



Dig It! Project Evaluation

Report of survey and interview findings

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Dig It! project describes itself as a 'celebration of Scottish archaeology with events from organisations across the country and resources that will send you across the centuries'. Funded largely by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and initially co-ordinated by two charities, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and Archaeology Scotland, it has promoted and run events and developed resources to educate and encourage people to discover Scotland's past (and present, and future) since 2015. With current funding arrangements coming to an end in March 2019 a short piece of evaluation was commissioned in order to reflect on the project's achievements and to inform potential future directions.

2 Method

- 2.1 A mixed-method approach was adopted, combining short survey along with a series of interviews to add depth to the survey findings. The survey was issued by the Dig It! team directly to 160+ organisations and 200+ individuals. This generated 82 responses, 61% of which were from individuals working or volunteering primarily in the heritage sector. Questions sought views on which elements of Dig It! were engaged with; which elements should continue; whether the project should continue; and future funding arrangements.
- 2.2 Individuals from ten organisations were interviewed – these are listed at the end of this report. The range of interviewees reflected the range of the relationships that were generated through the project. Either one or two people were interviewed, mostly face-to-face in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Paisley, Rosyth, Glenrothes and (by skype) to Shetland. The same questions were put to all interviewees; these sought views on what went well and what could be improved; which elements of Dig It! should continue; ideas for other things the project could tackle; and thoughts on project management. Interviews were carried out by Jo Robertson (Jo Robertson Facilitation).

3 Findings

3.1 Involvement with Dig It!

Survey responses indicated that the highest levels of involvement were with the 'events', 'event listings' and 'collaborative initiatives'. The 'Crafting the Past' element, 'funding relationships'

and 'skills sharing' reported the lowest levels of involvement by respondents. The breakdown of responses is shown below under 'Survey results'. For interviewees, involvement with Dig It! was variable; some had good knowledge of the project as a whole, while others had more specific knowledge of their own experience as a partner.

3.2 Continuation of activities

There was fairly even support for continuation across all elements of the project, with higher support for the 'Crafting the Past' element and 'Dig It! TV' (see Survey results below). Also the 'skills sharing' element was seen as something that should continue, with a similar level of support as other Dig It! elements. Feedback from the interviews on the specific elements is given below at 3.6.

3.3 Continuation of Dig It!

The survey results demonstrated strong support (82%) for Dig It! to continue as complete project or brand. With another 12% in support of continuation of some element of the project, and 4% supporting continuation with a different focus, this represents 98% in favour of the project, or some element thereof, continuing. There was a high level of support (67%) that the project should continue to receive public funding, with a further 23% responding that certain elements should receive public funding. Interview feedback was also extremely positive and there was a sense that the initiative should continue in some form. The connections and profile created through the brand, and associated trust in the staff team, are things which should be built on.

3.4 What has worked well

Overall: The project has been very well received, mainly because of the *approach* it took in firstly promoting and delivering events; and secondly in supported community groups in using social media and engaging the public. It was described as 'shining a light on Scottish Archaeology', showcasing and advocating for Scottish archaeology in a fresh and unexpected way in order to broaden audience, especially reaching out to younger people. The impact of such showcasing activity is that ultimately people take pride in their local place and get involved in caring for it. Much of the success was put down to the enthusiasm, energy, attitude and passion of the staff. All was achieved on very limited resource, with a focus on looking for synergies and aligning complementary activities.

Approach: The project was variously reported as 'innovative', 'ground breaking', 'extremely creative', 'fun', 'risk taking', 'doing things differently', 'giving permission' [to others to try new things in presenting archaeology], 'a go-to for archaeology product knowledge', 'hand-holding' and 'building confidence'. Staff were particularly good at sharpening ideas of partner organisations and in coming up with unusual ways for presenting archaeology to new (especially younger) audiences. By trying new ways of promoting archaeology, the project has inspired others to do the same. By providing support to community groups Dig It! has generated confidence and provided specialist help where needed.

Management: It appears that the staff team has been allowed some latitude in trying out new methods in engaging people with archaeology. The funding arrangement with Historic Environment Scotland has been important in enabling this.

Timing: The project was very much the right approach at the right time, especially in how it responded proactively to the gaps and opportunities afforded by the 'Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology (HHA)' (including broadening the scope of the themed year to actually include archaeology).

3.5 Room for improvement

Clarity of purpose: There were a number of questions raised around project identity and purpose; is it a project, a campaign or an organisation? Is it operating locally or nationally? Is it delivering on the ground, or enabling others to deliver? Who is the target audience and at what scale? Is it focusing on archaeology or is the reach across the heritage sector? It was commented that latterly the scope had moved away from archaeology. It was observed that the approach has been somewhat 'scattergun' and trying to be 'all things to all people'. That said, *it is worth noting that the aspects described above under 'what has worked well' are arguably a result of the opportunistic approach taken.* Embedding evaluation from the outset would help with understanding the extent to which activities have achieved what was intended.

Project coherence: There is scope for more coherence across the project elements, so that partners understand where they fit in the 'Dig It! family' and reap rewards through connections made. A sense of common cause and clarity around audience would help partners work to the same standards and co-ordinate content.

Funding and capacity: Reliance on one funding source is clearly a vulnerability, although as noted above, this has enabled the project to be quite innovative. The small staff team has been stretched in delivery; there was an impression that they could have done more if additional funds were forthcoming.

3.6 Specifics

Brand and media: The name, brand and visual identity were thought to be very strong, being referred to as the 'baby brand of the sector' and described as 'a phenomenal achievement'. It was also however commented that this strength can work to eclipse local promotional activity. In terms of accessibility, the language and tone used made the subject matter simple and easy for both the audience and for partners to extract for use in their own marketing. The website was generally described as being clean, dynamic, easy to navigate and accessible. One interviewee found the matrix style less appealing; one liked the moving images. It was stressed that it is important to keep the content up-to-date otherwise confidence in the website content reduces. In terms of press releases and articles the staff team were very proactive in seeking quotes, which was welcomed. For one partner in particular, this assistance represented an increase in capacity.

Event advertising: The website platform for events advertising was seen generally as a fundamental aspect which connects much of the content together (although Dig It! is much more than 'just' an event listing). The listings are valued for being searchable by theme and also for promoting events in the context of other local events. It was commented that Dig It! has generated ambient marketing, using a varied spread of media. This may be associated with increasing awareness of events through 'word of mouth'. The objective of achieving comprehensive coverage of events across Scotland is challenging. Other organisations do collate events listings and it is important to understand how people hear about events. Interviewees were not able to comment on whether the event listings had helped broaden reach.

Crafting the Past: Described as 'absolute genius', the project responded well to the opportunity afforded by the Minecraft game, which was emergent and hugely popular with children/pre-teens at the time. The staff team saw the potential in using Minecraft as a tool for educational purposes as it represented a way to crowd source archaeology by reaching a pre-existing, global online community. Combining the online dig with a real dig was thought to be especially powerful. The creation of an associated retail offer for the Scottish Mining Museum was seen as pushing boundaries and was very well received. It was commented that the initiative was 'beautifully exportable'. It was also observed that the initiative would have greater visibility if it were to have its own website. It was stressed that the objective with 'Crafting the Past' was not to roll out the same product and that future Minecraft 'builds' should clearly meet the educational needs of a heritage site.

'Scotland in Six' campaign: The 'Scotland in Six' campaign was highly commended, and described as the 'Showpiece of the 2017 Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology'. This was put down to how the campaign was conceived with event programming, complementary content and effective use of different types of media. The success of the campaign could be attributed to the effort taken to develop the brand, connections, credibility and trust; these things take time to develop and nurture. Also, there was a willingness to speak to different people and bring new voices into the discussion about how to present archaeology. The steam punk event at North Queensferry station was cited as an unusual pairing of interests which worked well; this typifies the Dig It! approach of presenting ideas in an unexpected way. Overall it was commented that Dig It! contributed hugely to the success of the themed year.

Hidden Gems campaign: The Hidden Gems worked well as a social media campaign by providing a platform for local groups to upload content and generating energy around the online voting. Dig It! had built up collateral and was seen as a trusted provider/safe pair of hands for running the campaign. The staff team knew how to work with small voluntary organisations with limited capacity. Not all events generated footfall but the concept was good. More could have been made of the event outcomes – there was a feeling for some of being 'left hanging' after the campaign and the winner events could have been better connected. That said for one community group the legacy is represented in a sense of pride generated throughout the campaign and materials/resources created. The project has inspired ideas that

can be adapted to local circumstances, for example hidden gem stones at Ardrossan Castle and the top trumps game and broch crawl on Shetland.

Events (shipping container, green screen etc): Events using these resources were well received because of the novel approach; they 'created a draw' around which other activity could hang. They also sometimes served to provoke thinking and help audiences develop views – for example the dialogue event between archaeologist and storyteller. The event driven format was viewed as working well, but also meant that there were lulls in activity.

Dig It! TV: The quality of the videos was high, however interviewees found it hard to comment on impact in terms of viewings. It was recognised that drawing viewers to video content on YouTube is challenging. As a resource though, such videos can be highly beneficial to those community groups which do not possess the relevant skills and/or equipment and would otherwise not be able to develop such content.

Collaboration: The staff team were highly skilled in networking and reaching out (to for example performing artists), generating connections, being available, proactive and approachable (and willing to travel from Edinburgh/central belt). The value of this should be recognised and made more explicit. For HES and Museums Galleries Scotland the project enabled them to reach out into the sector, acting as a middleman.

Skill sharing: The peer support provided through the Scottish Heritage Social Media Group was well received, though not all were aware of this initiative. It enabled participants to try out new things in using social media and share experiences.

3.7 Future content

The project was acknowledged as being right for the time (being perfectly placed to shape and help deliver the Year of HHA in 2017), however it must be recognised that the landscape is changing and the project does need to adapt. Significantly, it was the approach taken by the staff team, as outlined at 3.4 above, that appears to be highly regarded and a unique characteristic of the project. The success of the brand comes with a health warning; that it must remain rooted in the objectives for the project. Interviewees sought more clarity of purpose, with outcomes identified *and communicated* from the outset. This would help address the questions raised at 3.5 about the purpose of the project. There are other organisations delivering similar types of activity (in the form of local events, community engagement) and it will be important for Dig It! to clearly express *how it does things differently and how its approach meets prescribed outcomes*. The project could choose to focus on fewer events to achieve higher impact, enabling participants to 'feel a part of something bigger'.

Ideas around future content identified continuation of the Crafting the Past initiative; engaging with themed years and other high profile events; rolling the brand out (for example by strengthening the relationship with the museums sector); and building capacity within local communities.

Regarding the Crafting the Past initiative, there was a preference to focus on creating small 'builds' with a live feed, to secure a global reach. It could be used as a focal point to bring children together to do Minecraft 'builds' taking on different roles (measured survey, video etc). Also to create a more detailed map of Scotland in Minecraft, enabling children to explore their local place. Developing better measures of the educational benefits associated with using digital tools (games such as Minecraft, 3D printing, virtual reality) could help make the case to educators for using such resources in interdisciplinary learning.

There is opportunity for further content curation in relation to high profile events. The project and staff have a strong track record following the themed year. This should be built on by ensuring that archaeology is plugged in to future themed years and other major events where appropriate.

Capacity building within communities was identified as a gap across the heritage sector generally. This responds to the financial context of suppressed local authority budgets and legislation that encourages communities to manage local assets. The needs of community groups vary according to their own skills, so the challenge is in providing flexible support that could either provide specialist skills for community groups, or enable groups to acquire skills either through 'hand-holding' or training.

3.8 Future project management

Future project management points to a more strategic approach, doing less but with more focus, so that activities can be related to measurable impact. This should build on the relationships and credibility already established by the project. Activities should retain the innovative approach which has made Dig It! distinctive.

Not all interviewees felt able to comment on the governance of the project because not all were aware of current arrangements. Two main comments were offered on project management. One suggestion responds to the scope of the project – whether the aim is to promote activity at a national level to a national audience, or promote local activities locally, or both. It may be that bridging the two is where Dig It! offers most value – giving a voice to local initiatives across the country. A second suggestion responds to the development role that Dig It! has undertaken in building capacity, beyond simply promoting an event. The specialist skills offered by the team could be deployed in a peripatetic way across the country, responding to local need.

4 Summary

Dig It! is very well regarded for its innovative approach to advocating for Scottish archaeology, bringing to life for a younger audience what can be perceived as a dry subject. Described as a 'breath of fresh air' it has intangible qualities such as building confidence, inspiring community groups and 'giving permission' to try new things. The project is seen variously as:

- advocating - promoting and campaigning
- enabling - generating and shaping ideas and ‘hand-holding’
- doing – delivering projects on the ground and providing specialist input.

98% of survey respondents wish to see Dig It! continue in some form or other. Going forward there is a need to retain the innovative approach; focus more on audience and scope; and ensure that activities are linked to outcomes so that the project can generate a greater sense of coherence and impact.

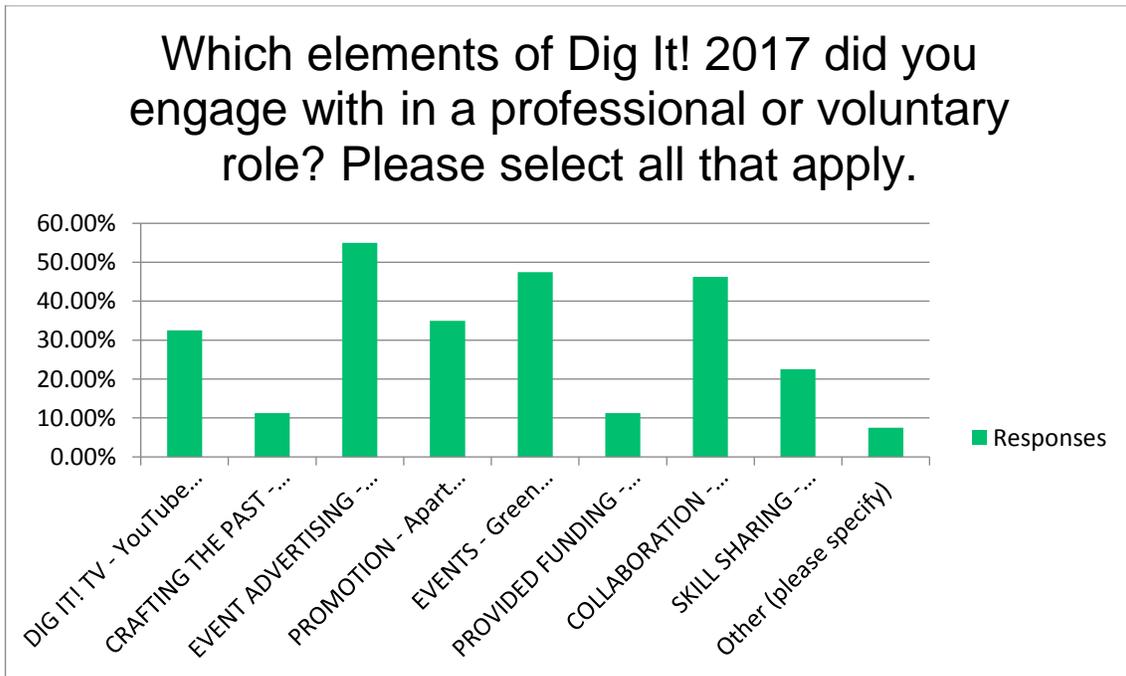
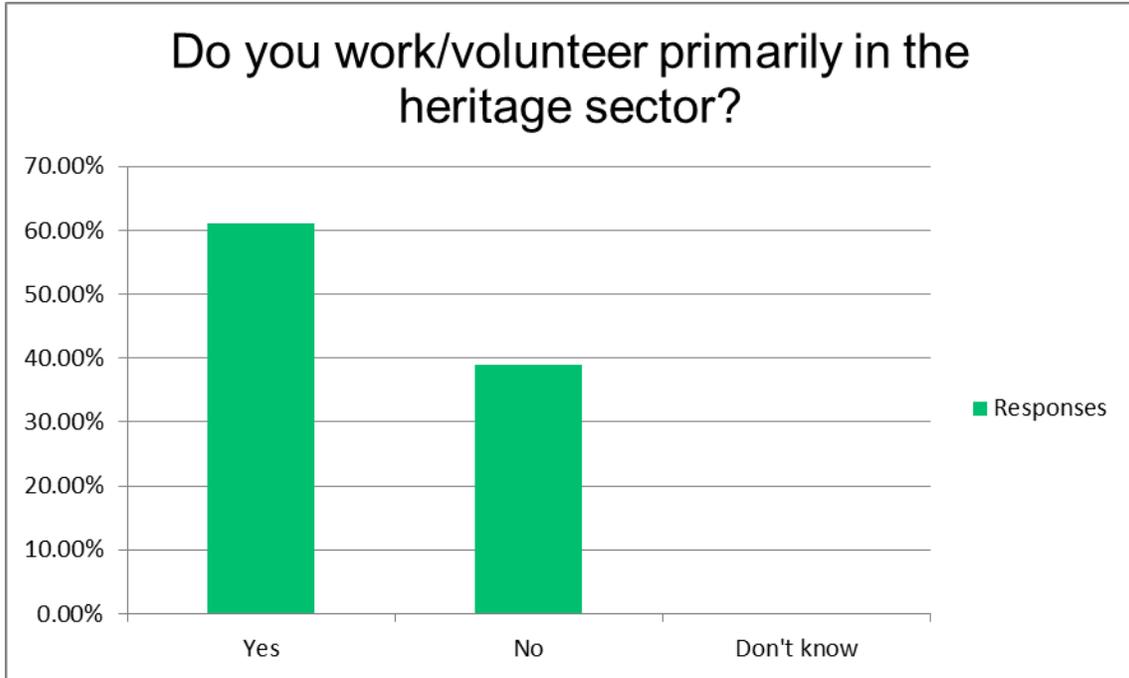
5 List of interviewees and acknowledgements

- Archaeology Shetland (partner – community group)
- Ardrossan Castle Heritage Trust (partner – community group)
- Fife Council (partner – tourism team)
- Grayling Marketing (advisory group)
- Historic Environment Scotland (HES) (funder and advisory group)
- Immersive Minds (partner – Minecraft)
- Museums and Galleries Scotland (MGS) (funding partner – strategic intermediary body)
- Northlight Heritage (personal - consumer of content)
- Scottish Storytelling Centre (partner – storytelling)
- Visit Scotland (funding partner – themed years)

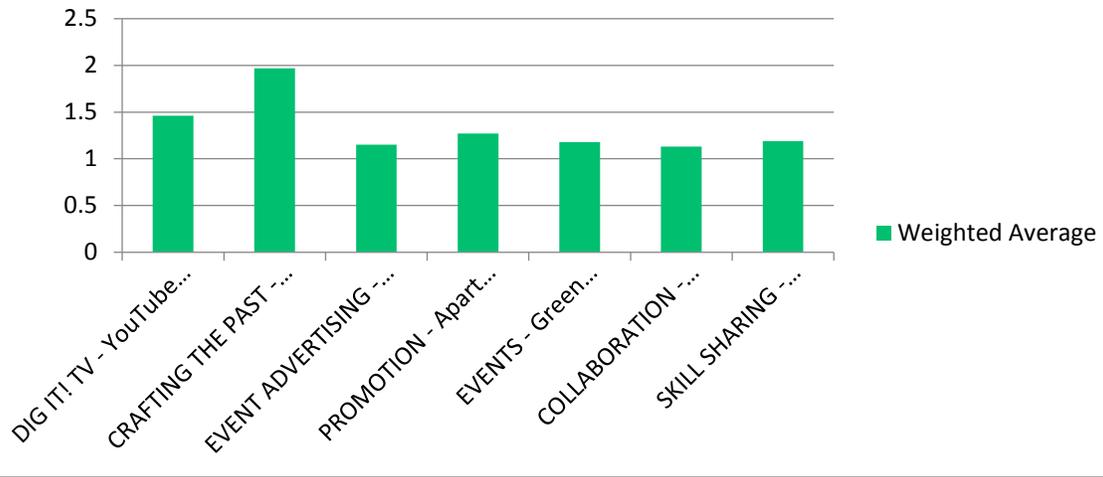
Jo Robertson is grateful to all those who took part in the interviews and gave so generously in sharing their thoughts, ideas and time.

6 Survey results

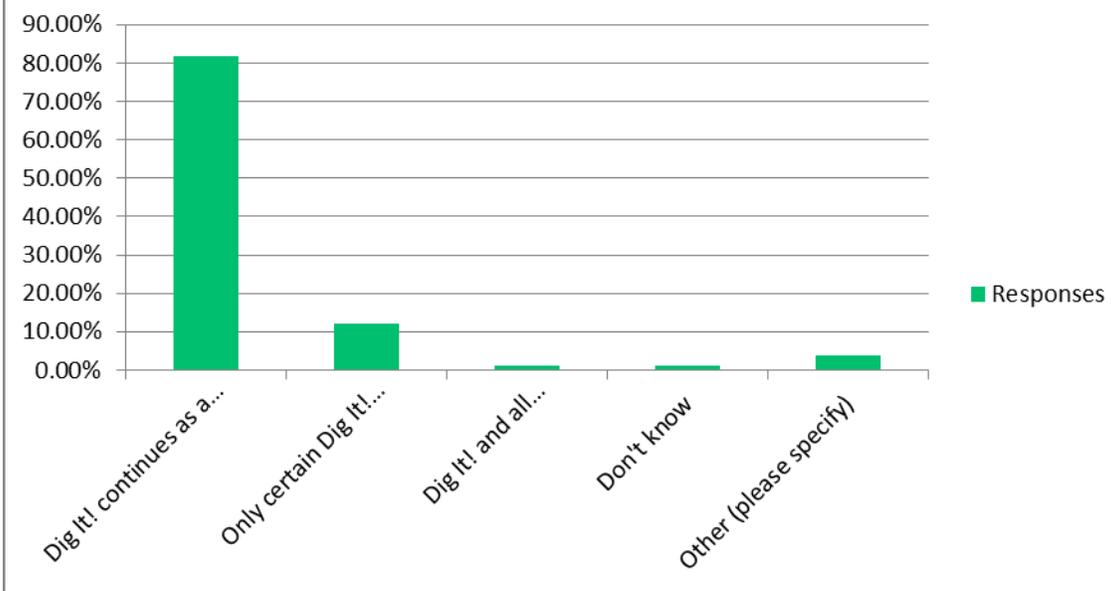
Survey questions had a high level of response, generating 80-82 responses for all questions.



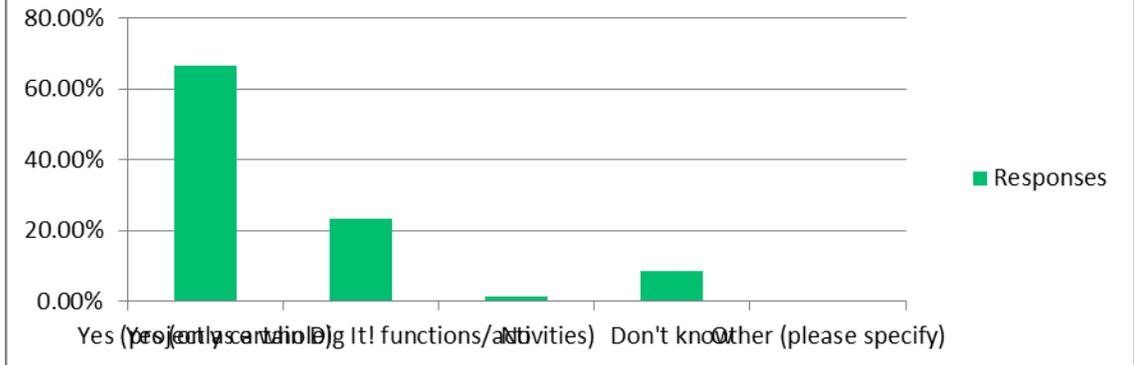
Would you like to see the following Dig It! activities/initiatives continued in some form (not necessarily with Dig It!)?



Which option would you find preferable?



Do you believe that public funds should be spent on Dig It!? If your response to the previous question was "DIG IT! SHOULD END", please skip this question.



4th September 2018