

Wired Up?

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

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Methodology

Phase 1: Online Survey

Completed by 403 participants drawn from all 11 NI council areas.

Phase 2: Four focus groups conducted with 22 participants in a range of roles across the sector including:

- 6 senior leaders
- 6 managers
- 5 practitioners
- 3 volunteers
- 2 support staff

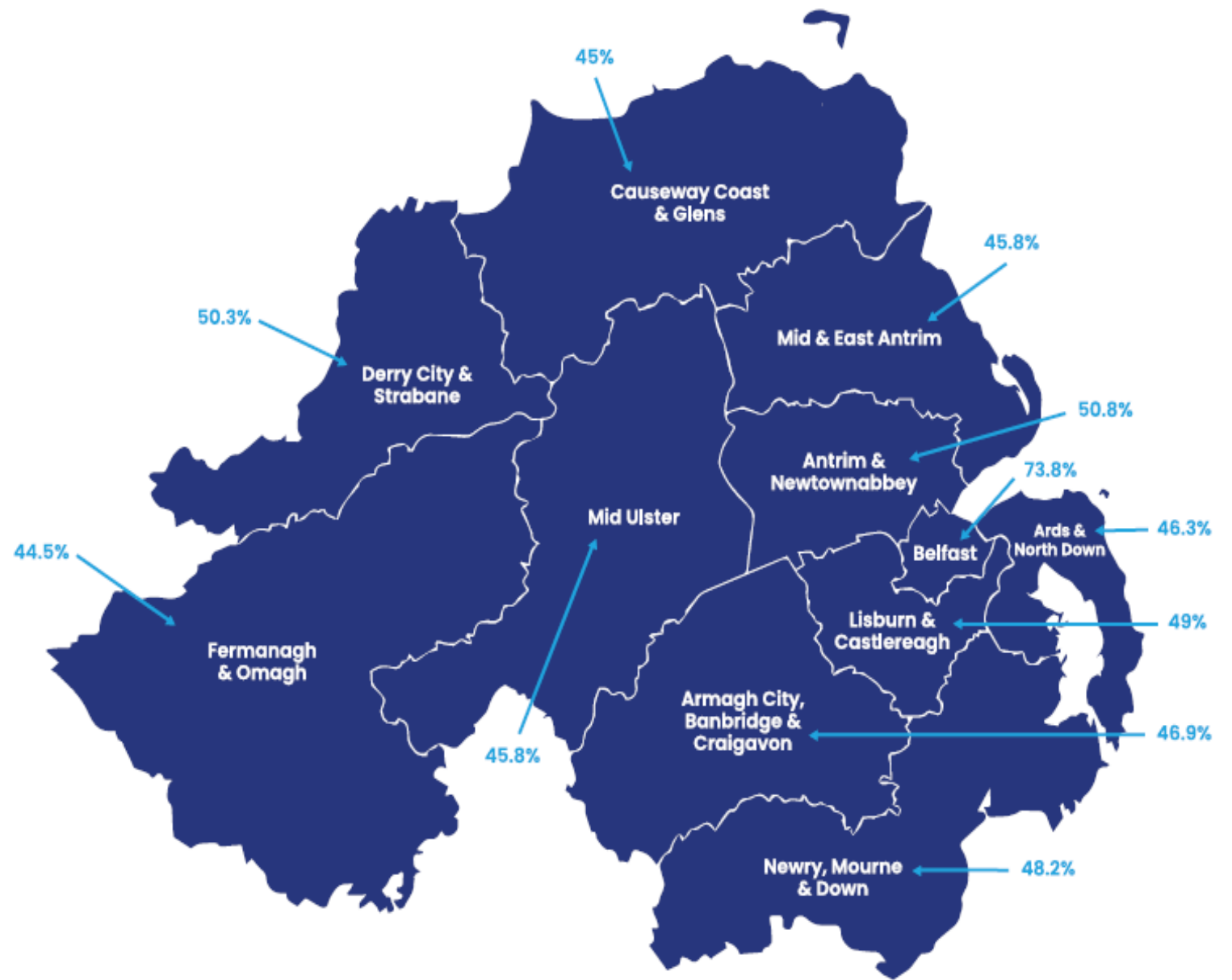
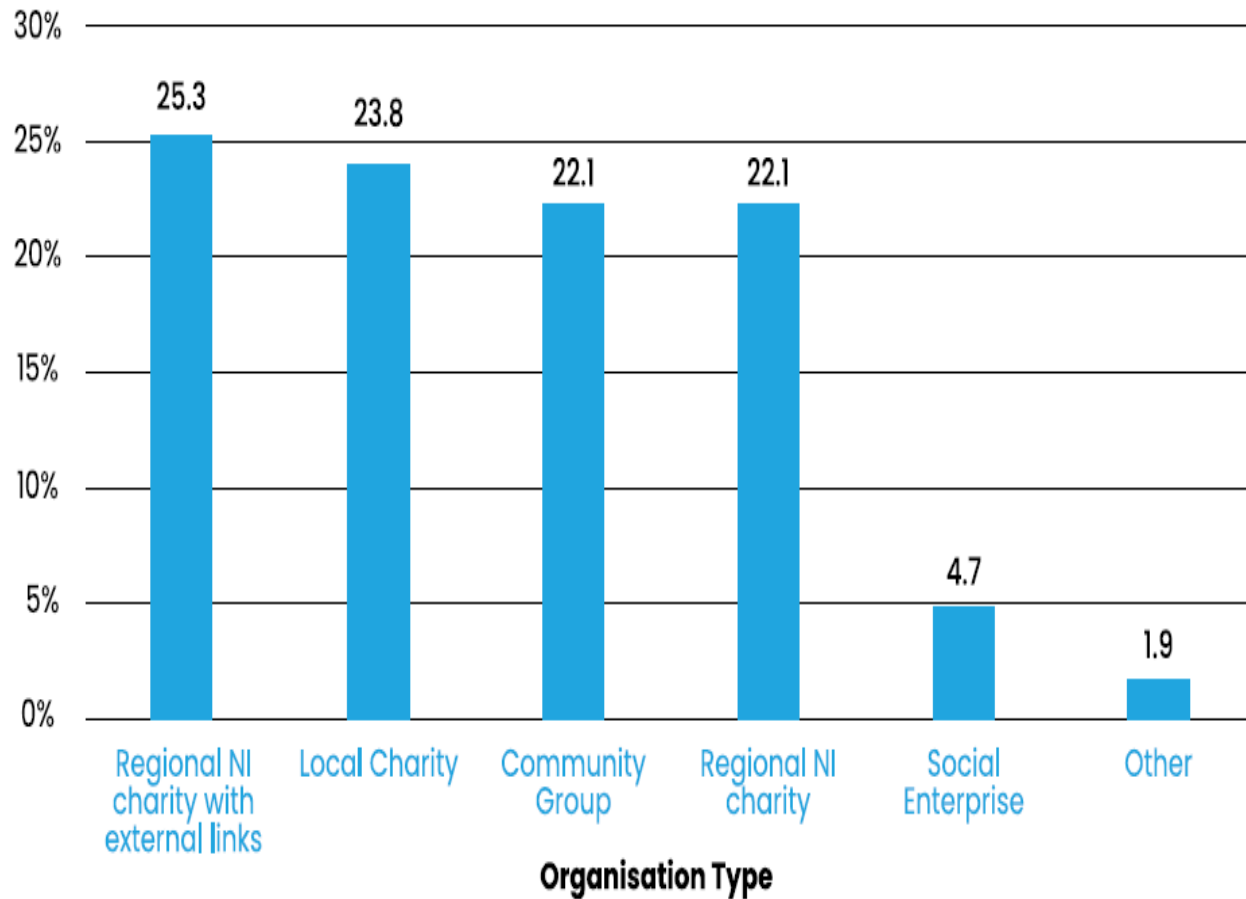


Figure 1: Representation from VCSE Organisations Across 11 Council Areas in Northern Ireland

Figure 2: Organisational Type



Income: Under £10,000 – £5 million+



Staff: 0 – 500+



Volunteers: 0 – 500+

Digital Skills Areas

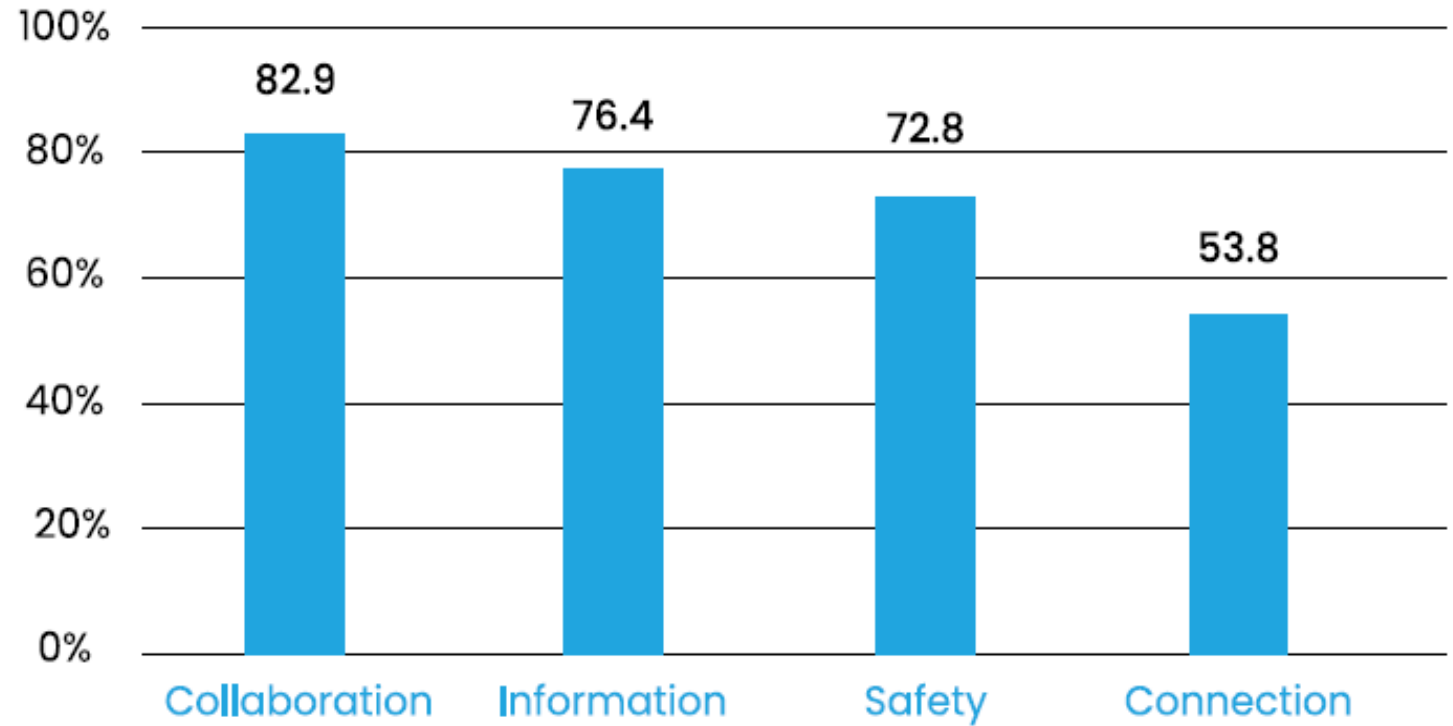
1. Collaboration: ability to work with others within their organisation

2. Information: ability to use information to inform their work

3. Safety: ability to work securely online

4. Connection: ability to connect with others such as service users and supporters outside their organisation

Figure 3: Percentage of Participants Rating their Digital Skills as Excellent or Good across Four Areas



Digital Skills

42.9%
rated their digital skills across every area as excellent or good.

8.9%
rated their digital skills across every area as fair, poor or none

Manager

"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."

Practitioner

"Coming from the charity sector, I did go looking for training courses for the charity sector but I was really, really disappointed."

Addressing the Digital Skills Gap in the VCSE Sector

- 💡 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.

Barriers to Digital Inclusion

85.0% Lack of digital skills to go online

82.3% Cannot afford ongoing data costs

82.0% No device other than a mobile

78.3% Lack of confidence to safely navigate online

72.1% Poor internet connection in their area

Figure 4: Groups at Risk of Digital Exclusion

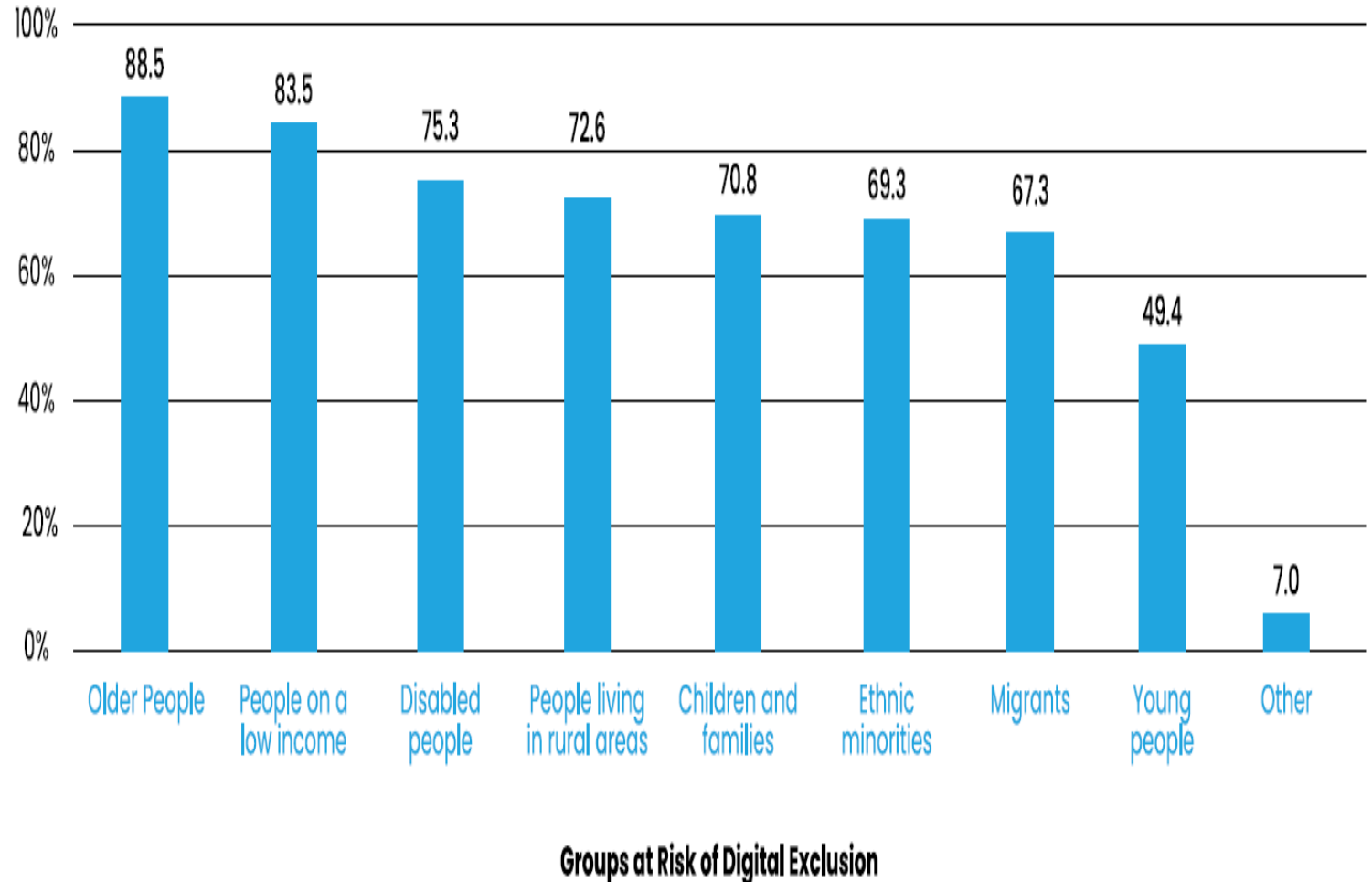
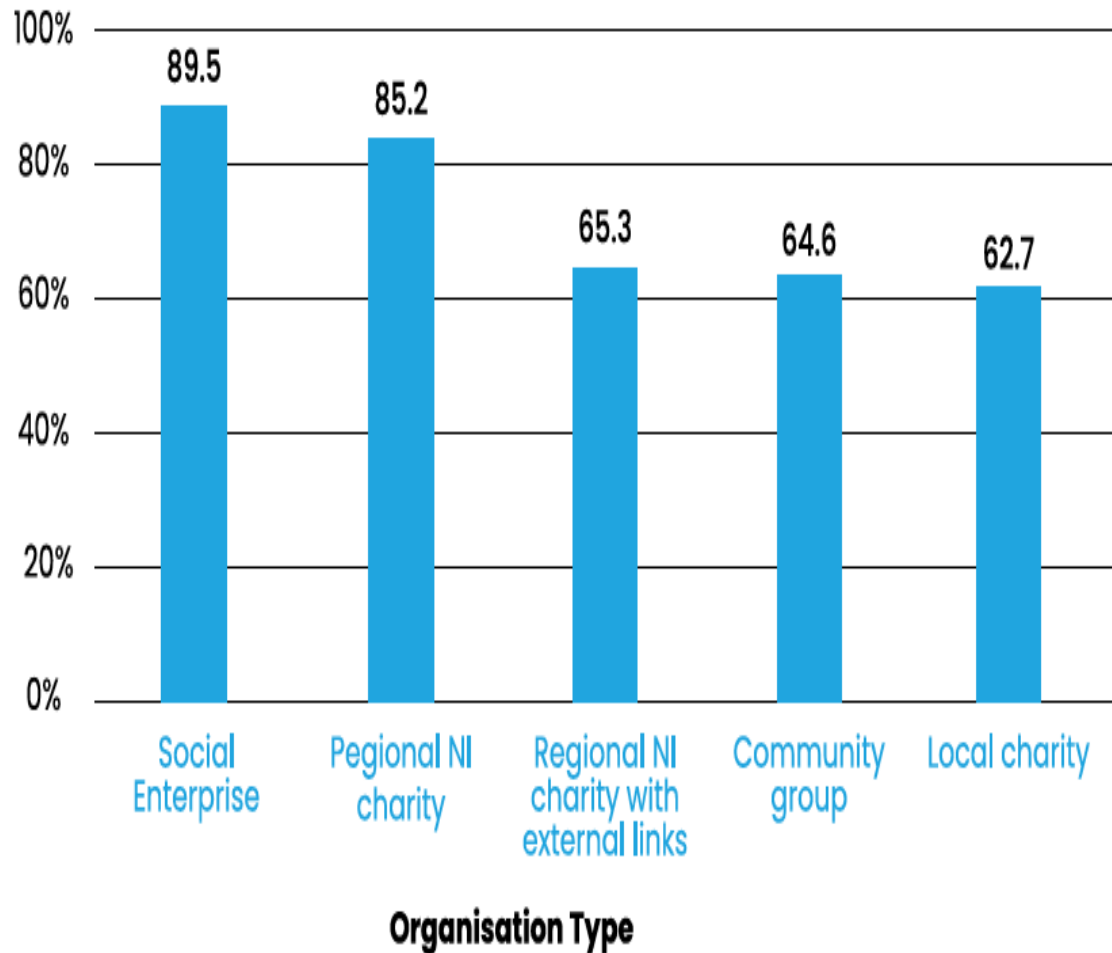


Figure 5 : Digital Inclusion is a Priority by Organisation Type



Two key actions that would support the VCSE sector make digital inclusion a priority:

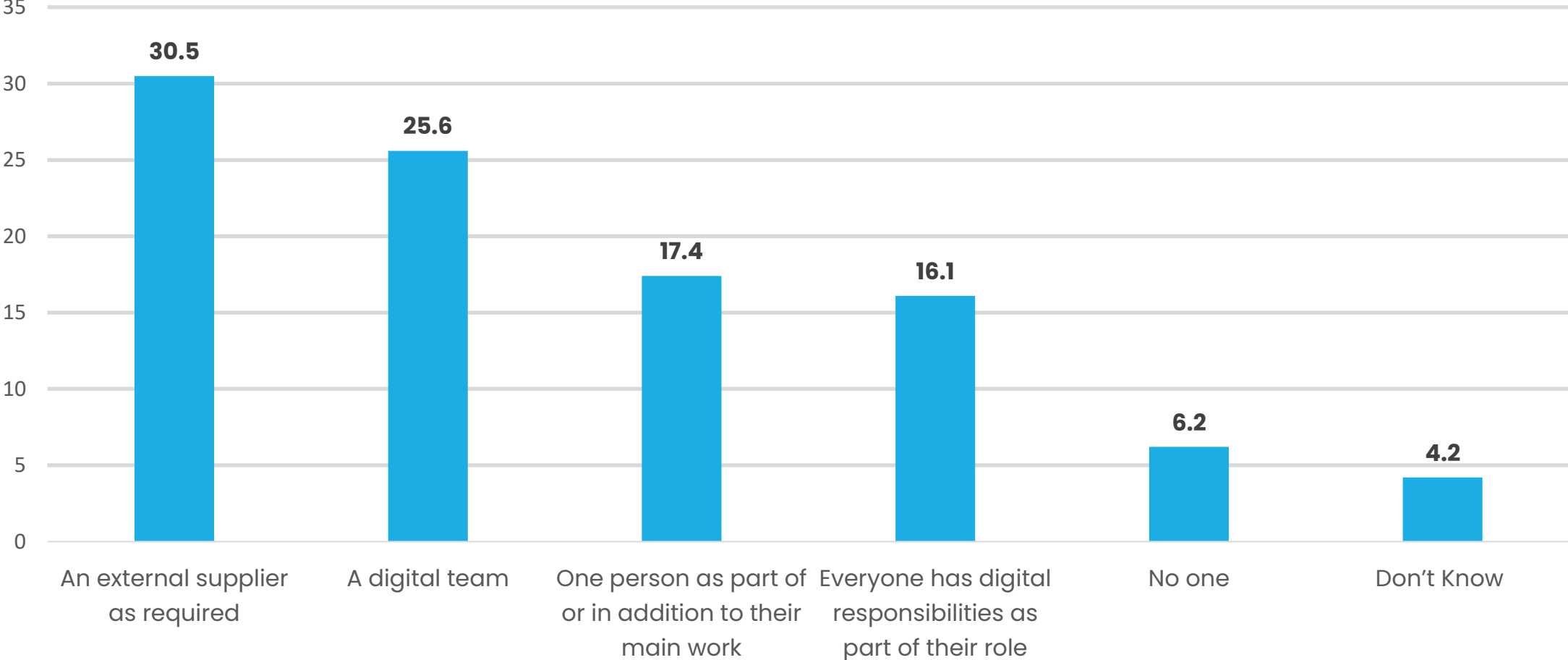


Investment: 87.0% agreed that investment was needed in devices, software and support for staff to develop skills to improve digital inclusion



Digital Skills to support others: 36.8% agreed that staff and volunteers lacked the skills to support people at risk of digital exclusion

Figure 6: Who Manages Your Digital Infrastructure?



Challenges of Managing Digital Infrastructure for VCSE Sector

Senior Leader

"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."

Manager

"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."

Top 5 Digital Priorities

89.4% Improve online presence to promote the organisation

84.9% Increase confidence and digital skills amongst staff and volunteers

82.2% Better use of data to improve services or operations

82.2% Develop process of managing information to demonstrate impact

81.7% Explore how to further incorporate digital methods into service delivery

Challenges for the VCSE Sector in the Future

Core Funding for Digital



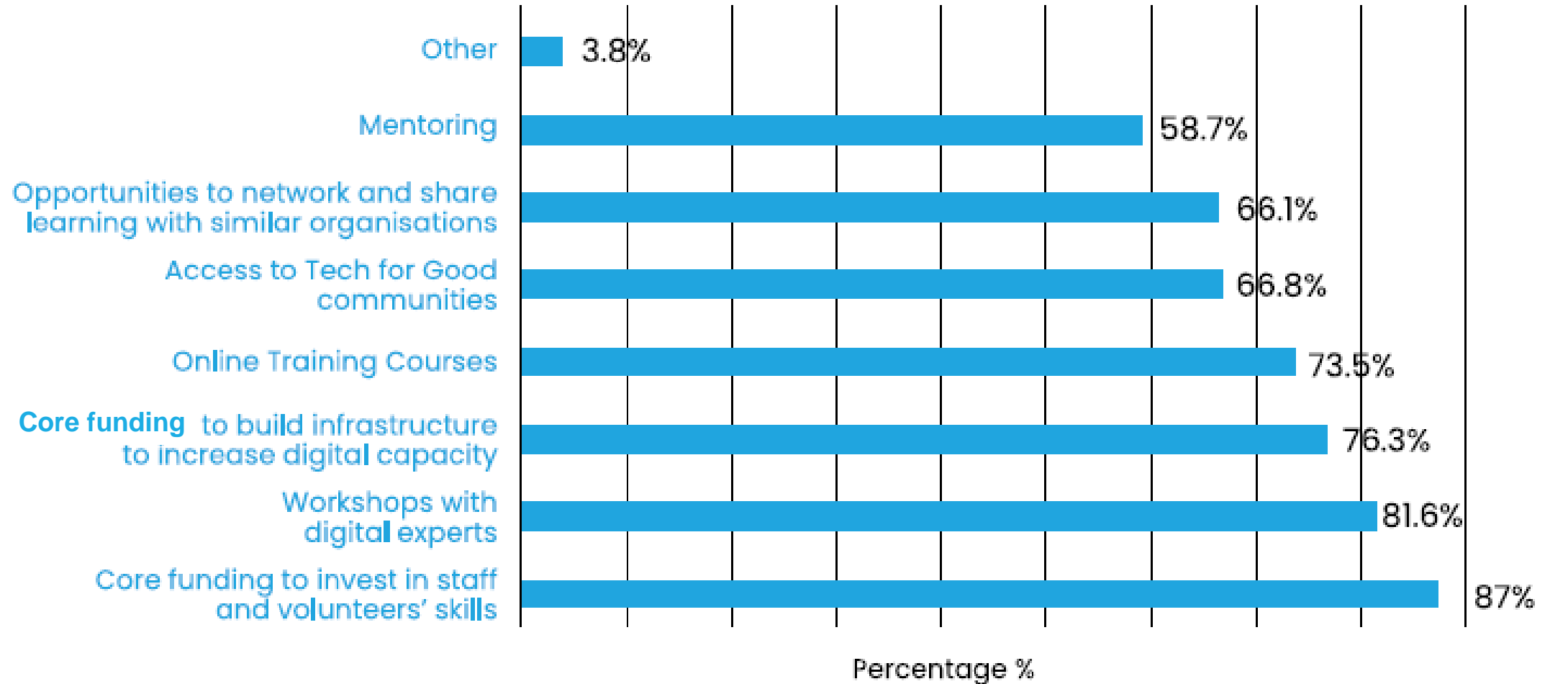
81.8%
identified getting
core funding to
support digital as a
challenge

Short Term Funding



81.8%
identified short term
funding as a
challenge

Figure 7: Support for the VCSE Sector



Recommendation 1: A Digital Strategy for Northern Ireland

- ✓ Prioritise tackling digital exclusion
- ✓ Focus on supporting collaboration across all sectors
- ✓ Monitor the progress of the Digital Strategy

Recommendation 2: A New Approach to Funding Digital Infrastructure

- ✓ Core funding for digital infrastructure on a long-term basis
- ✓ Full cost recovery for VCSE sector
- ✓ Additional funding available for digital inclusion work

Recommendation 3: Improving Digital Support for the VCSE Sector

- ✓ Technical Assistance
- ✓ Training Resources
- ✓ Learning Opportunities

Recommendation 4: Workforce Development for the VCSE Sector

- ✓ Developing a Digital Skills Audit
- ✓ Training resources and opportunities
- ✓ Creation of 'digital champions'

Summary of Wired Up? Recommendations