

Evaluation of signposting websites

Signposting sites were created for each of four digital inclusion projects in 2015 as part of One Digital Phase 1:

- Digital Highland
- Digital Plymouth
- Digital Gwynedd
- Digital Brighton & Hove

During Phase 2 of One Digital, the Plymouth and Highlands sites were discontinued as funding for those projects ended in November 2016. Digital Brighton & Hove and Digital Gwynedd continued to be supported until Summer 2019 when the Gwynedd project ended. Only [Digital Brighton & Hove](#) remains as a live site.

The aims of the sites were to provide Digital Champions in each area with a tool to support effective triage, signposting and referral of members of the community to relevant help and support.

Each site had a searchable database of resources:

- Free internet access locations with public access computers / equipment
- Digital skills support drop-in sessions (Digital Champion support)
- Digital skills training courses (either generic or specific; formal or informal)

The sites were intended to be used mainly by Digital Champions as a resource for signposting learners to the most appropriate places where for them to get online and get ongoing support. We noted over time that many members of the public used the sites effectively to self-triage / signpost and refer.

There were two approaches to evaluating the sites.

1. Examining the responses given in our One Digital Partner Survey, which was open in April-May 2019 and promoted online.
2. Interviews with Project Managers of the Digital Brighton & Hove and Digital Gwynedd projects as to their insights and views on the sites.

The survey was promoted to all Citizens Online partners and former project areas and so while the majority came from Brighton & Hove and Gwynedd projects, several came from other locations.

PARTNER SURVEY RESPONSES

In total there were 84 completed responses to the survey:

- Brighton & Hove 57
- Gwynedd 17 (6/35% completed the Welsh Language survey)
- Plymouth 4
- Anglesey 3
- Kent 1 (after duplicate respondents removed)

In **Brighton & Hove**, there were 57 respondents to the survey, representing 25 organisations. There were a range of respondents in different roles. 30% were senior leaders or managers.

When asked to rate the value of different project communication resources to them and their organisations, the resources with the most value (highest % of respondents scoring positive results at 4, 5 or 6 out of 6) were jointly considered to be:

- The Digital Champions Network (DCN - online e-Learning resource)
- Signposting Website for Digital Skills and WIFI Access

The element with the least value (highest % of respondents scoring negative results at 1, 2 or 3 out of 6) was considered to be:

- Signposting Website for Digital Skills and WIFI Access

The fact that the signposting website was amongst the most highly valued and least valued scores demonstrates the ‘split’ of opinion about its use and usability. We know from anecdotal evidence that the signposting website was highly valued by a small number of Digital Champions who used it, but for many it was a little or never-used resource with no value.

Interestingly in Brighton and Hove 19.6% of respondents said they “weren’t aware” of the signposting site. This result is surprising as every communication in the preceding 4 years of work included links to the site and it had been promoted heavily. The same practice of promoting the sites was in place in Gwynedd, but only 9.1% were unaware across those respondents.

In **Gwynedd**, there were 17 respondents representing 8 organisations (the 8 organisations equate to an 11% sample of the 70 organisations engaged in the Digital Gwynedd Network). Around a third were from senior leaders or managers.

Here, the resources with the **most value** (highest % of respondents scoring positive results at 4, 5 or 6 - out of 6) were jointly considered to be:

- The Digital Champions Network (online e-Learning resource)
- Signposting Website for Digital Skills and WIFI Access

11 of the 17 respondents rated the value of the signposting site as 4, 5 or 6 (the highest ratings). More gave these marks than to any other aspect of the project, except Partnership Development (e.g. meetings, workshops and events).

In other areas (Plymouth, Anglesey, Kent) – of 8 [valid] respondents, 4 gave the signposting site a rating of 6 (presumably from Plymouth as other areas did not have a local signposting site). This was reasonably positive, though the site was less positively rated overall than other communication resources such as the DCN, newsletters and Twitter.

Figure 1: Ratings for the value of the Signposting site - Brighton & Hove

17.2. Signposting Website for Digital Skills and WIFI Access			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Not applicable		7.1%	4
2	Not Aware		19.6%	11
3	1		3.6%	2
4	2		3.6%	2
5	3		21.4%	12
6	4		12.5%	7
7	5		12.5%	7
8	6		19.6%	11

Figure 2: Ratings for the value of the Signposting site - Gwynedd (English language)

17.2. Signposting Website for Digital Skills and WIFI Access			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Not applicable		0.0%	0
2	Not Aware		9.1%	1
3	1		9.1%	1
4	2		9.1%	1
5	3		9.1%	1
6	4		9.1%	1
7	5		36.4%	4
8	6		18.2%	2

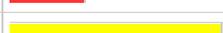
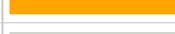
Figure 3: Ratings for the value of the Signposting site - Gwynedd (Welsh language)

17.2. Gwefan cyfeirio sgiliau digidol a mynediad wifi			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Nid yn gymwys		0.0%	0
2	Nid yn ymwybodol		0.0%	0
3	1		0.0%	0
4	2		16.7%	1
5	3		16.7%	1
6	4		50.0%	3
7	5		16.7%	1
8	6		0.0%	0

Figure 4: Ratings for the value of the Signposting site – non-Brighton/Gwynedd respondents

17.2. Signposting Website for Digital Skills and WIFI Access			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Not applicable		11.1%	1
2	Not Aware		22.2%	2
3	1		11.1%	1
4	2		0.0%	0
5	3		11.1%	1
6	4		0.0%	0
7	5		0.0%	0
8	6		44.4%	4

Figure 5: Summary of responses in Partner Survey – all projects

17.2. Signposting Website for Digital Skills and WIFI Access			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Not applicable		6.1%	5
2	Not Aware		17.1%	14
3	1		4.9%	4
4	2		4.9%	4
5	3		18.3%	15
6	4		13.4%	11
7	5		14.6%	12
8	6		20.7%	17

Nearly half (40 of 82) responses rated their local project signposting site as between 4-6: very positive, with the highest number of these giving a rating of 6.

Bearing in mind that some respondents came from project areas without a signposting site (Kent, Anglesey), and that a significant number (14) were not aware of the site, this is a reasonably good approval rating of the impact of the sites.

SUMMARY OF LOCAL PROJECT MANAGER INTERVIEWS

The value of the sites for partners has been that they represent a service, a product: people see their names on there in the listing of resources; they can see the range of courses and sessions that are offered. It's a tangible sign of what's going on in an area and that is helpful.

When projects first started, signposting information was printed out. This was really valuable in terms of getting information to people who weren't online – but not sustainable in terms of printing costs and information becoming quickly out of date.

Sites have overall been less useful to service users ["end learners"] as they have not been aware of them – the sites weren't promoted to residents and they're not the sort of sites users would usually access independently.

The sites also take a lot of time and resource to manage and keep up to date. They are built using WordPress, which requires updates and regular 'tweaks and fixes' to keep them accessible.

Citizens Online have also been keen to ensure that information stays up to date and the risk of users attending sessions that aren't running or discovering an accessibility issue on arrival is minimised. However, this takes a lot of effort. We first attempted to keep sites updated every two weeks, but the system became cumbersome. Eventually they were updated roughly every 1-2 months.

Overall, it's quite difficult to make an assessment as to the value of the sites – some digital champions are clearly 'power users' and COVID-19 generated refreshed interest in the Brighton & Hove area; but they are an expensive resource to manage in terms of time and energy, albeit relatively low cost in terms of domain hosting etc.

Citizens Online would only recommend building a new signposting website from scratch in an area if there were no other existing online signposting resources. Many local authorities, health services and charities, do now have these sites up and running – it is likely better to build digital skills information into existing sites where they already exist.

BRIGHTON & HOVE

“Many members of the local digital inclusion network did not care about the site until Covid-19. Then it started to be used a lot more as a place to access a comprehensive list of services, support offers and training materials – all summarised in regular newsletters.

It’s important to spend time gathering quality resources, materials that are *current* and *useful*. There’s more that could be added through the post-Covid re-opening process, in terms of the site being a place where reliable information can be found about which services and venues are reopening, and on what date, where can people go to access a computer and Wi-Fi, do they have to book a computer at the library and so on.

The priority into the next phase will be keeping that “reopening” info current.

Another priority is developing and curating the “Useful Resources” page. People are really wanting information and advice on how to help people, especially advice on groups with specific needs, such as how to help people with dementia.

It needs to be a simple place to send people to when they come with enquiries and needs, rather than writing a new email from scratch each time. It’s about streamlining the response to needs and requests for help, so you can just point people immediately to your resources page. Another priority is workflow; making it easy to update the site information, as this has been one of the most time consuming and resource heavy elements of maintaining the site”.