Digital participation in action

Summer 2015

Our first annual report sets out the scale of the digital participation challenge in Scotland, what we're doing about it, and how you can get involved.

SCVO   Digital Scotland

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Foreword

For centuries, Scots have made an impact on the world out of all proportion to our size as a nation, both at an individual level and through our collective efforts.

Today, in all sorts of ways, the world is changing more rapidly than ever before - and at the heart of that global change is the digital age. Unlike, for example, the industrial revolution when it took place, the digital revolution is truly global and it is happening now, everywhere. That creates both challenges and opportunities.

In the 21st century, our small country of five million people has the potential to lead the way in how a modern society embraces the digital revolution, and creates progress socially and economically. But we will only realise our full potential if all of Scotland's citizens and organisations understand the potential of digital, and embrace that potential to the full. If we can achieve this, Scotland really will make its mark on this digital revolution, just as it did during the industrial revolution.

We can do it, if all of us pull together towards that common goal.

Brendan Dick
Chair of the Digital Participation Leadership Group

Executive summary

For most of us, the internet is just another part of everyday life. But nearly a million people in Scotland, along with many tens of thousands of charities and small businesses, still lack the basic digital skills to get things done online.

For the past 18 months the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, with the support of the Scottish Government and the European Regional Development Fund, has been leading a national effort to promote digital participation and basic digital skills.

This short report provides a brief overview of the issues and the key facts and figures for Scotland, along with a progress update on our work and the fantastic range of community projects and business growth internships that we are backing. It also includes an update on Scotland's Digital Participation Charter, and some thoughts about what comes next as we aim to further scale up and accelerate our work.

Above all, we believe that digital participation is a team effort. Everyone has a part to play in helping our country become a world-leading digital nation, and if you're not already part of Scotland's digital participation movement then we'd love to help you get involved.

1. Why digital participation matters

There are more than 1.6 million Scots under the age of 26, many of whom voted for the very first time in the 2014 independence referendum. Whatever their politics, all of these young people have one thing in common: none of them has ever known a world without the internet.

Scotland is already a digital nation. Eight in ten households have an internet connection, and four in ten have a tablet computer. Six in ten people use a smartphone. For those who have the access, motivation and skills to get things done online, life is immeasurably enhanced.

But still far too many people risk being left behind.

If this were just a case of missing out on a few distracting websites and celebrity tweets then we might think nothing more of it. But the stakes are so much higher. Amongst other things, the internet helps people keep in touch, learn new things, save money, find work and stay healthy. For some people it's been a genuine life saver. These things matter to everyone, and they should be for everyone.

"The internet is the organising principle of our age, touching all our lives, every day." - Martha Lane Fox

The same is true for charities and small businesses. Organisations that embrace digital opportunities grow faster, innovate more and do a better job of meeting the needs of their clients and customers.

Bringing more people into the digital world will be good for all of us, even for those who are already online. Our economy, public services, democracy and civil society will all benefit from increased participation and a greater plurality of voices.

Just over a year ago, the Royal Society of Edinburgh published Spreading the Benefits of Digital Participation, the final report of their inquiry into digital participation. This called on the Scottish Government to recognise that everyone has an undeniable right to digital inclusion, and to assume overall accountability to ensure that it is available and accessible to all.

Since then, we have been working hard to advance the digital participation agenda in Scotland. This is our first annual progress report, and a look ahead to the challenges to come.

2. The facts for Scotland

If we want to understand how the internet is changing lives, it's important to measure people's ability to use it for the things that matter to them - and not just count the number of households with a broadband subscription or smartphone.

We're working with the definition of basic digital skills developed by Go ON UK. This highlights five key skills:

1. **Managing information**
   Find, manage and store digital information and content

2. **Communicating**
   Communicate, interact, collaborate, share and connect with others

3. **Transacting**
   Purchase and sell goods and services, organise your finances, and register for and use digital government services

4. **Problem solving**
   Increase independence and confidence by solving problems using digital tools and finding solutions

5. **Creating**
   Engage with communities and create basic digital content

In each of these areas there are things that people and organisations should be able to do, as well as things they need to be aware of to stay safe.

The basic digital skills gap

The most recent available data tells us that one in five adults in Scotland lacks basic digital skills. **This adds up to about 800,000 people aged 16 or over.**

Across the UK as a whole the proportion is about the same. Amongst those who lack basic digital skills, three quarters are offline, but one quarter already have internet access (this shows clearly why just counting the number of broadband connections isn't sufficient). Cut by age, seven in ten are aged 55 or over. Cut by social grade, seven in ten are in C2DE households. There is no particular reason to think that the picture in Scotland is markedly different.

Basic digital skills also matter for organisations. The most recent available data tells us that half of charities and a quarter of SMEs in Scotland lack basic digital skills. **This adds up to over 20,000 charities and voluntary organisations, and over 80,000 SMEs.**

Again, across the UK as a whole the proportions are about the same. What's more, one quarter of charities and SMEs see digital as irrelevant to them, and three quarters are not investing any of their budget in digital skills.

3. Changing lives, one person at a time

When it comes to closing the digital divide, the most important insight is that the real challenge is about people, not technology.

Getting things done online takes the basic digital skills outlined above. But it's not at all essential to have a deep understanding of how the technology works (much like, say, driving a car). This means that anyone can help other people to learn: digital inclusion is the domain of anyone and everyone, not an elite handful of technology experts. In our world, empathy and patience count for far more than any sophisticated understanding of silicon and code.

For the people who need a little help and encouragement to use the internet, we know from experience that the best way to start is to show, first hand, how the internet is relevant to something they care about. And once the spark of interest is ignited, hands-on learning, tailored around the things people are interested in and in the company of someone familiar, is the best route to independence.

The personal and local nature of these interactions mean that official media campaigns and formal courses will never win the attention of all the people we need to reach.

So we must look to each other. All of us can help friends and family to take their first steps online and make the most of everything the internet has to offer. And charities, voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises will be on the front line, because they can use the relationships they already have with people and communities as a springboard to passing on basic digital skills.

Clearly our public and private sector partners have a big role to play as well. It will be incredibly important that we join our efforts up in the best way to meet the needs of the people that we are trying to help. This will mean taking a long view of the benefits of digital inclusion (which for companies is about expanding markets more than it's about pushing products), and more often than not standing shoulder to shoulder with the community groups and voluntary organisations that are closest to the people we want to help.

What it costs to turn things around

A recent study commissioned by the Tinder Foundation sought to quantify the cost of all the additional activity (i.e. beyond business-as-usual) required to close the digital divide by 2020. It estimated the new investment required to equip 100 per cent of the UK adult population with basic digital skills by 2020 at £875 million (based on a known cost for the sort of interventions described earlier, which ranges from about £50 to more than £300 per person, depending on an individual's needs and circumstances).

A simple calculation based on Scotland's share of the basic digital skills challenge puts the figure for our country at **somewhere in the region of £75-100 million.**

This shouldn't necessarily be seen as a lump-sum injection of cash, since a big part of the cost reflects the time that needs to be spent by people helping other people. But it is a useful benchmark for the order of magnitude of effort required across the public, private and third sectors, and provides context for the discussion later about future plans.

4. Building a national movement

The Scottish Government's ambition is for Scotland to be a world-leading digital nation, and achieving an excellent rate of digital participation is an essential part of this. To help move this agenda forward, the Scottish Government asked SCVO to play a leading role in promoting digital participation and basic digital skills.

We are now 18 months into our programme. Backed by financial support from the Scottish Government, along with some additional match funding from the European Commission, we have:

- Re-launched Scotland's Digital Participation Charter
- Begun awarding funding to community digital participation projects
- Begun supporting digital internships in charities and voluntary organisations
- Established a series of free practitioner and stakeholder events across the country

Digital Participation Charter

Scotland's Digital Participation Charter is the cornerstone of a national movement to promote digital participation and basic digital skills. Any organisation can sign the Charter as a way to show solidarity and make a public commitment to getting involved.

There are five commitments in the Charter that we ask our partners to live up to:

1. Ensuring that all of our staff and volunteers have an opportunity to learn basic digital skills, and that they take advantage of this opportunity

2. Encouraging and supporting our staff and volunteers to help other people learn basic digital skills, and help other organisations to embrace digital tools

3. Contributing resources and practical support for digital participation initiatives in Scotland in whatever ways we can

4. Channelling our efforts through the Digital Participation Programme, so that our activities can be coordinated for maximum impact and measured consistently

5. Using common language based on digital participation and basic digital skills, to make our thinking and actions as clear as possible

So far over 100 organisations have joined us. This includes central and local government bodies, large and small businesses, and a range of charities and community groups.

We are working with all of our partners to make connections between those who share common interests, and to broker practical support that will help more people learn basic digital skills.

Community projects

Our community projects are on the front line when it comes to delivering digital participation and basic digital skills. Based on the principles outlined above - local and hyperlocal interventions, community led and based on user needs - we have awarded over £350,000 across 55 projects that we think have the potential to make a real difference on the ground. Together, these projects will aim to help up to 10,000 people gain basic digital skills.

These projects are small, local and together span the length and breadth of Scotland. They are employing a range of approaches, from structured learning to informal efforts run by friends and neighbours. And the locus for each is different depending on the interests of the people they are working with, so things like local history, employability, culture and walking - rather than keyboards and mice - are taking centre stage. Each of the projects has a page on our website where you can find out more about their story and how they are getting on.

As well as supporting the delivery of basic digital skills via charities and voluntary organisations, though this work we are also improving our understanding of the type of support that community digital participation projects need. Of all the applications that we received, more than eight in ten asked for support to acquire equipment (particularly tablets and smartphones), half asked for help with marketing their activities (including on social media), and half asked for help attracting volunteers.

Business growth internships

Building up the basic digital skills of charities and voluntary organisations themselves is just as important as working with end users. Our business growth internships are designed to provide a quick burst of practical support for charities, by providing funding for them to hire an intern to work on digital projects for between 6 and 12 weeks. Interns are paid the living wage, and through a partnership with Scotland IS we have been linking interns and charities up to contacts in the Scottish tech sector where appropriate. Around 100 charities have applied for the scheme, and over 60 opportunities have already gone live.

As well as building up basic digital skills amongst charities, through this work we are also improving our understanding of where charities are most in need of support. The two most popular topics for projects are websites (creating or updating) and online marketing / social media. The next most popular topic is looking at in-house IT, followed by digital strategy.

5. Where we go from here

It's clearer than ever that digital participation is a critical issue for the future of Scotland. Having basic digital skills is a pre-requisite to be able to participate fully in society, the economy and our democracy. Most people are already in a good place, but the job will not be finished until everyone who would benefit from basic digital skills has had a real and meaningful opportunity to take their first steps online.

As things stand, nearly a million people in Scotland still lack the basic digital skills to get things done online. Through our programme of activity we are pushing digital participation up the agenda, and accelerating the work being led by charities and community groups across Scotland.

There is huge demand from all sides to go further. Thus far we have received over 300 applications from community projects for funding totalling almost £1.5 million, and almost all of these presented a strong case for support. For the projects that we have been able to fund, reaching an overall target of up to 10,000 people will be a fantastic achievement - but even then it will only be one per cent of the people in Scotland in need of basic digital skills.

So we are continuing to seek out new sources of support to maintain momentum and scale up the collective efforts of everyone involved with digital participation in Scotland.

We are fortunate that the Scottish Government understands the fundamental importance of this agenda, and with their continued support we will be delivering further financial support for community projects over the coming year. Alongside additional support from some of the larger signatories to the Digital Participation Charter, this will make a real difference to thousands of people from all walks of life. And we are continuing to explore new funding opportunities that will enable us to reach more charities, community groups and end users.

Revolution, not evolution

Our programme is now the backbone for a solid, community-led path to increased digital participation in Scotland. This will remain the core of our work, and we will continuously learn and improve our efforts to help charities and communities make the most of digital opportunities.

Nevertheless, ensuring that no one is left behind remains a major challenge, and in the absence of a 100-fold increase in funding, we will need some radical options to test alongside the tried-and-tested approaches that most of us are comfortable with.

So as well as continuing to deliver the core of our programme, and growing it as far and as fast as resources allow, we also want to explore new ways to reach large numbers of people quickly and without incurring massive cost.

We are particularly interested in:

- Ways to share learning resources, and to make it easier to start a local digital participation initiative with zero hassle

- Ways to embed digital participation into everyday activities like grocery shopping, meeting friends, visiting the doctor or getting to work

- Ways to take advantage of the fact that more and more people are using smartphones and tablets as the main way to get online

Now is also the time to redouble our efforts to connect digital participation to other agendas, from information literacy and parent engagement with schools to person-centred digital public services.

Get involved!

Delivering digital participation for Scotland is, and always will be, a team effort. Before you close this page, here are some of the ways that you can get involved:

- Sign the Digital Participation Charter
- Start your own community project
- Come along to our events and make connections with like-minded people

And if you're in a position to contribute material support, then we'd love to hear from:

- **Funders:** we can help you get the best social return on investments in community projects and digital capability building for charities and voluntary organisations
- **Consumer businesses:** we can help you reach new customers and grow your markets, through partnerships to bring digital participation into people's lives
- **Public sector:** we can help you develop services that meet user needs, through partnerships to embed digital participation into digital public services

Together, we can make a real and lasting difference.

Digital participation in action

People need five basic digital skills to get things done
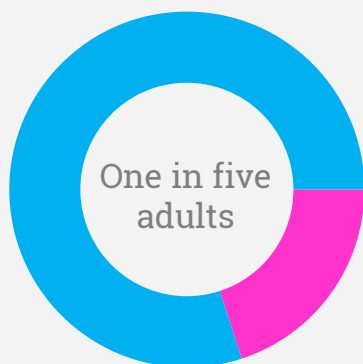
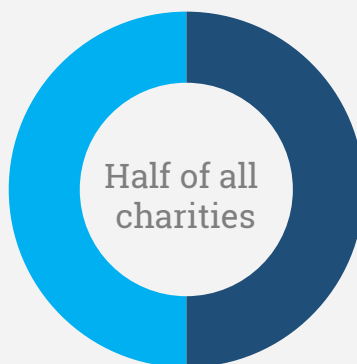| Managing information	Communicating	Transacting	Problem solving	Creating

The trouble is, not everyone has them...

Who in Scotland is missing basic digital skills?

One in five adults
800,000 people

Half of all charities
20,000 organisations
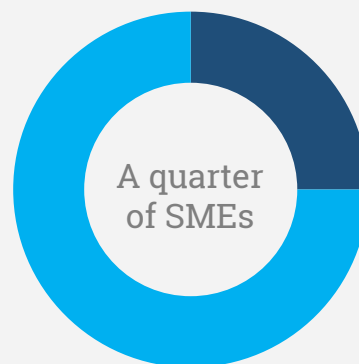
A quarter of SMEs
80,000 businesses

and this group is mainly...

Offline	75%	25%	Online
Over 55	70%	30%	Under 55
C2DE	70%	30%	ABC1

We're leading a national movement to close the gap

★ 50+ community projects reaching 10,000 people

✎ 100+ signatories to the Participation Charter

🚀 100+ digital internships in Scottish charities

💬 Events and activities all across the country

Find out more at digital.scvo.org.uk   🐦 @digiscot   △ SCVO   Digital Scotland

About SCVO

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) is the national body representing the third sector in Scotland. There are over 45,000 voluntary organisations in Scotland, working with around 140,000 paid staff and approximately 1.3 million volunteers. We have over 1,600 members who range from individuals and grassroots groups, to Scotland-wide organisations and intermediary bodies.

Through lobbying and campaigning, SCVO works to advance the interests of our members and the people and communities they support. We also provide a range of services to help charities and third sector organisations across Scotland focus on what they do best, whether that's supporting the most vulnerable people in our communities or conducting cutting edge research.

Contact the digital participation team

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