



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

REPORT

Digital inclusion progress report: towards a digitally confident Wales

What we have done since December 2020 to help more people confidently engage with digital technology.

First published: 14 March 2022

Last updated: 14 March 2022

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Introduction

Since our [Digital inclusion forward look: towards a digitally confident Wales](#) was published in December 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, progress has been slower than hoped. The restrictions have created ongoing challenges for reaching and engaging with communities and digitally excluded priority groups, which is a critical need for our policy. The Welsh Government, are committed to delivering against Mission 2 of our [Digital Strategy for Wales](#), which is now our digital inclusion policy and strategy position for the next five years. The Digital Strategy for Wales delivers on our commitment in the Forward Look to develop a new Framework.

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This Progress Report will outline our work to date in addressing the priorities outlined in the [Digital Inclusion forward look](#) to tackle digital exclusion. The work includes examples of policy and programme delivery interventions in each of the 6 areas of focus within our Forward Look, over the past 12 months since publication in December 2020. We also describe the challenges faced progressing certain areas of focus and how, despite the challenges, we have improved our understanding of the impact of digital exclusion on Welsh communities.

Area of focus: 1

“ We will engage with communities and organisations to discuss, understand and develop our future digital inclusion and basic digital skills policy interventions. ”

Progress

The pandemic has presented a unique challenge since publication of the ‘Forward Look’. We have been unable to undertake any face to face engagement at community level with those with lived experience of being digitally excluded. However, we recognise there remains a need for discussing and understanding the barriers which remain to addressing digital exclusion. We gave consideration to setting up facilitated virtual engagement, which would rely on lead organisations to bring together people who are digitally excluded, to hold these discussions with communities. However, engaging with people who are digitally excluded in non-face-to-face settings is not ideal when trying to understand their barriers.

We accept this work has not progressed as far as planned but we remain committed to engage. This will be governed by the speed and extent to which pandemic related restrictions continue to be relaxed. Below, we have outlined areas of work that will help to strengthen our understanding of the barriers and challenges within Wales for addressing digital exclusion and basic digital skills.

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Minimum Digital Living Standard for Wales

The Digital Strategy for Wales (March 2021) made clear our commitment to explore a minimum digital living standard for Wales. The 'Standard' would look to consider the type of device, broadband speed and/or mobile data required (for both upload and download) and of the recognised five basic digital skills, which, as a minimum, are needed to be digitally included in modern Wales. To set a baseline, the 'Standard' would look to gain the views from a representative sample size of both digitally excluded (those with lived experience) and digitally included citizens from across Wales, and from the recognised priority groups. This would then scope a defined 'Standard' with a rationale for how it might be best measured e.g. by household or individual citizens across Wales.

Following an open procurement process for 'scoping a minimum digital living standard for Wales' a contract was **awarded to the University of Liverpool** on 10 February 2022.

Mapping of Digital Inclusion

Outlined in the Digital Strategy for Wales, Mission 2, we are working closely with the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) to undertake a piece of research to understand the current provision, support and funding available across Wales for digital inclusion (basic digital skills, devices and connectivity). This research will look to map existing provision, by local authority or health board level, allowing officials to identify possible gaps in support. CDPS are working with **DataMapWales** to ensure this vital work can be made available publically and help organisations to target support appropriately.

Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being Programme (DCW)

In April 2021, following the **Stage 1 independent evaluation of DCW by OB3**, the contractual outcomes for the programme were changed. We have worked closely with DCW to develop a programme which focuses on the impact of

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digital exclusion within Welsh communities. Since the contract started in July 2019, DCW has engaged with over 1,648 organisations, from all sectors, across Wales. It is through their work on the ground with these organisations that we are able to learn from experiences and ensure our policy is supportive. Regular updates provided by the programme demonstrate how far-reaching and cross cutting the work of DCW has been to improve the experiences of those who are digitally excluded or who require basic digital skills. The following two examples showcase the type of work DCW undertakes across Wales to support area of focus one:

- **Welsh Language:** In September 2021 DCW held an online event aimed at organisations focused on supporting the Welsh language, from nationwide charities (Merched y Wawr and Cymdeithas Eisteddfodau Cymru) to small community run social enterprises (Tafarn y Plu, Llanystumdwy and Antur Waunfawr). The aim was to discuss the challenges for those organisations, the Welsh language, and communities in the digital age. Following the event, DCW contacted all attendees to ask them to participate in a regular network in collaboration with Mentrau Iaith Cymru. The Network would focus discussions on digital inclusion, digital technology and innovation and ensure there is alignment with the Welsh Government response to the [report on the effects of COVID-19 on Welsh language community groups](#) (July 2021) to improve basic digital skills among those groups.

The Event titled 'Ymateb i'r Heriau' (Responding to the Challenges) was formed with the intention to network, support, share, learn, interact and move forward for the benefit of the Welsh language, digital inclusion and technology.. Seventeen organisations have registered for the Network (including a leading official from the Welsh Government for the [Cymraeg 2050 strategy](#)) with the first meeting held in February 2022. S4C delivered a presentation which provided an overview work to develop a new strategy and insight into viewership and trends as they relate to different platforms. S4C have committed to becoming members of the group and supporting the inclusion agenda with the intention of developing specific pieces of activity over the coming year.

- **Libraries in Wales:** The Welsh Government officials leading on library services and DCW agreed a plan to provide a consistent approach to digitally upskilling library staff across Wales. DCW recognised a need to

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initially assess the basic digital skills levels of library staff. The pilot, delivered by DCW, with Gwynedd and Rhondda Cynon Taff libraries saw them undertake a basic digital skills audit to identify gaps in staff and volunteer skills. Based on the responses, DCW were able to develop a six-week training programme focussing on accessibility and online safety. The training plan is outlined below:

- Digital inclusion and library services: exploring resources and support available to help people to engage online.
- Accessibility: digital tools and settings to support users.
- Online safety: advice and support available for staying safe and secure online.
- Helping people to use different devices.
- Basic Digital Skills: supporting staff to become digitally confident.
- **Online Centres** for citizens: an overview of the opportunities Online Centres can provide including support for citizens to learn new skills.

The training programme, delivered in Welsh and English, is currently being evaluated and DCW will help to identify a Digital Champion in every library who can support members of the public with their basic digital skills and confidence. We acknowledge the critical role community centres and libraries play in supporting the digital inclusion agenda. Throughout the pandemic these spaces have been impacted by restrictions, either being closed, having reduced opening hours, or reduced numbers of people able to attend. Citizens, reliant on access to these settings for use of device or connectivity, face ongoing challenges in undertaking their day to day activities digitally.

Area of focus: 2

“ We will consider through further research how current and future interventions within health and care need to be implemented so staff have the required skills and knowledge necessary to ensure that they, patients and residents, benefit from digital technology. ”

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Progress

In 2020, Public Health Wales published a [scoping review of digital technology and health inequalities](#). The review reinforced our understanding of the vital connection between citizens being digitally confident and access to health and care. Therefore, we know there remains a pressing need to understand and address the basic digital skills levels of staff within the health and care sector to use the latest digital interventions. Through our procured programme, DCW, we continue to engage health boards and trusts across Wales to ensure the needs of those digitally excluded (staff and patients) form part of the consideration and discussion when services are being designed.

Below we have provided some examples of work DCW are doing to support the health and care agenda across Wales.

Health Boards

DCW as part of the contract have a directive to engage with health boards. A consequence of the pandemic is the need and expectation for many patients and staff to shift to a digital way of delivering and receiving health and care across Wales. While the seven health boards are aware of the issue and challenges for those digitally excluded, progress in ensuring digital inclusion is embedded as part of their strategy and delivery varies across Wales.

A best practice example is Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) who have developed a new [Digital Strategy](#), entitled 'Our Digital Future'. Their Strategy includes two ambitions associated with their vision ('Enabled Patients and Carers' and 'Connected Staff'), together with 6 enablers which will help them to achieve these ambitions: Strengthened Digital Foundations; Digital Inclusion; Strong Partnerships; Information for Improvement; Digital Organisation and Embracing Innovations. BCUHB are working with DCW on the delivery of a Digital Skills Programme, whereby DCW will undertake a bespoke basic digital skills audit of the staff within their directorate. DCW will then create a range of agreed learning opportunities, with input from staff focus groups.

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Cardiff & Vale University Health Board (CAVUHB) Recovery & Wellbeing College is being supported by DCW, which will see CAVUHB start their digital journey, recruit and appoint Digital Peers and co-produce/deliver training with devices provided by DCW. CAVUHB are currently working on the implementation of their Digital Strategy. DCW will be supporting the development of a model of Digital Champions across the Health Board and supporting the Welsh Nursing Care Record (WNCR) roll out. All aspects of this work will support CAVUHB's strategic commitment to learn about and implement digital inclusion within their operations.

Despite these successes, we do recognise more work is needed to ensure digital inclusion is embedded in strategy and delivery consistently, across all health boards.

Digital Inclusion Guide for Care Homes

Building on the work during the pandemic to provide devices and connectivity to care home residents, DCW developed a **Good Practice Guide to Digital for Care Homes** which aims to provide care homes with the information required to understand how digital technology can be used in care home settings. The Guide was developed with the views of care home staff being considered and sets out the beneficial role digital technology can provide for residents, for example: maintaining relationships; calming; entertainment; potential physical health improvements; improved well-being and keeping occupied. The guide recognises the benefits for staff in the form of training for those who would like to improve their basic digital skills, allowing them to support residents with using the technology, and the opportunity to become a Digital Champion within their care home.

Social Care Wales

DCW have been working with Social Care Wales to develop an e-learning course that aims to boost the confidence, digital skills and understanding of the social care workforce. Social Care Wales works with people who use care and support services and organisations to lead improvement in social care across

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Wales. The e-learning is split into categories that are traditionally seen in the social care sector from staff caring for elderly people in a care home setting, to staff working in crèche and child support services. The module will sit on the Social Care Wales e-learning platform, allowing their 30,000 plus staff to be able to access the training through their single login. The e-learning is due to be launched in spring 2022.

Digital Childcare Offer

The Welsh Government is developing an all Wales digital service for the Childcare Offer. The Offer aims to make life easier for parents by offering help with childcare costs, where they could claim 30 hours of early education and childcare in Wales a week, for up to 48 weeks of the year. The Offer has already helped parents from all over Wales to return to work, increase their hours or work more flexibly. The digital service is currently due to go live across Wales in autumn 2022 with DCW developing training to support the basic digital skills of the estimated 2,200 childcare providers across Wales.

The training will be aimed at supporting providers who need to complete registration digitally but may lack the basic digital skills to do so. There is a need, as a digital service, to ensure they are supported to gain these critical skills, including being able to set up an email address and create a Government Gateway account. In August 2021 DCW launched pre-recorded quick guide videos which can be accessed through the DCW website. The aim is to provide the opportunity for childcare providers to gain the required basic digital skills and confidence ahead of the service going live.

Area of focus: 3

“ We will further our understanding of the implications of digital exclusion for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. ”

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Progress

As discussed throughout the progress report, the pandemic has negatively impacted face to face engagement within communities across Wales. However, we remain determined to widen our understanding of the barriers faced by ethnic minority communities to engage with digital and how we can ensure support is available for them to overcome those barriers.

Social Change UK

Were commissioned in 2021, by DCW, to conduct insight research with citizens from ethnic minority communities across Wales, to understand the barriers they face to becoming digitally confident and how these barriers can be overcome. Additionally, they engaged with organisations working with people from ethnic minority communities to gauge their awareness and understanding of digital inclusion, how they are supporting service users to be online and what more can be done to support this. The full report 'Overcoming barriers to digital inclusion in ethnic minority communities' is available on request from DCW (digitalcommunities@wales.coop).

The recommendations within the report have facilitated DCW, working with Social Change UK, to implement a recruitment and engagement strategy. This aims to encourage organisations in Wales to deliver training and face to face support to ethnic minority communities lacking basic digital skills and confidence to engage with digital. To build on the report, DCW are undertaking a pilot programme over a 6 month timeframe with 10 supporting organisations, called **Digitally Connected Communities**. This programme is aimed at organisations working with ethnic minority communities to improve the basic digital skills of staff, but also to provide the opportunity for organisations to come together as a network to discuss digital inclusion. As part of the Digitally Connected Communities programme, Social Change UK will undertake an evaluation with the findings to be considered by DCW. To further support this area, DCW recruited and appointed a new team member to a specific role of Digital Inclusion Co-ordinator (for ethnic minority communities). The co-ordinator will be

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responsible for delivering training, co-delivering the Digitally Connected Communities programme and supporting the wider programme with stakeholder engagement.

Area of focus: 4

“ We will develop our understanding of the potential wider implications of ‘Data Poverty’ to the digital exclusion agenda. ”

Progress

The Forward Look (December 2020) identified the emerging concept of ‘data poverty’. This continues to be more apparent as a result of the pandemic, it is defined as ‘those individuals, households or communities who cannot afford sufficient, private and secure mobile or broadband data to meet their essential needs’. Our work in this area is varied and has often seen us working with or learning from UK-wide organisations who are researching the effects of data poverty. An example of this wider work is research in October 2020 jointly by Nesta (Scotland) and Y Lab (Cardiff University) which produced some insightful and interesting results to help our understanding of the implications of data poverty and how they may be addressed. The findings are based on research of over 2,000 people across Scotland and Wales and below we have provided some the key findings of data poverty specific to Wales:

- 14% of all adults (aged 18 and over).
- 15% of most deprived neighbourhoods.
- 12% of most affluent neighbourhoods.
- 9% of whose household income is £40,000 and over.
- 15% of households with children.
- 34% of households with 3+ children.
- 30% of those living in social housing.
- 23% of those with a disability or long-term health condition.

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The findings show how data poverty cuts across the type of neighbourhood with it impacting on deprived and affluent and concludes that different solutions are needed for the different needs and circumstances of data poverty identified e.g. low income and unaffordability. The findings demonstrate the relationship between digital inclusion and data poverty, while the latter is an impact on those engaging with digital, it could lead to a shift from included to excluded if we do not develop interventions to address these circumstances. [Data Poverty in Scotland and Wales](#)

The National Databank

This initiative was launched via a partnering agreement between Good Things Foundation (GTF) and Virgin Media O2 in August 2021. It aims to provide free data for community groups to distribute across the UK, including the most digitally deprived areas. GTF delivered an initial three-month pilot with 10 community groups across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland with CETMA (Community Engagement, Technology, Media & Arts), from Llanelli, engaged. DCW are helping to increase the number of Online Centres registered across Wales, which is the model planned to be used for the expansion of the Databank. The Welsh Government are a member of the ongoing roundtable for the National Databank to ensure we remain engaged and sighted as this work progresses. [National Databank will tackle data poverty \(goodthingsfoundation.org\)](#).

The Data Poverty Lab

In April 2021, GTF partnered with Nominet to set-up the [Data Poverty Lab](#) with the aim to bring together people, groups and ideas from across the UK, to help end data poverty by 2024. The Lab will link with and build upon research, ideas and initiatives already in this space, and involve people with lived experience of poverty in developing effective, sustainable and innovative solutions. The Lab builds on work delivered by Nominet and GTF to tackle the digital divide and data poverty through DevicesDotNow (an emergency appeal in response to COVID-19) and also Reboot, which helps local organisations and schools access unused devices in an efficient and cost-effective way. The Welsh

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Government will work to ensure DCW, through their partnership with GTF, are kept aware and engaged with the Data Poverty Lab.

Everyone Connected

Nominet partnered with GTF on the **Everyone Connected** programme, which aimed to help people whose lives were severely affected by digital exclusion and the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the programme, over 12,000 disadvantaged people received a device and connectivity, helping them to get up and running online by ensuring they have the tools and training they need. Following the end of the programme two reports were produced by the Lottery Fund and Good Things Foundation which we have summarised below:

- Summary of **Lottery Fund** and **Good Things Foundation** Reports: Through Everyone Connected it was found that community partners, where their buildings had closed due to the pandemic, were able to relocate into multi-use community spaces such as local health hubs. This resulted in numerous positives for community partners and enabled them to easily and efficiently refer people between services. Those who were unable to access a device were provided with one, and those involved were keen to maintain these new referral arrangements. Furthermore, staff, volunteers and advisors involved in the programme suggested that setting up devices is critical alongside basic digital skills support. It recognised this additional support requires significant time and resources from community partners. The programme found that when setting up the devices, people would be more open to discuss their needs and the challenges they are facing. The reports found that people relied on digital to maintain contact with friends and family, especially during and prior to lockdown.
- Digital Communities Wales: digital confidence, health and well-being (DCW): Through DCW we continue to provide training which focuses on the digital and financial inclusion agenda. It identifies areas where support is needed, and aims to understand the impact data poverty can have on communities and citizens in Wales. In a recent **blog** DCW examined the link between digital and financial hardship. It looked at where, through no fault of their own, people who are struggling financially often find themselves digitally

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excluded as a consequence. It highlighted how this situation creates an uneven playing field for many individuals from low income backgrounds and focuses on the 18% of people in social housing in Wales who do not have internet access, as compared to 6% in the privately rented sector. It describes how those who are in an unstable financial position and who are in data poverty, are also the people who are most likely to be left behind as services are increasingly being moved to a digital first approach.

Area of focus: 5

“ We will ensure digital confidence (motivation, access and skills) is embedded and aligned with the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) Strategy. ”

Progress

On 22 February 2022, the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) published **The UK Strategy for Financial Wellbeing - Wales Delivery Plan**. This was developed in partnership with the Welsh Government and identifies being digitally included and having basic digital skills as being beneficial to financial inclusion and wellbeing. Through the **Strategy and Delivery Plan** we ensure importance is placed on the need to support people to become digitally confident, thus helping support the intention by MaPS to develop new digital tools to help people save or learn how to improve their financial resilience. This is a good example of where digitalisation can help society to improve their financial wellbeing, as long as citizens are supported along the journey.

There is recognition more work must be done across the whole financial sector to fully understand the potential a move towards digital channels and solutions can have on citizens, whilst ensuring that no-one is left behind or excluded by doing so. This is reinforced through the MaPS Wales delivery plan where digital exclusion is recognised as 1 of 6 key barriers affecting long-term saving levels. By ensuring all citizens are digitally confident we will have a positive impact on

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Wales, with everyone able to enjoy a healthy financial future and have the opportunity to make the most of their money and pensions. The Strategy and Delivery Plan acknowledge there is a need for cross sector commitment to support everyone to gain the motivation, confidence and basic digital skills necessary to make informed decisions to choose how to participate in digital.

Within her Foreword for the Delivery Plan the Minister for Social Justice states:

“ This plan provides the continuing impetus necessary to tackle some of the social justice issues that I care about the most. I am also pleased that this delivery plan recognises the critical relationship between digital and financial inclusion as well as well-being. We have to ensure our citizens are digitally confident when accessing services online and that no citizen is left behind. I look forward to it driving us towards a financially resilient, fairer, and more prosperous Wales. ”

Below is an example intervention, funded by The Welsh Government, which is aimed at supporting those facing digital and financial exclusion.

The Big Issue

Through a networking discussion at a national digital event prior to the pandemic, officials had the opportunity to discuss the issue of financial and digital exclusion for Big Issue vendors. We were keen to explore a way in which we could ensure appropriate support is in place, through the Big Issue, for vendors to become digitally confident and therefore develop their financial skills. The pandemic further highlighted the impact on vendors who did not have the basic digital skills with the need to shift to contactless payment for services and goods across the UK – for example selling the Big Issue magazine. Working with the Big Issue, we have funded a twelve month ‘Digital and Financial Inclusion Co-ordinator for Wales’ post, with the aim to play a vital role in ensuring that 80% of Welsh vendors (total number currently 207) are able to accept contactless payments. A blog by the Big Issue in May 2021 helped demonstrate how **‘going cashless has paid off’**.

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Since starting in August 2021, the co-ordinator has already helped support 48 vendors to accept contactless payments; 16 vendors to purchase and use a smartphone and 11 vendors assisted to gain personal identification documents. This is the first digital and financial inclusion co-ordinator post within the Big Issue across the UK Nations, one which is being monitored closely for impact to consider national roll-out.

Area of focus: 6

“ We will consider how support for the social housing sector can be developed and delivered consistently to ensure residents can engage with and benefit from digital services e.g. reporting faults with housing, managing finances digitally and maintaining social connections with friends and families. ”

Progress

Our engagement, as officials, within the social housing sector has been limited. Through DCW we continue to work with and provide support to housing associations across Wales, building on the recognition of the high proportion of social housing tenants who are digitally excluded (National Survey for Wales, April – June 2021, 12%). Only through engagement with the housing associations will we develop our understanding of how to implement consistent support to overcome barriers those residents may face to engaging with digital. The following examples, while in response to the pandemic, help demonstrate the range of interventions DCW support.

Newydd Housing Association

Who are a key member of the Get the Vale Online (GTVO) network, have supported and driven the local authority to develop the Vale Tablet Loan scheme. This allows citizens to loan a tablet device, with an internet connection,

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from their local library much as they would for loaning a book.

Aelwyd Housing Association

Based in South Wales, deliver a digital project which aims to ensure their residents are able to access services, manage their health and well-being and to maintain social interaction online. Aelwyd identified that many of their residents are not digitally confident but are keen to overcome these barriers. Working with DCW, the project will focus on lending devices to residents and provide training to address basic digital skills. An initial twelve residents have been identified and they will be trained to become Digital Champions with the aim to pass on their knowledge to others.

First Choice Housing Association (FCHA)

Provide accommodation solutions for people with disabilities, veterans and those with additional complex needs across Wales and Shropshire. Working with DCW, FCHA, developed an intervention to procure and distribute devices to their tenants who have been identified, through a basic digital skills audit, as digitally excluded. DCW have supported the provision of devices with training and support, with the aim to ensure tenants understand the benefits being digitally included can make to people with existing health conditions, physical or learning disabilities and mental health issues. [First Choice Housing Association Case Study](#).

Summary

While the information provided above details the positive actions undertaken to date in addressing digital exclusion in Wales, more needs to be done. In Wales, we continue to use the National Survey for Wales as our robust data source, April to June 2021 (Quarter 1) states that 7% of Welsh adults (age 16 and over) do not personally use the internet. Although this is an improvement of 3% since July 2020, there remains a pressing need to further address digital inequalities.

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We remain committed to engage those with lived experience of being digitally excluded. When easement of pandemic restrictions allow, we will undertake some community level engagement. It is vitally important to gather lived experience of digital exclusion from those in our priority groups including social housing residents, ethnic minority communities, older people and those with disabilities and health conditions.

Digital inclusion is recognised as a critical social justice and equalities challenge.

Through the Digital Strategy for Wales, a programme for Government commitment, we will continue to work to ensure the actions set out in the **Digital Strategy Delivery Plan** are delivered upon. This will help to achieve our aim to 'equip people with the motivation, access, skills and confidence to engage with an increasingly digital world, based on their needs'.

Our work will again be strengthened through our procured digital inclusion and health programme, Digital Communities Wales: digital confidence, health and well-being (DCW) which has been extended by a further three years until June 2025. The £2million per annum programme, which is jointly funded by the Welsh Government Social Justice and Health, will continue to act as a critical way of reaching and engaging with organisations who are best placed to reach those digitally excluded.

We will also continue to work with and learn from stakeholders and organisations across the UK and wider on ways to positively impact and make progress in addressing the fundamental digital inequalities.

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