



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

POLICY AND STRATEGY

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

Update on technology provision for digitally excluded learners in maintained schools in Wales to support remote education during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

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Overview

At the start of the pandemic, the **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 infrastructure programme.

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’.

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

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Local authorities, working in conjunction with their schools, were invited to identify the number of MiFi devices and software licences they 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, there have been 10,848 MiFi devices and 9,717 software licences funded by the Welsh Government and deployed across Wales. These figures do not include any local arrangements made by individual local authorities or schools to loan other equipment to learners.

In January 2021 we completed a digital baseline exercise with all 22 local authorities, who reported that more families have contacted their schools for additional support. These new requirements are for a range of issues, with multi-learner households and increases in parental/learner engagement featuring highly. The vast majority of local authorities have confirmed that support has already been put in place in most cases.

Through the feedback provided, there appears to be sufficient devices available to meet the demand (through the new EdTech devices, repurposed school devices or devices local authorities and schools have purchased themselves). However, there is ongoing work to support families who are struggling with connectivity issues. The Welsh Government has provided a summary connectivity document to local authorities, outlining all the current options available, which they can use with schools to support their families.

Data uplift scheme

Since the Department for Education (DfE) launched their [data uplift pilot scheme](#), the Welsh Government has been working with the UK's for main Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) alongside a number of Mobile Virtual Network Operators (MVNOs) in order to mobilise a scheme that will provide mobile data uplifts to digitally excluded learners in Wales.

The scheme will further bolster the range of support available for connectivity

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services and help to meet the demand identified by local authorities in the recent digital baseline exercise. It will increase the mobile data allowance for either the parent or carer of the learner, or the learners account if deemed appropriate, where the individual has an existing account with the MNOs/MVNOs (and which meets their pre-conditions).

In line with the DfE agreement, and the Welsh Government's wider support for digitally excluded learners in Wales, any uplifts applied are currently scheduled to run until 31 July 2021.

The Welsh Government is actively engaged with the following MNO/MVNOs:

- BT
- EE
- Sky Mobile
- Tesco Mobile
- Virgin Mobile
- Vodafone

How digitally excluded learners have been identified

All local authorities have engaged with their schools to identify digitally excluded learners. Once identified, local authorities have been able to access central funding to repurpose existing devices and provide MiFi connectivity devices (where required).

Local authority and school responsibilities

Local authorities and schools were responsible for identifying which learners required access to devices and/or MiFi connectivity. Once identified, the school, in conjunction with their local authority, have responsibility for issuing devices and/or mobile connectivity, along with ensuring there are appropriate end user agreements in place.

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Apply for support

The implementation varies from local authority to local authority, but it is very much driven by the schools understanding of individual learner needs. Parents and carers can contact their child's school to establish what support is available, while schools should contact their local authority if they have not been contacted already.

Getting devices to learners

The Welsh Government's support programme has concluded following the information provided by schools and local authorities. Digitally excluded learners across Wales should now be in receipt of the required device and connectivity.

Any families experiencing issues with access to a device or connectivity should contact their school who will be able to give more specific details on local support arrangements.

The Welsh Government does not hold centrally recorded information on the onward distribution to families, children and young people. This process is managed by the local authorities and schools themselves. We don't hold information about additional support that has been arranged as part of the local authorities own digitally excluded learner programmes of work.

Getting help using online education platforms

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

Wales is very well placed to support schools, practitioners and learners during this period as we have [Hwb](#), our national digital platform for learning and teaching. Hwb provides its users with access to a range of free bilingual, digital

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tools and resources. Our **distance learning support on Hwb** includes resources to support you with distance 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 EdTech programme provides a national approach to digital services for maintained schools in Wales, supporting them in exploiting the transformational benefits which digital and technology can have on education.

Over the last two financial years, there has been an investment of around £92 million in the Hwb EdTech programme. With this funding, local authorities have been able to develop a standardised, sustainable and consistent approach to replacing core and wireless network infrastructure. The funding has also delivered 128,000 end user devices since the start of the pandemic, with the remaining 54,000 ordered devices expected by the end of May.

A further investment of £15 million in the 2021 to 2022 financial year will continue to support the transformation of digital infrastructure of all maintained schools in Wales.

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