



Let's Get Digital, Durham Event

24th October 2024

Feedback from the community on DSIT's four pillars of digital inclusion



The *Let's Get Digital* event on digital inclusion was held in the Great Hall and Lantern Room of Durham Town Hall on 24 October 2024. 94 people registered for the event. Delegates on the day included representatives from the public, private and voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors.

Findings from the workshops

Delegates worked in groups on the four pillars of digital inclusion identified by the Government's Department of Science, Innovation and Technology. They were asked to reflect on Access, Services, Skills and Confidence and to suggest what might lead to better digital inclusion.

The groups discussed some of the areas of life that are better or easier when people are digitally included. Several communities of interest that might face challenges were identified.

Having safe and accessible places with trusted people/digital champions with flexible learning offers was seen as important. Staff and volunteers will require soft skills to be effective. Digital hubs, libraries and GP surgeries were specifically mentioned as venues where people could potentially develop digital motivation, skills and confidence. Home visits were also viewed as important. Although digital champions might come from different age groups, younger people such as students were specifically highlighted.

Whilst the advantages of technology are to be celebrated, it was felt that a blended approach with human warmth was the ideal. It was also mentioned that coproduction and working with vulnerable communities is the way forward.

There was mention of ensuring larger organisations have joined-up thinking so that reflecting on digital inclusion is something for all departments.

Online safety must be a priority so people can avoid fraud and abuse.

Digital inclusion also requires reliable and affordable connectivity, digital devices and data.

Funding was mentioned time and time again as vital if we really want to tackle the digital divide. Along with the expected things that might be funded such as connectivity, digital champion projects and kit, several delegates highlighted the need for a funded publicity

campaign to make the population at large aware of the challenges around digital exclusion and just how many people are increasingly left behind. Family, friends and neighbours can have a part to play. Findings were as follows:

Digital exclusion affects so many areas of life ...

Housing

Health/NHS App

Employment

Welfare benefits

Access to banking

Access to utilities

Financial advice

Access to education/learning

Access to transport

Access to news

Access to hobbies

Access to community combating social isolation.

The impacts of digital exclusion include ...

Fear of being scammed

Social isolation

Struggle to integrate.

Increased chances of reoffending

Falling behind/disadvantaged

Missing out on the benefits and opportunities of the new world

Specific communities of interest face particular challenges. These include ...

Elderly

Asylum seekers/refugees

People whose first language is not English.

Young people who cannot afford the tech.

People who are not in the education system

People who are poor/living in deprived communities

People who do not have a home.

People with learning disabilities

People with physical disabilities

Carers

People in rural communities

Care leavers

People who don't want (or are scared or overwhelmed by) digital.

Services Pillar

Services need to be adaptive and flexible.

People need to be invited into the digital sphere/service by a trusted person as this builds their confidence.

Face to face services are shutting down. How can we replace them with an app? Sad face – losing the value of personal connection. How about a blended approach drawing on the strengths of face-to-face and digital?

Important to design tech and digital services using coproduction with the most marginalised and vulnerable. Takes longer to do but leads to better services.

Staff need an understanding of digital exclusion issues, know about tech and have the soft skills to support customers with digital skills and confidence.

Volunteers and digital champions can help so we need more of them.

Connectivity and access to devices are needed for people to make the most of digital services.

There is a move to AI and services need to take that into account and support people in understanding AI.

Design health services with an understanding of patient needs. Allow time and other resources to help patients with apps and digital aspects of healthcare.

Consideration needs to be given to online safety including for young people.

Accessibility issues should be considered.

Holistic educational programmes.

Skills Pillar

Table 1

Digital skills levy

Support and training people to access online Government, local council and health services.

Internet banking training and support needed.

Social Media training and support needed.

Age specific training and support required.

Embed employability skills.

Find the hook that people will relate to as this motivates them to develop digital skills.

1-2-1 upskilling incorporating the human element such as digital champions.

Access to kit – tablet/phone/laptop

Library input

Volunteers have a part to play.

More funding is needed for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector as trusted organisations who can provide digital motivation, confidence and skills.

Funding to connect community buildings and village halls to fibre broadband free of charge in perpetuity.

Funding for publicity campaigns to encourage and inform about digital inclusion.

All local authorities should have Digital Skills Officers.

More joined up thinking about digital inclusion across different local authority departments and with other agencies such as those involved in healthcare.

Public bodies should be mandated to repurpose and/or donate IT kit.

Sharing stories/exemplars of best practice

Table 2

Funding for charities so they can identify and support the digitally excluded.

Bring resources into the community.

Consider the challenges in rural communities.

Take resources to those who cannot access libraries etc.

1-2-1 support at home or in advertised groups.

Target common services that everyone needs.

Tailor an appropriate engagement strategy and get more people engaged and willing to help as digital champions.

University engagement to identify digital champions.

Understand individual needs and create education plans based on those needs.

Have a variety of options available.

Donate to educate? Make physical resources available nationally.

Confidence Pillar

Table 1

Include the individual's support system – relatives and friends etc.

Digital hubs in convenient locations where people can drop in for support.

Funding for more community workers/digital champions

Services need to be aware of and signpost to/feed into voluntary sector support available.

Treat everyone as an individual.

Build digital confidence into everyday conversations with service providers.

Work on stopping scammers and phishing attacks.

AI needs to be moderated.

More onus on social media companies to remove harmful content. Scams etc. Moderate more. Harsh penalties for companies that don't do these things.

Education

Table 2

Use digital champions.

Build confidence in staff and volunteers who can then filter their learning to and set the scene for service users.

Free training

Peer supported learning

Basic IT skills training

Government funded Broadband.

Hubs for drop-in and informal digital support based in communities. No need to enrol.

Continuous support on an ongoing basis

Consider what the individual learner wants and go at their pace even if that is slow.

Home visits to provide digital skills support.

Confidence does not exist alone - must be considered in the context of the other pillars.

Protect people.

Need a cultural shift and behavioural change.

Understand some people don't like the move to digital.

Access Pillar

Table 1

Funding is needed for locations, devices, connectivity and delivery.

Give people digital skills training and support at a basic level and build on that with more people on the ground to help with skills and confidence such as digital champions.

Good and affordable Broadband needed in all areas.

Recycling and rebooting of older devices.

Further education colleges and universities – more remote learning.

More infrastructure – IT

Consider the specific needs of rural areas and other geographical differences.

Simplify online forms and services.

Review processes - should they be easier?

Give people a choice – don't preach!

Table 2

Simplify forms/processes.

Have alternative provision for those who are not online.

Educate everyone from children upwards.

Access is good but consider online safety as a priority.

Devices are great but need education in how to use them.

Funding for digital support and training

Consider connectivity issues.

Consider affordability.

Delegates' reflections on their DI knowledge

- "I thought I knew quite a lot about digital exclusion but was surprised (and pleased) that the event broadened my knowledge and found it really thought provoking."
- "Discovering the various barriers that affect all different types of people and thinking of ways to overcome them to ensure digital inclusion not exclusion."
- "The event has made me realise the real struggles that people have if they don't have the digital means or skills to complete simple everyday tasks such as accessing the NHS app. I am more aware of how this can make people feel and was really shocked to learn how many people were in this situation. It has inspired me, in my job role and personal life, to help as many people as I can."

Delegates' insights & actions

- "That young people have a huge part to play in shaping this agenda they are often forgotten or not listened to."
- "That there is a need for change and support, that we all have a part to play."

Some delegates were able to identify immediate action points to improve their digital inclusion efforts.

- "Will adapt how we target our non-digital tenants and provide support, focusing more on communal areas working in communities."
- "Try to encourage my volunteers to become more digital."
- "Ask members about gaining more confidence in IT."
- "I intend to spread the word among council colleagues to raise greater awareness around digital exclusion and encourage them to factor this into their roles."

Delegates' social media comments

"From sharing insights to exploring innovative solutions, this event truly highlighted the power of collaboration in creating a more digitally inclusive society."

"Fantastic session, leading to great networking links!!"

"Exciting to see social value come to life in Durham."

"So many new connections made! Lots to process. We have to keep the momentum going."

"I am always astounded at the stats. Digital inclusion needs to be on everyone's agenda."

"A great day spent at Durham City Hall learning about Digital Unite's initiative -Let's Get Digital Durham. It was wonderful to share ideas, challenge assumptions and find ways to bridge the digital divide together."

Conclusion

The *Let's Get Digital* event was a success at bringing individuals from diverse organisations and different sectors together to reflect on digital exclusion and to consider how they could act to bring about greater digital inclusion.

It was engaging and empowering for delegates to understand more about DSIT's Four Pillars of digital inclusion and to be encouraged to feel part of the national debate.

If DSIT is motivated to support digital inclusion promotion and delivery on a local level at national scale, the engagement with and empowerment of local people and organisations will be key.



Such an inspiring event! It was great to connect with others passionate about digital inclusion and share ideas on how we can make real improvements. The discussions were thought-provoking, and I'm excited to see where it goes from here.

Shauna Nixon, Building Self-Belief CIO