A growing confidence in digital: from pandemic survival to future planning

25/01/2022

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The second Digital Attitudes and Skills for Heritage (DASH) survey report offers a unique insight into how the UK heritage sector's use of digital has evolved during the pandemic.

Attachment	Size
PDF View Digital Attitudes and Skills for Heritage (DASH) survey report 2021 as PDF(837.75 KB)	837.75 KB
PDF View Adroddiad DASH 2021 – fersiwn Cymraeg as PDF(996.87 KB)	996.87 KB

DASH report 2021

Published on 25 January 2022, the report brings together the responses of **4,514 individuals from 323 organisations**. The survey ran from September to November 2021.

The first DASH report, published on 14 October 2020, analysed the responses of 4,120 individuals from 281 organisations. It launched just as the UK went into its first lockdown.

This year's findings are a snapshot of a unique moment in time, as the heritage sector continues to pivot online to deal with the pandemic and repeated lockdowns.

The research was carried out by Timmus Research Limited and Heritage Alliance, who provide in-depth analysis of their data. You can read the report to the left.

Ingenuity and determination

Respondents to the survey most commonly described their organisation's approach to digital as **"keeping up with the times"** (48%).

The research shows that the sector's skills have increased over the last year. These centre around "business critical" digital practices – including working online and keeping the public connected to heritage during the pandemic.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund Head of Digital Policy Josie Fraser said: "The research demonstrates the ingenuity and determination of a sector which made the most of technology to keep working, communicating and connecting during an extremely difficult time."

Growing confidence

With the great changes of the past year has come greater digital confidence for many of those surveyed.

In 2020, 75% of staff, 67% of trustees and 49% of volunteers felt able and confident in using video conferencing. In 2021 this had increased to 80% of staff, 76% of trustees and 57% of volunteers.

Digital is now embedded in day-to-day working practices. One respondent said: “the pandemic has placed digital (video meetings) at the heart of working life".

Thinking beyond short-term goals

The authors observe that, as in 2020, most respondents focused on learning new digital skills needed to solve immediate tasks or problems.

Organisations have increased their support of staff in acquiring the necessary digital skills for core business activities. Understandably, less progress has been made on digital strategy and innovation, while organisations have focused on shifting their day-to-day activities online.

> We just need to accelerate our digital transformation.
>
> *A survey respondent*

However, the report shows that many are aiming towards more strategic thinking. In the 2020 survey, most respondents asked for more training to improve their organisation's digital ways of working. This time, respondents were also looking to build on the skills and training developed during the pandemic by looking at a more strategic approach to technology use and adoption. This included an interest in improving infrastructure and more time for work on digital plans.

One said: “We just need to accelerate our digital transformation.”

Improving skills

The move (for many staff) to working from home has shown that many miss acquiring digital skills in face-to-face or informal environments: 42% said they learned by "picking up skills from colleagues" or by "bringing skills from a previous organisation" (31%). One staff member in a large heritage organisation said: “It is very difficult to access effective training, particularly with the loss of shared physical working office space post Covid."

> The 2021 research demonstrates a positive link between the support we have provided and sector-wide skills development.
>
> *Josie Fraser*

However, the report also shows that effective digital training can be delivered online. The research found a positive link between the Heritage Fund's Digital Skills for Heritage initiative and skills gains. Of DASH 2021 respondents, **10% (across all job roles, 23% of senior staff) had used at least one of five listed Digital Skills for Heritage resources** . These respondents – across all job roles and digital skills listed – reported higher digital confidence in comparison to people who had not used any of these resources.

Josie Fraser added: "It’s gratifying to see the Digital Skills for Heritage initiative has delivered tangible skills increases across the sector. Our new 2022 projects will continue to help organisations build their digital skills and confidence to meet current challenges and put strong foundations in place for the longer term."

Coming up in 2022

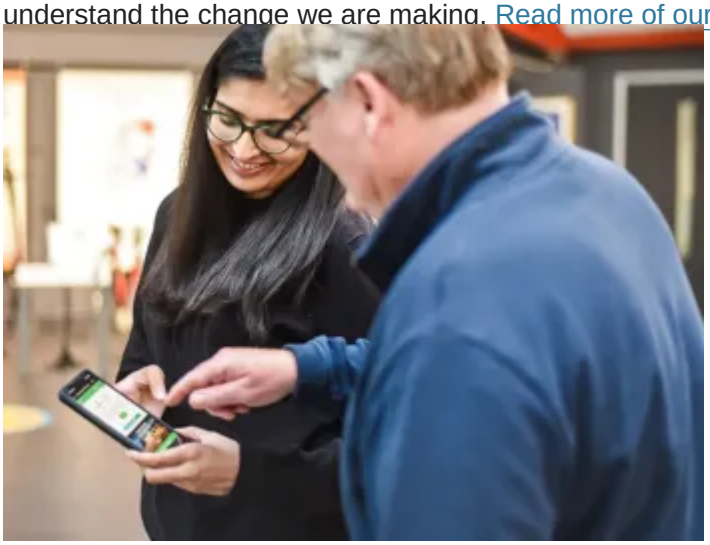
New Digital Skills for Heritage projects will help develop digital business models and services, build digital leadership and leverage the power of digital volunteers.

We will also be providing digital leadership development and networking opportunities to senior sector leaders, and launching a new online learning hub.

Find out more about Digital Skills for Heritage.

Our research and evaluation

We regularly conduct research to discover what is happening in the heritage sector, and we evaluate our work to better understand the change we are making. Read more of our insight.



Minder Kaur Athwal, a trustee at the Digital Skills for Heritage-supported Heritage Trust Network. Credit: Sarah Hayes.





[al in heritage]

Heritage Trust Network trustee Minder Kaur Athwal. Credit: Sarah Hayes

'Trailblazing' projects to boost digital volunteering and leadership