Digital Inclusion:
Vision for the Future

July 2024

Abstract

In this document, Cwmpas will draw on its experience of delivering digital inclusion projects in Wales to set out its vision for the future of digital inclusion in Wales. It will take a strategic approach to ensuring a digitally-inclusive and digitally-confident nation. Digital technologies have the potential to transform the Welsh economy and our communities, allowing people to be more connected, engaged and innovative than ever. However, it also has the potential to exacerbate inequalities and leave people behind, putting even more pressure on public services in the long-term. As a result, attention on and investment in digital inclusion should be embedded at all stages of policy development. In this report we will outline our next steps to creating a truly digitally-inclusive nation.
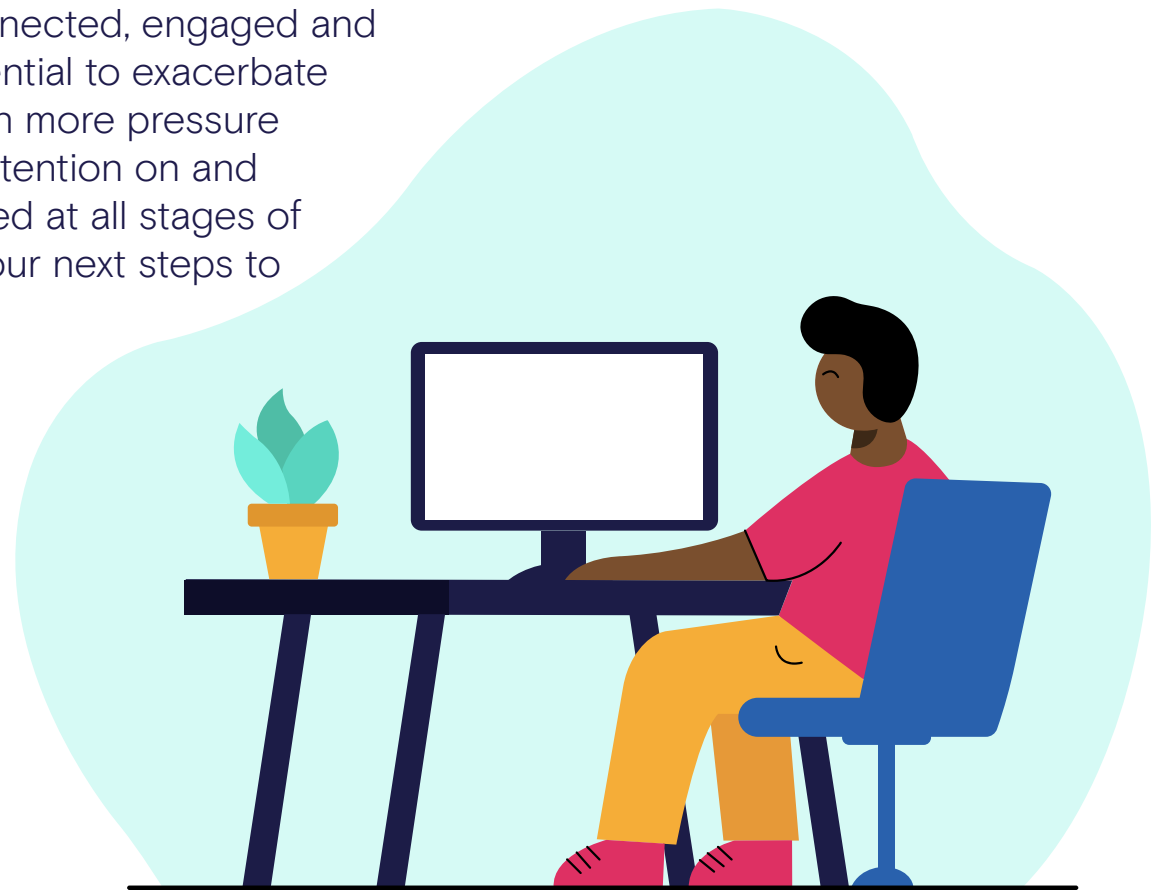
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Introduction

What is Digital Inclusion?

Digital inclusion is about being able to access and use the internet and engage with digital technology, confidently and safely, as and when needed or wanted. These are basic requirements for people to participate in a digital society and economy. As more of our lives move online and services become digital as standard, it is more important than ever that everyone in our communities are included.

A whole range of factors impact whether an individual is able to use the internet as they want or need to. The four main barriers to participation have been identified as cost (of data as well as devices), connectivity, motivation and skills.

Some people in our communities are far more likely to be digitally excluded than others. We know that older age, low incomes and low educational attainment all correlate strongly with digital exclusion, social disadvantage, and health inequalities.

Digital Inclusion in Wales

Cwmpas digital inclusion projects

Cwmpas is a development agency working for positive change, in Wales and across the UK. We are a co-operative, and our focus is on building a fairer, greener economy and a more equal society, where people and planet come first.

We deliver an abundance of effective projects linked to housing, social care, digital inclusion and business support, which aim to increase access, equity, diversity and participation. We make positive change happen by working with people and organizations to take action for good.

Cwmpas are digital leaders. We understand the digital inclusion agenda, the Welsh context, and the communities we work with. We have experience working with all health boards, all local authorities,
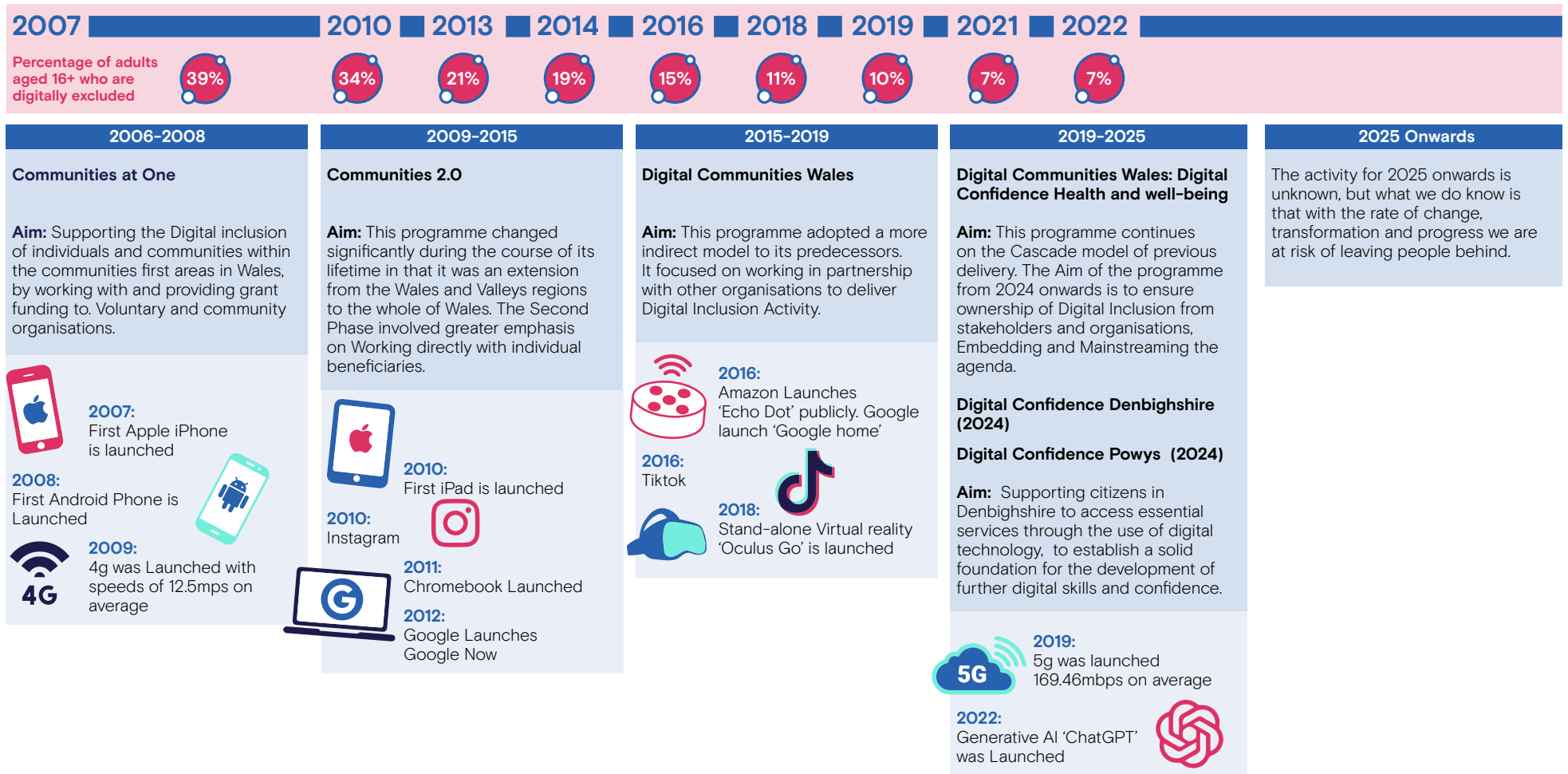
Digital Health and Care Wales, Social Care Wales, County Voluntary Councils, large national 3rd sector organisations, local 3rd sector organisations and community groups, as well as direct delivery with citizens.

Our expertise in this space has resulted in stakeholders from devolved nations - including Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), Connecting Scotland, Scottish Government, British Irish Council, and Community Foundation Northern Ireland – seeking our advice and guidance. This has resulted in the development of learning exchanges around digital inclusion initiatives specifically on our experience and expertise in Wales as leaders in the field of Digital Inclusion and Health.

Cwmpas has a track record as digital leaders in Wales of successfully delivering nation-wide digital inclusion initiatives since 2006, including Welsh Government funded flagship initiatives Communities@One, Communities 2.O, Digital Communities Wales, and the current Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being (DCW) national programme. Cwmpas has also been responsible for delivering direct intervention in communities as a part of Shared Prosperity Funding with Digital Confidence Denbighshire and Digital Confidence Powys. As an organisation we have operated in and driven forward the digital inclusion space in Wales for nearly two decades.

Cwmpas' Digital Inclusion Timeline

This timeline shows the key digital developments over the past 18 years that Cwmpas has been delivering digital inclusion activity in Wales. It also illustrates the rapid evolution of technology and connectivity along with figures taken from the national survey for Wales and Welsh Government's digital inclusion analysis.

2007	2010	2013	2014	2016	2018	2019	2021	2022

Percentage of adults aged 16+ who are digitally excluded

| 39% | 34% | 21% | 19% | 15% | 11% | 10% | 7% | 7% |

2006-2008

Communities at One

Aim: Supporting the Digital inclusion of individuals and communities within the communities first areas in Wales, by working with and providing grant funding to. Voluntary and community organisations.

2007: First Apple iPhone is launched

2008: First Android Phone is Launched

2009: 4g was Launched with speeds of 12.5mps on average

2009-2015

Communities 2.0

Aim: This programme changed significantly during the course of its lifetime in that it was an extension from the Wales and Valleys regions to the whole of Wales. The Second Phase involved greater emphasis on Working directly with individual beneficiaries.

2010: First iPad is launched

2010: Instagram

2011: Chromebook Launched

2012: Google Launches Google Now

2015-2019

Digital Communities Wales

Aim: This programme adopted a more indirect model to its predecessors. It focused on working in partnership with other organisations to deliver Digital Inclusion Activity.

2016: Amazon Launches 'Echo Dot' publicly. Google launch 'Google home'

2016: Tiktok

2018: Stand-alone Virtual reality 'Oculus Go' is launched

2019-2025

Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence Health and well-being

Aim: This programme continues on the Cascade model of previous delivery. The Aim of the programme from 2024 onwards is to ensure ownership of Digital Inclusion from stakeholders and organisations, Embedding and Mainstreaming the agenda.

Digital Confidence Denbighshire (2024)

Digital Confidence Powys (2024)

Aim: Supporting citizens in Denbighshire to access essential services through the use of digital technology, to establish a solid foundation for the development of further digital skills and confidence.

2019: 5g was launched 169.46mbps on average

2022: Generative AI 'ChatGPT' was Launched

2025 Onwards

The activity for 2025 onwards is unknown, but what we do know is that with the rate of change, transformation and progress we are at risk of leaving people behind.

*2007 and 2010 – Digital Inclusion: Analysis Package https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-08/110823-digital-inclusion-analysis-package-en.pdf
**2013 Onwards – National Survey for Wales National Survey for Wales | GOV.WALES

The activity for 2025 onwards is still unknown, but what we do know is that with the rate of change, transformation and progress we are at risk of leaving people behind. Without appropriate investment in digital inclusion, the business case for digital transformation does not add up. We know that a disproportionate amount of people who are digitally excluded are those most in need of services. If we do not bring everyone along with us on the journey to more efficient and effective public services, we will need to duplicate services or people will fall through the gaps – leading to poorer well-being and more costs in the long-term.

Health systems are increasingly moving towards digital, with the likes of the NHS Wales App, Digital Maternity records, and wider wellbeing tools being developed digitally. If left unaddressed, existing digital and social inequalities risk further exacerbating health inequalities, and this could result in a digital health divide and a digital inverse care law.

Policy Landscape

Digital Strategy for Wales

The Digital Strategy for Wales, published in 2021, set out "a national vision for jointly adopting a digital approach across Wales", seeking to develop modern and efficient public services and innovative and resilient businesses. Digital inclusion was the second of six missions identified, which aimed to "Equip people with the motivation, access, skills and confidence to engage with an increasingly digital world, based on their needs". The mission's intended outcomes were that:

• fewer people will be digitally excluded

• people will feel more supported and confident in developing basic digital skills and using them

• people will know where to get help to engage digitally

• organisations will design their services appropriately because they recognise a lack of digital confidence can be a barrier for people to engage digitally

• public services can be accessed and used by everyone, either digitally or through other channels

• people feel supported by organisations across sectors in Wales

The third mission focused on Digital Skills, aiming to "Create a workforce that has the digital skills, capability and confidence to excel in the workplace and in everyday life". Its intended outcomes were that:

• people and businesses will be digitally confident and able to take full advantage of the opportunities that digital technologies can offer

• young people will be digitally competent with good prospects for rewarding jobs

• public, private and third sector organisations have the skills to deliver services based on user need and digital and data skills are valued

• public sector workers in Wales have greater confidence and skills in using digital in the delivery of public services

• employers recognise the value that digital skills and technologies can bring and are investing in the needs of their workforce

• businesses in Wales have access to the skills they need to be able to innovate, improve and grow

• digital talent is developed and retained across public, private and third sectors in Wales
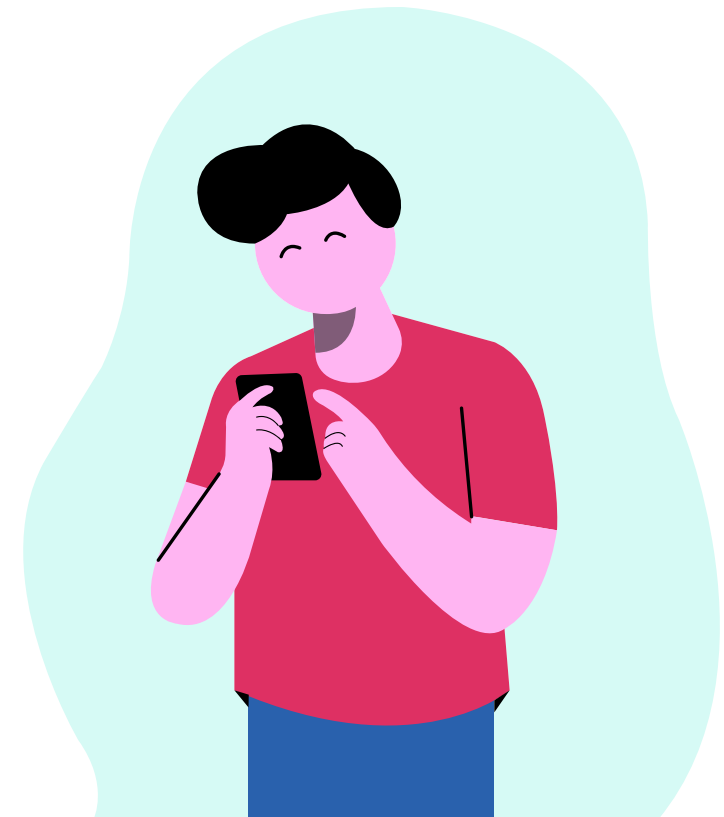
Digital Inclusion Alliance for Wales

Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales (DIAW) brings together organisations from across Wales that are working together to make Wales a digitally-inclusive nation. With over 100 members, the Alliance comprises of public and third sector organisations, private sector companies and academia, all focused on ensuring that everyone who wants to in Wales is able to access and use digital tools and technologies in their everyday lives and has the confidence to do so.

The Alliance published a cross-sector agenda for digital inclusion in Wales, 'From Inclusion to Resilience', in early 2021.

In 2023, it published a second edition of this Agenda, reflecting the changes that had been achieved, work that had been done, and changing wider conditions.

It set out five key priorities:

Priority 1	Embedding digital inclusion across all sectors
Priority 2	Mainstreaming digital inclusion in health and social care
Priority 3	Addressing data poverty as a key issue
Priority 4	Prioritising digital skills in the post-Covid economy
Priority 5	Setting a new minimum digital living standard and adopting co-production approaches

The new cross-cutting themes were:

Priority 1	Embedding digital inclusion across all sectors
Priority 2	Mainstreaming digital inclusion in health and social care
Priority 3	Addressing data poverty as a key issue
Priority 4	Prioritising essential digital skills for work and life economy
Priority 5	Implementing a new minimum digital living standard

Data: Digital Inclusion in Wales

There is a variety of data sources for measuring the level of data inclusion in Wales, which give us vital information on the extent of the problem of digital exclusion, who needs targeted support to get online, and digital confidence in different contexts.

The National Survey of Wales 2022-2023

7% of adults in Wales are not online. The level of digital exclusion in Wales is higher than in the rest of the UK, with as many as 7% of the population, or approximately 170,000 people, not using the internet.

Digitally excluded people are likely to be:

Older adults: There is a higher proportion of digitally excluded people in older age groups. Only 41% of people over 75 have basic digital skills, compared with 89% of 16-49-year-olds. Older adults are not, however, a homogenous group. Although internet use is increasing among older adults, more direct support to improve skills and confidence is required.

People with disabilities or long-term health conditions: 90% of people with a disability or long-term health condition use the internet, compared with 96% of those without. People with disabilities may require help in identifying appropriate assistive technologies.

Those with lower educational attainment: 93% of those with qualifications at degree level or above demonstrated all five digital skills compared with 51% of those with no qualifications. Many may benefit from more assistance in initial adoption of digital services or in broadening the range of services and activities which they use and participate in online.

Lower income individuals and families: Those who are economically inactive are less likely to use the internet (86%) than those in employment (99%). Lower income families and individuals may be affected by access to and affordability of devices and connectivity. As they may not have access to devices and networks, they may also not have developed digital knowledge, motivation or skills.

People in rural areas: People living in rural areas who are not online are usually excluded due to problems with reliable or appropriate broadband provision, both for fixed line and mobile broadband services for their needs. There are still many areas of Wales affected by not-spots, although the prevalence of these is reported by our case study participants to be diminishing.

7% of adults in Wales are not online

The level of digital exclusion in Wales is higher than in the rest of the UK, with as many as 7% of the population, or approximately 170,000 people, not using the internet.

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Welsh speaking people and others who do not use English as their first language: Digital systems and their associated support processes need to be designed to accommodate the needs of Welsh speakers and speakers of common minority languages. In a user-centred design process Welsh content should be drafted alongside the English content, not just translated.

Socially isolated and lonely people: Digital exclusion can be a facet of other social issues faced by individuals, for example, those facing social isolation and loneliness may also be excluded from digital interaction.

People experiencing homelessness: It may be assumed that homeless people are excluded as a by-product of their situation. People experiencing homelessness, however, include groups that, while they may not have access to permanent housing, may be 'sofa surfing' or may be in temporary accommodation such as hostels. Many people in these situations do have access to adequate mobile devices, but may face issues of affordable connectivity rather than complete exclusion from digital services.

Data collected by DCW

A Digital Skills Audit which is currently available through the DCW Programme uses the Essential Digital Skills as a framework. This questionnaire is a standardised template which is sent to organisations for their staff and/or volunteers to complete to assess the skills of those in the organisation. Following the Digital Skills Audit DCW recommend training, support and can provide advice and recommendations for areas of improvements that the organisation can take as part of its digital journey. Capturing data in this way enables a data driven approach to support, and removes the chance of assumption based delivery. Utilising the Essential Digital Skills Framework, and Digital Competency frameworks establishes a much more nuanced and deeper understanding of the support required to ensure we are creating a truly digitally included nation. These graphs represent people's confidence in their own Digital Skills, along with the voices of people who have the confidence to help others.

Our Impact

Since 2009

395,00 people in Wales have benefitted because of our work to become more digitally skilled and confident. This includes face to face and online training, support through organisations and direct support to communities.

Digital exclusion rates have reduced from 39% to 7% of people in Wales aged 16+

Across Wales we have worked with staff and volunteers who are willing to use their time and skills to help others.

Confidence Helping Others

1–low 5 is high.

Own Confidence
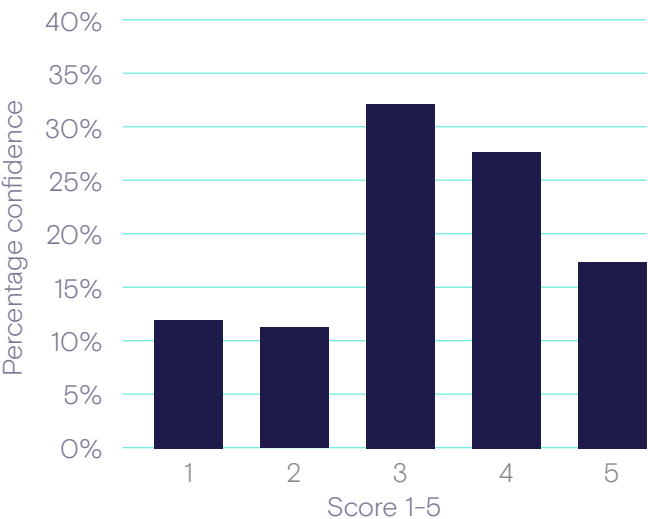
1–low 5 is high.

*Based on 2257 responses
1 – 276 (12.2%)
2 – 268 (11.9%)
3 – 725 (32.1%)
4 – 605 (26.8%)
5 – 383 (17%)
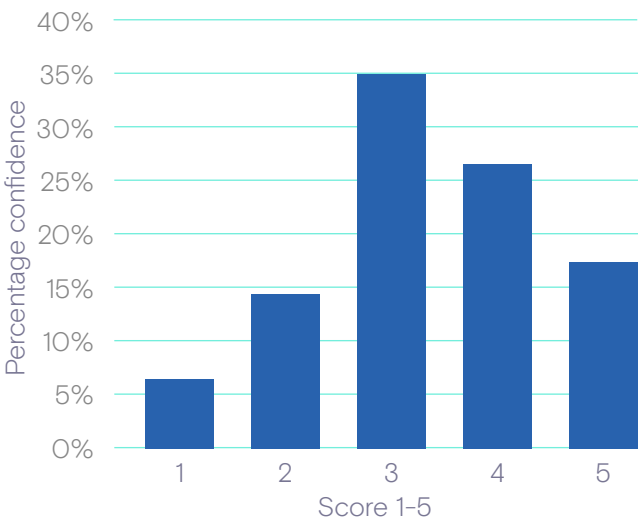
* Based on 3486 Responses
1 – 232 (6.7%)
2 – 498 (14.3%)
3 – 1222 (35.1%)
4 – 937 (26.9%)
5 – 597 (17.1%)

Read our case Studies here: An Invaluable Presence: Digital Champions in the Vale (gov.wales)

Volunteer Jane helps older people save money online (gov.wales)

Student Jack puts a smile on people's faces through his digital volunteering (gov.wales)

Minimum Digital Living Standard for Wales

In 2021 Cwmpas, as part of the Digital Inclusion Alliance for Wales, called for the establishment of a Minimum Digital Living Standard for Wales. This would be an agreed standard of what it is to be digitally included, aligned with our national Well-being Goals. It would provide a more nuanced understanding of what is needed to be able to get online confidently and securely, as is needed, beyond a binary included or excluded categorization. The initial verbal definition of the MDLS was taken from the UK pilot research funded by the Nuffield Foundation and delivered by Good Things Foundation and Liverpool, Loughborough and City Universities Minimum Digital Living – The UK's Digital needs for the 21st Century (mdls.org.uk):

'A minimum digital standard of living includes, but is more than, having accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need. It's about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence.'

We knew that this would be a complex task, but through the principles of co-design and citizen engagement, the ambitious objective could be fulfilled.

In 2022, the Welsh Government supported this ambition and commissioned research into a Welsh MDLS. The project was delivered by Liverpool, Loughborough and Swansea Universities along with Good Things Foundation and Cwmpas.

The Minimum Digital Living Standard is a citizen-centred definition of what counts as digital inclusion or exclusion. The approach applies the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) methodology to issues of digital inclusion, using deliberative methods with members of the public to develop a standard based on and rooted in public consensus. Following MIS, the MDLS sets a 'digital participation threshold', defined with members of the public, as a minimum below which households do not have all they need to take part in everyday activities. As a proof- of-concept study, the MDLS has initially focussed on the needs of households with children through a series of focus groups with parents and young people to establish what they think families need to meet this threshold. This includes devices, internet connection as well as skills.

The research project comprised a series of research activities: engagement with members of the Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales; a literature review; online interviews and a survey with stakeholders from across the Welsh digital landscape. The team also held deliberative focus groups with members of the public in Wales to test and explore the relevance of the MDLS definition to Wales, and the contents of the MDLS for urban households with children, including its relevance in rural areas.

'A minimum digital standard of living includes, but is more than, having accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need. It's about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence.'

Key insights from the research

Insight 1

Members of the public felt the MDLS definition and the MDLS contents for urban households with children were appropriate and reflected needs in Wales. Discussion centred around barriers to meet those needs.

Insight 2

Stakeholders in Wales (across public, private, voluntary and community sectors) welcomed the ideas of a national benchmark for digital inclusion for Wales. They felt this could:

• support coordination across Wales, encouraging the Welsh Government and others to take more risks and work more collaboratively to achieve such a standard

• enhance and develop their digital offers as organisations based or working in Wales, directing more resources into supporting the digital lives of people they support

• consolidate a long-term commitment to improving digital equality in Wales, driving prioritisation of digital inclusion higher up the agenda for policy and investment

Insight 3

Most stakeholders supported the MDLS definition for Wales. Stakeholders identified key areas to consider in taking forward a Minimum Digital Living Standard for Wales:

• affordability barriers, particularly in the context of the current cost of living crisis

• infrastructure barriers – broadband and mobile data infrastructure, but also wider infrastructure especially (but not limited to) rural areas in Wales

• parity of the Welsh language in digital systems, services, training, and support

• ability of providers and organisations to help households achieve the standard

• importance of recognising, identifying, and addressing equalities, diversity, and inclusion

• identifying roles for the Welsh Government, local government, and others, including to influence central Government, regulators, and UK companies on behalf of Wales

Implementing the MDLS across Wales is a complex challenge, but it is essential for fostering a digitally inclusive and thriving nation. We need to do this together; no single sector or organisation can achieve this alone.

What have we learned?

There is a need for consistency across Wales

People not knowing where they can go for support has been identified as one of the key barriers to digital inclusion, and previous projects as well as recent Shared Prosperity Funding work has meant inconsistencies across Wales in the level of support provided to communities. While it is essential to understand local contexts and how they impact the barriers to digital inclusion, a national intervention to ensure consistency of messaging and support around digital inclusion is important.

Digital Inclusion is everyone's responsibility

The data collected by DCW from Digital Skills Audits demonstrates that digital confidence is not binary – people can be confident in completing certain tasks, but not others. This means that we need to work together to ensure people have the skills and confidence they need across different parts of their lives.
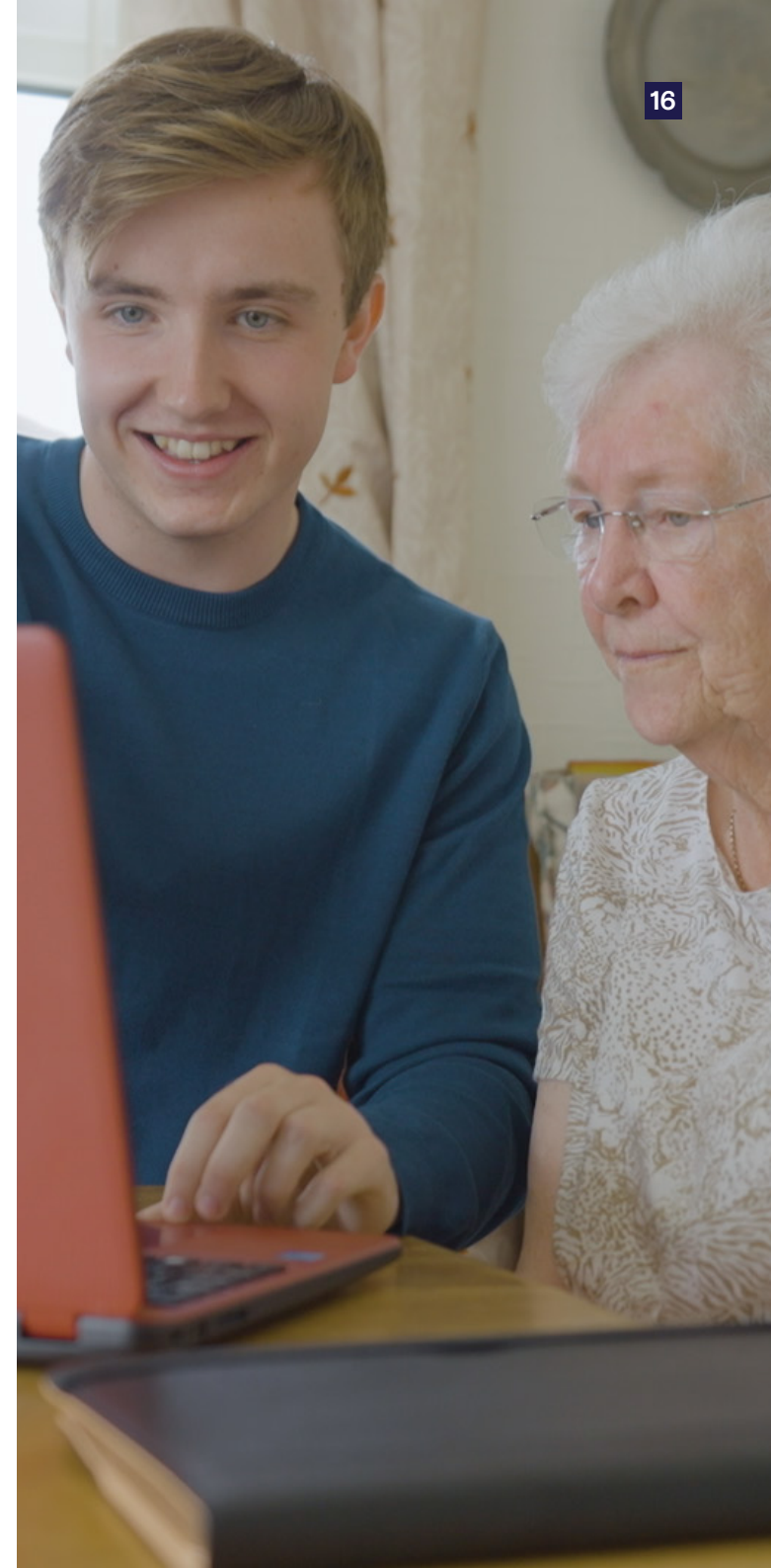
Across sectors, government departments and parts of Wales, everyone needs to ensure that digital inclusion is embedded in their work. Digital inclusion cannot just be one person, team or organisation's responsibility, or be an add-on at the end of service design. A culture of digital inclusion needs to be embedded throughout everything an organisation does and embedded in how services are designed, funded and evaluated. This will result in better outcomes, improved well-being for all and more cost-effective investment.

The Older People's Commissioner Wales has led these calls, saying:

"Tackling digital exclusion benefits us all: it's everyone's business. Because as technology continues to develop at a rapid pace and our circumstances change, perhaps finding ourselves without support from family, friends or colleagues, we may one day find ourselves digitally excluded and at risk of the social exclusion that follows."

https://www.digitalcommunities.gov.wales/blog/tackling-digital-exclusion-is-everyones-business-by-helena-herklots-cbe-older-peoples-commissioner-for-wales/

We need to take digital inclusion support to people

We have learned a lot about how to engage people in becoming digitally-included through our various projects over the past eighteen years. We need to cooperate across organisations, sectors and public bodies to ensure that we reach people in the most accessible way possible. As part of our Digital Confidence Denbighshire project, we have seen clients are often experiencing exclusion beyond just digital. Some are not able to access training and employment opportunities because they don't have the connectivity or the digital skills needed to make the most of those opportunities.

In older clients we very often find that they feel excluded from large aspects of modern society as they don't have the skills they need to interact with friends and family online. This is even more apparent with clients who have experienced the loss of a loved one or whose families live too far away to visit regularly. We have had many clients who have used the drop-ins and workshops at least partially to gain social interaction and combat their own loneliness.

To be a truly digitally-inclusive nation, we need to take support to people, where they live their lives.

Mair has attended multiple digital drop-in sessions and workshops since January 2024. By April, she felt comfortable enough to join our Essential Digital Skills Course at Denbigh Hwb, which she completed and was given a certificate for. Here is what Mair had to say about her experience being supported by us at Digital Confidence Denbighshire. Hyder Digidol Sir Ddinbych / Digital Confidence Denbighshire – Astudiaeth Achos / Case Study (Mair) – YouTube

Digital confidence is more than inclusion and exclusion

Whether someone is fully confident in participating in today's digital society and economy is more nuanced than a yes/no question. Some people have the skills, confidence, resources and connectivity to do parts of what they need, but not everything. In addition, technology develops so quickly that people who are digitally-included can fall back into being digitally-excluded over time. Being a digitally-inclusive nation will mean always providing the support communities need.

Where data is available, the National Survey For Wales 2022 outlines that 22% of Adults online don't have all of the Essential Digital Skills, this presents a need to ensure that users who are currently digitally excluded don't find themselves being left behind with the rate of change in an everchanging digital world.

When we consider the binary for being digitally excluded 7% of the adult population is included, but when you consider functional skills for being able to save money online 11% of people surveyed by DCW are unable to do this. This creates barriers for people being able to save/ manage their money online which means that they are missing out on 'online only' deals.

While considering specific skills that make up the essential Digital Skills framework, handling information and content, has a higher average than the binary Excluded/ Included figures show that considerations need to be made to empower people to have fully rounded Digital Skills.

The Digital Confidence Denbighshire project has attracted a high number of clients returning to further workshops and training courses on an ongoing basis. It is apparent that digital confidence isn't something an individual gains over a two-hour workshop but is something that comes with consistency of trusted support and the opportunity to try the technology in a safe and supportive setting. The high volume of returning clients this project supports is indicative of the value they place in the training and support that they have received to date.

Ability to save money online

11%   1%
       4%
84%
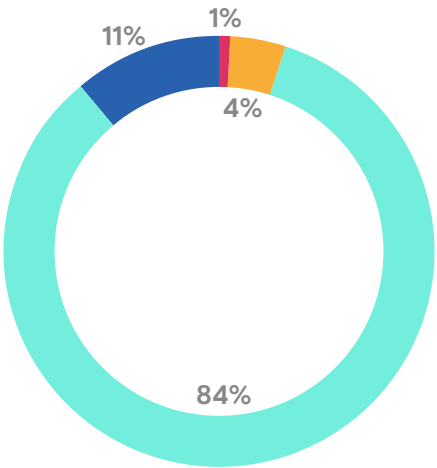
*Based on 2165 responses.

- Yes – 1817 (84%)
- No – 243 (11%)
- With help – 20 (1%)
- Want to learn – 85 (4%)

Ability to handle information and content

11%   1%
      10%
77%
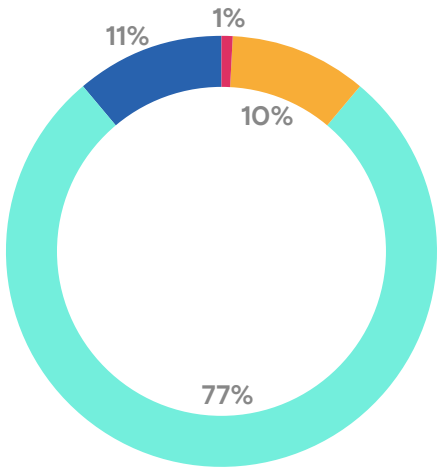
*Based on 2143 responses

- Yes – 1654 (77%),
- No – 245 (11%),
- With help – 26 (1%),
- Want to learn – 218 (10%).

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We need targeted support

People with certain characteristics or from certain communities need targeted support. While 93% of adults in Wales are now using the internet, the remaining 7% have remained excluded over several years. Reaching these people requires specific, specialist intervention. DCW is working thematically, providing focused and appropriate support for individuals to ensure they aren't left behind. We have worked across Wales and across Sectors to develop this thematic approach to supporting Digitally excluded people. Read our case studies here:

Grŵp Cynefin (gov.wales)

Learning-Disability-Wales.pdf (gov.wales)

My love for Social Media and how the internet is supporting my future – Melissa's Story (gov.wales)

Earlier this year, Welsh Government committed to supporting further specific digital inclusion work with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities which is a part of the DCW programme from April 1st 2024. We hope that this can lead to further funding for targeted support for other communities in the future.

In providing support to communities across Wales, we can ensure that we are reaching out to people to provide them with the knowledge, training and support to improve their skills and confidence in areas that are important to them. If we consider health and wellbeing, increasingly digital is playing a significant role in Digital Health Transformation, however 33% of people surveyed don't have the skills or confidence to engage with Digital Health and wellbeing tools.

Ability to manage health and wellbeing using digital tools

1%

3%

33%

63%
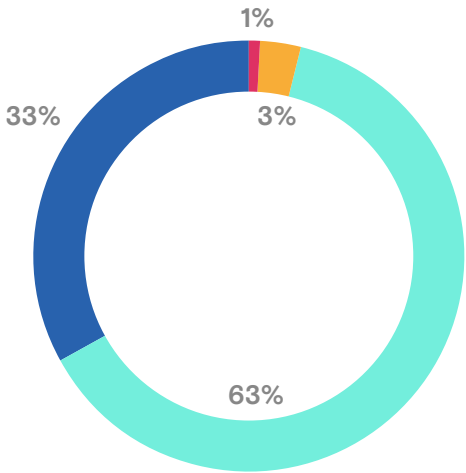
*Based on 1299 Responses

Yes – 812 (63%)

No – 430 (33%)

With help – 13 (1%)

Want to learn – 44 (3%)
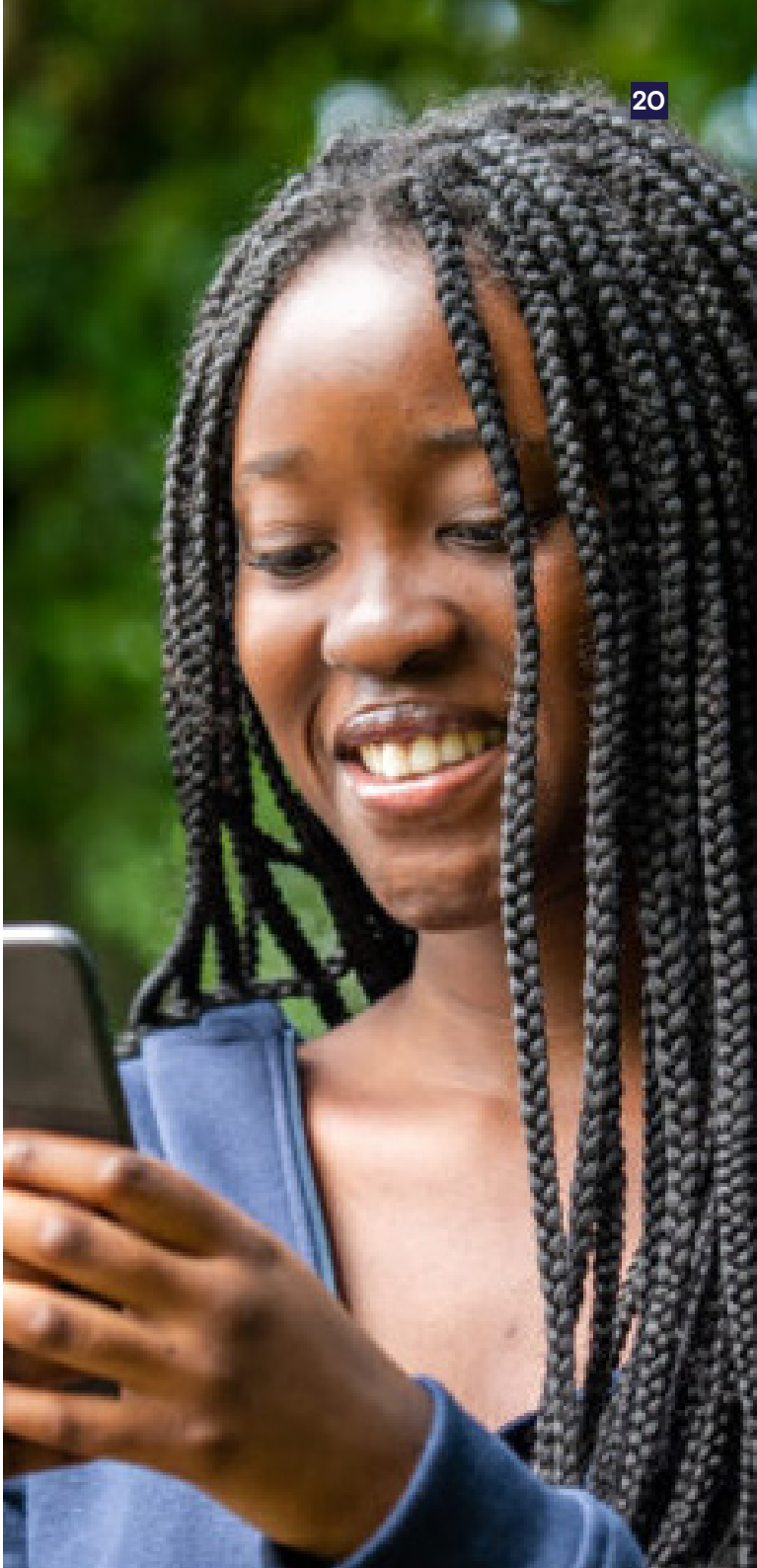
Digital inclusion is essential for effective, digitally-transformed services

The business case for the digital transformation of services requires investment in and prioritisation of digital inclusion from the very beginning. The cost savings and added value provided by digital transformation cannot be fully achieved if those most in need of public services are not able to access them, and require additional services, or are left behind. Investment in digital inclusion and having it at the forefront of transformation strategy is preventative and a key part of building more resilient communities.

There is lots of good work to build on. Digital Health and Care Wales were recently awarded Digital Inclusion Charter Accreditation, and are leading the way in their commitment to mainstreaming and embedding digital inclusion to ensure that no one in Wales is left behind.[1]

Cymru Can the Strategy for the future Generations Commissioner for Wales 2023-2030 report outlines the need to ensure that future generations have the digital Skills and abilities to respond to future trends, with young people and women being most at risk to the impacts of automation in the future, we need to make sure that our future generations are equipped appropriately with the Digital Inclusion Skills to build a resilient, and equal nation of competent digital users.[2]

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[1] https://dhcw.nhs.wales/news/latest-news/dhcw-awarded-digital-inclusion-charter-accreditation-after-exemplary-approach/

[2] 2023-11-20-Strategy-English.pdf (futuregenerations.wales)

What comes next?

Following the learning we have outlined in this report, following years of working on digital inclusion in Wales, we present Five specific recommendations for policymakers. These recommendations are not for a specific government department, but for everyone. We must all take a responsibility to end digital exclusion.

Digital exclusion is not an isolated problem – it is one of countless challenges facing communities in Wales that have unacceptable levels of poverty. The cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated existing inequalities, and there are many stories of families needing to choose between data, heating and food. Ending poverty in Wales requires supporting everyone to get online when they need to, confidently and securely.

Digital must be at the heart for our vision of a Wales that is fit for Future Generations. It is central to achieving each of the seven well-being goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (Wales).

Health systems are increasingly moving towards digital, such as through the NHS Wales App. While there are clear advantages to this, existing digital and social inequalities risk further exacerbating health inequalities. This could result in a digital health divide and a digital inverse care law.

Younger generations need to have the practical and functional skills for using digital devices and engaging online. The education system must be at the forefront of reaching families most at risk of data poverty and digital exclusion, to enable them to have the opportunity to develop the skills and confidence they need to participate in our digital society.

We understand the financial pressures faced by the Welsh Government, but now is not the time to cut back on digital inclusion. A report published by The Good Things Foundation suggests that for every £1 invested in interventions to enable digitally excluded people to build basic digital skills, £9.48 is gained throughout the economy. This is in addition to the potential savings across health and other government departments. Money invested in a new digital inclusion programme beyond 2025 makes business sense".[3]

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[3] Good Things Foundation publishes report on investment in digital inclusion - htn

Recommendations

With these cross-cutting themes in mind, we present the following recommendations:

1. **Commit to six-year funding for a national digital inclusion programme that:**

• Delivers direct, targeted support to the 7% of people who are still digitally excluded, and those who do not have the five essential digital skills. Now, more than ever, it is crucial that digital inclusion is embedded into, mainstreamed and owned by organisations and communities across Wales.

• Provides the support, collaboration, and amplification to organisations and community groups to establish a mainstreamed digital skills and inclusion agenda, that is the responsibility of everyone in Wales.

A long-term commitment to funding digital inclusion, to the benefit of all government departments, will ensure the project will be able to focus on delivery, develop relationships with key stakeholders and communities, and adapt to the evolving digital environment in a way driven by need, not funding requirements.

2. **Implement the findings of the Minimum Digital Living Standard research pilot and expand to all households in Wales**

We need to see the implementation of the Minimum Digital Living Standard in a way that is impactful for communities and accessible for the groups and organisations that support them. No household in Wales should be below the MDLS threshold. We need effective cross-sector strategies, policies and actions that are developed together with financial and political commitment to achieve this vision.

The creation of a Minimum Digital Living Standard for Wales for households with children should be a catalyst for Welsh Government to commission further research to understand the implications of the Minimum Digital Living Standard on a range of households and communities facing digital exclusion in Wales.

3. **Funding of the Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales must be continued to ensure its sustainability and enable it to consider options for a transition to alternative funding sources, should that be required in future.**

The Alliance has been a key asset in ensuring a space for peer-networking, data gathering and experience-sharing, fostering meaningful change across sectors. It is growing to be an influential hub to support organisations, small and large delivering digital inclusion systematically across the country and we would want to see more organisations joining the network in the next phase.

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4. Welsh Government should develop strategic partnerships with the technology industry to support an expanded Digital Inclusion programme.

Industry partners have a key role to play in supporting Wales to become a digitally inclusive nation ensuring all barriers to digital inclusion are overcome, including improving access, skills and confidence.

5. All digital transformation programmes in the future should include a percentage of their funding for Digital inclusion.

As we have demonstrated in this report, the business case for Digital Transformation requires investment in digital inclusion. Without this, it risks excluding citizens from essential services, negatively impacting well-being and increasing costs in the long run. By requiring Digital transformation policy and programmes to allocate funding to Digital inclusion initiatives we are ensuring inclusive practices are embedded throughout the transformation process.

As we have demonstrated in this report, the business case for Digital Transformation requires investment in digital inclusion.

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To discuss our digital inclusion work or find out how we can support you or your organisation, please contact Cwmpas on:

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