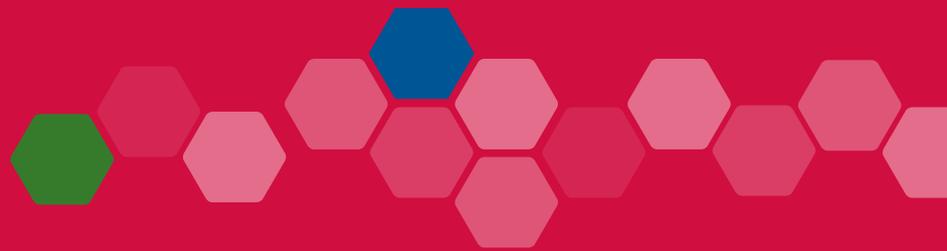




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# Connecting Scotland: Phase 1 Evaluation



**EQUALITY AND WELFARE**





# Connecting Scotland: Phase 1 Evaluation

Connecting Scotland evaluation research team  
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# Executive Summary

This report is an interim evaluation of the Connecting Scotland programme which was set up to provide digital devices and support to people on low incomes who are digitally excluded.

In the primary phase of the programme, devices were issued to people shielding during the COVID-19 outbreak, or who were otherwise vulnerable, to alleviate the effects of social isolation brought about, or exacerbated, by the national lockdown.

Further roll-out of the programme has seen devices go out to other digitally excluded groups, including young care leavers, and low income families with children.

This report evaluates the experiences and outcomes of users **in phase 1**. Subsequent reports will focus on the succeeding phases.

People receiving devices through Connecting Scotland can use them as they wish, though the anticipated benefits for people of consistent online access include enhanced mental wellbeing, improved financial management, greater opportunities to access learning and training, and enhanced societal engagement.

## About Connecting Scotland

Connecting Scotland is funded by the Scottish Government and administered by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO). Third sector organisations, or local authorities, apply for devices on behalf of individuals on low incomes, who are digitally excluded. Applicants can apply for Apple ipads or Google chromebooks, as well as 'MiFi' (mobile wifi) devices so that their clients can get a smart device, and a means of connection should they need it. Limits on data use initially applied to users in phase 1 but Connecting Scotland now provides users with free unlimited internet access for 2 years; this includes phase 1 users for whom the extended data offer was retrospectively applied. Users own the devices they receive and can keep and use them for as long as they wish.

End users who receive devices are offered support from a 'digital champion'; a nominated person from the applying organisation who can provide digital skills support and help with using devices. End users can also call the Connecting Scotland helpline if they need help with a specific issue.

Connecting Scotland has delivered on its target of getting 60,000 digitally excluded households online in the first 3 phases, distributing devices via more than 1,000 organisations.

## Evaluation approach

Throughout the lifecycle of the programme, data is collected about the characteristics of the people receiving support from Connecting Scotland, as well as their thoughts and opinions about their experience of using devices and going online.

People are invited to complete surveys at the beginning of, and around 9 months into, the period of support. A sample of users is also selected to take part in qualitative interviews in which they are asked about their experience of the programme after they have had their device for a few months. These interviews allow for more in-depth understanding of people's use of their device and the internet, as well as any issues or concerns they may have.

All of these sources of evidence, as well as details from the applications submitted by organisations, are analysed to help the Scottish Government understand the needs of various types of users, as well as the elements of Connecting Scotland that are working well, and any areas for improvement as the programme extends into further phases, and reaches more people.

Connecting Scotland is still at a relatively early stage of delivery. Because of the phased roll-out, data collection is staggered. **This report focuses on phase 1 users – those shielding, or otherwise vulnerable, during the COVID-19 restrictions - and collates evidence from both the welcome survey and the impact survey (including telephone 'top up'), as well as qualitative interview data.** Reports for subsequent stages of the programme will be provided as more data becomes available.

## Interim findings

Evaluation of the first phase of the programme shows that Connecting Scotland has increased digital skills and confidence and supported those shielding to cope with the severe social restrictions resulting from COVID-19.

The main findings from this evaluation are:

- Over the life of the programme, Phase 1 users reported increased levels of skill and confidence in using their devices and going online.
- Devices have primarily been used for keeping in touch with family and friends and, to a lesser extent, for entertainment purposes, which has helped people cope with lockdown restrictions.
- Use for other reasons, such as online banking, accessing health, or public services online, was less frequently reported, though several users acknowledged that they were still learning to use their devices and would look to learn further applications in the future.
- Phase 1 users reported improvements in their mental health and said that the device had helped them cope with restrictions resulting from COVID-19.
- Around half of users said they had received support from their digital champion; of these the vast majority were satisfied with this support. 14% said they had never met with a digital champion while a further 15% said they had not needed to. Around a fifth of interviewees said they didn't know about digital champions.
- As well as digital champions, people reported receiving help with their devices from family and friends (37%) or learning for themselves (37%).

## Programme learning

The research indicates some areas where there may be scope for changes or improvements as the programme continues to be implemented.

- There was an appetite among phase 1 users for face-to-face learning opportunities and/or formal courses. As COVID-19 restrictions ease, there may be scope to consider how structured, in-person engagement might be supported by Connecting Scotland.
- A minority of users indicated that, for varying reasons, devices issued weren't the most appropriate to their needs; providing a broader range of devices could be a consideration in order to meet diverse needs of users.
- People receiving support from digital champions responded positively to their experience, however, there appear to be differences in levels of awareness of, and willingness to engage with, digital champions. All Connecting Scotland users should have equal awareness of, and access to suitable and relevant digital skills support.
- Users' main concerns were around sharing personal data and entering financial information online. These concerns may present a barrier to people taking advantage of some services available through internet connection.

## Analysis and Evaluation

The approach to data collection, analysis and evaluation is evolving throughout the programme. Reflecting on these processes for phase 1 has led us to identify a number of ways in which changes and improvements can be made to evaluating the programme. These include:

enhancing the detail of data collected on end users and improving the degree to which we can make comparisons between surveys. We have recently collated our data sets together onto one platform to enable data linkage and are collecting postcodes in phases 2 and 3 which should allow for finer grained analysis

relatedly, we have identified a need for more statistical support for the analysis of survey results which will allow us to disaggregate data by respondent characteristics and also identify response patterns across different questions

the need to use more than one channel to approach participants so that we include people who will not be in a position to respond to a survey delivered digitally. To this end we have implemented a 'top-up' survey by telephone and are considering further methods, such as postal surveys

considering different ways to engage and communicate with users to encourage participation in research and boost response rates.

the need to consider coherent ways of measuring the impact of the programme beyond surveys and interviews. For example, using the 'Social Return on Investment model' to demonstrate the broader financial benefits of the programme

# Introduction

Low income households are more likely to be digitally excluded than the general population. They often cannot afford appropriate devices, lack a high quality and continuous internet connection and may have fewer opportunities to be able to acquire digital skills. Getting online might involve visiting a library, job centre, or a relative or friend to use their connection. Whole families might share a single mobile phone to meet all their digital needs and be unable to always afford to pay for data.

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when lockdown restrictions confined people to their homes, there was a huge expansion in the use of digital technologies to mediate people's everyday lives. The extent of this is only now becoming clear with a recent Nesta report stating that: *“the response to the pandemic has brought digital adoption forward by 5 years.”*<sup>1</sup>

For those on a low income, particularly those instructed to shield, not being able to join everyone else in finding digital means to achieve everyday goals meant increased social isolation, poor access to vital information and deepening poverty.

Connecting Scotland was initiated to alleviate the extreme situations created for people by the compounding effects of low incomes, digital exclusion and the requirement, for many, to shield. In phase 1, Connecting Scotland delivered devices, data and training to people on a low income, who were shielding or vulnerable to COVID-19 so that they could:

- acquire appropriate digital skills to be able access the internet and use their devices
- stay connected with their support networks
- be able to keep up with healthcare and pandemic related advice
- avoid a decline in their mental health due to loneliness and isolation
- continue to shield effectively

A second phase of Connecting Scotland was later launched with a primary focus on low income families and care leavers. The additional aims for this phase were concerned with enabling access to education and employability resources.

The third phase is currently underway and has a specific focus on helping people looking to enter employment.

This interim report presents initial evidence of the benefits realised by people in the phase 1 cohort - those shielding or particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 - from their involvement in Connecting Scotland.

Fig 1. Overview of Connecting Scotland Programme Delivery

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<sup>1</sup> [Learning-in-a-Pandemic - 2020 \(nesta.org.uk\)](https://www.nesta.org.uk/learning-in-a-pandemic-2020)

Phase	Date phase announced	Funds £	Target group	Target numbers	Delivered
1	May '20	5M	People at a high clinical risk of Covid-19	9,000	April – July 2020
2	Aug '20	15M	Young care leavers & families with children	23,000	August 2020 – April 2021
Winter Support	Nov '20	4.3M	Socially isolated / older and disabled people	5,000	December 2020 – March 2021
3	Jun '21	26.6M	Employability Digitally excluded / low-income households	23,000	June 2021 – September 2021 August – December 2021

## Programme details

This section presents more information on the roll-out of the Connecting Scotland programme in its first phase, detailing the characteristics of those receiving devices and support, the types of devices available to apply for and the offer of support from 'digital champions'.

## Application Process

The application process for Connecting Scotland worked in the following way:

1. Support organisations and local authorities applied for Connecting Scotland support on behalf of their clients
2. Applications were made to SCVO (Connecting Scotland's delivery partner) who convened panels to assess the applications in partnership with designated local authority leads
3. Applications were assessed on the basis that appropriate client groups had been identified who met the target criteria, and confidence in the organisation's ability to provide digital champion support
4. An award formula was used to ensure a balance of awards across all of Scotland's local authority areas

5. Successful organisations signed a grant agreement and committed to the programme's contractual obligations
6. Post award, the [Mhor Collective](#) provided training for those nominated as digital champions in each organisation
7. Devices were delivered to organisations who distributed them to their clients within a prescribed timeframe
8. Post distribution, organisations submitted monitoring data on their device recipients to a central portal managed by SCVO

## **Groups in phase 1**

Phase 1 (April – July 2020) focused on those who were at risk of isolation due to coronavirus because they were in the extremely high vulnerability group ('Shielding') or the higher risk of severe illness group. For Phase 1, around 50% were in the Shielding category, around 35% in Group 2 (clinically higher risk) and around 15% as 'other vulnerabilities'.

The following data shows the relative proportions of awards:

479 applications were received.

- 84 were exclusively for people in the extremely high vulnerability ('shielding') group
- 36 were exclusively for people in the higher risk of severe illness group
- 49 were exclusively for 'other vulnerable groups'
- 310 were for more than one of the above 3 groups

Applications were received from organisations working with these groups across all 32 local authorities.

Over 8,500 devices have been delivered to these groups in phase 1.

## **Devices**

Organisations could request the following for their clients:

- an iPad: Chosen as an easy to use device with accessibility features that would meet the needs of older clients who would be using the device to stay in touch and access information
- a Chromebook: suitable for clients with a wider range of digital needs who may need to produce documents (e.g. create a C.V.) or use other applications requiring extensive use of a keyboard

- a MiFi device: an easy way to provide internet access without the need to have a broadband connection installed and allowing multiple users to connect simultaneously. During the first lockdown, a solution was needed that avoided face-to-face contact e.g. with a broadband installer

## **Support provided**

To optimise users' experience of the programme, Connecting Scotland coordinates digital skills support via 'digital champions'.

Digital champions are normally staff who work in front line positions for the organisations that have applied to Connecting Scotland and so will already possess knowledge and experience of working directly with user groups. Training and a range of resources for digital champions are provided for free as part of the Connecting Scotland programme. This covers device-specific training as well as materials to enhance core digital skills.

The role of digital champions is to help people who get devices through Connecting Scotland to do things online like:

- connecting a device to the internet using the Wi-Fi settings, and putting in the password when they need to
- sharing documents by attaching them to an email
- understanding that not all online information and content that they see is reliable

The aim is that, with support from digital champions, learners will be able to use the internet safely, confidently and effectively.

More information about applicant organisations' experience of identifying and training digital champions can be found in this report: [Evaluation of Connecting Scotland - Blake Stevenson](#).

The [Connecting Scotland website](#) also includes information for end users or others who may lack experience in online technology. Beneficiaries of the programme are also able to call a dedicated helpline to deal with any specific issues.

# Evaluation approach

To understand how, and to what extent, the Connecting Scotland programme is having an impact on those receiving support, evaluative research is being carried out throughout the life cycle of the programme, led by Scottish Government user researchers. The evaluation chiefly focuses on collecting and analysing data on the experiences of those who have received equipment and support from Connecting Scotland. The main data collection methods are:

- analysis of **application data** – i.e. the information included on application forms for each of the Connecting Scotland phases that explains the needs of the clients being referred to Connecting Scotland
- a **‘welcome / baseline Survey’** – to learn about the user and understand their situation and their needs when they are enrolled
- **follow-up interviews** – to understand, in detail, users’ experience of Connecting Scotland
- **impact survey** – around 9 months after users’ involvement asking what has changed for them by being digitally connected.
- **telephone top-up survey** – an added measure being piloted for phase 1 to validate the findings of the impact survey by taking an additional sample using a different channel.

## Where are we in the evaluation?

**Table 1 Overview of research and evaluation activities in Connecting Scotland**

Phase	Activity	Status	Response rate
Phase 1: 8,061 users + 500 pilot <sup>2</sup>	Welcome survey	Complete	13.5%
	Interviews	Complete	n=37
	Impact survey	Complete	5.7%
	Telephone top-up	Complete	n=57
Phase 2:	Welcome survey	Complete	5%

<sup>2</sup> Pilot users not included in the evaluation

Phase	Activity	Status	Response rate
23,481 users	Interviews	Complete – undergoing analysis	n=40
	Impact survey	Complete	4.8%

The most comprehensive user data collected so far pertains to phase 1 users, for whom a welcome survey, impact survey and follow-up qualitative interviews have been conducted, and is the focus of this report. Research activities for phase 2 are still ongoing and will be the subject of the next evaluative report.

## Methods

### Analysis of application data

Applications for devices from organisations, on behalf of their clients, contain information about people’s digital support needs and the barriers they face in getting online.

Application data was analyzed and coded with the aid of Nvivo software to help identify the key themes relating to users’ experience of digital exclusion and their support needs.

Analysis of application data helps to show that Connecting Scotland is addressing barriers to digital inclusion and targeting support to people who need it.

### Surveys

People getting support through Connecting Scotland were invited to complete the welcome survey shortly after receiving their devices. Surveys are run on an online platform called ‘Questback’. Mindful that people being supported by Connecting Scotland are still developing their digital skills, digital champions were enlisted to help participants complete online surveys. Participants who had registered an e-mail address with Connecting Scotland when they received their devices were sent an e-mail inviting them to complete the survey by following a link.

Users are invited to complete a second survey – the ‘experience and impact survey’ - after owning their devices for around 9 months, although the different pace of device distribution among applicant organisations meant that some users had had their device for slightly more, or less time at the time of the survey. For the impact survey, text messages with the survey link were sent to those who did not have an e-mail address but did have a mobile number. Those with only a landline number were called to ask if they wanted to complete a shorter survey on the telephone.

The surveys allow us to quantitatively measure aspects of users’ experience as a whole. This gives an overview of how phase 1 of Connecting Scotland has been perceived and the impact it is having on users.

Responses to survey questions were analysed and interpreted in relation to other responses, both within and between the two surveys. This allows us to gauge impact, and potentially provides some context for better understanding responses to certain questions. For example, comparing data between the welcome and impact surveys indicates that users' confidence has increased over time. We can also, arguably, better understand why, for instance, the use of some online services was not reported more widely when we account for people's concerns around online safety as indicated by responses to other questions; people might be reluctant to use services where entering personal information is required.

### Comparability between survey data

There are features of how the research was set up that constrain the ability to make direct comparisons between the phase 1 welcome survey and the phase 1 impact survey. Chief amongst these is that the surveys are anonymous and so we cannot work out if the samples for the welcome survey and impact survey overlap or are distinct<sup>3</sup>. However, we can take a measure of confidence from the similarities in the demographic profile of respondents between these surveys, which suggests the underlying samples may be similar. In each, around a third of respondents report being retired (P1-Welcome Survey - 33%, P1-Impact Survey - 30%), and around a quarter being disabled (P1-Welcome Survey 26%, P1-Impact Survey 22%). There were more female respondents (62%) than male to the impact survey. The Phase 1 welcome survey employed different age ranges to the impact survey so *direct* comparison of age is not possible, but this too looks to have been broadly maintained. Additional interviews have been conducted over the telephone to help redress any biases in the data.

### Qualitative interviews

Around 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted with phase one end-users over the telephone. Respondents were recruited through organisations who had received support from Connecting Scotland.

Interviewees were sent a form explaining the reason for the interview and informing them of their rights as participants, including assurances of anonymity in any reporting of the interviews. Participation was completely voluntary and interviewees could withdraw at any time.

As well as the interviewer and interviewee, a note-taker was on each call to make a detailed record of the conversation, including capturing direct quotations where possible. These notes were anonymised and assigned individual codes to enable analysis.

In these interviews, respondents were asked questions about their thoughts, perceptions and experiences of the Connecting Scotland programme. The semi-structured interview format meant that respondents could be asked more in-depth

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<sup>3</sup> In phase 3 we will be collecting postcodes which will allow for a more fine grained comparative analysis and support more robust evidence of change.

questions about aspects of the service that were important to them, and could explain why, or how, they were using their devices and the impact that this had.

Interview notes were read, manually coded and cross referenced with other responses to identify common themes throughout the sample.

Qualitative interviewing enables us to find out about aspects of people's experience that might not have been considered in the design of the programme, or when planning research activities. The data from interviews can also, in some cases, add to our understanding of the survey data; sometimes interviewees explain in greater depth the reasons for how they are using their device or accessing support. The data from qualitative interviews can also help us to strengthen certain hypotheses about the impact of the programme, for example, when people describe the effect that their ability to connect with others has had on their mental health.

### **Top-up survey**

To help validate the findings of the impact survey that was delivered online, we implemented a telephone top-up survey to provide an alternative channel for participants to engage with the research. The main aim was to mitigate some of the potential sources of bias that may be associated with a digital survey that we outlined in the previous section.

Delivering a survey over the telephone is more time consuming than completing one online. We shortened the survey to ensure that it remained comfortable to answer over the telephone. In the top-up survey, we prioritised questions that related to the key metrics for phase 1 of connecting Scotland (being able to cope with the Covid response), and demographic questions so that we could understand any differences between samples. We piloted the survey and discovered that the 5 point Likert questions proved to be cumbersome to answer on the telephone, so these were shortened to a 3 point scale. The survey took on average 16 minutes to complete.

### **Sample selection**

Our telephone sample was selected according to the following criteria:

1. participants living in Local Authority areas that had a poor response rate to the online survey compared to the number of devices issues to that region
2. participants who lacked an e-mail address and so would not have received a personal invitation to take part in the research
3. participants who had a landline number, which we took as a proxy of their being less digitally literate and less likely to have completed a survey online (after calling all the landline numbers in the sample, we called mobile numbers that met criteria 1 and 2 above)

Of 421 people contacted, 57 completed the telephone interview; a response rate of 14%.

# Connecting Scotland and digital exclusion

This section considers contemporary evidence about the extent of digital exclusion in the UK; the characteristics of the groups most affected, the barriers they face and the potential impacts and consequences of being digitally excluded.

Evidence from applications to Connecting Scotland and the phase 1 user surveys are drawn on to highlight how the experience of Connecting Scotland end users relates to this wider evidence.

From these data, we can see that the barriers Connecting Scotland clients face in getting online are similar to those identified in other research for the wider population in the UK. We can also see what the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on people's lives has been, for example, in terms of increased social isolation. These are close to the harms anticipated at the beginning of the pandemic<sup>4</sup> and were the initial drivers for the programme. Overall, these findings give us confidence that Connecting Scotland is reaching its target population, and that the problems the programme anticipated solving were indeed real problems for people on a low income, digitally excluded and vulnerable to COVID-19.

## Barriers to digital inclusion

The Office for National Statistics estimated in 2018 that 89% of Scotland's population were active 'internet users' (i.e. used in the last 3 months), and that 80% of Scots possess the 5 essential digital skills (see annex B)<sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup>. While these numbers convey relatively high levels of digital literacy nationally, they conceal the experiences of particular groups at significantly higher risk of digital exclusion. Connecting Scotland takes a targeted approach to redressing this balance; providing support and devices to those most likely to be on the wrong side of the 'digital divide'. Connecting Scotland provides digital support for the following marginalised groups:

### Low income households

While Connecting Scotland targets support to specific groups of people, the overarching characteristics of *all* end users are that they are digitally excluded and on low incomes. Most available evidence identifies cost as being the single greatest barrier to digital inclusion. In 2017, the Scottish Government estimated that a third of low income households (<£15k) had no internet access at all<sup>7</sup>, while a 2018 report by Citizens

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. [Loneliness and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic - International Psychogeriatrics May 2020](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Office for National Statistics, 2018 - Exploring the UK's digital divide](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Essential digital skills framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)

Advice Scotland found that two of the three most common barriers preventing respondents from using the internet related to money; namely the cost of broadband and data. Unsurprisingly, financial barriers to digital access were more pronounced for people living in more deprived areas (as defined by the SIMD)<sup>8</sup>.

While only 15% of phase 1 users reported cost as a concern related to using the internet, almost 30% of respondents to the phase 1 impact survey reported that they would not be able to afford to pay for their own connection after Connecting Scotland support ends, while 22% said they didn't know what they would do. Connecting Scotland devices are provided for free so it might be that those who reported that they planned to pay for their own internet (44%) felt able to do so because of this saving and planned to keep using their device.

Phase 1 application data indicates that, for all groups on whose behalf applications were made, being on low incomes (including from social security) meant that internet connection and devices simply were unaffordable for many, as the following application extract illustrates:

*“The main barrier we hear about is financial; in many cases related to income reduced by welfare reform measures. Clients in these circumstances simply do not have the funds available to them to purchase suitable digital technology or pay for an internet connection.”*

## **People aged 60+**

Connecting Scotland support enables older people to connect with others to reduce social isolation and feelings of loneliness. Phase 1 of Connecting Scotland was chiefly targeted at those most vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic, including older people and disabled people (each group representing around a third of the cohort). Lack of digital skills and experience was a prevalent issue among these users responding to the welcome survey, almost half of whom were over 60: 41% of respondents to the welcome survey said that they cannot use, or would need help to use the internet, while a further 22% reported being able to use it 'with some difficulty'. This corroborates research finding that people over 65 account for the single largest proportion of 'non-users' of the internet in the UK<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, it is important to note that, among older populations, digital connectivity declines significantly with income bracket<sup>9</sup>.

Application data highlights lack of skills and experience as the predominant barrier to digital inclusion, particular for older people who were shielding.

Age UK also report that living alone, and having mobility issues, are additional factors that decrease the likelihood of an older person using the internet. These are also factors

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<sup>8</sup> Citizens Advice Scotland, 2018 - [Disconnected - Understanding digital inclusion and improving access](#)

<sup>9</sup> Age UK, 2018: [age uk digital inclusion evidence review](#)

that *increase* the likelihood of feeling lonely among over 50s<sup>10</sup>. The majority of respondents to the phase 1 impact survey (51%) reported living alone.

## Disabled People

Similarly to age, disability is a strong predictor of non-use of the internet. The Office for National Statistics reported that, in 2017, “56% of adult internet non-users were disabled, much higher than the proportion of disabled adults in the UK population as a whole, which in 2016 to 2017 was estimated to be 22%”.<sup>11</sup>

As well as the coincidence of disability with poverty<sup>12</sup>, a chief barrier to internet use for disabled people is difficulty using devices and applications (for instance operating keyboards and mice, viewing text on a screen)<sup>13</sup>. While assistive technologies are available, they may be prohibitively expensive and require time and support to learn to use.

Some phase 1 applications noted that the people who support disabled people – family and/or paid carers – lack the skills to help them get online, or learn to use a device.

Access to the internet and digital devices has the potential to impact significantly on the lives of disabled people. For instance, in enabling participation in the workplace through forms of online working, and providing a means of remote civic participation<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, the devices themselves have features and applications capable of assisting with day to day tasks.

## Intersections

It is important to note the interdependencies of each of the barriers to internet use described here. The intersection of age, disability and income means that the tendencies outlined will vary for people within these categorisations. For instance, while disabled people are more likely to be non-users of the internet overall, the discrepancy in use between disabled and non-disabled people is minimal in the 16-24 age category<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, while age is a strong predictor of non-use, there are significant differences within older age cohorts when accounting for income, with those in highest socio-economic groupings being over 3 times more likely to use the internet than those in the lowest<sup>16</sup>.

## COVID-19

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<sup>10</sup> [Age UK 2018: All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Office for National Statistics, 2018 - Exploring the UK's digital divide](#)

<sup>12</sup> [World Bank, 2021: Disability Inclusion Overview](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Good Things Foundation \(2016\): Disability Handbook](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Worldbank, 2016. Bridging the Disability divide through digital technologies](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Internet users, UK - Office for National Statistics, 2020](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Age UK - Internet and older people in the UK - Key Stats \(2016\)](#)

The restrictions associated with COVID-19 have added to the existing barriers to digital inclusion. Almost half of the respondents to the welcome survey said that they, or someone in their household, had been advised to 'shield' at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. 41% of respondents to the phase 1 welcome survey reported that the restrictions prevented them from going online in ways that they had previously, such as using library or community centre facilities, or connecting at someone else's home.

Similarly, many people who relied on others in physical proximity to help them get online, or to go online on their behalf, were left unsupported due to physical distancing restrictions.

## **Effects of digital exclusion**

### **Social Isolation**

The links between social isolation, loneliness and poor mental health are well documented<sup>17</sup> and the pandemic has seen increased prevalence in mental health problems, driven in part by significant increases in people feeling lonely, and spending too much time alone.<sup>18</sup>

Around half of respondents from phase 1 (45%) said their ability to keep in touch with friends or family had been limited or non-existent during COVID-19 lockdown restrictions (welcome survey).

For some people, particularly older and/or disabled people, COVID-19 has exacerbated existing isolation, with key services moving online and physical contact all but disappearing. People who lack digital skills are thus even further excluded than those that are able to replace physical contact with online communication. Research indicates that people who do not, or cannot, use the internet are "more likely to feel isolated from others."<sup>19</sup>

Respondents to the phase 1 impact survey overwhelmingly agreed that internet access had helped them to cope with being at home more due to pandemic restrictions (89%).

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<sup>17</sup> For example - [Risk to health | Campaign to End Loneliness \(accessed 5/8/2021\)](#)

<sup>18</sup> Office for National Statistics, 2020 [Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain](#)

<sup>19</sup> Age UK, 2019: [age uk loneliness research briefing-digital inclusion](#)

## Finances

There are several ways in which being digitally excluded can negatively impact upon a person's financial situation. For instance, without internet access, people lack the ability to shop around for cheaper products or services, adding to the so-called 'poverty premium' (additional costs incurred by people on low incomes due to their circumstances).

There are also obvious disadvantages with regards to employability for people without ready access to the internet when a majority of job advertisements and application processes are online. Even where people do have some limited online access, applications highlighted that some devices were not *appropriate* for employment related activities; being either incompatible with online learning platforms, not supporting certain applications, such as 'Teams', or the screen not being an adequate size to undertake employability-related tasks. Research by Citizens Advice Scotland similarly reports that, although people might have internet access through a smartphone, tasks such as filling out forms present challenges for users<sup>20</sup>.

People who need to access information about, and apply for, benefits are also disadvantaged by not having adequate internet access. With a few exceptions, Universal Credit is administered entirely online and requires claimants to provide an email address, yet Citizens Advice Scotland found that people seeking advice on benefits were among the least frequent internet users<sup>20</sup>.

## Digital Inclusion and National Outcomes

The ubiquity of the internet and digital technology means that fostering digital inclusion is essential for enabling people to participate in social, economic and civic life. By providing access to a connection and digital support, Connecting Scotland potentially impacts upon each of Scotland's National Outcomes. These are set out in the National Performance Framework<sup>21</sup> and reflect the values and aspirations of the people of Scotland.

As a programme aimed at people on low incomes who are digitally excluded, Connecting Scotland most obviously aligns with the outcome on poverty, which states that poverty is tackled by "sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally". Online access opens up a range of goods and services unavailable to people who are digitally excluded; it also makes looking for jobs and claiming social security infinitely simpler. Links to other specific outcomes will be more pronounced in different phases of the programme. For phase 1, the most pertinent outcomes are perhaps those for 'Health' and 'Communities' as people were able, through use of their devices, to stay connected to others and keep mentally stimulated.

See Annex C for a full consideration of Connecting Scotland's contribution to realising the National Outcomes.

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<sup>20</sup> Citizens Advice Scotland, 2018 - [Disconnected - Understanding digital inclusion and improving access](#)

<sup>21</sup> [National Outcomes | National Performance Framework](#)

# Findings

## Headline findings from the Phase 1 impact survey

The principal aim of Connecting Scotland Phase 1 was to help those shielding, or otherwise vulnerable, to cope mentally and practically with the isolation imposed by lockdown. The results of the impact survey indicate for a large majority of respondents that this aim has been met.

89% of respondents agree or strongly agree that access to the internet has helped them to cope with being at home more due to COVID-19 restrictions. Only 1% disagreed with this statement.

The impact survey included a series of questions to understand more specifically how Connecting Scotland had helped. During the initial phases of the pandemic, concerns centred around how social isolation and the inability to access normal daily activities could lead to a widespread decline in mental health<sup>22</sup>. Impact survey results indicate highly positive outcomes on each of three metrics relating to staying in touch, staying occupied, and improvements in mental health.

86% of respondents reported an improvement in their ability to stay in touch with each other

83% of respondents reported an improvement in being able to find interests

74% reported an improvement in their mental health

The impact survey also asked about how gaining devices and connectivity via Connecting Scotland supported people to be able to shield effectively whilst continuing to live their lives during lockdown. This included asking about people's ability to continue to access public health information, find jobs and access services.

Again, survey respondents felt that Connecting Scotland support had helped them in these respects; crucially in being able to access public health information in an evolving lockdown situation. 71% of respondents said that their ability to find advice and guidance on important issues was much (38%), or a little (33%) better.

## Building digital confidence and skills

<sup>22</sup> For instance: [The coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic's impact on mental health - June 2020 - International Journal of Health Planning and Management](#)

Another significant measure for the success of Connecting Scotland is whether it proved an effective intervention at getting people online by building their confidence and developing their skills.

In the original baseline survey for phase 1, a majority of respondents reported they could not use the internet, would need help to use it or could only use it with some difficulty. In contrast, after being involved in Connecting Scotland, 68% of respondents in the phase 1 impact survey said that they were confident or fairly confident internet users and 86% said that their digital skills had improved.

<p>64% of respondents in the <b>phase 1 baseline survey</b> said they can't use the internet, would need help to use it or could only use it with some difficulty</p>	<p>68% of respondents in the <b>phase 1 impact survey</b> said that they were confident or fairly confident internet users.</p>
	<p>86% of respondents in the <b>phase 1 impact survey</b> answered that their digital skills had improved since becoming involved in Connecting Scotland</p>

## Engagement with digital champions

An important part of the Connecting Scotland delivery model is the support provided by digital champions to enable people to gain the skills and confidence they need to use their iPad or Chromebook online.

<p>48% of respondents have met with their digital champion regularly or at least a few times.</p> <p>99% receiving support from their digital champion rated that support as good or very good.</p> <p>The three main sources of support to get online and use devices were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• digital champions (46%),</li> <li>• family members (37%)</li> <li>• learning by themselves (37%)</li> </ul>
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## Summary

There is substantial evidence that Connecting Scotland has met its aims in phase 1 of enabling some of those most at risk from COVID-19 to cope both mentally and practically with the lockdown or shielding restrictions imposed on them. There is evidence of Connecting Scotland clients acquiring digital skills, being able to remain connected with support networks, and access important public health information during the pandemic, borne out by the following interview responses:

*-“I’m fairly confident with what I’m doing at the moment. I’ve been on the iPad every day so my confidence is far more.”*

*-“People will Facetime just to say ‘Hi, How are you?’. It’s been an absolute blessing. I don’t know what I’d do without it.”*

*-“I’ve used it for the Scottish Government. Keeping up to date with the Scottish Government and what’s going on with this COVID. I do that quite a lot.”*

There is evidence too that the support and training provided with digital champions has been effective for those engaging with it.

*“It was hard at first but my worker was brilliant. Any questions I had I gave her a call and she helped me. I’ve grown in confidence with it.”*

Some of the findings suggest further areas to explore, such as where a large minority of respondents report that their ability to use online government health services has not changed since getting support from Connecting Scotland. This may indicate areas where more focused help from Connecting Scotland could be beneficial for users, or else that there are external or situational factors that are preventing wider use of these services.

## Reported Impacts

The issues affecting phase 1 end-users mean that, for the most part, digital support was seen as a means of reducing social isolation during lockdown, with several applications referring to the risk of people being cut-off from family, friends, community and sources of support.

It is important to note that end users were not given devices with the expectation that they would use them for specific purposes, and support was provided in an individualised way, responding to the needs, goals and skill levels of end users, rather than setting expectations around the use of devices.

The following outlines the primary impacts of the programme reported by phase 1 end users. Quotations are from qualitative interviews with users, unless otherwise stated.

## Digital skills

A number of measures in the experience and impact survey indicate that users had developed competence in using their internet connected devices. For instance:

- Over 80% of respondents reported they were using the internet a lot (62%), or a little (25%), more than they had done before receiving equipment from Connecting Scotland
- 49% said their digital skills had improved ‘a little’, and 37% said they had improved ‘a lot’
- 66% of respondents reported they were now ‘very’, or ‘fairly confident’ internet users
- In comparison, 64% of respondents to the phase 1 welcome survey said they either couldn’t use the internet, would have difficulty doing so or would need help

Although we should be cautious in comparing these results with the findings of the welcome survey<sup>23</sup>, the contrast between the levels of digital skills and confidence expressed in the welcome survey and those reported in the impact survey is significant enough to suggest that users have, at the very least, engaged positively with the programme. The responses from qualitative interviews too, suggest a notable improvement in digital competence:

*“I’m quite happy and quite proud. For my age I would say a 6 or 7 out of 10 and pat my own back. Before it was maybe a 3. I knew how to turn it on!”*

## Engagement with digital champions and developing online skills

An important part of the Connecting Scotland delivery model is the support provided by digital champions to enable people to gain the skills and confidence they need to use their devices online.

- Overall, 48% of respondents had met with their digital champion regularly or at least a few times.

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<sup>23</sup> Mainly because of the difficulties matching responses from the welcome survey to those of the follow-on survey. However, the changes observed here are striking.

A quarter of respondents (24%) told us that they met with their digital champion regularly. Another quarter (24%) said that they have met<sup>24</sup> with their digital champions a few times. 15% of respondents said that they did not need to meet with their digital champion, and 14% said that they have never met with their digital champion. 8.1% responded to say that they don't know if they have met with their digital champion or not.

Of those who have had support from their digital champion, 99% rated the support as good or very good, with 1% responding that they don't know.

Three main sources of support identified by respondents were from digital champions (46%), family members (37%) and learning by themselves (37%). Of course, people may have developed their skills through a combination of each of these means, too.

The qualitative interviews with phase 1 end users provide further insight into how people have been learning to use their devices and the internet, including relationships with digital champions.

It appears that the extent of digital champion support has varied considerably among users; some having a consistent, and even close, relationship with their digital champion, others reporting that they were not familiar with the term, or the role.

In most cases, people who said they had been supported by their digital champion were satisfied with this support. Interviewees praised, in particular, the responsiveness and patience of their digital champions:

*"I think she's just brilliant. I don't think you could improve on her. Because she's took time to sit and explain things to me."*

Several other respondents were aware that digital champion support was available but chose, for various reasons, not to make regular contact. For the most part, this was because people had others, such as family and friends, who were able to help them, or they believed themselves capable enough not to require additional assistance:

*"I set it up myself. A girl phoned me to offer training but I said I did it myself, no bother."*

Where people said they were mostly 'self-taught', they had simply experimented with the device, working things out through regular use:

*"I just keep trying to get what is needed from it, using trial and error without assistance."*

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<sup>24</sup> 'Meeting' with digital champions includes online meetings or phone calls; face to face contact was limited due to COVID-19 restrictions

There is some evidence that those relying on learning for themselves may be limited in the things they are able to do with their devices:

*-“ I know this thing can do all sorts of things I don’t know, but I don’t need to know the things; it doesn’t concern me.”*

*-“It is simple. I don’t understand other things and don’t touch it. I use just Zoom and Youtube, and sometimes read my college books and emails.”*

A small proportion of interviewees knew about digital champions, but seemed reticent in asking for help, saying they didn’t wish to bother, or ‘burden’ somebody.

A significant minority (around 1/5) of interviewees seemed to have little awareness of who their digital champion was, or the kind of support that might be on offer. Consequently, some of these reported that they had not made much progress in developing their skills and confidence. One interviewee presumed that someone would go through how to get the device up and running, but commented that the person who had dropped off the device ‘was distant’ and explained that they weren’t comfortable using their device:

*“If I was confident in using it, then I would be more likely to use it.”*

Another user said that they weren’t familiar with the concept of a digital champion but would have got in touch to ask for help had they been aware.

Amongst the sample, there was a strong preference for face-to-face learning, rather than the remote support necessitated by the COVID-19 restrictions. A number of interviewees suggested that the resumption of in-person services would provide greater opportunities for learning.

*-“I would like one-to-one tuition to demonstrate how things work and to allay fears”*

*-“Face-to-face would be advantageous”*

Finally, a small number of interviewees expressed an interest in having written materials, in a physical format, that they could refer to when learning how to use their devices:

*“The tablet didn’t come with a manual. I’ve looked for one but none was provided. It would have been helpful to have a manual. Pictures with explanations would be preferable. I would like the manual to describe how it operates, how to change password, how to access certain screens/apps. I would prefer the manual to prevent having to contact someone.”*

## Connecting with others

Both the phase 1 impact survey, and the qualitative interviews show that users primarily used their devices for keeping in touch with others in a variety of ways, including:

- email (72%)
- video calls (51%)
- instant messaging services (44%)
- social media sites (42%)

A considerable majority of survey respondents (87%) reported that their ability to stay in touch with others was either much, or a little better since getting support from Connecting Scotland.

The phase 1 impact survey suggests keeping in touch may have positively impacted upon people's mental health, with almost 75% of people reporting that their mental health was either 'a little' (40%) or 'a lot' better (33%) since receiving support from Connecting Scotland. 89% of respondents agreed (41%) or strongly agreed (48%) that *"Access to the internet has helped me to cope with being at home more due to COVID-19 restrictions"*.

The data collected in qualitative interviews allows us to further examine the connection between staying connected and mental health, as people told us how things had changed for them since receiving support. Several appreciated their newfound ability to stay in touch with others. In the following, a user describes a direct link between the ability to connect with others and their mental wellbeing:

*"That's my lifeline. It might not sound a lot, but in my mind it makes me in my body feel better, not as tense as what I am. If that wee green button is on, I can contact anyone at the touch of a button."*

## Entertainment

The next most reported use of the internet, after staying connected with people, was watching videos, films and television programmes (58%) which, again, might be supposed to contribute to the positive impact on mental health which the survey reveals.

The qualitative interviews indicate that people's access to entertainment was helping to keep their minds occupied, especially during lockdown restrictions – *"It stops you climbing the wall"* - but also that, in some cases, the scope of material available on the internet meant people were able to enjoy a more personalised and stimulating experience:

*“But for my own personal use I can type in 1964 and a song will come up. It’s all I use it for, it lets me reminisce. It lets me go back into the good times.”*

## **Finding information and using services**

While 71% of respondents to the impact survey rated their ‘ability to find advice and guidance on important issues’ as much (38%), or a little (33%) better, just under half of respondents also reported going online to seek out information, either by reading the news (45%), or looking up advice and guidance on important issues (45%). Only around a quarter said they used the internet to access public, or health, services for themselves, which might appear surprising given the potential for the internet to simplify aspects of healthcare (such as ordering repeat prescriptions, or arranging GP appointments).

The qualitative interview data show, perhaps more encouragingly, that some people are planning to expand their device and internet usage to access public services when they are more accustomed to their devices, and have further developed their skills:

*“I intend to use it for this. I haven’t had the device for very long and have only possessed it for nine or ten weeks.”*

It may also be the case that people are anxious about using the internet for things where they have to enter their personal information – respondents’ main concerns were ‘being a victim of fraud’ (49%) and ‘sharing personal data’ (41%).

Similarly, half of the respondents said that they hadn’t used the internet to save or make money and use of internet banking was relatively low (24%, compared to 73% in the wider population<sup>25</sup>). Again, this likely reflects people’s concerns about online safety, as exemplified by one interviewee:

*“I’m very security conscious as there’s that many scammers and hackers out there...I try to be as cautious as I can be”*

Some of the survey questions asking about changes in people’s abilities to access various services show high incidences of people answering ‘not relevant for me’ or indicating ‘no change’ (see table 2). For instance, 51% of people selected the ‘not relevant’ response when asked about applying for jobs. This is unsurprising given the demographics of the phase 1 cohort, in which nearly a third of people are retired, and a further 23% are not in work due to a long-term disability.

Perhaps more unexpectedly, when asked about their ability to access health services, a relatively high proportion of respondents reported ‘no change’ (29%) or ‘not relevant for

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<sup>25</sup> Office for National Statistics, 2019: [Internet access – households and individuals, Great Britain](#)

me' (27%), with similar results when questioned about their ability to access a service such as a social security benefit.

There could be a number of reasons for this: it may be that respondents already had a solution independent of getting online, for instance, preferring to use the phone (which was reported by a few of those taking part in qualitative interviews). In the case of accessing a public service, such as social security entitlements, it might be that this simply had not coincided with the period of support from Connecting Scotland. Also, the survey question specifies Universal Credit as an example of a public service; it may be that people not specifically claiming this chose to discount the question.

However, these ambiguous answers could be due to a factor that Connecting Scotland arguably should be helping with (such as acquiring appropriate digital skills to use a specific service). In which case, further research, with both users and digital champions, should aim to understand more about *why* people seem to be relatively disengaged from these activities.

**Table 2 Phase 1 impact survey - How respondents ability to access information and services has improved since getting support from Connecting Scotland**

Outcome	% reporting an improvement in phase 1	% reporting an improvement with 'not relevant to me' answers excluded	% reporting no change	% reporting the question is not relevant to them
Your ability to search and apply for jobs	32%	51.3%	16%	51%
Your ability to access online public services (for example a benefit like Universal Credit)	44%	67%	19%	37%
Your ability to access health services (e.g. GP appointments or prescriptions)	42%	58%	29%	27%

## Continued Use

Several of those taking part in qualitative interviews acknowledged that, while their skills and confidence had improved since receiving equipment from Connecting Scotland, there remained scope for further development:

*"I'm a lot better but I have a long way to go."*

Many identified things that they were aiming to be able to use their devices for in the future:

*"The next thing I thought I'd do would be look at the weather forecast, that's a goal for me."*

This arguably demonstrates that people are recognizing the potential of the internet for them, and are invested in learning more about its uses and applications.

A small number of interviewees questioned whether the device that they received was optimal for certain kinds of uses and some said there were certain apps or programmes that were unsupported:

*“If the restrictions are still here next year the online education part is restrictive with the Chromebook. It’s good for basic stuff but not ideal for educational stuff...not a good hard drive, no office and not very powerful. If I was going to continue with online education I would prefer something like a cheap laptop”*

Expanding the range of devices offered may be beneficial to some users as Connecting Scotland reaches more people. However, it is worth also considering whether, where people expressed dissatisfaction with a device, this was due to insufficient knowledge and understanding, rather than inadequacy of the device, per se.

While almost 30% of people responding to the impact survey said that they wouldn’t be able to afford to pay for their own internet after provision from Connecting Scotland ends, nearly half of people (44%) said they did plan to pay for it themselves. It is possible that the relatively high proportion of people planning to pay for their own internet indicates increased appreciation of the benefits of online access and a desire to maintain their connection, in spite of the costs involved.

As with any survey, these responses are a snap shot of people’s thoughts and intentions at the time; it should be noted that the impact survey was administered before recent dramatic inflation in prices of goods and services. Given that beneficiaries of the programme are on low incomes, it is possible that people have since reappraised the affordability of maintaining an internet connection.

## **Analysis of the Telephone Top-up Survey**

The demographic profile of top-up survey respondents was similar to that of those responding to the online survey, with the distribution of age, ethnicity and gender broadly consistent.

Fewer people in the top-up survey reported being unemployed which is reflected in greater numbers of retirees (38% compared to 29%) and people in employment (19% to 6%). The proportions of respondents not working due to a long term condition is roughly the same for both surveys.

The similarity in the demographic profile of respondents indicates that any differences in responses are more likely to be due to other factors – such as less interaction with a digital champion.

We asked the top-up survey respondents why they hadn’t completed the online survey. Almost all (97%, n=55) responded that this was because ‘no one had told them about the survey’. Many more people in the top-up survey had not met with their digital champions (66.5% of top-up survey respondents saying they had never met with their digital champion, compared to 14% in the main sample). These results indicate that the sampling strategy for the top-up survey was reaching a group of people who did not get the opportunity to complete the main online survey. Either because they would not have

received the link to the survey directly having no e-mail address, or would not have been supported to complete it by their digital champion as they had no ongoing contact with them.

In other words, the top up sample addressed some of the types of bias we anticipated may be present in the group responding to main online survey. A last point of difference between the responses to the top-up survey and the main sample is that the top-up sample reported having their devices longer than those in the main sample, which can be accounted for by the fact that top-up survey was implemented after the main survey had closed.

On the main metrics for phase 1, the results from the top-up survey were often similar to those of the main online survey, providing a degree of reassurance that the findings from the main sample are valid. In particular, the high level of agreement that support from Connecting Scotland has helped respondents to cope more with being at home during the pandemic (89% main survey / 87% top-up survey agreed that it helped).

However, the positive ratings in the top-up survey are systematically lower than those in the main survey, indicating that the main survey may be slightly biased towards reporting more positive outcomes, although not to the extent that would invalidate the overall conclusion of this report. The table at annex B shows the variation in responses between the online and telephone survey, for the main metrics.

Because of the lower number of participants in the top-up survey there will be larger confidence intervals around these results than for the main survey sample, which may go some way to explaining discrepancies between the findings from each.



## **Device and internet use**

Phase 1 users have, so far, principally used their devices and connection for keeping in touch with others and entertainment; these have been valuable resources throughout the pandemic and lockdown, reducing isolation and helping to maintain wellbeing.

Overall, the impact survey suggests limitations in the wider use of the internet, however interview data indicate ambition to learn more in the case of several respondents. Some respondents acknowledged their relatively limited use but seemed content with the purposes for which they had been using their device.

Nevertheless, there are indications of scope for further learning and engagement which are considered in the final section of this report.

## **Limitations**

The data collected for phase 1, through surveys and from interviews, presents a consistent picture of how people are using their devices, their levels of confidence and the benefits deriving from being connected. However, it ought to be noted that the sample of participants included in the research might reflect biases resulting from the means used to engage participants.

- Because surveys are conducted online, those more confident using online and digital technologies are likely to be overrepresented in the sample
- To promote responsiveness, digital champions were asked to highlight research activities and help people return surveys where necessary. It is therefore likely that users who enjoy a positive relationship with their digital champion are overrepresented

The telephone top-up survey is one mitigatory measure to balance the sample of participants; other channels will also be considered for future research activities.

## **Moving Forward**

This is an early stage report written to provide a snapshot of the findings that have emerged from the research and evaluation activities for phase 1 of Connecting Scotland to date. Moving forward, the insights from this report will be developed in the following ways:

- Develop the analysis to show how the findings align with Scottish Government priority policy areas, for example, relating to poverty and families, health, employment and education

- Develop the analysis of the phase 2 welcome survey and integrate evidence from the phase 2 interviews and the phase 2 impact survey when in completes in April 2022.
- Undertake a more detailed analysis of the survey data, e.g. breaking it down by age group, region and gender, to gain additional insights and linking with mobile usage data.

## **Analysis and Evaluation**

We are learning lessons from the research and evaluation activities in phase 1 (and currently in phase 2) and constantly developing our research approach to get closer to demonstrating the impact of Connecting Scotland on users. Lessons learned include:

- the need for finer grained detail on who the users are so that we can make comparisons between surveys more directly and have greater confidence that we are measuring real changes
- to have customer data gathered in a timely way when citizens join Connecting Scotland, so that we can more effectively enroll participants into research activities
- the importance of being able to link together datasets to allow more detailed analysis so that we can triangulate between data sources and draw more robust conclusions
- finding ways to boost survey sample sizes where possible
- the need to use more than one channel to approach participants so that we include people who will not be in a position to respond to a survey delivered digitally
- the need to focus the evaluation around measurable outcomes that can be linked to benefits and enumerated

Accordingly we have taken the following actions:

- implemented the collection of postcodes from phase 2 and phase 3 users to allow more fine-grained comparisons
- altered the process for awarding devices so that data is collected prior to devices being released
- brought together all of our data sources onto the a single platform to be able to link them together and perform more sophisticated analysis (e.g. breaking down survey responses by gender)
- we are in the process of recruiting a data engineer to manage Connecting Scotland data and create reports
- we are seeking to get further statistical resource for Connecting Scotland analysis

- we are supplementing our digital survey with a telephone survey to ensure a balanced sample
- we have attempted to boost sample sizes through different strategies, included strategically timed reminder emails to organizations, and texting individual beneficiaries directly, and will continue exploring ways to facilitate research participation
- we have focused our evaluation for phase 3 on capturing the progress made towards employment during the time supported by Connecting Scotland, to be able to demonstrate impact
- we are exploring use of 'Social Return On Investment' as a way of demonstrating the financial benefit to the individual and to society of outcomes such as those delivered by Connecting Scotland. E.g. by being enabled to access health information online

## **Programme Delivery**

Several phase 1 respondents reported issues with having a limited data allowance; running out of data and not being able to check usage. This has been addressed and, from phase 2 onwards, ends-users are given an unlimited data allowance for 2 years.

A small number of interview respondents said they felt that, in certain respects, the devices issued might not be the most appropriate for some uses. For the further roll-out of Connecting Scotland, as the range of users broadens, it may be worth considering whether different kinds of devices can be made available and whether users might have greater input into what they receive.

Several interviewees indicated they would be interested in attending face-to-face training for using their devices and the internet. Connecting Scotland could work with organisations, particularly those applying on behalf of clients, to determine if and how such resource could be coordinated.

While mostly positive, people's experience of digital champion support varied; from being unaware of support, to having strong relationships with advisers. The programme could consider ways to ensure consistency of the support offer, either through training or resourcing, so that all users can realise the full potential of devices and connectivity.

A number of respondents, both to surveys and in interviews, indicated that they had concerns about sharing personal data and financial information, which could be a barrier to engaging in some online activities. Connecting Scotland could consider ways to provide training and information specifically about managing such issues to increase user confidence.

## **Annex A: 5 Essential digital skills**

### **1. Communicating**

The skills required to communicate, collaborate, and share information.

#### **Skills for life**

I can:

- understand the importance of communicating securely
- set up an email account
- communicate with others digitally using email and other messaging apps
- use word processing applications to create documents
- share documents with others by attaching them to an email
- communicate with friends and family using video tools
- post messages, photographs, videos or blogs on social media platforms

#### **Skills for life examples**

I can:

- set up a group on messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp or Messenger, to talk to friends or family members
- use word processing software to create a CV or a letter
- send photographs and other documents to friends and family as an email attachment
- set up and use video-telephony products such as Facetime or Skype for video communications with friends and family
- be a member of and manage personal networking sites, such as Facebook
- post appropriately on social media, visit and post to forums such as Mumsnet or Reddit

#### **Additional skills for work**

I can:

- understand and conform with my organisation's IT and social media policies
- comply with my organisation's security protocols when accessing my email or working remotely
- communicate in an appropriate way for my organisation by using email, online and collaborative digital tools
- use digital collaboration tools to meet with, share and collaborate with colleagues
- use professional online networks and communities

#### **Additional skills for work examples**

I can:

- use the email address book of my organisation to send emails to colleagues and use the 'cc' option when requested
- work remotely using a virtual private network when provided by my employer, and use the requested authentication to connect

- use different document formats such as PDF to make it easier to share documents with colleagues
- use document sharing through web based applications such as Google Docs to work on a document in collaboration with colleagues
- use video-conferencing products such as Skype and Facetime to communicate with colleagues on conferences and calls
- be a member of and manage my account on professional networking sites, such as LinkedIn

## **2. Handling information and content**

The skills required to find, manage and store digital information and content securely.

### **Skills for life**

I can:

- understand that not all online information and content that I see is reliable
- evaluate what information or content may, or may not, be reliable
- use search engines to find information and make use of search terms to generate better results
- use bookmarks to save and retrieve information on my web browser
- access information and content from different devices
- understand that the cloud is a way that I can store information and content in a remote location.
- organise my information and content using files and folders on my device or on the cloud
- use the internet to legally access content for entertainment including films, music, games and books

### **Skills for life examples**

I can:

- understand that not all entries in online encyclopaedias, such as Wikipedia, are true or reliable
- search for news using a browser such as Chrome, Internet Explorer or Safari
- use a cloud storage account for a music or photo collection (from legal sources such as Apple iCloud, Instagram) and access the collections from different devices, such as a laptop or a smartphone
- stream music from legal sites such as Spotify or Apple Music, or watch streamed movies from legal sources such as Netflix or Amazon Prime

### **Additional skills for work**

I can:

- understand and conform with my organisation's policy for IT use
- synchronise and share information across different devices including computers, tablets and mobile phones

### **Additional skills for work examples**

I can:

- search for information requested by a supervisor using browsers such as Chrome, Internet Explorer or Safari
- manage a calendar or appointments system on multiple devices, including work computer and phone or tablet

### **3. Transacting**

The skills required to register and apply for services, buy and sell goods and services, and administer and manage transactions online.

#### **Skills for life**

I can:

- set up an account online, using appropriate websites or Apps, that enables me to buy goods or services
- access and use public services online, including filling in forms
- use different payment systems, such as credit/debit card, direct bank transfer, and phone accounts, to make payments for goods or services online
- upload documents and photographs when this is required to complete an online transaction
- fill in online forms when required to complete an online transaction
- manage my money and transactions online and securely, such as my bank, through the use of websites or apps

#### **Skills for life examples**

I can:

- set up online accounts for public services such as with your local council or a government department
- set up online accounts with retailers to order and pay for goods online such as through Amazon or eBay
- use travel websites and apps to book tickets and make reservations
- make a GP appointment online
- complete online forms to apply for a television license or road tax
- set up and use online and telephone banking through websites or apps, keeping access information secure
- upload a CV to an online recruitment site
- complete an online application form, for example for a job

#### **Additional skills for work**

I can:

- complete digital records for absence, holidays or expenses online
- access salary and expenses information digitally including password protected payslips

### **Additional skills for work examples**

I can:

- submit requests for annual leave, record absence from work or submit expenses claims online
- review own payslip and salary payments when received digitally

### **4. Problem solving**

The skills required to find solutions to problems using digital tools and online services.

#### **Skills for life**

I can:

- use the internet to find information that helps me solve problems
- use the internet to find sources of help for a range of activities
- use chat facilities (where available) on websites to help me solve problems
- use online tutorials, FAQs and advice forums to solve problems and improve my skills in using devices, software and applications
- **Skills for life examples**

I can:

- use the internet to find specific information related to Life tasks that need to be carried out, for example finding a recipe, or finding information that helps plan travel
- use the help, FAQ section or chat facility of a manufacturer's website or other related content to work out how to fix an issue with a device
- find out how to do something by using a tutorial video such as those found on YouTube

#### **Additional skills for work**

I can:

- use the internet to find information that helps me solve problems at work
- use appropriate software to present information to others
- use appropriate software, including a spreadsheet, to manipulate and analyse data to help solve problems at work
- understand that different digital tools can improve my own and the organisation's productivity

#### **Additional skills for work examples**

I can:

- use the internet to identify alternative ways of resolving a problem encountered at work such as checking out a business competitor
- use spreadsheets to plan the cost of a project.
- use analytic tools to monitor website usage and spot trends that enable decisions to be made about marketing tactics

## **5. Being safe and legal online**

The skills required to stay safe, legal and confident online.

### **Skills for life and work**

I can:

- respond to requests for authentication for my online accounts and email
- keep the information I use to access my online accounts secure, using different and secure passwords for websites and accounts
- set privacy settings on my social media and other accounts
- identify secure websites by looking for the padlock and https in the address bar
- recognise suspicious links in email, websites, social media messages and pop ups and know that clicking on these links or downloading unfamiliar attachments could put me and my computer at risk \*make sure that any information or content is backed up frequently by making a copy and storing it separately either in the cloud or on an external storage device

I understand:

- the risks and threats involved in carrying out activities online and the importance of working securely
- that viruses can damage my computer and that security software should be used to prevent this
- that my online activity produces a permanent record which could be accessed by others and used both now and in the future
- that others can capture and use my data and that I can protect and secure my personal data against such threats through privacy settings
- that I must not share other people's data online without their consent
- why it is important to keep my computer systems and security software up to date and I allow them to be updated when prompted
- why I cannot take and use content (images and documents from the web) that belongs to others without their permission because I know that online material is subject to copyright and intellectual property legislation

### **Skills for life examples**

I can:

- make sure that online login information is not shared with anyone
- ensure your posts on social media are not offensive or inappropriate
- ensure that nothing is posted on social media about others, including children, without their permission
- use a second device to receive codes when a website provides dual factor authentication and input the code to access the associated account
- create passwords using three random words or with at least 8 characters, using lower- and upper-case letters, numbers and symbols
- apply privacy settings to Facebook to ensure only friends can see posts and shared content

- activate pop-up blockers on my web browser to reduce the threat from malicious sites
- set automatic updates in the settings menu for the computer operating system and security software
- use search tools to find and access images and other online content that can be used by others
- use an external storage drive and copy any new documents on to it at the end of the day

### **Skills for work examples**

I can:

- follow organisational guidelines and policies for choosing login information including choosing secure passwords and changing them when prompted
- know whether your organisation has IT use and social media policies and be able to apply them
- know and use specific procedures to report suspicious emails to IT support staff in your organisation
- follow specific organisational guidelines to allow updates of software
- know that open source sites are available for content that can be used in the workplace and make use of them
- follow specific organisational guidelines to allow backing up of content from work-based devices

**Annex B: Comparison between main survey and telephone top-up**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Main survey (n=502)</b>	<b>Top-up survey (n=57)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Has access to the internet helped you to cope with being at home more due to COVID-19?	89% Said it had helped them cope more	87% Said it had helped them cope more	
How often do you use your iPad/Chromebook/internet access?	85% used their device once a day or more	76% used their device once a day or more	
Since getting your iPad/Chromebook/internet access, what effect has this had on your digital skills?	84% said their digital skills had improved	60% said their digital skills had improved	The top up group had less dig champ contact and were more likely to learn from friends and family
Are you using the internet more because you have received your iPad/Chromebook/internet access through Connecting Scotland?	85% said that they were using the internet more	81% said that they were using the internet more	
How has your ability to stay in touch with others changed?	88% said that this had improved	71% said that this had improved	'Not relevant to me' responses omitted from the analysis
How has your ability to access health services changed? E.g. setting up GP appointments or prescriptions	60% said that this had improved	39% said that this had improved	'Not relevant to me' responses omitted from the analysis
How has your ability to search and apply for jobs changed?	67% said that this had improved	59% said that this had improved	'Not relevant to me' responses

Question	Main survey (n=502)	Top-up survey (n=57)	Comment
			omitted from the analysis
How has your ability to access online public services changed? E.g. Getting a benefit like Universal Credit	70% said that this had improved	59% said that this had improved	'Not relevant to me' responses omitted from the analysis

## Annex C: Analysis by National Performance Framework Outcome

NPF Outcome	Impact of tackling digital exclusion on this outcome	Ref policy or strategy
We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessing information to understand rights</li> <li>• Seek advice and support via both specialist services and social networking routes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rights based approaches in Children’s Human Rights, Care Review, Patients’ Rights</li> <li>• Embedded in Social Security Scotland</li> </ul>
We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create using digital tools</li> <li>• Express diversity</li> <li>• Consume culture</li> <li>• Be informed about opportunities to participate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural strategy</li> </ul>
We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in need to travel to work</li> <li>• Reduction in emissions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emissions legislation and targets</li> </ul>
We are healthy and active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NHS Near Me</li> <li>• Remote monitoring</li> <li>• Wellbeing apps</li> <li>• Self-management groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Health and Care Strategy</li> </ul>
We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job search online</li> <li>• Self-employment opportunities opened up</li> <li>• Building skills needed for work, contributing more to the business</li> <li>• More able to work from home if Covid-19 second wave/local lockdown occurs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair Start Scotland</li> <li>• Skills Development Scotland</li> </ul>
We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to take part in online learning activities (particularly in event of local school closures from Covid-19 outbreaks)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising Attainment for All</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital exclusion exacerbates students existing experience of exclusion and inequality</li> <li>• Further and higher education courses moving online, many free MOOCs help build skills</li> </ul>	
We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being part of social groups online has become an integral part of growing up, and being excluded by reasons of poverty heightens feelings of exclusion</li> <li>• The internet can foster social connections, supporting mental health and wellbeing</li> <li>• For a child at risk, in any way, it can provide a route to access support and to develop relationships which empower</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting it Right for Every Child</li> <li>• Care Review</li> </ul>
We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports the development of local geographically defined communities</li> <li>• Online networks have become a more important way for communities to engage. This builds resilience, supports relationships and fights loneliness.</li> <li>• Where people can't access the internet, they are even less able to access support than they were in normal times</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Empowerment Act</li> </ul>
We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 drivers of poverty – income from employment, costs of living, and income from social security – all helped by tackling digital exclusion</li> <li>• Job search online, building skills to get better job</li> <li>• Ability to apply online for benefits, less risk of sanctions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Poverty Act and action plans</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to search and find better deals on goods and services to reduce bills</li> </ul>	
<p>We are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging with international partners requires digital infrastructure</li> <li>• People, businesses, institutions, Government, need tools and skills needed to take their places as global citizens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scotland's International Framework</li> </ul>
<p>We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If people are digitally excluded, they are also excluded from pursuing business ideas</li> <li>• Where people are excluded, digital businesses cannot reach them, limiting the field of customers</li> <li>• Increased digital participation equals greater economic participation, resulting in positive growth for all.</li> <li>• Businesses need employees who have good digital skills to continue to innovate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic Strategy</li> <li>• Digital Strategy</li> </ul>

### **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 <csresearch@gov.scot> 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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