



Digital inclusion in Wales

Perspectives on why it matters and
what still needs to be done



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Ensuring everyone has the opportunity to use the internet and other digital technologies as an enabler to a better life remains one of modern day's social challenges.

Our Programme for Government, 'Taking Wales Forward', reinforces the importance of a digitally inclusive society. We've made an ambitious commitment to help 95% of Welsh citizens gain at least the basic digital skills needed for the 21st century by the end of this Government, helping to create a more prosperous, healthier and resilient society with equality at its heart.

There is so much to be gained by improving the digital skills of all. People's life chances can be transformed, whether it is helping people find work and helping them progress in that job, offering improved learning opportunities or helping squeezed incomes go further by purchasing often cheaper online goods and services. Digital inclusion can also reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness by helping individuals stay in touch with friends or family and other support networks.

The Welsh Government will continue to provide strategic leadership to this important agenda and do all we can, through our wide range of programmes and activities, to contribute to helping more people get online and do more online. Our Digital Communities Wales programme; the Digital Competence Framework; our Learning in Digital Wales (LiDW) programme, which includes Hwb, Hwb plus, and e-safety work; and embedding digital literacy as an 'essential skill' across our employability programmes, can all make a significant contribution to this.

The collection of thought pieces which follow help highlight the excellent work that is taking place across Wales and the huge strides we've made in recent years. I've been fortunate to see first hand numerous digital inclusion projects being delivered across the private, third and public sectors, and the life-changing impact of this work is clear. But, there's still much more we can all do. We need to help and encourage more people to realise the benefits of being online, help develop people's digital skills so they become confident users who can overcome trust and security fears (not helped by recent high profile data hacks I know) and provide the affordable access so everyone can benefit from the digital world.

More and more services, including vital public services, will continue to move online, so people cannot be left further behind. For those that haven't already done so, let's make a commitment as employers, employees and citizens to eradicate digital exclusion, so everyone can use digital technologies as an enabler to a better life.

Opening digital public services out to all



Published:
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Categories:
Digital inclusion

When the iPad first came out I bought one for my 80 year-old mother. Peggy is an ex-teacher, and a fully competent short-hand typist, but she had never got on with computers – all that waiting around for them to boot up and so on. So she had never sent an email. Now she sends and receives emails, shares in family photographs and videos immediately, reads her newspaper online, and sometimes watches the cricket online as well.

When the Welsh Government programmes Communities@One and subsequently Communities 2.0 were launched, their focus was on how we reached out to people through the things that interested them. With community brokers acting as digital inclusion champions across Wales, and a fund to support community initiatives, often on a very small scale, we found local people, often with no real computer training beforehand, overcoming their own digital exclusion as they recognised that digital offered them new opportunities for existing interests, whether those were in pigeon racing, photography, family or community history, community radio or a range of other activities. For many, this was just the start. I remember my then constituent, Sharon Morris of Treherbert, who became one of the great successes of the Communities@One programme [1]. Wales's success with these programmes was acknowledged at UK and EU levels.

We know that more and more public services are becoming digital. There are great opportunities to upskill our workforces, and to make work more rewarding and less time-consuming, freeing staff to do more useful and less repetitive tasks. When I was Minister

for Public Services, I saw the great success of the new scheme introduced by South Wales and Gwent police forces which pioneered the Electronic Pocket Notebook and the I-Patrol mobile 'app'. These enable officers at crime scenes to capture audio and visual accounts from victims, witnesses and offenders, to upload these files and information obtained directly into a shared computer system without the need to return to their home police station [2].

Increasingly, public services are being configured directly around the needs of users with digital being at the heart of new service provision. Small amounts of funding can trigger innovation and new developments, as we saw through the Digital Innovation Fund which I launched in 2015 [3] and previously through the Welsh Language Technology and Digital Media Action Plan [4]. More recently, a Digital Innovation Fund for the Arts has been established [5].

We know that those at school are growing up with digital as natural to their everyday life, and the Welsh Government has made significant investments in strengthening online learning through Hwb and Hwb+ [6].

These developments will continue, but we know that almost one in five Welsh people still don't make regular use of the internet, which is why the Welsh Government launched its new Digital Communities programme in March 2015 [7].

This is integral to the Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty and Economic Agendas. Reaching out to new users, identifying ways to include them in service development and improving their own skills remains a vital task for the future – and in a world where we are increasingly concerned at the impact of loneliness in later life, could be one of the routes to tackling that challenge as well.

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[3] <http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/previous-administration/2015/digitalinnovationfund>

[4] <http://gov.wales/topics/welshlanguage/publications/welsh-language-technology-and-digital-media>

[5] <http://www.nesta.org.uk/digital-innovation-fund-arts-wales-full-details>

[6] <http://www.lpplus.com/solutions/education/hwb.html>

[7] <http://gov.wales/topics/science-and-technology/digital/digital-inclusion>



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Digital inclusion and older people



Published:
05.10.16

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Categories:
Digital inclusion

Our digital world is moving on at such a pace it's easy to get left behind or never even start the journey. Whilst there has been progress in Wales in addressing digital exclusion for older people, the challenge is significant, increasing and evolving.

It's great that we are living longer and our ageing population (over 60) is expected to increase from 800,000 to over 1 million in the next 20 years. By 2037 the proportion of the population aged 80 and over will increase from 5% to almost 10%. Prevalence of health conditions and co-morbidities increases in our older years but recent studies indicate we are happier and healthier for longer. It's crucial that service models are fit for purpose and are inclusive e.g. sensory loss.

In 2014/15 the Wales National Survey reported that 63% of 65-74 year olds and only 29% of people aged 75 and over were using the internet. The survey also indicates that disabled people are twice as likely to be digitally excluded.

Whilst providing support is critical, usability and affordability are significant barriers. A re-contact survey of non-internet users from the 2013-14 National Survey for Wales, highlights the multiple barriers that prevent people from going online including that 91% identified a lack of interest or need as a factor. Cost was a contributing barrier for one third and upfront costs were seen as more of a constraint than monthly connection fees.

Industry reliance on digital services means that many older people are missing out on savings of up to £560 per year. Digital inclusion is also key to the continued participation of older people in lifelong learning and the significant contribution to communities and economies.

We should be mindful that digital solutions impact positively on many aspects of our lives but are not a replacement for human interaction. Embracing advances in the digital world will almost certainly present challenges and opportunities but it is essential to embed and integrate these advances to overcome barriers, this is particularly relevant for people with sensory loss.

Over the last decade funding for digital inclusion has enabled Third Sector providers to provide vital support in communities across Wales. RNIB's Online Today partnership project is funded by the Big Lottery for people with sensory loss. The impact on people's lives is evident and the team frequently talk about the impact on people's lives from speaking to family overseas to online shopping or simply being able to read books or correspondence independently. Early results from the evaluation indicate that after intervention:

- + 98% said they could use their technology independently
- + 81% of people said they felt more independent
- + 63% happier
- + 63% closer to their friends and family

RNIB Cymru is signed up to the Digital Communities Wales Digital Inclusion Charter and welcomes the support provided throughout the project including excellent training and recruiting volunteers.

The Welsh Government's refreshed Digital Inclusion Strategic Framework and Delivery Plan recognises progress across all sectors. Moving forward, it is imperative that services are sustainable including specialist support.



Digital (and other) matters



Published:
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Categories:
Digital inclusion

Living in Newport in South Wales and having excellent connectivity to the internet gives me a distinct advantage professionally and personally (with family living abroad). This point is brought home to me every time I travel in our beautiful Welsh countryside and encounter areas where there is poor mobile/internet connectivity.

The impact of this lack of access cannot be underestimated for individuals, families, communities and businesses. However, the lack of access is only the first barrier. Another barrier, even amongst those with access, may be the deeper digital literacy [1] needed to fully maximise opportunities from these connected technologies.

And these opportunities cannot be underestimated.

Used purposefully, these technologies connect us to an online world full of people, content, services, entertainment. And whilst online, size does not matter – reputation, transparency and quality do. Especially if the only way that others can learn about you is via the internet. All these skills also go beyond the merely functional. They encompass the social and emotional intelligence to understand how the world, society and life is changing as a result of these connected technologies, as well as how to interact, create and gain benefits with and from these technologies.

Digital and other technologies are also changing the very nature of skills, services, jobs and solutions needed today and in the years to come – whether for example, you are a scientist studying big data to create better infrastructure solutions for your city, an Uber inventor, a filmmaker utilising the latest CGI techniques in your film, or a hospital delivering tele-health services remotely.

What does this mean for our young people and the skills that they need to be developing through school and further education? I believe it means we need to value learning not as an end goal with an end point, but as a constant ongoing process. And we need to be nurturing a culture of creativity, inquiry and excellence. We are fortunate in Wales. In his review on the curriculum in Wales [2], Professor Graham Donaldson has stressed the importance of these skills. He has also singled out Digital Competence as a key requirement for 21st century living, and has called for it to be the third pillar in the curriculum, alongside literacy and numeracy. He has also emphasised that it should not be seen as an 'IT issue', but as a cross-curricular responsibility for all teachers and people who work with children and young people.

The world of education provides us with some of the best examples of how digital is transforming the many different facets of teaching and learning, and removing the walls of a traditional classroom. Today, you and I can learn virtually anything online, and terms like YouTube, blogs, podcasts, social media are commonplace jargon. The fact that some of the top universities globally are putting their course content online for free, or that some of the top institutions are running free MOOCs (Massive Open Online Learning) courses in a diverse range of subjects, which anyone can join, often for free - changes where, what and how we can learn.

But all of this innovation could sit like beautiful cakes in an invisible bakery. If the passers-by are not aware of the bakery, they will not step in or sample the wares – so simple availability

is not enough. We need to educate, guide and inspire old and young to understand the changing landscape. We also need to look at the ecosystems in which our young people live – our families, schools, colleges and universities, and all the places of informal learning in-between to understand what the gaps are, and the support systems necessary to help young people overcome obstacles and thrive in society.

And these go well beyond digital skills. I feel we are on the right track, but there is still much work that needs to be done.

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[1] In their Digital Literacy Professional Development Resource [<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/FUTL07/FUTL07.pdf>], Nesta Futurelab defined digital literacy as follows:

“...digital literacy goes beyond a focus on the individual technical competence and functional skills needed in order to operate digital tools; it refers to the more subtle and situated practices associated with being able to create, understand and communicate meaning and knowledge in a world in which these processes are increasingly mediated via digital technologies”.

[2] Successful Futures – Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales. By Professor Graham Donaldson CB, February 2015. See <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150225-successful-futures-en.pdf>



But all of this innovation could sit like beautiful cakes in an invisible bakery. If the passers-by are not aware of the bakery, they will not step in or sample the wares – so simple availability is not enough.







We should be mindful that digital solutions impact positively on many aspects of our lives but are not a replacement for human interaction.

Ceri Jackson, Director RNIB Cymru



The importance of digital inclusion for rural communities



Published:
07.10.16

Author:
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Categories:
Digital inclusion

Back in the 1990s I was running the business team at a company called CableTel South Wales, later to become NTL and now, Virgin Media.

We were building the first fibre networks to deliver TV and telephone services and of course this new “big thing” called “The Internet”.

Even then we were concerned that this new connection to a “digital superhighway” could widen the gap between developed and developing regions in Wales. Has that changed? Or do we still live in a multi-speed country in terms of access to and performance of our digital lives? I think we do.

We still have nearly one in five of our population digitally excluded and even those that are connected may still suffer poor performance in terms of speed and reliability. Meanwhile those networks I was involved in building back in the 1990s are now delivering speeds of up to 200MBps - way in excess of the 10 Mbps seen in some rural areas.

Sadly it’s our rural communities that suffer and having now worked closely to rural and agricultural communities for the best part of a year, I am continually disappointed that this situation still exists. 2% of our population produce around 60% of our food. Yet there is a significant part of that 2% who remain unable to connect to the internet from their farms. To plagiarise the old joke, we seem to have created a 3 speed Wales - Slow, Dead

Slow and Stop. This might be tongue in cheek but it’s not far from the truth.

Those parts of the country well served are not only connected, but now have nearly two decades of benefit from internet connectivity. Digital skills are high, tech awareness is endemic and economies benefit. Inward investment is attracted, businesses “connect” and thrive.

Meanwhile in the slow lane of rural Wales, skills remain poor as they’ve not been required until recently and the lack of mobile digital connectivity further exacerbates the challenge of getting maximum bang for the mega-bucks that have been spent on fixed line connectivity programmes.


In consequence, those without a connection cannot diversify their businesses as some might do. They cannot support children with homework as many need to do and they cannot connect readily with Government programmes for advice and support payments as they are mandated to do. In simple terms they are still being ignored and the gap continues to widen.

But over and above all that, they cannot benefit from the wider impact of digital technology that is racing through many parts of the world. If you are not familiar with the digital world you will find it far harder to adopt new and innovative practices that could transform businesses.


And even those communities that are connected cannot maximise benefits. Training programmes that were available in “the early days” are no longer available for businesses today. So those late to the party through no fault of their own are penalised even more.

And while much progress has been made over the years to include more and more people in the digital world in Wales there is still more to be done; particularly to reach the most remote groups, those families that are farming our land to produce the food we eat and care so well for our natural habitat and landscapes, who can often be found in the most rural areas of Wales.

We must not underestimate how important it is that we get every part of Wales connected and exploiting digital technologies in order to help make farming and rural businesses more effective and efficient and help more people to a brighter digital future.



And while much progress has been made over the years to include more and more people in the digital world in Wales there is still more to be done.



Transforming healthcare through digital inclusion



Published:
08.10.16

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Categories:
Digital inclusion

As three quarters of the UK population go online every day, the internet touches every area of our lives, making things faster, cheaper, better.

The networked age brings incredible opportunities for healthcare. The challenge is to ensure that digital health care services are designed around the needs of the hardest to reach and least digitally skilled.

In Wales almost one in five people are digitally excluded. The majority of these people are elderly, disabled or economically inactive – in short, the most vulnerable within our society; ironically, the largest users of our health and social care services.

It's undeniable that internet enabled technology can radically transform health care services and improve patient experiences. Technology should also help and enable clinicians to deliver more care, more effectively; and help patients and carers to spend time doing the things that really matter.

Digital health tools and services can help people:

- + Manage appointments – choosing suitable dates/times
- + Better manage their own time – e.g. ordering repeat prescriptions online
- + Monitor and manage their own health – e.g. through apps
- + Communicate more effectively with clinical teams
- + Create and engage with support networks
- + Feel more empowered

But in order for people and patients to be able to maximise the opportunities presented by digital health and social care services, they must have the necessary skills and tools.

Fundamentally, unless digital inclusion across Wales improves, individuals, families and communities through the Principality will not benefit from the significant opportunities that digital health services present to improving health outcomes and patient experiences.

At Maggie's, we are passionate about enabling people to feel as empowered as possible in their own health care and clinical decision-making. Increasingly, it is becoming more evident that those who are digitally included are becoming ever more empowered – using apps to record appointments, monitor their own health and even track their own emotions. Those who are digitally skilled are also gaining huge amounts of information and knowledge from the internet and support from online groups.

The Services team at Doteveryone is working to highlight how technology can improve the quality of life for elderly people who have life limiting conditions, and are at the final stages of life. Amongst other projects, the team is developing and testing new ways in which elderly people at end of life can be better connected – to reduce isolation and loneliness by finding and connecting people with others.

We are all responsible for ensuring that everyone, including the most vulnerable people that our services are designed to support, are given the opportunity to learn the necessary digital skills and get access to the appropriate tools.

Charitable organisations like Maggie's, Health Boards, Social Services and initiatives such as Digital Communities Wales must continue to work collaboratively (and in conjunction with the private sector) to tackle digital exclusion in years ahead – to ensure no one is left behind.

Digital Wales – more important than ever



Published:
09.10.16

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Categories:
Digital inclusion

When I first started to work with Cardiff University's journalism school in the late 1990s, I argued that Wales should declare millennium year 2000 the year of World Wide Wales, as an indication of intent that Wales would make sure of its place as a digital leader by prioritising investment in connectivity to the world wide web.

It didn't happen and for this lack of vision, we have paid a high price. The Welsh economy continues to struggle, with a few important exceptions, notably in our capital city. The best figures to watch are those gathered by my colleague Rob Huggins, which Sion Barry discussed recently on Wales Online, itself a digital resource of which Wales can be proud [1].

Over the summer, I had a personal sharp reminder about the effects of digital exclusion when we moved house from digitally abundant Penarth to a place ten minutes away where there's virtually no mobile signal and not much broadband. Combined with an unlucky breakdown in my own mobile phone system, every day brought reminders of the things you can't do without digital: check a fact, find a location, pay a bill, receive a delivery, track down your teenage daughter, stream music or work from home.

Let's hope that amid the post-Brexit confusion in Whitehall, the current Digital Economy Bill survives and delivers its albeit meagre promise of basic digital access for everyone. We've been arguing for something like this all through these years. It's the equivalent of the Royal Mail's universal service obligation, which guarantees the right to a postal service wherever you live. For the individual this is a basic right of citizenship and without it,

nation-scale societies can't work well or their economies prosper. It's the kind of start we should have achieved ten years ago. Chris Bryant, MP for Rhondda, drew attention to the bill's limitations in a recent debate in the House of Commons [2].

The other thing we've learned in the first two decades of the digital era is that solving the access problem is about more than infrastructure. There are many reasons other than the absence of strong broadband why people are not able to secure for themselves the benefits of digital services. These range from limitations of physical ability and health to education and questions of personal circumstance. Digital exclusion then compounds social exclusion.

Digital Communities Wales is doing great work to address issues of digital exclusion across Wales and has built on the work undertaken by Communities 2.0 and Communities@One. There is, however, plenty more work to be done.

We've discovered in the last 20 years that making Digital Wales a reality is even more important than we first thought, but harder.

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[1] <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/business/business-news/stark-figures-showing-just-how-11882426>

[2] <http://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-09-13/debates/16091326000001/DigitalEconomyBill>

Digital exclusion – another barrier to finding sanctuary



Published:
10.10.16

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Categories:
Digital inclusion

A large proportion of people seeking sanctuary find themselves digitally excluded. Whilst some will own or have access to smartphones, others will have no I.T. equipment of their own, relying on publicly accessible computers in libraries or other community spaces.

For asylum seekers, individuals who are undergoing a legal process which can take years to reach a conclusion, regular contact with solicitors or other legal representatives is likely to be high priority. With limited access to the internet, effective communication and furthering your legal case can be a challenge.

For anyone new to a city or area, being able to access online information and directories of services is bound to help to familiarise yourself with opportunities in your new area. For people seeking sanctuary, who may be entirely by themselves in a new area, the ability to access these resources is a hugely important step in becoming part of a new community.

On the other hand, if an individual receives a positive decision, granting them refugee status and leave to remain in the UK, there is a twenty-eight day 'move on period' to transfer from asylum support to mainstream benefits such as housing benefit, job seekers allowance or universal credit. In recent years, the process of accessing government benefits has moved primarily to digital online forms, as opposed to paper hard copies- a clear barrier for anyone trying to access these services without I.T. equipment, or stable internet access.

Refugees have the legal right to seek employment, unlike the vast majority of asylum seekers who are prohibited from working. Searching for a job is very likely to encompass some sort of online activity. Refugees are often highly skilled individuals with degrees, skills and experiences which can enhance their new community, contribute to society and to the tax pot. If individuals lack the digital means or the knowledge to apply for a job online, it is not only harmful for that one individual, it is a loss for wider Welsh society.

Digital Communities Wales is working in partnership with Swansea City of Sanctuary to develop training specific to helping people seeking sanctuary to reduce the risks of digital exclusion. Wales has a proud history of welcoming people seeking sanctuary, and more can be done to ensure the welcome offered is truly holistic, preventing further social and digital exclusion.







Our primary challenge is getting people into work – work with a decent rate of pay. That is almost impossible, these days, without computers.

Christine Gwyther, Lead Poverty Intervention Officer, Pembrokeshire Communities First



Digital inclusion – opportunities in the workplace



Published:
11.10.16

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Categories:
Digital inclusion

Today, people tend to have more opportunities in the world of work if they know their way around a smartphone or a laptop. Over 90% of jobs in today's world require basic internet skills. Currently in Wales around one in five adults are classed as digitally excluded. The vast majority of those are also socially excluded older adults, those in low paid employment or unemployed.

Trade unions in Wales are actively promoting digital inclusion in the workplace in a number of innovative ways. Union reps, especially Union Learning Reps (ULRs), are playing a vital role in getting people online and developing their ICT skills.

Employers have a responsibility to plan for the training and development that has to be invested in when introducing new technology at work. The pace with which employers are introducing new workplace technologies is not always being matched by an increase in workplace training and support. The drive to cut costs by modernising working practices is understandable and often necessary to protect budgets and ultimately jobs. However the access to appropriate training, particularly for lower paid employees and front-line staff, should keep pace. Many large employers are delivering more HR services and workplace training online. Yet in most sectors, and particularly in the public sector, less than a third of employees have access to a computer in work. Digital exclusion in the workplace has an impact on worker's equality of opportunity,

health and safety, pay and conditions, job security, workplace morale and training just to name a few. All issues of the upmost importance to trade unions.


The Wales TUC is pleased to be working with partners such as Digital Communities Wales to promote digital inclusion in the workplace. Through our affiliates and projects supported by the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) we are identifying workplace 'digital champions' to support digitally excluded colleagues in the workplace. Trade unions are also successfully negotiating with employers in the public and private sector to provide more support for their employees. We are encouraging employers to engage with the 'Digital Charter' in Wales, an award for employers who take the digital inclusion of their workforce seriously.

There has been some well publicised successes for trade unions in this area, for example in the utilities sector, where nearly 1000 employees have accessed forms of bespoke ICT training over the last few years. Union Learning Representatives acting as digital champions have underpinned this work. The public sector has specific challenges in this area. The size and demographic of the workforce makes it difficult for staff to gain access to a computer at work at all, let alone develop the required skills to effectively use new technologies. Yet the need to modernise and to cut costs is often most pressing here. Work has begun to engage public sector union branches across Wales on this issue, to recruit


more ULRs and digital champions and to identify the most at risk employee groups for urgent support with digital skills. The majority of union branches and public sector employers have already engaged in this activity with some significant early success.

Addressing this in the workplace will have an influence on the wider community. Accessing benefits and local services requires digital skills more and more these days. If workers below certain pay grades are denied the opportunity to learn, they won't have equal access to the public services they pay for, which only reinforces the inverse care law.

The workplace is a huge opportunity to reach those who need the support to overcome this barrier. Trade unions in Wales will continue their work in this important area, not only delivering direct support to workers where it is needed, but also holding employers to account to ensure that when they invest in their business with new technologies, they do not forget to invest in their staff also.



Over 90% of jobs in today's world require basic internet skills. Currently in Wales around one in five adults are classed as digitally excluded.



Digital inclusion and the media



Published:
12.10.16

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Categories:
Digital inclusion

Every member of the public in Wales needs access to reliable information to make good decisions for themselves, their communities and their nation. It is the job of the BBC to provide this type of information impartially, and in the Internet age this means delivery over digital platforms online and on mobile devices. An indication of just how important this has become is that the audience to BBC Online in Wales has grown massively in the past few years and now reaches over 3.4 million users a week.

It's not just about information and news though. Another key role for the BBC is to entertain our audiences and the Internet is a major entertainment platform in its own right. Our Sport audience for example, has grown massively in the last year, particularly on mobiles and tablets. Also, more than half a million people watch TV programmes from Wales in both languages on the BBC iPlayer every week, representing a three fold growth on the previous year.

The third key role for the BBC is to educate our audiences and our Learning services, such as Bitesize, are now delivered almost exclusively online as this is where our younger audiences want to find them.

The BBC has six public purposes, which are the values we hold in striving to achieve this mission to inform, educate and entertain. One of these public purposes is to deliver the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services. This is why we have invested in providing free digital services such as Freeview – the largest digital TV platform in the UK – and in DAB radio too. We are also

investing in initiatives such as Make it Digital, which encourages everyone to get coding. Eleven year olds across Wales have also been given BBC micro:bits which aims to do for coding in the 2010s what the BBC Micro did for personal computing in the 1980s.

We are also inspiring creative use of digital content through games linked to our big programme brands like Doctor Who; and through the creation of over 200 digital training placements across Wales. We have even recruited hundreds of volunteer 'weather watchers' many of whom have never been online before to help our weather forecasters provide an even better weather service to our audiences all over Wales.

We also appreciate that some people are not yet online and although their numbers have come down significantly in recent years they still make up nearly one in five of the population and there is still some way to go in achieving digital inclusion for everyone in Wales. This is why BBC Wales fully supports and works with initiatives like Digital Communities Wales, which highlight and provide help in accessing great content that informs, educates and entertains.



Digital inclusion and volunteering



Published:
13.10.16

Author:
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Categories:
Digital inclusion

The use of digital media and issues around digital exclusion have presented new and exciting opportunities, profound change, as well as challenges to the Third Sector in Wales.

WCVA has recently been in consultation with its members and stakeholders over its revised vision. Our vision looks to develop a society where volunteering and the Third Sector thrive, making an essential contribution to people's wellbeing today and for the future. In achieving this vision WCVA sees digital inclusion as key driver influencing the way we work and our mission.

Third Sector organisations are becoming increasingly proficient in the use of digital media and technology in respect of their volunteer engagement, volunteer recruitment processes, campaigning and advocacy. Research recently undertaken by the Open University has found that they are keen to embrace the opportunities offered by having digitally included staff and volunteers who use digital media and technology as part of their work. This research identified the fact that organisations with an enthusiastic digital advocate can make a real difference to the take up of technologies and practices.

This principle is central to WCVA's involvement with the Digital Communities Wales programme which recruits digital volunteers to work with organisations that are helping people get online. These volunteers have also acted as enablers and catalysts with Third Sector organisations to improve websites, social media engagement and volunteer interaction. This has led to organisations being able to engage with a wider and more diverse audience and to communicate more effectively with all relevant stakeholders.

The use of digital technology can also lead to dynamic ways of working that save time and cost and avoid duplication of effort and resource. For example, the use of digital technology can create opportunities for volunteers to communicate with volunteer managers and other relevant staff and volunteers. They can submit expense claims, send time sheets, sign up their availability for different activities, and make comments or share news, all in their own time.

And the possibilities go further. Communication and sharing of information between staff and volunteers in a 'horizontal' manner can help to create understanding between different teams, contact between volunteers who have little face-to-face contact with one another and mutual support (which can reduce the support time needed from staff). It can create a positive sense of belonging and contribute to an organisation. It encourages remote working and develops activity outside traditional working hours, leading to the potential engagement of a more diverse set of volunteers. WCVA, through its involvement with Digital Communities Wales, has been able to engage with individuals new to volunteering who are attracted to the digital aspect of the volunteer opportunities offered through the project.

A significant issue faced by the Third Sector will be a potential exacerbation of the digital divide. Voluntary sector organisations across Wales often work with communities and individuals that are facing multiple forms of social and economic exclusion. As the access to more goods and services become "digital by default", the gap between those digitally included and those excluded could potentially widen leading to significant challenges for the

Third Sector organisations working with them. The need to support those not online was a key driver in WCVA becoming a strategic partner for the Digital Communities Wales project. Digital technology challenges the very notion of what the role of a volunteer is.

Digital Inclusion can revolutionise all aspects of the future volunteer experience. This will manifest itself in all areas of Third Sector activity. Potential volunteers will be able to match to an appropriate volunteering opportunity seamlessly through the use of digital technology. Apps, webinars and digital toolkits will increase learning and the dissemination of innovation and best practice. Fundraising activity will be able to reach new audiences quickly saving time money and valuable staff and volunteer resource. The influencing and engagement activities of the sector will be enhanced by utilising technology to reach decision makers speedily using digital storytelling as an impactful tool.

WCVA is excited to be at the forefront of the sharing of best practice and innovation around the issues of digital inclusion. We look forward to working with other partners to embrace the challenges and opportunities that the fast changes in technology present to the Third Sector in Wales.



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Digital inclusion and public libraries



Published:
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Categories:
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Swansea public libraries continue to address digital inclusion through their network of 17 libraries. Along with other libraries in Wales, we provide free public access to PCs, broadband infrastructure and WIFI. We have venues that are settled in their very local communities where people can access services with ease. Libraries remain neutral places, well thought of and respected by all those who have browsed the shelves, sought out information and advice, accessed technology or just needed to sit and be part of a community.

A 2016 a survey conducted by the Society of Chief Librarians throughout Wales demonstrated the levels of engagement in digital inclusion that libraries and library staff have in their everyday work.

In answer to a question about whether library customers needed help from library staff to use Library IT the response was 41% yes and 59% no. This suggests that those who have started to be digitally included still need help and support.

Customers who are seeking out library IT facilities do so because they need access to computers, access to printers, scanners or broadband.

The survey demonstrated that the biggest activity online in libraries is accessing emails at 46%. There is a critical need for everyone to have access to an email address so that they can register for Universal Credit, look for jobs, communicate with the DWP and increasingly receive notifications from GPs and Health agencies. Having access to an email can help reduce financial and debt issues and opens up a whole range of services online to benefit individuals.

Libraries provide an essential role in supporting the digitally excluded whether they are excluded from lack of access or from lack of skills. Library staff are taking on the role of supporting them to gain access and to get to essential government and other agencies' services.

In addition to day-to-day "drop in" help and advice, libraries deliver Beginner IT sessions focusing on the very first steps to get someone online. Training and resources from Digital Communities Wales have assisted staff to better develop these skills. Digital Fridays are a common event with three-week courses or "drop in" sessions to support new IT users. Fear and safety of accessing services online is a barrier to some customers and libraries

Customer survey

No computer of my own	No printing facilities at home	No scanning facilities at home	No broadband access at home	Faulty equipment/faulty broadband at home	To access to IT training	Needed staff support	Other reason
38%	45%	17%	16%	5%	6%	9%	13%

participate in internet safety awareness campaigns and promote safe use of the internet to a wide range of users. Ad hoc “drop in” sessions provide opportunities for new-to-digital customers to stay engaged with technology and build on new-found skills.

Libraries are an important partner in supporting culture and heritage and those wishing to access content to trace family or discover more about their local community, its history or its buildings, find that they need to be able to use a wide range of online services to do this. Beginner IT sessions are often linked to accessing resources such as Ancestry or Times Digital Archive and this supports other needs and motivates the acquisition of new skills.

Ebooks, emagazines, online books, newspapers online are all a part of modern libraries and being digitally enabled and skilled will open up access to a large range of news services. These free resources can also be a motivator for individuals to learn to get online.

What next for digital engagement in libraries? Raspberry Pi sessions, Techno lego and coding clubs, fitness and health technology. There are many exciting opportunities, which everyone needs to be able to benefit from. The digitally excluded must be a part of this innovation.

Digital Communities Wales has been instrumental in providing new training and updating the skills of library staff. In particular it supports the delivery of Beginner IT sessions, facilitates networking and supports groups for partners involved in supporting the digitally

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Digital Communities Wales has been instrumental in providing new training and updating the skills of library staff.

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excluded. It shares resources and expertise with front line and direct delivery staff and finds flexible ways of sustaining training opportunities. Train the trainer events and bite sized training modules particularly support the creation of a community of digitally aware champions. DCW has started on the creation of volunteer digital champions to help sustain delivery in the future. One in five people in Wales are still digitally excluded and although progress is being made there is still a long way to go to ensure this number is reduced.

Without organisations such as DCW, libraries, community and volunteer sectors and other partners involved in addressing digital exclusion would be isolated and localised in their delivery and perhaps lose focus on the big picture to see digital exclusion eradicated.

Using digital engagement to combat poverty



Published:
15.10.16

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Categories:
Digital inclusion

There are certain things many of us take for granted. Being able to get the information we need and the entertainment we want at a moment's notice has become second nature. It empowers us as individuals. But, increasingly, government and private sector services rely upon digital interaction as a first resort. For anyone who does not have digital skills, this can leave them feeling powerless.

In Communities First, part of the Welsh Government's anti poverty programme, we work with people who need help with various aspects of their life. They may have chronic health issues which need to be managed or they may want to find out what sport and leisure activities are available to them. They may be looking for work or they may need tips on how to maximise their income, stay out of debt or look for cheaper utilities. All of these activities need a fair degree of digital literacy.

The Money Advice Service recently commissioned a UK wide survey which found that people in Wales (21%) are more comfortable seeking debt advice than the rest of the UK (15%). But that situation is reversed for rural Wales (13%). 59% of people living in Wales are happy to bank online but in rural Wales that level drops to 52%. Clearly connectivity is a problem and there is a lack of opportunity but also a reluctance to use online services in rural Wales. In places like Pembrokeshire that presents us with a real challenge when we are trying to increase digital engagement to combat poverty.

The predominant indicator of poverty, including child poverty, is income, and it is important that we treat with great caution any policy imperative which tries to downgrade or downplay that fact. Our primary challenge is getting people into work – work with a decent

rate of pay. That is almost impossible, these days, without computers. Having talent and practical experience is no longer enough for people seeking work. They need to be able to look online for the best opportunities and also to prove to the Department for Work and Pensions that they are actively seeking work.

We are currently seeking partners to help us digitally upskill our Communities First cohort of job seekers and people ready to start their own businesses. Understanding your own online persona is important. That hilarious email address you adopted at school or college is no longer appropriate when you are applying for jobs. Employers will also search social media to see what you do in your spare time. They want to see who they will be working with day to day, and with that in mind we try to ensure our customers know how to present themselves virtually as well as in real life.

And whether in or out of work, income maximisation is key. Looking after your money with confidence and building great habits for the future can be learned by anyone at any age. Digital competency can be delivered by professionals and also by talented volunteers such as those in Digital Communities Wales. We are looking to work with both to make a real difference to our customers and give them the confidence they need to manage their own learning and meet their own challenges in the future.

Government support for digital literacy will probably not be around forever. If we have a finite window of opportunity to address the twin challenges of poverty and digital exclusion, then we need to work together and we need to make our interventions truly count.



Get in touch

The articles in this publication were originally published online on the blog everyonesbusiness.coop to highlight the ongoing need for stakeholders to work together to address issues of digital inclusion.

If you're interested in finding out more about our work on digital inclusion, please get in touch.

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The Wales Co-operative Centre has been working to address issues of digital exclusion in Wales for over 11 years now. We know that our Welsh Government funded work has made a significant contribution to addressing the digital divide in Wales, but we also know that there is plenty more to be done, as more and more services and interactions are moving into an online space.



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Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd oedi os byddwch yn gohebu â ni yn Gymraeg.