Citizens Online

Digital Skills Support Review

During One Digital we encouraged Digital Champions (DCs) involved in our projects to complete a session record each time they provided digital skills support to someone. These records including space to record the type of help provided to a learner.

While it does not cover *all* sessions delivered, a substantial amount of data was recorded on the Digital Champions Network (DCN) between January 2016 and June 2019.[1] While similar data was also collected through other means, for this part of our evaluation we have focused only on DCN session records.[2]

The Essential Digital Skills framework describes five basic digital skills that can be used to measure digital skills support,[3] and example activities related to demonstrating these skills. These were:

- **Managing information**: using a search engine to look for information, finding a website visited previously, or downloading/saving a photo found online.
- **Communicating**: sending a personal message via email or online messaging service or carefully making comments and sharing information online.
- **Transacting**: buying items or services from a website or buying and installing apps on a device.
- **Problem Solving**: verifying sources of information online or solving a problem with a device or digital service using online help.

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[1] One Digital work continued until May 2020, but we do not expect data collected since June 2019 to substantially alter the findings and Covid-19 has restricted the time available to repeat the analysis.

[2] For a variety of reasons, many DCs involved weren't able to record sessions on the DCN; even among DCs who regularly report, not every session was recorded. Reporting on sessions can be time-consuming and may overlap with other reporting mechanisms DCs use (especially if they are 'Embedded' DCs). As part of our attempts to mitigate the impact of this, sessions can also be reported through a simpler "tally" system via the DCN, or in "Activity Snapshots" that sample one week's data from as many DCs in a Network as possible. We have not attempted to incorporate such data into this analysis.

[3] The BDS framework was developed by GoOn UK / Doteveryone and taken on by The Tech Partnership, as a tool to measure digital inclusion (PDF). It evolved into the Essential Digital Skills Framework during 2018, managed by the UK Government Department for Education. We have utilised examples from the initial framework as these were those used to explain the categories to most DCs.

- **Creating**: completing online application forms including personal details, or creating something new from existing online images, music or video.

These categories are broad, and aren't mutually exclusive. It appears that DCs may understand them differently – which affects how skills sessions are recorded. However, the data provides us with insight into the skills with which learners appear to most frequently require assistance or training.

Across the two projects of Digital Brighton and Hove, and Digital Gwynedd/Gwynedd Ddigidol, we analysed 5,276 individual DCN session records – submitted by 69 different Digital Champions. As DCs can mark multiple skills for each session, these sessions account for 9,353 categories identified (broken down in figure 1)

While each of the categories attracts a significant number of sessions, the categories of Managing Information (24.0%), Problem Solving (23.6%), and Communicating (21.4%) account for much higher proportions of sessions (69.0% in total).

Figure 1: Help provided at digital support session by Basic Digital Skill category. Source: DCN, January 2016 - January 2019.
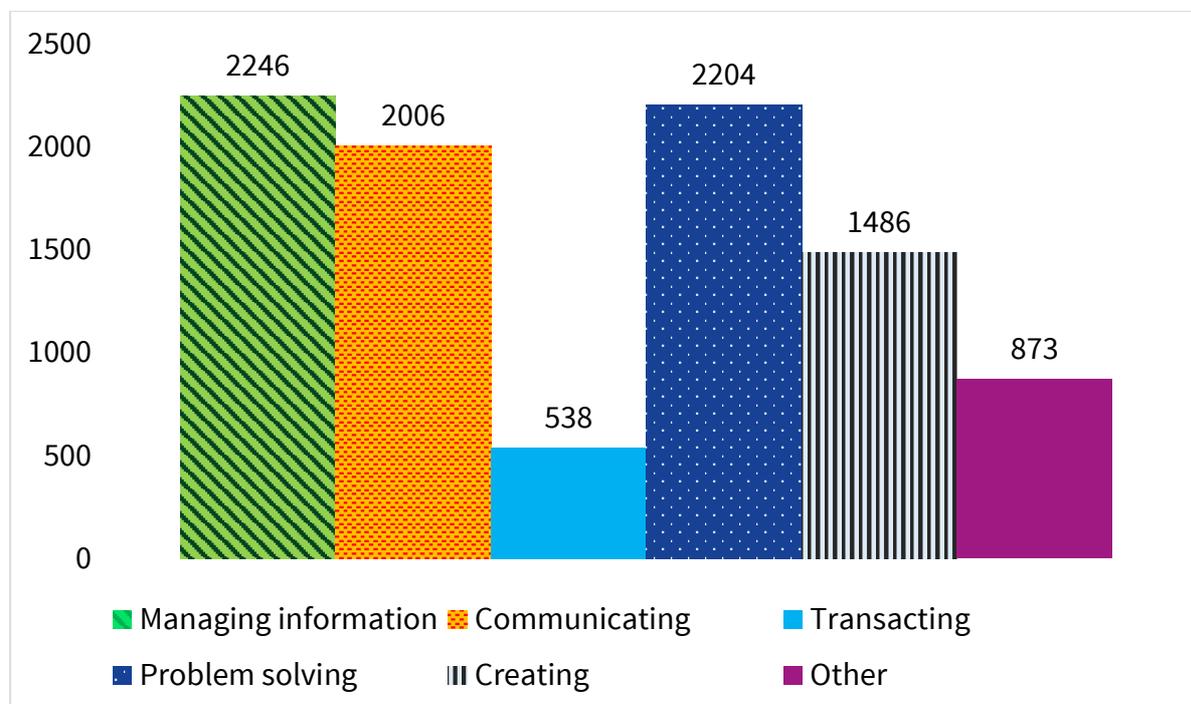
Figure 2 shows that different DCs report helping people with different proportions of digital skills.[4] This may partly reflect the way in which particular DCs arrange sessions or are allocated to provide help to particular groups. However, it seems reasonable to assume that this also reflects the way in which DCs understand the categories – the variation in selection of the category "Other", suggests some DCs are happy allocating find the 5 broad categories can be stretched to include most activity, while others are happy to spend time detailing the specifics of the support they have provided and are less certain this support fits into a pre-existing category.

Figure 2: Basic Digital Skills support recorded by proportion for the five DCs submitting the highest numbers of reports. Source: DCN, Jan 2016 - Jan 2019.[5]
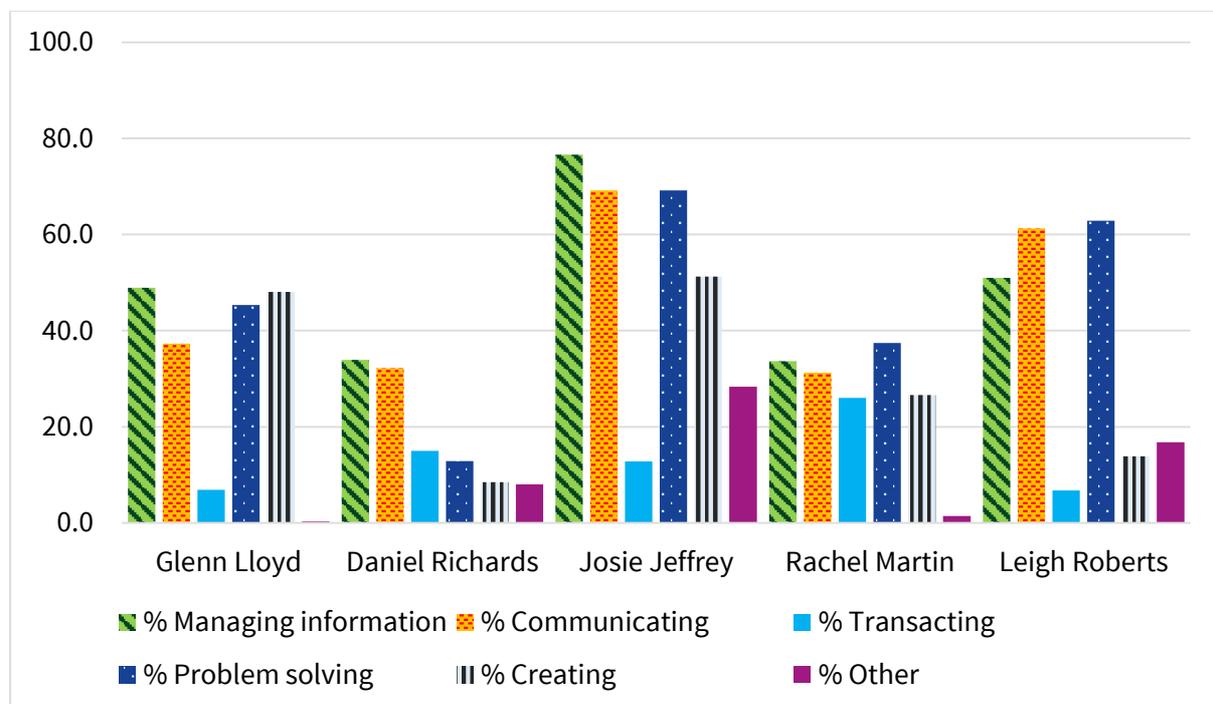

Figure 3 shows that there is nonetheless broad consistency across our two Deep Dive projects, which implies the data at a headline level does represent the breakdown of learner needs approximately, once DC preferences in reporting are accounted for. The

[4] Each of the five DCs listed here recorded at least 300 session records via the DCN. Each of the DCs listed is or has been a Professional Digital Champion employed by Citizens Online – both enabling them to undertake more digital skills sessions, and meaning they are more likely to fill in DCN records.

[5] Percentages do not sum to 100 as DCs can select multiple skills which they helped learners with at each session.

difference in proportion on "Creating" as a skill (twice as high in Brighton and Hove than in Gwynedd), and on "Transacting" in Gwynedd (almost twice as high in Gwynedd than in Brighton and Hove) don't dramatically alter the overall picture – and likely do reflect DC preferences and organisational priorities as much as different learner needs. These differences themselves may be explained by differing interpretations regarding assistance with application forms – described as "Creating" in the five-fold system, but arguably more similar to transactional skills.

Figure 3: Proportions of digital skills identifications, Brighton and Gwynedd. Source: DCN, January 2016 - January 2019.