

## Wolverhampton City Learning Region: Learning Digital Skills Study



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## Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

**INTRODUCTION:** The current COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of digital connectivity. The City of Wolverhampton’s investment in digital inclusion is now fundamental. Digital skills are crucial for economic resilience and growth, as the gateway to jobs and progression and for social inclusion and cohesion as digital is the primary means of connection and access to essential services.

**AIMS:** The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of digital inclusion at a community level in Wolverhampton. The aim is to use the findings in order to inform future provision and build on the experiences and lessons learnt from the rapid provision provided during COVID-19.

**METHODS:** A mix of methods were used, including an online survey and qualitative in-depth individual interviews. Ten in-depth interviews were conducted with local residents aged 40 – 65 years old, and 14 local service providers completed the survey. All data was collected in October 2021. The defined target group for this study was adults aged 40 – 65 years old. The rationale for focusing on this age range was that this generation did not benefit from digital learning in schools but are still of working age.

**FINDINGS:** Key findings and recommendations from the study are summarised below.

## Experiences with current digital skills courses and sessions:

Key findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Overall, local residents enjoyed the training courses they had attended or were currently attending. Not only did they improve their digital skills, but of often equal importance, they appreciated the social aspects of the course.</li><li>• Local residents recognised that there was a difference between IT teachers, and people who were simply good at IT. Having the correct skill set and being able to carefully and patiently explain and support people in their learning journey was seen as vital.</li><li>• The existing training could be improved by including more practical elements of digital usage, for example understanding how to do online shopping, completion of online forms, access to COVID vaccination certificates, etc.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Any support needs to be provided by professional teachers as opposed to simply IT specialists. Training should also include practical skills, such as completing online forms, etc.</li><li>• Further work should be done to link people up with other online activities delivered in the area or further afield. For example, link in people to other online courses that may look at activities outside of the digital learning remit, such as hobby classes.</li></ul>

## Perceptions of the lending scheme:

Key findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Around 50% of the local residents interviewed had heard about the city's digital device/connectivity lending scheme, the remaining residents had not heard of the scheme but thought it sounded like a good idea.</li><li>• Of the people who had accessed the scheme, all had issues using the devices and some had never even taken the device out of its box because they did not know how to do the basics such as switching on the tablet or laptop or charging it.</li><li>• For those that did not have access to the Internet, this limited their usage of the digital device and could mean that the device was actually left at another relative's house who had Wi-Fi for them to use when they visited.</li><li>• There seemed to be a lack of information about the scheme given to the people. For example, users of the scheme were not always told how they could renew the digital device if they wanted to have it for longer than three months and they were unsure what they could and could not use the device for. Therefore, they were often wary to use their borrowed device to do practical activities such as completing forms online that contained personal data or online shopping. This resulted in the devices mainly being used to watch YouTube videos, send emails, and play games.</li><li>• Positively, having the device made people feel less socially isolated.</li><li>• There appeared to be a lack of promotion of existing courses with many local residents simply being told that there was a possibility of training run in their local area. This meant that they waited for this training to begin and often did not use the digital device.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There needs to be greater clarification of what is provided and also support for those who do not have access to Wi-Fi at their homes. This could be in relation to having more free Wi-Fi localities available within the local community or discussions with homeowners to get Internet access in their own properties.</li><li>• When digital devices are lent to local residents, all residents should be given at least one session to start them off on the device. There also needs to be greater clarity over what the borrowed devices can be used for as well as clear explanation of the security facilities and security settings on the devices.</li></ul>

**Existing service provision:**

<b>Key findings</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Many of the partners who completed the survey appeared to offer support, mentoring or courses in relation to the digital inclusion agenda.</li><li>• The courses offered appeared to be varied ranging from basic IT skills to IT skills around very specific programs.</li><li>• However, it was acknowledged that there was a lack of cross promotion of the support activities within Wolverhampton.</li><li>• The local residents recognised the need for IT courses, as well as mentoring and one-to-one support. Many of them lived by themselves and felt very socially isolated, and they also believed that younger family members could not be always relied upon to support them with their digital needs and therefore they appreciated and were interested in attending courses or support sessions.</li><li>• Although a couple of local residents were interested in attending courses in relation to future employment opportunities, for many it was simply to learn the skills to be able to email people, watch videos online, and also to be able to speak and conference call with others so they felt less isolated.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There needs to be clear and greater promotion of existing courses and services available within the Wolverhampton area to support people to use digital devices, as opposed to telling people to wait for courses to start in other areas.</li></ul>

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Learning Digital Skills in Wolverhampton

The Wolverhampton City Learning Region (WCLR) Core Partner Group have established a WCLR Learning Digital Skills Task and Finish Group to undertake a focused piece of work based on a collaboration with partners (formal, informal, non-formal learning) city-wide to produce a Learning Digital Skills Innovation Report that can feed into the development of the city's wider strategy from the learning perspective and/or form the basis of a funding request for a specific initiative to address digital poverty through learning.

The current COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of digital connectivity. Local intelligence during the first lockdown (2020) highlighted that 50% of adult education learners, nine out of ten people on a basic skills course, 60% of residents on the city's 'Wolves at Work' programme and 25% young people on the 'Impact' programme were unable to access remote learning or employment support due to lack of devices and/or connectivity. In addition, many vulnerable adults and carers were unable to access support available. Point Topic data indicates that 11,659 households in Wolverhampton are without broadband. However, Good Things Foundation estimate there are 118,000 limited and non-users of the internet in Wolverhampton, which may reflect issues around unsuitable or limited access to devices and data poverty.

The City of Wolverhampton's investment in digital inclusion is now fundamental. Digital skills are crucial for economic resilience and growth, as the gateway to jobs and progression and for social inclusion and cohesion as digital is the primary means of connection and access to essential services. WCLR partners are working within the context of a whole city approach to tackling the digital divide within the city and supporting the commitment to be a digitally inclusive city from a learning digital skills perspective. The learning component of digital poverty represents a significant problem for residents and that, whilst there is considerable action linked to it, it is hard to understand the connections between all strands of work, the positioning and importance of the role of learning within these strands and the mechanisms required to achieve a joined-up approach.

## 1.2. Formative Research

The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding and rounded picture of digital inclusion at a community level in Wolverhampton. The aim is to use the findings in order to inform future provision and build on the experiences and lessons learnt from the rapid provision provided during COVID-19. WCLR is working with core partners and the city council to understand what is needed next and this will inform the city's revised digital strategy under development and any bids for funding.

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## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Aims of the Study

This formative research was undertaken to gain feedback on existing digital inclusion activities and resources available in Wolverhampton and help inform future provision. Beneath this overarching goal, two key aims were defined, each with associated research questions. These were:

1. To understand what provision is currently being offered and what are the gaps in this provision.
  - What digital resources have people accessed over the past 18 months?
  - How have these resources been used/helped the people accessing them?
  - How can the current provision be improved?
2. To understand the learning needs of the local population
  - What are the barriers and motivators to learning digital skills?
  - What types and level of support is needed?

### 2.2. Selection of the Target Audiences

The defined target group for this study was adults aged 40 – 65 years old. The rationale for focusing on this age range was that this generation did not benefit from digital learning in schools but are still of working age and therefore are likely to need some digital skills to access employment opportunities.

### 2.3. Research Design and Methods

A mixed methods approach was taken, including a survey conducted with service providers, and in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with the target audience for this study - adults aged between 40 – 65 years old living in Wolverhampton.

#### 2.3.1. Qualitative research methods

Principles of Grounded Theory were used throughout the qualitative part of the study to guide sampling, data gathering, and data analysis.<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'Grounded Theory' refers to a theory of behaviour that is developed inductively from a body of data, rather than from the preconceptions of the researchers. Therefore, findings from such studies should have high validity. The approach is iterative, in that ongoing sampling, data gathering, and data analysis inform each other over time as tentative theoretical explanations are generated during data analysis, and subsequently tested through further data gathering. In this way, a circular process ensures the theory is gradually, but robustly, developed.

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<sup>1</sup> Glaser, B., Strauss, A. (1967). The discovery of grounded theory. Chicago: Aldine.

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The participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling, meaning they were selected because they possessed knowledge that was directly related to the research questions. Sampling considered age, employment status, and highest level of education achieved. All of the participants had either accessed the city's digital device/connectivity lending scheme and/or had attended a digital skills/IT courses in Wolverhampton since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants were recruited through local community groups and the local college. During recruitment, if someone expressed an interest in taking part in the study, they were emailed an information sheet which explained the study in more detail and informed them: (a) why the study was being conducted, (b) who was doing the study, and (c) how the data collected would be stored, used, and analysed.

### *Data collection methods*

Individual interviews were conducted in October 2021. All interviews were conducted over the phone due to increasing rates of COVID-19 at time of the data collection. These interviews were all qualitative in nature to gain a greater understanding of not just the barriers, but to understand *why* these barriers affected digital learning and identify possible motivators for change. The sample size aimed to achieve data saturation.<sup>2</sup>

### *Research questions*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. At the start of each interview, loosely structured, open-ended questions were asked. In order to pursue an idea or response, more detailed questions were subsequently asked, or prompts made. The wording was not standardised, as the interviewers tried to use the participant's own vocabulary when framing supplementary questions.

The questions covered the following areas:

- Past experiences of digital learning
- Current digital usage
- Barriers and motivations for increasing digital skills
- Experiences with the existing digital learning courses available in Wolverhampton and the lending scheme.

The guide was used as an 'aide-memoire' and as a general framework for discussion, ensuring that all themes were covered with the necessary prompts but, at the same time, enabling discussions to be spontaneous, flexible, and responsive to the thoughts and opinions of those being interviewed.

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<sup>2</sup> The point at which no new themes are developed, and the participants are not saying anything new



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### *Data analysis*

Data collection and analysis followed an iterative process, whereby emergent themes from early interviews were used to add to or refine questions during subsequent interviews. Detailed notes were taken during the interviews and were then typed up and imported into NVivo (V.11.4.3, QSR)<sup>3</sup> and analysis followed a thematic approach to identify key themes and codes<sup>4</sup>. Data collection and analysis continued until saturation occurred (i.e., the point at which no new significant themes emerged).

In discussing the results, using quantitative descriptions to describe qualitative data seemed inappropriate, therefore, the frequency of a response is indicated by such terms as, “all,” “most,” “many,” “some,” “a few,” or “one.”

### **2.3.2. Quantitative research methods**

A survey was conducted with local service providers in Wolverhampton during October 2021. The survey was used to provide an audit of current provision of digital learning and digital inclusion activities across Wolverhampton.

### *Development of the survey, data collection and analysis*

The survey questions were developed based on discussions between the University of Wolverhampton WCLR team and the National Social Marketing Centre. The draft questions were then sent to WCLR core partners for further input. Data was collected online and analysed using SurveyMonkey. The survey included a mix of open and closed questions and was available for completion for four weeks. Respondents were only able to complete the survey once.

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<sup>3</sup> Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty Ltd. NVIVO. (2019). Victoria, Australia

<sup>4</sup> Coffey A, Atkinson P. Making Sense of Qualitative Data. London: Sage, 1996.

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## 3. Research Findings

### 3.1. Qualitative Research Findings

Ten participants were interviewed. Due to the small sample size and the way in which the sample was recruited, to ensure full confidentiality of the participants no further personal details are presented in this report. However, all were aged between 40-65 years old, and had either accessed a digital learning course/support in Wolverhampton in the past 18 months or had used the city's digital device /connectivity lending scheme. Only three of the participants were currently in employment.

#### 3.1.1. Past experiences of learning digital skills and using digital devices

None of the participants had learnt IT or digital skills at school. Computers had not been available at their schools and when most of them started working, computers were not used within their job roles. For some this meant that they had never used computers or other digital devices (apart from their phones) and did not understand the basics of using such devices. For example, how to switch the device on, how to open any programs or access the Internet, how to send an email, etc. However, all recognized that they needed such skills in the world today and this was the main motivation for using such devices and learning new skills.

*“During my school days, nothing like that existed. But we can’t do without, if you want to communicate, these things are what you need to use.”*

*“My daughter, she was born into it [the digital age]. But I wasn’t. No, no computers at school or mobile phones.”*

*“It’s just the world isn’t it. We need it [digital skills]. We can’t do without it.”*

For others, through their work they had been exposed to using digital devices. However, these were usually desktop computers and they had been taught to use only certain programs on them which they required for their everyday work. They also relied heavily on other colleagues or the IT department at their work to support them. When they tried to use a new device, such as a laptop or tablet, they struggled to apply the skills they used on their desktop to the new devices.

*“It’s just different isn’t it. My laptop seems different that my computer at work.”*

#### 3.1.2. Motivation for using digital devices and experiences with the lending scheme

On the whole, the participants were keen to learn new digital skills and they all stated that such skills were important for life in Wolverhampton today. They all mentioned, unprompted, about the time they had needed to use a digital device to access certain information or to complete a form. They had

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felt frustrated and disappointed that they had been unable to do this and therefore recognised the need to have such skills.

*“I never had it [digital skills] and it never bothered me. But now, you get lost without it.”*

*“I needed to know. I needed [to know] how to type a letter, all these things I thought. How to make a CV and make it look good. I didn’t see age as a barrier, I just cracked on with it.”*

*“When I was trying to do my CV, this digital skills came up and I had no idea how to access computers and I had to rely on my daughter to do everything. When they asked if I wanted to go on the free course, I was apprehensive, but I can’t rely on my daughter always, she has her own life too.”*

Around half of the participants had bought their own device. They had often been confused around which device they should buy to meet their needs and as one participant described this lack of awareness about the different devices had resulted in her buying a Chromebook instead of a laptop. As a result, she was unable to do all the things she'd wanted on it.

*“I had problems using it and my son said it was because it was a Chromebook. I wish I’d known. I took the Chrome to the class, as it is a bit different. And they taught me the basics on it.”*

The participants who had bought their own devices, they appreciated one-to-one support to get them up and running on the devices. As one participant described: *“I bought a used one [laptop] and I just looked and thought it has good buttons and a wide screen. I showed it to my computer teacher, and he sat me down and took me through everything. Now I am making good use of it.”*

The other half of the participants had been issued with a digital device as part of the Wolverhampton digital device/connectivity lending scheme. The participants who had borrowed a digital device believed that the scheme was a good idea. However, they highlighted issues with the current system and areas where improvements needed to be made. Further issues with the current scheme set up are detailed in section 3.1.3.

*“It’s such a lovely, lovely tablet. But I have no internet at home. If I had known they were not going to keep paying for data, I would have said they’re best to give it to someone else.”*

### **3.1.3. The need for greater support**

For some of the participants who had no digital skills, when they had been given the digital device they received no training on how to use it. Therefore, they would explain that the laptop or tablet had just remained in its box, as they did not know how to switch it on or charge it.

*“I’ll be honest with you. I can’t even switch it on, I don’t know where to start. No, I’ve not used it yet.”*

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*“It’s almost as if they assume that you know how to use it [the digital device].”*

*“It [the digital device] wasn’t even set up for accessing emails. I had to work it out all on my own. I had used a computer before, but I don’t know what sites are safe to use.”*

This seemed to be more of the case for laptops as opposed to tablets. As one participant postulated, this was probably due to tablets being similar to mobile phones and therefore perceived as easier to use.

For those who were unable to use the devices at all, they explained that they were waiting for a training course and that they had been told there was a training course hopefully starting in the near future if funding was available. This often resulted in the borrowed digital devices not being used whilst they waited for the training course to begin. There appeared to be a lack of sign posting to other, already running courses.

*“I’m waiting for the course [to start using the digital device lent to them]. We were told there might be funding to do one, but not heard yet.”*

For the participants who had some basic IT ability, they had also received their digital device with no further support. However, as they had some IT skills, they would “play around” with it to determine how to do the things they wanted to do on it, such as watching YouTube videos, playing games, sending emails, and accessing the Internet. Yet, they felt frustrated still as there were a lot of other activities they wanted to use the digital device for, which they could not do. Such as filling out forms online or online shopping.

*“I’m not quick on it, but I got the hang of it, and I can do things. But there is a lot of other things I could do on it if I knew how to.”*

*“I’ve been able to check my emails and go online but I can’t do zoom and I want to do that. I want to access my NHS vaccine records also so I can go away but I’m not sure [how to do that].”*

There seemed to be a lack of clarity on what they could and could not do on the borrowed digital devices and there were concerned around security and cyber attacks. They had no idea if any virus protection systems were set up on their devices.

*“I want to shop online but I’m not sure I can on that [as a borrowed laptop]. How do I prevent cyber fraud? Is it safe to use? I don’t want to risk it as I don’t know if it is secure or not.”*

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Although the organisations who lent people the devices often explained that if they had any problems they could come and ask for advice, most of the participants felt reluctant to do this or they struggled to get hold of people due to part-time and home working. There was also confusion on how long people could borrow the digital devices for, or if they could renew them (like they would a library book).

*“She said I could ring her if I had an issue, but I don’t feel I can. And then you can’t get hold of people as they work part-time.”*

*“They said I could have it for three months. But that is not enough as I spent the first two months working out how to use it! It should be at least six [months]. But can I get it for longer? Who do I phone?”*

The lack of Internet access was mentioned by one of the participants who had received a digital device via the city’s digital device/connectivity lending scheme. They were initially given a certain amount of data and they tried to use this data sparingly. Yet, after two months it ran out. They then contacted the organisation who they had received the tablet from and had been told that they were now responsible to buy the data allowance. However, this was too expensive for them so they could only use the device at a family members house where the participant could use free Wi-Fi. This meant that the digital device was not actually kept at the participant’s home; they kept it at the family members home for when they went to visit.

*“I thought it would be ongoing, but it wasn’t. They said when leaving [after dropping off the tablet], ‘if you run out [of data] just let me know’. But when I asked they said ‘no’, and I was quite shocked. I wasn’t abusing it. If my mum didn’t have Wi-Fi at her house, I wouldn’t be able to use it.”*

#### **3.1.4. Training preferences**

Most of the participants preferred face-to-face training when it came to digital skills, and small class sizes so that they could receive one-to-one attention. To access such training courses, most of the participants were prepared to travel on public transport (although they acknowledged local classes would be preferable, especially during the winter months). Although they were often apprehensive they were still motivated to attend the classes.

Courses where the participants received a certificate at the ends also gave people greater satisfaction and helped them feel as if they had really achieved something. This was also important if they were hoping to use their new skills to enhance employment opportunities.

*“The excel was so sweet for me. But it wasn’t easy at the beginning. But the teacher was excellent.”*

*“Before the exam, I was scared. I said to [name of teacher], I can’t do this. But [name of teacher] calmed me down and said I could. And I did it [passed the exam].”*

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As the courses progressed, the participants explained how their confidence grew and they gained great satisfaction from ‘their firsts’.

*“A few days ago, I managed my first email! I thought, I can do this!”*

Despite this, even those who had attended the courses and enjoyed them, still felt as if it would be helpful to have a few more practical sessions on completion of forms, understanding what QR codes are and how to use them, how to access their COVID vaccination passport, cyber security, and other practical activities.

*“I want to know about cyber security. How to fill out forms, QR codes, I’ve no idea. I need to learn this.”*

Only a few of the participants talked about learning the skills for employment activities. As mentioned previously, most of the participants wanted to use the skills for their own personal use or to help them socialise online.

*“I live alone. I wanted it to improve my social life. Maybe as a hobby.”*

### **3.1.5. Experiences of adult digital courses in Wolverhampton**

For those that had attended a training course, they talked positively about it. They enjoyed learning the new skills and, often as or even more importantly, they enjoyed having a reason to “leave the house” and socialise with other people. There was overwhelming gratitude for the teachers. The participants talked about the patience of the teachers and the teachers’ skills in explaining things in a simple and clear way.

*“He was so, so skillful. The type of teacher that would motivate you. He makes you do it again, so you know it in your head. I was lucky to have such a teacher. It is the number one priority; it makes a big difference when you have a good teacher like that.”*

*“I didn’t know about computing, and I wanted to know how to use Microsoft. Before the course I was really not confident, but I wanted to learn accounting, so I needed to know Excel. Now I feel very confident.”*

*“She [the teacher] is a good teacher. She doesn’t just leave you to get on with it. She comes and helps.”*

For a couple of the participants, they had attended a more informal, one-off introduction to using digital devices. The introductory session had been run at the local community centre. It was unclear who had run the session, whether it was an existing member of staff or an external person who specialised in IT. Still, the participants who had attended this session felt disheartened and believe that the teacher was becoming frustrated by their lack of its skills and knowledge. This did not appear to

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happen with professional teachers. As one participant explained: *"I'm guessing there is a difference between a teacher of computers and someone who is good at computers. It's a different skill set. I got a bit anxious and I felt left out."*

Although most of the participants lived alone, some had children or other younger family members that lived within the local area. They recognise that these younger family members were IT literate. However, they did not feel as if they could bother them with their digital issues. As one participant explained: *"They know how to do it. But they have their own lives, their own jobs and they work long hours. I can't expect them to run and help me always."*

### **3.1.6. The impact of COVID-19**

Having a digital device, as well as Wi-Fi or data so that they could access the Internet, was seen as even more critical because of COVID-19. Many of the participants talked about feeling lonely and isolated during the pandemic and a couple of participants mentioned a desire to learn specific conference call programs, such as Zoom to be able to socialise and keep in touch with other people.

*"During the lockdown, people were having Zoom sessions. I wanted to explore how to do that too."*

*"I would go [during lockdown] weeks without seeing anyone. I hoped it would make me less lonely if I had a tablet."*

Most of the people interviewed lived alone and talked spontaneously about their feelings of loneliness. These feelings of isolation and loneliness occurred before the pandemic, but the pandemic increased the feelings of isolation. Although at the time of the interviews, the COVID-19 movement restrictions had been lifted, the feeling of loneliness and isolation seemed to be ever present for most of the participants.

*"I love using it [the tablet], and if I had Wi-Fi here, I'd enjoy using it more. I spend a lot of hours on my own here and I won't see anyone so it can be a long week."*

## 3.2. Quantitative (survey) Research Findings

Fourteen participants completed the survey. Most of them (n=9) were from Voluntary/Charitable organisations, two were from Community Interest Companies, and one was from a community facility (e.g. library, community centre etc.).

### 3.2.1. Current provision of digital skills training courses

The majority of the participants (93%) worked for organisations which offered training, courses, workshops, sessions, or support of any kind to help residents of Wolverhampton to learn / develop digital skills. The participants who stated they offered digital training, courses, workshops, sessions, or support, detailed various support, including one-to-one support, basic IT skills training courses, and certified courses detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Current provision

One-to-one support and individual mentoring	Basic IT skills training courses	Certified courses	Other courses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual mentoring on using laptops/other digital devices and certain programs such as Zoom</li> <li>Support for people to do online job searches</li> <li>Supporting people with learning/ speech/ hearing/ sight difficulties were engaged with the use of laptops and how to enlarge text, get the computer to speak / read the text, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learn My Way</li> <li>Computers for the Terrified</li> <li>Essential digital IT skill sessions</li> <li>IT for Beginners</li> <li>Excel for Beginners</li> <li>Make it Click training (entry level 1-3)</li> <li>Introduction to digital and wellbeing</li> <li>Learn My Way Make It Click Connect and Collaborate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Essential Digital Skills OCN (Entry 3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designing in Canva</li> <li>Social Media/Online Promotions</li> <li>Selling on eBay</li> <li>CV creation and Enhancement</li> <li>Online Job Searching</li> <li>IT Health Checks for SMEs</li> </ul>

When asked what types of digital skills participants have helped local residents learn, the most frequently given response was *'Getting people started on using their equipment, phones, tablets, laptops, using the mouse and keyboard if available'*. The second most frequently given response was *'Using the internet to support daily living and independence and / or to access online services'*. Full detail of responses is presented in Table 2. Only one of the respondents said that they did not currently



provide any training, courses, etc. on digital skills as it was “not part of our offer / services as we have a focus on other types of provision/support.”

**Table 2.** Responses to the question: *Considering the 2 years, what types of digital skills have you helped residents of Wolverhampton to learn? Please tick all that apply*

Response	Percentage of responses
Getting people started on using their equipment, phones, tablets, laptops, using the mouse and keyboard if available	92%
Specific IT packages and training software e.g. Microsoft Word, Excel etc.	67%
Using social media e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or messaging apps such as WhatsApp & Facebook Messenger	50%
Online conference platforms such as Zoom, Teams, Google Meet etc.	67%
Setting up and using Email accounts	75%
Using apps to support daily living and independence	58%
Using the internet to support daily living and independence and / or to access online services	75%
How to keep personal details etc. safe when using any online or digital services or devices	58%

### Digital Buddies Network

Respondents were asked if they were aware of the city’s Digital Buddies Network which is being developed through the Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council. Nearly two-thirds - 62% - stated that they were aware of this.

### **3.2.2. Digital support providers**

The respondents were asked if their organisations supported other grassroots organisations to be digital support providers. Over two-thirds (69%) answered ‘yes’ to this question. When asked further details around how they actually do that, the responses were varied, but mainly focused on either the digital device/connectivity lending scheme or providing training or support. The responses, presented verbatim, are detailed in Box 1.

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**Box 1.** Responses to the question: *How does your organisation support other grassroot organisations to be digital support providers?*

- Through the Wolverhampton Learning Platform, we are supporting 10-15 organisations by equipping them with chrome books and tablets as supplied through the digital loan scheme.
- Work with faith groups to identify and assist people we can help to improve digital skills.
- We provide practical advice.
- All of the above opportunities are available to partner agencies from the private, public, and voluntary sector.
- We offer advice and consultation via workshops and 1 to 1 support.
- We applied for funding for some tablets. Help set people up so they can access other services as well as ours.
- We offer programmes to build capacity and encourage others to become UKOnline Centres.

### **3.2.3. Increasing digital access for residents**

Respondents were asked an open question: *What do you think we most need in Wolverhampton to help increase access for residents to learning digital skills?*

The most frequently given response was access to free Wi-Fi in community venues. The need for further funding to provide one-to-one support and mentoring, as well as drop-in centres, was also discussed, including home-visits to the most vulnerable. However, a couple of the respondents stated that *“better promotion of existing services”* is needed. Two of the respondents talked about accessing parents through targeting schools. The need to support people to do everyday tasks was also mentioned, such as helping them do shopping, paying for parking, and making card payments online. This last point tallies with the findings detailed in Section 3.1.

The final question asked the respondents to share details of any innovative or inspiring ideas of what other organisations, cities or places were doing to support their residents to learn digital skills. Only three of the 14 respondents gave examples. These are presented in Box 2.

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Box 2. Responses to the question: *If you have come across any innovative or inspiring ideas of what other organisations, cities or places may be doing to support their residents to learn digital skills please share here.*

- Secret Angels are doing home visits to disadvantaged to help the resident learn digital skills and offering support as and when required.
- Gloucester Street Community Centre - Digital Online Centre online presentations from the key private and public sectors who offer a digital service e.g. doctors surgery, energy suppliers, schools, colleges, shops, shopping online, safety online etc.
- Free Wi-Fi available in areas that are easily accessible.

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## 4. Conclusions & Recommendations

This piece of work has been conducted to support the ongoing digital inclusion work and digital learning initiatives within Wolverhampton. It provides important feedback on the existing provisions and identifies areas for improvement moving forward. They have been numbered on order of priority; however, they are interlinked, and all should be considered to create an effective environment for change.

Based on the findings, a number of recommendations have been made, including:

1. **Greater support at the time of borrowing the digital device.** When people are lent the digital devices, consistent information needs to be given to them about how long they can borrow the device for, what they can use the device for, who they talk to for renewals of the device loan, and where they can go for support.
2. **Promotion of existing courses and digital learning support services.** There needs to be clear and greater promotion of existing courses and services available within the Wolverhampton area to support people to use digital devices, as opposed to telling people to wait for courses to start in other areas.
3. **Further support and information provided at the time of borrowing.** When digital devices are lent to local residents, all residents should be given at least one session to start them off on the device. They should be supported to learn the basics of how to switch it on, how to charge the battery, how to access the Internet and to send emails or connect with other people via digital platforms.
4. **Greater clarification on the borrowing scheme.** There needs to be greater clarity over what the borrowed devices can be used for as well as clear explanation of the security facilities and security settings on the devices. This should also link to peoples understanding of the return policy, and when they return the device how will they ensure that any personal information that they may have stored on certain websites, such as credit card details will not be available for the next user to access or see.
5. **Ensuring connectivity to the Internet.** There needs to be greater clarification of what is provided and also support for those who do not have access to Wi-Fi at their homes. This could be in relation to having more free Wi-Fi localities available within the local community or discussions with homeowners to get Internet access in their own properties.
6. **Practical training required.** As well as teaching local residents how to turn on and do the basics with their digital device, there is also practical teaching that needs to be done on how to fully use the device to do online shopping, filling out forms, and everyday activities which have now been moved online.
7. **To help achieve digital inclusion and success, work with stakeholders and users to co-create a set of best practice principles for digital inclusion that work for Wolverhampton around learning digital skills** to ensure impact for key groups of the population that will help guide

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current and future practice. Appendix I details some examples of best practice from other cities / organisations for digital inclusion and should be reviewed when co-creating them for Wolverhampton.

8. **Professional teaching support.** Any support needs to be provided by professional teachers as opposed to simply IT specialists.
9. **Using the digital learning and digital device/connectivity lending scheme to link local residents up with online courses and social activities.** Digital devices and the accompanying courses were seen as a good way to break social isolation and get people out the house. However greater work should be done to link people up with other online activities delivered in the area or further afield. For example, link in people to other online courses that may look at activities outside of the digital learning remit, such as hobby classes.
10. **Raise awareness of the importance of learning digital skills for wellbeing.** This research highlighted that digital inclusion is much greater than enhancing employability. It is also about reducing loneliness and isolation. Therefore, work should be done in collaboration with Public Health and relevant community organisations create a joined up approach around why learning digital skills is so important in relation to supporting wellbeing in the times of this pandemic.

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## APPENDIX I

### Leeds, UK

<https://digitalinclusionkit.org/author/leeds-city-council/>

<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/>

### Lancashire Digital Skills Partnership, UK

<https://www.lancshireskillshub.co.uk/digital-skills-partnership/>

### Manchester Combined Authority, UK

<https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/digital/digital-inclusion-agenda/>

<https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/digital/>

### West Midlands Digital Bootcamp, UK

<https://www.wmca.org.uk/news/digital-bootcamps-helping-local-people-to-gain-new-jobs-in-tech-sector/>

<https://www.uktech.news/news/wmca-launches-next-round-of-digital-bootcamps-20211105>

### Good Things Foundation, UK

<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/>

<https://www.onlinecentresnetwork.org/>

Social change charity focused on helping people to improve their lives through digital and in particular Online Centre Network and WMCA Coalition for Digital Inclusion.

### Loti (London Digital Agency), UK

<https://loti.london/>

<https://loti.london/projects/diip/>

### National Digital Inclusion Network

<https://www.digitalinclusion.org>

### Unite's Digital Champions Network

<https://www.digitalchampionsnetwork.com>

<https://www.digitalunite.com/news-reviews/how-help-others-remote-digital-champion>

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## **Estonia, Europe**

**(Tallinn – capital of Estonia)**

<https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/digital-frontrunners-spotlight-estonia/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/30/lessons-from-estonia-why-excels-digital-learning-during-covid>

## **Singapore, South East Asia**

<https://www.skillsfuture.gov.sg/>

<https://opengovasia.com/singapore-offers-digital-skills-training-for-senior-citizens/>

<https://www.collectivecampus.io/digital-skills-training/singapore>

## **UNESCO Learning Cities and scaling up Digital Learning and Skills**

<https://en.unesco.org/news/scaling-digital-learning-and-skills-worlds-most-populous-countries-drive-education-recovery>

<https://en.unesco.org/news/digital-learning-way-forward-high-population-countries-rally-around-initiative>

*PDF report: E-9 initiative: Scaling-up digital learning to accelerate progress towards SDG4 Summary of the Consultation meeting of Ministers of Education, 6 April 2021*

[https://en.unesco.org/system/files/e9\\_consultation\\_6\\_april\\_2021\\_summary.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/system/files/e9_consultation_6_april_2021_summary.pdf)

## **TechUK**

May offer ideas to explore (relates to stimulating vibrant high streets and communities)

<https://www.techuk.org/resource/technology-and-the-future-of-the-uk-high-street.html>

Direct link to the report – Technology and the Future of the High Street, December 2021

<file:///prs->

[store2.unv.wlv.ac.uk/home2\\$/U23412/home/Profile/Downloads/techfutureofhighstreetfinallores.pdf](store2.unv.wlv.ac.uk/home2$/U23412/home/Profile/Downloads/techfutureofhighstreetfinallores.pdf)

## **Help to Grow Campaign**

<https://helptogrow.campaign.gov.uk/>

Digital offer includes: free, impartial online support about how digital technology can boost your business's performance. From December 2021, if a business is eligible, they can also get a discount of up to 50% towards the costs of buying approved software, worth up to £5,000.

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For more information about the Wolverhampton City Learning Region

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E: [LearningRegions@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:LearningRegions@wlv.ac.uk)

Twitter: @LearningRegions