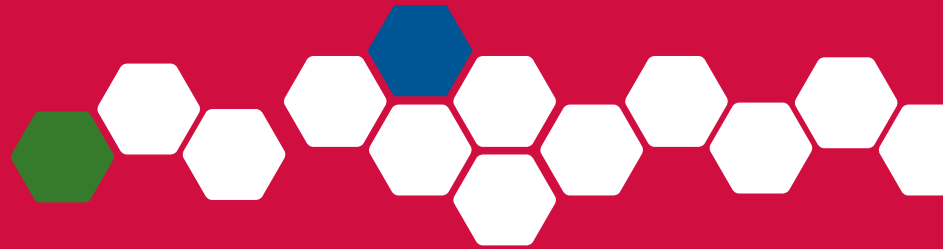




Evaluation of Connecting Scotland: Qualitative research with key stakeholders exploring implementation and early impact



EQUALITY AND WELFARE



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Blake Stevenson

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Executive summary

Connecting Scotland is the Scottish Government's crisis-response, delivered by SCVO, offering those who are digitally excluded an essential lifeline. The programme's aim is to enable people to stay connected with friends, family, information, and essential services. Organisations taking part in the programme can apply to provide their service users with a device (an iPad or Chromebook), internet connectivity, and support to set up and use these.

Blake Stevenson Ltd was commissioned by Scottish Government to conduct an external evaluation of Connecting Scotland, looking at whether the programme is reaching the right number and range of stakeholders, the outcomes and impact of the programme, lessons learned from the work so far and how it can be improved going forward.

The methodology applied to this evaluation involved an approach which combined a web-based survey of all delivery partners, deep-dive interviews with a smaller sample of 52 organisations and desk research to review evaluation documents submitted by participating organisations. In addition, SCVO staff involved in steering and implementing the Connecting Scotland programme were interviewed.

Programme overview

Connecting Scotland has funded 670 unique organisations which between them have delivered a total of 1,737 projects. Across these projects, 17,700 Chromebooks, 18,400 iPads and 32,391 MiFi devices have been issued to people in need across Scotland. The total value of the programme to date is £48,095,700 and devices have been distributed widely across Scotland

Key findings

Connecting Scotland is a unique and ground-breaking programme. It was set-up and implemented at the height of the pandemic in response to an immediate need for digital connectivity that is unprecedented. A programme of this nature has never been done before on this scale and the speed at which it was implemented, especially given the ongoing restrictions in place due to Covid-19, is impressive.

Application process and delivery of devices

The vast majority of applicants found the programme concept easy to understand, the opportunity to apply for funding was widely advertised, and the application process was described by most organisations as straightforward and reasonable. 77% of respondents to our survey found the process either easy or very easy, 20% found it neither easy nor difficult, and only 3% found it difficult. Furthermore, 96% of survey respondents indicated that adequate support was provided during the application process. Interviewees were similarly positive.

One area of frustration that was raised by a number of national organisations was that separate applications had to be submitted for each local authority area that

they worked in. They reported that this created additional administration at both application stage and in relation to data collection and reporting. Others felt that the eligibility criteria for each round of funding could be widened, or removed altogether and be dependent on need only.

While there some teething problems identified, related to delivery of devices, and the programme database, these were immediately picked up on by SCVO and as the programme has progressed, solutions have been found to address these. Programme managers continue to work on improvements and solutions to any challenges as these arise.

Digital Champions

A key component of the programme was the provision of support to service users who had received a device, through the appointment by funded organisations of digital champions. The vast majority of organisations were easily able to identify digital champions within their organisation. These were usually members of staff who were well-placed to take on this role – either because they had strong relationships with their local communities; had good IT skills; or worked directly with service users who were eligible to receive devices through the programme. Some digital champions were other types of staff who were unable to carry out their usual job due to COVID-19 restrictions.

SCVO data shows that for 36,000 devices issued, some 3000 digital champions have been trained to date. This number is far lower than expected and low relative to the number of devices issued and SCVO is keen to ensure that projects do not provide devices to people without adequate support. However, the actual number of digital champions may be higher than this as it is unknown how many did not take part in the training offered.

The training provided by SCVO through the Mhor Collective was generally felt to be comprehensive and as the programme progressed, a range of different training opportunities were offered to enable Digital Champions to develop their skills.

The main concern raised with regards to Digital Champions relates to the sustainability of the model which relies on the goodwill of organisations to identify, recruit, and dedicate time to the digital champion role. Some interviewees raised concerns about the amount of in-kind staff time that had to be dedicated to the programme, either through the digital champion role, or in relation to management and administration. This is at the heart of one of the key considerations for the future sustainability of the programme.

Identifying and supporting participants

Most organisations identified recipients/demand in advance which meant that issuing the devices once these were received was straightforward. Of the organisations responding to our survey, 67% indicated that they had reached out to eligible clients before receiving devices from Connecting Scotland, and 33% had done so afterwards. Of those, however, most had already determined demand and had a clear route for identification of eligible people and for distribution.

A small number of organisations encountered challenges identifying recipients but these challenges were exceptional and organisations described SCVO as understanding, supportive and flexible in relation to these issues.

Organisations' experiences of providing support to participants varied. While all were confident that their service users had received support when they needed it, the level of support required tended to vary depending on the type of service users being supported. Organisations supporting older people reported more challenges in supporting their clients than organisations supporting younger people who were more familiar with using technology.

Implementation of the programme by SCVO

SCVO implements Connecting Scotland on behalf of Scottish Government and this working relationship was described positively and as an "equal collaboration". Although the Connecting Scotland model pre-dated the pandemic, the pandemic provided the impetus for the programme to be implemented and required it to be set up at speed to urgently address need. Staff reported that the advantage of this speed was that the process was far less bureaucratic than would usually be the case and SCVO was given the freedom to implement as they saw fit. SCVO staff recognised that this led to some initial teething problems arising but these were resolved as the programme progressed. Feedback from funded organisations was extremely positive about SCVO's role in the programme.

Challenges arising

A small number of challenges were identified with regards to programme implementation. These included challenges with inputting data to the programme database; some challenges with delivery; challenges with poor internet service (particularly in some rural areas); cross-over in recruitment with other local organisations; and the challenges already mentioned regarding supporting older people. Most of these challenges could be overcome with effective support from SCVO and were not a hindrance to the programme being implemented effectively overall.

Capacity to deliver

The vast majority of the organisations consulted during the research confirmed that they had adequate capacity to deliver the programme. Only a small minority reported any challenges with managing the number of devices they had received and this usually related to problems identifying as many people in need as they had anticipated at application stage.

This picture has begun to change however, as staff are moving back into their pre-pandemic roles, leaving them less time to devote to Connecting Scotland. Some feel that it may be impossible to manage the level of support that they have provided to date alongside their normal day job once COVID-restrictions are lifted. Many organisations are concerned that it may not be sustainable going forward without staff resources being paid for.

Programme impact

Although impact data collection to date has been varied in quality, organisations are confident that the programme has had a significant positive impact on their service users. They reported that the programme has helped to reduce social isolation (particularly during the peak of the pandemic) by supporting people to connect with family and friends; has supported young people and their families to access education and training opportunities; supported employability; supported health and wellbeing by enabling people to connect in to a wide range of health services online; ensured continued access to welfare benefits; and facilitated access to a wide range of services online.

It has also positively impacted on participating organisations by upskilling their staff; increasing their capacity to deliver and support online services; speeding up the implementation of online service delivery; and encouraging more advanced thinking in relation to opportunities to deliver services online.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Connecting Scotland programme has been efficiently and effectively implemented, and has had a significant positive impact on both recipients of devices, and the organisations funded to distribute these to date. There continues to be a demand for the programme, particularly in relation to the provision of a free internet connection.

While the Connecting Scotland model was designed to be an emergency response to reach people quickly and get them digitally connected, it has been instrumental in helping organisations to understand how they might deliver services differently in future. Many intend to continue to apply a blended approach to service delivery in future – offering support through a mix of online and face-to-face support.

However, whilst the model has been highly successful, there are real question marks over whether it is sustainable in the longer term – both in relation to continuing to make devices and, more significantly, free data packages available. Many organisations highlighted the unaffordability of an internet connection for many of the households they support. Similarly, some organisations questioned organisations' ability to continue to devote the current level of support to service users, and staffing to administer the programme.

Many organisations emphasised the need to plan well ahead of the end of the programme to ensure seamless transition. The following recommendations have been developed on the basis of feedback received throughout the evaluation:

Strategic recommendations

Consider continuing the provision of free data beyond the end of the current two-year period, but for a fixed time period with a clear transition plan to ensure this can continue to be supported beyond the lifetime of the programme.

Consider contributing to the cost of administering the programme and providing financial support for the digital champion role to ensure that the programme can be sustained beyond the current timeframe.

Ensure that organisations collect monitoring and evaluation data systematically, whilst ensuring this remains manageable and proportionate.

Operational recommendations

1. Remove eligibility criteria in relation to target group and enable organisations to apply for devices for those who are most digitally excluded.
2. Enable organisations to specify which type of device they would prefer to issue to service users, rather than allocating based on availability. Consider offering the option to organisations to receive low-cost laptops where this is more suitable (e.g. for training organisations)
3. Consider issuing devices which are already set up with common apps downloaded onto them to reduce time required by digital champions at the outset.
4. Consider allowing national organisations to submit one application across all local authority areas in which they operate – potentially by bidding into a ring-fenced pot for national organisations.
5. Consider allowing organisations to bid for a data package only, particularly as numbers of people requiring devices reduces.

Chapter 1: Introduction and evaluation methodology

Description of the programme

When the Scottish Government published [Scotland's Digital Future: A Strategy for Scotland](#) in 2011, it looked at the digital opportunities and challenges facing Scotland at that time. A key set of proposed actions centred on promoting digital participation. This was cemented by the 2014 *Digital Participation Charter* and the publication of *Digital Participation: A National Framework for Local Authorities*. The Scottish Government partnered with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) to lead implementation, with a Digital Participation Team embedded into their organisation.

The updated strategy of 2017, *Realising Scotland's full potential in a digital world: a digital strategy for Scotland*, reaffirmed the government's commitment to digital equality with the aim that their actions 'enable everybody to share in the social, economic and democratic opportunities of digital'.

Huge in-roads have been made into making Scotland a connected nation, yet digital inequality remains. The most recent figures gathered for the Scottish Household Survey¹ in 2018 show that in 20% of the most deprived areas of Scotland only 82% of households have access to the internet; that only half of those over 60 in the most deprived areas use the internet; and that 21% of adults in social housing do not use the internet. COVID-19 and the subsequent restrictions placed on everyday life exacerbated these digital inequalities and brought the need to address them into sharper focus.

Connecting Scotland is the Scottish Government's crisis-response, delivered by SCVO, offering those that are digitally excluded an essential lifeline. The programme's aim is to enable people to stay connected with friends, family, information, and essential services. Organisations taking part in the programme can apply to provide their service users with a device (an iPad or Chromebook), connectivity, and support to set up and use these.

Purpose of the evaluation

A comprehensive evaluation across the programme aims to assess the effectiveness of Connecting Scotland. This evaluation consists of a welcome survey for new clients joining Connecting Scotland, followed by interviews and a follow-up survey after they have been engaged in the programme for a few months.

¹[Scotland's People Annual Report: Key findings - 2019 \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

Overall, the evaluation examines whether the programme is reaching the right number and range of stakeholders, the outcomes and impact of the programme, lessons learned from the work so far and how it can be improved going forward.

As part of this research portfolio, Blake Stevenson was commissioned to specifically address:

The scoping, design and implementation of stakeholder research with organisations engaging with Connecting Scotland to support end users looking at programme development, organisation and delivery of this support.

Collation of insights and lessons learnt from stakeholders engaging with Connecting Scotland to support end users regarding the application process, engagement and barriers in respect to providing this support.

Evaluation methodology

Due to the high number of delivery partners participating in the Connecting Scotland programme, the methodology applied to this evaluation involved a mixed methods approach which combined a web-based survey of all delivery partners, deep dive interviews with a smaller sample of organisations and desk research to review evaluation documents submitted by participating organisations.

The survey was issued on 3rd June 2021 and was live until 30th June 2021.

It was designed and managed using SNAP surveys software, enabling the full breadth of experience across organisations to be captured. A total of 547 representatives of applicant organisations (both successful and unsuccessful) responded to the survey, which constituted a response rate of 82%. Respondents represented a wide range of organisations across Scotland which varied in size and type. Respondents to the survey reported having provided 16,411 participants with a WiFi connection; issued devices to 23,069 respondents; and provided support and advice to 26,344 participants. (Some participants will have received all three forms of support – these numbers do not relate to unique individual participant numbers).

Full details of the profile of respondents is contained within Appendix 2.

In addition, we conducted deep dive telephone and web-based interviews with 59 people across 52 unique organisations which enabled us to collect a rich picture of individual organisations' experiences. Interviewees were selected by us, independent of Scottish Government, based on agreed criteria including size and type of organisation, location of organisation, numbers of devices received through the programme, and type of client group. A full list of organisations interviewed is contained within Appendix 3.

Finally, we conducted nine interviews with SCVO staff who have been involved in steering and implementing the Connecting Scotland programme.

The remainder of the report is set out as follows:

- Chapter 2 Programme Implementation
- Chapter 3 Programme Impact
- Chapter 4 Conclusions and recommendations

Chapter 2: Programme overview and implementation

In this chapter we provide an overview of the experiences of organisations and SCVO in implementing the programme. This chapter has been informed by data provided by SCVO, survey data, interviews with representatives of applicant organisations, and interviews with key members of the SCVO team responsible for the programme.

Programme overview

Connecting Scotland has funded 670 unique organisations which between them have delivered a total of 1,737 projects. Across these projects, 17,700 Chromebooks, 18,400 iPads and 32,391 MiFi devices have been issued to people in need across Scotland. The table below provides details of the three rounds of funding to date.

Phase	Date phase announced	Funds £	Target group	Target numbers	Applications open	Dates phases delivered
1*	May '20	5M	People at a high clinical risk of Covid-19	9,000	Jun-Jul '20	Pilots: Apr-Jun '20 Main roll out: Aug-Oct '20
2	Aug '20	15M	Young care leavers & families with children	23,000	Round 1: Aug-Oct '20 Round 2: Nov '20-Jan '21	Dec '20-Mar '21
Winter Support	Nov '20	4.3M	Socially isolated / older and disabled people	5,000	Round 1: Dec '20 Round 2: Jan '21	Jan-Mar '21

The total value of the programme to date is £48,095,700 and it has a target of delivering a total of 60,000 devices by the end of 2022. Devices have been distributed widely across Scotland as can be seen in Figure 1 on the next page.

Figure 1: Distribution of devices by local authority area (as at 20/8/21, covering Phases 1, 2 and Winter Support)

Local authority	Chromebooks	iPads	MiFi	No. of projects
Aberdeen	571	551	881	48
Aberdeenshire	662	563	1138	52
Angus	296	283	510	44
Argyll & Bute	214	298	380	32
Clackmannanshire	317	123	396	28
Dumfries & Galloway	368	540	918	41
Dundee	544	488	976	73
East Ayrshire	447	488	910	52
East Dunbartonshire	265	196	436	17
East Lothian	371	285	573	37
East Renfrewshire	376	411	776	59
Edinburgh	1199	1417	2228	128
Falkirk	470	521	839	80
Fife	1192	959	1858	113
Glasgow	2439	2812	4918	191
Highland	753	889	1240	64
Inverclyde	436	349	702	26
Midlothian	181	348	476	31
Na h-Eileanan Siar	156	204	300	16
Moray	303	180	418	45
North Ayrshire	647	758	1332	54
North Lanarkshire	1119	1342	2218	74
Orkney	117	275	359	44
Perth & Kinross	282	520	636	50
Renfrewshire	916	700	1316	56
Scottish Borders	287	526	806	32
Shetland	148	75	163	30
South Ayrshire	292	340	624	27
South Lanarkshire	599	726	1274	50
Stirling	194	265	446	33
West Dunbartonshire	398	439	698	41
West Lothian	549	523	1037	63
National	592	6	609	6
Total	17700	18400	32391	1737

Through Phase 1, devices were distributed to 8,057 people, 7,205 of whom were clinically vulnerable, and 852 people with other vulnerabilities. This built on the 470 devices that had been distributed as part of the initial pilot programmes to a mixed group of people with disabilities, people who were socially isolated, families with children, and refugees.

In Phase 2, devices were distributed to 4,116 young care leavers, 17,026 families with children, and 1,527 people with other vulnerabilities.

Through the Winter Support programme, 4,887 older people and people with disabilities received a device through Connecting Scotland.

Clarity of programme purpose

The vast majority of those we interviewed during the evaluation felt that the purpose of the programme when they initially applied to it was very clear. Likewise, 88% of respondents to our survey found the concept of the programme quite or very clear from the outset. Only 2% reported having found it difficult to understand.

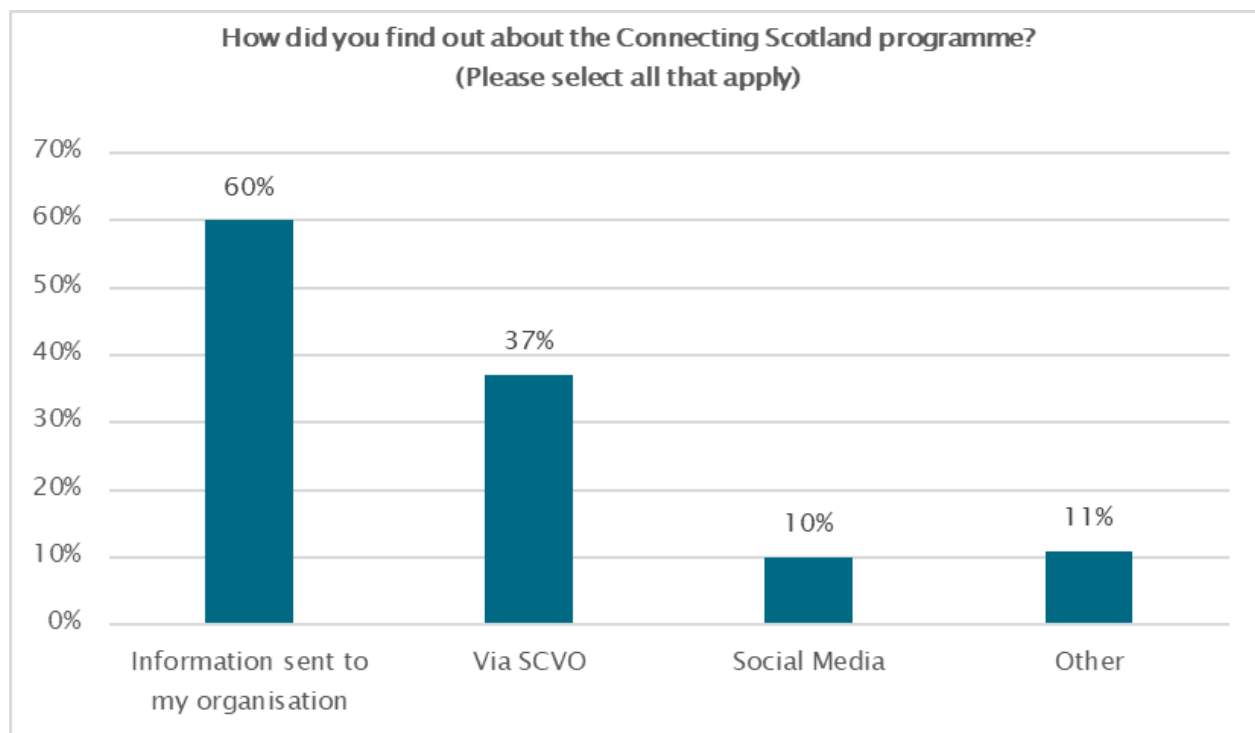
One interviewee, for example, reported that the programme purpose was not clear to them at the outset and that there were a few things like the digital champion role (and requirements with regards to level of support) and the speed at which devices had to be issued (within one month of receipt) which they felt could have been clearer ahead of applying.

However, overall the purpose of the programme has been very clear to participating organisations and this has been one of the programme's clear successes. It has made it accessible to a wide range of organisations, including organisations that did not have previous experience of participating in or applying to government-funded programmes. Many evaluation participants compared it favourably in this respect to other government programmes they had been involved in.

How organisations identified the opportunity to apply

Most applicants we interviewed had found out about the opportunity to apply either through a contact in their own organisation, through some form of communication from SCVO, or via social media. This tallied with survey responses as Figure 2 on the next page shows – 60% had found out about it via information sent to their organisation, 37% had received notification from SCVO and 10% had read about the opportunity on social media. Of the remaining 10%, a large proportion had heard about it by word of mouth.

Figure 2: How organisations found out about the programme (n=547)



This, coupled with the varied type and location of applicant organisations, suggests that the range of outlets SCVO used to advertise the opportunity for funding were sufficiently wide ranging.

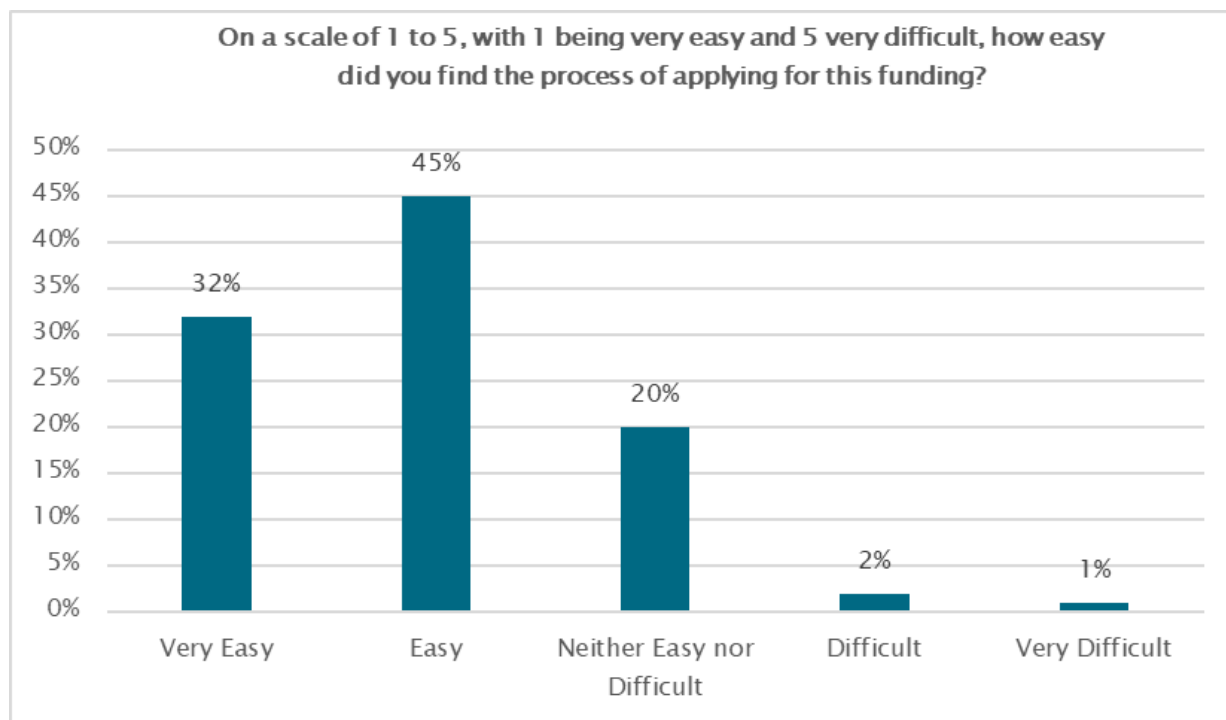
There were no suggestions provided for alternative dissemination routes.

Experiences of the application process

The vast majority of applicants found the application process very straightforward, particularly compared to other programmes they had applied to in the past.

As Figure 3 on the next page indicates, 77% of respondents to our survey found the process either easy or very easy, 20% found it neither easy nor difficult, and only 3% found it difficult.

Figure 3: Ease of application process (n=547)



Furthermore, 96% of survey respondents indicated that adequate support was provided during the application process. Of the 4% who had not found the support adequate, the majority of responses related to a lack of feedback about reasons for unsuccessful applications, or queries around eligibility; or concerns related to having to complete individual applications for each local authority area an organisation operates in. We return to these issues later in the report.

Amongst interviewees, feedback was also very positive.

“The application process was much easier than other programmes – there were far fewer hoops to jump through and as a result it focused on the individuals in need more.”

“The application was straightforward, and we were able to complete it without any additional support.”

“The application form was really good, really clear.”

However, one area of frustration that was raised by a number of national organisations was that separate applications had to be submitted for each local authority area that they worked in. They reported that this created additional

administration at both application stage and in relation to data collection and reporting.

“It was frustrating that we had to complete four separate application forms, have four separate contracts and compile four sets of monitoring data, when in practice it was managed by us as one programme.”

“Although a third sector organisation might operate nationally, that does not mean that we additional capacity

Some organisations also felt that the eligibility criteria for target groups was too specific. This was not limited to a particular type or size of organisation – a range were of this view. These organisations noted that they would prefer that need was identified and justified by the organisations themselves, rather than being prescribed at programme level. This may be something which would benefit from further consultation with applicant organisations.

“The eligibility criteria have been tricky – there has not been enough opportunity for young people (18-25 year olds) to receive a device, unless they were in receipt of employability support.”

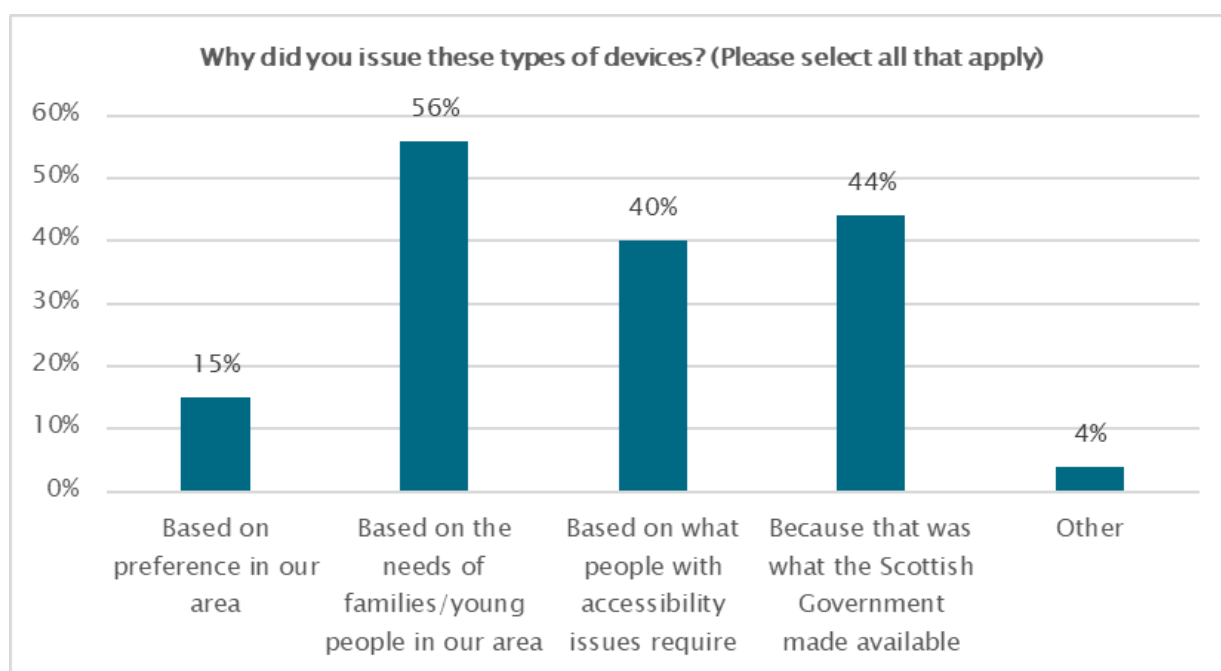
“It was challenging to shoe-horn people into different categories. Organisations need to be trusted to apply for those who are most digitally excluded.”

Types of devices selected/issued/applied for

As noted in the introductory chapter, to date participants in the programme have received 17,700 Chromebooks, 18,400 iPads and 32,391 MiFi devices.

Through our survey, we sought to identify the reasons why organisations selected Chromebooks or iPads. The findings are illustrated in Figure 4 below:

Figure 4: Why types of devices were issued (n=547)



Interview feedback indicates that most people were content with the devices that they received.

“Apple products are great for older people – the set-up is so easy.”

“The devices were ideal. Good quality products.”

A few, however, did not receive the devices they had requested (for example, they may have received Chromebooks instead of iPads, or a mix of both when they requested only one) and in some instances this impacted on their usability. For example, some organisations felt that some devices were better suited than others to people with disabilities or older people, while others working in a training setting had different preferences. For example, one training organisation reported that Chromebooks did not work well for college platforms, and in fact these organisations felt that laptops would be preferable in future for learning providers.

Some organisations operating in rural areas in particular encountered issues with regards to connectivity. The MiFi devices were provided through Vodaphone and a good connection was not always available. This improved as the programme progressed, with a second provider being appointed, and organisations were also able to make a business case to SCVO for other providers.

Some interviewees felt that it would be preferable to allow organisations to select which devices they would prefer, rather than allocating on the basis of what was available at the time.

Distribution of devices

For many organisations, distribution of devices was relatively straightforward. A few did encounter some challenges however. For example, some organisations had challenges distributing devices, particularly in the earlier rounds when still in the midst of a harder lockdown, with devices having to be sent to people’s homes where they also then had to find space to store them. This seemed to be a particular concern for volunteer-run organisations. A few of whom were concerned about insurance implications of storing the devices.

Some organisations also had challenges with delivery organisations sending unclear delivery notifications, or with devices initially being sent to the wrong part of their organisation. These issues mainly arose in the first round, and experiences have been better in subsequent rounds.

For some organisations, the timeframe between receiving the devices and having to have them issued to recipients (one month) was too short. Some organisations discussed this with SCVO and were given flexibility but others continued to face challenges with this.

Some organisations reported having experienced gaps between receipt of the devices and receipt of the MiFi devices (for example, one reported having had a three week gap), which meant that it took longer to get people set-up and connected.

As a result of ongoing monitoring and improvements made by SCVO, these issues were largely ironed out as the programme progressed.

Role of Digital Champions

The vast majority of organisations we consulted were easily able to identify digital champions within their organisation. These were usually members of staff who were well-placed to take on this role – either because they had strong relationships with their local communities; had good IT skills; or worked directly with service users who were eligible to receive devices through the programme. Some digital champions were other types of staff who were unable to carry out their usual job due to COVID-19 restrictions – for example one organisation had maintenance and repair staff act as digital champions.

SCVO data shows that for 36,000 devices issued, some 3000 digital champions have been trained. They voiced some concerns that this number is far lower than expected and low relative to the number of devices issued. They are keen to avoid projects providing devices to people without adequate support. The actual number of digital champions may be higher than this as it is unknown how many did not take part in the training offered. Feedback from interviewees suggests that there is reasonable capacity in organisations to support the number of participants currently receiving devices, but that this position is likely to change as organisations move out of Covid-19 restrictions and staff return to their usual way of working. We return to this issue later.

Survey respondents were asked to provide data on the numbers of digital champions they had appointed. This showed that the average number of digital champions was four, with the 68 being the highest number in any one organisation.

Some organisations were unable to identify digital champions within their own organisation and worked in partnership with other local organisations to ensure that their participants still had access to suitable support. Some were able to access a pool of digital champions that had been appointed and trained by other organisations.

Some participants in the evaluation observed that they were able to recruit some members of staff to be digital champions, e.g. social workers, who in normal circumstances (pre-pandemic) may not have had the time to take part. Their input was considered valuable but there is uncertainty about the longer-term sustainability of drawing on such members of staff's time. The Connecting Scotland model relies on the goodwill of organisations to identify, recruit, and dedicate time to the digital champion role. Some interviewees raised concerns about the amount of in-kind staff time that had to be dedicated to the programme, either through the digital champion role, or in relation to management and administration.

This is at the heart of one of the key considerations for the future sustainability of the programme.

Through our survey we explored with respondents whether they had appointed digital champions prior to applying for funding and 63% reported that this was the

case. 20% had to recruit them following receipt of funding, and the remaining 17% had a mix of some already in place, and others requiring to be appointed following receipt of funding. Of those organisations that waited to appoint until after they received the funding, 85% reported that this had not caused any delays to implementation.

Some organisations appointed volunteers as digital champions. A few used staff initially and are now, as their staff are needed to return to normal duties, training volunteers to take over.

A small minority of organisations found it more challenging to identify digital champions. These were predominantly volunteer-run organisations that felt they had neither the capacity or skills to fulfil the digital champion role themselves.

Almost no organisations reported any challenges with churn of digital champions to date. Those who did had not experienced any specific issues that could not be managed.

Training of digital champions

SCVO, through its training partner the Mhor Collective, delivers a comprehensive range of training for digital champions. This begins with Core Digital Champion Training, and digital champions then have the opportunity to access a range of other training to enhance learning and skills development. These training opportunities include Chrome Book and iPad demos; Employability; Children, Families and Young People; Foundation Skills and Communication Tools; Handling Information and Content; Problem Solving and Staying Safe Online; Transacting – Shopping, Public Services and Online Banking.

Through the survey, we asked respondents how easy it was to accommodate the digital champion training. 68% had found it easy or very easy to accommodate, 28% found it neither easy nor difficult, and only 5% had found it difficult.

93% reported that the training had adequately equipped the digital champions to undertake their role with only 7% indicating that it had not equipped them to undertake the role.

“All of our digital champions undertook the training and they found it excellent.”

“Our DCs thought the training was very good.”

This largely tallied with feedback received through interviews. However, while everybody interviewed welcomed the training, a small number of interviewees felt that it had been too basic. Some felt that it had not included sufficient training in how best to support a particular target group, however this was not the purpose of the training. The training focused on training them to be a digital champion and was designed on the basis that staff in organisations already had expertise in engaging with their service users:

“The training was too basic and did not take sufficient account of the needs of disabled people. The initial two and a half hour sessions were not enough – our staff had lots of follow-up questions.”

“Our DCs had mixed views about the training. They felt it was helpful but too basic, and too long.”

A couple of interviewees also felt that the training was better suited to a process that involved sitting next to someone which was obviously not possible during the pandemic.

Feedback about the handbooks developed by SCVO was positive - *“The handbooks were very good and well-pitched.”* One organisation also noted that the picture-based format in the handbooks was very good for people with low literacy levels.

Engaging with participants

Identification of participants

Most organisations identified recipients/demand in advance which meant that issuing the devices once these were received was straightforward.

Of the organisations responding to our survey, 67% indicated that they had reached out to eligible clients before receiving devices from Connecting Scotland, and 33% had done so afterwards. Of those, however, most had already determined demand and had a clear route for identification of eligible people and for distribution. 67% of those who identified recipients after receiving devices indicated that this had not delayed implementation of their project, and 33% reported that it had caused some delays. This mirrors what organisations told us through interview:

“We had conducted a survey at the start of lockdown about various issues including digital connectivity, so we knew where there was demand.”

“We had some people in mind ahead of applying and some were allocated afterwards on a needs-basis.”

“We have a residents’ panel that meets regularly. We used it to establish who needed a device before we applied.”

“We already had a list of people waiting for digital assets.”

A small number of organisations encountered challenges. One organisation, for example, had hoped to receive referrals through the Social Prescriber in their local GP practice but this proved fruitless. These challenges were exceptional however and evaluation participants who had encountered challenges with identifying recipients described SCVO as understanding, supportive and flexible in relation to these issues.

Providing support to participants

Organisations' experiences of providing support to participants varied. While all were confident that their participants had received support when they needed it, the level of support required tended to vary depending on the type of service users being supported. For example, many organisations supporting young people and young families found that they already had a reasonable understanding of how devices worked (many had previous experience of using mobile phones). They did not tend to require significant amounts of technical support – they were described as “already tech savvy” but needed support to set up the devices initially, or if something stopped working.

This contrasted with organisations supporting older people or people with disabilities, who reported that the level of support required by their participants was far more extensive.

Experiences of volunteer-led organisations

We interviewed a small number of volunteer-run organisations and a number of issues arose in relation to their experiences.

Overall, they seemed to have found the application process straightforward, in line with other organisations, further reinforcing our sense that the application form was appropriate to the wide range of organisations applying. However, given their reliance on volunteers, they emphasised the benefit of having as much forward notice as possible for application deadlines.

In addition, some volunteer-run organisations operate nationally and had encountered the same challenges as other organisations with applications being developed for individual local authority areas.

They encountered greater challenges than other organisations in, for example, taking delivery of devices, with one organisation reporting having to take receipt of 64 devices into their home. Not only were there practical challenges in terms of having to be in the home to take receipt, they also raised concerns about insurance cover for the period of time that the devices were in their home.

Administration of the programme was reported to be harder when volunteers are involved. One organisation noted, for example, that it is harder to compel volunteers to provide required data about who their devices had been allocated to, for example.

SCVO raised concerns about new volunteers taking on the role of digital champion as they felt they were unlikely to have the level of insight into the person's full range of needs. SCVO discouraged this model from the outset as they felt that the digital champion role was more suited to employees or volunteers who had existing relationships with service users.

Role of SCVO as implementation lead

SCVO implements Connecting Scotland on behalf of Scottish Government. SCVO was the lead on digital inclusion for Scottish Government and co-designed the original model for Connecting Scotland. SCVO described a close working relationship with Scottish Government which felt like an “equal collaboration”.

The Connecting Scotland model pre-dated the pandemic, but the pandemic provided the impetus for the programme to be implemented. This happened at speed, in response to need. Staff reported that the advantage of this speed was that the process was far less bureaucratic than would usually be the case and SCVO was given the freedom to implement as they saw fit. Examples of the ways in which they were able to be more nimble included using organisations that were included in Government frameworks but negotiating better deals with them; and when devices were not able to be provided through these suppliers, they simply called a shop to acquire additional devices. This would not normally be possible without more complex procurement processes involved.

Latterly, more traditional arrangements have been put in place by Scottish Government – for example, a project board – however, there is a sense from SCVO that these do not add sufficient value for the time they take up, and tend to focus on risk and audit rather than effective decision making related to delivery.

While the speed at which the programme was put into place was seen as positive, SCVO staff recognised that this led to teething problems arising. However, these were able to be resolved on an ongoing basis, and each round has been smoother than the one before. Continual improvement has been at the heart of their approach, and the organisation has demonstrated a real desire to learn about what is working well or less well. Feedback from interviewees supported this view.

Examples of improvements in processes included:

- Addressing a bottleneck when contracts came back in to SCVO by increasing the number of staff processing these
- Improving the functionality of the database to make data entry easier for organisations

SCVO has in place a team of staff who operate a help desk during working hours. They respond to both telephone and email queries. Where necessary, they can make direct contact with partner organisations, such as Vodafone, in order to resolve organisations’ issues or queries.

Feedback about the role of SCVO in the Connecting Scotland programme has been universally positive. Organisations across the board reported that SCVO staff responded quickly and helpfully to queries, and were supportive in finding solutions to challenges reported.

In relation to the application process specifically, 96% of respondents to our survey indicated that adequate support had been provided during this stage of the process.

“The help desk was excellent. They helped with everything from failure of the MIFIs to replacing laptops.”

“It felt like we had a real safety net with SCVO.”

Staff at SCVO provided similar feedback – acknowledging that there had been plenty of challenges but that due to the expertise available to them, solutions were invariably found. They described a lot of goodwill from partner organisations, such as Vodafone, which supported improvements as the programme progressed.

Challenges arising with implementation

While overall feedback about the programme was very positive, some organisations did encounter some challenges in implementation.

49% of respondents to our survey found the implementation of the programme either easy or very easy and 44% had encountered some challenges with the implementation. 7% found it difficult or very difficult.

Challenges were not specific to any particular geographical area.

We describe some of the most common challenges below.

Inputting data to the SCVO database

The issue raised most frequently related to challenges collecting and submitting data to SCVO. While 71% of respondents had not experienced any challenges inputting data to the SCVO system, 29% had.

“It wasn’t made clear what type of data we would need to collect from recipients before inputting data – knowing this in advance would have made the process quicker and less clunky.”

“Importing from the Excel sheet didn’t work. Had some issues with the login when tried to access it later. Couldn’t check what had input already.”

“I am still uncertain if all of the data has been stored effectively despite updating the system several times. It has been quite stressful and frustrating.”

People’s experiences of the system did seem to improve after the first round, when a number of glitches were resolved by SCVO.

“The database had a number of glitches in it, this improved when a new online form for inputting data was implemented.”

Many people reported being concerned about the amount of administrative time that had been required.

Delivery of devices

Some organisations reported issues with delivery of devices. These included not knowing when devices would arrive which made it hard for planning – for example,

one organisation that is involved in running training sessions for young people found it hard to schedule these as they did not know when the devices would arrive. Others faced challenges with delivery companies delivering outwith office hours or to incorrect parts of the organisation. Delivery issues were compounded during the first round due to the impact of lockdown. These appear to have eased in subsequent rounds.

Challenges with iTunes accounts

One interviewee flagged concerns that an iTunes account is required to download apps on an iPad which they reported as being intimidating for some people as it asked for personal details, bank details etc.

Malfunctioning sim cards and MiFi devices

Some organisations had issues with sim cards and MiFi devices not working but SCVO provided support to resolve these issues, or organisations were able to resolve them themselves.

Poor WiFi coverage

Internet coverage in some rural areas is very limited and a number of organisations flagged this as an issue, which emphasises the importance of the roll-out of high speed broadband in rural areas.

Cross-over with other delivery organisations

Some organisations operated in areas where other organisations were also in receipt of devices through Connecting Scotland. They described some challenges with the same service users being contacted by both organisations, and felt that this had resulted in some time-wasting.

Challenges with supporting older people to set up and use devices

A number of organisations reported that allocating devices and supporting people to set them up was particularly challenging with older people during the first lockdown. One organisation reported that this was even more challenging as they worked with older people with hearing impairments. Some organisations resorted to visiting people and standing on their doorsteps to provide advice and support.

“Service users were absolute beginners and mostly older people so they needed a lot of support to use the device. Support workers need to embed 1:1 support with their other work, and to “find the hook” to encourage people to take part.”

“We travelled the length and breadth of West and East Lothian to get people set up!”

Some organisations also tried to coach family members, so that they could support the older person with the device.

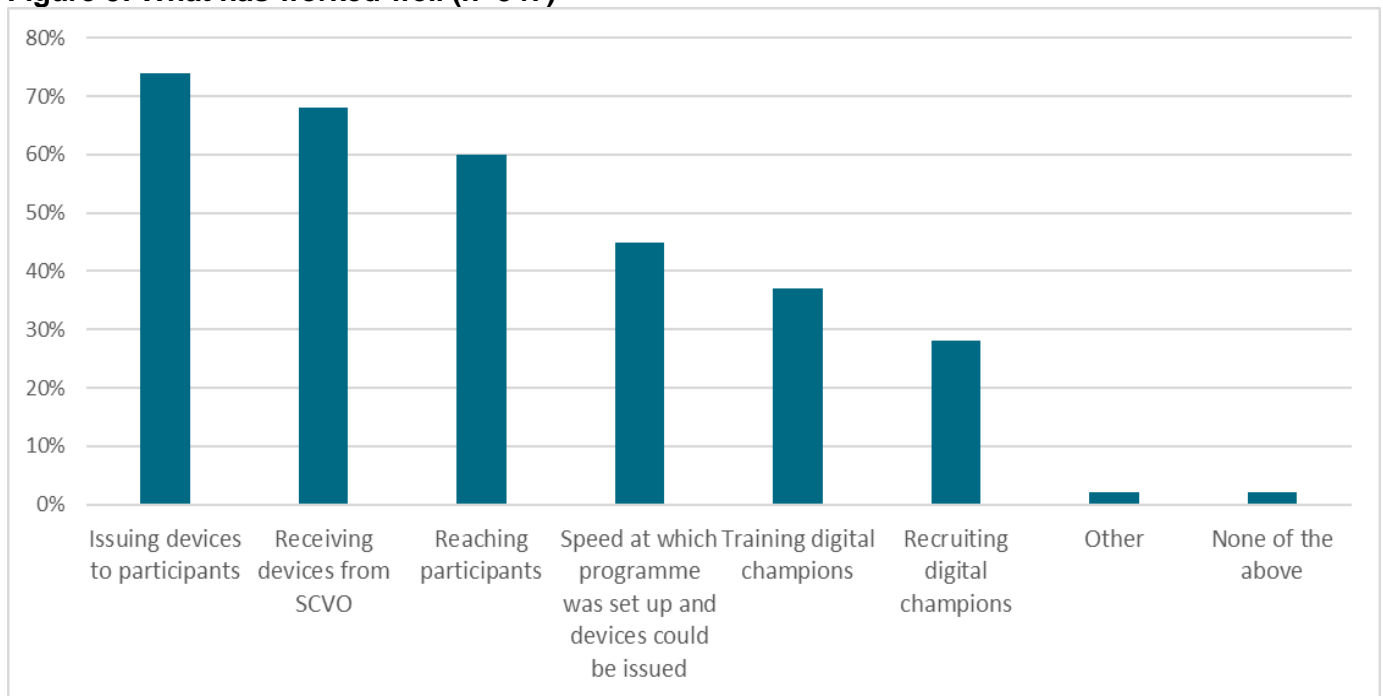
“It took us a number of persuasive conversations with older people to convince them it really was free! It was a welcome surprise for people.”

“Having asked only for iPads, we got a mix of devices – it would have been better if we had just got one type of device.”

What worked well in relation to implementation

We asked survey respondents to indicate what had worked particularly well in relation to programme delivery. The results, illustrated in Figure 5 overleaf, show that issuing and receiving devices was reported to have worked best, closely followed by reaching participants. Significant numbers of respondents also indicated that the speed at which the programme had been set up had been positive. Fewer respondents agreed that training digital champions and identifying and recruiting digital champions had worked well, which reflects some of the challenges highlighted earlier in this chapter.

Figure 5: What has worked well (n=547)



Other things that were cited as particularly successful components of the programme included the provision of free data for two years - *“The Connecting Scotland offer of data is so important. How can it be sustained in future? This is critical.”* In addition to the devices themselves, organisations reported that having the support to set up and use the devices was a successful part of the programme.

In conducting the evaluation interviews with applicant organisations, many other examples of good practice were cited. These included:

Using local managers to be the bridge between the resources and distribution.
“We could get the devices to the right people quickly through good quality conversations on the ground.”

Having one person as the lead digital champion

Using hooks to engage people – for example, one organisation engaged older people in solitaire on their iPads which enabled them to become familiar with functionality.

One organisation involved trainees on Modern Apprenticeships to support older people with their devices to encourage inter-generational engagement and with the hope that it may interest them in being involved in working with older people.

Capacity of organisations

Most organisations that took part in the evaluation reported having sufficient capacity to distribute the devices they received and ensure ongoing support to people. Only a small minority reported any challenges with managing the number of devices they had received and this usually related to problems identifying as many people in need as they had anticipated at application stage.

While this has largely been the case to date, this has begun to change as staff are moving back into their pre-pandemic roles, leaving them less time to devote to Connecting Scotland. Some feel that it may be impossible to manage the level of support that they have provided to date alongside their normal day job once COVID-restrictions are lifted.

Many organisations are concerned that it may not be sustainable going forward without staff resources being paid for. *“We would definitely be interested in supporting more older people with devices but opted not to apply to the most recent round due to the staffing resources required.”*

Some organisations have been most challenged in relation to the administration involved in implementing the programme, with some struggling to complete data requirements. This tallies with feedback from SCVO which indicates that around 40% of organisations are failing to provide data requested on time. This is not limited to smaller organisations - large organisations feature equally in relation to this issue.

Experiences of unsuccessful organisations

According to data provided by SCVO, 512 applicants have been unsuccessful in applying for Connecting Scotland funding to date. As Figure 6 below shows, these organisations have been distributed across Scotland, with a higher rate of attrition being reported in Glasgow and Edinburgh which were described by SCVO as being consistently over-subscribed.

Figure 6: Number and distribution of unsuccessful applicants

Local authority	Not Awarded
Aberdeen	14
Aberdeenshire	2
Angus	4
Argyll & Bute	14
Clackmannanshire	2
Dumfries & Galloway	24
Dundee	12
East Ayrshire	28
East Dunbartonshire	11
East Lothian	5
East Renfrewshire	3
Edinburgh	25

Falkirk	35
Fife	25
Glasgow	111
Highland	8
Inverclyde	15
Midlothian	3
Na h-Eileanan Siar	2
Moray	12
North Ayrshire	4
North Lanarkshire	10
Orkney	3
Perth & Kinross	7
Renfrewshire	40
Scottish Borders	9
Shetland	10
South Ayrshire	4
South Lanarkshire	29
Stirling	10
West Dunbartonshire	22
West Lothian	8
National **	1
Total	512

We endeavoured to engage with unsuccessful applicant organisations, but only a small number were willing to take part in the evaluation. Of these, some reported having received no feedback about why they were unsuccessful, although we understand that feedback was available to all unsuccessful applicants.

“There was no information as to why we weren’t successful in both occasions. And we thought all questions were answered as asked.”

“We weren’t successful and we weren’t then given any support to re-apply.”

One organisation reported having been told that they were being over-ambitious with initial numbers and were given a quarter of their original request for devices, however they eventually got this number topped up to more than what they originally asked for through subsequent application rounds. They noted that this had made planning more difficult than if they had received the full allocation initially.

SCVO staff reported that weaker applications tended to be weaker in relation to the support side. Their staff reported confidence that the process had resulted in organisations being turned down for the right reasons.

This feedback, while from a relatively small number of organisations, suggests that the feedback and support available to unsuccessful applicants needs to be made more visible to them.

Suggested improvements for future programme delivery

While overall feedback was positive and organisations were very supportive of the programme, interviewees and survey respondents made some suggestions for improvements which can be grouped into the following key issues:

Enable national organisations to submit one application for multiple local authority areas to minimise administrative time and costs.

Allow organisations to apply for a data connection only – some people can afford to purchase a device but cannot afford the ongoing costs of an internet connection in their homes.

Enable organisations to apply for laptops as well as Chromebooks or iPads (this was highlighted as particular need for training organisations).

Consider allowing organisations to apply for a number of devices to keep in stock for future clients who require these.

Trust organisations to order the types of devices they need, rather than allocating iPads and Chromebooks depending on availability. For example, organisations need to be able to take account of the specific needs of people with disabilities.

Build more sharing of good practice into the Digital Champion training – for example, things like using a screen-sharing app when providing support can be helpful.

Shift the focus to helping people to use devices for real-life applications – for example, for drawing down benefits, skills, applying for jobs etc.

Consider amending the application process to enable organisations to describe any innovative aspects of their delivery approach.

Allow for more innovation in approach by organisations – enable them to apply for devices, connectivity, staffing resources to address digital inclusion based on demand in their area. *“Scottish Government needs to give up control and trust organisations more – maintaining the ease of process that Connecting Scotland has demonstrated can work.”*

SCVO staff could come to larger sites and undertake digital champion training for a group of participants at one time.

Drop the restrictive eligibility criteria and enable organisations to apply for whoever is most digitally excluded.

Involve a panel of participants in future programme design.

Ensure that DCs receive sufficient support for their health and wellbeing – one organisation was concerned that some DCs are dealing with people who are very vulnerable and some even suicidal and it is not clear whether DCs are equipped or supported to manage these sorts of issues. DCs have also had to deal with people being frightened about COVID-19 specifically. *“You have a duty to think about what’s going to happen if you phone someone and they are*

in distress.” This is an important point, which is why the programme has advocated for an embedded model where digital champions have pre-existing relationships with clients and therefore have the skills and knowledge to deal with other issues they may encounter (e.g. isolation or distress). In addition, SCVO checks that organisations have appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures in place as part of the agreement they sign with the organisation.

Ensure checks are put in place to monitor levels or patterns of usage amongst clients, thereby enabling organisations to contact the person in case there are issues?

Chapter 3: Programme impact

To date, information on the impact of the programme on participants and on applicant organisations has largely been anecdotal. While 82% of survey respondents indicating that they undertook some form of evaluation, our sense from conversations we had with interviewees and the data currently available, is that there is little systematic collation of impact data being gathered currently. While some organisations are undertaking formal evaluation work with participants, many are not.

While further, more in-depth, evaluation will be undertaken later in relation to impact, this evaluation was an important opportunity to begin to gather evidence of impact from participating organisations. We did so through the survey and interviews, in addition to analysing a small number of evaluation reports which organisations submitted alongside their survey response to us.

Responses to our survey indicated that the programme has had a significant impact. Figure 7 below shows the range of outcomes that have been delivered:

Figure 7: Outcomes delivered (n=547)

Impact on Participants	%
They have a device to access the internet	90%
Better able to stay in touch with friends and family	87%
They have a WiFi connection	86%
Improved wellbeing	79%
They have gained IT skills	74%
Improved mental health	74%
They are more connected with local services	71%
They can access advice and guidance on important issues	62%
They are more engaged with their local community	59%
Family members benefitted from Connected Scotland devices	56%
Able to access public services such as the benefits system	55%
Able to access health services	52%
They are better able to engage with their children's education	51%
They can search and apply for jobs	47%
They are more employable	27%
Able to save money on bills	24%
Other	12%
Have made money online (e.g. through selling things)	3%
None of the above	1%

N.B. Multiple responses to this question were allowed.

In the next sections we give further details of the impact the programme has had on participants.

Impact on participants

Increased engagement with family and friends

The most frequently cited outcome of the programme was that by providing people with devices and an internet connection, many were able to connect with family and friends for the first time since the pandemic had begun.

87% of respondents to our survey indicated that they used their devices to engage with family and friends, and among interviewees, organisations most frequently described having given their participants the skills to connect with family and friends using apps such as Facetime or Zoom. Organisations reported the enormous impact this had on people's wellbeing and sense of being connected with the outside world again:

"The joy on people's faces was just unbelievable."

"They thought they had won the lottery."

Some organisations also reported the programme having had an impact on inter-generational interaction – training older people and increasing their knowledge and understanding of the internet made them better able to engage with young people in their household.

A few organisations also noted the impact on carers and peer supporters, whom it helped to have a life outside their caring role.

"It is easy to under-estimate the impact of Connecting Scotland. Our tenants are among the most vulnerable and they hadn't seen anyone up until that point during the pandemic. It meant they were instantly able to Facetime with family and friends."

Improved access to services

The programme was instrumental in giving people access to services which, during the pandemic, would have been otherwise inaccessible to them. In addition, it equipped people with the skills to access services online outwith the pandemic, and in addition to practical services such as online shopping or medical appointments, opened up a whole range of new sources of entertainment, information and education to them.

71% of respondents to our survey indicated that having an internet connection and device had enabled them to engage with local services. Representatives of organisations that were interviewed during the research were equally positive about this outcome.

"One deaf-blind lady we work with can now use the iPad as a white-board to communicate with her carer. She is also able to have contact with her sister and her church. It has had a massive impact."

Other examples of the ways in which people accessed new services are given below:

One organisation that worked with teenage mothers had some of their participants under child protection orders. They were able to join Child Protection Team Meetings by Zoom (or similar) which worked far better than over the phone which is what had been done previously. In addition, it enabled them to work simultaneously with two separated parents which they said was highly valuable.

During the pandemic, one organisation reported that they were able to undertake remote “accompanied home visits” by having one person attend in person, and the other join in via Microsoft Teams.

People who were shielding and had visual impairments had not been able to access talking books during the early stages of the pandemic, but Connecting Scotland enabled them to access these through an app on their device.

A number of organisations spoke of the value of people being able to access church services online, giving them access to their church which would not have been otherwise possible at that time due to lockdown restrictions.

For one council service, it meant that local people could access services which they could not have otherwise during the pandemic.

“It has helped people to connect with real-world groups in their communities.”

As a result of the success of the programme, many organisations are delivering more services online now that more of their clients have access to devices, and intend to continue to do so once restrictions related to the pandemic have eased. There has been a positive response to this so far, with many of them reporting ever-increasing numbers taking part in these sessions. They also emphasised the importance of having upskilled people so that they have the skills and systems for accessing services when they become less mobile – for example, enabling them to continue to shop for food and to socialise.

Impact on health and wellbeing

Respondents to the survey of participating organisations indicated that the programme had had a positive impact on health and wellbeing, with 70% reporting improved wellbeing among their service users, 74% reporting improved mental health, and 52% reporting that the programme had enabled service users to access health services. Interviewees also emphasised health benefits of the programme. For example, some interviewees reported that the programme had given people a means to order repeat prescriptions, or to have video consultations with their GP.

Some organisations also reported that having a device gave people better access to health information online.

“Our participants have been accessing self-help information online since they received their devices.”

Other examples reported included a person with a brain injury using their device to organise themselves – for example by storing emails and linking them to Siri and their calendar; and in another case one organisation reported a young mother keeping her Chromebook hidden from her partner which then enabled her to contact friends to let them know that she was being abused. When she eventually left her partner, she was able to take the Chromebook with her.

Another organisation piloted virtual annual reviews for people with epilepsy which avoided people who are prone to seizures having to travel. It has increased the number of people attending their annual reviews as a result and has had a positive impact on their health (for example, by enabling earlier prescribing of medication).

Organisations also reported people using their devices for a wide range of leisure purposes, including things like accessing information online about local history, and a photographer learning to upload all of his photos to his device. Organisations emphasised the importance of enabling people to take part in leisure activities in improving their mental health and wellbeing, particularly during the periods of lockdown last year, but also as a lasting legacy for the future.

It did, however, also highlight some challenges – for example, one service found that the programme they delivered online required significant amounts of data to be available. Until unlimited data became available through the programme in the second round, they could not deliver the programme effectively online. This re-emphasises the importance of people having access to high speed broadband and unlimited data to ensure that they can access the full range of services available online.

Access to benefits and welfare

62% of survey respondents indicated that the provision of devices had enabled their service users to access advice and guidance on important issues, and 55% specifically reported that it had given their service users access to public services such as the benefits system.

Among those organisations interviewed during the research, some also reported that providing people with devices has given them easier access to benefits, which must now be applied for online, and that it enabled them to update their Managing Universal Credit journals more easily. Some organisations anticipated that this will impact on the ability of people to maximise their income going forward.

“Some of our homeless clients in temporary accommodation were able to keep on top of their benefit and undertake virtual tours of properties before they took them on. That was a huge benefit.”

Impact on education

One of the most significant shifts during the pandemic took place in education, with young people suddenly having to undertake all of their school work online. Many families did not have devices or an internet connection and so were disadvantaged compared to those families that did. Giving families access to a device ensured that children had equal access to online learning and educational materials. Prior to

Connecting Scotland, organisations reported that many of the families they were working with either had no device, or were trying to do school work on a mobile phone, which was challenging.

In addition, parents were also upskilled as a result of the programme and were better able to supervise their children's wider online activities.

51% of survey respondents reported that issuing devices to families had resulted in them being better able to engage with their children's education. Interviewees were also positive about the impact on education. For example, one school is hoping to offer SQA accredited training for parents in future.

"It helped to contribute to the vision that every young person deserves equity in relation to digital inclusion and it sped up the process of getting resources."

Access to training and employability support

Survey results and feedback from interviewees indicate that the programme has had a substantive impact on services users' ability to access training or employability support. 47% of survey respondents reported that as a result of the programme their service users were better able to search and apply for jobs, and 27% reported that their service users are more employable as a result of Connecting Scotland.

A number of organisations interviewed reported that the programme had encouraged their clients to access online learning. For example, one client completed a hairdressing course online and other organisations reported that clients had been accessing Open University courses. One project provided a client with a Chromebook which they are now going to use to support their college work.

"Chromebooks were useful for completing college applications which require online accounts and are challenging to complete on mobile phones."

"The role of CLD is taking adult learning out to the community so this programme fitted well with it by offering people the opportunity to take part in a learning opportunity."

One organisation also noted that taking part in the programme provided valuable information about what did and did not work online – their clients were more willing to engage in practical face-to-face learning than online.

Some organisations also gave examples of people using their devices for job searching. This would previously have had to be completed on a mobile phone or they would have had to leave their house to use the internet, making the whole process significantly more challenging.

"We have one person who is now back on track with their life and applying for jobs online. The iPad made a huge difference."

Impact on participating organisations

In addition to having an impact on the individuals who have received devices, Connecting Scotland has had an impact on delivery organisations – in relation to their delivery of online services, staff skills and capacity, and on organisations' wider approach to digital inclusions. We describe these impacts further below. It should be noted that there were no particular trends by sector or type of organisations. The issues outlined related to a wide range of participating organisations.

Increased delivery of online services

Many organisations reported having increased the range of services that they deliver online.

Some organisations had conducted their own research into digital connectivity among their clients prior to Connecting Scotland and so had a good sense of where there was demand and what the benefits of having a more connected group of clients would mean for service delivery. They described Connecting Scotland as having helped to make this happen and having sped up the process.

For others, working online was entirely new, and prompted only by the restrictions arising from the pandemic. Connecting Scotland was a lifeline for these organisations (and their service users) – enabling them to deliver services which would otherwise have had to shut down during the various periods of lockdown.

For example, one organisation has introduced an aftercare programme for its programme participants which is fully online. They would never have been able to do so previously as not enough participants were digitally connected. Another organisation now offers health and wellbeing sessions online facilitated by an instructor, with the aim of progressing participants from this to re-engaging with local services and community life.

Many of the organisations that participated in the evaluation described a permanent shift in service delivery model – moving from services delivered face-to-face, to services being delivered through a more blended approach. COVID has shifted how organisations across the board work, with many now realising that much more can be done digitally.

Enhanced capacity

Some organisations reported that providing their clients with devices, and shifting to a more web-based method of service delivery has impacted positively on their staff's capacity. They described time savings for staff due to reduced travel time, particularly staff in rural areas. They reported that this would enable more efficient use of the staff resources they have.

“There will be a huge impact on time and money savings. We don't want to jump back in to regular ways of engagement. We will take a more blended approach from now on.”

In addition, some organisations described the benefits of online work if staff are off sick – with other staff able to step in to appointments remotely now that their clients have access to a device.

Many organisations reported greater attendance at activities that they run. Running activities online has not only benefited people who have been limited from attending in person due to restrictions arising from the pandemic, it has enabled people to take part in activities who live further away and for whom attendance would previously have been impossible due to journey times (i.e. there will be a continued benefit even after pandemic restrictions are lifted completely).

For example, one training organisation reported having had 120 people attend a recent graduation ceremony online which is a far higher number than had ever attended previously. Another organisation runs an arts therapy course and when this shifted online, attendance was higher than previously.

One housing association reported that they now have higher participation rates in consultations about affordability of rent, heating etc. They hope that this will lead to fewer issues with outstanding debts.

In the case of one school, they were able to hold virtual parents' nights, avoiding need for parents to travel to the school and to arrange childcare for their children.

“We can now reach more families in a day.”

Upskilling of staff

Some organisations have observed that taking part in the Connecting Scotland programme has improved digital skills amongst staff involved in delivery. This is particularly the case for staff who have been trained as digital champions (although it should be noted that some of these staff already had good digital skills), but in addition some other organisations have observed that the programme has encouraged their wider staff group to improve their digital skills.

One organisation, for example, reported that many more staff are competent using iPads now and that previous resistance to their tablet-based MIS system had decreased as a result of participation in Connecting Scotland.

Increased emphasis on digital inclusion

Some organisations reported that participating in the programme has led to an increased emphasis on digital inclusion within their organisation. 81% of survey respondents indicated that it had helped to advance their organisation's digital inclusion provision, with 18% indicating that it had not helped.

Some organisations have now appointed a member of staff to provide digital support on an ongoing basis because they have seen the benefits through this programme. Other organisations reported a change in mindset at management level.

“It has really shifted thinking – we were reticent before about what can be done.”

“It has sped things up – the Council in our area is now starting to factor in WiFi to sheltered housing complexes and to gypsy traveller sites.”

We also heard good examples of organisations already on a journey to providing better WiFi for their clients. For example, one housing association reported that the case for communal WiFi has already been made and that their future approach will be to give tablets to all tenants and provide them with WiFi through their main complex and its surrounding streets.

But for some organisations, progress has not been as significant as they would have liked. One organisation noted the challenge of community work being seen as a “lense to make the housing association’s work easier, but not as a solution.” There was a sense that this still needed to change and that Connecting Scotland had not impacted on this as much as would have been desirable.

“We don’t have the scale to change practice yet. We issued 133 devices and have over 4000 tenants!”

“It has tempered ambition about what we can do online – this is a massive step change for people.”

While much progress has been made, opportunities remain to continue to develop digital inclusion practice in organisations.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and recommendations

Connecting Scotland is a unique and ground-breaking programme. It was set-up and implemented at the height of a pandemic in response to an immediate need for digital connectivity that is unprecedented. A programme of this nature has never been done before on this scale and the speed at which it was implemented, especially given the ongoing restrictions in place due to Covid-19, is impressive.

While there have inevitably been some teething problems related to delivery of devices, and the programme database, these were immediately identified and as the programme has progressed solutions have been found to address these. Programme managers continue to work on improvements and solutions to any challenges as these arise.

However, the programme has also re-highlighted the scale of digital inequality in Scotland and the demand for this kind of programme. There is no sense from those we consulted during the evaluation that demand was saturated and indeed many evaluation participants were concerned about sustainability, once Connecting Scotland was no longer able to make data packages in particular available to people in need. Organisations noted that devices are available through other programmes, or through recycling at affordable prices, but that it is far harder to access free data. This was considered to be a critical issue for the future.

The response to the programme has been very positive, and as a result of its simplicity the programme has been accessible to a wide range of organisations, including some volunteer-led organisations. It has enabled many participating organisations to continue to deliver services while staff have been restricted in their ability to provide face-to-face support.

While the Connecting Scotland model was designed to be an emergency response to reach people quickly and get them digitally connected, it has been instrumental in helping organisations to understand how they might deliver services differently in future. It has been an effective way for organisations to trial new approaches to service delivery and it fits clearly with the technology-enabled care agenda. It was a real-time opportunity for organisations to look at things differently. Many intend to continue to apply a blended approach to service delivery in future – offering support through a mix of online and face-to-face support.

SCVO's role in implementation

SCVO has implemented the programme on behalf of Scottish Government efficiently and effectively. While not without teething problems, feedback from applicant and participating organisations was highly positive and there was clear evidence of continual improvement to the delivery model.

Impact

The programme has had a significant impact on those people who have received devices and support, and on the organisations involved in implementation.

Organisations reported very positive impact on those individuals who received devices and support through the programme. Outcomes included improving people's engagement with family and friends; improved health and wellbeing; improved IT skills; better access to local services; more engagement with local communities; parents engaging more effectively with their children's education; improvements to employability of participants; and improved ability to search and apply for jobs.

There were clear benefits to organisations participating in the programme including improved IT skills amongst staff; a case being made for more digital delivery of services in future; and more effective use of staff time due to reductions in travel time, and more flexible use of staff time.

Sustainability of the model

However, whilst the model has been highly successful, there are real question marks over whether it is sustainable in the longer term. While participants in the programme will continue to be able to use the devices they have received for as long as these are functioning, staff in participant organisations had concerns about the impact on people once the free data packages end (they are currently available for a period of two years). Many highlighted the unaffordability of an internet connection for many of the households they support. While many would like to see Connecting Scotland continue indefinitely, some believe that longer term, connectivity and access to devices needs to become the responsibility of organisations like housing associations and care homes. Some also felt that WiFi should be considered like an essential utility and be available to all.

Similarly, some organisations questioned the sustainability of the model in relation to the support element. While most have managed to identify and train digital champions to date, some organisations highlighted concerns that this would prove more challenging in future as staff involved as digital champions were required to shift back to delivery of face-to-face duties once restrictions related to the pandemic are lifted. Furthermore, some raised concerns about the amount of time spent administering the programme and were concerned that these costs were not eligible for funding through the programme.

Many emphasised the need to plan well ahead of the end of the programme to ensure seamless transition. The following recommendations have been developed on the basis of feedback received throughout the evaluation:

Strategic recommendations

1. Consider continuing the provision of free data beyond the end of the current two-year period, but for a fixed time period with a clear transition plan to ensure this can continue to be supported beyond the lifetime of the programme.

2. Consider contributing to the cost of administering the programme and providing financial support for the digital champion role to ensure that the programme can be sustained beyond the current timeframe.
3. Ensure that organisations collect monitoring and evaluation data systematically, whilst ensuring this remains manageable and proportionate.

Operational recommendations

1. Remove eligibility criteria in relation to target group and enable organisations to apply for devices for those who are most digitally excluded.
2. Enable organisations to specify which type of device they would prefer to issue to service users, rather than allocating based on availability. Consider offering the option to organisations to receive low-cost laptops where this is more suitable (e.g. for training organisations)
3. Consider issuing devices which are already set up with common apps downloaded onto them to reduce time required by digital champions at the outset.
4. Consider allowing national organisations to submit one application across all local authority areas in which they operate – potentially by bidding into a ring-fenced pot for national organisations.
5. Consider allowing organisations to bid for a data package only, particularly as numbers of people requiring devices reduces.

Appendix 1 – Survey questions

Survey of Phase 1 and 2 Organisations

Background information

1. Name of organisation (free text response)
2. Your name and title
3. Size of your organisation
 - i. Drop down options for number of staff – micro (1-9 employees), small (10-49 employees, medium (50-249 employees), large (250+ employees)
4. Location of organisation
 - i. By LA area (drop down menu)
5. Phases you have been involved in (please select all that apply)
 - i. Tick box options to include none, we were unsuccessful in applying for funding
6. Number of participants you have supported
 - i. By providing a WIFI connection (box to enter number)
 - ii. By providing a device (box to enter number)
 - iii. By providing support and advice (box to enter number)
7. Criteria you came into the programme under.
8. Type of participants you have supported (please select all that apply)
 - i. Tick box options of various groups of people

Connecting Scotland user groups	
Phase 1 (Apr. - July 2020)	
people shielding	
people in the higher risk of severe illness	
other vulnerable groups	
applications for more than 1 of the above 3 groups	
Phase 2 round 1 (18 Aug. - 5 Oct. 2020)	
Low income families	
Young Care Leavers	
Other Vulnerable Groups	
applications for more than 1 of the above 3 groups	
Phase 2 round 2 non-Winter Support Package (24 Nov. 2020 - 18 Jan. 2021)	
Low income families	
Young Care Leavers	
Other Vulnerable Groups	
applications for multiple groups	
Phase 2 round 2 Winter Support Package (24 Nov. 2020 - 18 Jan. 2021)	
disabled under 60	
disabled 60+	
60+ not disabled	
unspecified i.e. 60+ and / or disabled but not clear which	

9. Would you describe your clients as:
- i. Urban
 - ii. Rural
 - iii. Both urban and rural

Devices issued

10. Number of devices issued to date
- i. Number of iPads (box to enter number)
 - ii. Number of Chromebooks (box to enter number)
11. Why did you issue these types of devices? (please select all that apply)
- i. Based on preference in our area
 - ii. Based on the needs of families/young people in our area
 - iii. Based on what people with accessibility issues require
 - iv. Because that was what SG made available
 - v. Other (box for response)

Application process

12. How did you find out about the Connecting Scotland programme?
(please select all that apply)
- i. Information sent to my organisation
 - ii. Via SCVO
 - iii. Social media
 - iv. Others?
13. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very easy and 5 very difficult, how easy did you find the process of applying for this funding? Rating scale
- i. 1. Very easy
 - ii. 2. Easy
 - iii. 3. Neither easy nor difficult
 - iv. 4. Difficult
 - v. 5. Very difficult
14. Was there adequate support available to you during the application process?
- i. Yes
 - ii. No
15. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very easy and 5 being very difficult, how clear was the concept of the Connecting Scotland programme at the outset?
- i. 1. Very clear
 - ii. 2. Quite clear

- iii. 3. Neither clear nor unclear
 - iv. 4. Difficult to understand
 - v. 5. Very difficult to understand
16. [For unsuccessful applicants only] What reasons were you given for your application being unsuccessful? (Please select all that apply)
- i. The application did not fit with the criteria for the programme
 - ii. The programme was over-subscribed/there were insufficient funds available
 - iii. I did not receive any feedback on why my application was unsuccessful
 - iv. Other reason [box to specify]
17. [For unsuccessful applicants only] Do you have any other comments about the programme? Free text response
18. [For unsuccessful applicants only] Would you apply again?
- i. Yes
 - ii. No
19. [For unsuccessful applicants only] Please explain why/why not

Implementation of the programme

20. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very easy and 5 being very difficult, how easy has it been to implement the programme? Rating scale
- i. 1. Very easy
 - ii. 2. Easy
 - iii. 3. We had some challenges
 - iv. 4. Difficult
 - v. 5. Very difficult
21. How many digital champions do you have in your organisation? (Free text response)
22. Were the digital champions already in place or did you have to recruit them once you were awarded funding? (Please select one option)
- i. Already in place
 - ii. Had to recruit them
23. [If the organisation had to recruit the champions] Did the recruitment of the digital champions cause delays in issuing devices?
- i. Yes
 - ii. No

24. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very easy and 5 being very difficult, how easy was it to accommodate the digital champions training? Rating scale
- i. 1. Very easy
 - ii. 2. Easy
 - iii. 3. Neither easy nor difficult
 - iv. 4. Difficult
 - v. 5. Very difficult
25. To what extent did the training adequately equip the digital champions to undertake their role? Rating scale
- i. 1. To a great extent
 - ii. 2. To some extent
 - iii. 3. Not at all
26. What has worked particularly well in relation to delivery of the programme? (tick all options that apply)
- i. Identifying/recruiting digital champions
 - ii. Training digital champions
 - iii. Reaching participants
 - iv. Receiving devices from Scottish Government/SCVO
 - v. Issuing devices to participants
 - vi. Speed at which programme was set up and devices could be issued
 - vii. Other – please describe
27. Have there been any barriers to successful implementation? (Free text response)

Programme reach

28. Did you reach out to clients before receiving devices or after you received them?
- i. Before
 - ii. After
29. [If After] Did this delay implementation of the programme?
- i. Yes
 - ii. No

Programme impact

30. What impact has the programme had on participants? ? (Please select all that apply)
- i. They have a WiFi connection
 - ii. They have a device to access the internet
 - iii. They have gained IT skills

- iv. They are better able to engage with their children's education
- v. They are more employable
- vi. They are more connected with local services
- vii. They can access advice and guidance on important issues
- viii. They can search and apply for jobs
- ix. They are more engaged with their local community
- x. Able to save money on bills
- xi. Able to access public services such as the benefits system
- xii. Able to access health services
- xiii. Have made money online (e.g. through selling things)
- xiv. Family members benefitted from Connected Scotland devices
- xv. Better able to stay in touch with family and friends
- xvi. Improved mental health
- xvii. Improved wellbeing
- xviii. Other (box to specify)

31. Did you undertake any impact evaluation with your participants?
- i. Yes
 - ii. No

32. [If Yes] Please describe the results of this or attach the evaluation report to this survey.

Delivery processes

33. Did you have any challenges inputting data to the SCVO system?
- i. Yes
 - ii. No
34. Please explain your answer

Impact on your organisation

35. Did the programme result in you creating a digital inclusion officer post in your organisations?
- i. Yes
 - ii. No
36. Has the Connecting Scotland programme helped you as an organisation to advance or develop your digital inclusion provision?
- i. Yes
 - ii. No

Future developments

37. Do you have any other comments about the programme? (Free text response)

Appendix 2 – Profile of survey respondents

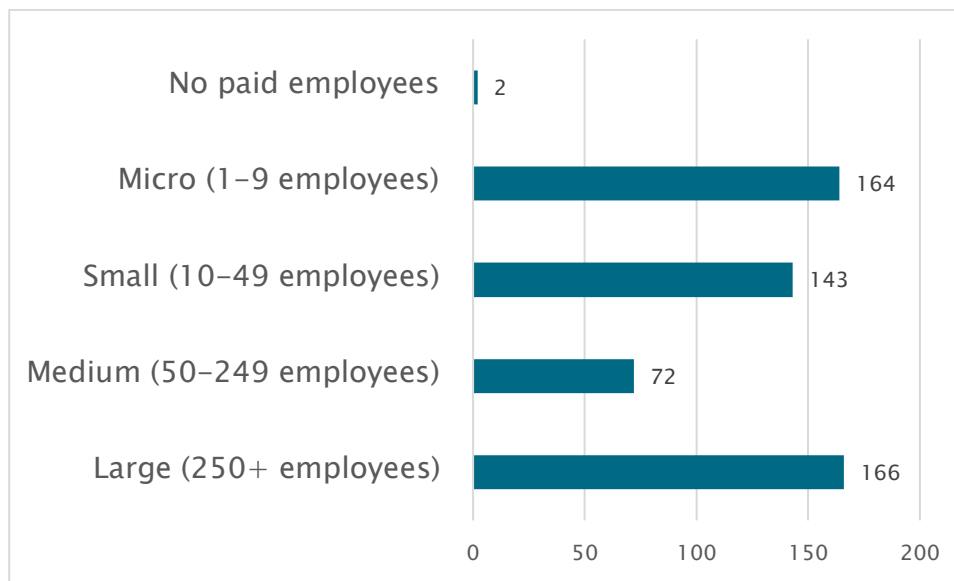
Survey respondents

We received 547 responses from 420 organisations.

Size of organisation

Of the 547 responses, most (307, 56%) were either micro (164, 30%) or small organisations (143, 26%). Nearly a third (166, 30%) were from large organisations.

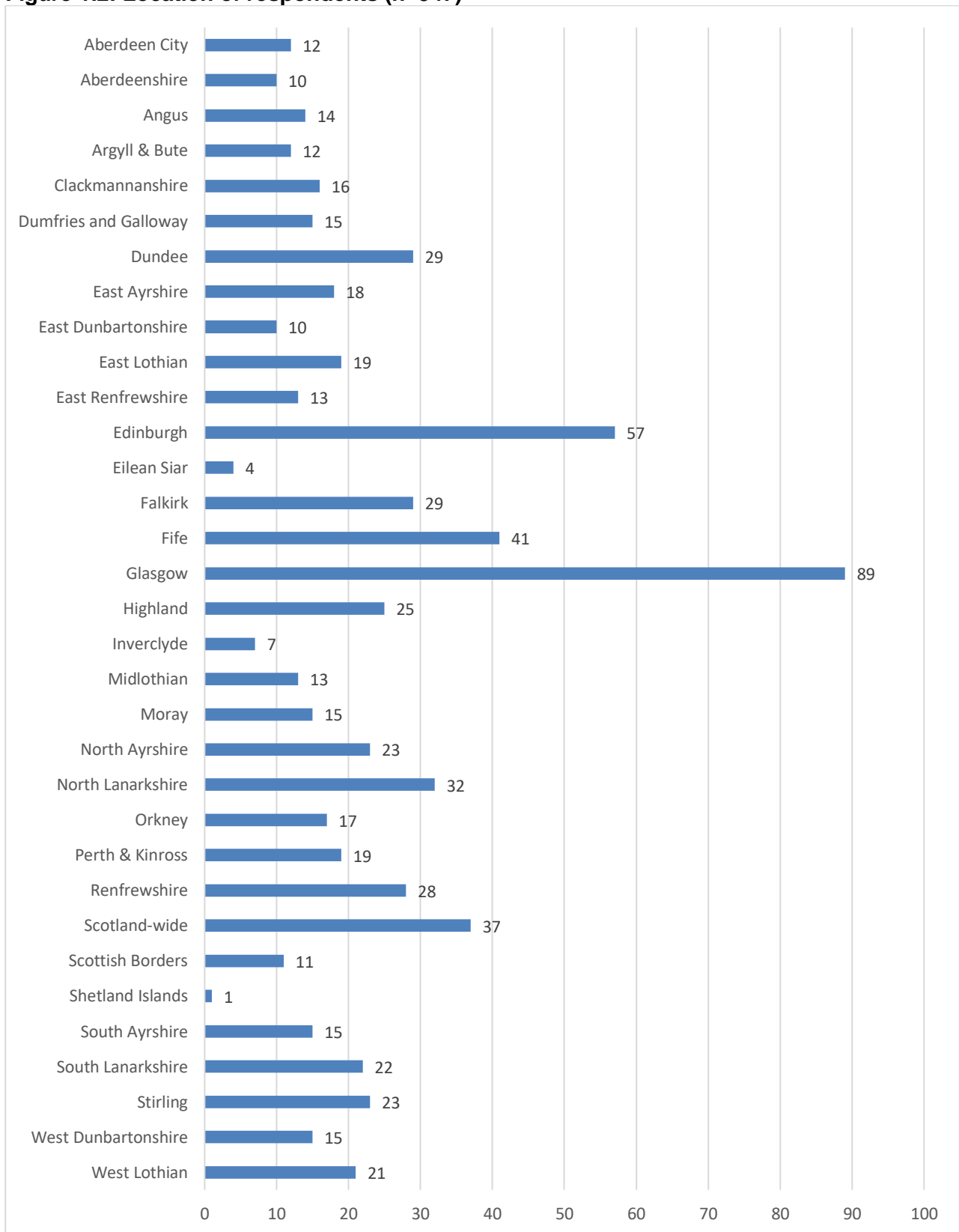
Figure 1.1: Size of organisation (n=547)



Location

Survey respondents were based across Scotland, with at least one response from each local authority area. Most worked in Glasgow (89, 16%), Edinburgh (57, 10%), Fife (41, 7%) or North Lanarkshire (32, 6%). (See over.)

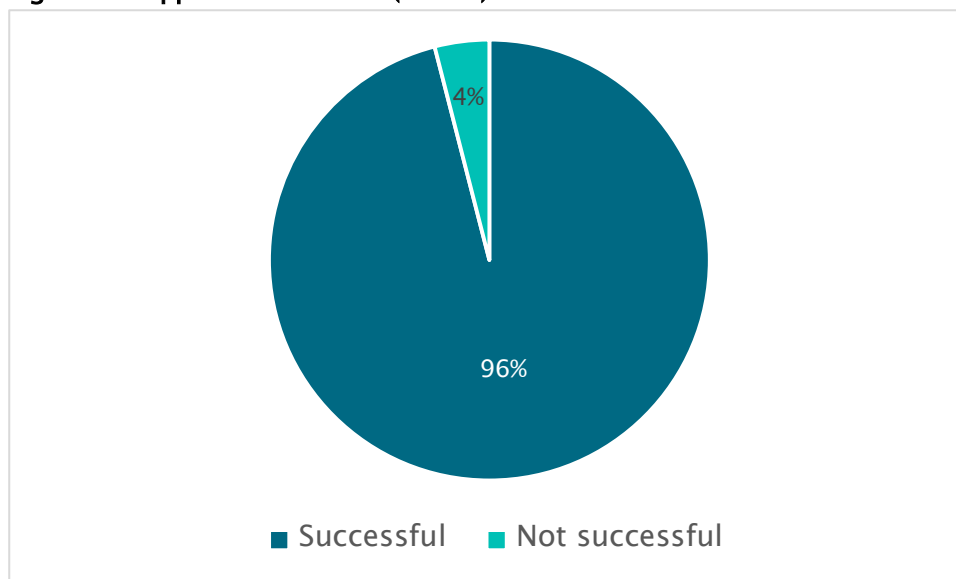
Figure 1.2: Location of respondents (n=547)



Application outcome

The vast majority of respondents (524, 96%) were successful with their application. Twenty-three (4%) were not.

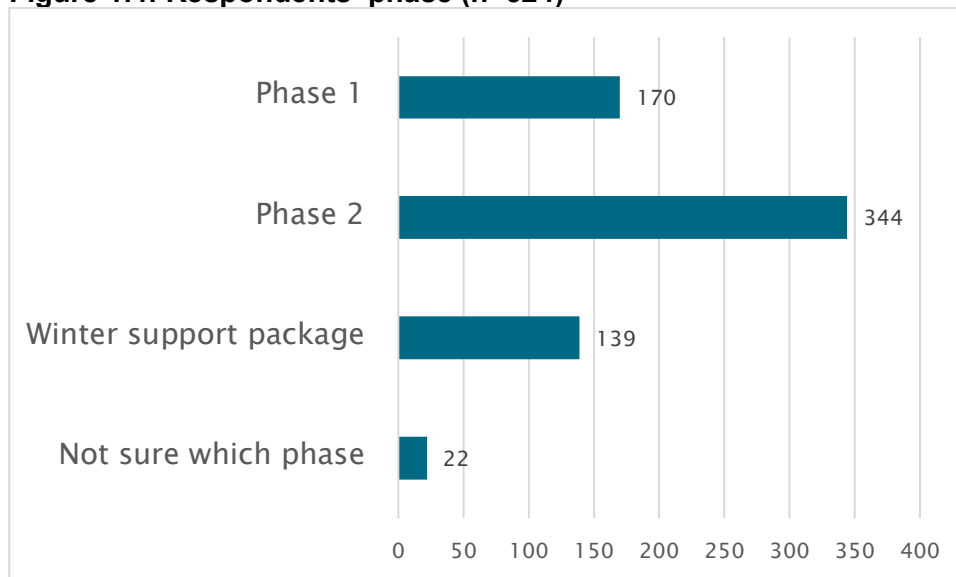
Figure 1.3: Application outcome (n=547)



Phase

Of the 524 respondents that were successful with their application, most applied to phase 2 (66%). Just over a quarter (139, 27%) applied to the winter support package, 170 (32%) applied to phase 1 and 22 (4%) were not sure which phase they applied to.

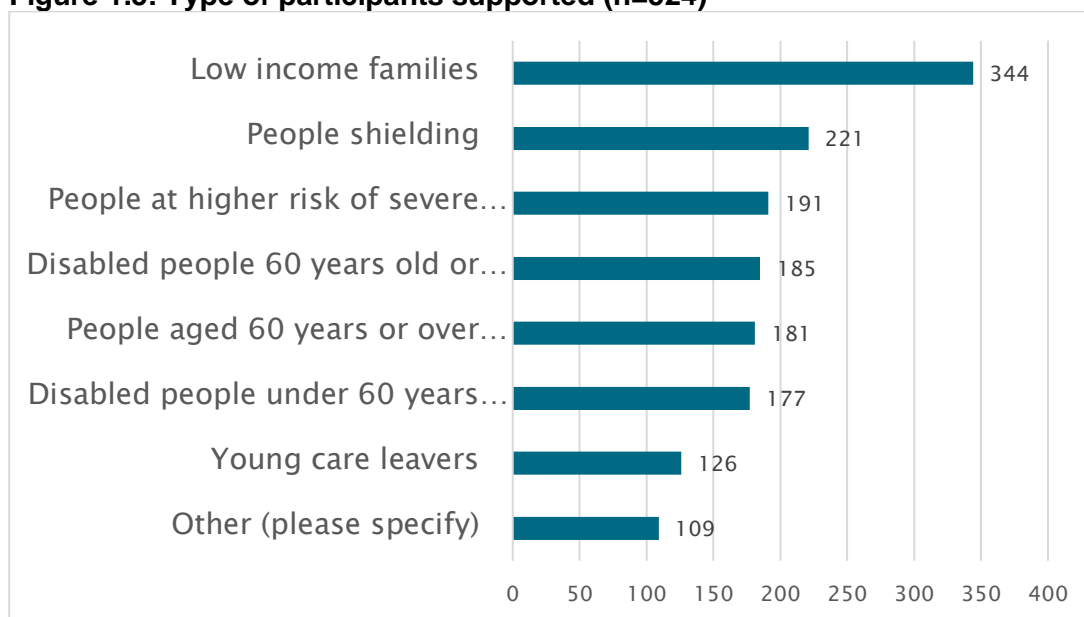
Figure 1.4: Respondents' phase (n=524)



Type of participants

The 524 successful applicants supported a wide range of participants. The most common category was low income families (66%), followed by people shielding (221, 42%), people at higher risk of severe illness (191, 36%) and disabled people aged 60 years or over (185, 35%), people aged 60 years or over (not disabled) (181, 35%) and disabled people under 60 years old (177, 34%). One hundred and nine respondents (21%) reported that they supported another type of participants. These 'other' types were wide ranging and included young carers, people with substance use issues, people with mental health issues and homeless young people.

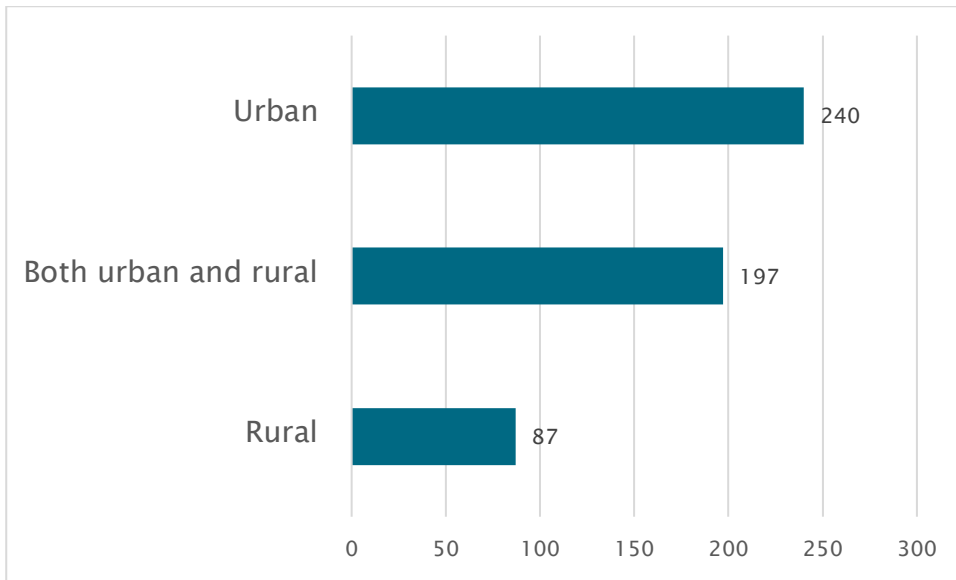
Figure 1.5: Type of participants supported (n=524)



Urban/rural

Most respondents reported that their clients are based in urban locations (240, 46%), 87 (17%) said they were rural and 197 (38%) described their clients as both urban and rural.

Figure 1.6: Urban/rural location of participants (n=524)



Appendix 3 – Organisations interviewed

Organisation	Sector	Local Authority	Number of Interviewees
Aberdeen Foyer	Third Sector organisation	Aberdeenshire	2
Ark	Third Sector organisation	Various	1
Bield Housing and Care	Housing association	Edinburgh	1
Brechin Healthcare Group @ The Jenner Centre	NHS	Angus	1
CAP (Christians Against Poverty) Highland Perthshire Debt Centre / Aberfeldy Parish Church	Third Sector organisation	Various	1
Capability Scotland	Third Sector organisation	Edinburgh	1
Children 1st	Third Sector organisation	Edinburgh	1
Cyrenians	Third Sector organisations	Edinburgh	1
Deafblind Scotland	Third Sector organisation	Glasgow	1
DG Voice	Third Sector organisation	Dumfries & Galloway	1
DK Advocacy	Third Sector	Various	1
Dufftown and District Community Association	Third Sector organisation	Moray	1
East Ayrshire Council - Sensory Impairment Team	Local authority	East Ayrshire	1
East Renfrewshire Council	Local authority	East Renfrewshire	1
ENABLE Glasgow	Third Sector organisations	Glasgow	1
Family Nurse Partnership, NHS Lothian	NHS	Lothian	1
Family Nursing Partnership	NHS	Highland	1
Fife Council	Local authority	Fife	1
Fife Council - Housing Services	Local authority	Fife	1
Forres Area Community Trust	Third Sector organisation	Moray	1
Glasgow Clyde College	Third Sector organisation	Glasgow	1
Glasgow Disability Alliance	Third Sector	Glasgow	2
Glasgow's Golden Generation "care in the autumn years"	Third Sector	Glasgow	1

Govan Housing Association	Housing Association	Glasgow	1
Health in Mind	Third Sector organisation	Edinburgh	1
High Life Highland	Third Sector	Highland	1
Highland Council	Local authority	Highland	1
Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health	Third Sector organisation	South Lanarkshire	1
LEAD Scotland	Third Sector organisation	Edinburgh	1
Liberton High School	Education	Edinburgh	1
Libertus Services	Third Sector	Edinburgh	1
Mount Blair Community Development Trust	Third Sector organisation	Perth & Kinross	1
NHS Ayrshire & Arran	NHS	North Ayrshire	1
NHS Forth Valley	NHS	Stirling, Clackmannanshire and Falkirk	2
NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde	NHS	Glasgow	1
North Coast Connection	Third Sector	Highland	1
Orkney Islands Council – Housing Service	Local authority	Orkney	1
Perth & Kinross Council	Local authority	Perth & Kinross	1
Quarriers	Third Sector organisations	Inverclyde	2
Self-directed Support Forum East Renfrewshire	Local partnership	East Renfrewshire	1
Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) Scotland	Third Sector organisation	Glasgow	1
South Ayrshire Council	Local authority	South Ayrshire	1
Stepwell	Third Sector organisation	Inverclyde	1
Stirling Council	Local authority	Stirling	4
Stirling Council Libraries & Archives	Local authority	Stirling	1
Street Soccer Scotland	Third Sector organisation	Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow	1
Summerhill Community Centre	Third Sector organisation	Dumfries & Galloway	1
Tenants Information Service (TIS)	Housing association	Glasgow	1
Terrence Higgins Trust	Third Sector organisations	Glasgow	1
The Gate	Third Sector organisations	Leith	1

Transform Forth Valley (Time 4 Us)	Third Sector organisation	Stirling, Clackmannanshire and Falkirk	1
West Dunbartonshire Council's Working 4 U Crisis Support Team	Local authority	West Dunbartonshire	1
TOTAL			59

Appendix 4 Summary Survey Findings

Connecting Scotland

Data from survey of applicants

547 of those who applied for funding from Connecting Scotland completed the survey.

Background Information

Location of Organisation

Location	Total Number	Percentage
Glasgow	89	16.3%
Edinburgh	57	10.4%
Fife	41	7.5%
Scotland-wide	37	6.8%
North Lanarkshire	32	5.9%
Dundee	29	5.3%
Falkirk	29	5.3%
Renfrewshire	28	5.1%
Highland	25	4.6%
Stirling	23	4.2%
North Ayrshire	23	4.2%
South Lanarkshire	22	4.0%
West Lothian	21	3.8%
Perth & Kinross	19	3.5%
East Lothian	19	3.5%
East Ayrshire	18	3.3%
Orkney	17	3.1%
Clackmannanshire	16	2.9%
Dumfries and Galloway	15	2.7%
South Ayrshire	15	2.7%
West Dunbartonshire	15	2.7%
Moray	15	2.7%
Angus	14	2.6%
Midlothian	13	2.4%
East Renfrewshire	13	2.4%
Aberdeen City	12	2.2%
Argyll & Bute	12	2.2%
Scottish Borders	11	2.0%
East Dunbartonshire	10	1.8%
Aberdeenshire	10	1.8%
Inverclyde	7	1.3%
Eilean Siar	4	0.7%
Shetland Islands	1	0.2%

Size of Organisation

- 30% of respondents represent an organisation of up to 9 employees
- 26% between 10 and 49 employees
- 18% between 50 and 249 employees
- And 30% with over 250 employees
- Only 0.4% (2) with no employees

Phase Involvement

- 63% of respondents were involved with Phase 2
- 31% were involved with Phase 1
- 25% were involved with the Winter Support Package
- 4% were unsure which phase they were involved with
 - These were split across a number of locations
- 4% were unsuccessful with their application(s)
 - 4% equates to 23 participants. 9 of the 23 were in Glasgow, where (10%) were unsuccessful with their applications

Number of Participants Supported

- Respondents have supported 16,411 participants by providing a WiFi connection
- Respondents have supported 23,069 participants by providing a device
- Respondents have supported 26,344 participants by providing support and advice

Type of Participants Supported

Type of Participant	Total	Percentage
Low income families	344	66%
People shielding	221	42%
People in the higher risk of severe illness	191	37%
Disabled people 60 years old or over	185	24%
People aged 60 years or over (not disabled)	181	34%
Disabled people under 60 years old	177	35%
Young care leavers	126	35%
Other (please specify)	109	21%

- 4 Participants selected all 8 of the above options
- 27 Participants selected 7 options
- 60 Participants selected 6 options

- 98 Participants selected 5 options

Urban or Rural

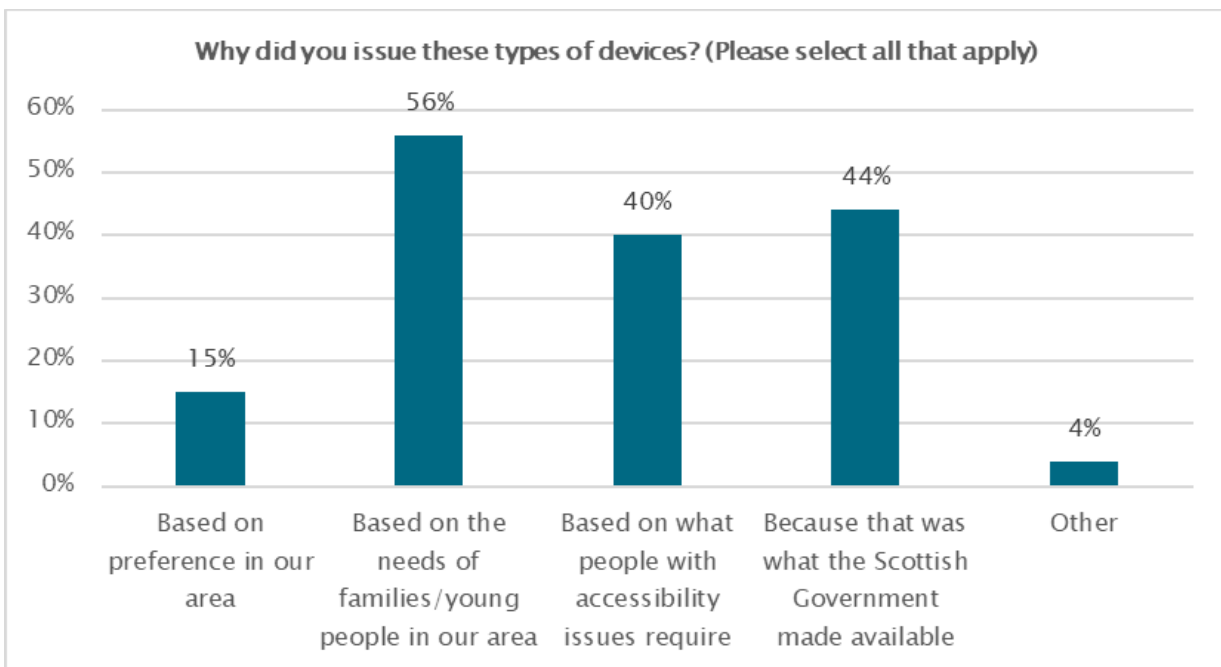
Urban or Rural	Percentage
Urban	46%
Both urban and rural	38%
Rural	17%

Devices Issued

Number of Devices Issued

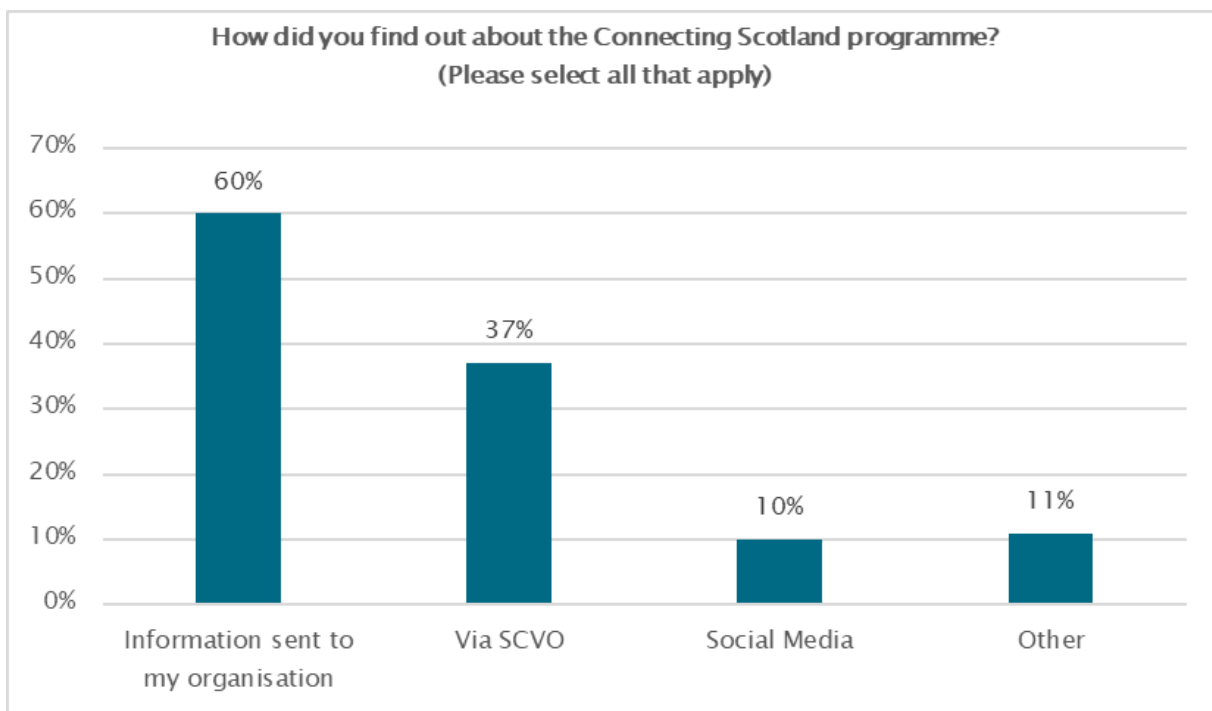
- Participant organisations have issued 10,410 iPads
- Participant organisations have issued 12,736 Chromebooks

Why These Devices Were Issued



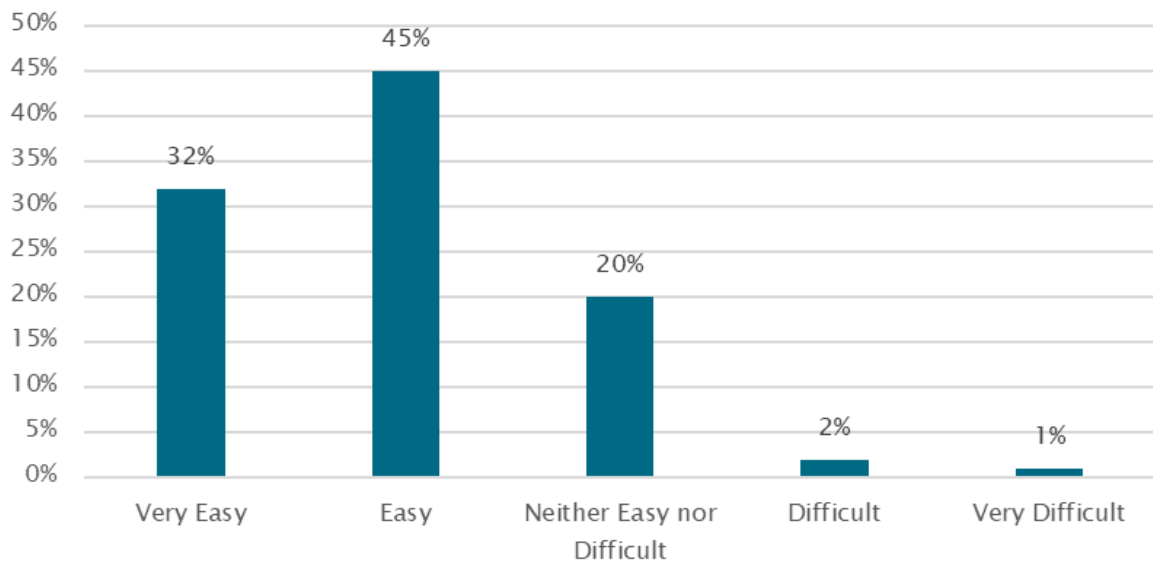
Application Process

Discovery of Connecting Scotland



Ease of Funding Process

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very easy and 5 very difficult, how easy did you find the process of applying for this funding?



Support Provided

- 96% agreed there was adequate support provided during the application process
- The other 4% (22) were divided across most locations
- When asked what support was needed but they were unable to access, all 22 entered a response – all are listed below:
 - We are a small charity and don't employ people. However, we work with the community and support where possible
 - emailed but was never responded to. wanted some clarity about the process.
 - All
 - Information about future phases to submit appropriate request.
 - Communication with process of applying.
 - I made a mistake of putting the wrong building number for delivery but despite several attempts got no response to say this had been sorted which was quite stressful as it due to Covid lockdown the items were to be delivered to my home address. One was sorted one was not
 - We weren't successful and we weren't then given any support to reapply
 - Links for non 3rd sector or public body organisations
 - clearer understanding of the criteria
 - We needed more information to work out eligibility
 - More clarity about what fund was and what parameters for applying?
 - Unaware of option to ask for cromebooks and the mifi devices where requested but not registered as being asked for
 - I was not aware of any.
 - There was no feedback as to why we weren't successful in both occasion. And we thought all questions were answered as asked
 - We had absolutely no support in researching, applying for funding, no constructive feedback as to how we could get into the "loop". We were late in finding out about the funding (not in applying), and were advised that most of the grants had been allocated in the previous phase as an explanation as to why we were unsuccessful.
 - We work with highly deprived community and we got nothing and felt let down because we had made a big promise to these vulnerable groups that the Scottish government through connecting Scotland will provide them with devices.
 - Guidance for the Application did not inform of all the relevant conditions of applying. This was not related until the Agreement signing stage.
 - getting in touch with the proper people
 - We requested 40 items and received 30 to support people across 2 local authority areas
 - We were not aware that we could have asked for support with the application form.

- I wasn't aware how fiddly it was doing applications for each local authority area. It would have been much easier doing one application. And the data gathering logistics bit was difficult during the pandemic as it wasn't clear about matching the sim numbers with the local authority CS code with the iPad or chrome books. This wasn't spelt out to us. The pandemic caused all kinds of problems with our teams were working from home, and only two members of staff at the centre. It was a bit of a struggle but we managed it in the end.

Clarity of Concept

- 46% found the concept of Connecting Scotland very clear from the outset
- 42% found it quite clear
- 9% found in neither clear nor unclear
- 2% found it difficult to understand
- 0.4% (2) found it very difficult to understand
- None of the selections were favoured by any particular location

Reason for Unsuccessful Application

- 24 Respondents entered a selection, of which
 - 30% were unsuccessful due to the programme being over-subscribed or insufficient funds
 - 26% because their application did not fit with the criteria of the programme
 - 22% did not receive any feedback with a reason
 - 26% had another reason:
 - we were told it was for shielding people, which was interesting since most of our people were shielding
 - We didn't receive any funding for devices as we are not a 3rd party or public body. This was a tragedy for those we support who have been left isolated especially throughout the pandemic.
 - Duplication. My application was rejected as the authority also applied.
 - "Thanks for your interest in the Connecting Scotland programme in Stirling. We are sorry but we are unfortunately unable to support your request at this time. Stirling Council operated a closed application process and received a large amount of eligible requests for the number of devices available. We do appreciate the particular needs of your service users. If they haven't already looked, please encourage the families you support to make contact with their school settings as there may be scope to get devices through the Education strand of Connecting Scotland."
 - I don't remember.

- 2 applications submitted, only received feedback for one. This said we had not indicated we had IT support but this was included in our application text.

Other Comments

- When asked for other comments, 11 responses were received:
 - Nobody seems to care for this group and despite requests to Edinburgh health and social partnership for assistance none has been forthcoming. My feedback to the government would to allow care companies to apply on behalf of those they support if they really want to expand access to the most vulnerable in society.
 - we applied in the first round and received an "already over subscribed" rejection. it would have been better to close the applications rather than allow people to waste time. in the second application we were again told that due to over subscription we were rejected as we didn't meet the criteria under "other vulnerabilities" (our work is with destitute asylum seekers who have no right to work or claim benefits, nor access homelessness support.
 - The authority was able to secure devices of which we benefited. It has made a positive impact for our families. Children are able to complete homework online, communication between home and school has improved, parents have used their devices to attend online school meetings, attend online Social Work and Scottish Reporter meetings and attend authority NVR (Non Violent Resistance) parenting classes.
 - We deal with very vulnerable people with addiction and blood borne virus issues. I was told that we were unsuccessful as they were not families (I am sure that some of them do have families)
 - We are continuing to grow and develop the MorphFit model and connecting more populations online to the MorphFit Gentle Movement Programme. We would like to be considered if there is any future funding available.
 - I did feed back at the time that the eligibility seemed to change between application and feedback.
 - We found this answer very disappointing, we were supporting families who did not have any devices and whom we could not access devices for - Stirling Council included. Young people and young adults with disabilities, struggled massively during the pandemic and still are. We did not apply again as we did not see the point with such a poor response.
 - I do not have enough information to comment.
 - I think it was for selected people. And those were the organisation that were successful.
 - Basically a good idea, but there is a chasm to cross in terms of inclusion , safety-nets and the input - or rather - lack of - support from the local authority. Notwithstanding that, even a hint of interest in the group would have been nice.

- I am now waiting to hear back from someone after contacting my local MP who seems to be pointing me in the right direction

Would They Apply Again?

- When asked if they would apply again, only 23 responded
 - 61% said they would apply again

Their comments on why:

 - I feel that there are people who can benefit greatly from this help
 - Some families in my service still have no access to IT equipment and with computer and video appointments staying it is difficult for the families to connect with the service
 - Because we still have people who require some connectivity
 - We had previously been successful with receiving Tablets from Barclays bank and as they supported a limited number of people we work with more to allow more individuals connect with family, friends etc.` would have been appreciated
 - The impact on individual families has been very positive.
 - I did apply to Fairer Falkirk Covid-19 Digital Exclusion Fund in March and were approved in April. The funds have just come into our account. I am disappointed that there is no guidance on making the purchases. If a deal was available negotiated centrally for all with a specific provider this would be much easier.
 - I have applied again because our organisation really need the devices for our service users to attend our online zoom activities.
 - People still need support to access online services/support/contact with outside world etc.
 - I would apply again as I think it will help a lot of people
 - This organisation is linked to the beneficiaries who require to become digitally savvy. However they all require one to one training and its whether or not their personal health allows them to undertake the training over the funded time span is the reason why this organisation cannot define recipients in advance.
 - If our clients have a need, we will always try to access help for them.
 - I will continue to work for the service users we have to help them gain access to technology that could help them in so many ways.
 - 39% said they would not apply again

Their comments on why not:

 - Disappointing - had to source other resources
 - We got funding through the LA to support our young people and families
 - Unless the criteria changes to support organisations such as care providers then there is no point in applying

- Too difficult to work out the eligibility criteria and moving goal posts
- as above
- It was a one-time requirement due to isolation, and concern that some of our young members could not connect to online meetings due to financial hardship.
- I'm not sure that we will still be here and be viable as a group. We have lost 2 members through death and ill-health. Our C E Centre is still closed to us. Most of our paints and papers will be unusable.

Implementation

Ease of Implementation

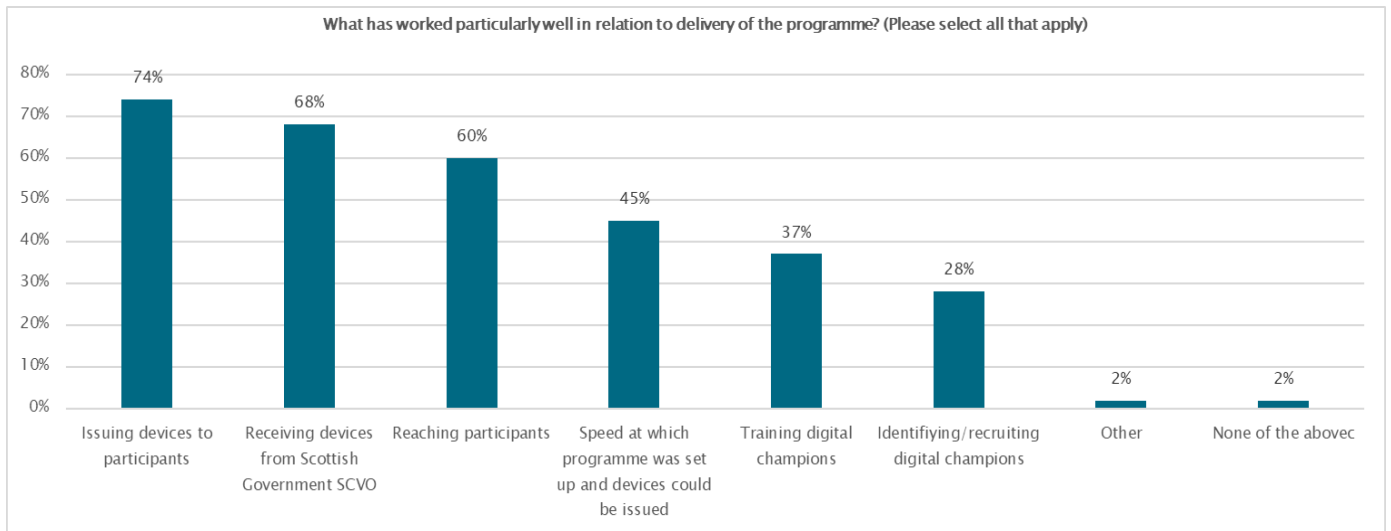
- 49% of respondents found the implementation of the programme either easy or very easy
 - 21% very easy and 28% easy
- 44% had some challenges with the implementation of the programme
- 7% found it difficult or very difficult
 - 2% very difficult and 5% difficult

Digital Champions

- When asked how many digital champions were in their organisation:
 - 53 respondents did not give an answer or stated n/a or zero
 - There were an average of 4.4 per organisation
 - The maximum for any one organisation was 68
- When asked if the digital champions were already in place:
 - 63% already had them in place
 - 20% had to recruit them
 - 17% had some in place and had to do some recruitment
- When asked if the recruitment of digital champions caused delays:
 - 85% said no
 - 15% said yes
- When asked how easy it was to accommodate digital champion training:
 - 68% found it either easy or very easy
 - 44% easy and 24% very easy
 - 28% found it neither easy nor difficult
 - 5% found it either difficult or very difficult
 - 4% difficult and 1% very difficult

- When asked to what extent the training adequately equipped the digital champions to undertake their role:
 - 63% said to some extent
 - 30% said to a great extent
 - 7% said not at all

What Has Worked Well?



Barriers

- When asked if there had been any barriers to implementation, 378 entered a response. Of these:
 - 89 entered no, none, n/a or similar
 - 76 mentioned COVID or Lockdown

Programme Reach

Reaching Out to Clients

- 524 responses were received when asked if they reached to clients before or after receiving devices
 - 67% before
 - 33% after
- 175 responses were received when asked if this delayed implementation of the programme
 - 67% no
 - 33% yes

Programme Impact

What Impact Has the Programme Had?

Impact on Participants	Total	%
They have a device to access the internet	473	90%
Better able to stay in touch with friends and family	456	87%
They have a WiFi connection	452	86%
Improved wellbeing	416	79%
They have gained IT skills	389	74%
Improved mental health	386	74%
They are more connected with local services	371	71%
They can access advice and guidance on important issues	323	62%
They are more engaged with their local community	308	59%
Family members benefitted from Connected Scotland devices	292	56%
Able to access public services such as the benefits system	287	55%
Able to access health services	270	52%
They are better able to engage with their children's education	269	51%
They can search and apply for jobs	246	47%
They are more employable	143	27%
Able to save money on bills	125	24%
Other	61	12%
Have made money online (e.g. through selling things)	17	3%
None of the above	3	1%

- 1 respondent selected all 18 options (excluding none of the above)
- 48 selected 17 of the 18 options
- 77 selected 16 of the 18 options

Impact Evaluation

- 82% carried out impact evaluation

- 18% did not

Delivery Process

Inputting Data into SCVO System

- 71% did not have any challenges
- 29% had challenges
 - Of those that had challenges, 150 entered a comment. Some typical examples are:
 - It wasn't made clear what type of data we would need to collect from recipients before inputting data - knowing this in advance would have made the process quicker and less clunky.
 - Importing from the excel sheet didn't work. Had some issues with the login when tried to access it later. Couldn't check what had input already.
 - with phase one, we distributed devices without noting serial numbers, when we discovered we needed these for inputting we have some difficulties getting clients to find and report the numbers back to the digital champions to input, partly due to Covid restrictions and partly because of the nature of our young client group. this improved during the second phase, we noted device, sims and mifi serial numbers before distributing but then had some delivery issues. both these challenges continue to some extent
 - It was not clear to capture the numbers on the Mifi and chromebook device from the box. The link was unstable then it was changed I put in approximately 35 individual families received there was no admin support but I managed didn't know you can just put missing but it didn't seem to accept the details therefore missing information to Connecting Scotland.
 - The original system was quite difficult to navigate and then the system used was changed
 - System is very prescriptive and does not allow for a more bespoke reporting for each person as each client does not technically fit in all boxes neatly. Also, having set up our own systems to record clients data, it felt like duplication as could not simply copy and paste. This was a little time consuming.
 - Some times the system crashed. I was able to upload the spreadsheets finally what was really useful and the best way to do it. I think uploading the spreadsheet instead of manually input the data works better.
 - The database had a number of glitches in it, this improved when a new online form for inputting data was implemented.
 - I am still uncertain if all of the data has been stored effectively despite updating the system several times. It has been quite stressful and frustrating

- there was issues with the bulk upload systems which were rectified
- Phase 1 - spreadsheet bulk upload didn't seem to really work. Phase 2 - individual upload was a pain to enter every time, particularly around childrens ages having to be entered for every age group.
- Had to enter all data individually. There was no confirmation that each piece of data had been received.
- Length of time and cumbersome to input by having to include ages etc. No technical issues experienced.
- The log in did not remember organisation/user details so a lot of time was spent re-entering.
- Ha change of process caused a little confusion but we got there.
- In the first phase, we didn't take a note of serial numbers of devices before giving them out so it was difficult to get these retrospectively
- There was no place to import upload data from a spreadsheet from phase 2. This would have saved an incredible amount of time.
- Due to the lockdown and being furloughed I had to rely on Council workers to distribute devices and enter details of families onto the web portal and this has been patchy so far.
- duplicated requests for information to be sent
- The difficulty came in receiving the link, not in using the link. Sometimes it went to the wrong person or it was cutting it fine to input data.
- Would not accept a group upload - had to insert details individually
- We had inputted information, and where asked where the info was.
- Not sure how or when to access the area to input data.
- Due to the withdrawal of our digital champion we didn't have access to a lot of the information required.
- The information was repetitive it could have all have been collected on one spreadsheet. There was problems uploading the information Once I finally managed to upload it, I keep getting emails asking me to upload. It makes me think its been a bit problematic.

Impact On Your Organisation

Creating a Digital Inclusion Officer Post

- 94% responded that the programme did not result in them creating a Digital Inclusion Officer Post in their organisation
- 6% responded that it did
 - The 6% were quite evenly divided across different locations

Developing Digital Inclusion Provision

- The programme has helped 81% advance their organisation's digital inclusion provision
- It has not helped 18% to do so

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this <statistical bulletin / social research publication>:

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available via an alternative route <specify or delete this text>
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact <email address> for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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