Digital Entitlement Combined Report

The contribution of Third sector, Family and Adult Community Learning Providers to the delivery of the digital entitlement

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

This report reviews the findings of research carried out by the Learning and Work Institute (L&W) which aimed to identify factors potentially affecting:1) voluntary and community sector and social enterprise (VCSE) providers and; 2) Family and Community Learning (F&CL) providers, to contribute to the delivery of the Government's proposed digital entitlement.

"The digital entitlement plans to make training in basic digital skills free for adults in England who lack relevant qualifications."[1]

"A specified qualification in making use of information technology" has been added alongside literacy, numeracy as a Level 2 vocational qualification. Wording has also been added to the Apprentices, Skills, Children and Learning Act (ASCL) Act which allows the Secretary of State to determine which qualifications are included and the proposal has now been passed into law. An amendment to the ASCL Act (2009) enacting the entitlement was included in the recent Digital Economy Act (March 2017). The Act defines the basic digital skills in scope as:

"*The level of attainment demonstrated by a specified qualification in making use of information technology must be the level which, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, is the minimum required in that respect by persons aged 19 or over in order to be able to operate effectively in day-to-day life"*[2]

Delivery arrangements for the digital entitlement are unconfirmed however, there is an expectation that colleges and other adult education providers will offer free digital skills training, probably at Level 2, through their existing Adult Education Budget (AEB) allocations.

The UK Digital Strategy[3] also states that the government is not and should not be the only provider of digital skills training, referring to the role of employers and companies, nationally and locally, and the importance of more coherent, coordinated and targeted approaches. Elsewhere, it refers to tackling the digital skills gap through "*strong collaboration between the public, private and third sector…so the sum is greater than the parts and everyone everywhere has better access to the training they want."*[4]

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) funded this research on the premise that VCSE and F&CL providers potentially have distinctive and unique contributions

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-plans-to-make-the-uk-one-of-the-most-digitally-skilled-nations

[2] Digital Economy Act (March 2017), Paragraph 114 **'**Qualifications in information technology: payment of tuition fees**'** **http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/30/section/114/enacted**.

[3] UK Digital Strategy: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (March 2017)

[4] DCMS (March 2017), p 3

to make in the delivery of the digital entitlement, however, initial consultations carried out in advance of the research identified that there may be barriers to that contribution.

Therefore, the research aimed to answer the following questions:

- Are there identifiable features and models of VCSE / F&CL digital skills delivery?
- Are there distinctive, positive aspects to these providers' digital skills delivery?
- Are there factors that inhibit, or would inhibit their digital skills delivery?
- Are there factors that encourage, or would encourage their digital skills delivery?
- Are there actions which could address barriers and support providers' digital skills delivery?

L&W aimed to answer these questions and produced two separate reports based on the findings of two research programmes:

- "Factors affecting the contribution of Third Sector providers to the delivery of the forthcoming digital entitlement": L&W June 2017
- "Factors affecting the contribution of family and adult community learning providers to the delivery of the forthcoming digital entitlement": L&W June 2017

Findings from both have been combined in this report to:

- Inform the UK government's forthcoming consultation on the digital entitlement
- Identify the current contribution of the VCSE and F&CL sectors to the UK digital agenda
- Identify the potential contribution of both sectors to the delivery of the digital entitlement
- Identify unintended barriers to VCSE and F&CL sectors' contribution to the digital entitlement
- Recommend actions designed to reduce barriers to VCSE and F&CL participation in delivering the digital entitlement

SECTION 2: RESEARCH METHOD

2.1   Instruments
- *Online questionnaires* – Separate questionnaires were emailed to VCSE and to F&CL providers
- *Initial statistical analysis* - to provide a basis for:
  o identifying emerging themes and findings and areas for further investigation via telephone interview;
  o selecting interviewees; and
  o designing a semi-structured interview schedule.
- *Semi-structured telephone interviews* – conducted to drill into the questionnaire findings and generate additional qualitative data.

2.2   Sample
- Questionnaire 1 was sent to approximately 2,500 VCSE organisations including directly-contracted and sub-contracted providers, accredited and non-accredited provision. The questionnaire focused on both embedded and direct digital skills delivery and was completed by 46 respondents.
- Questionnaire 2 was sent to approximately 2,500 F&CL providers including directly-contracted and sub-contracted providers, accredited and non-accredited provision. The questionnaire focused on both embedded and direct digital skills delivery and was completed by 78 respondents.
- 38 respondents in total indicated their willingness to be interviewed and 8 were interviewed: Four from the VCSE sector and four from Family and/or Community Learning providers
- Interviewees encompassed various roles including manager or senior manager, digital lead/tutor, Chief Executive/Principal, Quality Officer, Project Development officer, volunteer and WFL Co-ordinator

SECTION 3: RESEARCH SUMMARIES

3.1   Voluntary and community sector and social enterprise (VCSE)

"Without involvement of VCSE, they risk losing people who won't take up opportunities for digital skills, despite them being free. There's a whole raft of learners who won't engage, like there was with the Skills for Life Strategy. And those people are vulnerable to people exploiting them by 'helping' them access their benefits on line. Voluntary and community providers can address their holistic needs through their wider work and help them to learn."

*"***[The rollout of Universal Credit]** will have a massive impact on vulnerable people without skills and the confidence to cope with that change who are already so disenfranchised and cut off. Not because they want to be but because they lack the skills.***"*

The research findings suggest that voluntary and community sector and social enterprise (VCSE) providers deliver a broad range of digital skills provision. This includes both informal and non-accredited programmes and, crucially for the Digital Skills Strategy, accredited courses. The amount of accredited digital provision offered by the respondents, mixed with embedded and non-accredited programmes, was noteworthy.

As one interviewee observed: *"the role of the VCSE is known and fairly well articulated in terms of outreach but not in relation to qualifications. This potential can be overlooked."*

The research findings align with the long-established understanding of VCSE provision that it is designed, predominantly, to meet the needs of some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised learners and communities, precisely those within scope for the Strategy. The research confirms the key role played by the VCSE in enabling people to take a 'first step' into learning linked, in part, to relevant and accessible curricula tailored to the lives, needs and aspirations of local people. This includes tackling dependency and mental health issues, building pre-employment capability, and supporting social integration. This is reflected in the amount of embedded delivery identified by the research, demonstrating the importance to widening participation of using opportunities in other VCSE activities (some learning based, other not), to incorporate learning.

The diversity of under-represented groups covered by the respondents' work is striking, including long-term unemployed adults, those in low income families, residents of poor areas, those with mental health issues, adults with low literacy and/or numeracy skills, with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. A holistic approach to understanding and addressing such learners' wider support needs through volunteers, mentors, flexible timing, and local locations was seen by respondents and interviewees as integral to the VCSE's success and as reflective of a distinctive, socially purposeful VCSE ethos. However, the approach was also identified as a source of vulnerability in view of the associated 'wrap around' costs.

Extensive partnership work behind VCSE provision was a key theme. This was linked to accessing funding and commissions and, importantly, to the design of well-articulated routes for learner progression from many different entry points to provision funded as part of the new entitlement. This aligns well with the more coherent, co-ordinated and targeted approaches, based on *"strong collaboration between the*

public, private and third sectors" envisaged by the Government's Digital Strategy and behind the setting up of the new Digital Skills Partnership. However, respondents also commented on the associated actual and 'hidden' opportunity costs of partnership working in terms of establishing and managing such approaches.

In summary, there are distinctive, positive aspects to VCSE digital skills delivery, due to:

1. The sector's reach to learners most in need of developing their digital skills, including adults from low income families, residents of poor areas, those with mental health issues, adults with low literacy and/or numeracy skills, people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities.
2. The range of digital provision currently offered by the VCSE sector, including formal, informal, accredited and non-accredited programmes.
3. The practice of embedding digital skills within other programmes, offering relevant, non-threatening pathways to digital skills.
4. The key role played by the VCSE in enabling people to take a 'first step' into learning linked, in part, to relevant and accessible curricula tailored to the lives, needs and aspirations of local people.
5. The sector's experience in tackling people's wider issues and supporting social integration.
6. The sector's success in meeting the needs of disadvantaged learners, providing a trusted, non-threatening route to digital skills for socially excluded adults.
7. The sector's role in offering 'skills on demand', where flexible approaches help their clients to develop the digital skills they need to achieve their goals.
8. Effective support for learners offered through volunteers, mentors, flexible timing, and local locations.
9. The sector's ability to offer different entry points to provision of the digital entitlement.

Whilst asserting a central role for VCSE providers in the successful delivery of the Digital Strategy, respondents and interviewees identified a range of strategic and practical issues that could become unintended barriers to that contribution. Insufficient knowledge of VCSE provision among local commissioners/decision makers, the absence of a VCSE perspective in planning fora, and inadequate knowledge among VCSE providers of the digital entitlement were identified as likely to exclude an optimal role for VCSE providers in strategic plans to tackle local digital skills gaps.

Barriers at a practice level included insufficient appropriate equipment (identified also as a restriction on embedded delivery), software, technical support and connectivity. Staff skills, knowledge and confidence were a concern, particularly in relation to the pace of change and the limited size of VCSE CPD budgets. Not enough guidance on

good and outstanding practice in embedded and non-embedded digital skills delivery was raised, alongside a need for more support in keeping up with developments in digital capability, including understanding of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) approaches. Interestingly, one interviewee argued that VCSE providers are hampered not just by inadequate or inadequately maintained equipment but also by their inability to make optimal use of what they already have. These issues were extended to volunteers, where insufficient training to improve their own digital skills, knowledge and confidence was seen as potentially restricting their contribution. Enhanced peer support/networking, provider-generated materials (building on existing FE and VCSE-specific CPD programmes), and improved awareness amongst VCSE providers of existing support through the Education and Training Foundation and other sources were seen as positive ways forward, alongside further webinars, workshops and other training opportunities.

Access to sufficient funding for delivery and additional costs was identified as a further practical problem, exacerbated by limited awareness of VCSE provision, insufficient flexibility around sub-contracting, not enough inclusion of social value within commissions, and the scaling-up of contracts which then become inaccessible to smaller providers. Uncertainty in the current policy and funding climate, it was argued, means providers also need to think creatively about how to resource their work, demonstrate its wider social and economic value and use the leverage available to them. For example, some of the respondents' thinking in relation to CPD was intended to find smart ways around restricted resources. Similarly, suggestions for tackling equipment problems included joining up providers to share portable technology or linking with business to encourage investment as part of corporate social responsibility initiatives.

In summary, there are both strategic and practical barriers to the VCSE sector contribution to the digital entitlement including:

1. Insufficient knowledge of VCSE provision among local commissioners/decision makers.
2. Lack of a VCSE perspective in local skills planning fora.
3. Inadequate knowledge among VCSE providers of the digital entitlement.
4. Insufficient access to appropriate equipment, software, technical support and connectivity.
5. Limited staff skills, knowledge and confidence in the use of technology, especially mobile technology.
6. Not enough guidance on good and outstanding practice in digital skills delivery.
7. Lack of support for staff in keeping up to date with technology.
8. Limited opportunities to exchange practice within the sector and with other sectors.
9. Limited access to up to date resources and support materials.
10. Insufficient funding for delivery and additional learner support.

3.2   Family and Adult Community Learning (F&CL)

"The success of the digital entitlement is at risk if the F&CL sector is unable to play a key role in its delivery." ACL Senior Manager

"We need to offer a cohesive programme where duplication of provision is avoided, where programmes will allow learners to progress to formal qualifications if they choose to and where we measure impact and outcomes consistently" ACL Service manager

The research findings demonstrate that Family and Adult Community Learning providers currently deliver a broad range of digital skills provision through both informal and non-accredited programmes, with accreditation provided through a wide range of awarding bodies.

Current F&CL digital skills delivery consists of both digital skills programmes and programmes which embed digital skills in non-digital skills programmes. The majority of programmes are designed for and target learners across a broad range of under–represented groups, aligning with the aim that F&CL provision is predominately designed to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged and marginalised learners and communities. That is, adults who are most likely to need support to develop the digital skills they need for life, work and learning.

According to Ofcom[5], an estimated 15.2 million people in the UK fall into the category of non-or limited internet users. Of these:

- 64.4% of non-users are aged 65 or over (25.3% aged 65-74; and 39.1% aged over 75);
- 47.7% of non-users have a disability or long-standing health issue;
- 49.5% of non-users are in DE social class;
- 44.5% of non-users have an annual household income less than £11,500;
- 1.5. million people in the UK, and 21.8% of limited users are not working or looking for work;
- 78.3% of non-users left education at aged 16 or under.[6]

F&CL providers currently offer support for digital skills to people in all categories.

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[5] Ofcom 2015 Media Literacy Survey

[6] The real digital divide? Understanding the demographics of non-users and limited users of the internet: an analysis of Ofcom data. June 2017: Good Things Foundation & Professor Simeon Yates

F&CL providers currently design and deliver courses to increase the digital skills of: long term unemployed adults, those moving to Universal Credit, people with low levels of literacy and / or numeracy skills, people residing in poor or in rural areas, adults from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, pensioners, adult carers, women survivors of domestic / sexual violence, ex-offenders, adults with physical disabilities, adults with learning difficulties and / or disabilities, adults from traveller communities, adults in low income families, adults with mental health issues, adults retraining in later life due to redundancy or work-related illness.

F&CL providers have a strong track record in engaging with and successfully supporting marginalized learners to take a 'first step' into the digital world, either through customized digital skills programmes or through digital skills embedded within other curricula which are relevant to the requirements and aspirations of individual learners or groups. For example, digital skills are generally embedded in Functional Skills English and Maths and within Vocational Programmes, such as employability or Family courses.

F&CL providers often combine other forms of support with digital skills delivery, such as literacy support or support for mental health issues, which can themselves present barriers to the development of digital skills. Therefore, the delivery of digital skills by F&CL providers offers additional benefits of overcoming related barriers to digital exclusion.

The extensive partnerships already established by the F&CL supports coherent, coordinated and targeted approaches, based on *"strong collaboration between the public, private and third sectors"* envisaged by the Government's Digital Strategy and supported by the new Digital Skills Partnership.

In summary, the research supports the conclusion that the F&CL sector have a unique, positive contribution to make to the delivery of the digital entitlement due to:

- The sector's reach to learners most in need of developing their digital skills.
- The sector's extensive local community based partnerships, including those faith groups, Job Centres, Public Libraries and Sure Start Children's Centres.
- The sector's successful track record in meeting the needs of disadvantaged learners .
- Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) offered to learners by F&CL to progress and maintain their skills through referral to local partners such as colleges or public libraries or further learning courses offered by F&CL providers.
- The role of F&CL in offering 'skills on demand', where providers' flexible approaches result in requests for support for digital skills.

- Current learner demand for F&CL support for specific purposes, most notably in relation to Universal Credit.

While identifying a unique role for the F&CL sector in the delivery of the digital entitlement, F&CL representatives identified a range of strategic and practical issues that could present barriers to that contribution.

The uncertainties of the current policy and funding climate, are of greatest concern, with providers stating the need to evidence the value of their current and future contribution to the digital agenda, especially to local commissioners and stakeholder agencies such as DWP. Insufficient knowledge of the F&CL digital offer and impact among local and national commissioners/decision makers and a limited F&CL perspective in planning fora were identified as likely to exclude F&CL from strategic plans to tackle local digital skills gaps.

Currently, a large proportion of F&CL support for digital skills is delivered through AEB (Adult Education Budget) funded courses. However, how F&CL is planned and funded is undergoing substantial change as part of the transition to full skills devolution in England, planned to start from 2018/19. From 2018/19, control of the AEB will be devolved to local government areas with a skills devolution deal in place, where funding decisions will rest with local skills commissioners.

Respondents stated that many local commissioners/decision makers, have insufficient knowledge of F&CL provision and some combined authorities lack a F&CL perspective in local planning and commissioning, which could exclude F&CL providers from strategic plans to tackle local digital skills gaps. The research found that more needs to be done, locally and nationally, to make a strong case for the sector's contribution to the digital agenda and that raising the profile of F&CL as a delivery agent for digital skills with local commissioners and national agencies is key to the sector's future contribution to the digital entitlement.

However, it was argued that an essential element is the availability and sharing of credible evidence of the impact of the sector's delivery of digital skills. In recognition of this issue, L&W are currently working with the National Family Learning Forum and FLLAG to develop a common outcomes framework and national reporting system to collate evidence of the impact of FL programs on learners. This will includes evidencing the impact of FL on adults' digital skills, based on the GDS evaluation framework.

Further barriers were identified as insufficient local leadership and limited support from senior managers.

Barriers at a practice level included lack of access to hardware, lack of funding for new equipment and limited/no internet or Wi-Fi access. Staff skills, knowledge

and confidence were also of concern, along with insufficient guidance on good and outstanding practice in embedded and non-embedded digital skills delivery, funding for curriculum development, lack of support to keep up with technology developments, pedagogical approaches and effective use of mobile technology.

Suggestions for mitigating against hardware and software limitations included requests to support Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) approaches among other alternative solutions to mitigate against internet access and connectivity issues, especially in outreach centres. Support for BYOD and for multiple platform access was raised several times. Providers requested support to develop BYOD policies and to establish new partnerships to increase their ability to learners to use their own technologies.

Additional barriers included limited provider and tutor knowledge of existing support programmes, materials and resources, need for support to market the F&CL digital skills offer and to develop co-commissioned programmes that include broader outcomes e.g. health. Funding to support learners' childcare issues and additional special needs e.g. disabilities was also identified as barriers to delivery.

In summary, there are both strategic and practical barriers to the F&CL sector contribution to the digital entitlement including:

- Low profile for F&CL among local and national commissioners;
- Need for better understanding and promotion of the F&CL digital offer by existing infrastructure and networks;
- Limited staff skills, technical knowledge and confidence;
- Need for regular CPD to keep pace with changing technologies;
- Connectivity limitations;
- Cost of updating equipment/hardware;
- Limited technical support;
- Lack of guidance or sharing of good and outstanding practice;
- Support for alternative connectivity and hardware solutions, including BYOD approaches;
- Limited provider/staff awareness of existing CPD opportunities;
- Limited understanding of the digital agenda by senior leadership;
- Need for new partnerships, for example with the technology Third Sector and with employers.

SECTION 4: RECOMMENDATIONS

Are there actions stakeholders could take to address barriers and support VCSE/ F&CL digital skills delivery?

a) VCSE

The following recommendations are sub-divided between suggestions for strengthening practice across VCSE providers, ideas for raising awareness of VCSE providers' contribution to digital skills delivery, and possible options for improving providers' access to resources.

Strengthening practice

1. Support providers through workshops/webinars for VCSE practitioners/providers on digital technology and delivery.
2. Explore the most effective options for sustainable VCSE practitioner/provider networking and peer support in relation to both the use of digital technology in delivery, and delivering digital skills provision. This should include both VCSE-specific and cross-FE sector approaches.

3. Invest in the development of resources to support VCSE providers in: pedagogy and practice of BYOD approaches; embedding digital skills in diverse curricular and outreach activities; and supporting learner progression from informal and/or non-accredited provision to accredited programmes.

4. Invest in a VCSE peer-support programme of e-guides or e-mentors to complement the availability of enhanced CPD materials, networking and workshops/webinars.

Awareness raising

5. In accordance with the Digital Skills Strategy's focus on cross-sector partnership, and to strengthen awareness of VCSE providers' contribution, stakeholders are urged to ensure the new Digital Skills Partnership includes direct VCSE provider representation.

6. Combined Authorities, local authorities, LEPs, FE and LEP networks, and other key stakeholders are urged to circulate case studies and other awareness-raising materials about VCSE providers' current and potential contribution to digital skills strategies.

7. VCSE networks and fora are urged to take further active steps to raise awareness amongst VCSE providers of existing resources (available through the ETF and other channels) to support their digital skills delivery.

Access to resources

8. Work with VCSE and other FE sector networks and fora to promote the circulation of innovative and transferable examples of ways to increase access to resources, for example, through crowd funding, initiatives such as 'Islington Giving', CSR, and 'kit' sharing/exchange schemes.

9. Work with skills commissioners and digital skills providers (including but not exclusively VCSE) to raise awareness of the policy push by the Public Services (Social Value) Act (2013) for more service design through community consultation and scope for incorporating wider social, economic and environmental benefits within commissions. This must be underpinned by dialogue between commissioners and providers to clarify what constitutes sufficient evidence of wider impact in this context.

10. Work with VCSE and other FE sector networks and fora to promote the circulation of example of effective partnership work underpinning digital skills delivery, including non-FE sector stakeholders.

b) Family and Adult Community Learning

The following recommendations are sub-divided between suggestions for strengthening practice across the F&CL sector, ideas for raising awareness of the sector's contribution to digital skills delivery, and possible options for improving providers' access to resources.

Survey respondents and interviewees recognised the existing work of the National Family Learning Forum (NFLF), the Family Learning Local Authority Group (FLLAG) and of LEAFEA to support these areas, as well as the potential of the ETF to extend its existing support.

Strengthening practice

1. Design and deliver a customised programme of support in digital technology and learning for F&CL providers, leaders and practitioners, in collaboration with existing fora and groups, including the NFLF, FLLAG and LEAFEA.

2. Customise useful assets and programmes for the F&CL sector, increasing access through webinars, online discussions as well as face to face events and online training.

3. Encourage cross sector collaboration between existing fora and groups to support sustainable F&CL practitioner/provider networking and peer support in relation to both the use of digital technology in delivery, and delivering digital skills provision. This should include both F&CL specific and cross-FE sector approaches.

4. Invest in the development of resources to support F&CL providers in: BYOD policies and approaches; embedding digital skills in diverse curricular and outreach activities; and supporting learner progression from informal and/or non-accredited provision to accredited programmes.

5. Build on existing work with senior staff from the F&CL sector which increases sector leaders' knowledge and capacity in the delivery of digital skills.

Awareness raising

6. In accordance with the UK Digital Skills Strategy's focus on cross-sector partnership, ensure F&CL current and potential contribution is acknowledged and supported through the forthcoming digital entitlement consultation.

7. Develop a common framework and national provider reporting system to produce evidence of the current and potential contribution of F&CL to the delivery of the digital entitlement, for dissemination to Combined Authorities, local authorities, LEPs, FE and LEP networks, and other key stakeholders and commissioners.

8. FLLAG, LEAFEA and the NFLF are encouraged to raise awareness amongst F&CL providers, practitioners and leaders of existing resources which could support their digital skills delivery.

Access to resources

9. Promote innovative and transferable practice which improves online access for learners e.g. BYOD approaches, mobile dongles, WIBE routers or kit sharing/exchange schemes.

10. Promote effective partnership work underpinning digital skills delivery. This could include both existing and new partnerships such as the Technology Third Sector, VCSE, public libraries, Sure Start Centres, schools, and other non-FE sector stakeholders.