

Digital Inclusion Alliance for Wales

From Inclusion to Resilience

An agenda for digital inclusion



Contents

About Us	2
Why digital inclusion matters to Wales	3
Priority 1: Embedding digital inclusion across all sectors	5
Priority 2: Mainstreaming digital inclusion in health and social care	7
Priority 3: Addressing data poverty as a key issue	9
Priority 4: Prioritising digital skills in the post-Covid economy	11
Priority 5: Setting a new minimum digital living standard and adopting co-production approaches	12
Appendix: Current members of Digital Inclusion Alliance for Wales	13
References	14



About us

Digital Inclusion Alliance for Wales (DIAW) is an umbrella group of organisations committed to taking joint action to significantly shift the digital inclusion agenda in Wales. We are an open, informal network of individuals and organisations with a firm commitment to social justice and equality.

DIAW was created as part of the Welsh Government funded Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being programme, delivered by the Wales Co-operative Centre.

We know that no single government programme can deliver everything that needs to be done to reach everyone who requires digital inclusion support in Wales. There is an urgent need for the responsibility for digital inclusion to be highlighted as a priority for all organisations that work with the public through digital channels. It is our aim, therefore, to create a dynamic movement across Wales, where all key stakeholders can come together under one banner: Digital Inclusion Alliance for Wales.

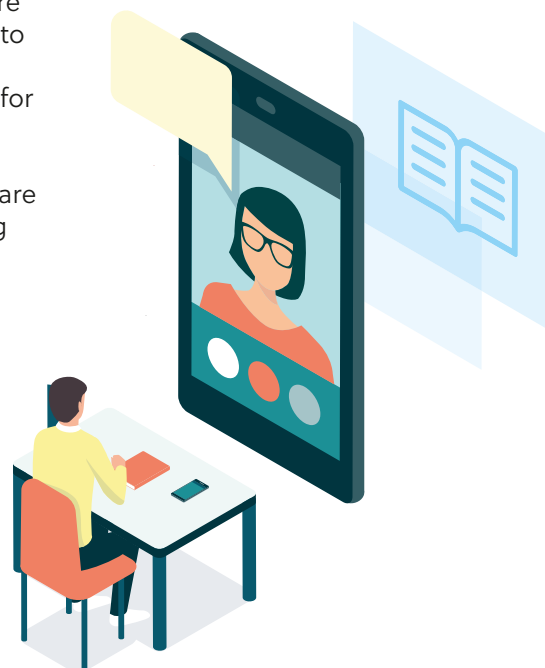
We are seeking collaboration across all sectors to improve the lives of some of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens. The decisions that we make as a nation as we rebuild and reset Wales following the Covid-19 pandemic will have long-term implications for our communities and the people who live in them.

In this brief paper we set out our agenda for making progress on this pressing and urgent issue. We have identified five priority areas where a real difference can be made so that everyone in Wales, who needs to and wants to, can access and benefit from the internet and digital technology. We have outlined the key outcomes that we want to see for each priority.

We hope that you will share our ambition and, whichever sector you are in, consider how you and your organisation can play a part in making Wales an exemplar for digital inclusion.



Professor Hamish Laing
Chair: Digital Inclusion Alliance for Wales
@DIAW



Why digital inclusion matters to Wales

Although the internet has been with us for 30 years, the growth of daily online activity in recent years has been dramatic. From shopping to banking, learning to socialising – for many of us, digital is now the default.

Through the Covid-19 crisis, everyday and essential services have moved online, and more people have needed to become more active in the online world. Covid-19 has also further exposed deep digital divides in Wales and exacerbated existing inequalities. Many children and young people have been unable to access learning online, patients have been unable to take part in video consultations, relatives have been unable to connect with loved ones isolated in hospital or care homes... the list goes on.

As our need grows for affordable, secure, reliable access to the internet in order to participate in daily life, tackling digital exclusion in a meaningful and holistic way becomes more urgent. Those 'left behind' are falling further behind and Covid-19 has shone a bright light on digital inequalities. Addressing this is essential for a just and equal society and it requires sustained intervention, resourcing, and prioritising. Wales must now step up to the challenge.

The four main barriers to participation are cost (of data as well as devices), connectivity, motivation and skills.

The context

The National Survey for Wales found that 90% of adults (aged 16 and over) said they personally use the internet in 2019/20.¹ This is up from 77% in 2012/13 but falls short of where Wales needs to be as a digitally-inclusive nation.

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. The four main barriers to participation are cost (of data as well as devices), connectivity, motivation and skills. Concerns about online safety - and not knowing where to start or get help - are also obstacles to be overcome.



¹ National Survey for Wales 2019/20

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.²

Public Health Wales reported that two thirds of people over 16 in Wales used digital technology to support their health in 2019.³ While 87% of 16-29 year olds reported using digital technology for their health, this fell to just 24% of those aged 70 and older.⁴ Only 51% of people in the most deprived areas used digital technology for their health, compared to 84% in the least deprived areas in Wales.⁵ And while 10% of the Welsh public say they don't use the internet this rises to 18% for those with limiting long-standing illness, disability or infirmity.

As more essential services are moving online (some at a very rapid pace since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic) the need for Wales to improve its levels of digital inclusion has never been more pressing.

The Welsh Government has recently published its 'Digital Inclusion Forward Look: towards a digitally confident Wales', setting out its areas of focus for the next 12 months, ahead of the publication of its next Strategic Framework in Winter 2021. We are pleased to see the ongoing commitment of the Welsh Government to digital inclusion and we will continue to engage actively with the consultation process for this framework.

In this paper we set out five priority areas that the Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales will prioritise and ask others to do the same, as we engage with stakeholders across all sectors in Wales to improve the digital inclusion and confidence of our citizens:

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

² Good Things Foundation (2020a)

³ This means using digital technology to find information about general health, health services, or activities to support health, or for self-diagnosis, tracking personal health goals, managing a long-term condition, making a healthcare appointment, finding emotional support online, managing medication or other supplements.

⁴ Public Health Wales 2019

⁵ Public Health Wales 2019

Priority 1**Embedding digital inclusion across all sectors**

The Alliance wants to see an end to digital exclusion in Wales. We recognise that it is unrealistic to expect 100% of our citizens to be online – some people will choose not to engage with digital technology and the internet for a range of reasons and will never be online. What we mean by an end to digital exclusion is for Wales to reach a position where everyone who wants or needs to can confidently access the internet and digital technology - including those with additional access needs.

For this to happen there must be a concerted effort by all sectors across Wales. The Alliance seeks to work with key stakeholders to ensure that digital inclusion is mainstreamed across the public, private and third sectors. We will seek collaboration with colleagues across Welsh Government to position digital inclusion as a cross-cutting priority for all areas - including anti-poverty initiatives and national well-being.

Digital inclusion is critical to each of the seven national well-being goals enshrined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act - in particular, for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, and healthier Wales. We will seek to encourage the Future Generations Commissioner to consider setting explicit objectives for digital inclusion.

We are pleased to see the Centre for Digital Public Services established and providing support across the public sector in Wales. It is still very early days, but we hope to see the work of the Centre bearing fruit and helping organisations develop their service delivery in a citizen centred way. We also welcome the appointment of a Chief Digital Officer for Local Government and a similar position proposed for Health and Social Care.

But all these initiatives must have digital inclusion at their heart. If any services are going to work, then they must be accessible to all, including the most vulnerable service users. This is a significant and complex challenge for organisations and it is essential that ongoing research, learning and innovation is a key element of all design and delivery. Understanding the ever changing and multi-faceted needs of the most vulnerable service users is essential, and a full understanding of what it means to be digitally excluded is crucial.

Every business case for digital investment in the public sector should include a clear statement of how digital inclusion will be supported, and how service design and evaluation will place service users' experience at the centre - including users with low or limited digital skills.





Digital inclusion is not only a job for the government. A great deal has already been achieved through Welsh Government's Digital Communities Wales programmes and other local digital inclusion initiatives across Wales. We want this progress to be built on and extended beyond individual programmes and projects - applying the learning, skills and experience to the new post Covid-19 context we will be living in. This includes local authorities and others actively supporting community organisations, libraries and others in the voluntary sector to respond to community needs for digital inclusion.⁶ It also includes the private sector stepping up and investing in digital inclusion initiatives alongside developing new digital products and services.

Through a partnership of mutual understanding and co-operation we believe, for example, that communications providers can work with the public and third sectors to expand the digital inclusion initiatives they have undertaken and push the boundaries further. From data sharing to low-cost offers, communications providers can promote and provide potential solutions to some pieces of the digital exclusion jigsaw in Wales.

The Welsh Government should look to lead on creating the conditions for change by promoting the role of the private, voluntary and community sectors in digital inclusion as providers of goods, services, solutions and community support. It requires a proactive approach from all sectors, working together, to make a co-ordinated, concerted effort to tackle the stubborn levels of digital exclusion that persist.

Key Outcomes

- **A bold Welsh Government delivery plan with a clear roadmap for ending digital exclusion in Wales.**
- **Explicit targets for digital inclusion in each of the seven national Well-being Goals for Wales.**
- **Digital inclusion of service users and staff as a core element of all public sector digital transformation projects.**
- **Further action to address digital exclusion across the private sector – especially by communications providers.**

⁶ Good Things Foundation (2020b)

Priority 2 Mainstreaming digital inclusion in health and social care

The role of digital in our NHS and in public health has been growing for years. Health boards and trusts, the NHS Wales Informatics Service, Public Health Wales and local authorities are creating 'digital first' services and adopting digital solutions to improve health and well-being.⁷ In 2021, a new platform - Digital Services for the Public and Patients - will be launched. Covid-19 has accelerated this transformation.

On the 50th anniversary of its original description⁸, we must avoid creating a digital "Inverse Care Law" in Wales - leaving behind those who could benefit most from new models of care.⁹ Digital - access, skills and confidence - is now being recognised as a social determinant of health¹⁰ and if implemented thoughtfully, digital approaches can help close the health inequality gap. Without addressing digital inclusion, they risk exacerbating the widening difference in health outcomes for our communities.

We seek to support the Welsh Government and the NHS in Wales to implement the recommendations made in *Digital Inclusion in Health and Care in Wales*¹¹ and *Leave No-One Behind*¹² - a landmark report from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales. Implementing these will improve people's lives, save time and costs, and support more effective health and care.

The pandemic has also taught us that the connectivity of our homes has a huge bearing on our ability to engage with health services online. We encourage Welsh Government and other key stakeholders to ensure equal access to health services by addressing gaps in connectivity at home. We understand the limitations regarding what can be achieved within the devolved powers and we welcome the approach outlined in Mission 5 of the evolving Digital Strategy - particularly the establishment of the [Barrier Busting taskforce](#), bringing together key actors to work collaboratively to address some of the complex issues of connectivity. We would also like to see requirements for all new social housing to include good digital connectivity as standard.



⁷See <https://phw.nhs.wales/files/research/population-health-in-a-digital-age/>

⁸Hart, Julian Tudor (1971)

⁹Wales Co-operative Centre with Carnegie UK Trust 2018

¹⁰Good Things Foundation (2020c)

¹¹Wales Co-operative Centre 2018

¹²Older People's Commissioner for Wales 2020

The proposed appointment of a Chief Digital Officer for Health and Social Care and the new Digital Special Health Authority are opportunities for the benefits of digital to be realised by all. This new body should be an exemplar for our NHS and social care; making the applications, websites and products it is responsible for accessible, inclusive and user-centred. The voices of people who face barriers to using digital must be heard at all stages of development and operation.

Savings from delivering services digitally should be used to improve digital inclusion and provide digital support. It is essential that accessible information practices are embedded across the NHS to ensure that everyone can confidently access health and care services on digital platforms.

We must ensure that each person in the Welsh health and social care workforce, including those who are unemployed and seeking work in these difficult economic circumstances, is given the necessary training to develop the digital skills needed to participate safely and effectively in the post-Covid digital economy. This is discussed in more detail in Priority 4 and is vital for those working in health and social care.

There is already good practice to build on through Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being programme, alongside learnings from outside Wales.¹³

Key Outcomes

- **All health and care providers in Wales recognise digital inclusion - access, skills and confidence - as a key determinant of health.**
- **Strategies and delivery plans for public health are required to address digital inequalities.**
- **Health and social care providers ensure that patients and carers can access relevant and appropriate digital skills support. This includes ensuring that the Welsh health and social care workforce is given the necessary training to develop the digital skills required to participate safely and effectively in the post-Covid digital economy.**
- **The recommendations in Digital Inclusion in Health and Care in Wales 2018 are revisited and implemented in full by the appropriate bodies.**
- **Addressing digital inclusion is a mandatory requirement in investment decisions by the Welsh Government and the Digital Special Health Authority, health boards, trusts and social care providers.**



¹³ Good Things Foundation (2020c)

Priority 3

Addressing data poverty as a key issue

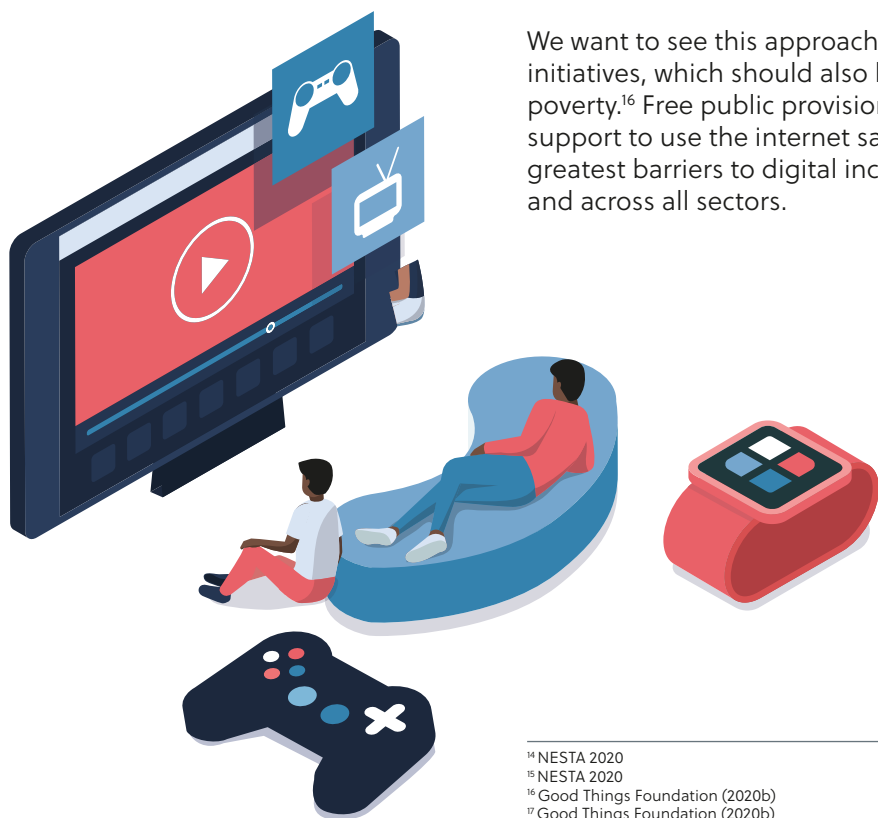
Data poverty has been made even more visible through the Covid-19 pandemic as many households have struggled to engage fully in the online world, due to the cost of data and devices. In Wales, as elsewhere, the pandemic has surfaced stories of families having to choose between data or dinner.¹⁴ New research by NESTA defines data poverty as: “those individuals, households or communities who cannot afford sufficient, private and secure mobile or broadband data to meet their essential needs.”¹⁵ Further research is now needed on the impact and scale of data poverty in Wales. This includes understanding the costs of data poverty to public services. We understand that NESTA is planning further research and we would welcome any additional discovery work in this very important area.

We would also welcome the exploration of how data poverty and access to digital support could be added to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) in a measurable way. We strongly believe that internet access needs to be recognised as an essential utility and we want to see sectors working together to make this a reality.

We understand the complexity of this issue, but the Covid-19 pandemic has pushed this to the top of the political agenda across the world and we believe there is learning to be taken from other countries. Finland, for example, became the first country in the world to make broadband access a legal right over ten years ago and in 2016 the UN declared that access to the internet was a human right. We would be keen to support any international research into this area.

We would like to see a joined-up approach across sectors that takes steps to promote the development of sustainable and co-produced solutions to data poverty. These might include solutions that encourage a culture of sharing and solidarity (such as data-donating and WiFi sharing), as well as social tariffs, social prescribing, and the extension of public WiFi across Wales.

We want to see this approach extended to all anti-poverty policies and initiatives, which should also be expected to recognise and address data poverty.¹⁶ Free public provision of WiFi alongside community-based support to use the internet safely is essential for those who face the greatest barriers to digital inclusion.¹⁷ Action will be needed at all levels and across all sectors.



¹⁴ NESTA 2020

¹⁵ NESTA 2020

¹⁶ Good Things Foundation (2020b)

¹⁷ Good Things Foundation (2020b)

We would like to see if there are lessons to be learned from Connecting Scotland; a partnership between the Scottish Government, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and local government.¹⁸ Significant financial investment has been made by Scottish Government into this joined-up approach across agencies bringing together kit, connectivity, data and ongoing skills support in one initiative. There are some similarities with Welsh Government's Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being programme (DCW), but the level of financial investment in Scotland is significantly higher and the initiative is targeted directly at low-income households without reliable affordable internet, rather than the broader remit of DCW.

Key Outcomes

- Internet access is recognised as an essential utility in Wales.
- There is free public provision of WiFi and community-based support for digital inclusion across all areas of Wales.
- Cross-sector collaboration takes place to research and design sustainable solutions to data poverty.
- The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation is explored to see how it might be possible to include data poverty and digital support in a measurable way.



¹⁸ Connecting Scotland 2020

Priority 4 Prioritising digital skills in the post-Covid economy

Unemployment is projected to reach 2.6m across the UK in the middle of 2021.¹⁹ In Wales, digital skills in the workforce will be essential to economic recovery. Even before Covid-19, an estimated 82% of UK jobs required some digital skills.²⁰

However, too many people in our communities and our workforce still do not have these skills.²¹ This is about the essential skills needed to find, search and apply for work, and for use in everyday jobs and workplaces. Even where people are online and have limited skills, more needs to be done to ensure they have the core skills needed to participate in our changing economy.

Working collaboratively with Welsh Government and wider sectors, the Alliance will strive to ensure the digital skills agenda is targeted at those people and places most likely to lack basic digital skills. In order to do this, we first need to understand the digital skills of the Welsh workforce. This is not about data analytics and high-end digital competence – but without the core basic digital skills our workforce will be unable to survive and thrive in our changing economy.

Any intervention must reach unemployed people and those in work who need to upskill or retrain to keep pace with change. In our city regions, we need basic digital skills in the workforce as well as digital infrastructure, innovation, and specialist skills.

Covid-19 has also had a huge impact on the children and young people of Wales and their education. The cost of devices and connectivity has put extra pressures on families, and on schools, creating new barriers for pupils from poorer backgrounds.²² In addition, Covid-19 has highlighted the gap in digital inclusion for disabled people, and targeted support is necessary to ensure young disabled people are able to access their education.



Key Outcomes

- Every adult seeking work or at risk of redundancy has access to appropriate, ongoing basic digital skills training and confidence building. This needs to be face-to-face where required; it is not sufficient to put learning resources online and assume that the people who need them can and will access them.
- A digital skills audit of employees across Wales is undertaken.
- Businesses and employers across Wales train and upskill their workforce in core digital skills.
- City region strategies consider how they can promote and invest in basic digital skills.

¹⁹ Office for Budget Responsibility 2020

²⁰ Cited in Good Things Foundation (2020b)

²¹ Lloyds Consumer Digital Index 2020

²² Teach First 2020

Priority 5

Setting a new minimum digital living standard and adopting co-production approaches

Co-design and co-production are fundamental to all the proposals we have recommended. The voice of people who have lived experience of digital exclusion must be heard when designing, developing and evaluating policies and programmes. This is essential for public services to be truly inclusive, and for digital inclusion policy initiatives to have a real impact.²³

When designing and delivering services we would like to see all sectors adopting methods of co-production which reflect the diversity of our communities. Particular effort is needed to engage under-represented minority ethnic, refugee and migrant communities; as well as older people and those with disabilities or limiting health conditions who face greater risk of digital and social exclusion.

Digital technology enables us to create a platform for all voices in our communities to be heard. We support calls for a digitally-led Welsh Citizens' Assembly. Digital democracy can reach under-represented voices, but only when digital inclusion is actively resourced and supported. There are lessons to be learned from best practice across the world which - together with co-design and co-production - can forge a more inclusive Welsh digital democracy.

There is an opportunity to use co-design and citizen engagement tools and a cross-sector approach to lead the world in establishing a 'Minimum Digital Living Standard for Wales' - an agreed standard of what it is to be digitally included in modern Wales, aligned with our national Well-being Goals. Such a standard should include devices and data, alongside skills, capabilities and support.²⁴ This is a complex area that needs further consideration, but it is an ambition that the Alliance would like to see fulfilled.

Key Outcomes

- All sectors make greater efforts to engage under-represented groups facing digital exclusion.
- The lived experience of digital exclusion is heard in policymaking processes.
- Co-production with citizens in policy design and service implementation is embedded across all services and sectors.
- Co-produced research to explore a 'minimum digital living standard for Wales' is undertaken by key bodies with the power to bring about change.
- A Welsh Citizens' Assembly is established that supports digital inclusion and is inclusive by design.



²³ Carnegie UK Trust 2020

²⁴ See Carnegie UK Trust 2020, Good Things Foundation (2020b)

Appendix: Current members of Digital Inclusion Alliance for Wales

Antur Teifi	Good Things Foundation
Board of Community Health Councils	HEIW
BT Wales	Innovate Trust
Caerphilly County Borough Council	Internet 4 Everyone
Caerphilly County Borough Council / ADSS	Microsoft
Cardiff & Vale UHB	Monmouthshire County Council
Care & Repair	National Libraries of Wales
Cartrefi Cymru	Older People's Commissioner
CAST	PAVS (Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services) on behalf of Third Sector Support Wales
Centre for Digital Public Services	Public Health Wales
Citizens Advice Bureau	RNIB
Clwyd Alyn Housing Association	Social Care Wales
Community Housing Cymru	Swansea University
Competition & Markets Authority	University of Wales Trinity St David's
Digital Communities Wales	Velindre University NHS Trust
Digital Inclusion Consultant	Wales Audit Office
Disability Accessibility Centre	Wales Co-operative Centre
Disability Wales	WCVA
Dŵr Cymru	Welsh NHS Confederation
Go Compare	



If you or your organisation would like to find out more about us and join the digital inclusion movement in Wales, please get in touch via diaw@wales.coop

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This paper has drawn on the extensive work on digital inclusion inside and outside of Wales, including:

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Digital
Communities
Wales

Digital Confidence,
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