading European countries where uptake has stopped growing and in some cases may have decreased (Fig 3.).[6] [7] It is important to note that the digital journey does not have an obvious or fixed destination point. It will be an ongoing task to ensure that as technology and services evolve those who are at risk of getting left behind will be supported.

A glossary is provided at the end of the paper which should help with unfamiliar terms.

Figure 1: Disadvantage and regular internet use [8]
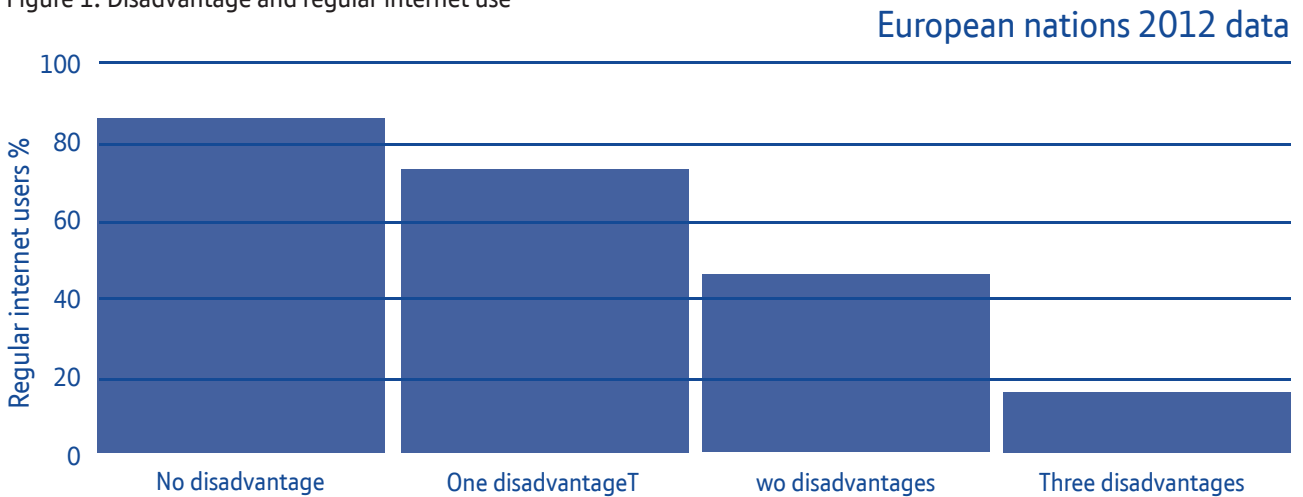
European nations 2012 data

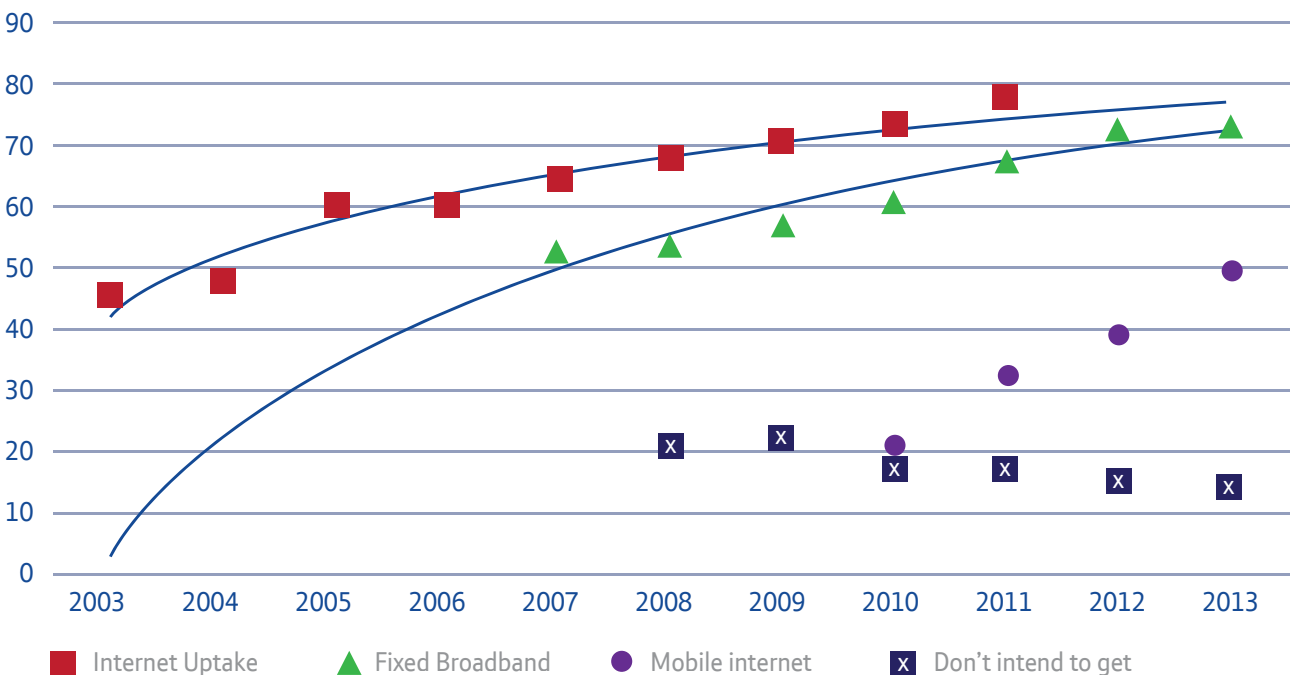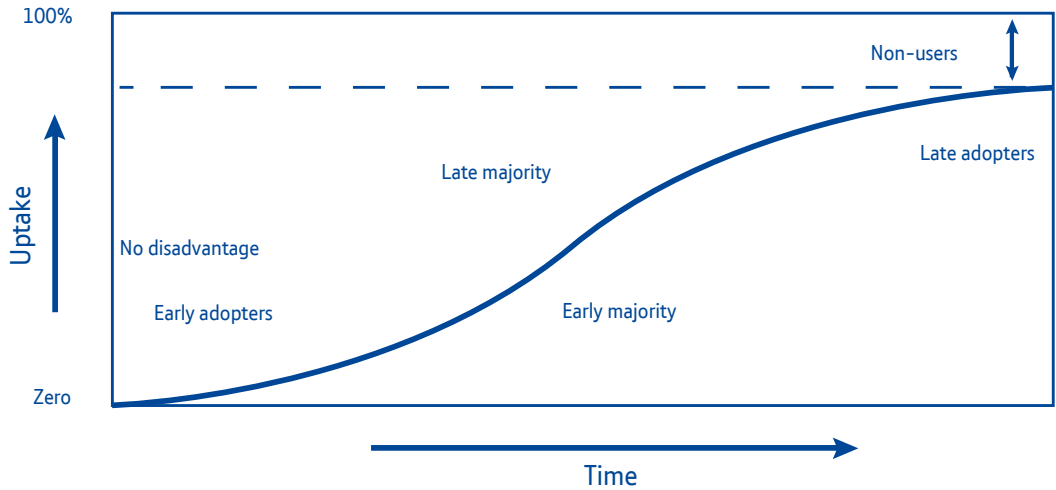Figure 2 : Internet uptake in the UK [9]

Figure 3: S-Curve adoption profile

In looking at digital skills we also need to distinguish between simply 'being online' and achieving beneficial outcomes for the individual, community and nation. Using the internet effectively means having basic online skills or being able to communicate, share, work and transact online as well as staying safe online. There is growing evidence of a digital skills deficit emerging with many people only able to engage in very basic activities online and lacking one or more of these skills. These 'core' skills also link to employability, gaining personal benefit from the internet and the digital by default agenda. [11] [12] This is supported by the Ofcom telecoms market data in

Figure 4 below and the EU data shown in Table 2, which shows that while the UK ranks high on social media use, it ranks much lower on transactional services such as e-government and banking. Comparison of usage types from both Ofcom and ONS data, as well as the experience of our stakeholders and practitioners and local research in Cornwall, also suggests that people over-estimate their skill levels. In reality, although more than 80 per cent of the UK population may be online, up to 60 per cent could lack one or more of the core digital skills needed to gain maximum benefit from being online [13].

Figure 4:
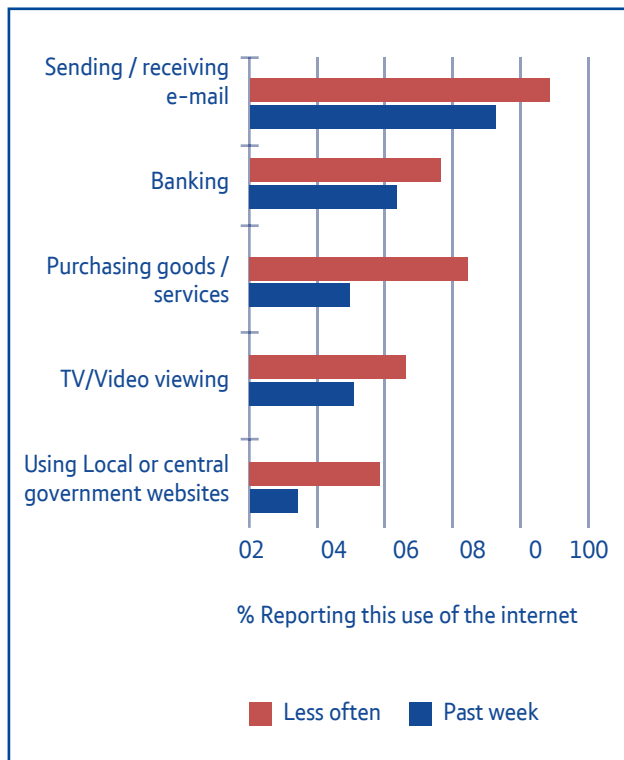What people used the internet for in the UK in 2013 [14]

Table 1: Usage of the internet: UK ranking 2012 vs. European nations [5]

Internet Use	UK Ranking*
Posting messaged to social media sites including messaging	4
Uploading self-created content to any website to be shared	4
Selling goods or services	5
Listening to radio or watching web TV	7
Playing networked games with other persons	8
Sending and receiving emails	8
Finding information about goods and services	9
Travel and accommodation services	9
Playing/downloading games, images, files or music	10
Internet banking	11
Telephone or video calls	13
Reading/downloading newspapers/news	17
e-government usage	18

*per cent of individuals using the internet for this purpose, lowest value implies highest usage for this purpose compared to 31 European nations.

Current models and challenges

Digital skills provision has typically taken one of three formats:

• Locally based community development approaches (see Get IT Together case study) that attempt to address skills gaps in specific areas and communities of need.

• Funding target-based, grass roots activity such as the Tinder approach [15] that aims to fund local providers to deliver basic skills according to a national 'franchised' training template.

• Funding national programmes with a focus on a community of interest, geography or specific skill (e.g. the Community Voices approach from the Media Trust [16]).

These programmes have been immensely useful in learning how to engage with communities and develop digital skills. However, this type of approach depends on continuous national funding and typically has little lasting impact on the larger community. They are in effect treating the symptoms of a problem and not its causes. We believe it is time to acknowledge the limitations of these models and build from their successes with a new systemic and sustainable approach.

Case Study: Get IT Together

Get IT Together is the national UK programme of community digital inclusion projects managed by Citizens Online and funded by BT, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Communities 2.0 and other local partners.

Each project runs for three years and covers a particular geographical area with a locally agreed focus to help disadvantaged groups e.g. unemployed or older people. The partners appoint a local project co-ordinator whose role it is to identify existing training provision and gaps; co-ordinate training delivery using volunteers and paid tutors and to market and signpost learners to training opportunities.

As part of the programme, a two year longitudinal study has been developed. More than 680 people are taking part in the study and over 150 have been contacted so far at three months, six months and 12 months after training.

The results show that 80 per cent of learners are still online a year after training. For the 20 per cent no longer online, lack of device and lack of confidence were the most often cited reasons. Just under half of these learners had no access to ongoing support to help them use the internet.

For those who were online, 80 per cent had support to use the internet, mostly from family. Eighty seven per cent had access to home broadband and those who were online were using the internet regularly (daily or weekly).

Those online (70 per cent of them) were also encouraging offline family and friends to use the internet too. The study also showed that 60 per cent of those who received training went on to access at least one government service online 12 months after training.

In addition to the longitudinal study, a Social Return on Investment model has been developed to evaluate additional social benefits of the training. The current forecast indicates the programme has significant benefits for volunteers who help to deliver the training courses, in addition to the benefits for the learners. The forecast suggests a conservative return of £3.70 of benefit for every £1 invested.

http://www.citizensonline.org.uk/get-it-together/

Lack of local cohesion

There is an obvious link between the benefits of digital by default approach to national service delivery [17, 18] and digital inclusion. Similarly a compelling case can be made for local authorities, housing associations, job centres, health services and voluntary sector providers to get together and engage with their customers, claimants, tenants and citizens in the digital world. However, the connection is generally made at a theoretical and superficial level, rather than with clear guidance on how to marry the two together.The discussion on how to get service users online has largely remained focussed on technical issues such as connectivity and service design not the user and the context of their lives and local community [17].

While service design and technology are clearly relevant, the crucial missing factor is a system-wide focus on how different key players interact and how they might work together locally to influence behaviour. One 'nudge' from one provider tends to be weak, but , multiple nudges from multiple providers can achieve a much more powerful effect. In addition, the issue of digital skills is often not addressed from the service user's perspective i.e. local access and individual motivation, confidence and skills not national strategy.

The benefits of working together, to motivate those offline, identify need and coaching support for digital skills, seem obvious. Research carried out with stakeholders [19] demonstrates an awareness of the need to work together, but it also shows that guidance such as the DWP Local Support Services Framework [20] gives insufficient detail on how to go about joint working. Similarly, although partners need to work together in mapping local public access points and training provision to make sure that resources are prioritised to areas of most need this tends not to happen. There is often a lack of committed local leadership and a reluctance for any service provider to take ownership of digital inclusion, especially when current funding is at threat and future funding streams are unclear. So, although all key local service providers are aware of major gaps, it seems many are waiting and hoping someone else will pay to plug them.

Is there a clear local lead on digital skills, with a strategy in place and partners working to that strategy?

There are pockets of great work going on but as yet it is not fully linked and not all partners are working together to deliver an agreed strategy. Everyone knows something needs to be done but as yet there is no clear leader or strategy in place.

Practitioner, Scotland

Currently no strategy in place and the local authority is slowly starting to recognise that more joined up strategic approach is needed.

Stakeholder, Cornwall

It's a postcode lottery – there are various short term funded projects with different priorities/target groups/locations but there is little opportunity at the moment for the projects to come together to share good practice and develop sustainable solutions.

Practitioner, Northern Ireland

There are various digital inclusion strategies from a Welsh government level and individual organisation and charity level. There is inconsistency across the local authorities that we work across and not all local authorities have a strategy in place that I am aware of.

Stakeholder, Wales

No local partnership involving everyone; patchy relationships, with everyone looking after their own patches.

Stakeholder, Northern Ireland

Funding digital skills

One of the reasons for the lack of cohesion is the absence of statutory requirement, by any public body, to provide digital skills to adults. Funding for formal skills development tends to be held at a European and Skills Funding Agency level and money for informal digital skills programmes comes and goes. Because of a lack of clear policy vision for how basic digital skills should be funded, there is now a major local funding gap for vital core skills. Therefore, although money is being invested in programmes to transform local and national online services in support of digital by default, the funding streams to equip citizens to use these online services either do not exist or are not joined up.

Within the digital inclusion sector it is also well known that informal training and ongoing support must be done in convenient and friendly locations with trusted 'champions' or 'intermediaries'. These are people who operate within communities, often specialising in a community of interest and have an ongoing role supporting and advocating for a particular group. They provide an experience very different from a classroom scenario and are also well placed for delivering assisted digital. The sector has done a great job of developing thousands of informal training centres across the UK which are able to 'hold this space' for the arrival of Universal Credit. Libraries are a major component, but other centres are also part of the provision. However, many of these locations are under threat due to funding cuts. Greater clarity and stability in funding arrangements could safeguard a vital set of resources and community networks.

However, currently these centres face uncertain futures and many good quality centres and libraries have already closed. Those with the loudest voices and greatest ability to bid for funding tend to get the majority of available funding. This can be at the expense of better, smaller and more locally focussed projects that struggle to understand and engage in this kind of bidding process and most importantly may not lead to delivery where it is most needed.

Do libraries, job clubs and centres, where training takes place, have sufficient capacity to deal with demand?

The local library has only six laptops, one printer, one photocopier. The users therefore have to be limited to 30 minutes per use, or up to an hour if they are a library member. For those who are challenged by searching the internet, or who need to complete an application form there is not always adequate time to so. There is not enough personal space between each machine to facilitate privacy if personal documents need to viewed.

Practitioner, Scottish Highlands

IT is very patchy. Libraries have IT but is can rationed in busy job seeking areas, some libraries have closed and are being run by volunteers with out of date equipment. There are some great centres with Wi-Fi but there are still lots of equipment not being used most of the time. One centre does have free Wi-Fi but no one uses it!

Practitioner, Leeds

The partners involved in Leeds recognise the need for greater IT awareness and up-skilling and wherever possible provide the facilities and tuition. This is not always easy as many are operating these classes as an extra to their core function, often with no direct funding for these elements of delivery.

DWP, Leeds

Anecdotally, the answer would be no. This is a result of branch library closures/ cuts in opening hours. Job clubs that report in to the Digital Inclusion group are oversubscribed.

Practitioner, Barnsley

No, libraries often have insufficient computers, or no training rooms. There is a lack of ICT training rooms in some parts of the city.

Stakeholder, Bristol

Influencing change

The past approaches to marketing and engaging with 'harder to reach' people have been limited in their success. Though, in many cases they have been heroic – with selfless individuals taking the necessary time to build relationships with, and work through, trusted intermediaries and community champions. However, these people were not marketing professionals.

In marketing digital skills to excluded groups we are attempting to influence people who are resistant to taking on new challenges. It is vital that we understand and use modern marketing and behaviour change techniquese and move beyond the plethora of posters, leaflets, 'go online' mugs and t-shirts. This, includes using detailed demographic and geographic profilingto target and tailor campaigns nationally and locally. This will we believe greatly enhance our chances of influencing attitudes and behaviours of those people hardest to reach.

In addition to these new marketing approaches there is a greatly under-utilised opportunity to use the face-to-face interactions that already exist with offline customers to assess and refer those who need better digital skills. The ability to use 'customer contact points' to discover digital skills deficits and then to nudge people to develop their skills, could be taken up by providers. All too often these contacts at Housing Provider offices, Council offices or even GP surgeries are ignored as opportunities to get the service users online to improve the service for them and potentially avoid the need for some future visits.

Where pockets of good practice do exist for all of these service providers, they tend to be the exception not the norm. Similarly, our unpublished research with clients including DWP shows that digital skills assessment of customers fluctuates enormously between organisations and local offices. It varies from self-assessment via a few unstructured questions, to a laminated sheet of skills questions, to a PC-based test. There's an indication that people tend to be inaccurate when self-reporting their digital skills proficiencies either through apprehension or not understanding what the questions mean. [21]

How well is JCP able to support people to apply for benefits online

I have seen a lot of very overwhelmed people who want to comply but aren't equipped to do so.
Practitioner, Scottish Highlands

The Job Shop has reported a problem with capacity of coping with high proportion of ESOL students.
Practitioner, Leeds

JCP will be rolling out thousands of internet enabled computers in the front of house and around the 729 centres nationwide for use by JCP customers. This will enhance the IT offer within JCP itself to meet the demands of the current labour market and allow JCP work coaches opportunity to develop the customer's online access and skills.
DWP Leeds

Job centres are aware there is a skills gap and are trying to direct people to courses etc. but in my experience job centre staff are often under-resourced and they themselves do not always have the online skills necessary to assist people. Job centres do not as yet have wi-fi or access points for clients.
Practitioner, Scotland

Depends very much on the adviser. Some are very good, others have very little understanding of barriers to learning and what is available.
Practitioner, Barnsley

There are 11 independent JCP branches in Cornwall and each has a digital champion who is part of a network across the county. Each JCP branch uses different IT training providers in their area. Some people will only look for support at crisis point of need, e.g. if they suddenly need to access online benefits information. Mandating attendance through Job centres helps with numbers, but creates difference training atmosphere and some are reluctant to get involved.

We need more open drop-in facilities that people can attend on more informal basis, either with their own kit accessing wi-fi or using public access computers. This has especially been identified as a need following initial six week beginners IT sessions – people want to know where they can get ongoing help/support – progression on to more informal training.

Stakeholder, Cornwall

We do notice a lot of people referred to us, primarily from JCP, who require specialist help which we cannot provide e.g. essential skills. Therefore I do not believe that individuals' skills are always effectively identified by JCP.
Stakeholder, Wales

Lack of training evaluation

The digital inclusion sector has tended to steer clear of more formal courses, believing that they wouldn't appeal to a disengaged learner. This approach has merit, but leads to a fragmented offer in a community and a lack of formal evaluation of the content and quality of courses. Without a formal external body to approve a qualification it is easy for standards of content and delivery to slip. Those of us that are signposting (or in the case of JCP mandating) people to courses have a role to play in making sure the training on offer is appropriate and of the right quality.

Our research with JCP has demonstrated that in order to deliver value from digital skills training, those who commission it need to take a very proactive role in determining and evaluating training. This is because:

- People are sometimes offered training without adequate assessment of their existing skill level or need (through a "triage").

- Training is commonly provided that does not meet the requirements of the basic online skills set.

- There are often no standard measurements in place to evaluate the success and impact of training that has been provided.

It is vital that the training that is offered is fit for purpose and meets the needs of both the organisations that rely on it and the individuals that engage. This includes accommodating a range of user devices, making it fun and friendly and embedding relevant 'hooks' to encourage practice.

Does formal training provision address the skills gaps that people have?

We do have courses such as ECDL etc but these do not target internet-based digital skills. Everything is very ad hoc and everyone's training is varied

Practitioner, Scotland

A lot of current provision is not keeping up with technology. Lessons still laptop-based, Windows 8 being shunned. My view is that all new training should concentrate on tablets, as a first step.

Practitioner, North Wales

The proportion of people aged over 65 that are accessing the web reached 42 per cent in 2013, up nine percentage points from 33 per cent in 2012. One reason for this is an increase in the use of tablet computers by older people aged 65-74 to go online, up from five per cent in 2012 to 17 per cent in 2013.

Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2014.

Keeping people online

There has historically been a belief that the benefits of the internet were very obvious and that once a person was online they would stay online. However, the 2013 survey by Oxis [22] into internet use in the UK found that three per cent of the public now reported being ex users of the internet. While this might be a small number in relation to the total population, it represents a significant portion of those who are offline. This effect was also seen in our longitudinal study work done with 20 per cent of those completing training being 'offline' within a year of completing the course [23]. A key reason for not staying online is a lack of ongoing support. If we invest in getting people online and providing access, it is only sensible to also invest in keeping them online by supporting them up until they are self sufficient. This may require 'light touch' support for months if not years after they gain the very basic skills needed, it may also require the provision of ongoing access points and wifi.

In order to respond to these challenges and create a 'joined up' and sustainable approach to digital skills, we need to build from the foundation of previous work in digital inclusion, by innovating and develop new approaches, that take a complete picture of the system into account

A vision for sustainable digital skills

Having listed many significant challenges that need to be overcome, it is important to state our firm belief that all of them can be overcome. There is already an established pathway for how to deliver effective digital skills and we know that many organisations are very capable of delivering it. In addition, much of the resources needed are already in place locally. In many ways what we need to achieve is simple:

1. **Funded training provision** that is of high quality and matches both the needs and interests of learners and service providers in a local area.

2. **Stable and appropriate community access points** that are known about across a community and meet the needs of specific communities of interest.

3. **Coaches that can give ongoing support** to learners to develop existing skills, keep people online and potentially signpost learners to further formal training.

However, the challenge of **how** to deliver is what has been limiting progress and our work implies that these elements can all be achieved through:

- **Local, multiple-partners strategies** that join up key local service providers and tap into the resources that they individually control and potentially draws down national or EU funding.

- **Using local evidence of needs and benefits** to shape strategies make clear business cases for investing in digital inclusion locally.

- **Delivery that takes a holistic approach** and has the potential to influence the beliefs and behaviours of whole communities, not just the individuals that engage directly with the programmes.

These components are detailed below along with examples of where they have been used successfully. Aspects of them have already been achieved locally in areas where a combination of need and visionary leadership has enabled it to happen. These case studies give examples of this kind of 'systemic' change, how it was done and what it achieved.

Local multiple-partners strategies

The digital by default agenda means that all key organisations such as local authorities, JCP, health, housing associations require a re-think of how digital inclusion fits into their service delivery strategies. In most places this can be classed as 'work in progress' that has been ongoing for many years. In all geographical areas it is recognised that digital access, skills and inclusion must become a core part of service delivery for all key public sector organisations. Organisations working in isolation are likely to create a local landscape that is fragmented, and hindered by gaps, inconsistencies and inefficiencies. Service providers need to adapt their delivery models to accelerate inclusion and work together to provide resources that help achieve sustainable digital skills. If partnerships are formed that include the local authority, Job Centre Plus, Housing Associations and Health they will have the resources and reach needed to get to most digitally excluded groups, especially while working with other agencies and the voluntary sector.[25]

However, there is often a reluctance for any organisation to take the lead locally due to the effort and resources this requires and the fear of being seen as taking 'ownership' of the issue locally. There is also a large gap between having the potential reach and resources and actually using them effectively to bring about change. Most local authority areas in the UK will already have groups that (at least as part of their focus) discuss digital skills. Many of these will aim to co-ordinate action.

In order to actually unlock the potential of these partnerships, all groups need a formal mandate to implement change across the area and to make changes within each organisation is required including:

1. A clear roadmap for working together on joint change and joint investment in digital skills. This is a specialist area of management and is likely to require facilitation of strategic partnerships by bringing in tested change models and internal or external channel shift expertise.

2. Internal support within each organisation to align its transformation and digital by default strategies with the partnerships local strategic plan. This includes developing business cases that justifying an ongoing investment of time and resources, towards achieving sustainable digital skills through the partnership.

3. Clarity on external funding available from local, regional, national and EU sources to support digital skills. This includes strategies for accessing SFA, EU, LSSF and assisted digital funding and other relevant funding.

This can be done and the following case studies demonstrate how and the value of true joined up working:

Croydon Family Space

The Croydon Family Space partnership was born from recognition that some of the most digitally excluded families in the area were unable to make the most from the delivery of government services. Each partner had recognised they needed to get service users online, but could not solve the problem of digital inclusion on their own. What's more, they weren't prepared to commit resources to a partnership approach. In order to implement changes it was necessary for each local partner to review who their customers were, what they needed and how current provisions were or were not working. There was also a requirement for each partner to commit resources to this change process and then make changes to the way in which they delivered their services, promoted online and provided online access.

Individually, none of the partners could have achieved the scale and scope of the change needed to provide the 'truly compelling one-stop-solution' that would keep people online, which has now been achieved. The project is realising savings - making it much more likely to be sustained and extended by the local partners in Croydon.

"At that time I didn't use the internet. I had a full-time job to support my family, and I'm a single mum so the rest of the time I was looking after my son who has severe autism. I had no-one to help me, and no time to use the internet. Now I get more support and I find I'm on the net all the time." (Parent)

Bringing together all the online services which this mother needed, changing the processes she used to access them and providing access that she could actually use while caring for her son, was only possible using a partnership approach. As a result the mum now places a value on the internet, she uses it and has seen how it has improved the quality of her's and her families' life. The fact that she is now online also benefits all of the partners that are trying to reach her and provide services to her family.

Kirklees Kick Start Your Career

The Kirklees Kick Start Your Career project was established as a way of engaging with young people who were Not in Education Employment or Training (NEETs). NEET is considered a major predictor of later unemployment, low income, depression and poor mental health. Kirklees was rated among the top 20 per cent of local authorities in the country in terms of highest numbers of NEETs. However, NEETs are difficult and expensive to engage with and budgetary challenges meant that new and effective methods for connecting NEETs to training or jobs were needed, including the use of online self-service options. While technology proved to be an important part of the new approach, the critical factor was working in partnership with organisations that understood NEETs and had the capacity to influence them.

"Introduction of the smart phones has proved a great success to New Beginnings. We have not seen this level of engagement from some of our young people before." (Course tutor)

The partnership brought the online service and the ability to share it with NEETs in a very direct way. This was done through specialist personnel already working with NEETs face–to-face. As a result, the ability of the project to reach these groups was increased significantly. It also allowed calculated risks to be taken in giving smartphones to selected individuals. Without the partners' experience and judgement this would not have been viable. It is very much the type of active engagement through partner organisations that will be needed so that many other excluded groups can get online.

Local jobs and training on your Android phone

Calderdale & Kirklees Careers

Get the latest jobs and training opportunities from Calderdale & Kirklees Careers direct to your Android mobile phone – search for 'C&K Careers' on the Android store.

Not got an Android phone?
You can still find out about job and training opportunities at
www.workabout.org.uk
the website of C&K Careers

Free school meals

The main benefit, in the case of online free school meals, added by the partnership approach was the ability to influence potential service users. The online proposition offered provided very real and immediate benefits to service users. It could provide the free meals much faster, with more conveniently for parents and with a much lower 'embarrassment' factor as there was no longer a need to apply in person. But, many of the people that needed to be reached were likely to be socially and digitally excluded and unlikely to be influenced by posters, flyers or other similar marketing. The key was getting the school staff in day-to-day contact with parents face-to-face to act as advocates for the online service. Originally, school staff had been offering paper forms and phone numbers to parents as they had not fully understood or bought into the online service. When this was changed, uptake levels greatly improved.

Funding

There is a great deal of value in local partnerships securing and using resources effectively with smaller organisations. However, in a model where funding flows from a central 'pot' to individual local organisations (circumventing any local strategic partnerships) on the basis of bids for grant funding, the incentive to partner locally and create a 'joined-up approach' is not always alluring. There is usually a competition for funding that tends to favour those who can dedicate resources to engage in the bid process.

But an approach where partners agree to work together to draw the necessary funding also allows for the establishment of a 'hub and spoke' model. This means that larger partners such as Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), umbrella voluntary sector organisations and larger development associations can use their reach and resources to organise 'micro-locally' and help sustain smaller, more specialist providers. The end result is that smaller third sector organisations are able to do what they do best – work face to face with excluded groups. Meanwhile the larger bodies take on the role of having local oversight they are better at interfacing with statutory bodies as well as providing services with a wider remit.

To successfully achieve sustainable digital inclusion developing these kinds of active change partnerships and local business cases for digital skills will prove critical

Using local evidence of needs and benefits

Evidence of community need and the intelligence to direct investment to successfully meet that need are critical when it comes to achieving the kind of active local partnerships and holistic solutions that we are advocating. It is relatively easy to get organisations nationally and locally to endorse the potential value of digital skills, but to invest in it they will have to make a business case supported by evidence locally. Therefore, in order to be successful and sustainable, any local programme of change has to be based on local 'evidence of need'. Evidence must include geographic and demographic details of the area and the specific benefits to local citizens and service providers.

Typically, this will require:

1. Demographic and geographic profiling, e.g. data mapping of the sections of the community that lack digital skills and those accessing services.

2. Mapping of assets in the community at a detailed level, e.g. the number of available PC usage hours in a library, the availability of coaching style support, understanding which organisations are offering generic support and which ones are specialist, so that their roles can be clarified.

3. Overlaying i) and ii) to look at areas of over and under provision

4. Assessing the marketing channels and messages of partners especially aligned to customer service transformation strategies, with an emphasis on looking out for opportunities to join up.

Customer profile mapping in Plymouth

One of the early actions in our Plymouth project has been to carry out demographic profiling of the population as well as the mapping of access points and areas where training is provided. The demographic profiling has allowed us to establish that 'one size' will not fit all in terms of a digital skills model. Instead it was clear that there were three groups within the population that had particular significance in Plymouth and that each group would have its own needs in terms of demand stimulation:

1. **'Transient singles'** in Experian groups G33 and G32 who make up 9.74% of Plymouth households (four times more prevalent than the UK average). Channels to market:

   - SMS text marketing (high)
   - Cinema marketing (high)
   - Face-to-face marketing (average)

2. **'Vulnerable and low income families'** in Experian groups I44 and 069 who make up 9.78% of households in Plymouth (two and a half times more prevalent in Plymouth than the UK average). Channels to market:

   - Radio marketing (high)
   - Local newspaper marketing (above average)
   - Face-to-face marketing (average)
   - SMS text marketing (average)
   (and crèche facilities would greatly help).

3. **'Older families and couples' i**n Experian groups E19, K49, K50 and O67 who in total make up 19.62% of Plymouth households (around twice as prevalent in Plymouth than the UK average). Channels to market:

   - Face-to-face marketing (High)
   - Local newspaper marketing (High/Above average)
   - Radio marketing (Above average)

This research has identified clear target groups that local partners can use jointly to develop strategies as all of them will have relevance to one or more of the partners. Furthermore, by having clear numbers for each group it is possible to establish the size of any need and the likely scale of any benefit from skills work.

Another early action in Plymouth was to map geographically where excluded groups were living and where people within these groups could find access points to ICT. This mapping exercise showed very clearly that demographic groups tended to form geographic clusters which did not necessarily match where the access was being provided. It also implied that we would need to consider the lifestyles and situations of these groups and where they live as part of our engagement strategy. Examples of mapping are shown in Figure 5 below. This maps low income families and vulnerable young parents. Mapping of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimants and PC-usage hours availability at libraries also gave us some useful insights, Figure 6, which indicates that in many areas of the city jobseekers may struggle to get the internet access they need to find work.

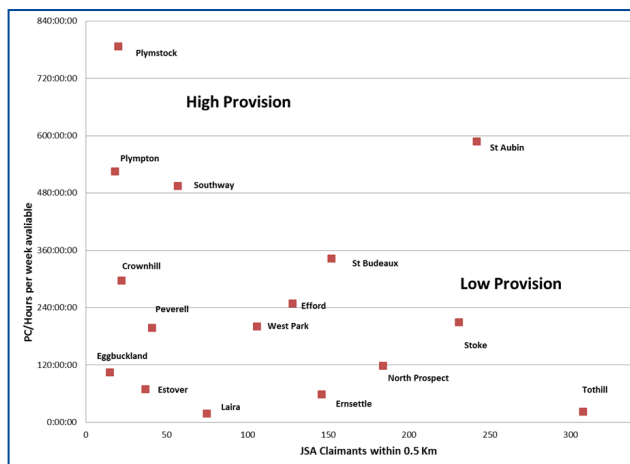Figure 5 Geographic plots of demographic groups in Plymouth
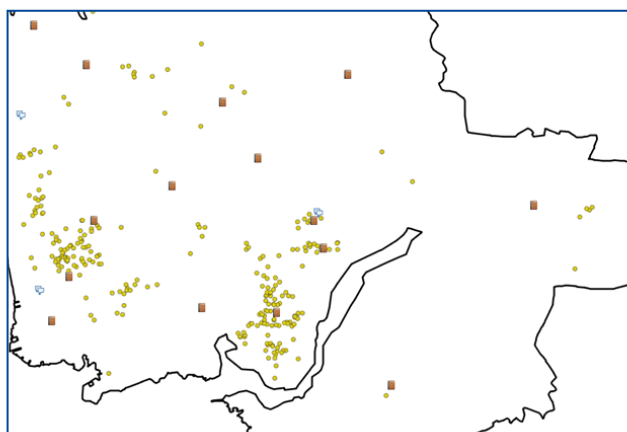
Mosaic type I44 – low income families
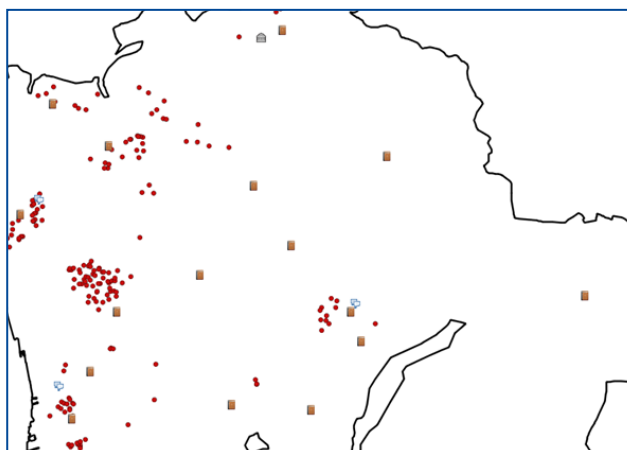
Mosaic type O69-vulnerable young parents

Figure 6: JSA claimants within 0.5 km of each Plymouth Library

JSA Cliamaints with 0.5 Km vs available hours on a PC at Librray

A similar exercise which reviewed the provision of training, ranging from absolute basic keyboard and mouse skills to more advanced search and transactional skills, showed a highly disrupted landscape. While a wide range of training is available in the city, there is no common method of assessing a person's skills needs and no easy way of finding a relevant training course. In addition, there are very few locations where a person with basic skills can go to access the internet and get some simple coaching. This has resulted in a highly fragmented landscape and very chaotic journeys for those attempting to get online. These findings come to life when presented in a mapping format. They allow conversations about who is best placed to address gaps to emerge naturally.

As a result, our project has developed a joined up plan, where each partner contributes to holistic solution for digitally excluded people. It involve partners training their front line staff to recognise individuals with digital skills gaps, applying common 'triage' skills tests and then referring them to suitable support and training. In parallel, each partner now reviews their access and online service provision to make sure that, at a local level, it all joins up.

This 'joining up' appears simple and obvious, but is unlikely to have happened without a dedicated project co-ordinator, the support of Citizens Online's central team and a package of mapping work to support it. It has also led to a growing recognition that the local partners share a common base of digitally excluded individuals and families and need to share local resources. The use of local evidence as a starting point for successful partnerships and inclusion work is a common theme in the case studies chosen below.

Bristol City Council (BCC), One Place Project

The goals of this project were to make sure that front line public services were delivered efficiently, that access for local people was improved and that their needs could be prioritised and better addressed. The project focused specifically on the vulnerable members of society in specific wards and sought to engage more closely with some of the lesser known migrant communities, including the Polish and Somali communities. This was to help ensure that service provision supported those most in need. It also looked at how many citizens were using self-service options to access services, what was encouraging this and what was discouraging it.

One of the key findings of this work was that very few of the most vulnerable service users were accessing online self-service options. It has meant that the council now takes a more holistic approach to service delivery, looking at specific customer groups, their journeys, their needs, the geography of the city and how customers are 'shared' with other organisations. It has led to an increase in online self-service from six per cent to 20 per cent and a recognition that services need to be tailored to the service user's needs.

Not only were there significant financial and operational benefits to Bristol City Council, but strategically, BCC moved the customer service debate forward by agreeing that a 'one size fits all' approach was unsuitable for its diverse population.

The Devon Grapevine

The Devon Grapevine project was all about using technology to support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups scattered across the rural areas of the county. Its objective was to use social media and digital technology to make a good support service affordable for small groups dispersed across a large geographic area. In principle. social media was ideal for this task – the challenge was to actually get the communities to engage with the project in a way that benefited them.

Some of the factors critical to the success of this project was the use of MOSAIC Origins, individual resident interviews and surveys and mapping of target groups – together with the establishment of a clear profile of Devon's BAME communities. This allowed the project team to understand the communities, where they were and how they currently used social media and digital technology. In addition, working through partner organisations already in contact with these communities led to a very successful engagement approach. Without this mapping insight the project would not have succeeded nearly as well.
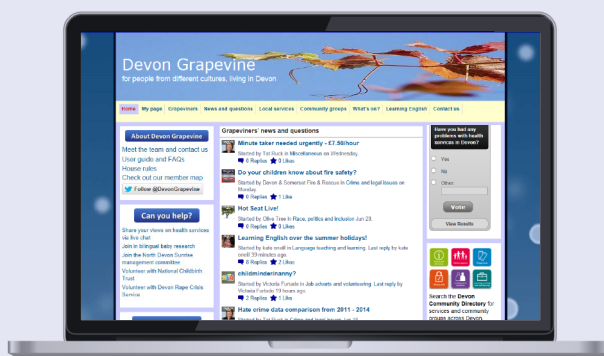
There is strong evidence that Grapevine has had a significant impact on numbers finding and accessing appropriate English classes. In Exeter, for example, the English classes that were advertised on Grapevine led to a 60 per cent average increase in student numbers.

The private sector and behaviour change

In using evidence to design a service, and in particular an online service proposition, attention needs to be paid to what private and public sector healthcare providers are doing. In the general private sector, huge sums of money have been spent on understanding how to influence the behaviour of customers and persuading them to buy online. In particular, companies have in invested in helping their customers to overcome barriers so they become more willing and able to 'self-serve' online. The classic example of this model is Amazon.com. Amazon has maintained a relentless focus on learning to understand its customers and their experiences and making it easy for them to self-serve online.

It is also worthwhile considering modern public health campaigns aimed at changing behaviours; for example, anti-smoking, healthy eating, exercise and safer sex campaigns.

Before a campaign is launched, the organisers will scrutinise all available data and commission large amounts of local insight work so that the campaign team understands what will work locally. The similarity between encouraging this kind of behaviour change and getting excluded groups online is obvious. In both cases the target audience may believe there is no need for them to take on board the advice or service being offered.

In both cases the audience may have existing negative beliefs that need to be changed. And in both cases they are being asked to make an effort to change their behaviour in the hope of some future benefit. Achieving this requires local partnerships to gain new skills and to seek specialist external support.

Evidence is at the heart of effective change as it allows the case to be made for investing in digital skills locally. It also helps to produce design approaches that fully exploit local resources and actually deliver the desired outcomes. These kind of mapping and data analysis activities are relatively easy to undertake given the availability of many good mapping products such as the Experian MOSAIC tool or the CACI Acorn tool. In the private sector, an organisation would never consider investing in a new service before doing this kind of research, it should be the same for digital skills.

"The power of digital distribution over physical retail outlets is you have a chance to create a global audience."

Chad Hurley

Delivery that takes a holistic approach

The final element of success in digital skills is offering a 'joined up' or 'holistic' experience that keeps people online. In our longitudinal study around 80 per cent of those that completed the Get IT Together programme were still online one year after the end of the course. However, this study also implies that 20 per cent did not stay online. It is critical that new learners have the opportunity to use their skills and have them positively reinforced after they leave a training course. Keeping people online and progressing and sustaining their skills levels requires a concerted effort from multiple partners over a prolonged period. For example, they need to be encouraged, back online should they encounter problems as well as receiving ongoing support.

In the Croydon Family Space and Kirklees Kick-start Your Career case studies this holistic approach was a central element of the project. Success in these projects was not achieved by reaching out to the relevant individuals and getting them to use the online service. It was imperative also that both projects were able to provide ongoing easy access and support. In the case of the Kirklees this went as far as loaning smartphones to the young people in greatest need and working very closely with these people to make sure that they made use of the online service. In Family Space project this meant offering access and support when and where people needed it. This project also showed that helping people get to what they needed through the internet, could make them become regular users and active advocates of online services.

The value of a holistic approach is something that the private sector has learnt very well. Amazon and the John Lewis Partnership are both good examples of this.

In the case of John Lewis, the retailer's aim has been to migrate customers from its face-to-face business over to its online businesses. To achieve this, the firm has used existing contact opportunities with its shoppers and offered an experience for online shoppers designed to be as simple and convenient as possible. While the concept of click and collect is not new on the high street, the John Lewis Partnership has exploited it well using its grocery stores to promote the online business and offer customers pick up points for goods bought online.

In the case of digital inclusion this implies that all partners in an area work together to offer potential internet users the same high quality and low effort pathways to getting online and staying online. This involves looking at what's being offered locally from the perspective of digitally excluded individuals and making sure that the 'offer' is easy and simple:

1. Key partners must embed a system of 'triage'[24] into their customer journeys so they can highlight digital skills gaps and send people on to appropriate training or support providers.

2. Training must be aligned to the skills deficit and the individual's needs. The training must still retain an informal and friendly style and incorporate digital inclusion 'hooks' that keep it relevant beyond the end of the training.

3. The local partnership must analyse the outputs of mapping to understand where access and coaching resources are in their communities, whether this is sufficient to meet needs, and where sustainable funding can come from.

If all three things can be established in a locality then a sustainable 'holistic' proposition can be achieved that truly
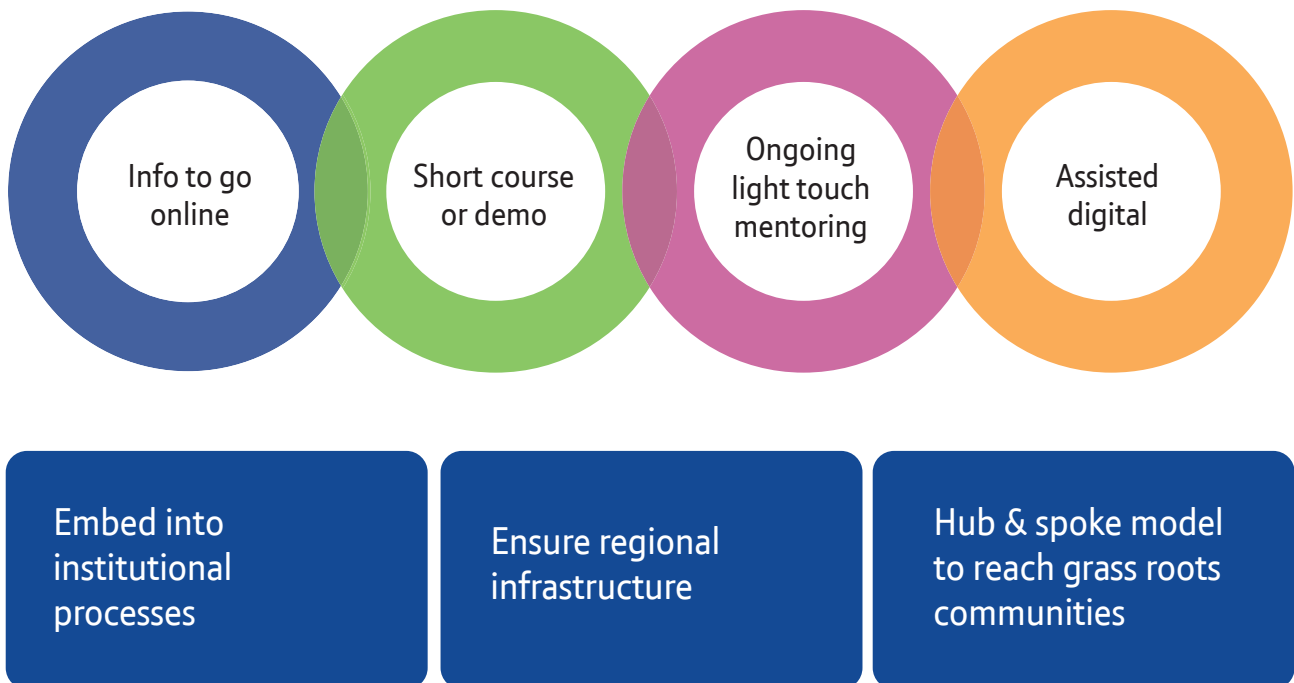
encourages excluded groups online and keep them there. While adopting a holistic approach requires co-ordination and effort, it also brings with it significant benefits for service providers in terms of efficiency and end outcomes.

- If partners in contact with an individual can assess their skills and needs accurately and quickly then the training they are referred to is more likely to be successful.

- Training providers will also benefit as referrals will be appropriate for the courses being run and they get sufficient numbers to run courses efficiently.

- The individual benefits through quick and easy access to support and being able to get on to the right course for them.

- Larger service providers and funders benefit as their resources get used more efficiently. If access points and coaching provision are in the right places with the correct signposting, they are much more likely to be used and yield benefits.

Those lacking one or more of the basic digital skills will have a variety of needs to help them thrive in a digital world. Figure 7 below shows the increase in assistance needed and the link to assisted digital.

Figure 7: Joining up the digital inclusion proposition

Info to go online

Short course or demo

Ongoing light touch mentoring

Assisted digital

Embed into institutional processes

Ensure regional infrastructure

Hub & spoke model to reach grass roots communities

Issues specific to rural areas

Infrastructure and critical mass

Access to any kind of broadband is still an issue in many rural communities although this picture is improving all the time. In general, though there are many exceptions to this 'rule'. Rural communities are less engaged with digital technologies but individuals within those communities who are skilled rely on them more. This is often because efforts to support people to go online have not reached more isolated communities. But when they do, they can be warmly welcomed. Evidence suggests that people who live in rural communities and who are digitally skilled, rely on the internet more than their urban counterparts. This can be addressed by:

- Having up-to-date information on high speed broadband deployment and tapping into the demand stimulation programmes that will follow from this. Liaising with community broadband projects if these exist. Teaming up with refurbishers and promoting information about low cost computing and access to lower-cost broadband services.

- Making use of mi-fi systems where local open Wi-Fi is not available and where mobile reception is possible.

- Offering training that involves the formation of a peer network group. Ideally, this can be supported from a distance, is able to self-organise and will allow friends and family to join encouraged by the first attendees. Peer groups can also be encouraged to start a Facebook page.

Reaching communities and sustaining support

Rural communities are often dispersed. The general digital inclusion principle of working in local informal settings, convenient for individuals, is not always feasible across great expanses of geography. Once initial training has been established, the issue of ongoing support is a similarly problematic, with there being a greater difficulty in resourcing local coaching and peer support groups. This can be addressed by:

- Knowing, understanding and working with established partnerships and organisations that support rural communities

- Making use of contact points, especially mobile units, that organisations already use to serve rural communities and individuals.

- Making use of life transition points, such as becoming a carer, that lead to new contacts.

- Working closely with community-minded individuals. Investing in and supporting community group leaders and influencers. Taking time to understand the hyper-local context and getting buy-in from local 'movers and shakers'.

- Working through informal networks and interest groups to reach more people. For example, working with churches, etc.

- Signposting to online content to enhance and deepen skills once basic skills have been established. Also highlighting other opportunities such as IT training in FE Colleges, libraries or drop-in support sessions where face-to face-support is available.

- Making use of local media channels such as newsletters and local radios, as well as piggy-backing on local events including markets, crofting and agricultural shows.

- Ensuring access points and mobile coaching resources are embedded in the transformational strategies of local authorities, JCP and housing associations, working as a partnership with other relevant bodies.

- Encouraging workplace learning to include the exciting possibilities of the internet to facilitate learning. Helping to create workplace digital ambassadors.

Leveraging contact points and partnerships

In urban areas, it is worth considering the opportunities offered by 'leverage points' that partners share with their customers; for example, when an individual enters a job centre or housing association office. These opportunities tend to be less prevalent in rural settings, though they are still of value. Furthermore, partnerships established to look at a particular issue for an urban conurbation, may not have a strong reach into rural outlying areas.

Learning from failure

It is often possible to learn more from failure than from success. This is because failure often prompts a systematic review of what an organisation should or could have done. The following three case studies have relevance to digital skills. The most striking example is the Student Loans Company (SLC) which was unsuccessful in its campaign to get students to apply for loans online. In reality, this should have been a very easy task as the service users were, by their nature, highly educated and digitally savvy. In practice, the service was a disaster as the SLC failed to communicate with potential service users, was unable to engage with partners and unsuccessfully managed demand for its new service. [26] The system was technically sound, but simply did not offer a service that met the needs of its users or provided a holistic end-to-end journey. It was considered to be a financial and reputational disaster.

The NHS National Programme for IT has struggled to meet its objectives. While these objectives were technically ambitious at the time the project was conceived, some now seem relatively simple. Although the project has encountered many problems the key lesson relevant to digital inclusion was its failure to understand and adapt to the complexity of the delivery organisation. The NHS may seem like a single entity, but it is in fact made up of thousands of distinct local organisations at the delivery end that all do things differently. An inability to gain an early understanding of the local needs of these organisations has been a major cause of delay and failure. [27]

The final example of failure is the BBC digital media initiative. This should have led to the BBC being a world leader in use of digital technology and resulted in savings through better productivity as well as improved creativity. While the National Audit Office (NAO) has made many recommendations, the most relevant to this paper is that the BBC failed to keep under review whether the project would in fact deliver the anticipated benefits. In the case of the BBC the project timescale was long, the technology changed or did not work as anticipated, many users were unhappy with the solutions offered and the project's objectives and structure changed - but benefits were not kept under review. [28] This is very relevant to the world of digital inclusion where technology moves on and the groups we work with change.

Conclusion

Twelve years of research, grass roots and cross-sector working lead us to conclude that a systemic approach to digital skills is the only way to achieve a sustainable and flexible outcome. While this is a more complex approach, none of the elements that are needed in delivery are new. They are all tried and tested. It is simply a matter of putting them together with ready-to-go partnerships.

Once proven in a number of locations, the approach and tools developed can be re-used and scaled across the UK. This will achieve both sustainable digital skills and digital by default, as well as underpinning the roll-out of Universal Credit.

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3. **Ofcom Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2014**, page 27, see Figure 10 – Online activities undertaken at least quarterly by age. http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/adults-2014/2014_Adults_report.pdf

4. Ofcom Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2014, page 13 take-up and use.

5. **European Commission Digital Agenda Scoreboard 2013**, page 80, Section 3.3.1 progress in getting people online, Figure 78.

6. **European Commission Digital Agenda Scoreboard 2013**, page 80, Section 3.3.1 progress in getting people online, Figure 78. and section 3.2.2 Developments across EU 27+ countries.

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8. **European Commission Digital Agenda Scoreboard 2013**, page 77 Figure 75, Regular internet use by disadvantaged individulas, by number of 'disadvantages', EU27.

9. Data drawn from Ofcom market surveys 2004-2013.

10. **Disadvantaged young People looking for work: A job in itself?** Rebecca Tunstall, Ruth Lupton, Anne Green, Simon Watmough and Katie Bates. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. October 2012 www.jrf.org.uk

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12. **Manifesto for a Networked Nation**, Martha Lane Fox UK Digital Champion July 2010. The Economic Case for Digital Inclusion, Price Waterhouse Coopers, Oct 2009.

13. **Unpublished research by Citizens Online** which compared the outcomes of 'self-assessment' of digital skills levels and assessment using a simple 'show me' test to establish if an individual had basic digital skills. These skills were the ability to use a keyboard and mouse, the ability to use a browser, the ability to use email and the ability to manipulate (upload, download or attach) electronic files or documents.

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19. This statement is based on work with Jobcentre Plus (JCP) in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset. The regional management team responsible for these areas commissioned Citizens Online to provide support and advice on getting more of its claimants online and back into work. Although it had already hit its national targets for claims submitted online, there was a clear recognition that the aim was to give individuals the skills they needed to get back into work not just the skills needed to claim online. There was also a clear recognition that in principle this was going to involve deepening and broadening its network of partners, there was no clear roadmap for doing this in a way that would achieve the desired outcomes.

20. **Universal Credit: Local Support Services Framework.** DWP February 2013. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181395/uc-local-service-support-framework.pdf

21. This variability in the ability of service providers to assess skills and individuals to 'self-assess' has been a key driver in our work to develop simple and effective 'triage' tests based on asking individuals to complete simple tasks online using an internet connected device. This creates consistency and the ability to track progress as an individual's skills develop. It also removes the need for a highly detailed verbal interview that might still prove inaccurate. In the case of JCP it was able to offer some of the best examples of local innovation and excellence in assessment. However, in the absence of a standard framework and process JCP had other local offices that were struggling and is now in the process of setting best practice guidance to bring up all of its offices to the standards of its best.

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24. The concept of 'triage' was developed as part of a programme of work for JCP and was aimed at identifying skills gaps that were potential barriers to employment. However, the broader value of a simple, rapid and accurate way of evaluating skills was quickly recognised and is being developed as part of the Get IT Together programme. It addresses a fundamental problem that if you don't know what an individual's current skills levels are you can't refer them to appropriate training and support. An individual with skills gaps is unlikely to be able to accurately assess their own training needs and the bigger the gaps the less likely they are to be able to quantify them. If they are referred to a course that is too advanced it is likely to be ineffective and demoralise them as well as creating problems for the training provider. If the course is too basic it can be frustrating for the individual and wasteful of limited resources. Early 'triage' that results in the sorting of clients into groups based on their skills and needs is we feel vital in joining up local training and support to get and keep people online.

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Glossary

- **Digital ecosystem** – the collection of local assets that allow a person to be supported and enabled to go online, for example access to relevant training and ongoing support or coaching, access to devices and broadband if needed.

- **Digital by default** – In reality we believe future access to government services including benefits will be online self service by default with paper and other options either fully withdrawn or offered only in exceptional circumstances e.g. citizens with a recognised disability or some other valid reason for being unable to use the digital option as the DDA obliges the service providers to do. Digital will not be elective; it will be 'default' for most people. The Government led drive to make online public services so easy and attractive to use that people are most likely to go and use that method for getting things done. (see https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/start)

- **Public service** – any services offered by the Government and its agencies, such as the taxing of cars, dealing with planning applications or claiming benefits.

- **Channel shift** – changing the way people access services for example from face to face help to call centre help or online services.

- **S-curve** – a graph for which the rate of change increases and then declines, such that there is very little change after a while.

- **Social Return on Investment** - is a framework based on social generally accepted accounting principles that can be used to help manage and understand the social, economic and environmental outcomes created by a organisations' activity.

- **Assisted digital** - support for people who can't use online government services independently. The support should ensure that these people can access and use government services online

- **Experian groups / Mosaic type** – a demographic profiling tool takes a large data set to classify households or individuals. These are then assigned into a number of types or groups, which give a pen picture.

- **mi-fi** is a brand name used to describe wireless routers that act as mobile Wi-Fi hotspots

About the Authors

Dr Gail Bradbrook

Gail has worked for Citizens Online since 2003. She oversees the Get IT Together Programme, the Fix the Web project (web accessibility) and Tweetlocal, as well as supporting the charity's consultancy work, fundraising and strategic direction.

Gail helped establish the EC's e-inclusion awards and has been a judge for awards from Microsoft and Nominet. She was previously Director of comm.unity, Business in the Community's campaign focusing on digital inclusion and corporate responsibility for the ICT sector, which included the establishment of IT4Communities. Gail's postdoctoral research in molecular biophysics took place in France, the Netherlands and India.

Dr. Gerald Power

Gerald started his career with the Ministry of Defence on its science and technology fast track management training programme. Later he went on to specialise in change and benefits realisation with a particular emphasis on the role of technology, skills and behaviour change in effective delivery of outcomes. During his career he has worked across all of the major Central Government departments including DWP, DH, HMRC, DfT, Directgov and CLG. This has also involved working with Local Government, the third sector and industry in situations ranging from simple procurement to international collaborative alliances. His most prominent role within Government before leaving to become a freelance consultant was with the Cabinet Office where he provided advice to Ministers and Departments on the economic case for digital services and on delivering cashable savings.

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