

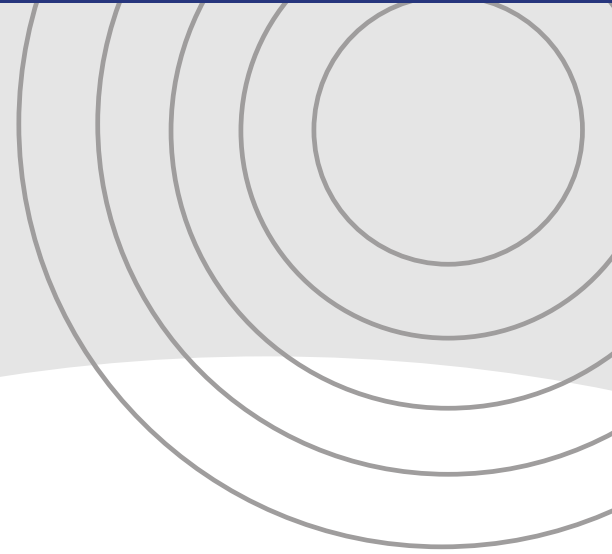
Wired Up?

Exploring the current levels of digital skills and inclusion in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector in Northern Ireland

By **Dr Donna Kernaghan and Stephen Dallas**
September 2022

Commissioned by Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.
Supported by Comic Relief.

Table of Contents



Figures and Tables	3
Executive Summary	4
Part 1: Background	10
Part 2: Results	18
Part 3: Conclusion and Recommendations	38
Acknowledgments	43

List of Tables & Figures



Tables

Table 1: Comparison between Groups Adopting a Digital Culture

34

Figures

Figure 1: Participant by Role in Organisation

19

Figure 2: Representation from VCSE Organisations Across 11 Council Areas in Northern Ireland

20

Figure 3: Range of Services Provided by the VCSE Sector

20

Figure 4: Organisational Type

21

Figure 5: Percentage of Participants Rating their Digital Skills as Excellent or Good

23

Figure 6: Groups at Risk of Digital Exclusion

27

Figure 7: Barriers to Digital Inclusion

28

Figure 8: Digital Inclusion is a Priority by Organisation Type

29

Figure 9: Does your organisation have a digital strategy?

31

Figure 10: Participants' Rating of IT Equipment and Support Provided by Organisation

32

Figure 11: Digital Culture by Organisation Type

34

Figure 12: Digital Priorities for Organisations in Next 12 Months

35

Figure 13: Supports for the VCSE Sector

37

Executive Summary

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland commissioned The Bytes Project in partnership with Stats & Stories to develop the 'Wired Up'? project to explore the current digital needs of the VCSE sector in Northern Ireland and to identify areas for potential development in the future.

Supported by Comic Relief



Specifically, the research explored four key themes using the following research questions:

- 1. Digital Skills:** What is the current level of digital skills in the VCSE sector in Northern Ireland?
- 2. Digital Inclusion:** What are the challenges for the VCSE sector to improve digital inclusion and reduce digital exclusion?
- 3. Adoption of Digital Culture:** What are the characteristics and capacity of VCSE organisations who have adopted a digital culture?
- 4. Support for VCSE sector:** What support have VCSE organisations received to make good use of the opportunities offered by digital in terms of skills, digital inclusion and digital capacity?

Methodology

The Wired Up? project was informed by a review of relevant research focussing on digital skills and digital inclusion within the UK policy context. The research was conducted in two phases and used a mixed method approach combining quantitative and qualitative research methods:

Phase 1 Online Survey

During June 2022, a total of 403 valid surveys were completed by staff, volunteers and trustees drawn from every council area in Northern Ireland. This number provided a representative sample of the NI VCSE sector¹. The Wired Up? survey was anonymous and covered the themes of digital skills, barriers to digital inclusion and challenges for the sector to build digital capacity in the future. Analysis of the quantitative data was conducted using the statistical software package SPSS with qualitative comments thematically coded.

Phase 2 Focus Groups

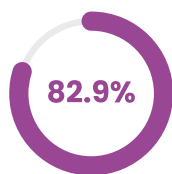
Participants of the focus groups explored some preliminary findings from the Wired Up? survey and discussed ways in which the VCSE sector can tackle the digital challenges related to skills, inclusion and developing a digital culture for the future. Four focus groups were held, three online and one in person, with a total of 22 people in a range of roles across the sector. All focus groups were recorded, with participants' consent, for the purposes of conducting thematic analysis.

¹According to [NICVA's recent estimates](#) the VCSE sector makes up 7% of the workforce in Northern Ireland with approximately 53,620 employees. Using this figure as a reasonable approximation for the population size of the VCSE sector, it was calculated using Krejcie & Morgan (1970) [Table for Determining Sample Size for a Finite Population](#) that 382 responses would provide a representative sample of the VCSE population.

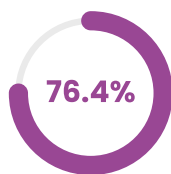
Key Findings

Digital Skills

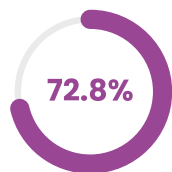
There is a wide variation in digital skills across the VCSE sector. Results identified the largest gap in digital skills for staff and volunteers was connecting with others outside their organisation.



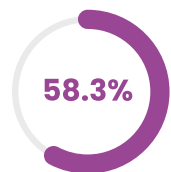
rated their digital skills to collaborate with others within their own organisation as excellent or good



rated their digital skills related to using information to inform their work as excellent or good



rated their ability to work safely online as excellent or good



rated their ability to use digital skills to connect with others outside their organisation as excellent or good

Staff and volunteers with poor digital skills tended to be older with 75.0% over fifty years of age, had higher levels of disability (25.7%) and worked or volunteered for a community group (41.7%), NI regional charity (25.0%) or local charity (19.4%).

While recognising that some learning opportunities are available to support the development of digital skills, the lack of free training available to the sector was considered a challenge in addressing the digital skills gap.

Digital Inclusion

Most participants recognised that increasing digital inclusion was now an organisational priority. The top three groups identified as being at risk of digital exclusion were older people (88.5%), people on a low income (83.5%) and people with a disability (75.3%). The most common barriers to digital inclusion were:

- poor digital skills (85.0%);
- lack of ability to afford the ongoing cost of data (82.3%); and
- lack of devices other than a mobile phone (82.0%).

Examples highlighted by the research showed that organisations had successfully reduced digital exclusion by providing a combination of equipment, data and support to develop digital skills on an ongoing basis. Further service delivery in this area would require long term investment in devices, data and support for staff and volunteers to strengthen their skills to assist those facing digital exclusion.

Adopting a Digital Culture

Most participants rated their organisation's digital culture as excellent (11.7%) or good (46.0%). Over one third (34.3%) rated their organisation's digital culture as fair with 8.0% rating it as poor. No respondent rated their organisation's digital culture as very poor.

Over one fifth of participants (22.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that their organisation was struggling to adopt a digital culture. Half of participants (50.0%) disagreed with this with 28.0% remaining neutral on this question. The research identified three key characteristics present in organisations who are more advanced in adopting a digital culture:

1. Recognition that digital is a part of everyone's job;
2. Commitment from senior leaders to develop digital capacity; and
3. Understanding that addressing digital inclusion is now a normal part of service delivery.

The Future

Funding was seen as the largest challenge facing the VCSE sector in the future. This was expressed in two ways:

1. Difficulty in getting core funding to support digital (81.8%); and
2. Short-term funding making it difficult to plan ahead (81.8%).

Results show that organisations incur considerable and ongoing costs associated with their digital infrastructure. Organisations may require annual subscriptions and licenses to use products, apps or services to support their work and spend significant funds on external IT contractors to maintain cybersecurity, website, equipment, systems and provide troubleshooting support.

Recommendations

Drawing from the findings of the 'Wired Up?' research, a number of recommendations have been made:

Recommendation 1:

A Digital Strategy for Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Executive should develop a Digital Strategy for Northern Ireland to provide a coherent digital vision with a fully funded action plan. The Digital Strategy should:

- Prioritise tackling digital exclusion and address key barriers to digital inclusion including affordability, access and lack of digital skills;



- Focus on supporting collaboration across all sectors including the creation of a strategic partnership between the VCSE sector and statutory agencies. Investment should be made to support VCSE organisations develop their digital infrastructure;
- Plan to collect and publish data on an annual basis to monitor trends and measure the progress of the Digital Strategy in achieving its outcomes.

Recommendation 2:

A New Approach to Funding Digital Infrastructure

Funders must play a greater role in supporting the digital needs of the VCSE sector, particularly regarding smaller organisations. Funders and organisations should work in partnership to develop a new approach to fund the digital processes and products essential for operational and service delivery. This should include:

- Availability of core funding for digital infrastructure on a long-term basis to improve organisational efficiency and which offers flexibility to try new approaches;
- Recovery of the full costs associated with developing and maintaining digital infrastructure;
- Additional funding should be available to support organisations with their digital inclusion work. This should include collaboration between sectors.

Recommendation 3:

Improving Digital Support for the VCSE Sector

The creation of a digital support service would provide organisations with access to a range of supports and would particularly benefit smaller charities. This role may be filled by one organisation or a network of organisations and should provide:

Technical Assistance: Including troubleshooting and advice on cyber security. The service would also support organisations to undertake a digital audit, strategic planning for digital improvements and have the ability to negotiate with third party contractors to ensure best value;

Resources: Collate and maintain online information with resources such as video tutorials, case studies and other guidance;

Learning Opportunities: Offer training and learning opportunities for staff and volunteers with a range of digital skills including regular opportunities for staff and volunteers to share and learn from others in different organisations.

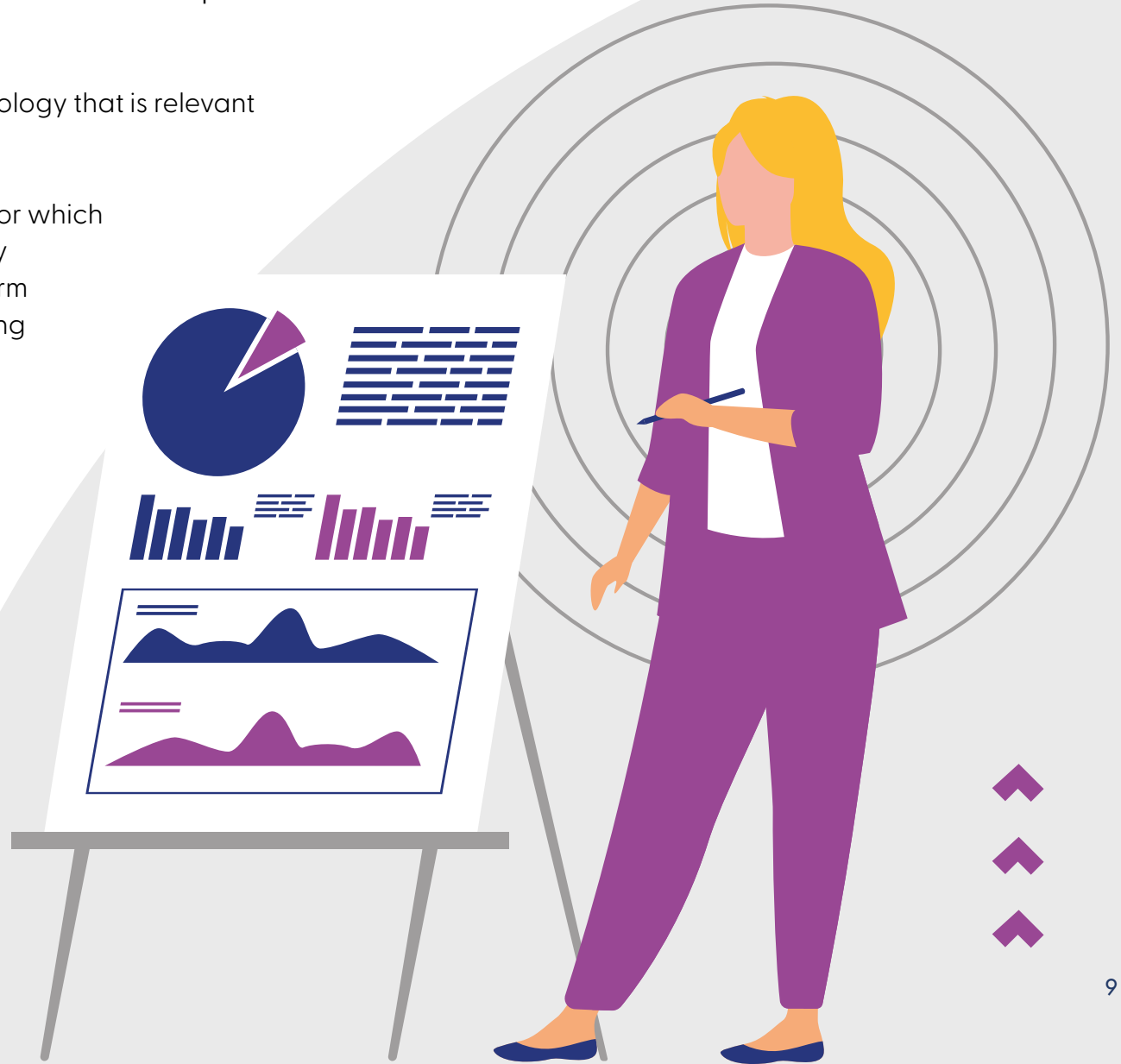


Recommendation 4:

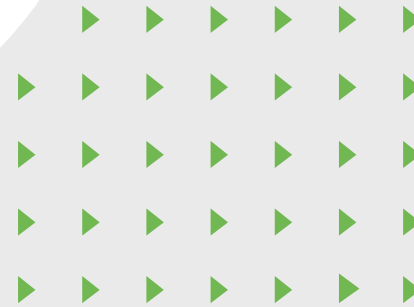
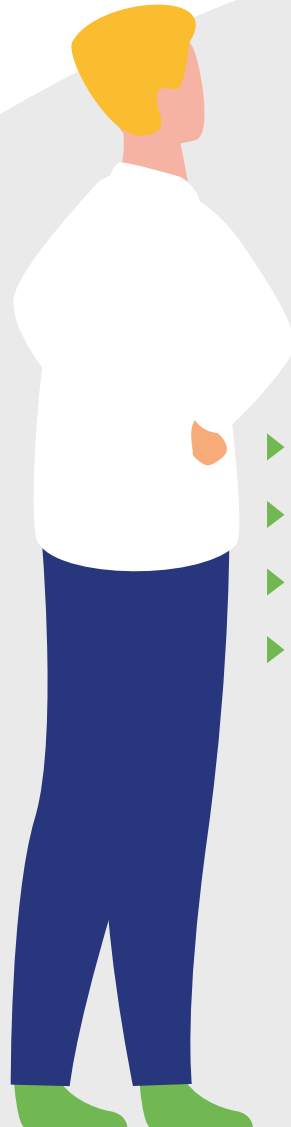
Workforce Development for the VCSE Sector

Training opportunities to develop digital skills should be ongoing and be available for free or low cost to organisations. Workforce development should focus on:

- Enabling staff and volunteers to use digital technology that is relevant to their job role and will improve effectiveness;
- Developing a Digital Skills Audit for the VCSE sector which should be conducted at regular intervals to identify gaps, trends and provide an evidence base to inform organisations, funders and policy makers of ongoing need;
- Training resources and opportunities specifically developed to support staff and volunteers with poor digital skills, particularly older people or people with learning or physical disabilities;
- Creation of 'digital champions' across the sector to raise awareness of training opportunities, share good practice and encourage partnership working across the sector.



Part 1: Background



Introduction

The voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Northern Ireland has played a significant role in supporting people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Demonstrating the sector's innovation and flexibility, results from the COVID-19 Impact Survey in August 2020² found that over 60.0% of organisations developed new services in response to increasing demand from service users. Some of these new services provided support on the ground such as organising food parcels, creating mental wellbeing packs and distributing devices to families while digital technology was used to develop services online and connect people to reduce isolation. During this time, staff and volunteers were also adjusting to new work practices including remote working and using digital tools to collaborate and deliver services online.

Due to this rapid transition in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, very little research has been conducted on the digital needs of the VCSE sector in Northern Ireland. To address this lack of evidence, The Community Foundation commissioned The Bytes Project in partnership with Stats & Stories to develop the 'Wired Up?' research project. The purpose of this research was to explore the current levels of digital skills, barriers to digital

inclusion and challenges for the VCSE sector to build digital capacity in the future.

The following section outlines the opportunities and challenges VCSE organisations may face with increased use of digital technology followed by a brief overview of the policy context related to digital across the UK.



²Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (2020) COVID-19 Impact Survey. [Available here](#)

³King, D, Chan, O, Coule, T, Dahill, D, Mainard-Sardon, J, Martin, A, Rossiter, W, Smith, S, Stuart, J, Vahidi, G and Ibokessien, N (2022), Respond, Recover, Reset: Two Years On, Nottingham Trent University, Centre for People, Work and Organisational Practice. [Available here](#)

Digital Opportunities and Challenges for the VCSE Sector

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of digital technology across the VCSE sector. This shift to working and delivering services digitally has presented both opportunities and challenges. The increased use of digital technology has provided staff and volunteers the opportunity to work remotely and connect with others in a way that is low cost and offers convenience and flexibility. Research drawn from the Respond, Recover, Reset Project³ which explored how VCSE organisations across the UK have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 – March 2022, found that 54% of organisations reported that their digital capabilities had improved with 50% stating that their range of services had improved.

A total of 55% of organisations indicated that their services now reached new or different people as digital ways of working has improved accessibility. For some organisations, digital has enabled them to expand their reach to a broader range of groups, across a wider geographical area with more diverse service users.

However, not all service users may be able to enjoy the benefits of being online. Results of the annual UK wide Charity Digital Skills Report 2021⁴ found digital inclusion was the biggest challenge faced by charities with 52% worried about excluding some people or groups. Digital inclusion may be understood as, “the capability of individuals or groups to enjoy the benefits of being online and use technology confidently to improve their day-to-day lives. Those who lack this capability are considered “digitally excluded.”⁵ People may experience digital exclusion if they cannot afford devices or the ongoing costs of data to access the internet. This is particularly challenging in the current context of rising food and energy bills. In addition to affordability and access, digital skills are also necessary to navigate the online environment. Digital skills have been defined as “a range of abilities to use digital devices, communication applications, and networks to access and manage information.”⁶ These skills enable people to communicate and collaborate with others, access services and information.

⁴ Skills Platform and Zoe Amar Digital (2021) Charity Digital Skills Report 2021. [Available here](#)

⁵ The Be Connected Network Website (2022). [Available here](#)

⁶ UNESCO (2018) Digital skills critical for jobs and social inclusion. [Available here](#)

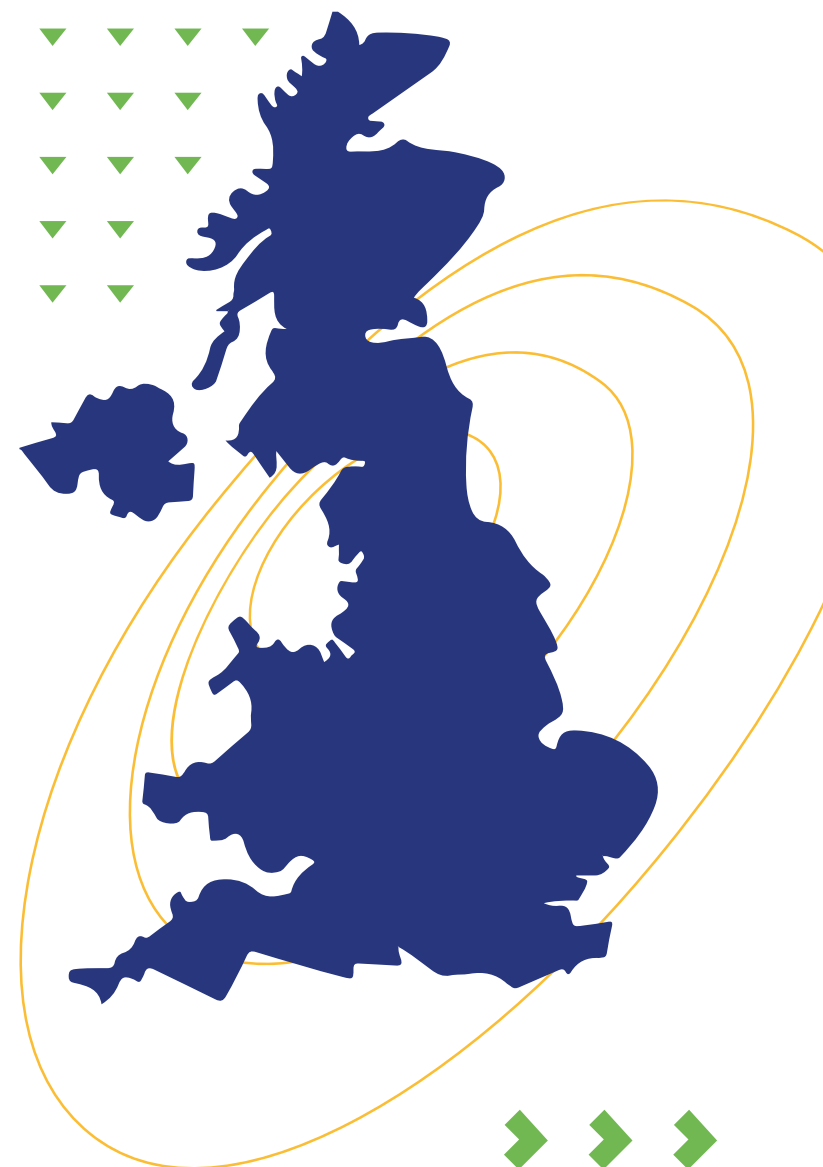
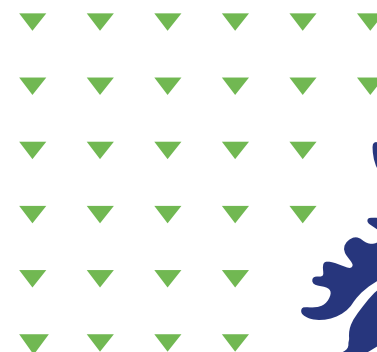
Key factors that contribute to digital exclusion in Northern Ireland include:

- **Demographic factors:** the profile of people who may face digital exclusion include older people, those in poverty, those not working, people living alone and people with a disability⁷
- **Lack of Digital Skills:** Northern Ireland is ranked below the UK average for adults with basic digital skills⁸
- **Infrastructure:** At present 17% of rural premises in Northern Ireland are unable to receive decent broadband from a fixed line⁹

In addition to digital inclusion, the Charity Digital Skills Report 2021 found that 38% of organisations found remote working difficult, exhausting or isolating which has impacted on staff's wellbeing¹⁰. The factors associated with digital exclusion such as lack of digital skills, demographic factors or inability to access the internet from home also apply to staff and volunteers in the VCSE sector.

Policy Overview

While there is an overarching UK Digital Strategy¹¹, which includes outcomes for England, many policy areas relating to digital skills, capacity and inclusion are a matter for the devolved governments in the UK. The following section provides a brief overview of key policies related to digital across Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.



⁷ Ofcom (2022) Digital exclusion A review of Ofcom's research on digital exclusion among adults in the UK. [Available here](#)

⁸ Lloyds Banking (2021) Essential Digital Skills Report 2021. [Available here](#)

⁹ Ofcom (2021) Connected Nations 2021 Northern Ireland report. [Available here](#)

¹⁰ Skills Platform and Zoe Amar Digital (2021) Charity Digital Skills Report 2021. [Available here](#)

¹¹ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2022) UK Digital Strategy. [Available here](#)

Northern Ireland: The policy focus on digital has been on two key areas to date: (i) digital transformation of the public sector to build better services online and; (ii) the rollout of digital infrastructure to extend access to broadband services across NI. A significant investment of £245 million of public and private funding has been made through Project Stratum¹² to improve connectivity for 85,000 eligible premises in predominantly rural areas unable to access broadband services of at least 30 Megabits per second. The recent examination of digital policies and strategies by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)¹³ found that this emphasis on digital infrastructure will continue with the next Programme for Government (PfG)¹⁴ expected to promote digital in terms of economic investment:

- 1. Infrastructure:** developing digital, energy and physical infrastructure to provide opportunities to grow business in all areas.
- 2. Growth:** growing the economy to attract and stimulate investment across Northern Ireland, including increased digital access.

There is also recognition in the 10X Economy Strategy¹⁵ of the need to enhance the digital skills of the NI population and the importance of fostering collaboration across sectors to develop innovative solutions to social issues such as digital exclusion. However, Northern Ireland currently has no national digital strategy to focus and take advantage of the social,

cultural and environmental benefits digital technology can bring. In contrast, both the Scottish and Welsh governments have developed and updated their own digital strategies to reflect the changes in society post-pandemic as outlined below:

Scotland: Scotland's Digital Strategy¹⁶ focusses on collaboration to achieve its aims of increasing digital inclusion, skills development, growing digital capacity and providing digital public services. Specific reference is made to partnership working with the Third Sector to develop both the digital skills and capacity of the sector and reduce digital exclusion amongst service users. Two examples, drawn from the Scottish Digital Strategy, of how this works in practice have been summarised on the next page:

¹² Department for the Economy (2022) Project Stratum state aid public review. [Available here](#)

¹³ Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (2022) The Digital Divide in Northern Ireland: Horizon scan of digital policies. [Available here](#)

¹⁴ Northern Ireland Executive (2021) Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework Consultation Document. [Available here](#)

¹⁵ Department for the Economy (2021) 10X Economy - an economic vision for a decade of innovation. [Available here](#)

¹⁶ The Scottish Government (2021) A Changing Nation: How Scotland will thrive in a Digital World. [Available here](#)

1. The Digital Participation Charter: 673 organisations have committed to supporting their employees and people across Scotland to develop the essential digital skills they need to do their jobs. This is supported by a Charter Fund, administered by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), to provide grants up to £10,000 to tackle poverty, social isolation and other forms of inequality in society through embedding essential digital skills development work in day-to-day activity with their service users.

2. Connecting Scotland Project: This collaboration between Scottish Government, Local Government and the Third Sector, developed in response to the pandemic, provides the most vulnerable and digitally excluded people in Scotland the necessary equipment, data and skills to access services and support and connect with friends and family. This includes provision of:

- a laptop or tablet;
- an internet connection (20 gigabytes a month);
- training and support.

Wales: The stated purpose of the Digital Strategy for Wales¹⁷ is to provide a national vision for jointly adopting a digital approach. The approach taken in Wales recognises the importance of partnership working, collaboration and coordination across all sectors to achieve better outcomes in six key 'mission' areas including digital skills, digital inclusion and digital connectivity. A delivery plan with actions has been developed to accompany

the strategy.

As this brief review has demonstrated, Scotland and Wales benefit from having a national digital strategy which provides vision, coordination and action across all sectors. While Northern Ireland has a range of programmes and initiatives related to digital, the lack of an overarching digital strategy means there are a number of areas that require further development. Currently, there is no specific plan to tackle digital exclusion. This is despite the investment made to shift public services online and the challenges households face during the current cost of living crisis. There is also little recognition of the significant role the VCSE sector can play to address digital exclusion. This includes consideration of the support and long-term investment required to develop digital skills and infrastructure in the VCSE sector in a similar way as the Northern Ireland Civil Service aims to increase their digital capacity through the Digital Transformation Programme. Finally, the emphasis on collaboration seen in the Scottish and Welsh Digital Strategies highlights the importance of partnership working and provides a collective working model that could be replicated in Northern Ireland.



¹⁷ The Welsh Government (2021) Digital strategy for Wales How we will use digital, data and technology to improve the lives of people in Wales. [Available here](#)

Methodology



The primary purpose of the 'Wired Up?' project was to investigate the current digital needs of the VCSE sector in Northern Ireland and to identify areas for potential development in the future. Specifically, the research explored four key themes using the following research questions:

- 1. Digital Skills:** What is the current level of digital skills in the VCSE sector in NI?
- 2. Digital Inclusion:** What are the challenges for the VCSE sector to improve digital inclusion and reduce digital exclusion?
- 3. Adoption of Digital Culture:** What are the characteristics and capacity of VCSE organisations who have adopted a digital culture?
- 4. Support for VCSE sector:** What support have VCSE organisations received to make good use of the opportunities offered by digital in terms of skills, digital inclusion and digital capacity?



Method

The 'Wired Up?' project was informed by a review of relevant research focussing on digital skills and digital inclusion within the UK policy context. A mixed method approach was used combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The data was collected in two phases as outlined below:

Phase 1 Online Questionnaire

The 'Wired Up?' survey was designed to gain greater understanding of the current levels of digital skills, barriers to digital inclusion and challenges for the sector to build digital capacity in the future. The survey was anonymous and available online for four weeks during June 2022. A total of 403 valid surveys were completed which provides a representative sample of the NI VCSE sector¹⁸. Quantitative data from the survey was systematically analysed by developing a coding frame created using the statistical software package SPSS with qualitative comments thematically coded.

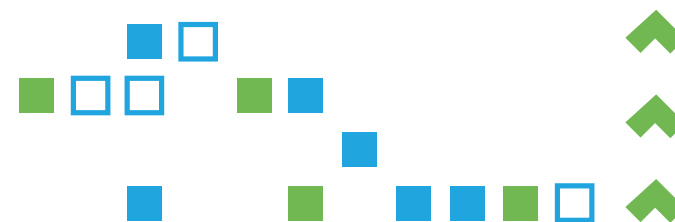
Phase 2 Focus Groups

The purpose of the focus groups was to explore some preliminary findings from the 'Wired Up?' survey together and to discuss ways in which the voluntary and community sector can tackle the digital challenges related to skills, inclusion and developing a digital culture for the future. Four focus groups were held, three online and one in person, with a total of 22 people in a range of roles across the sector including: 6 senior

leaders, 6 managers, 5 practitioners, 3 volunteers and 2 support staff. All focus groups were recorded, with participants' consent, for the purposes of conducting thematic analysis.

Limitations

While the research did achieve a representative sample of the NI VCSE sector, the use of an online survey and focus groups with promotion primarily through email and social media networks may have limited the participation of staff and volunteers without access to devices or data during the time the data was being gathered. It may have also been the case that staff and volunteers with poor digital skills felt unable to participate. To counterbalance this, we provided participants with the option of attending an in person focus group to remove the barriers associated with digital.



¹⁸ According to [NICVA's recent estimates](#) the VCSE sector makes up 7% of the workforce in Northern Ireland with approximately 53,620 employees. Using this figure as a reasonable approximation for the population size of the VCSE sector, it was calculated using Krejcie & Morgan (1970) [Table for Determining Sample Size for a Finite Population](#) that 382 responses would provide a representative sample of the VCSE population.

Part 2: Results



Demographic Overview

Responses to the Wired Up? survey were drawn from 403 staff, volunteers and trustees across the VCSE sector. A demographic overview is provided in this section for both individuals and organisational profiles.

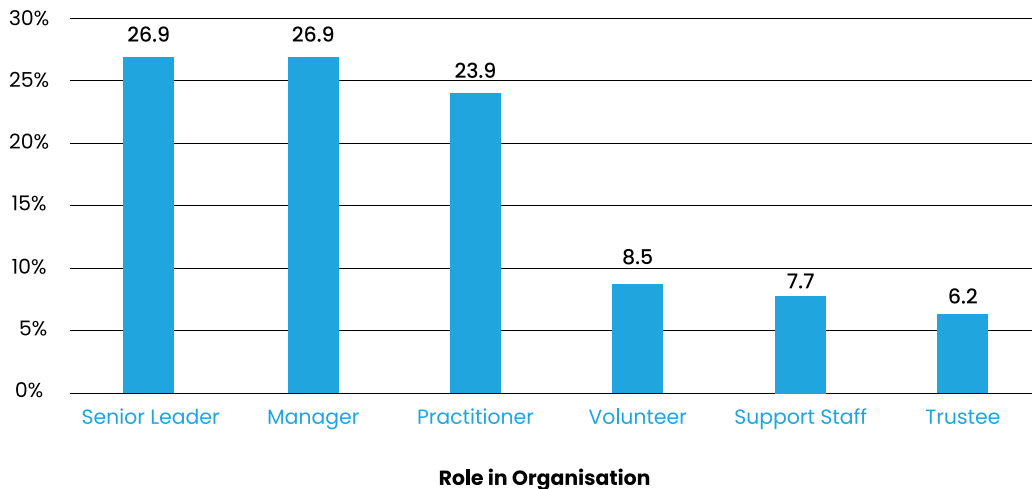


Demographic Information of Participants

Roles

The majority of participants were employed by an VCSE organisation (85.3%) with 8.5% volunteers and 6.2% trustees or members of a management committee. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of respondents by role in their organisation.

Figure 1: Participant by Role in Organisation



Age

Respondents were drawn from every age group. Over half of participants (51.7%) indicated that they were 40 – 49 years old (25.6%) and 50 – 59 years old (26.1%). A further 29.3% reported they were under 40 years old with 18.6% of respondents indicating that they were over 60 years of age.

Gender

Just over two-thirds of respondents were female (67.9%) with 32.1% male.

Disability

12.0% of participants considered that they had a disability.

English Language

The majority of participants reported that English was their main language (98.3%) with 1.7% reporting another language as their main language.



Organisational Profile

Responses to the 'Wired Up?' survey were received from staff, volunteers and trustees from VCSE organisations operating across all 11 council areas in Northern Ireland with the majority of organisations delivering services in Belfast City Council (73.8%), Antrim and Newtownabbey (50.8%) and Derry City and Strabane (50.3%) as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Representation from VCSE Organisations Across 11 Council Areas in Northern Ireland

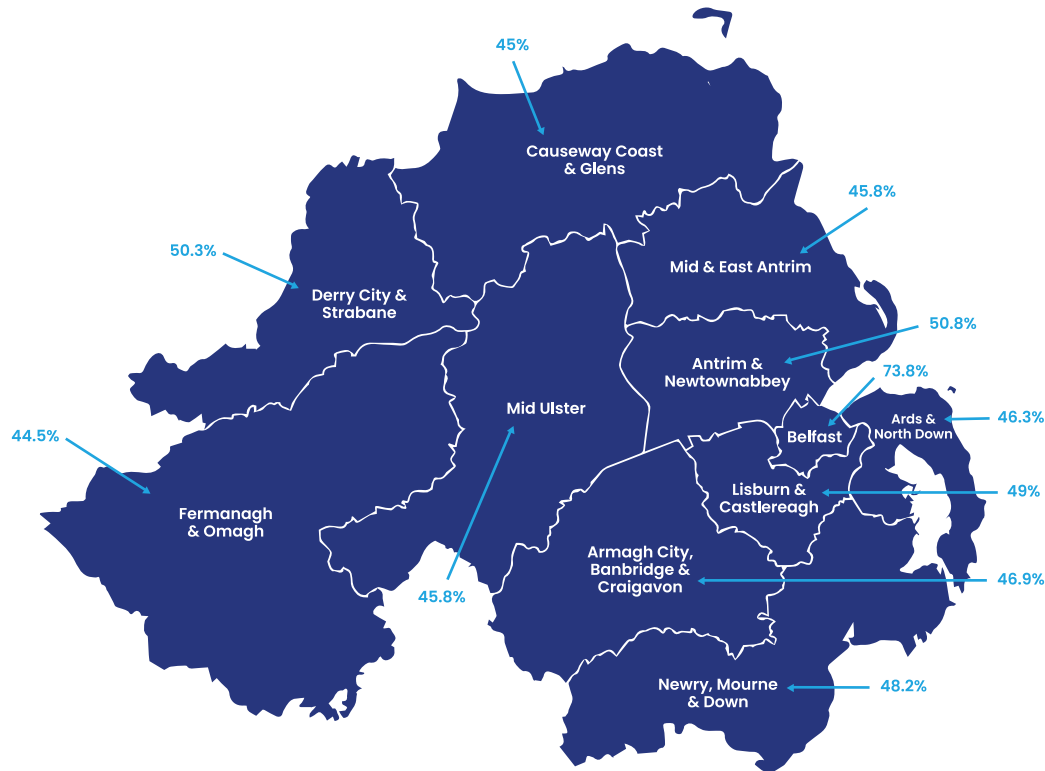
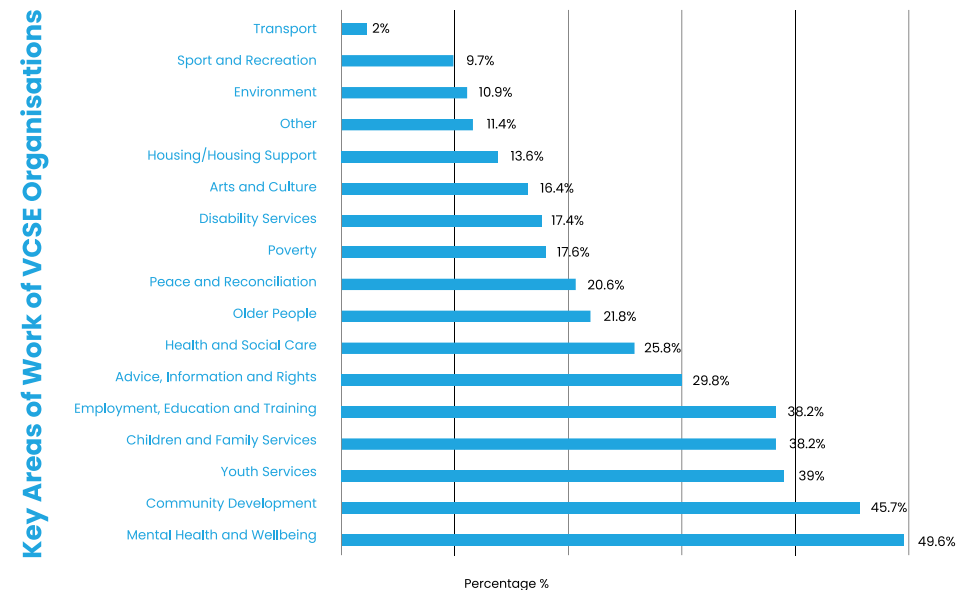


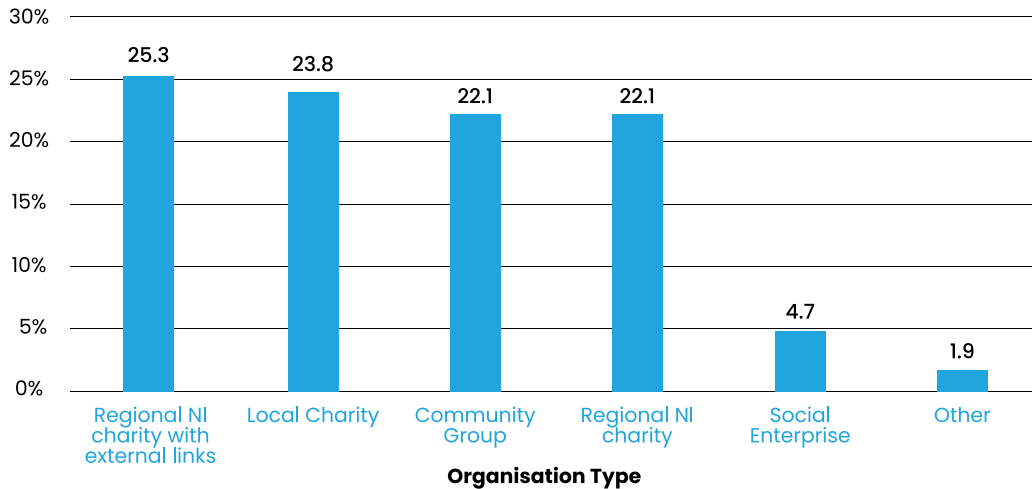
Figure 3 shows the diverse range of services participants reported that their organisations provided. Nearly half of the sample reported that their organisation provided services to support mental health and wellbeing (49.6%). Other common areas of work including community development (45.7%), youth services (39.0%), children and family services (38.2%) and employment, education and training (38.2%) in addition to health and social care (25.8%), older people (21.8%) and peace and reconciliation work (20.6%).

Figure 3: Range of Services Provided by the VCSE Sector



Organisations of various sizes are represented including local charities (23.8%), community groups (22.1%) and NI regional charities (22.1%). A distinction has been made throughout the report between regional organisations which operate only in NI and those that provide regional services in NI and operate outside NI in the UK, Ireland or internationally (25.3%) as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Organisational Type



Results indicate that there is significant variation in the resources available to different organisations:

Income

Participants from charities operating at a regional level reported having a higher annual income for 2022/23 as 60.7% of regional charities with external links had an income of over £1 million while 40.7% of regional charities had an income of over £1 million. This is compared to 53.3% of community groups with an income up to £100,000 and 42.9% of local charities with an income between £100,000 and £500,000.

Staff

Over half of participants working or volunteering in community groups (57.3%), social enterprises (57.9%) and local charities (56.1%) reported having under 10 members of staff compared to 38.2% of NI regional charities and 17.2% of NI regional charities with external links. In contrast, half of NI regional charities (50.5%) employed 11 – 99 staff with 56.3% of NI regional charities with external links employing over 100 members of staff.



Volunteers

Volunteers play a significant role in the VCSE sector with 78.5% of participants indicating that their organisation had between 1 – 10 volunteers (40.3%) and 11 – 50 volunteers (38.2%). Participants from local charities (54.9%) and community groups (46.8%) reported that their organisation had between 11 – 50 volunteers, compared to 33.0% of NI regional charities, 23.4% NI regional charities with external links and 21.2% of social enterprises. In comparison, one third of participants (33.8%) from NI regional charities with external links indicated that their organisation had between 200 – 500+ volunteers.

Results from the Wired Up? survey have highlighted the difference in resources available to different organisations. This has obvious implications for organisations' ability to support staff develop digital skills, maintain IT infrastructure and adopt a digital culture. This disparity was also a recurring theme throughout the focus groups. Comparison between different organisational types has been conducted and reported throughout as appropriate.



Section 1: Digital Skills in the VCSE Sector

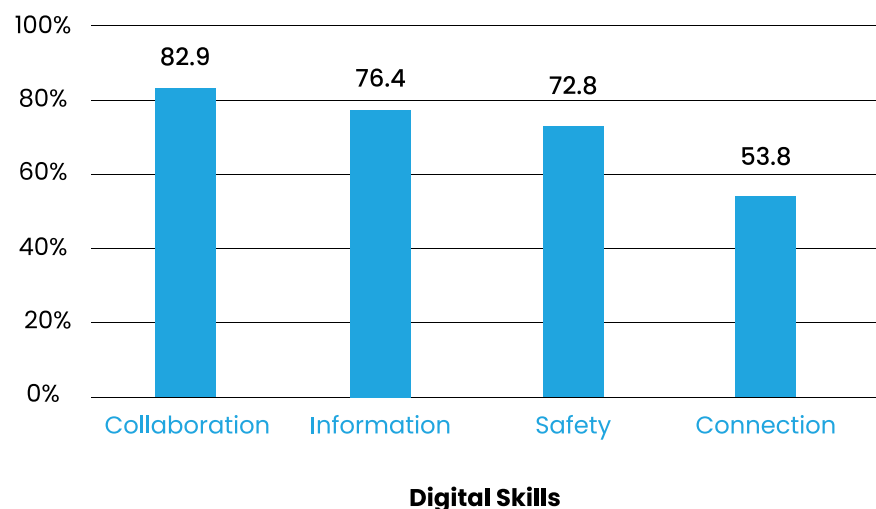
In order to gain an understanding of the digital skills of staff, volunteers and trustees across the VCSE sector, participants were asked to rate their own ability to perform a series of basic digital tasks across four core areas needed to work effectively. These areas were:

- 1. Collaboration:** ability to work with others within their organisation
- 2. Information:** ability to use information to inform their work
- 3. Connection:** ability to connect with others such as service users and supporters outside their organisation
- 4. Safety:** ability to work securely online

Results presented in Figure 5 illustrate the percentage of participants rating their digital skills as excellent or good in each of the four core areas. Findings show collaboration with others within their own organisation was the most common digital skill to be rated as excellent or good (82.9%). Over three quarters of participants (76.4%) rated their digital skills related to using information to inform their work as excellent or good with 72.8% rating their ability to work safely online as excellent or good. The lowest level of digital skills across the four core areas was associated with communication with those outside their

organisation. Just over half of participants (53.8%) rated their ability to use digital skills to connect with others outside their organisation as excellent or good.

Figure 5: Percentage of Participants Rating their Digital Skills as Excellent or Good



Collaboration

This core area focussed on participants' ability to use digital skills to work with colleagues. Results show:

- **93.8%** rated their ability to log in and access email from anywhere as excellent or good;



- **91.8%** rated their ability to use video conferencing tools to communicate with colleagues as excellent or good;
- **32.1%** indicated their skills to use digital collaboration tools, such as Google Docs as fair, poor or none.

Information

Searching the internet for solutions for work related problems was rated by the highest number of participants (95.0%) as excellent or good. Other tasks related to this core area focussed on data recording, analysing and presentation of information:

- **79.7%** considered their skills to create a simple spreadsheet to record data to be excellent or good;
- **71.2%** reported their skills to analyse data using a spreadsheet as excellent or good;
- **62.9%** rated their ability to create charts to present data to others as excellent or good.

Safety

72.8% of participants rated their ability to work safely online as excellent or good as shown in Figure 5.

While a high proportion of participants reported that they could use a secure password (90.8%), over one fifth of the sample (21.8%) reported having poor or no skills in at least one of the three safety skills outlined here:

- **13.9%** had poor or no skills to update their cyber security to prevent viruses and other risks;
- **12.9%** had poor or no skills to use cloud-based storage to securely save and retrieve information;
- **3.4%** had poor or no skills to recognise suspicious links in emails and websites, social media messages and pop ups.

Connection

Results indicate that nearly half of participants (48.8%) have little or no digital skills in at least one of the four areas below to connect with others such as service users and supporters. This included:

- **40.3%** had poor or no skills to update their website;
- **20.9%** had poor or no skills to create images and videos to share online;
- **26.3%** had poor or no skills to provide an online service for service users;
- **11.9%** had poor or no skills to use social media to promote their work.

Demographic Overview for Digital Skills

Overall, the highest proportion of participants self-reported that they had mixed abilities in terms of digital skills (48.2%). In order to learn more about digital skills across the VCSE, further analysis was conducted on two groups:

1. Participants who rated their digital skills as excellent or good across every core skill area:

42.9% of the sample rated their digital skills across every area as excellent or good. Senior leaders (27.7%), managers (25.4%) and practitioners (25.4%) were more likely to rate their ability as excellent or good across every area compared to volunteers (8.1%), support staff (6.4%) and trustees (6.9%). The profile of this group tended to be younger with most participants under fifty years old (66.3%). A higher proportion of females (65.3%) rated their ability in every area as excellent or good compared to males (34.7%). Little difference was found between participants from different types of organisations.

2. Participants who rated their digital skills as fair, poor or none across every core skill area:

A smaller number of the sample (8.9%) rated their ability in all of the four areas as fair, poor or none. Over half of this group were managers (28.6%) or senior leaders (25.7%) followed by 22.9% practitioners and 14.3% volunteers. This group tended to be older with 75.0% over fifty years of age. Higher levels of disability (25.7%) were present in this group compared to the group with better digital skills (11.0%). A higher proportion

of females (69.4%) rated their ability in every area as fair, poor or none compared to males (30.6%). Participants from this group tended to work or volunteer for a community group (41.7%), NI regional charity (25.0%) or local charity (19.4%).

Addressing the Digital Skills Gap in the VCSE Sector

During the focus groups participants were asked to consider how the digital skills gap identified in the Wired Up? survey could be addressed. The qualitative data highlighted that there was a lack of training, particularly free training, available for staff and volunteers working in the VCSE sector:

“ I think one of the gaps as well, is that there’s no training and free training because in our organisation, we just can’t afford to do any training for staff. We don’t have a budget and so it can be quite difficult. ”
Manager

“ Coming from the charity sector, I did go looking for training courses for the charity sector but I was really, really disappointed, particularly with NICVA, in terms of a lack of training and support for people within the charity sector. ”
Practitioner

Participants were clear that training opportunities to develop digital skills could take many forms. This could include:

- Access to online training resources for digital skills including short courses and guides such as 'How to...?' video tutorials
- Collaboration between the VCSE sector and businesses to learn new digital skills
- Mentoring
- Peer learning within organisations
- 1-1 short sessions to provide the opportunity to ask questions and be shown how to do things
- Webinars

Participants also highlighted the need to go beyond training to address the digital skills gap in the sector. Participants suggested that a strategic vision for the VCSE sector is required to improve digital skills, increase effective working practices and provide coordination. The use of digital champions to encourage and inspire people to develop their digital skills as well as opportunities to share digital solutions with other organisations in the VCSE sector were also considered useful ways to address the skills gap.

Section 2: Digital Inclusion

This section explores the challenge of digital inclusion and how the sector may reduce digital exclusion. Digital inclusion has been defined as “the capability of individuals or groups to enjoy the benefits of being online and use technology confidently to improve their day-to-day lives. Those who lack this capability are considered “digitally excluded”.¹⁹

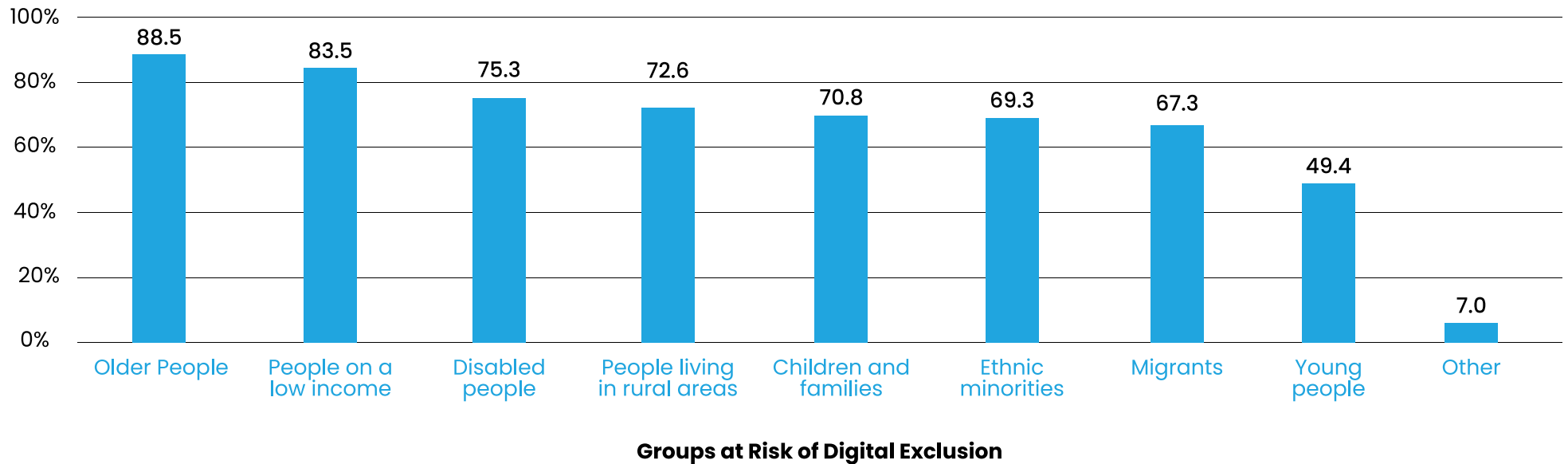


¹⁹ The Be Connected Network Website (2022) [Available here](#)

Who is at Risk of Digital Exclusion?

Participants were asked to indicate which groups were at risk of digital exclusion. While acknowledging that people may be categorised into multiple groups, the top three groups identified by the sample as being at risk of digital exclusion were older people (88.5%), people on a low income (83.5%) and people with a disability (75.3%). Participants also recognised that people living in rural locations (72.6%) and families with children (70.8%) could be at risk of digital exclusion as shown in Figure 6. Interestingly, a higher proportion of participants from NI regional charities with external links (88.8%) and NI regional charities (82.0%) recognised that people living in rural areas could be at risk of digital inclusion.

Figure 6: Groups at Risk of Digital Exclusion



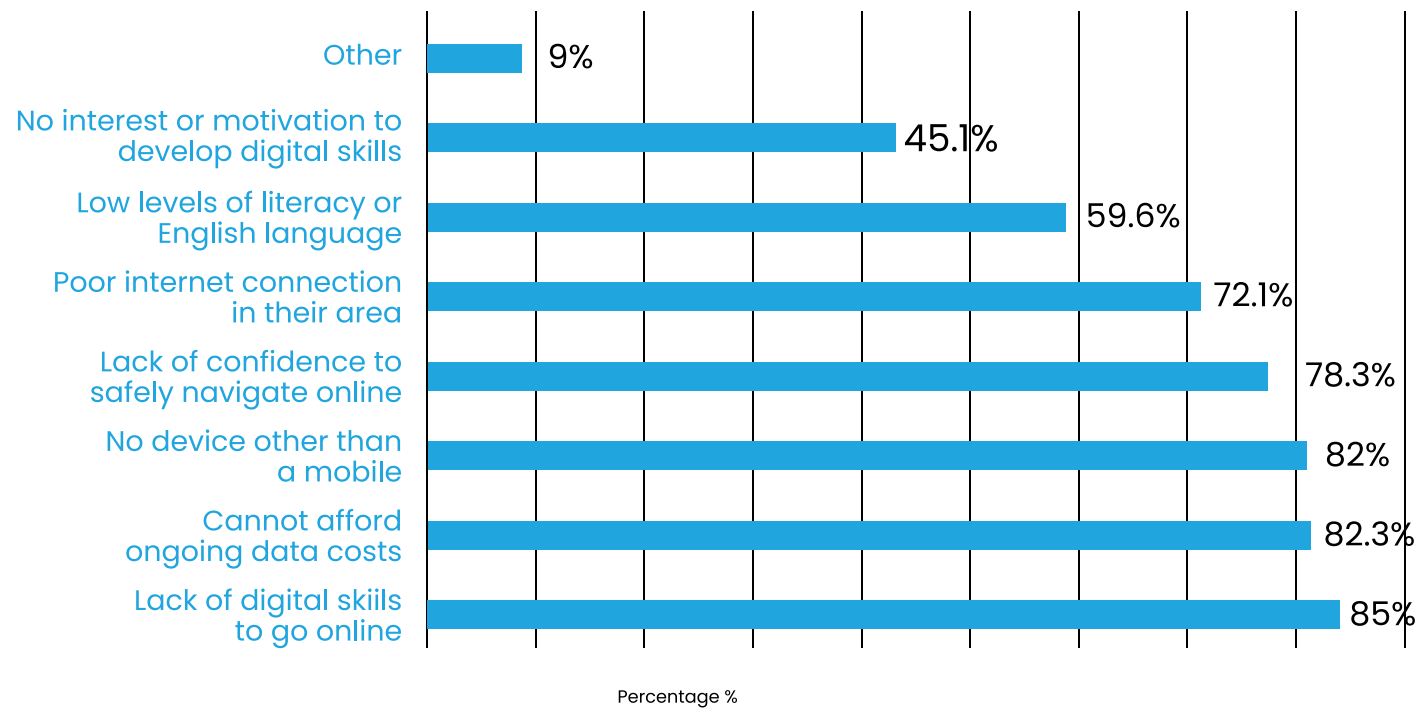
Other responses (7.0%) highlighted additional groups who face digital exclusion such as children and adults living in residential care, refugees and asylum seekers, people who are homeless and those in the criminal justice system.



Barriers to Digital Inclusion

Results show that people supported by the VCSE sector may face multiple barriers to digital inclusion. The most common challenges people at risk of digital exclusion may face including poor digital skills (85.0%), ability to afford data (82.3%) and lack of devices other than a mobile phone (82.0%). No significant differences were identified by organisational types in the barriers to digital inclusion service users faced.

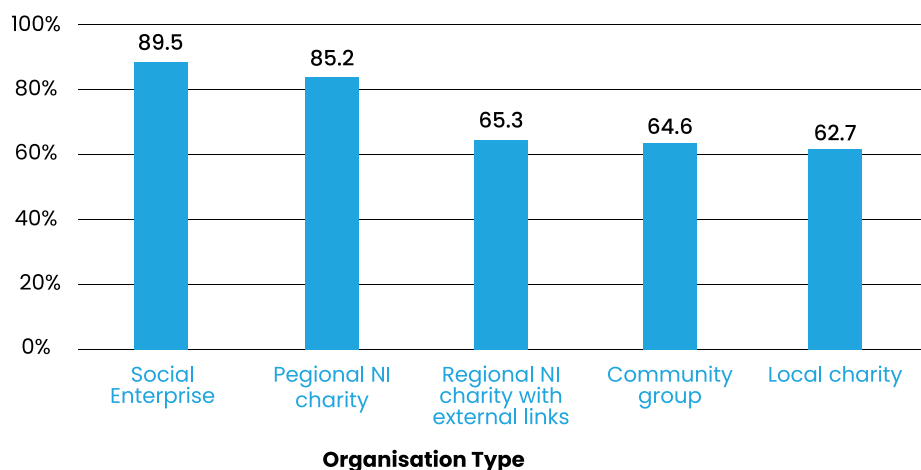
Figure 7: Barriers to Digital Inclusion



How can the VCSE Sector Improve Digital Inclusion?

The majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that increasing digital inclusion amongst the people they support is a priority for their organisation (86.9%). On further analysis, significant differences between types of organisations were evident with community groups (64.2%) and local charities (62.7%) less likely to agree with this compared to social enterprises (89.5%) and charities that operate on a regional basis as displayed on Figure 8.

Figure 8: Digital Inclusion is a Priority by Organisation Type



Two key actions were identified by participants that would support the VCSE sector make digital inclusion a priority:

- 1. Investment:** 87.0% of participants agreed that investment was needed in devices, software and support for staff to develop skills to improve digital inclusion
- 2. Digital Skills:** 36.8% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that staff and volunteers lacked the skills to support people at risk of digital exclusion.

Participants working or volunteering for community groups (45.3%) or local charities (43.3%) were more likely to agree or strongly agree that staff and volunteers lack the skills to support people at risk of digital exclusion. Participants working in regional charities with external links (34.9%), NI regional charities (30.7%) or social enterprises (21.1%) were less likely to agree or strongly agree that staff and volunteers lacked skills to support people at risk of digital exclusion.



Reflecting on their experiences of adapting service delivery to those with no or poor digital skills in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, focus group participants shared key learning on how the VCSE sector can increase digital inclusion:

Devices and Support

Access to a device and support to use it safely was seen as essential to digital inclusion. Many participants were involved in programmes which combined supplying service users with devices, such as laptops or tablets, and building their capacity and confidence to use their devices. Organisations did this through both online and face to face training courses and by providing ongoing support. Specifically, participants stressed the importance of providing data with devices to ensure service users can use their device to go online and do not become digitally excluded by lack of data:

“Data should be treated as a utility like water and electricity because you cannot participate in life, in society without data.”
Senior Leader

Choice

Many participants voiced surprise that some programmes worked better online and reached more service users compared to when the programme was only delivered in person. In some cases, online or hybrid programmes or training courses provided more opportunities for those that

who were isolated to connect with others online:

“Since COVID we’ve changed, so we still offer remote blended learning so it’s been really good for women who have anxiety and don’t want to come into the centre. Also, its really good for people who have caring responsibilities maybe children who have disabilities or they’re looking after elderly parents, so they can’t actually come in and gain the qualifications but they’re able to join remotely and join the class from home.”
Senior leader

Accessibility

The adoption of online service delivery provided the opportunity for organisations to increase their use of assistive technologies. Participants reported that this was beneficial in supporting users with learning and physical disabilities. The use of subtitles and interpretation software also increased participation of people with English as an Additional Language.

Despite this positive work conducted by the sector to increase digital inclusion, participants expressed frustration at the significant structural limitations faced by service users such as lack of broadband in rural areas and the current cost of living crisis which is beyond the control of the VCSE sector.

Section 3: Adopting a Digital Culture

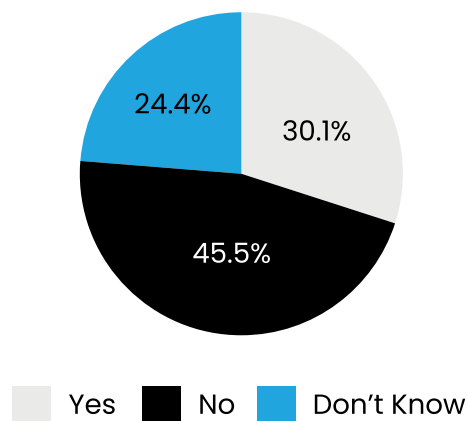
In order to better understand the digital capacity of the sector, this section provides an overview of the current digital infrastructure of the VCSE sector by exploring participants' views of the equipment, support and training available to them from their organisation. This section also outlines the characteristics of organisations who have been successful in adopting a digital culture.

Digital Capacity of the VCSE Sector

The Wired Up? survey explored how participants viewed their organisations digital infrastructure. Findings show that most VCSE organisations do not have a digital strategy (45.5%) with 30.1% reporting that their organisation does have a digital strategy. Most community groups (52.1%) and local charities (65.1%) do not have a digital strategy.

Figure 9: Does your organisation have a digital strategy?

Interestingly, 30.6% of the group who responded 'don't know' (24.4%, n = 98) consisted of managers (25.5%), senior leaders (3.1%), and trustees (2.0%).



A further 50.0% of this group were practitioners followed by volunteers (11.2%) and support staff (8.2%). While most participants recognised the usefulness of a digital strategy in the focus groups, people were unclear about what options they had available to them and felt that their organisation would require external expertise and capacity to develop this.

“ I think when you're talking about a digital strategy it's very difficult to know where to start when you don't know what the possibilities are. ”
Senior Leader

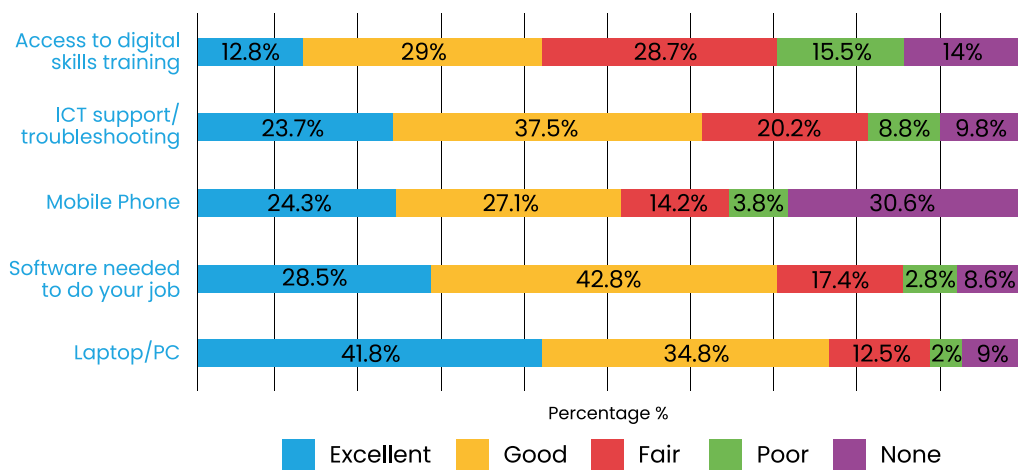
Digital Infrastructure

Participants were asked to rate the digital infrastructure of their organisation in terms equipment, troubling shooting support, access to digital training and online presence. Taking into consideration the broad range of jobs across the VSCE, it is important to note that not all participants need access to a laptop or require the use of a mobile.



Equipment: Figure 10 illustrates the majority of participants rated their work laptop or PC (76.6%) as excellent or good. For those respondents that indicated they had a mobile phone (n = 274), 74.1% rated it as excellent or good. Similarly, most participants rated the software provided by their organisation as excellent or good (71.3%).

Figure 10: Participants' Rating of IT Equipment and Support Provided by Organisation



ICT Support/ Troubleshooting: While the majority of participants rated their organisation's ICT support as excellent or good (61.2%), this varied significantly by organisational type. Those working or volunteering for community groups (27.7%) or local charities (27.2%) rated their ICT support as poor or none. This was compared to regional NI charities (12.5%) and regional NI charities with external links (10.3%). No participant from a

social enterprise rated their organisation's ICT support as poor or none with most rating (73.6%) as excellent or good.

Access to Digital Skills Training: Overall, 29.5% of participants rated their access to digital skills training as poor or none. Analysis by organisation type found that participants working or volunteering for community groups (33.6%) and local charities (32.9%) were more likely to experience poor or no access to digital skills training from their organisation compared to NI regional charities (25.9%) or NI regional charities with external links (25.8%). Around ten percent (10.5%) of those working or volunteering for a social enterprise also rated their access to digital skills training as poor or none.

Online Presence: Most participants reported that their organisation had an online presence (96.7%) with 92.1% of participants reported that their organisation had an active social media presence and 74.6% of participants reported that their organisation had an up – to – date website. Of those that did not have an organisational website, the majority reported that they did have an active presence on social media (81.5%). These organisations tended to be community groups (41.3%) or local charities (25.3%). Only 3.3% of participants reported that their organisation did not have a website or a social media presence.

Managing Digital Infrastructure

The largest number of participants reported that their organisation used an external supplier to support their IT infrastructure (30.6%). Specifically, NI regional charities (44.9%), local charities (39.8%) and social enterprises (36.8%) were more likely to contract an external supplier compared to community groups (24.0%) or NI regional charities with external links (16.3%). Two key themes emerged from the qualitative data on the use of external IT suppliers:

Expense: Participants highlighted that this was very expensive, especially for organisations with a low income:



We are a service provider. We are not IT people. We have to pay thousands of pounds a year to an external provider to help us manage this otherwise we couldn't do it. We have to fundraise to get that money to retain an external provider just to keep us digitally safe and working.

Senior Leader

Length of Time to Access Support: There was frustration at the time taken to repair systems or devices which could impact on the service delivery of an organisation:



We are a small team of five people in our charity so we outsource our IT so it can be very frustrating to try and get them in when you really need them and need something fixed.

Manager

While 25.6% of participants reported that their organisation had a digital team responsible for IT infrastructure, most of those participants were drawn from NI charities with external links (61.2%) or NI regional charities (20.2%). Participants working or volunteering for community groups were twice as likely to report that no one was responsible for their IT infrastructure (14.6%) compared to local charities (7.2%). Only 3.4% of participants from a regional NI charity and 1.0% of those from a regional NI charity with external links reported that no one was responsible for their IT infrastructure. No participant working or volunteering for a social enterprise indicated that no one was responsible for their IT infrastructure.

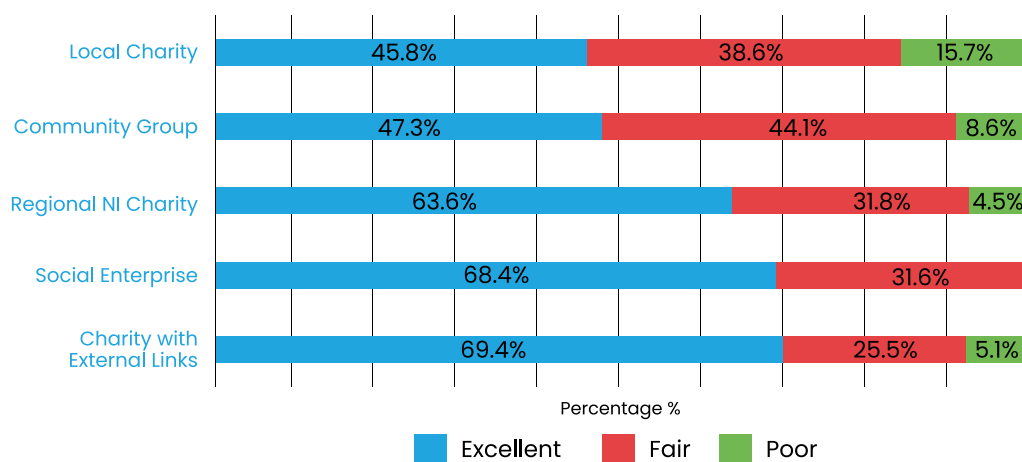
Adopting a Digital Culture

Participants were asked to rate the digital culture of their organisation. Overall, 57.7% rated their organisation's digital culture as excellent (11.7%) or good (46.0%). Over one third (34.3%) rated their organisation's digital culture as fair with 8.0% rating it as poor. No respondent rated their organisation's digital culture as very poor. Figure 11 provides an overview using a three-point rating scale of digital culture as 'Excellent/Good', 'Fair' and 'Poor' by organisational type.



As shown, most participants from NI regional charities with external links (69.4%), social enterprises (68.4%) and NI regional charities (63.6%) rated their organisation's digital culture as excellent/good compared to 47.3% of participants from community groups or 45.8% from local charities.

Figure 11: Digital Culture by Organisation Type



Specifically, participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with the statement "My organisation is struggling to adopt a digital culture." Results from the survey show that 22.0% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their organisation was struggling to adopt a digital culture. Half of participants (50.0%) disagreed with this with 28.0% remaining neutral on this question. Comparison between these three groups revealed differences in attitudes and approaches to adopting a digital culture as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison between Groups Adopting a Digital Culture

	Organisations Struggling to Adopt a Digital Culture % (n = 88)	Neutral % (n = 113)	Organisations Not Struggling to Adopt a Digital Culture % (n = 200)
Digital is seen as part of everyone's job	53.4	30.4	80.0
Staff and volunteers are too busy to prioritise digital	65.3	45.5	19.1
Staff and volunteers are confident to try new approaches using digital tools	36.4	37.2	62.5
Addressing digital inclusion is now part of our normal service delivery	35.2	48.7	63.1
Senior leaders are committed to developing digital capacity	35.3	25.5	68.5

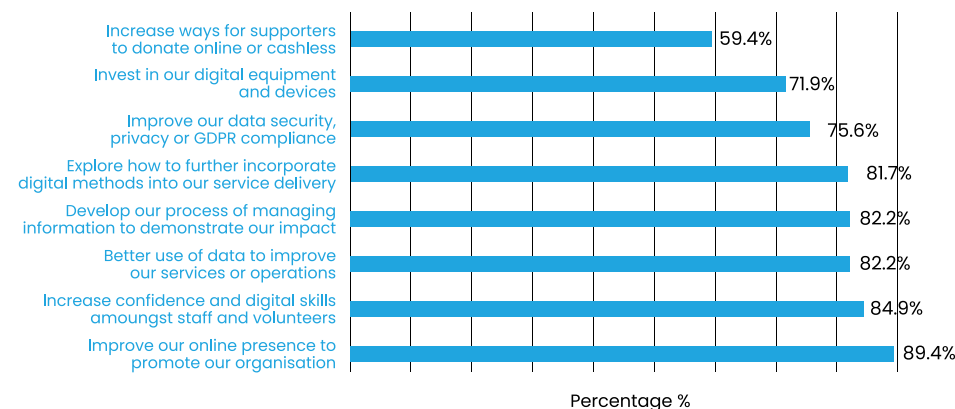
Table 1 shows participants from organisations who were not struggling to adopt a digital culture tended to agree that digital is a part of everyone’s job (80.0%) and that the senior leaders in their organisations were committed to developing digital capacity (65.5%). The majority of this group also agreed that addressing digital inclusion is now a normal part of service delivery (63.1%). Participants from organisations struggling to adopt a digital culture were more likely to agree that staff and volunteers were too busy to prioritise digital (65.3%) and less likely to agree that staff and volunteers are confident to try new approaches using digital tools (36.4%).

Section 4: The Future

This section provides an insight into the future direction participants think their organisation should take requiring digital and identifies the supports required for the VCSE sector for the future.

Priorities: Participants were asked to indicate what digital priorities their organisation should focus on in the next 12 months. Figure 12 shows that the majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that improving their online presence (89.4%) and increasing the confidence and digital skills of staff and volunteers (84.9%) should be prioritised. The joint third priority related to how data can be used to improve services or operations (82.8%) and how information can be managed to demonstrate the impact of services (82.2%).

Figure 12: Digital Priorities for Organisations in Next 12 Months



Reflecting the pattern already identified in the research, comparisons between groups revealed that different priorities are held by organisation type. The leading priority for local charities (94.0%) and NI regional charities (93.2%) was to improve their online presence while the top priority for those working or volunteering in community groups was to increase the confidence and digital skills of staff and volunteers (90.2%). The highest priority for participants from both NI regional charities with external links (88.8%) and social enterprises (94.7%) was to develop processes of managing information to demonstrate impact. In contrast, greater consensus was reached on participants lowest priority. Every group apart from social enterprises, placed online fundraising or cashless donations as their lowest priority. The lowest priority for social enterprises was investment in digital equipment and devices (52.6%).

Challenges: The central challenge recognised by the majority of participants was funding. This was described in two main ways:

1. Core funding for digital: 81.8% identified getting core funding to support digital as a challenge. As discussed in Section 3, significant funds may be spent by VCSE organisations on external IT contractors to maintain their website, equipment, systems and provide troubleshooting support. In addition to these costs, organisations may require annual subscriptions and licenses to use products, apps or services to support their work. In the focus groups, participants emphasised that IT expenses were ongoing, underpinned service delivery and identified a funding gap in how VCSE organisations finance their core digital infrastructure:

“**It’s having that recognition that these backroom functions need to be in place and funded for in order to be able to provide the front room functions, the front line services, so I think that’s important. IT is the future.**”
Senior Leader

“**It is a challenge in terms of the funding and the fact that a lot of project funding doesn’t really allow for those important roles in an organisation. You’re not always talking about full cost recovery with project funding. How do you actually finance those kinds of roles that aren’t necessarily direct project delivery?**”
Manager

2. Short term funding: 81.8% identified short term funding as a challenge. This was seen as a greater challenge for social enterprises (94.4%), community groups (90.0%), local charities (82.7%) and NI regional charities (82.8%) compared to NI regional charities with external links (72.7%).

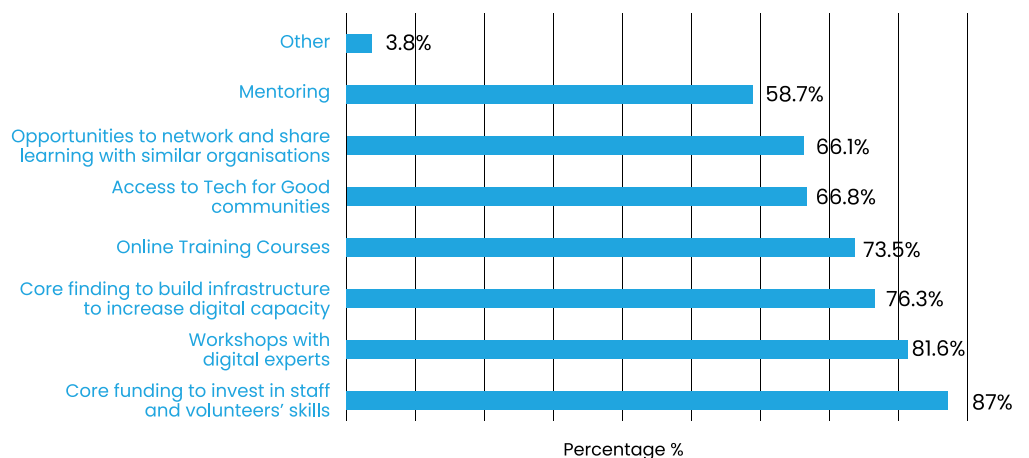
In addition to challenges around funding digital infrastructure and capacity, respondents recognised that addressing digital inclusion for service users (80.4%) and finding time to develop strategies around how digital can be used (79.2%) as a challenge faced by the VCSE sector in the coming year.

Support: Participants were asked to identify any support their organisation had availed of in the past 12 months. Findings show that the most common types of support for organisations around digital was for funding for devices and equipment (52.3%) or digital skills training for staff and volunteers (35.2%). Less support was accessed for funding for software (19.4%) or support for digital governance (10.7%). A quarter of participants (25.3%) reported that their organisation had no support in the past twelve months.



Reflecting the challenges identified by participants above, 87.0% indicated that core funding to invest in staff and volunteers' skills would best support the VCSE make good use of digital with a further 76.3% reporting that core funding to build infrastructure to increase digital capacity would be positive. As illustrated in Figure 13, other supports participants would find helpful included workshops with experts (81.6%), online training courses (73.5%), access to Tech for Good communities (66.8%) and mentoring (58.7%).

Figure 13: Supports for the VCSE Sector



Participants in the focus groups identified the need for effective coordination to support the VCSE sector. Participants suggested that this coordination is carried out by one organisation which would provide a range of services and support in one location.

“ I think we need a coordinated approach one like a go - to organisation that’s overseeing all this. ”
Practitioner

“ Something like an umbrella organisation could set up an IT support wing almost so the smaller organisations could buy in to, for that stuff that you can’t train your staff to do. ”
Manager

“ There’s a gap there where there isn’t the support for the community sector from an independent organisation that can provide training, lobby for funding for devices and networks and broadband and so on. ”
Volunteer

Participants expressed that this would simplify how VCSE organisations access resources, training and support and would be important in providing support to the sector on a long-term basis.

Part 3: Conclusion and Recommendations



Digital technology plays a significant role in the operation and delivery of services provided across the NI VCSE sector. However, to date, there has been little consultation with the sector around this issue. The purpose of the 'Wired Up?' research was to address this lack of evidence and explore the current levels of digital skills, barriers to digital inclusion and challenges for the sector to build digital capacity in the future. Specifically, findings of the research demonstrated that there is a wide variation of digital skills and infrastructure across the sector with organisations at different stages of adopting a digital culture. As a result, some participants report a lack of skills around supporting digital inclusion and that it is difficult for their organisation to prioritise digital inclusion. The 'Wired Up?' research has also identified two key areas that remain a challenge in meeting the current needs of the VCSE sector and supporting further digital development. These areas are outlined below:

Lack of a Digital Support Service for the VCSE Sector:

Results indicate that organisations generally did not have the knowledge or technical ability inhouse to easily identify how they can make the best use of digital for themselves. As a result, VCSE organisations, particularly smaller charities, often buy in expertise from a third party at considerable cost. Results suggest that VCSE organisations of all sizes would benefit from being able to access a digital support service which could supply a range of technical assistance, guidance, resources and training. This could be co-ordinated across

the VCSE sector. Better coordination of these supports could provide strategic direction of how the sector further develops digitally, offer increased opportunities to collaborate with others and be a useful way to negotiate with providers of technical assistance on behalf of the sector.

Funding: Funding remains a major challenge for the digital development of the VCSE sector. Most participants reported that it was difficult to obtain core funding to support digital. Funding tends to be short term or for a one-off investment for equipment or staff training. This research has identified that funding of this type is inadequate to cover the significant and ongoing costs associated with developing and maintaining digital infrastructure. Furthermore, there is a funding gap for essential products such as annual software subscriptions or anti-virus protection. Greater recognition of the seemingly invisible costs related to digital infrastructure is needed by funding bodies.



Drawing from the findings of the 'Wired Up?' research, a number of recommendations have been made:

Recommendation 1:

A Digital Strategy for Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Executive should develop a Digital Strategy for Northern Ireland to provide a coherent digital vision with a fully funded action plan. The Digital Strategy should:

- Prioritise tackling digital exclusion and address key barriers to digital inclusion including affordability, access and lack of digital skills;
- Focus on supporting collaboration across all sectors including the creation of a strategic partnership between the VCSE sector and statutory agencies. Investment should be made to support VCSE organisations develop their digital infrastructure;
- Plan to collect and publish data on an annual basis to monitor trends and measure the progress of the Digital Strategy in achieving its outcomes.



Recommendation 2:

A New Approach to Funding Digital Infrastructure

Funders must play a greater role in supporting the digital needs of the VCSE sector, particularly regarding smaller organisations. Funders and organisations should work in partnership to develop a new approach to fund the digital processes and products essential for operational and service delivery. This should include:

- Availability of core funding for digital infrastructure on a long-term basis to improve organisational efficiency and which offers flexibility to try new approaches;
- Recovery of the full costs associated with developing and maintaining digital infrastructure;
- Additional funding should be available to support organisations with their digital inclusion work. This should include collaboration between sectors.

Recommendation 3:

Improving Digital Support for the VCSE Sector

The creation of a digital support service would provide organisations with access to a range of supports and would particularly benefit smaller charities. This role may be filled by one organisation or a network of organisations and should provide:

- **Technical Assistance:** including troubleshooting and advice on cyber security. The service would also support organisations to undertake a digital audit, strategic planning for digital improvements and have the ability to negotiate with third party contractors to ensure best value;
- **Resources:** Collate and maintain online information with resources such as video tutorials, case studies and other guidance;
- **Learning Opportunities:** Offer training and learning opportunities for staff and volunteers with a range of digital skills including regular opportunities for staff and volunteers to share and learn from others in different organisations.

Recommendation 4:

Workforce Development for the VCSE Sector

Training opportunities to develop digital skills should be ongoing and be available for free or low cost to organisations. Workforce development should focus on:

- Enabling staff and volunteers to use digital technology that is relevant to their job role and will improve effectiveness;
- Developing a Digital Skills Audit for the VCSE sector which should be conducted at regular intervals to identify gaps, trends and provide an evidence base to inform organisations, funders and policy makers of ongoing need;
- Training resources and opportunities specifically developed to support staff and volunteers with poor digital skills, particularly older people or people with learning or physical disabilities;
- Creation of 'digital champions' across the sector to raise awareness of training opportunities, share good practice and encourage partnership working across the sector.

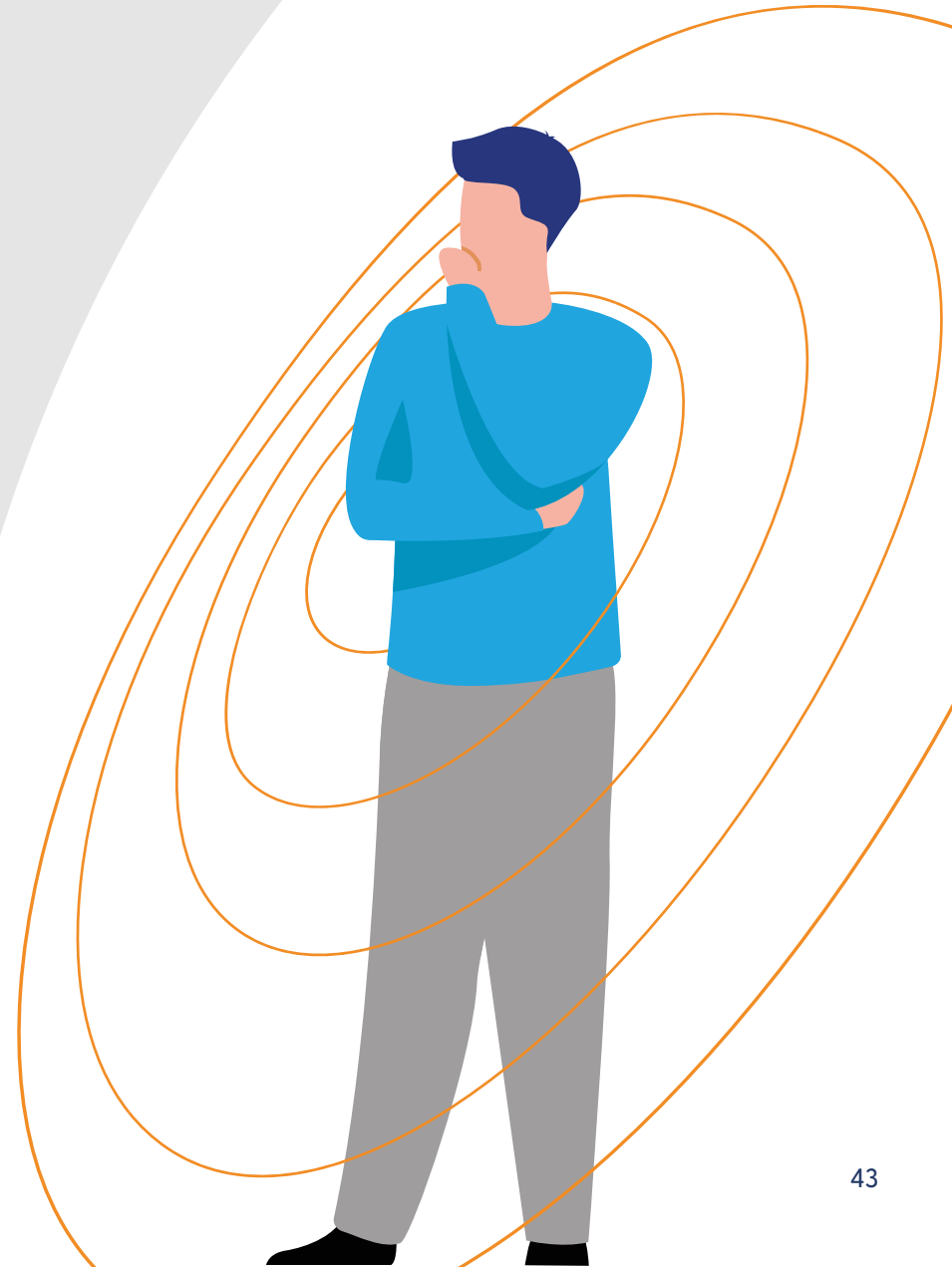


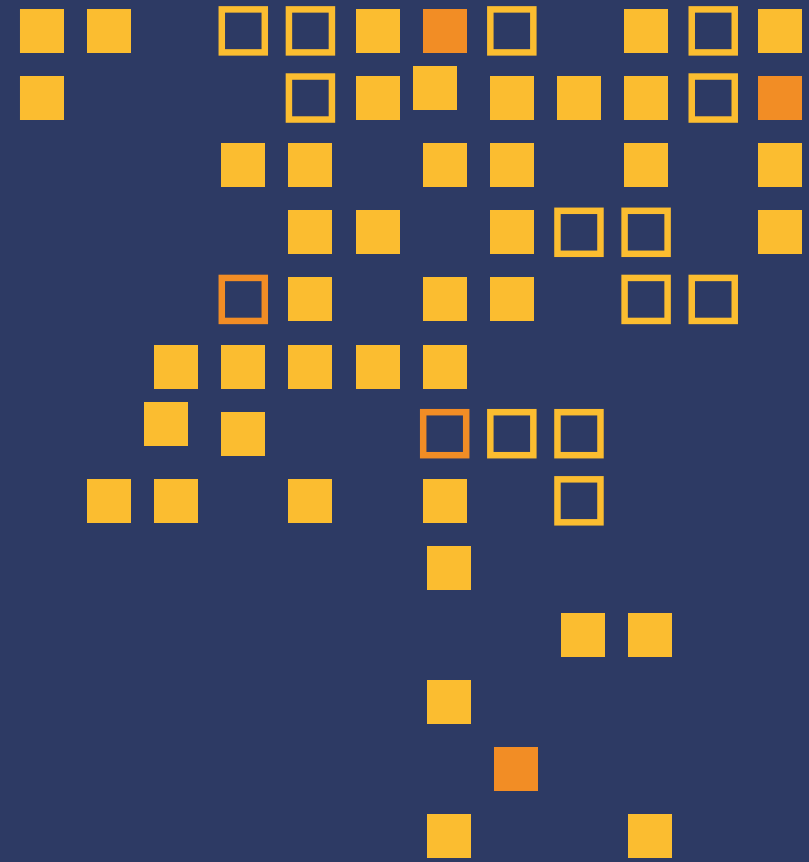
Acknowledgements



The authors would like to thank all involved in the Wired Up? research.

We appreciate the efforts made by so many VCSE organisations to share the survey with staff, volunteers and their wider networks. Special thanks to Giga Studios for developing the content used to raise awareness of the research on social media platforms. Finally, thank you to all the participants who took the time to complete the survey or take part in the focus groups.





Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

Community House
City Link Business Park
6a Albert Street
Belfast BT12 4HQ

T : +44 (0) 28 9024 5927

Charity Number: NIC105105

communityfoundationni.org