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Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health, and Well-being: 2023 Update Report

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being: 2023 Update Report

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Contents

| | | |
|----|--|----|
| 1. | Introduction..... | 2 |
| 2. | DCW performance and achievements..... | 4 |
| 3. | Conclusions and issues to consider | 15 |

List of tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 2.1: DCW performance July 2019 to March 2021 (21 months) | 4 |
| Table 2.2: Key Performance Indicators | 5 |
| Table 2.3: Programme Outcomes | 5 |
| Table 2.4: DCW performance April 2021 to June 2022 (15 months)..... | 6 |
| Table 2.5: DCW performance during Year 4 (July 2022 to June 2023, 12 months) and overall performance to date for Years 4 to 6 (July 2022 to June 2025, 36 months)..... | 8 |
| Table 2.6: Progress against DCW programme outcomes | 13 |

1. Introduction

- 1.1 OB3 Research was appointed by the Welsh Government to undertake an evaluation of the Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health, and Well-being (DCW) programme. DCW is now a six-year programme, following a decision by the Welsh Government to activate the option to extend the original three-year delivery contract. The programme is delivered by Cwmpas, in conjunction with the Good Things Foundation and Swansea University, to reduce digital exclusion and help improve basic digital skills levels across Wales.
- 1.2 The Welsh Government invested £6m revenue funding¹ into the programme over a three-year period between 1st July 2019 and 31st June 2022 (the first phase, Years 1 to 3). Additional revenue funding of £6m was made available for a further three-year period between 1st July 2022 and 31st June 2025 (the second phase, Years 4 to 6).
- 1.3 The aims of the evaluation are to:
- review and summarise existing evidence around the relationship between digital inclusion and health
 - review the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of the programme
 - assess the extent to which the programme aims have been achieved and targets met
 - provide evidence of the outcomes of the programme for individuals and the services they access.
- 1.4 The evaluation is being undertaken across three main stages:
- the first stage involved the preparation of a process evaluation and theory of change report during 2020²

¹ Revenue funding differs to capital funding in that it funds fixed or short-term activities such as staff. Capital funding is used to fund purchases which can be used over a longer-term period such as equipment.

² [Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being | GOV.WALES](#)

- the second stage involved the preparation of an interim process and outcome evaluation during 2021³
- the third stage will involve the preparation of a summative final evaluation. It was originally intended that this would be conducted in 2022 but will now be undertaken during 2025 to coincide with the programme extension.

1.5 This short update report, which draws upon programme documentation such as progress reports, is intended to review programme performance against targets to date. It considers:

- key performance indicator (KPI) performance over the first phase of delivery (Years 1 to 3, July 2019 to June 2022)
- initial KPI performance during the second phase (Year 4, July 2022 to June 2023)
- progress against programme outcomes (Years 1 to 4, July 2019 to June 2023).

³ Ibid.

2. DCW performance and achievements

DCW KPI performance - Years 1 to 3 (July 2019 to June 2022)

2.1 During the first phase of DCW and up until the end of March 2021, the programme reported against nine annual KPIs. Our Interim Process and Outcome evaluation concluded that the programme was performing well against four of these, having exceeded two of them by some margin. It was performing reasonably well against another three KPIs but was significantly under-performing against the remaining two, which related to engagement with private sector organisations and supporting health and care staff.

Table 2.1: DCW performance July 2019 to March 2021 (21 months)

| KPI | 3-Year target (36 months) | Achieved (at 21 months) | Achieved (as % of overall target) | |
|-----|---|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|
| 1 | People directly supported through intensive interventions | 15,000 | 12,597 | 84% |
| 2 | People supported indirectly via engagement with organisations | 120,000 | 29,109 | 24% |
| 3 | Large Private Sector organisations engaged with | 30 | 1 | 3% |
| 4 | Third and public sector bodies engaged with | 240 | 361 | 150% |
| 5 | Public sector organisations engaged with (to include every Health Board and Local Authority) | 105 | 31 (10) | 30% |
| 6 | Digital Inclusion volunteers recruited and placed by organisations supported by the programme | 1,500 | 1,365 | 91% |
| 7 | Health and care staff supported to engage with technology to improve health outcomes | 15,000 | 1,394 | 9% |
| 8 | Patients supported to engage with technology to improve health outcomes | 45,000 | 14,905 | 33% |
| 9 | Front Line Staff (non-health and care) trained to support service users to engage with technology | 1,500 | 1,529 | 201% |

Source: DCW programme quarterly reports

2.2 In response to a recommendation offered in our Process and Theory of Change Evaluation report⁴, which suggested that the Welsh Government review the programme’s KPIs and adopt a smaller number of more realistic outputs and qualitative outcomes which better reflected the programme’s priorities and provisions, four new KPIs (outputs) and four programme level outcomes were adopted by DCW from 1 April 2021 onwards⁵, replacing the nine indicators previously used. These new outputs and outcomes are set out at Tables 2.2 and 2.3 below.

Table 2.2: Key Performance Indicators

| No. | Key Performance Indicators |
|-----|--|
| 1 | People supported to become digitally confident (motivation, basic digital skills and confidence) |
| 2 | Volunteers providing support to citizens |
| 3 | Support to ensure digital inclusion is recognised strategically ⁶ and embedded within organisational delivery |
| 4 | Health and care, public, private and third sector staff supported to become digitally confident |

Table 2.3: Programme Outcomes

| No. | Programme Outcomes |
|-----|---|
| 1 | People having sufficient basic digital skills and confidence to be able to engage digitally (and with digital services) in their everyday and working lives |
| 2 | Increased levels of people using technology to manage their health (physical & mental) and wellbeing independently |
| 3 | Increase in digital inclusion being embedded in organisational strategy and delivery |

⁴ [Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being | GOV.WALES](#)

⁵ Three new outcomes were adopted originally, with the fourth (Outcome 3 in Table 2.3) added in July 2022

⁶ This KPI was amended slightly in September 2023 (during Year 4) following a discussion between Welsh Government officials and the DCW delivery team. The original KPI was ‘support to ensure digital inclusion is recognised and embedded within organisational strategy and delivery’.

| | |
|---|---|
| 4 | Improved understanding of the use of digital health services and tools through cohort specific research projects and longitudinal mapping |
|---|---|

2.3 Initial programme performance against these targets over a six-month period between April and September 2021 was considered as part of the interim process and outcome evaluation. Programme performance was found to be either on track or exceeding targets for three of its KPIs. It was slightly behind in its performance for KPI 3 (Support to ensure digital inclusion is recognised and embedded within organisational strategy and delivery) although it appeared that DCW had engaged with an adequate number of organisations to allow this target to be achieved within the delivery period.

2.4 Table 2.4 sets out programme performance against the four KPIs for the 15-month delivery window from April 2021 to June 2022. It shows that DCW exceeded its target for KPI 1 (People supported to become digitally confident) but, whilst good progress was made against the other three, the programme did not fully achieve them.

Table 2.4: DCW performance April 2021 to June 2022 (15 months)

| KPI | | Target | Achieved | Achieved as % |
|-----|--|--------|----------|---------------|
| 1 | People supported to become digitally confident (motivation, basic digital skills, and confidence) | 32,500 | 40,610 | 125% |
| 2 | Volunteers providing support to citizens | 1,250 | 861 | 69% |
| 3 | Support to ensure digital inclusion is recognised and embedded within organisational strategy and delivery | | | |
| | a.) Private Sector | 2 | 0 | 0% |
| | b.) Local Authorities | 10 | 10 | 100% |
| | c.) Health Boards (IMTP) | 3 | 6 | 200% |
| | d.) Third and Public Sector | 20 | 6 | 30% |
| | Total | 35 | 22 | 63% |
| 4 | Health and care, public, private and third sector staff supported to become digitally confident | 1,750 | 1,291 | 74% |

Source: DCW programme quarterly reports

DCW KPI performance - Year 4 (July 2022 to June 2023)

- 2.5 Over the second phase of funding (Years 4 to 6, July 2022 to June 2025), annual targets were set for each KPI. Table 2.5 sets out DCW's achievements during Year 4 (July 2022 to June 2023). It shows that the programme has made excellent progress, having far exceeded its annual targets for KPI 1 (People supported to become digitally confident) and KPI 4 (Health and care, public, private and third sector staff supported to become digitally confident) and is making good progress against its three-year target for KPI 3 (Support to ensure digital inclusion is recognised strategically and embedded within organisational delivery) (i.e., there are no annual targets for KPI 3).
- 2.6 Performance against KPI 2 (Volunteers providing support to citizens) has been somewhat disappointing for this period, with DCW having only achieved two-thirds of its annual target during Year 4 (July 2022 to June 2023) to engage volunteers to provide support to citizens, echoing the programme's prior experience during the first phase of delivery. It is also notable that whilst good progress is being made overall against KPI 3 (Support to ensure digital inclusion is recognised strategically and embedded within organisational delivery), no private sector organisations have been recorded to date against this indicator.

Table 2.5: DCW performance during Year 4 (July 2022 to June 2023, 12 months) and overall performance to date for Years 4 to 6 (July 2022 to June 2025, 36 months)

| KPI | | Year 4 (July 2022 to June 2023) | | | Years 4 to 6 (July 2022 to June 2025) | |
|-----|---|------------------------------------|----------|---------------|--|------------------------------------|
| | | Target | Achieved | Achieved as % | Target | Achieved to date ⁷ as % |
| 1 | People supported to become digitally confident (motivation, basic digital skills, and confidence) | 34,000 | 41,780 | 128% | 102,000 | 41% |
| 2 | Volunteers providing support to citizens | 1,000 | 623 | 62% | 3,000 | 21% |
| 3 | Support to ensure digital inclusion is recognised strategically and embedded within organisational and delivery | | 0 | | 10 | 0% |
| | a.) Private Sector | | 4 | | 12 | 33% |
| | b.) Local Authorities | | 4 | | 9 | 44% |
| | c.) Health Boards (IMTP) | | 16 | | 24 | 67% |
| | d.) Third and Public Sector Total | n/a | 24 | n/a | 55 | 44% |
| 4 | Health and care, public, private and third sector staff supported to become digitally confident | 1,350 | 1,877 | 139% | 4,050 | 46% |

Source: DCW programme quarterly reports

Discussion of KPI achievements – Years 1 to 4 (July 2019 to June 2023)

2.7 We now turn to consider some of the main issues for these KPIs:

KPI 1: People supported to become digitally confident

2.8 DCW supported 41,780 people to become more digitally confident between July 2022 and June 2023, bringing the total number of outputs against this KPI since April 2021 to 82,390 (exceeding the target set by the Welsh

⁷ Outputs achieved July 2022 to June 2023 against the overall three-year target July 2022 to June 2025.

Government in discussion with the contractor provider of 66,500). Year 4 (July 2022 to June 2023) quarterly reports notes that most of these outputs were achieved via participants being indirectly supported via Digital Consultation Plans⁸ and indirectly supported via training provision.

KPI 2: Volunteers providing support to citizens

2.9 DCW engaged 623 volunteers to provide support between July 2022 and June 2023, bringing the total number of outputs against this KPI since April 2021 to 1,484 (against a target of 2,250). During Year 4 (June 2019 to June 2023) of delivery, the main source of achieving these outputs was via the Digital Heroes workstream⁹ (which accounted for 267 of the 623 volunteers recruited that year) followed by the Digital Champions workstream¹⁰ (134 volunteers).

2.10 The continued impact of the pandemic accounts for much of the under-performance against KPI 2, as volunteer numbers have not returned to levels seen pre-pandemic as has been the case for other similar interventions which rely on the input of volunteers. It is understood that DCW are exploring new ideas and approaches to recruit volunteers, including the use of digital volunteers, which may help to boost volunteer recruitment somewhat for the remaining delivery period. However, as it stands the current annual targets set for Years 5 and 6 appear unrealistic and there may be merit in reducing them over the remaining delivery period to reflect the changing face of the volunteer landscape post-pandemic.

KPI 3: Support to ensure digital inclusion is recognised strategically and embedded within organisational delivery

2.11 The most recent DCW quarterly report (April to June 2023) notes that the programme had engaged with 1,985 organisations in total, and of these, 736 had received a Digital Consultation Plan. In addition, 46 organisations

⁸ Digital Consultation Plans are developed for organisations who engage with DCW, setting out how organisations will support their users/members to become more digitally confident.

⁹ Digital Heroes are children and young people who are confident users of tech, and who use their skills to help others with digital. See: [Digital Heroes \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/digital-heroes)

¹⁰ DCW delivers training for volunteers and front-line staff to become Digital Champions within their organisation, so that they can better support individuals to engage with digital inclusion.

had received support to ensure that digital inclusion was embedded into organisational strategy and delivery. Quarterly reports helpfully identify the clients being claimed during each reporting period and provide further evidence that there is significant ongoing work with these organisations.

- 2.12 The continued difficulties faced by DCW to engage private sector organisations over its four years of delivery raises an important question about the appropriateness of this target, and the programme's ability more generally to directly engage private sector employers. Since 2019, DCW has only been able to report upon engagement with one private sector organisation, and progress reports do not offer any confidence that the target of 10 will be achieved (i.e., quarterly reports do not provide any detail about private sector companies which are in the pipeline or specific plans to target this sector). More broadly over the last year, DCW has been adopting a more strategic approach to its work with the private sector and commissioned independent research¹¹ to inform a package of support around digital which small businesses might require in the future. Whilst it is not expected that DCW will take full responsibility for delivering this support, it will nonetheless be important for the programme to take on board the findings to inform its offer to the private sector. Given that the programme has less than two years left to achieve this target, there is a strong case for DCW to develop an action plan, drawing upon the research findings, to set out how it intends to achieve its programme target for private sector organisations. There is also a compelling case, given that the programme is performing well against its other KPIs, for DCW to divert resources to focus upon this area of delivery for the remaining period.

KPI 4: Health and care, public, private and third sector staff supported to become digitally confident

- 2.13 DCW supported 1,877 people to become digitally confident during Year 4 (July 2022 to June 2023), bringing the total number of outputs against this KPI since April 2021 to 3,268 (exceeding the target of 3,100). Quarterly reports for Year 4 shows that 29 per cent (544 of the 1,877) staff supported

¹¹ [Small Business Digital Exclusion \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/small-business-digital-exclusion)

to become digitally confident were from the health and social care sector whilst 71 per cent (1,333) were from other sectors. It would be reasonable to expect that a larger proportion of staff being supported by DCW were from the health and social care sector, given the programme's overall objective to support this sector. It may be worth introducing a minimum annual proportional or absolute target for those being trained from the health and care sector, and that this be appropriately resourced from within the programme delivery team for the remaining two years of delivery in order to boost the numbers being supported.

- 2.14 The training provision has been delivered online and face to face, with most participation taking place online over the course of Year 4 (June 2022 to June 2023).

Progress against programme outcomes – Years 1 to 4 (July 2019 to June 2023)

- 2.15 Our interim process and outcome evaluation reported on initial feedback (over a six-month period) captured from client organisations and individuals trained, as a means of measuring whether the three programme outcomes (at the time) were achieved. We reported that of the total of 95 individuals trained who provided feedback:

- 83 per cent were more confident to share digital skills with others
- 82 per cent were more motivated to use technology in their everyday lives
- 80 per cent reported that their digital skills had improved
- 75 per cent felt more confident using technology regularly
- 55 per cent had a better understanding of how to use technology to improve and manage their health.

- 2.16 We also reported that for supported organisations:

- 100 per cent of organisations surveyed said that DCW support helped them to work towards their digital inclusion goals

- 61 per cent of organisations were aware of the Digital Strategy for Wales
- 48 per cent of organisations received staff training from DCW trainers
- 35 per cent of organisations developed digital partnerships with other organisations as a result of DCW.

2.17 Overall, there has been an improvement in the outcomes reported compared to those captured and reported at the interim stage. An analysis of data set out in Year 4 (July 2022 to June 2023) quarterly reports, which draws upon survey feedback gathered by DCW from 309 participants and 48 organisations¹² is set out at Table 2.6. The data shows that the overwhelming majority of trained participants report improved outcomes as a result of being involved in DCW. Survey data captured by DCW for supported organisations shows a slightly more mixed picture, albeit an improvement in the outcomes compared to the interim evaluation.

2.18 It is worth noting that the data set out at Table 2.6 forms only part of the evidence required to demonstrate whether DCW is achieving its programme outcomes, and it will be important to consider primary evidence gathered as part of our final evaluation fieldwork to assess the extent to which these have been achieved.

¹² Outcome data for organisations is provided in three quarterly reports across Year 4. Data has been aggregated for three survey questions which were reported upon in these three quarterly reports.

Table 2.6: Progress against DCW programme outcomes

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Outcome 1: People having sufficient basic digital skills and confidence to be able to engage digitally (and with digital services) in their everyday and working lives</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 88 per cent felt that digital skills had improved. • 92 per cent felt more confident using technology. • 98 per cent said they know how to stay safe online. • 91 per cent feel motivated to use technology in daily lives. • 89 per cent were more confident sharing digital skills with others. |
| <p>Outcome 2: Increased levels of people using technology to manage their health (physical & mental) and wellbeing independently</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 79 per cent better understand how to use technology to improve and manage health. • 88 per cent have the skills and confidence to do all the things they want to with technology. |
| <p>Outcome 3: Increase in digital inclusion being embedded in organisational strategy and delivery</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90 per cent of organisations (43 of 48) said that support helped them to work towards digital inclusion goals. • 62 per cent of organisations (30 of 48) developed digital partnership with other organisations as a result of DCW. • 50 per cent of organisations (24 of 48) were aware of the Digital Strategy for Wales. |
| <p>Outcome 4: Improved understanding of the use of digital health services and tools through cohort specific research projects and longitudinal mapping</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No specific metrics are reported within the quarterly reports against this outcome, but work is underway to support the development of the NHS Wales app. Evidence relating to this outcome will need to be gathered as part of the final evaluation fieldwork. |

Source: DCW programme Year 4 (July 2022 to June 2023) quarterly reports (309 participants and 48 organisations)

- 2.21 It is worth noting that DCW has been consistently collecting participant feedback to help demonstrate the extent to which the first two outcomes are being achieved and the metrics set out above for Year 4 (July 2022 to June 2023) would suggest that the sample size is adequate to offer robust data.
- 2.22 The metrics used to evidence the outcomes for organisations have varied from one quarterly report to another, and this, together with the lack of data for quarter 3 of Year 4 (July 2022 to June 2023), limits the analysis which can be undertaken. There would be value in being more consistent in the quarterly outcome survey data reported for organisations for the remaining delivery period and better aligning the survey feedback to outcomes 3 and 4.

3. Conclusions and issues to consider

- 3.1 DCW continues to make good progress against its annual KPIs and is performing exceptionally well against two of its four targets (KPI 1 and KPI 4) which are both focused on supporting people to become digitally confident. There would be merit in setting a minimum proportion or number of staff who are supported from the health and social care sector as part of KPI 4, to boost their participation and to ensure that DCW remains focused upon its overall aim of working across this sector.
- 3.2 DCW is struggling to recruit volunteers to achieve KPI 2 (Volunteers providing support to citizens), and the long-term impact of the pandemic on people's volunteering habits more broadly would suggest that there may be value in reducing these targets over Years 5 and 6 of the programme.
- 3.3 Whilst good progress is being made to ensure digital inclusion is recognized strategically and embedded within organisational delivery (KPI 3), the on-going challenge of engaging private sector organisations continues. We think it would be beneficial for DCW to set out a clear action plan for how this KPI will be achieved, drawing upon the findings of the recent research undertaken, and which articulates how private sector organisations will be identified and recruited. The action plan should set out how this work will be appropriately resourced and coordinated from within the programme e.g., a dedicated private sector champion, and what implications, if any, diverting resources to this task might have upon other elements of the programme. Quarterly reports should provide specific updates against the action plan for private sector organisations, to enable the Welsh Government to monitor progress.
- 3.4 DCW also continues to make good progress against its four programme outcomes, and the evidence captured via participant feedback surveys suggests that the overwhelming majority of those who engage with DCW report improved outcomes as a result of the intervention.
- 3.5 Feedback from survey organisations is slightly more mixed and less consistently reported within quarterly reports, although we accept that metrics of these nature will only offer a limited insight into the difference

made by the programme to supported organisations. There would be value in capturing and reporting more consistent outcome survey data from supported organisations for the remaining delivery period, and better aligning this with programme outcomes 3 and 4. We suggest that quarterly reports (a) use data for the same organisational survey questions every time; and that (b) these data, as well as any other evidence, are presented in a similar manner to Table 2.6, aligned to the four programme outcomes.