

## 3 ways you can support your Digital Champions during COVID-19



19th March 2020

The Digital Champions (DCs) we support through our Digital Champions Network (DCN) cascade digital skills to peers within the workforce and in the community. In turn they support the development of digital skills with service users and customers.

COVID-19 does give them and the organisations they work in and for a range of challenges; how do DCs remain active and effective without contact with learners, be they colleagues or 'citizen' learners? Do Digital Champion programmes need to be stalled or stopped? How do they maintain the impact of the work they've been doing as digital skills become increasingly important as the pandemic takes hold? How do you support the vulnerable who may also be lacking, and needing more than ever, digital skills in this uncertain time?

in this rapidly changing and unprecedented situation, our top three current recommendations are:

### **1. Take stock, formulate a plan, reflectively not reactively**

We're encouraging our DCN clients to respond proactively and not to panic. Often easier said than done and especially with an urgent underlying health risk. Of course, personal health and safety is the first consideration for their staff and their service users and customers.

Refer in the first instance to your own volunteering and HR policies when considering their Digital Champion activities in the current situation. And then follow [national guidance](#) which is updated regularly. Ideally Digital Champions (DCs) should avoid face to face contact where possible to minimise the risk to their health and safety and that of their learners.

We have lots of guides that can help both organisations and their DCs at this time. They cover accessing health services and information online, guides for remote working and digital tools to reduce social isolation.

Strategic/ senior management and leaders are encouraged to take time to review, adjust and adapt their Digital Champion projects and programmes. In terms of deliverables and outputs – which may be measured by number of Champs recruited and trained, learners engaged, or staff members trained by Champs – target numbers will need to be adjusted, and time scales too. Outcomes and time frames for realising them also.

Creating a new risk register – or updating a current one – is always a good thing to do even if it can initially cause mass frowning. A problem identified is a problem with the chance of a remedy! That's not a DU saying but it should be.

## 2. Nourish your Champs - stimulate a learning frenzy

With no face to face support, think of other ways to maintain the energy and skills in your Champion networks. And think about what can be done virtually, creatively even experimentally while we all wait to see what the next day brings.

We know from our own research that over 80% of those who become Digital Champs do so because they want to help others and they get huge satisfaction, and stimulate their own well-being, by helping others.

We also know that learning new skills and consolidating others brings satisfaction too. So now's the time to encourage and support Champions to keep learning. There are more than 20 'trainer the trainer' type courses, many CPD accredited, on the DCN, which extend and consolidate Digital Champion skills in that role. With digital credentialing on all titles, exportable to CVs and as records of achievement, there's plenty of DC gold yet to be mined.

We'll be adding a new consolidated suite of COVID-19 pertinent titles to further support this including guidelines and resources on how to be a virtual DC.

There's a nice list of resources also published recently [here](#) by our friends at Citizens Online

And some more online learning for the COVID-19 age from [Thrive Learning](#).

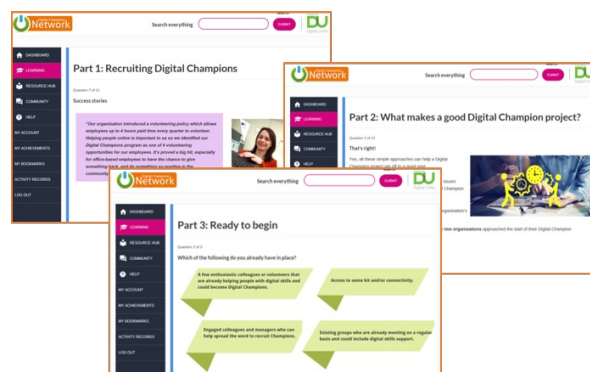
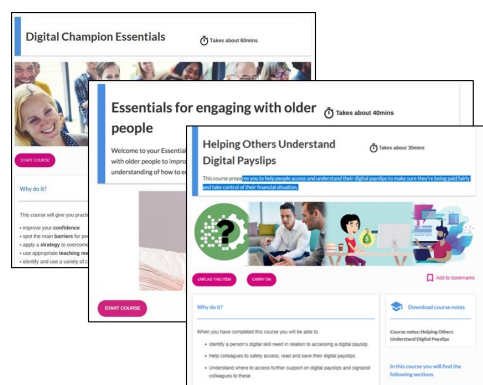
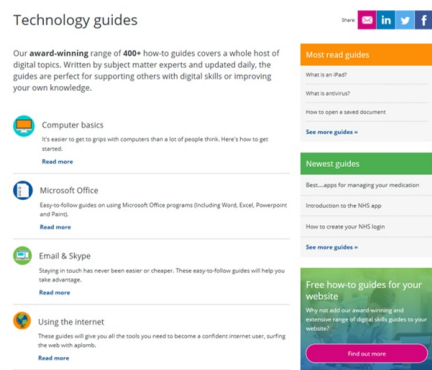
Digital Champions should also be encouraged to support each other as well, share hints and tips, trouble shoot each other's issues. For example there's already an interesting thread on the DCN forum where a couple of DCs are now addressing learners' concerns about hygiene and looking at voice activation software as an alternative as well as advice on cleaning devices. They weren't doing this a couple of months ago...

## 3. Give Project Managers new opportunities

DCs won't be the only ones missing hands on skills delivery and support.

If you are running Digital Champion activities, the chances are you have at least one person (depending on the size and complexity your project/programme) acting as a Project Manager (PM), co-ordinating and monitoring activity.

Project Managers have their own suite of tools and resources on the DCN supporting them to communicate with their DC networks, stimulate learning and sharing. With, on the ground activities being suspended, PMs can use online tools and methods to stimulate creativity and communication. Building and maintaining remote support through forums (see above), online chat, using smart phones to stay connected can all help.



Having a plan and creating habits and routines is super useful; it's usually easier to encourage flourishing when there's a some sort of structure underpinning and guiding activities. That doesn't need to be onerous or take days to write; a simple set of bullet points on the back of an envelope will do the trick. Just get started – and see how the list evolves.

Support DCs to experiment with creating their own resources to support others in these challenging times. These might be as light touch as check lists for virtual support, 'useful apps and websites' lists, may be experimenting with video and audio support and resources.

Project Managers can also lead by example in encouraging DCs to 'look upwards and outwards'. Having a rummage around in the wonderful learning opportunities out there online .... which needn't be anything explicitly to do with digital skills. [Futurelearn](#) is still one of our favourite places to learn new things, for example, and to experiment with subject matter and skills sets.

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