

Digital Inclusion in County Durham

COSMB

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Introduction

Digital exclusion occurs when people lack the necessary digital skills or access to connectivity and/or devices, potentially putting them at a **significant disadvantage**.



Digital inclusion has been a national and local priority for more than a decade.

The Covid-19 pandemic led to the accelerated adoption of digital technology for many.

It also further exposed, and in some instances deepened, the digital divide.

There is now a risk the digital poverty gap is widening and will accelerate with the cost-of-living crisis.

A review was undertaken to better understand the digital inclusion landscape and inclusion inequality in County Durham.

It aimed to identify whether the current approach and wide range of initiatives, provided by both the council and external organisations, is delivering the best level of support for our residents.



Introduction

Digital inclusion is increasingly becoming an **essential** part of everyday life.

Benefits of a strategic approach to digital inclusion, alongside targeted intervention, may include support for population health management, wider social issues, economic growth and help close equality gaps.

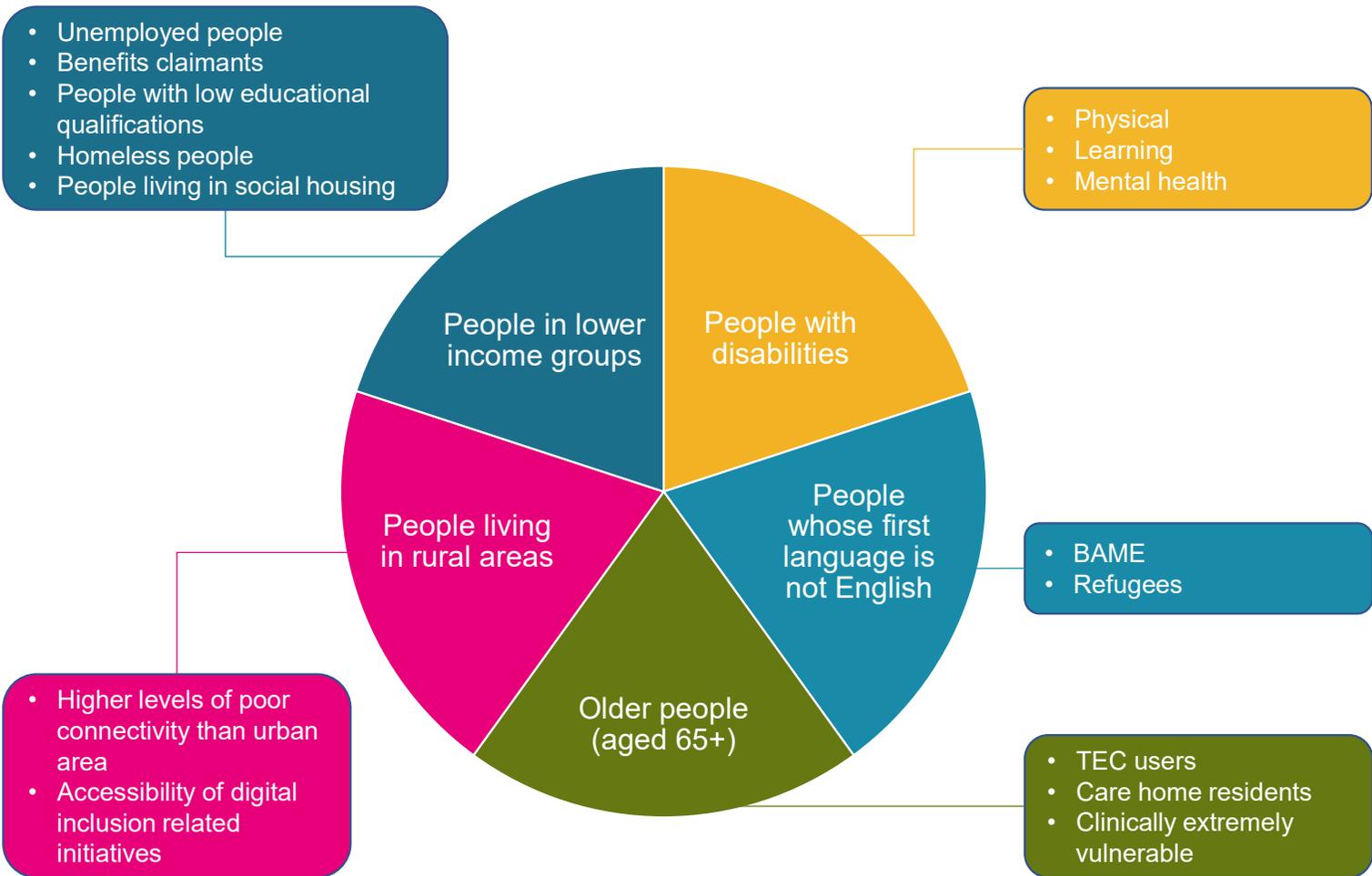


Being **digitally included** can connect people to:

- 1 better jobs
- 2 training and education
- 3 social interaction
- 4 public services
- 5 cheaper and more wide-ranging products and services

Who is most likely to be excluded

Government research has identified the population groups more likely to be digitally excluded than others. These groups can broadly be split into 5 categories.



How are they affected

Individuals may experience various aspects and levels of digital exclusion.

However, broadly, these are the five main ways people experience it.



- **Access to connectivity** – Lack of access to the Internet due to absence of infrastructure, poor speeds, unreliable service or affordability.
- **Access to devices** – Lack of access to a suitable digital device to fulfil a particular need, which may relate to accessibility issues or affordability.
- **Skills** – This may include a lack of literacy and/or the digital skills needed to safely participate in a digital world.
- **Confidence** - Some people lack confidence and trust in using devices and engaging with online services. Could be a fear of online crime, or simply not knowing where to start.
- **Motivation** - Some people do not want to develop digital skills or do not understand the benefits (e.g. financial, social, health and wellbeing) of digital inclusion. A lack of support or belief that it is too complicated and expensive can also be contributing factors.

Discovery: County Durham and regional statistics



Several datasets from trusted sources, including the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Ofcom and Lloyds Bank, provide contextual information on digital exclusion trends at a high level.

The research and analysis considered as part of the review indicates that many County Durham residents are confidently using the Internet; and a strong correlation between regional and local trends.

However, a proportion of people experience some form of digital exclusion that prevents them from fully benefiting from being online.

Whilst the reasons behind this can be specific to an individual, research generally indicates gaps are linked to poor connectivity, affordability in terms of broadband and/or device access, lack of skills and confidence or motivation.

Regional trends

- The North East has the second lowest digital capability, but is the region that has made the most progress with a 3% increase on 2021 figures (¹Lloyds Bank UK CDI 2022)
- One in ten people cannot complete any of the 26 Life tasks - this will hamper their ability to engage with online services, such as online banking, booking GP appointments, requesting prescriptions, online grocery shopping and scanning QR codes (¹Lloyds Bank UK CDI 2022)
- **County Durham insights**
 - 14% of residents are internet non-users which is the 12th highest ranking local authority in the UK (²ONS)
 - 14% of people do not feel confident going online (DCC survey 2021)
 - 12% of adults said poor connectivity stops them from going online (DCC survey 2021)

¹[2022 Consumer Digital Index](#) Lloyds Bank UK

²Never used the internet or have not used in the last 3 months (2020), [Office of National Statistics](#) (ONS)

Discovery: County Durham connectivity



The table details the tracked [broadband coverage measures for County Durham](#).

All measures continue to move in a positive direction.

Superfast levels have increased from c.60% to 97%, mainly as a result of delivery under Digital Durham.

Changes in technology and communication needs have resulted in a market shift to deliver new digital infrastructure capable of delivering gigabit capable broadband speeds. For comparison superfast is 30 Megabits per second (Mbps) and gigabit is 1,000 Mbps.

Government has set a minimum target of 85% gigabit coverage by the end of 2025, with the rollout expected to continue beyond that to 2030.

Digital Durham has an extensive programme of ongoing engagement with both Government and commercial infrastructure providers to encourage and support investment into the county with the aim of provisioning faster and more reliable connectivity.

Gigabit broadband is currently available to more than half of County Durham properties (c.53%).

Alongside commercial deployment, County Durham is also set to benefit from the first phase of government [Project Gigabit contracts](#) and [voucher projects](#) that will see gigabit broadband delivered to properties outside of commercial plans over the next 3 years.

Measure	³ Coverage Percentage
Properties with broadband speeds less than 10 Mbps (Legal Universal Service Obligation) – <i>low is good</i>	1.4%
Properties with broadband speeds of at least 30 Mbps (Superfast) - <i>high is good</i>	97.3%
Properties with broadband speeds of at least 100 Mbps (Ultrafast) – <i>high is good</i>	56.5%
Properties with access to gigabit-capable broadband (1000 Mbps) - <i>high is good</i>	52.6%

³Data download from [Thinkbroadband](#) 20 January 2023

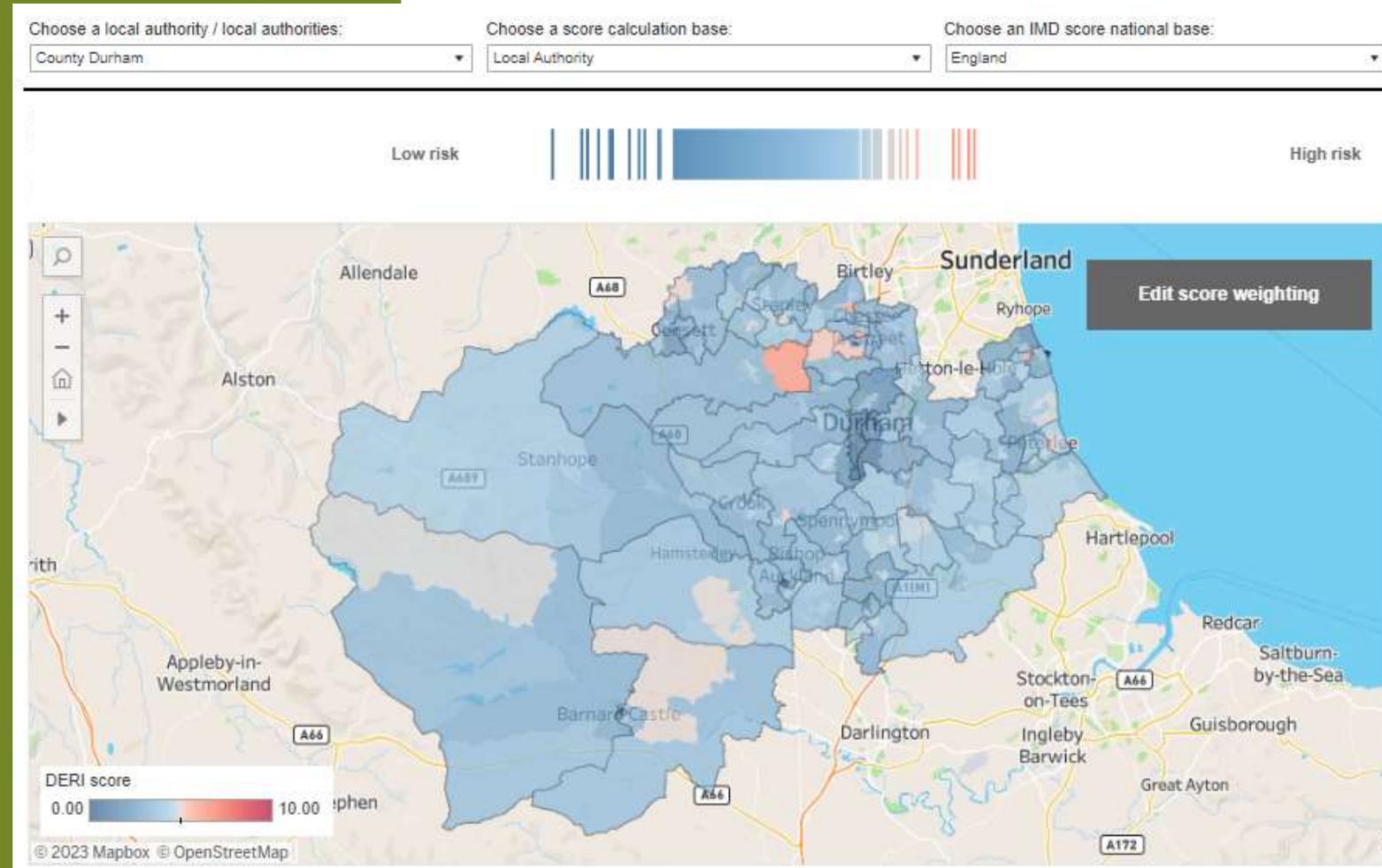
Discovery: Digital Exclusion Risk Index (DERI) tool



The [DERI](#) tool (developed by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority) brings together a broad set of 12 indicators (covering demography, deprivation, and broadband access) to create an overall DERI score for each Ward of between 0 (representing low risk of digital exclusion in that area) and 10 (representing high risk).

It visualises the risk, or likelihood, of digital exclusion for every Lower-Layer Super Output Area (LSOA).

County Durham ward scores currently range from 0.621 (Neville's Cross) to 6.058 (Lanchester).



Data download 27 January 2023

Discovery: Affordability likely to be a key factor

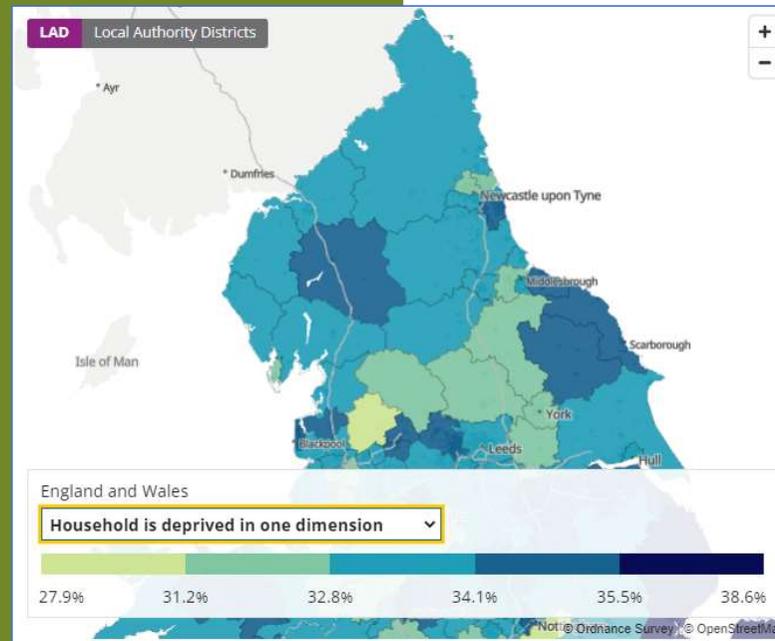


Statistics show there are at least one million households that struggle to afford Internet access in the UK today, and ten million adults lack the most basic digital skills preventing them from fully participating in our digital economy, effectively holding it back.

Figures indicate that by 2028, almost £22 billion will be missed as a direct result of digital exclusion.

With clear links between digital inclusion and economic growth, digital exclusion also needs to form part of the levelling up agenda to help ensure better equality.

- Data from the latest ⁴ONS census shows the North East is the part of England with the highest proportion of deprived households.
- The four dimensions used to classify deprivation are employment, education, health and disability and housing.



- A household is classified as deprived if it meets at least one of the four dimensions - 33.7% for County Durham⁵ (North East average is 54.6% and UK 51.7%).
- Affordability (in terms of access to connectivity or devices) is likely to be one of the key factors behind digital exclusion for some.

⁴[Household and resident characteristics](#), ONS census 2021

⁵[Household deprivation census map](#), ONS

Discovery: Baselining



High-level baselining activity was undertaken to identify the available internal and external digital inclusion related projects, initiatives and support available to County Durham residents.

Categorised under the headings of connectivity, devices and skills.

The examples provided are not an exhaustive list.

Most provision is not explicitly designed for a specific audience or need, however there do appear to be many programmes that support overcoming the barriers to employment.

Information on schemes is available on the [Digital Durham website](#) as well as being marketed to customer touchpoints and supporting partners for onward sharing. An online checker is currently in development to help signpost people to any initiatives.

Linking in with Corporate Communications to develop a 'digital' landing page on the DCC website to bring together the various council initiatives for easier finding.



- Project Gigabit – Government contracts for gigabit broadband delivery to properties outside of commercial delivery plans in Teesdale and the North East including County Durham
- Project Gigabit - Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme (GBVS) offering up to £7k per home or business to fund the installation of gigabit broadband to communities
- Project Gigabit – £1.5 million DCC funding to subsidise the cost of delivering gigabit broadband to the most hard-to-reach rural County Durham communities (if needed)
- Mapping of free to use public Wi-Fi supplied by the council or commercial outlets such as libraries, leisure centres and shopping centres
- Social tariffs - Discounted broadband and mobile services for those in receipt of certain benefits
- TalkTalk and DWP – Flexible Support Fund offering 6 months free broadband for job seekers



- Durham Works – Skills, qualifications, work experience and support for young people aged 16-24 living in County Durham who are not in education, employment or training
- Job Centre Plus – Support to develop basic digital skills to more advanced qualifications in coding and digital media.
- Job Centre Plus Skill-up helps upskill people to support the employment needs of the digital sector
- Free digital inclusion courses from DCC Adult Learning, providing basic skills to entry level qualifications
- Age UK online digital guides and IT training classes – 6 to 8 week tablet loan scheme and digital champions offering 1 to 1 or group digital support sessions
- Digital Training from Bishop Auckland College and New College Durham – Free Level 2 digital qualifications to anyone on means tested benefits
- Skills to succeed academy – Free and interactive training including technology at work for unemployed people
- Karbon Homes – Foundations for life skill training for residents
- Believe Housing - Principles for digital skills in employment training for residents
- Home Group - Achievement programme for residents
- Livin – Online digital skills training for residents



- Reboot scheme – Offering low cost, recycled council devices (laptops and desktops) to registered charities and social enterprises
- Get online at home – Scheme offering low cost recycled devices to anyone including discounted rates for those in receipt of certain benefits
- Family fund – Grants awarded to families raising disabled and seriously ill children and young people to purchase a computer or tablet
- Anchor - Be Digital offers a tablet loan scheme and 6 week digital training course to its customers.
- Vodafone – Devices donated by Vodafone and the public are recycled and distributed to refugees through the Refugee Council and Barnardo's as part of the Great British Tech Appeal
- Durham Advance – Provide access to digital equipment where's it's a barrier to people gaining employment

Discovery summary



- With increasing aspects of life taking place online, a more strategic and joined up approach to digital inclusion is required to support and mitigate the digital inclusion gap identified.
- While the pandemic did not create the digital divide, it did further expose it, and whilst it pushed some to become digital included, others remain excluded – leading to this review to understand if the current approach and wide range of activities are delivering the best level of support for our residents.
- There are numerous initiatives aimed at providing access to devices, connectivity and developing digital skills. However, the current approach to tackling digital exclusion is fragmented, with a mixture of activities at a local, regional and national level, targeting separate groups and challenges. Alongside DCC interventions, there are Government, private sector and VSCE organisations providing various initiatives.

Despite all the work that is going on across the sector, gaps remain, and as we move out of the pandemic into the cost-of-living crisis, work in this sector becomes increasingly important.

Conclusions

- This baselining review and best practice research has demonstrated we would benefit from a more co-ordinated approach. Some clear priorities and opportunities have been identified, and the work has validated that the establishment of a working group, delivery plan and business case for future funding applications would be of value.
- A key aim will be setting out of a vision for digital inclusion that is centrally accountable but delivered through strong stakeholder partnerships.



Data led diagnosis



Customer insights



Asset and activity mapping



Identification of local priorities

This is an opportunity to link the relevant stakeholders, strategies, processes and technology to deliver the desired outcomes to address digital exclusion in County Durham.

Take residents on a digital journey

Helping people not only to access our services, but to gain confidence in using technology in a way that helps them in their daily lives.



- Device access
- Connectivity costs
- Broadband speeds
- Mobile signal
- Skills, confidence and trust
- Motivation and interest
- Language barriers
- Health and disability
- Social isolation

“It isn’t about digital inclusion. It’s about

inclusion.

That’s a harder thing. It’s a mindset change.”

– Director of IT, Sense

“The root cause of **data poverty** is poverty.”

– Dr Emma Stone,
Good Things Foundation

The digital inclusion journey

Four essential steps:

Step 1:
Discovery

- Identify people
- Diagnose need
- Map assets
- Understand motivations

Step 2:
Development

- Build on local strengths
- Develop partnerships
- Set strategy

Step 3:
Delivery

- In-house
- Through partners
- Build community capacity

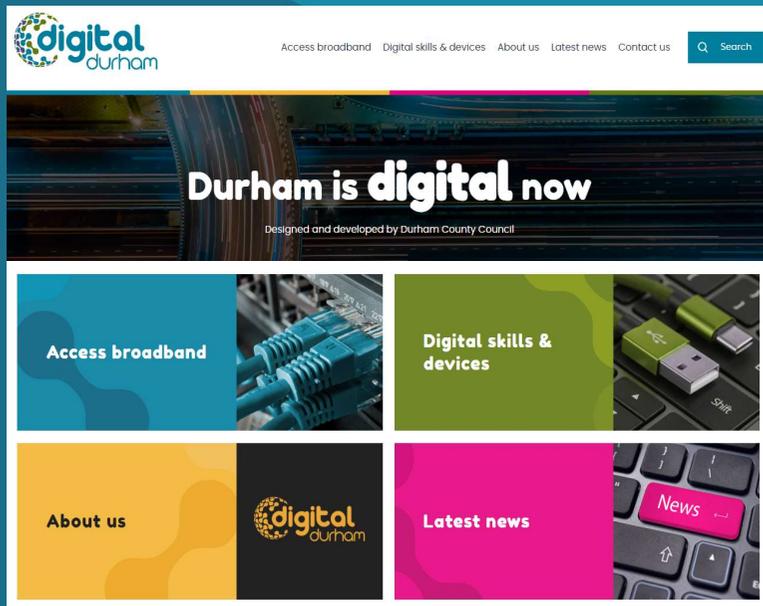
Step 4:
Evaluation

- Baselining
- Measure progress
- Lessons learned
- Adapt the offer
- Scale up

Organic
growth

- Working regionally and nationally
- Lobbying
- Funding and long-term investment

Next steps



- Gather stakeholder feedback on Digital Inclusion report, findings and proposed approach.
- Engagement with stakeholders to facilitate greater co-ordination, information sharing and potential partnership working and shared resources.
- Support the formulation of priorities and a delivery plan.
- Implement quick wins.
- Develop business cases for future funding to fill gaps.
- Holistic approach to marketing and branding to make it easier for end users to identify available support.
- Proactive monitoring for new opportunities and information sharing amongst stakeholders and a more co-ordinated approach to signposting.
- Ensure alignment with new DCC Digital and Inclusive Economic Strategies.

DCC digital skills training and adoption



Findings from the 2022 digital skills staff survey and initial feedback from digital maturity assessments, carried out to support the ongoing digital strategy review, have led to new proposals for a strengthened digital skills training and adoption offer.

Whilst a broad range of digital skills training and support is already in place, these findings have informed proposals for a more comprehensive offer which includes:

- Online courses available through Microsoft licensing
- Face-to-face and virtual training by Digital Services and Microsoft on key applications
- Ask the Expert community forum on the new Intranet
- Increased support for staff to set up new equipment, including laptops and mobile phones
- Digital showcases/drop-in sessions to promote knowledge sharing, best practice and the art of the possible
- Support to digitally engage/upskill the frontline workforce

The programme will be underpinned by a comprehensive communication and engagement plan.

If approved, the full digital skills training offer will be available via the [Durham Learning and Development System](#) and launched to staff as part of a new 2023/24 Corporate Learning and Development Programme.

The programme will be evaluated to measure its impact on increasing digital skills and confidence across the organisation.

A survey has also been sent to Members to baseline their digital skills and future requirements as part of the digital strategy redevelopment.

Questions



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Appendix One: Digital Inclusion in County Durham report



Microsoft Word
Document