



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

POLICY AND STRATEGY

Device and connectivity update for digitally excluded learners during coronavirus (COVID-19)

Technology support provided for digitally excluded learners in maintained schools in Wales to support remote education during the initial coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

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Please note, central support from the Welsh Government concluded as planned on 31 July 2021.

Overview

At the start of the pandemic, in early 2020, the then **Minister for Education has committed up to £3 million as part of 'Stay Safe. Stay Learning'**, to support digitally excluded learners in maintained schools where there was no existing provision in place from their school or local authority. The funding was managed through the wider Hwb EdTech programme.

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How did we define a Digitally Excluded Learner?

A digitally excluded learner is defined as ‘a learner who does not have access to an appropriate internet connected device to engage in online learning activities from home’.

How were Digitally Excluded Learners identified?

All local authorities engaged directly with their maintained schools to identify digitally excluded learners.

Support we provided

The Welsh Government reacted swiftly in early 2020 by securing a national connectivity deal with major mobile operators for MiFi devices, alongside establishing a technical solution which enabled all local authorities and maintained schools to repurpose existing devices for use in a learner’s home.

Local authorities, working in conjunction with their schools, identified the number of MiFi devices and software licences needed to support their digitally excluded learners. Once numbers were confirmed, the Welsh Government purchased the appropriate number of MiFi devices and software licences.

Based on the demand identified by schools and local authorities, 10,848 MiFi devices and 9,717 software licences funded by the Welsh Government were deployed across Wales up to the end of July 2021. These figures do not include any local arrangements made by individual local authorities or schools to loan other equipment to learners.

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Data uplift scheme

At the start of 2021, the Welsh Government collaborated with a number of the UK's Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) and Mobile Virtual Network Operators (MVNOs), establishing a scheme to provide free mobile data uplifts to digitally excluded learners/their parents or guardians in Wales, where other support had yet to be accessed.

In line with a similar scheme launched by the Department for Education in England, the scheme closed at the end of July 2021. Related mobile network providers contacted all customers who received a data uplift to let them know when the data increase ended.

Need support?

Local authorities and schools remain responsible for identifying which learners require support with access to devices and/or connectivity.

Any families experiencing issues with access to a device and/or connectivity should contact their school in the first instance, who will be able to give more specific details on the local support arrangements available.

Getting help using online education platforms

The Welsh Government and its partners continue to work across the education system in a number of ways to offer support during the on-going COVID-19 response. The latest [education guidance can be found on the coronavirus pages](#) on the Welsh Government website.

Wales continues to be well placed to support schools, practitioners and learners during the ongoing pandemic response, as we have [Hwb](#), our national digital platform for learning and teaching. Hwb provides its users with access to a

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range of free bilingual, digital tools and resources. Our **blended learning support on Hwb** includes resources to support you with blended learning activities as well as links to advice on health and well-being.

Stay Safe, Stay Learning pulls together contributions from across education, and beyond, to provide support to the whole of our education system. More information on the plans and actions that support this can be found in the '**Stay Safe, Stay Learning**' section.

The **Keeping safe online** zone on Hwb also provides extensive support to all education stakeholders including a wide range of resources and other support services.

The wider Hwb programme provides a national approach to digital tools and services for maintained schools in Wales, supporting them in exploiting the transformational benefits which digital and technology can have on education.

There has already been an investment of over £135 million in the Hwb programme. This funding has delivered superfast connectivity to all maintained schools in Wales, future proofed their digital infrastructure, supported the purchase of over 216,000 end user devices to date, alongside starting to refresh teaching and learning tools.

About this document

This document is a copy of the web page [Device and connectivity update for digitally excluded learners during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) downloaded.

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