

Department for Digital, Culture, Media  
and Sport


# Evaluation of the Local Digital Skills Partnerships

September 2021

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

# Evaluation of the Local Digital Skills Partnerships

September 2021

Reviewed and approved by:	
Signature(s):	_____
Name(s):	Graham Russell
Job Title(s):	Chief Executive
Date:	September 2021

AMION Consulting is the trading name of AMION Consulting Limited  
Registered Office: Langtons, The Plaza, 100 Old Hall Street, Liverpool  
L3 9QJ  
Company No: 3909897  
Tel: 0330 174 3024  
Ref: C:\Users\Kathryn Booth\Documents\Evaluation of LDSP Final 080921

# Contents

**Glossary**

<b>Ministerial foreword</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Purpose of the evaluation	1
1.2 Evaluation aim and objectives	1
1.3 Methodology	1
1.4 Structure of the report	2
<b>2 Context</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 The importance of digital skills	3
2.2 Policy environment	6
2.3 Funding for digital skills	7
2.4 Partnership working best practice	7
<b>3 Overview of DCMS-funded Local DSPs view</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Objectives of the Local DSP Programme	10
3.2 Formation of the Local DSPs	11
3.3 Local DSP Model	12
3.4 Activities	13
3.5 DCMS Funding and Support	13
3.6 Programme costs	13
<b>4 Establishing, delivering and sustaining the Local DSPs</b>	<b>15</b>
4.1 Vision and priorities	15
4.2 Board structure and Chair	16
4.3 The Regional Coordinator role	17
4.4 Alignment with local governance structures	17
4.5 Funding to deliver digital skills activity	18
4.6 Linkages with key corporates, national digital skills partners and Government	19
4.7 Impact of Covid-19	20
4.8 The importance of the LEP / CA role	21
<b>5 Comparator areas</b>	<b>22</b>
5.1 Background	22
5.2 The alternative models	22

---

5.3 Attractiveness of the Local DSP model	23
<b>6 Outcomes of DCMS-funded Local DSPs</b>	<b>25</b>
6.1 Local DSP logic model	25
6.2 Outcomes for individuals and communities	28
6.3 Outcomes for business	29
6.4 Outcomes for the public sector	30
<b>7 Additionality and contribution to outcomes</b>	<b>32</b>
7.1 A framework for assessment	32
7.2 Additionality	34
7.3 Performance of the Local DSP model	37
7.4 Added Value of the Local DSP Model	41
<b>8 Future of the Local DSPs</b>	<b>42</b>
8.1 Rationale	42
8.2 Models for sustainability	44
<b>9 Conclusions and policy considerations</b>	<b>46</b>
9.1 Key findings	46
9.2 Lessons learned	46
9.3 Considerations for the future	47
<b>Appendix A – Local DSP area profiles</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Appendix B – Comparator areas</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Appendix C – DSP roles and activities</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Appendix D – Case studies</b>	<b>60</b>

## Glossary

<b>Additionality</b>	The extent to which outcomes occur at all, on a larger scale, earlier, or within a specific designated area or target group as a result of an intervention
<b>Advanced digital skills</b>	Definition used by the CBI and Tata Consultancy. Includes software engineering and development, data analytics, IT support and system maintenance and digital marketing and sales
<b>AEB</b>	Adult Education Budget which funds the delivery of education and training for learners aged 19+
<b>BAME</b>	Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic
<b>Baseline digital skills</b>	Definition used by Burning Glass Technologies. Includes digital literacy skills e.g. productivity software skills such as spreadsheet and work processing, as well as enterprise management software like Oracle or SAP
<b>Basic digital skills</b>	Definition used by CBI and Tata Consultancy. Includes computer literacy such as familiarity with Microsoft Office, handling digital information and content, core skills such as communication and problem-solving and understanding how digital technologies work
<b>BEIS</b>	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
<b>CA / MCA</b>	(Mayoral) Combined Authority, a legal body that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries
<b>Comparator areas</b>	Areas included in the research to provide an understanding of how digital skills activity has been taken forward in areas without a DCMS-funded Local DSP
<b>CompTIA</b>	Computing Technology Industry Association. Promotes industry growth through education, training, certifications, philanthropy and market research
<b>Counterfactual</b>	What would have happened in the absence of the intervention
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development
<b>D&amp;I</b>	Diversity and inclusion
<b>DCMS</b>	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
<b>Defra</b>	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education
<b>Digital inclusion</b>	According to the Government Digital Inclusion Strategy, digital inclusion can be defined in terms of: (a) digital skills – being able to use computers and the internet, (b) connectivity and having the right infrastructure, and (c) accessibility, where services are designed to meet all users’ needs.
<b>Digital poverty</b>	WorkSkillsUK definition: a young person is in digital poverty if they do not have access to an appropriate device or the internet.  Office for Students definition: being without access to one of the core items of digital infrastructure: appropriate hardware, appropriate software, reliable access to the internet, technical support and repair when required, a trained teacher or instructor and an appropriate study space.
<b>Digital skills</b>	Competencies in and / or knowledge of IT tools including computer programmes and programming languages
<b>Displacement</b>	Where an outcome occurs in one area at the expense of another, thereby representing no net gain in the aggregate
<b>DRF</b>	Digital Retraining Fund. Being administered in the West Midlands to test new ways of equipping workers for current and future local jobs
<b>DWP</b>	Department for Work and Pensions
<b>EDS</b>	Essential Digital Skills. Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index defines ‘Life’ EDS, as an individual being able to complete tasks which relate to being safe, legal and confident online, communicating, problem solving, transacting, and handling information & content
<b>EOI</b>	Expression of Interest
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund
<b>ESB</b>	Employment and Skills Board (see ‘SAP’)
<b>ESF</b>	European Social Fund
<b>ESIF</b>	European Structural and Investment Funds
<b>FSB</b>	The Federation of Small Businesses

<b>GVA</b>	Gross Value Added (GVA) measures the contribution to the economy of each individual producer, industry or sector. Simplistically it is the value of the amount of goods and services that have been produced, less the cost of all inputs and raw materials that are directly attributable to that production.
<b>Impact</b>	The longer-term effects of an intervention
<b>KPI</b>	Key Performance Indicator
<b>KS3/KS4</b>	Key Stage 3 / 4 in the national curriculum, covering Years 7-9 (ages 11-14) and Years 10-11 (ages 14-16) respectively
<b>LAL</b>	Lancashire Adult Learning, one of the largest providers of Adult and Community Learning in the country
<b>LEP</b>	Local Enterprise Partnership. Business-led partnerships which play a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and job creation, improve infrastructure and raise workforce skills within the local area
<b>Levelling Up</b>	A government commitment to improve opportunities across the country, working closely with local partners to help drive regional economic growth
<b>Lifetime Skills Guarantee</b>	A government initiative to offer adults without an A-Level or equivalent qualifications a free, fully-funded college course
<b>Local DSP</b>	Local Digital Skills Partnership
<b>LSPs</b>	Local Strategic Partnerships, partnerships formerly responsible for developing coherent service provision and sustainable communities
<b>MHCLG</b>	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
<b>National DSP</b>	National Digital Skills Partnership. A DCMS-led initiative bringing together industry, third sector and cross government to provide advice and guidance on digital skills
<b>Outcome</b>	Social or economic measures delivered by the Local DSPs
<b>Productivity</b>	The effectiveness of production as measured by the rate of GVA per unit of input (for example, GVA per hour worked)
<b>ROI</b>	Return On Investment

<b>SAP</b>	Skills Advisory Panels. Local partnerships that work to identify and address local skills priorities. In some places the SAP has replaced the LEP / CA Employment and Skills Board (ESB), or equivalent. In others the ESB has taken on the functions of the SAP.
<b>Skills Bootcamps</b>	Free, flexible 12-16 week courses for adults aged 19+ who are either in work or recently unemployed, which give people the opportunity to build sector specific skills and fast-track to an interview with a local employer
<b>SME</b>	Small to medium-sized enterprise employing up to 249 people
<b>STEM</b>	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
<b>T Level</b>	Equivalent to 3 A Levels, T Levels were introduced in September 2020 and focus on vocational skills. They can help students into skilled employment, higher study or apprenticeships
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>TTC</b>	Tech Talent Charter, a non-profit organisation which seeks to address inequality in the UK tech sector and drive inclusion and diversity
<b>UKRI</b>	UK Research and Innovation, a non-departmental public body which seeks to build a thriving, inclusive research and innovation system
<b>Upskilling</b>	The process of improving workers' skills
<b>WMCA</b>	West Midlands Combined Authority



## Ministerial foreword



The first Local Digital Skills Partnership launched in Lancashire in April 2018. Over the last three years DCMS have supported six other regions – West Midlands, Heart of the South West, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, the South East, Cheshire and Warrington, and West Yorkshire to develop their own Local Digital Skills Partnerships

Local Digital Skills Partnerships are designed to help build regional capacity to improve digital skills capability at all levels, bringing together and connecting partners from the public, private and third sectors to upskill the current workforce, advance digital inclusion, and raise awareness of the importance of digital skills regionally.

To assess the impact of these regional partnerships and help inform future government policy, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport commissioned AMION Consulting to undertake research. To inform their research AMION Consulting interviewed a number of key stakeholders including Local Digital Skills Partnership board members, regional employers, training providers, regional public sector bodies and other government departments with an interest in digital skills policy.

I am delighted to see this research which provides a detailed insight into the positive impact these regional partnerships are having in driving digital skills provision in their respective regions and contributing to levelling up.

**Chris Philp**  
**Minister, Department for Digital, Media, Culture and Sport**

## Executive summary

In February 2021, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) commissioned AMION Consulting to evaluate the first six Local Digital Skills Partnerships (DSPs): Lancashire, Heart of the South West, West Midlands, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, Cheshire and Warrington and the South East.

### Local DSPs

Local DSPs are designed to build regional capacity to improve digital skills capability at all levels. They bring together and connect partners from the public, private and third sectors to upskill the current workforce, advance digital inclusion, and raise awareness of the importance of digital skills regionally. The first six Local DSPs benefited from £75,000 DCMS funding per annum to employ a full time Regional Coordinator. They had access to high level contacts in the private sector, wider DCMS policy areas and other government departments, secured via DCMS and the National DSP. The DCMS team provided support and expertise, and facilitated a Regional Coordinator network.

### Evaluation Aims and Objectives

The aim of the evaluation was to understand the value added to Local DSPs by the DCMS funding and wider support. The objectives were to identify: the outcomes and additionality of the Local DSPs; the factors which contributed to the delivery of these outcomes; and the lessons learned.

### Summary of Local DSP Outcomes and Additionality

Local DSP responses to digital skills needs reflect the context in which they operate (i.e. funding, delivery, governance arrangements). There has been a high degree of commonality in the types of activities delivered, reflecting shared digital skills challenges across the country.

### Positive outcomes for local people and communities include:

- **increased awareness of digital opportunities amongst young people:** Local DSPs established new routes to engage young people with digital opportunities and strengthened existing ones, e.g. the Enterprise Advisor network. In Lancashire, following the success of the first TeenTech Live festival, brought to Lancashire by the Local DSP, business sponsorship will be sought to hold it on a regular basis. In Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, the Local DSP supported students to undertake virtual work experience with Screen Cornwall. They produced films featuring young people who use digital skills as a vital part of their job, showcasing the breadth of digital opportunities in Cornwall;
- **increased digital skills and career opportunities, including for groups under-represented in the digital workforce:** delivery of digital skills bootcamps in the West Midlands, Lancashire and Heart of the South West prepared people for new careers in digital roles and included provision targeted at women and disadvantaged groups. A series of online digital job fairs promoting opportunities in Cheshire and Warrington attracted over 16,000 views;
- **reduced digital exclusion:** all Local DSPs increased awareness of the need for skills, devices and connectivity across all groups. They worked with partners to provide support for those at risk of digital exclusion, including the over 50s, children and young people.

**Positive outcomes reported for local businesses include:**

- **better informed businesses connected to digital skills provision:** businesses involved in the Local DSPs have greater awareness of existing digital skills provision. Enhanced efforts have been made by all Local DSPs to promote digital skills initiatives to the wider business base through social media activity and Board member networks, for example through the South East Skills website, set up by the South East DSP and SAP;
- **greater influence over priorities / funding:** businesses and business representatives on all the Local DSPs have influenced the use of funding for digital skills training. For example, the Tech Lancaster Electronic Skills programme bootcamp was developed specifically to meet the needs of businesses in the electronics design and manufacture sector. Businesses on the Local DSPs have also informed the digital skills priorities identified in the Local Skills Reports produced by the SAPs;
- **improved business confidence:** as the Local DSPs have demonstrated that they can deliver digital skills initiatives in response to business needs, confidence has grown and businesses have become more willing to engage on other topics.

**Benefits arising for public sector partners include:**

- **better informed local strategies and funding bids:** Local DSP-led research, and intelligence gathered from DSP businesses, supported the SAPs' Local Skills Reports and external funding applications (e.g. to the Digital Skills Innovation Fund and the National Skills Fund Pilots);
- **greater impact from existing initiatives and funding:** Local DSPs capitalised on intelligence from pilot projects and connected complementary activity leading to increased impact. For example, Local DSP activity linked to STEM Learning's programmes, particularly in Lancashire, the South East, Heart of the South West and Cornwall and Isles of Scilly;
- **new and strengthened relationships:** national partners and corporates have been encouraged to operate in the DSP areas and build relationships with new local partners. Local DSP status has encouraged strategically important large regional employers to engage with and work more collaboratively with other local stakeholders. The inclusion of wider public sector bodies in Local DSP working groups resulted in improved coordination and cross boundary working; and
- **Central Government better informed about place-based policy interventions:** Local DSPs have been used as a platform to test policy innovations and ideas, for example, the Department for Education (DfE) Bootcamp model was informed by the Digital Skills Innovation Fund Pilots.

The evaluation found that more digital skills activity had been delivered over a shorter time period in areas with a DSP when compared to three areas without a DCMS-funded Local DSP. Consultees also stated that the quality of delivery had been enhanced through greater involvement of businesses in steering activity taken forward by the Local DSPs.

## Factors Contributing to the Outcomes Achieved

### 1. Funding and wider support provided to the Local DSPs by DCMS

The evaluation found that the DCMS-funded Regional Coordinators are the most important element of the Local DSP model. The first six Local DSPs benefited from collaborating and sharing best practice through the Regional Coordinators network facilitated by DCMS. The status of being a ‘DCMS-funded Local DSP’ was valuable in engaging local businesses and stakeholders in the initiative; and attracting national organisations, funders and corporates to support local activity. The first six Local DSPs provided an opportunity to test what could be achieved through provision of enhanced capacity dedicated to improving digital skills. Their success has led to other areas replicating the model, drawing on the learning and expertise developed.

### 2. Access to funding for digital skills activity

In addition to the DCMS funding for additional local capacity, three of the six Local DSP areas secured significant external funding to support the delivery of digital skills programmes, whilst two re-focused existing funding. This enabled these areas to respond to local digital skills priorities, pilot new activity, and demonstrate to businesses and partners that the Local DSP could add value to existing delivery.

### 3. The role of the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) / Combined Authorities (CAs)

The LEPs and CAs have played an important role in:

- **the establishment and early success of the Local DSPs** - the Skills Lead in each area was instrumental in setting up the partnership, identifying an appropriate Chair for the Board / steering group, and working with these individuals to attract Board members from business, education and the wider public sector to support the work of the Local DSP;
- **setting the local strategic context and providing the governance framework in which the Local DSPs have operated.** This includes the Local Skills Reports (developed by the SAP), close alignment of board members (across the LEP, SAP and Local DSP), and synergies between Local DSP activity and wider LEP / CA interventions; and
- **providing a supportive operational framework for the Local DSPs.** The Regional Coordinators are embedded within the LEP / CA Skills Teams, reporting to the Skills Leads. This has facilitated effective linkages with colleagues working on other skills priorities, including careers, workforce development and social inclusion, as well as those supporting business growth.

### Levelling Up

The Local DSPs have supported the government’s “Levelling Up” objectives in two ways. Within the Local DSP areas some activity has been focused on people and places particularly at risk of being left behind. Nationally, DCMS has facilitated new relationships between the trailblazer areas and corporate businesses and digital skills organisations. National organisations have been encouraged to focus digital skills activity on the Local DSP areas which might otherwise have been delivered elsewhere.

## Lessons learned

The evaluation has identified the following prerequisites for success:

- **a dedicated coordinator** to drive the partnership, with an ability to balance strategic oversight and operational delivery, and coordinate partnership working. This post should be embedded in an existing employment and skills team (LEP / CA) to benefit from wider support and integration;
- **a strong board or steering group** with cross sector representation and businesses that represent the local area. An influential, impartial and enthusiastic chair attracts and retains members;
- **a clear vision and priorities** informed by local research to focus activity and maximise the impact of limited resources. This needs to be jointly owned from the outset, with mechanisms built in for measuring and reporting on performance and impact;
- **alignment with the wider skills agenda** of the SAP to ensure that interventions add value to existing activity e.g. through enhanced promotion and profile; scaling up; accelerating or trialling innovation / new concepts; and
- **sharing best practice and networking / collaborating** with other areas or partnerships to understand what works, for whom, why and in what circumstances.

## Future Policy Considerations

There is clear evidence from this evaluation that the Local DSP model is working effectively and is having an impact in improving digital skills capacity. During the evaluation process a wide range of stakeholders were consulted – LEPs, CAs, regional employers, Local DSP Board members, and other Government departments. All were supportive of the partnerships and most viewed Local DSPs as a positive development in tackling the digital skills challenges faced in each region and nationally. Putting in place a dedicated regional coordinator to develop the Local DSP has worked well, but their limited capacity constrains delivery and they would benefit from greater project / administrative support.

The research has also identified other challenges that will need to be addressed if the Local DSP model is to be further developed, and scaled across the country. Firstly, there needs to be a firmer commitment from DCMS to fund the coordinators over the medium term rather than on an uncertain year by year basis. Secondly, collaboration and joint working between Local DSPs and large corporates has had limited success. More needs to be done to find effective ways in which to roll out their national programmes into Local DSP regions. Thirdly, there is a need for more flexible government funding for digital skills interventions, and a joined up approach across government departments providing this funding. Local DSPs should be firmly embedded in developing and delivering these interventions.

Policymakers in DCMS have the opportunity to build upon the Local DSP model and consider how best to expand into other regions of the country, and join up other DCMS policy areas with an interest in regional and place-based delivery. More broadly, enabling wider regional “Digital Partnerships” will ensure DCMS has a footprint in every region of the UK and is well positioned to deliver on many of the “Levelling Up” objectives and DCMS Secretary of State’s ten tech priorities.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

AMION Consulting was commissioned by the DCMS to undertake an evaluation of the first six Local DSPs in Lancashire, Heart of the South West, West Midlands, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, Cheshire and Warrington and the South East<sup>1</sup>. This report sets out the findings of the evaluation.

## 1.2 Evaluation aim and objectives

The aim of the evaluation was to provide evidence to inform decisions on the future of the Local DSP programme, by understanding the value added by the DCMS funding and wider support. The evaluation addresses the following questions:

- What have been the outcomes and additionality of the Local DSPs?
- What factors contributed to their achievements?
- What lessons have been learned?

## 1.3 Methodology

The evaluation was informed by evidence gathered through:

- analysis of Local DSP documentation: including the monthly update reports provided to DCMS, annual reports produced for local stakeholders and summary documents produced to illustrate key areas of activity. These provided an overview of Local DSP activity and illustrated the wide range of stakeholders engaged;
- observation of Local DSP Board / sub-group meetings: the evaluators attended Board / sub-group meetings in five of the six Local DSP areas (where meetings were arranged within the evaluation period) to observe how the partnerships operated;
- qualitative research with Local DSP stakeholders: Consultations were undertaken with stakeholders across the first six Local DSP areas<sup>2</sup>. The stakeholders included the Regional Coordinator, the LEP / CA Skills Lead, the Local DSP Chair, the SAP Chair or Vice-Chair, business representatives and other Local DSP members / partners. The consultations covered the outcomes and additionality delivered by the Local DSP, the effectiveness of the Board, alignment with local governance and delivery priorities and the contribution of DCMS funding and support to the outcomes achieved. Consultees

---

<sup>1</sup> The West Yorkshire DSP was not included in the evaluation as it only launched in the autumn of 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Consultations were also undertaken with seven stakeholders in West Yorkshire, to understand their expectations for the most recently designated Local DSP. However, outcomes and impacts were not assessed.

were also asked to complete an online survey asking them to score the effectiveness of their Local DSP in a series of areas;

- qualitative consultations with national partners and policymakers: including four with representatives from corporate businesses who have supported the Local DSPs and five with digital organisations / providers who have been engaged with a number of Local DSPs. There were also three consultations with policy leads from other Government departments (DfE, MHCLG and Defra), plus two with other DCMS Digital teams. These gathered information on how activities and experiences within Local DSP areas compared to areas where there was no DCMS-funded Local DSP; and
- qualitative consultations in three areas where there is no DCMS-funded Local DSP. To understand how digital skills activity has been taken forward in areas which have not benefited from DCMS funding, consultations were undertaken with the LEP Skills Leads in the North East, New Anglia and the Humber. This also informed the assessment of the additionality arising from the DCMS funding.

## 1.4 Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** describes the original context and rationale for the establishment of the Local DSPs;
- **Section 3** provides an overview of the Local DSP model, including the timeline for their establishment;
- **Section 4** reviews how the Local DSPs have been established and delivered, focussing on what has worked well and what challenges have been encountered by the Local DSPs;
- **Section 5** briefly summarises the approaches adopted in three areas which have not benefited from DCMS Local DSP status;
- **Section 6** reports on outcomes for communities, businesses and the public sector;
- **Section 7** considers additionality, the value added by DCMS funding and support and the role of the LEPs / CAs;
- **Section 8** considers the ongoing rationale for the Local DSPs and models for sustainability; and
- **Section 9** concludes with an overview of key findings and recommendations for the future of the Local DSPs.

## 2 Context

- **The importance of digital skills:** Digital skills are increasingly important across the economy and society as a whole. Basic digital skills are needed to participate fully in society as more services move online, whilst general digital skills are required in almost all jobs. Those working in the increasing number of digital roles (across all sectors of the economy) need specialist digital skills. Numerous studies have indicated that the UK faces a growing digital skills gap as the supply of skills fails to keep pace with increasing demand.
- **Levelling Up:** Digital skills have an important part to play in contributing to the “Levelling Up” agenda. The Government is committed to improving opportunity across the country, working closely with local partners to help drive regional economic growth. Local DSPs tailor local support to help ensure that individuals have access to opportunities to improve their digital skills, and businesses can find workers with the digital skills they need.
- **Government investment:** The Government is making significant investment in raising digital skills in England, with a portion of the £2.5 billion National Skills Fund ringfenced for digital skills bootcamps. At a local level, through their Local Skills Reports, the SAPs working with LEPs / CAs have identified the need for increased investment in digital skills.
- **The role of partnerships:** Research from Nesta highlights the benefits of a partnership approach to developing digital skills, involving industry partners, the education sector and national and local government. Evaluations of previous partnership approaches to addressing public policy goals demonstrate the importance of clarity of purpose, clear roles and responsibilities, strong leadership and flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances., strong leadership and flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances.

### 2.1 The importance of digital skills

Digital skills are growing in importance across the economy and society as a whole. Basic digital skills are needed to participate fully in society as more services move online, whilst general digital skills are required in almost all jobs. Those working in the increasing number of digital roles (across all sectors of the economy) need specialist digital skills.



### 2.1.1 *Basic Digital Skills for everyday life*

The trend towards digital skills being required to access products and services has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, a significant proportion of the population lack basic digital skills. The Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index<sup>3</sup> (2020) found that:

- digital skills helped people to connect with friends (84%), made them feel part of a community (55%) and helped in managing physical and mental wellbeing (44%); and
- 16% are unable to use the internet or devices without assistance and, by 2030, it is forecast that one in four people will still have ‘very low’ digital engagement.

### 2.1.2 *Digital skills for the workplace*

Labour market research undertaken for DCMS<sup>4</sup> analysed the digital skills sought by UK employers and the specific requirements for different occupations and sectors. The research categorises digital skills for the workplace as either:

- ‘baseline’ or ‘basic’ digital skills – for example using productivity software (Microsoft Word and Excel), computer literacy, handling digital information and content and understanding how technologies work; or
- ‘specific’ or ‘advanced’ digital skills – for example software engineering and development, data analytics, IT support and system maintenance, digital marketing and sales, digital design, CRM and machining and manufacturing technology.

The requirement for employees to have digital skills competencies has increased in recent years but there are significant digital skills shortages within the workplace:

- baseline digital skills were found to be “near universal requirements” in jobs across all skills levels, required in at least 82% of jobs advertised online across the UK;
- WorkSkills UK found that 92% of businesses consider having a basic level of digital skills to be important for all employees<sup>5</sup>;
- 17.1 million working people (52%) are thought to lack essential digital skills for work<sup>6</sup>; and
- nearly one quarter (23%) of employers report that their workforce lacks basic digital skills, increasing to 37% when considering advanced digital skills.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyds Bank (2020), “UK Consumer Digital Index 2020”, [210519-lloyds-cdi-2020-updated-report.pdf \(lloydsbank.com\)](https://www.lloydsbank.com/~/media/210519-lloyds-cdi-2020-updated-report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Burning Glass Technologies (2019), “No Longer Optional: Employer demand for digital skills”, [No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/418812/no-longer-optional-employer-demand-for-digital-skills.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> WorkSkillsUK, Learning and Work Institute and Eginuity (March 2021), “Disconnected? Exploring the digital skills gap”, [Disconnected? Exploring the digital skills gap - Learning and Work Institute](https://www.workskillsuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Disconnected-Exploring-the-digital-skills-gap-Learning-and-Work-Institute.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Lloyds Bank (2020), “UK Consumer Digital Index 2020”, [210519-lloyds-cdi-2020-updated-report.pdf \(lloydsbank.com\)](https://www.lloydsbank.com/~/media/210519-lloyds-cdi-2020-updated-report.pdf)

Recent research commissioned by DCMS<sup>7</sup> identifies a significant under-supply of higher level data skills within the UK workplace. Whilst it is estimated that UK businesses are seeking to recruit between 178,000 – 234,000 data roles, the supply of data scientists from UK universities is unlikely to surpass 10,000 each year and half of workers say they have had no data skills training within the last two years.

### 2.1.3 *Future skills needs*

Digital skills underpin growth across the UK’s economy, improving the productivity and performance of businesses in a variety of sectors as digitisation becomes more widespread. However, there are forecast to be significant skills shortages in the future:

- research conducted by the World Economic Forum<sup>8</sup> estimates that by 2030 over half the UK population will need reskilling (53%) in response to changing skills needs, and over a quarter will need extensive reskilling (27%, requiring training of three months or longer); and
- the Industrial Strategy Council (2019)<sup>9</sup> found that by 2030, seven million additional workers could be under-skilled for their job requirements, with the most widespread under-skilling related to basic digital skills. By 2030, it is estimated that five million workers could be acutely under-skilled in basic digital skills, with up to two-thirds of the workforce experiencing some level of digital under-skilling.

Demand for digital skills (and the need for upskilling and reskilling) is likely to be even greater in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Skills demand from the digital sector itself is also growing, although not all those employed in the sector work in digital roles. In 2019, the digital sector contributed £150.6 billion to the UK economy, 7.6% of total Gross Value Added (GVA). In real terms, the sector grew at three times the rate of the overall UK economy between 2015-2019. Ensuring the supply of advanced digital skills meets the needs of employers will enable continued growth.

### 2.1.4 *Regional variations*

Local differences in demand for digital skills across the UK are largely driven by the industrial composition and urbanisation of the local economy, according to data collected for DCMS<sup>10</sup>. Whilst digital skills are important across all regions, Greater London and the

<sup>7</sup> DCMS (May 2021) “Quantifying the UK Data Skills Gap”, [Quantifying the UK Data Skills Gap - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94442/quantifying-the-uk-data-skills-gap.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> World Economic Forum (2018) “The Future of Jobs Report 2018”, [WEF Future of Jobs 2018.pdf \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2018)

<sup>9</sup> Industrial Strategy Council (2019) “UK Skills Mismatch 2030 – research paper”, [Microsoft Word - UK Skills Mismatch 2030 - Research paper \(industrialstrategy.org\)](https://www.industrialstrategy.org.uk/research-papers/uk-skills-mismatch-2030-research-paper)

<sup>10</sup> Burning Glass Technologies (2019), “No Longer Optional: Employer demand for digital skills”, [No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/814423/no-longer-optional-employer-demand-for-digital-skills.pdf)

West Midlands have the highest intensity of skills demand in England. Digital skills shortages were found to be particularly acute in the East of England, Yorkshire and Humber, the South East and Northern Ireland<sup>11</sup>. This variation highlights the need for digital skills policy and responses to be driven locally.

## 2.2 Policy environment

The importance of equipping people and businesses with digital skills is recognised in numerous government policies:

- **the UK Digital Strategy**<sup>12</sup>, published in March 2017, highlights the importance of supporting everyone to develop the skills required to participate in the digital economy, to raise productivity, real wages and prosperity. The strategy established the National DSP, bringing together public, private and community and voluntary sector organisations, to improve digital capabilities at all levels;
- **the Industrial Strategy (2017)**<sup>13</sup> included a range of measures to support digital skills, including a new adult digital skills entitlement which fully funds digital skills training up to Level 1. Other measures included the roll-out of the first digital T levels; and new standards for digital apprenticeships;
- **the Skills for Jobs White Paper**<sup>14</sup> published in January 2021 emphasises the need for further investment in both essential and higher-level digital skills; and
- **Build Back Better (March 2021)**<sup>15</sup> includes evidence on the take up of new digital technologies by business during the pandemic and reiterates the importance of digital connectivity in unlocking economic growth.

The Government is committed to improving opportunities across the country, working closely with local partners to help drive regional economic growth. Digital skills have an important part to play in contributing to the “Levelling Up” agenda. Individuals across the country need access to opportunities to improve their digital skills. Businesses need to be able to find workers with appropriate digital skills.

Digital skills are part of the overall regional digital ecosystem. DCMS is currently mapping regional ecosystems and reviewing their potential to generate further economic growth<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> CBI and Tata Consultancy (2019), “Delivering Skills for the New Economy”, [Delivering Skills for the New Economy | CBI](#)

<sup>12</sup> DCMS (March 2017) “UK Digital Strategy”, [UK Digital Strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> HM Government (November 2017) “UK Industrial Strategy”, [Industrial Strategy: building a Britain fit for the future - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> DfE (January 2021) “Skills for Jobs”, [Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> HM Treasury (March 2021) “Build Back Better: our plan for growth”, [Build Back Better: our plan for growth - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>16</sup> DCMS Study on Regional Digital Ecosystems. This research is expected to be published in Autumn 2021.

Building regional digital skills capability will be a key component of future digital ecosystem programmes.

## 2.3 Funding for digital skills

Much of the funding for delivering education and skills is controlled centrally in England. LEPs / CAs influence its use by identifying local skills priorities to support higher productivity and inclusive growth. SAPs have had a key role in identifying local needs, including digital skills, and strengthening the link between employers and skills providers to ensure provision better matches opportunities and needs.

The Government's £2.5 billion National Skills Fund is designed to help adults acquire skills to improve job prospects, with £375 million allocated in the November 2020 Spending Review. Support includes:

- providing adults with free access to Level 3 qualifications as part of a 'Lifetime Skills Guarantee'; and
- £43 million for trailblazer 'skills bootcamps' - targeting adults who are either in work or recently unemployed and offering free courses to build sector-specific skills and a fast-track interview with local employers.

Digital skills boot camps have been developed in partnership with employers, colleges and local authorities in Local DSP areas including Lancashire (with the Greater Manchester CA), Heart of the South West, the West Midlands and Leeds City Region, as well as in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire and Liverpool City Region.

## 2.4 Partnership working best practice

### 2.4.1 *Nesta best practice and recommendations for the Local DSPs*

In 2020, Nesta provided recommendations to DCMS on how to create and maintain digital skills partnerships. This focused on how stakeholders – namely government, educational institutions and industry representatives – should work together to build a resilient, adaptable labour market. The work drew on case studies from the Nordic and Benelux regions (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands and Belgium) where the 'Digital Frontrunners' and 'FutureFit' collaborative projects have been delivered.

The Nesta report highlighted the importance of a flexible approach, with recommendations structured around the different stages involved in setting up and operating a group (known as 'Tuckman's stages of group development'). Some of the key lessons at each stage included:

- **'Forming'** – to form the group, there needs to be some agent driving relations forward and the establishment of a governance structure for the partnership. A formal

commitment might be made to establish the partnership. Importantly, Nesta recommend having national leadership with local adaptation;

- **‘Storming’** – to overcome disagreements, an inclusive and informal environment needs to be established and an evidence-based approach must be adopted. The stakeholder group must be carefully curated;
- **‘Norming’** – to agree an approach across the partnership, there needs to be a common goal agreed as well as the setting of specific goals, with a data-driven approach;
- **‘Performing’** – shared responsibility needs to be ensured, along with adaptability if necessary and monitoring and evaluation is key;
- **‘Adjourning’** – given that projects are not linear and straightforward, there needs to be identification of what can be scaled up, iteration of projects and future planning and sustainability.

#### 2.4.2 Evidence from previous partnership approaches

There have been many attempts at partnership working to address public policy goals. Examples include health (e.g. Health Action Zones), employment and skills (e.g. Employment and Education Action Zones), targeted area regeneration (e.g. City Challenge; New Deal for Communities) and over-arching economic regeneration partnerships such as the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP). Common features identified across successful partnerships include:

- **a clear focus from the outset** – clarity of purpose with the following function. Therefore, partnerships need to start by asking “what do we want to achieve through working together?” and then work back from this to establish the governance arrangements, draw in the right membership and deliver against these agreed goals and objectives;
- **clarity of roles and responsibilities** – partnerships often operate with a mix of formal and informal expectations, understandings, and arrangements. While formalising everything would be impossible and stifling; articulating shared values, roles, responsibilities, and expectations is useful both symbolically and practically as partners learn to trust and work with one another;
- **strong leadership** – effective joint working needs active leadership and purposeful relationship management. The leadership styles of the chair and the facilitator are very important; and
- **flexibility** – to adapt and respond to changing circumstances.

These key success factors (see Table 2.1) demonstrate considerable overlap with the stages of group development described in the Nesta report. The extent to which the Local DSPs have been successful in embedding this best practice in the relatively short period since their establishment has implications for the outcomes which each has been able to deliver.

<b>Table 2.1: Pre-requisites for successful partnership working</b>	
<b>The Virtuous Partnership</b>	<b>The Vicious Partnership</b>
✓ History of strong partnership working	✗ No history of strong partnership working
✓ Good fit geographically	✗ Poor geographical fit
✓ Stable political context / Strong local leadership	✗ Political turbulence/No effective local leadership
✓ Trust and good working relationship between partners	✗ Little trust between partners
✓ Partnership seen as necessary and worth investing time in	✗ Value of investing in the partnership questioned
✓ Easy to recruit and engage partners	✗ Hard to recruit and engage partners
✓ Adequate resources	✗ Inadequate resources
✓ Effective staff team	✗ No effective staff team
✓ Effective communications	✗ Ineffective communications
✓ Effective performance management	✗ Lack of performance management
✓ Partnership plays a leading role in development of relevant Strategy	✗ Partnership plays no effective role in development of relevant Strategy
✓ Strategy drives activity of the partnership and partners	✗ Strategy does not drive activity of the partnership and partners
✓ Partnership is making progress towards meeting priorities	✗ Partnership is making less progress towards meeting priorities
✓ Wider recognition of role of the partnership	✗ No wider recognition of role of the partnership
✓ Partners recognise the value added by partnership	✗ Partners see the partnership as a talking shop

Source: Amended from the National Evaluation of LSPs: Theory of Change Issues Paper, 2006, Department for Communities and Local Government

### 3 Overview of DCMS-funded Local DSPs

- **Objectives:** Local DSPs were established to help build capacity and to improve digital skills capability from basic to advanced skills levels. They bring together partners from the public, private, and third sectors to upskill the current workforce, advance digital inclusion, and raise awareness of the importance of digital skills regionally.
- **Formation:** The first six Local DSPs were established during 2018 and 2019. The first two pilot areas were selected by DCMS, with the third established as part of a devolution skills deal. Three further Local DSPs were established in 2019 following a competitive EOI process.
- **Model:** The Local DSP includes: a board or steering group providing strategic direction; an independent Chair (usually from the private sector); and a Regional Coordinator providing dedicated capacity to support the partnership and take forward digital skills activity. Local DSPs sit within the local LEP / CA governance arrangements and report into the LEP / MCA's SAP.
- **Activities:** The activities supported by Local DSPs have varied, reflecting the local context, digital skills priorities, and the availability of funding. Common activities include raising awareness of digital opportunities; supporting individuals to enhance their digital skills; increasing business' appreciation of the importance of digital skills; and supporting digital inclusion.
- **DCMS Funding and Support:** DCMS provided funding for each Local DSP to employ a full-time Regional Coordinator, initially for a two-year period. Alongside this, the DCMS Digital Skills and Inclusion team provided support and expertise to the Local DSPs, facilitated networking and sharing of best practice and provided access to high level contacts in the private sector, other DCMS policy areas and other government departments.
- **Programme Costs:** Total DCMS financial investment in the first six Local DSPs at the time of the evaluation was £1.3m. The in-kind contribution from DCMS has been significant, with one full-time and one part-time post working on the programme over the last 2.5 years, which equates to approximately £300,000 of administration costs over the life of the programme.

#### 3.1 Objectives of the Local DSP Programme

Local DSPs were established in response to the context outlined in section two: a growing gap between digital skills demand and supply at all levels; evidence of regional variations in digital skills needs; and a recognition of the need for a partnership approach to tackle these issues.

Local DSPs help build capacity to improve digital skills capability from basic to advanced skills levels. They bring together and connect partners from the public, private, and third sectors to upskill the current workforce, advance digital inclusion, and raise awareness of the importance of digital skills regionally.

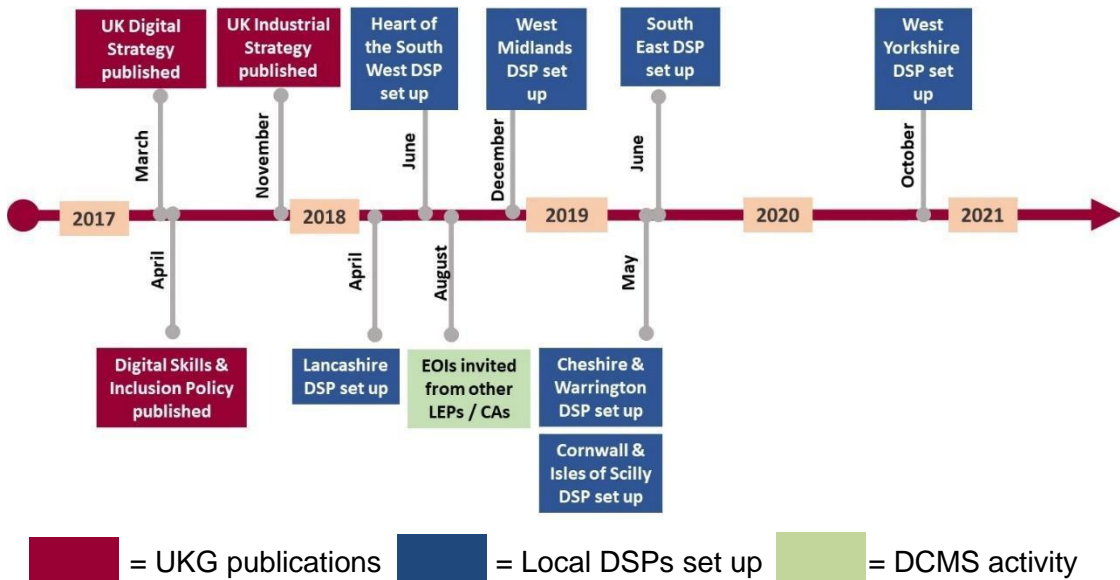
### 3.2 Formation of the Local DSPs

The first six Local DSPs were established through different pathways. In 2018, Lancashire and the Heart of the South West LEPs were chosen to host the first two Local DSPs following discussions with DCMS. The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) requested a Local DSP as part of its skills devolution deal, which included £5m of funding to pilot innovative ways of addressing digital skills needs.

In August 2018, DCMS invited EOIs to become one of three further Local DSP pilots. Fourteen responses were received, covering sixteen LEP areas. The EOIs were assessed by a cross Government panel against seven criteria, including potential for the Local DSP to add value.

The three LEPs with the highest scoring EOIs - South East, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, and Cheshire and Warrington - established the next three Local DSPs in 2019. The next highest scoring (Leeds City Region) subsequently established a Local DSP as part of the West Yorkshire CA devolution deal in October 2020. The timeline is summarised in Figure 3.1.

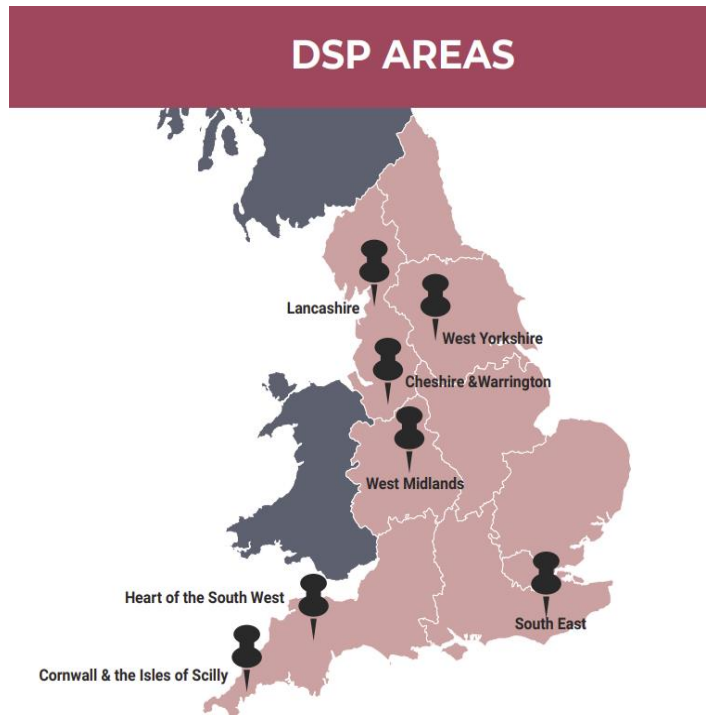
**Figure 3.1: Local DSP Formation Timeline**



The seven Local DSPs are located across five regions within England (as shown in Figure 3.2 below) and cover roughly 25% of England’s population.



**Figure 3.2: Location of the Local DSPs**



Profiles of each Local DSP are set out in Appendix A. These demonstrate significant variations across the Local DSP areas, which together with the different operational landscapes, have influenced how each Local DSP has been established, their remit, and the outcomes achieved.

### 3.3 Local DSP Model

There are a number of standard features of the Local DSP model, although DCMS provides local areas with flexibility to respond to the different context in which each Local DSP operates.

The key features include:

- a board or steering group providing strategic direction;
- an independent Chair (usually from the private sector);
- a Regional Coordinator providing dedicated capacity to support the partnership and take forward digital skills activity; and
- alignment with the local LEP / CA governance arrangements.

The model provides capacity funding (to fund the Regional Coordinator role) but does not include funding for the delivery of digital skills activities.

### 3.4 Activities

The activities supported by Local DSPs have varied, reflecting the local context, digital skills priorities and funding secured. Common activities include:

- engaging young people in digital opportunities;
- supporting individuals to enhance their digital skills;
- increasing business' appreciation of the importance of digital skills and supporting workforce development; and
- supporting digital inclusion.

A summary of activities is provided at Appendix C.

Two Local DSPs have focused on a smaller number of activities. In the West Midlands, the Local DSP's remit was to advise the CA on the use of funding secured through the devolution deal for digital bootcamps and an EdTech fund. Digital inclusion and work to engage young people in digital opportunities are the responsibility of different teams within the CA.

In the South East, the Local DSP's focus has been on engagement and outreach, developing relationships with partners, coordinating and raising awareness of existing digital skills support and establishing strategic priorities to inform future funding bids.

### 3.5 DCMS Funding and Support

DCMS provided funding and support to the Local DSPs. The key elements of the support included:

- £75,000 DCMS funding per annum to employ a full time Regional Coordinator;
- support and expertise from the DCMS team;
- networking and sharing best practice with the other Local DSPs; and
- access to high level contacts secured via DCMS and the National DSP – which included the private sector, other DCMS policy areas and other government departments.

### 3.6 Programme costs

Total DCMS financial investment in the first six Local DSPs at the time of the evaluation was £1.3 million<sup>17</sup>. This includes three years of funding for Regional Coordinators in the five LEP areas. In the West Midlands, 50% funding was approved for the third year, reflecting match-funding provided by the CA and the different staffing model adopted.

<sup>17</sup> A further £75,000 had been allocated to the West Yorkshire DSP

The in-kind contribution from DCMS has been significant, with one full-time and one part-time post working on the programme over the last 2.5 years, which equates to approximately £300,000 of administration costs over the life of the programme.

## 4 Establishing, delivering and sustaining the Local DSPs

- **Most Local DSPs had a clear vision and priorities.** Whilst securing resources to undertake local research was challenging for some Local DSPs, local intelligence helped to focus activity and maximise the impact of limited resources.
- **A strong board or steering group** with good cross sector representation ensured that the Local DSP had credibility and expertise. Local DSP status encouraged strategically important regional employers to join the Board and work more collaboratively with other key stakeholders. An influential, impartial and enthusiastic chair was also important in attracting and retaining members.
- **Having a dedicated coordinator to drive the work** of the partnership was very important in establishing, delivering and sustaining the DCMS-funded Local DSPs. Both the additional capacity and the personal attributes of the Regional Coordinator impacted on delivery. Successful coordinators demonstrated an ability to balance strategic oversight and operational delivery, and coordinate partnership working.
- **Local DSPs were embedded in the LEP / CA governance structure.** Alignment with the wider skills agenda of the SAP helped to ensure that interventions added value e.g. through enhanced promotion and raising the profile of existing support; scaling up activity where it was insufficient to meet needs; and accelerating or trialing innovation / new concepts where there were gaps in provision.
- **The Regional Coordinators shared best practice** and benefited from the close network developed through the monthly meetings facilitated by DCMS. The Coordinators also shared their experiences and learning with other areas interested in establishing a Local DSP.

### 4.1 Vision and priorities

There are similarities in the visions established across the Local DSPs, which are set out in Appendix A. Across most Local DSPs, priorities included:

- supporting digital inclusion;
- promoting diversity;
- engaging and developing the future workforce;
- supporting job search and careers development;
- developing digital skills;
- providing digital support to businesses;

- others priorities, bespoke to individual Local DSPs were:
  - Developing a Digital Prospectus (South East DSP); and
  - Supporting the CA to commission digital re-training programmes which met employer needs (West Midlands).

## 4.2 Board structure and Chair

The LEP / CA Skills Leads in each area worked with the Chairs to establish a Local DSP Board / steering group. These all have cross-sector representation from local businesses, the education sector, and public / third sector organisations:

- **Large businesses and strategically important employers:** The Local DSPs were successful in encouraging strategically important local employers from a range of sectors to participate, including Bentley Motors in Cheshire and Warrington, Pfizer in the South East and the Met Office in the Heart of the South West. This engagement with the Local DSP is encouraging greater collaboration with other key stakeholders; and
- **Digital businesses:** The Local DSPs have engaged digital businesses of all sizes. The West Midlands CA recruited major tech businesses based in the region to the Local DSP Board, including Microsoft, Cisco, BT plc, Amazon Web Services and Fujitsu. The aim was to use the profile of these organisations to influence the broader business base and ensure that the digital bootcamps that the West Midlands DSP oversaw had credibility within the sector. Organisations representing smaller digital employers, including Digital Lancashire, Tech South West, Software Cornwall and Birmingham Tech are also included on Local DSP Boards.

Including a wide range of employers in Local DSP Boards and working groups has led to the creation of new connections between businesses. One major global business which has played a leading role in its Local DSP commented: *“the added value is the network value which is huge. As a major corporation, we might not have those connections, so it really does broaden your accessibility [to other businesses]”*.

The structure adopted in each area varied. The South East DSP, for example, has over 40 members whilst in Cheshire and Warrington the Board is made up of a small number of strategically important local businesses, plus one training provider representative and one local authority representative. Most Local DSPs have established sub-groups aligned to local skills and employment frameworks or have set up Task and Finish groups to take forward specific activities.

The Boards all had independent Chairs or Co-Chairs from the private sector. In most cases, they were also LEP Board members or on the SAP. The Chairs played an important role in attracting other Board members, supporting and challenging the Regional Coordinators, driving forward Local DSP activity and sustaining engagement.

### 4.3 The Regional Coordinator role

The dedicated capacity provided by the DCMS-funded Regional Coordinators was crucial across the Local DSPs. The Coordinators played a key role in:

- building relationships with stakeholders and encouraging engagement on the Board and sub-groups;
- understanding digital skills challenges and helping partners to prioritise across a wide range of needs;
- identifying opportunities to address needs through joint working, attracting additional resource or enhancing access to existing support;
- raising awareness of and coordinating local digital skills activity to maximise the benefits of existing investment; and
- facilitating collaboration between partners by brokering new relationships and building trust.

The Coordinator skillset encompassed strategic oversight, operational delivery and partnership working. The role also involved managing the Local DSP Board and sub groups, and being the Secretariat to the Board.

Two Local DSPs experienced turnover within the Coordinator role. In Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, the absence of the Coordinator for several months impacted on the development of the Local DSP and constrained delivery of activity. In the West Midlands, the CA decided to move away from having a Regional Coordinator entirely dedicated to the Local DSP and instead used the DCMS funding to part-fund two roles – a Higher Levels Skills Lead who works across a number of sectors, and a Digital Skills Support Officer.

In addition to funding the Regional Coordinators, DCMS also host monthly all-day virtual workshops and invite the Local DSPs to share regional activity, local intelligence and best practice with each other and Government. This has led to the development of a peer network amongst the Regional Coordinators, allowing them to share learning and experience.

The Regional Coordinators are part of the LEP / CA Skills Teams, reporting to the LEP / CA Head of Employment and Skills or equivalent. This means they benefit from effective linkages and joint working with the wider employment and skills team (for example, social inclusion, careers and workforce development) and the business support team (for example, the Growth Hub / Service).

### 4.4 Alignment with local governance structures

Local DSPs operate within the existing LEP / CA governance structures, ensuring that the partnership adds value to existing activity. For example:

- most Local DSPs report directly to the SAP or LEP Board, with some also reporting to wider Digital Boards established by the LEP / CA;
- there is close alignment of board members across the LEP, SAP and Local DSP, with the DSP Chairs sitting on either the SAP, the LEP Board or both; and
- Local Skills Reports (developed by the SAPs) have been informed by research led by the Local DSPs and the intelligence on digital skills needs that they have gathered from businesses. The Local Skills Reports include specific reference to the Local DSP as a key delivery partner and feature case studies which promote the work of the partnership in the wider employment and skills context.

This alignment, together with the Regional Coordinators' awareness of other activity being delivered by the LEP / CA Skills Teams, means that Local DSP activity adds value to existing programmes and initiatives by:

- raising awareness of provision, where suitable provision exists but is not being taken up by local people or businesses;
- expanding provision where there are insufficient resources available or where more effective targeting is required;
- filling gaps in existing provision, raising awareness, and connecting people / businesses to the enhanced services provided; and
- piloting new approaches, both delivery and ways of working.

#### 4.5 Funding to deliver digital skills activity

The amount of funding which Local DSPs have been able to access to deliver digital skills activity has varied. This has impacted on the outcomes which each has achieved:

- the West Midlands DSP is unique in being established specifically to oversee the use of £5m funding allocated to addressing digital skills needs through the devolution deal. The CA wished to ensure that the funding delivered training which met employer needs. Members of the Local DSP Board were able to influence the design of the programmes and the selection of the providers, and have overseen delivery;
- Lancashire and Heart of the South West also secured significant external resource to deliver new digital skills activity, from DfE's National Skills Fund, the Digital Skills Innovation Fund and Nesta's EdTech fund, amongst others. This gave both Local DSPs the opportunity to develop and pilot new activity in response to unmet digital skills needs, and has provided a platform for trialling national digital skills initiatives;
- in Cheshire and Warrington and Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, the Local DSPs influenced the use of existing ESIF funding to address digital skills needs. This was

done through the ESIF-funded Pledge and Accelerate programmes in Cheshire and Warrington; and

- in the South East, the Local DSP was not able to access funding specifically for the delivery of digital skills activity. Instead, the Regional Coordinator focused on engaging and influencing partners to prioritise digital skills and improving awareness of existing activity through the development of a Digital Skills Prospectus.

A lack of funding for delivery can constrain Local DSP ability to implement new and innovative approaches to tackling digital skills needs. However, pursuing external funding opportunities is often labour intensive and can divert partners away from developing new ways of working with existing resources. A small ring-fenced fund which could be accessed to trial new approaches, alongside the DCMS capacity funding for the Regional Coordinator, would increase the Local DSPs' ability to innovate and pilot activities on behalf of national government.

#### 4.6 Linkages with key corporates, national digital skills partners and Government

The support provided by DCMS includes providing access to relevant contacts within the private sector, other DCMS policy areas and other government departments. The afternoon sessions of the monthly Regional Coordinator meetings are normally reserved for other Government departments and private sector partners to present relevant digital skills programmes to engage and collaborate with all Local DSP regions at one time. The extent to which the Local DSP areas have developed linkages with private sector and national digital skills partners has varied:

- some Local DSPs built new relationships with corporate businesses and national digital skills providers, where there was a clear alignment of priorities and the national organisation's 'offer' responded to an identified local need. For example, Lancashire DSP has worked closely with Tech Talent Charter to promote the benefits of increased diversity and inclusion in digital roles to its businesses (see case study in Appendix D);
- other Local DSPs chose to focus on developing local capacity to respond to digital skills needs, whilst using the contacts and Regional Coordinator network to learn from models adopted elsewhere; and
- all the Local DSPs, including West Yorkshire, have worked jointly with Google Digital Garage to develop webinars tailored to the needs of businesses in their areas.



Some Local DSPs have built relationships with key corporates. These have been important locally to engage smaller businesses and demonstrate credibility:

*“We had Google and others at our launch which showed we could get the big players in the room. This acted like a magnet and a lot of smaller local tech companies that we didn’t know about began to engage. We got this perfect mix of smaller organisations being able to work with the bigger corporates, and without the DSP that would not be happening.”*

For the national partners, the opportunity to connect with multiple local areas at once was valued, as it:

- provided an efficient way of identifying areas with shared interests and a desire to develop joint working;
- enabled national bodies to extend their local reach into previous ‘cold spots’ and make contact with smaller local organisations; and
- allowed them to demonstrate support of the Government’s “Levelling Up” agenda.

The cross-government policy leads consulted felt the Local DSPs offered a useful model for central-local digital skills working. A place-based approach was regarded as important, given the contribution that digital skills can make to the “Levelling Up” agenda.

There is an opportunity for other policy areas to make greater use of the Local DSPs as a focus for the local implementation of national policy. To date, engagement has been limited to using the Regional Coordinators to gather intelligence and feedback on new ideas.

## 4.7 Impact of Covid-19

The importance of digital skills for work, learning and social contact has been reinforced by the restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Partners looked to the Local DSPs to address the digital skills challenges that the pandemic brought to prominence, as the lead body for digital skills in their areas. For most Local DSPs, there was a refocusing of priorities to address immediate issues in relation to digital inclusion, including access to devices and connectivity for both younger and older people (the exception being the West Midlands DSP where digital inclusion was not within the partnership’s remit). The Local DSPs also provided advice and intelligence, coordinated activity across partners and supported businesses seeking to increase their online presence.

Five of the six Local DSPs were involved in programmes to provide digital devices and data to those without internet access during lockdown. Harnessing funding from a variety of sources, including crowd-funding, LEP reserves and charitable donations, over 1,250 laptops / tablets were sourced and distributed to those in need. The Local DSPs’ knowledge of disadvantaged communities ensured that support was provided to those most in need.

The pandemic impacted the Local DSP activities in the following ways:

- delivery of digital skills interventions and training programmes had to switch from face to face to online delivery. Whilst this worked smoothly in some cases, there were greater challenges for those whose digital skills were less advanced or who lacked the equipment or space they needed to learn from home;
- recruitment prospects for those completing digital training and bootcamps were affected as many potential employers were unable to take on new staff; and
- the lack of face to face meetings created challenges in developing new relationships and facilitating collaboration. Whilst this is likely to have delayed the ‘forming’ and ‘storming’ stages of partnership development, the evaluation found that attendance at Board and steering group meetings had improved since they moved online.

There was consensus amongst consultees that the pandemic had accelerated the shift towards new ways of working. However, it also highlighted the significant distance some organisations and individuals still have to travel to become ‘digital first’. This reinforces the rationale for the Local DSPs’ work to raise awareness of the importance of digital skills and encourage individuals and businesses to adopt digital approaches.

## 4.8 The importance of the LEP / CA role

The LEPs and CAs have played an important role in:

- **the establishment and early success of the Local DSPs** - the Skills Lead in each area was instrumental in setting up the partnership, identifying an appropriate Chair for the Board / steering group, and working with these individuals to attract Board members from business, education and the wider public sector to support the work of the Local DSP;
- **setting the local strategic context and providing the governance framework in which the Local DSPs have operated.** This includes the Local Skills Reports (developed by the SAP), close alignment of board members (across the LEP, SAP and Local DSP), and synergies between Local DSP activity and wider LEP / CA interventions; and
- **providing a supportive operational framework for the Local DSPs.** The Regional Coordinators are embedded within the LEP / CA Skills Teams, reporting to the Skills Leads. This has facilitated effective linkages with colleagues working on other skills priorities, including careers, workforce development and social inclusion, as well as those supporting business growth.

## 5 Comparator areas

- **Interest in establishing a DCMS-funded Local DSP:** All the comparator areas had shown an interest in hosting a DCMS-funded Local DSP. The North East and New Anglia LEPs had submitted EOIs. Humber had had a number of discussions with DCMS exploring options for becoming part of the Local DSP network.
- **Alternative models:** At the time of the evaluation, Humber was the only area which had established a Local DSP without DCMS funding (Leicester and Leicestershire LEP has now done the same). In the North East, digital skills activity is being aligned with the LEP’s broader digital work. In New Anglia, a range of activities are underway but with limited central coordination.
- **Sustainability:** Despite its early success, the Humber DSP faces significant challenges in securing local funding to maintain its Partnership Manager post.

### 5.1 Background

To enhance the understanding of the additionality derived from the DCMS model, the evaluation also reviewed the position in three areas where there is no DCMS-funded Local DSP. Two areas – North East LEP and New Anglia LEP – had expressed interest in becoming a DCMS-funded Local DSP through the EOI bidding round. The third area - Humber - had not been in a position to submit an EOI, despite strong interest in the approach. Profiles of each of the comparator areas are set out in Appendix B.

### 5.2 The alternative models

The three comparator areas have adopted different approaches to tackling digital skills issues, in the absence of DCMS funding to establish a Local DSP.

#### 5.2.1 North East

The North East LEP has developed a ‘Digital for Growth’ strategy which covers the use of data, digital infrastructure and connectivity, digital collaboration and enterprise, and the workforce. A Digital Steering Group has been established and a Digital Programme Lead employed. The LEP’s Skills Team reports into this group on digital skills issues and activity, ensuring that digital skills are connected to the wider digital agenda.

In the absence of a dedicated pot of funding for digital skills activities, the LEP has tried to ensure that digital is mainstreamed across all skills activities, including work with schools, and more general business support. Since the onset of the pandemic, digital inclusion has become a much greater focus.

### 5.2.2 *New Anglia*

In New Anglia, a wide range of digital skills activities are being taken forward. This includes skills capital investment, the prioritisation of digital skills within the SAP and in sector skills plans, the roll-out of digital bootcamps and the Go Digital business support programme which provides skills support for businesses increasing their use of digital.

Digital has been embedded as a priority within ESF calls and the LEP has sought to ensure digital skills are part of all mainstream programmes. Although there has been a significant amount of activity undertaken to date, the view of the LEP Skills Lead is that there would have been greater progress with a dedicated individual to drive things forward.

### 5.2.3 *Humber*

In the Humber, after commissioning specific research which highlighted the fundamental importance of digital skills to the future success of the economy, partners decided that a local partnership focused specifically on digital skills was required. Given the strategic importance of the issue, the Pro Vice Chancellor for Education at the University of Hull stepped forward to Chair the local partnership, and the (now former) Humber LEP provided funding from its reserves which enabled a Partnership Manager to be employed on a short-term basis (initially for two days per week).

The Humber DSP was modelled on those funded by DCMS in terms of structure, partners involved and activities, and drew heavily on the support of the Local DSP Regional Coordinators for advice, support and contacts, particularly the West Yorkshire Regional Coordinator, with whom the Humber Partnership Manager has worked closely. The DCMS team has also provided support and advice.

Establishing a digital skills partnership and employing a dedicated manager enabled the Humber partners to make rapid progress in addressing digital skills priorities. As a result, further funding was secured from the reserves to continue funding the post for a further six months. However, with no further local funding available, the Humber partners are now seeking DCMS funding to continue their Local DSP.

## 5.3 *Attractiveness of the Local DSP model*

The motivations for wanting to become a DCMS-funded Local DSP varied across the areas. In all three, digital skills are recognised as being particularly important to the future success of the local economy. The three areas share some similar economic challenges and opportunities, with the energy sector and green growth being an important priority for all, and the North East and Humber having significant manufacturing sectors.

Across these sectors, advanced digital skills are becoming increasingly important and the potential impact of automation means there is an economic imperative to upskill the

workforce. The opportunity to secure support from central government to address digital skills needs through a Local DSP was attractive to all three comparator areas.

For Humber and New Anglia, one of the key attractions of the DCMS Local DSP model was the funding that it provided for a dedicated Regional Coordinator to focus on digital skills activities. For the North East LEP, this was less important, with a view that resources could be found locally to fund a Coordinator, if one was required.

Instead, the key attraction for the North East LEP was having the status of being a DCMS Local DSP, as this was perceived to unlock access to significant pots of funding to deliver digital skills activity. New Anglia also felt that the support from DCMS and links to other Local DSPs would have been valuable – but this was less of a priority for the North East.

## 6 Outcomes of DCMS-funded Local DSPs

**The activities delivered through the Local DSPs led to positive outcomes for three different stakeholder groups. They included:**

- **Individuals and Communities**
  - Increased awareness of digital opportunities amongst young people
  - Increased digital skills and careers opportunities
  - Improved access to opportunities for groups under-represented in the digital workforce
  - Reduced digital exclusion
- **Businesses:**
  - Better informed businesses connected to digital skills provision
  - Broadened uptake of digital skills support
  - Greater influence over priorities and funding
  - Improved business confidence and engagement
- **Public sector organisations:**
  - More informed local strategies and funding bids
  - Greater impact from existing initiatives and funding
  - Improved and new engagement with national partners and corporates
  - Strengthened relationships with local partners and businesses
  - Enhanced joint working between local public sector organisations
  - Central government better informed about place-based policy interventions

### 6.1 Local DSP logic model

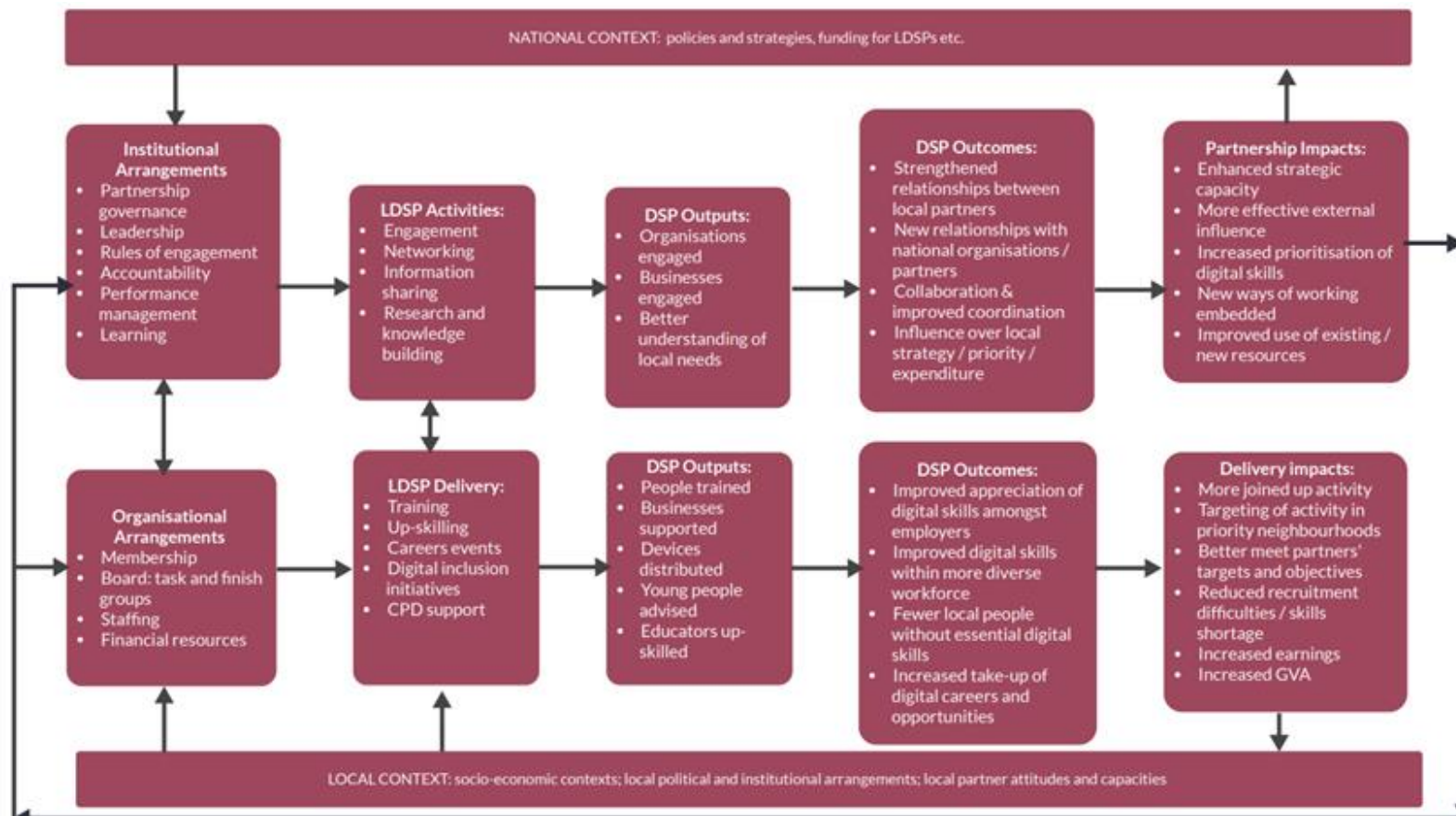
The activities of the Local DSPs have given rise to a wide range of benefits, for individuals and communities, for businesses and for public sector partners. While the Local DSPs did not set targets or report on a set of common performance indicators, they have documented these benefits in monthly reports to DCMS and annual reports provided to local stakeholders.

A logic model for a typical Local DSP is outlined in Figure 6.1. This highlights two broad functions – enabling activities and delivery – which give rise to different outputs, outcomes and impacts. These benefits will in turn be realised over different periods of time. While some outputs can be delivered and measured reasonably quickly (businesses engaged, people trained, events organised), outcomes and impacts take longer. This is particularly the case for intangible benefits, such as collaboration, which requires time to form and

deepen relationships between individuals and organisations prior to the development of new ways of working.

The benefits reported by the Local DSPs through the stakeholder consultations and the survey are presented in the following sections.

Figure 6.1: Local DSP logic model





## 6.2 Outcomes for individuals and communities

Consultees overwhelmingly felt that the Local DSPs were having a positive impact on local people and communities. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 was ‘no impact’ and 10 was ‘very significant impact’, the average score from 33 survey respondents was 7.4/10, and around 52% of them gave a score of eight or above. A range of positive outcomes were identified, as shown below. This also highlights the types of activities that have been delivered to achieve them. The ‘kit4kids’ case study in Appendix D, exemplifies the types of benefits arising for individuals.

### **Examples of positive outcomes arising for Individuals and Communities in the Local DSP areas**

- Increased awareness of digital opportunities amongst young people
  - Enhancement of the Enterprise Advisor (EAs) programme to include greater digital coverage through the recruitment of new EAs from the digital businesses involved in the Local DSP Boards / working groups
  - Delivery of digital skills training to 1,000 young people as part of the National Citizenship Service summer school in Cheshire and Warrington
  - Engagement work with schools, including the TeenTech Live digital festival in Lancashire, which engaged over 800 young people and their parents
  - CompTIA training for teachers who will deliver Digital T-Levels, which harnessed the expertise of an organisation involved in shaping T-Levels nationally to benefit 20 local educators and, ultimately, young people
- Improved access to opportunities for under-represented groups in the digital workforce
  - Digital Momentum training programme supported 194 women and people from disadvantaged groups to gain skills in cyber, software, data and digital skills for business with the aim of moving into digital roles, in the Heart of the South West
  - Tech Talent Charter’s work with Lancashire and South East DSPs supported businesses to increase diversity in their digital workforce through access to a standard toolkit, and bespoke support provided through tailored workshops
  - Re-focusing Lancashire Adult Learning’s (LAL’s) AEB funded curriculum to be ‘digital first’. This upskilled LAL’s staff to increase their confidence in delivering digitally and has ensured that all LAL’s 14,500 learners have the opportunity to develop essential digital skills
- Increased digital skills and career opportunities
  - Digital Bootcamps in West Midlands, Lancashire and Heart of the South West, provided the recently unemployed, returners to the labour market and those already in work with the opportunity to gain new skills and move into digital roles

- Online career and jobs fairs promoted opportunities in Cheshire and Warrington, with the successful model now being adopted by Jobcentre Plus and Talk Talk
- Reduced digital exclusion
  - Increased awareness of the need for skills, devices and connectivity
  - In Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, the Kit for Kids crowdfunding programme provided hundreds of children across Cornwall with the devices and connectivity required to learn online during the period when schools were closed due to the pandemic; and the Healthwave project identified people who would benefit from gaining greater digital skills
  - Lancashire Digital Futures 50+ programme distributed devices to those at risk of digital exclusion through over 50 voluntary sector partners. Funded through the Good Things Foundation and the Community Foundation for Lancashire, 361 individuals aged 50+ were provided with a device. They were supported to develop their digital skills through the Good Things Foundation’s Learn My Way online courses for beginners
  - South East donation to the Good Things Foundation provided devices and 24 months of connectivity to 50 individuals most in need

### 6.3 Outcomes for business

Evaluation consultees also felt that the Local DSPs were having a positive impact on business. On a scale of 1-10, where 1/10 was ‘no impact’ and 10/10 was ‘very significant impact’, the average score from the 32 respondents who responded to the question on outcomes for business was 7.4/10, and 18/32 (56%) gave a score of eight or above. The range of positive outcomes identified for businesses is shown below, again with an indication of the types of activities that have been delivered to achieve them. The ‘West Midlands Private Sector-led Board’ case study in Appendix D provides an example of the greater influence businesses have had in determining priorities and funding.

#### **Examples of positive outcomes arising for Businesses in the Local DSP areas**

- Better informed businesses connected to digital skills provision
  - Business involved in the Local DSP had greater awareness of the existing digital skills support (local / national) which was available to them
  - Existing provision was better coordinated and more visible, for example through the development of the South East Skills website and Digital Skills Prospectus, which brought together information on digital skills courses for businesses and residents

- Smaller businesses were able to access corporate providers, for example through promotion of Google Digital Garage provision through Local DSP networks
- Increased uptake of digital skills support
  - Heart of the South West Bounce Back Digital (Covid Recovery) programme, supported over 800 businesses with online tutorials and the South East’s “Stay visible, stay viable, stay profitable” campaign, run by the DSP’s SME sub-group, supported 100 businesses
  - Clockwork City delivered digital marketing training for women in business (Lancashire) / BAME-led and women-led businesses in West Yorkshire
  - South East DSP ensured a “Digitising Business” strand within the Covid Recovery Fund
- A greater influence over priorities / funding
  - Digital business representative organisations including South West Tech, Software Cornwall and Digital Lancashire were included on Local DSP Boards
  - West Midlands DSP influenced the use of £5m devolution deal skills funding; and advocated within their business networks to promote the recruitment of bootcamp graduates
- Improved business confidence
  - Bentley worked with Cheshire and Warrington DSP to identify what digital transformation looks like and the programmes needed to deliver it
  - Lancashire electronics cluster had their specific skills needs met through bootcamp delivery after experiencing long-running challenges in sourcing training which met their needs
  - Businesses, once involved with the Local DSP, were more willing to engage on wider topics

## 6.4 Outcomes for the public sector

Consultees felt that the Local DSPs were having a positive impact on the public sector. On a scale of 1-10, where 1/10 was ‘no impact’ and 10/10 was ‘very significant impact’, the average score from 31 respondents who provided an answer to the question on public sector outcomes was 7.3/10, and 15/31 (48%) gave a score of eight or above. The positive outcomes and activities are shown below, and a case study demonstrating the benefits of adding value to existing initiatives is provided in the Case Study for Lancashire’s Adult Learning Service in Appendix D.

## Examples of positive outcomes arising for the Public Sector

- Better informed local strategies and funding bids
  - Lancashire Digital Skills Landscape research informed the LEP's refreshed Employment & Skills Framework
  - Cheshire and Warrington commissioned a Digital Data and Labour Market report
  - Cornwall Council's Corporate Digital Strategy was informed by the Local DSP
  - Local DSP research and intelligence has informed Local Skills Reports / SAPs
- Greater impact from existing initiatives and funding
  - West Midlands use of devolved AEB is being informed by outcomes from the Bootcamps pilot and employer feedback on provision / quality
  - Local DSP partnerships with STEM Learning and Careers Hubs have enhanced the return on DfE investment in these programmes
- Improved / new engagement with national partners and corporates
  - National partners have been encouraged to operate in areas where they have not previously been active for example, TeenTech in Lancashire
  - Relationships built with corporate partners including Google, Lloyds, CompTIA
- Strengthened relationships with local partners / businesses
  - Improved ability to engage strategically important local employers in digital skills activity e.g. Bentley and AstraZeneca (Cheshire and Warrington), Pfizer (South East), Met Office (Heart of the South West)
- Enhanced joint working between local public sector organisations
  - Improved coordination across local authority boundaries within Local DSP areas (Lancashire, West Yorkshire)
  - Inclusion of NHS Digital, Library Services, HM Prisons and the Probation Service in DSP working groups
  - Joined up service delivery in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly
- Central government better informed about the place based policy interventions
  - Local DSPs used as a sounding board / route to market to test policy innovations and ideas; DfE Bootcamp model informed by Digital Skills Innovation Fund pilots.

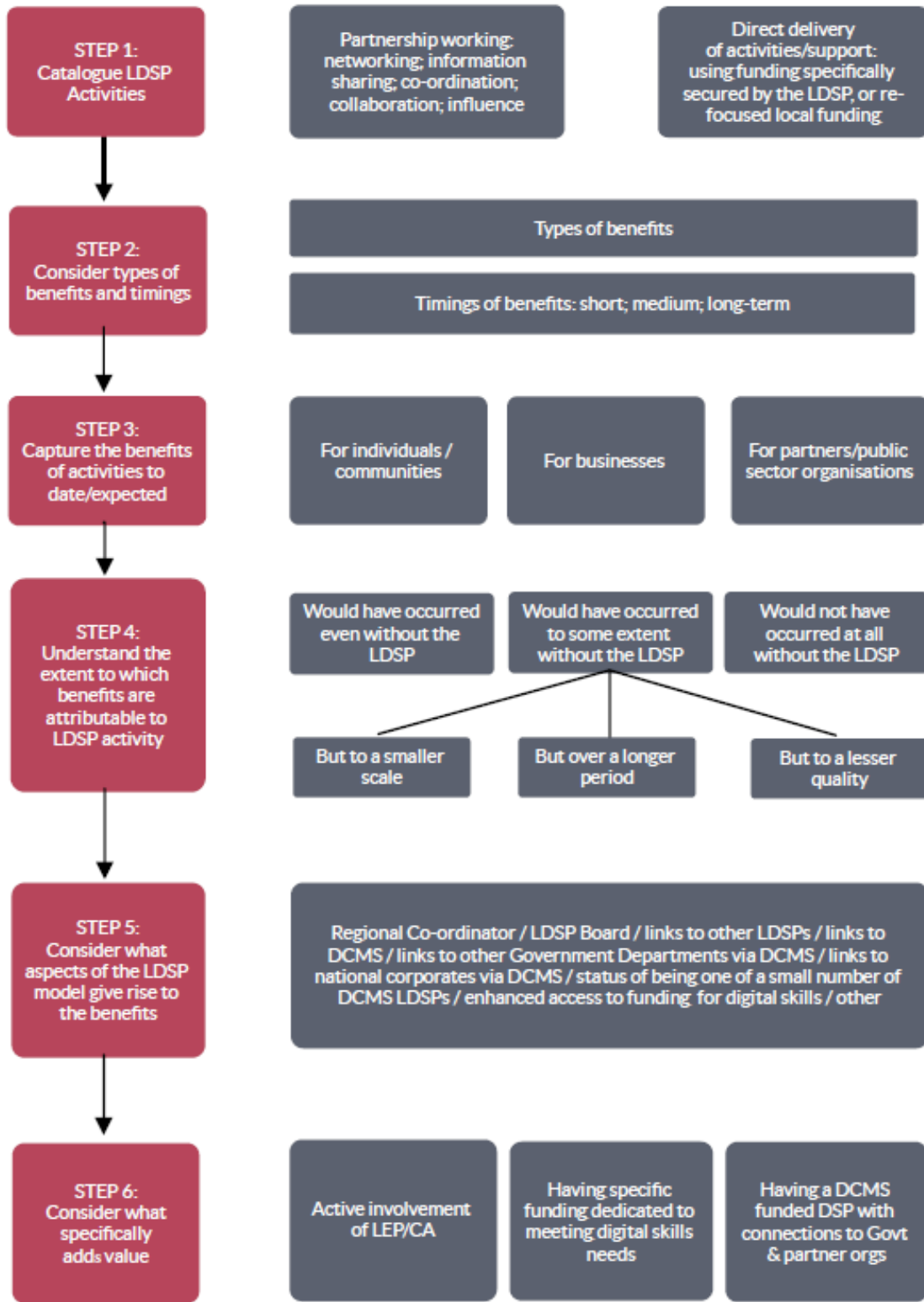
## 7 Additionality and contribution to outcomes

- **Increased scale and quality** – more digital skills activity has been delivered over a shorter time period than would have been delivered without the Local DSP and in comparison to three areas without a DCMS-funded Local DSP. The quality of delivery has also been enhanced through greater involvement of businesses in steering activity.
- **Factors contributing to the outcomes achieved:**
  - **Funding and wider support provided to the Local DSPs by DCMS** – the evaluation found that the Regional Coordinators (whose posts are funded by DCMS) are the most important element of the model, as they provide dedicated capacity to address local digital skills needs, which would not otherwise have been available. The Local DSPs also benefited from collaboration and sharing best practice through the DCMS-facilitated Regional Coordinators network.
  - **Access to funding for digital skills activity** – external funding and re-focusing existing funding, enabled the first six Local DSPs to respond to local digital skills priorities, pilot new activity, and demonstrate to businesses and partners that the Local DSP model could add value to existing delivery.
  - **The important role played by the LEPs and MCAs** – in establishing the Local DSPs; setting the local strategic context and providing the governance framework; and providing a supportive operational framework for the Local DSPs.
- **Levelling-up:** within the Local DSP areas some activity has been focused on people and places particularly at risk of being left behind. At the national level, DCMS has facilitated new relationships between the Local DSP areas and corporate businesses and digital skills organisations. National organisations have been encouraged to focus digital skills activity on the Local DSP areas which might otherwise have been delivered elsewhere.

### 7.1 A framework for assessment

This evaluation has attempted to move beyond an understanding of what has been delivered and achieved by the Local DSPs, to assess the extent to which outcomes are additional; to identify what could have been achieved in the absence of the Local DSPs; and to understand what aspects of the Local DSP model have led to the outcomes identified. Figure 7.1 presents the framework used and steps taken at each stage to arrive at a view of what adds value. The remainder of this section describes the results of these considerations, in relation to additionality, the factors influencing the achievement of outcomes and the added value of the Local DSP model.

**Figure 7.1: A Framework for assessing the additional outcomes of the Local DSPs**



## 7.2 Additionality

### 7.2.1 Considerations

Assessing the extent to which impacts are ‘additional’ is often challenging. Given the breadth of activities delivered by the Local DSPs and their different operational contexts, assessment of additionality is particularly complex. Considerations include:

#### (i) Partnerships

Past studies of effective partnerships have identified several ways in which they add value. The benefits of joint working must be greater than working alone, otherwise the potential opportunities arising from a ‘virtuous partnership’ described in Section 2.3 will be lost. Successful partnerships should aim to achieve the outcomes described in Figure 7.2.

**Figure 7.2: Partnership Outcomes**



The types of additionality which arise from partnership working are not dependent on the funding which DCMS has made available to the Local DSPs, and could be achieved in areas which establish partnerships to tackle digital (or other) skills needs without DCMS support. For example:

- one Local DSP area (West Midlands) has established similar, employer-led partnerships to support skills development in other key sectors (automotive and construction), without DCMS funding; and
- one comparator area (North East LEP) has established cross-sector partnerships to drive the development of the energy and advanced manufacturing sectors.

In both areas, employer engagement and partnership working have delivered industry insight, influence and credibility and ensured limited resources have been used effectively.

The Humber DSP, which was established without DCMS funding, has also started to deliver many of these partnership outcomes. However, it faces significant challenges in securing resource to maintain its coordinator post. There is a risk that the local capacity which has been developed will be lost and the outcomes delivered by the partnership will not be sustained. This demonstrates how valuable the security provided by the two year funding package from DCMS has been for the Local DSPs in securing sustainable local partnership outcomes.

**(ii) Benefits arising from additional funding for digital skills delivery**

Some of the outcomes outlined in Section 6 have been achieved as a result of the Local DSPs securing additional government funding for digital skills, such as DfE’s National Skills Fund and DCMS’ Digital Skills Innovation Fund. The West Midlands also secured dedicated funding for digital skills re-training through its skills devolution deal. This funding has delivered:

- bespoke digital training designed specifically to meet the needs of local employers;
- innovative training models and approaches to help fast-track learners into new digital careers; and
- a pool of skilled workers ready to move into digital roles which are hard to fill.

This funding was not part of the DCMS Local DSP model and was available across all LEP areas. Attributing the benefits delivered by this funding to the Local DSP may therefore over-state the additionality contributed by the Local DSP.

However, in two of the three areas which secured external resources (Lancashire and Heart of the South West) the Regional Coordinators and LEP Skills Leads believe they would not have attracted the funding without their Local DSP status. They therefore argued that the benefits delivered locally through the funding were attributable to the Local DSP.



**(iii) Geographic scale at which additionality is being assessed**

While benefits may be additional at the local level, if activity is displaced from other areas they may not be additional at the national level. This applies to the benefits arising from the DfE Bootcamp funding allocated to the Local DSP areas. This funding would have been used to deliver activity elsewhere if it had not been allocated to the Local DSP areas. Therefore, it could be argued that the outputs are not additional at the national level.

However, the quality of the outputs delivered in the areas with a Local DSP could be higher than it would have been in other areas, as a result of the greater employer engagement and shared understanding of digital skills needs, which has been facilitated by the Local DSPs.

Other examples include:

- raising the profile of national provision in the Local DSP areas, thereby encouraging greater take-up, such as the promotion of the Tech Talent Charter Toolkit by the South East Local DSP;
- securing activity in Local DSP areas which might otherwise have happened elsewhere (e.g. Teen Tech Festival in Lancashire);
- strengthening local leadership in Local DSP areas, enabling them to engage with private sector organisations and government departments to take forward new digital skills initiatives; and
- diverting activity and benefits from one area to another, which can be considered additional if it meets strategic objectives, for example “Levelling Up” by supporting digital skills improvements in areas which are lagging behind.

The Local DSP programme has supported the Government’s “Levelling Up” objectives in two ways:

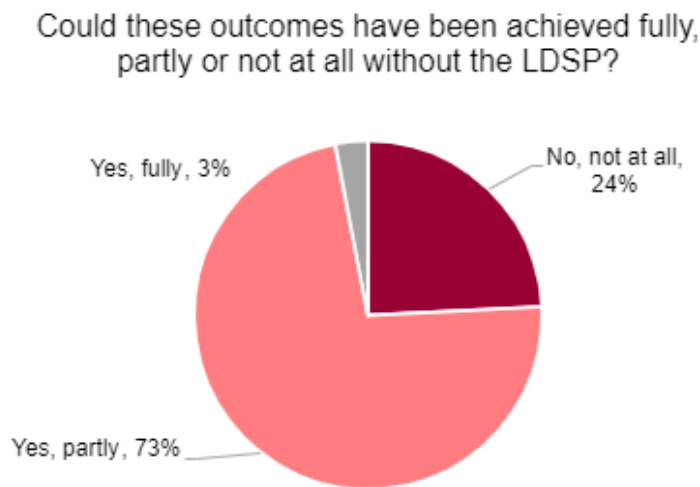
- within the Local DSP areas, some activity has been focused on people and places particularly at risk of being left behind, including older people and those in disadvantaged areas. The Local DSPs which secured external funding ensured that it supported under-represented groups to access digital skills and career opportunities; and
- at the national level, DCMS has facilitated new relationships between the Local DSP areas and corporate businesses / digital skills organisations. This has led to greater take up of existing digital skills support by businesses and individuals within the Local DSP areas than would otherwise have been the case. National organisations have been encouraged to focus digital skills activity on the Local DSP areas, which might otherwise have been delivered elsewhere.

### 7.2.2 Feedback from the Local DSP areas

Consultees were asked if outcomes could have been achieved without the Local DSP. Eight of the 33 people who responded to this survey question felt that the impacts were fully additional. Only one respondent felt that the benefits could have been achieved in full without the Local DSP.

The majority of survey respondents and stakeholders thought that although outcomes could have been achieved without the Local DSP, this would have been on a smaller scale, at a lower quality, and over a longer time period. In regard to the impact of the pandemic, many reported the Local DSP had *"accelerated digital skills activity just at the right time"*.

**Figure 7.3: Additionality of the Local DSP Outcomes**



Source: AMION Local DSP Survey

## 7.3 Performance of the Local DSP model

### 7.3.1 The Local DSP Model

Consultees and survey respondents were asked about the importance of each element of the DCMS funded Local DSP model in contributing to the outcomes identified. Table 7.1 presents the findings and an assessment of the extent to which outcomes are attributable to the DCMS funding and wider support.

<b>Table 7.1: Factors contributing to outcomes – Local DSP Model</b>			
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Score</b> 10 = successful	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Outcomes attributable to DCMS funding and wider support?</b>
<b>Regional Coordinator</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<p>31 out of 32 survey respondents thought the Regional Coordinator role was very important (8+ out of 10), across all Local DSP areas.</p> <p>Dedicated capacity and making connections were noted as particularly important: <i>“the glue that brings things together”</i> and <i>“if it’s no-one’s job it doesn’t get done”</i>.</p> <p>Key attributes referenced: being able to engage and enthuse partners; identifying opportunities; being able to prioritise; self-starter; impartial.</p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>To date, Regional Coordinators have largely been 100% funded by DCMS, indicating attribution to the DCMS model.</p> <p>Humber DSP was established without DCMS funding, and the Regional Coordinator is funded from local reserves. This is only very short-term funding, highlighting the value of the secure funding provided by DCMS.</p>
<b>All elements combined</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<p>26 out of 29 survey respondents considered the combination of all elements of the Local DSP model as very important (8+ out of 10), across all Local DSP areas.</p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>DCMS established the Local DSP model and the package of support available.</p>
<b>Board / steering group</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<p>28 out of 33 survey respondents said that the Board / steering group was very important (8+ out of 10), across all Local DSP areas.</p> <p>The importance of a good Chair and strong leadership were highlighted, but the restrictions of not being able to meet in person due to Covid-19 has affected the time taken to build relationships.</p> <p>Key attributes: cross-sector representation; Board members with credibility within the digital sector; shared priorities.</p>	<p><b>Partially</b></p> <p>Some non-Local DSP areas have established Boards focusing on the broader digital agenda / other skills topics. However, the link to DCMS and Local DSP status helped to engage high calibre Board members and sustain interest.</p> <p><i>“Being seen as the ‘official’ lead, government sponsored organisation is critical.”</i></p>

<b>Table 7.1: Factors contributing to outcomes – Local DSP Model (continued)</b>			
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Score 10 = successful</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Outcomes attributable to DCMS funding and wider support?</b>
<b>Local DSP status</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<p>23 out of 32 survey respondents said that the Local DSP status was very important (8+ out of 10). Whilst the number of Local DSPs is small, there is 'kudos' attached to being one of a select group. This was recognised by LEP / CA Skills Leads who noted that <i>"I don't think we could have had some of the Board members if we hadn't had that."</i></p> <p>Local DSP status was also felt to make it easier to secure funding and attract the interest of external partners.</p>	<b>Yes</b>
			<p>Limiting the initial number of Local DSPs to six, has enhanced the profile of the areas with DCMS-approved status.</p> <p><i>"Places with a Local DSP have greater convening power – can use it as a hook to bring people together. Other places can do it in theory, but Local DSP areas can do it in practice."</i></p>
<b>Relationship with / support from DCMS</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<p>22 out of 29 survey respondents said that the relationship with DCMS was very important (8+ out of 10).</p> <p><i>"This has very much been a partnership and there has been lots of engagement with DCMS which is really unusual, so that was appealing."</i></p> <p>This aspect of the model was considered less important in areas which felt they already had strong links across Government.</p>	<b>Yes</b>
			<p><i>"The connection to DCMS is key, without this there's not much to mark a DSP out as different to regions with Skills Leads or teams devoted to skills."</i></p> <p><i>"Local DSPs act as a sounding board for DCMS – their link to us is valuable to them."</i></p>
<b>Links to national organisations</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<p>22 out of 29 survey respondents said that the links made to national organisations were very important (8+ out of 10).</p> <p>This was less important for areas with strong connections to national corporates: <i>"we're not reliant on DCMS for introductions to anyone."</i></p> <p>Some felt the expected level of engagement with national organisations hadn't been achieved; for others, this was one of the most important benefits.</p>	<b>Yes</b>
			<p>Connections have been made via DCMS through monthly Regional Coordinator meetings.</p>

<b>Table 7.1: Factors contributing to outcomes – Local DSP Model (continued)</b>			
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Score 10 = successful</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Outcomes attributable to DCMS funding and wider support?</b>
<b>Links to other Local DSPs</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<p>14 out of 29 survey respondents said that the relationship with DCMS was very important (8+ out of 10), across all Local DSP areas.</p> <p>This element was scored particularly highly by the Regional Coordinators and LEP / CA Skills Leads, who perhaps had a better understanding of these links than other respondents.</p> <p>The Regional Coordinators valued the strong networks that had been developed, the opportunity to work together on shared priorities and learn from the experiences of others.</p> <p><i>“This is great to test and check things. That networking is always good.”</i></p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>The DCMS model has fostered strong links among the Regional Coordinators network. Extending the scope for Chairs / working groups will promote further learning. Areas without a DCMS-funded Local DSP have also benefited from Regional Coordinators providing guidance to areas outside the network.</p> <p>As the network is now well-established, less direct DCMS support is needed. Attention could be diverted to a second cohort of Local DSPs.</p>
<b>Links to central Government</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<p>12 out of 29 survey respondents thought the links to central government were very important (8+ out of 10), across all Local DSP areas.</p> <p>There was some frustration expressed at a lack of communication between Government departments.</p>	<p><b>Largely, yes</b></p> <p>Local DSP areas already have linkages of varying strength into some Government departments. For others, the ability to reach a contact via DCMS has been very helpful.</p>

## 7.4 Added Value of the Local DSP Model

The full range of outcomes achieved by the Local DSPs to date cannot be attributed to the DCMS model alone. Other areas have been able to address digital skills issues by engaging their LEP, other relevant partners and developing a set of clear shared priorities. Furthermore, the delivery of training for businesses and upskilling individuals has been dependent on securing additional funding or redirecting existing funding which is also outside the DCMS Local DSP model. **However, DCMS does provide dedicated capacity funding, links to national experts and Government contacts, and support for the Local DSP network.**

For areas such as Lancashire and Heart of the South West, where the DCMS funded model, dedicated funding for delivery, and a supportive LEP / CA are all in place, the benefits achieved by the Local DSP have been significant. For others, outcomes have not yet been realised on a similar scale. For the South East DSP for example, the lack of dedicated funding for digital skills has slowed progress. In contrast, the Cheshire and Warrington Local DSP has had a significant, and potentially more sustainable impact by influencing existing funding. The evaluation demonstrates that there are three key factors which collectively add value, and influence the higher level of outcomes achieved. The greatest impact is achieved where all three are in place:

Table 7.2: Foundations of Local DSP Impact		
LEP / CA Support	Funding for digital skills activity	DCMS funding and support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise of the Skills Lead</li> <li>• Local engagement</li> <li>• Supportive operational landscape</li> <li>• Strategic context and governance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to pilot new activity</li> <li>• Budget to respond to identified needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated capacity funding</li> <li>• Regional Coordinators</li> <li>• DCMS Local DSP network</li> <li>• Collaboration and best practice</li> </ul>

The greatest level of outcomes will be achieved by Local DSP's that are able to demonstrate strategic added value, through:

- **Leadership** – providing a focus for activity, connecting organisations with shared interests and catalysing /accelerating delivery.
- **Engagement** – identifying, recruiting and retaining appropriate board and sub-group members; engaging with external partners to identify opportunities of mutual interest.
- **Influence** – an ability to shape corporate digital strategies (including skills) and the networks of board members.
- **Leverage** – including external resources; and refocusing of existing resources.
- **Synergy** – promoting collaboration and more effective coordination and delivery of multiple digital skills initiatives.

## 8 Future of the Local DSPs

- **Continuation:** There was overwhelming support for the continuation of Local DSPs amongst stakeholders consulted.
- **Improvements:** Suggested improvements to the current model included additional support for the Regional Coordinator; longer-term funding; and a flexible funding pot to support innovative activity.
- **Remit:** There were mixed views on whether the remit of the Local DSPs should be extended to other digital issues and the most appropriate geographic scale.
- **Funding:** Increasing the number of Local DSPs would require additional funding to support the Regional Coordinators. Some Local DSPs are moving towards a greater local contribution. The potential to secure funding from other government departments from and from funding streams including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund were also raised.

### 8.1 Rationale

#### 8.1.1 Overview

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital skills and digital inclusion for all sectors and individuals in the economy. The Local DSP offer is well aligned with the government's growth objectives set out in Build Back Better<sup>18</sup> and Skills for Jobs<sup>19</sup> and can support the "Levelling Up" agenda if targeted appropriately.

The work of the Local DSPs in collating evidence of gaps and the mismatch of digital skills has been particularly important in confirming the need for ongoing coordinated action among relevant partners.

When consulted about the future of the Local DSPs, there was unanimous support for their continuation. However, the majority of survey respondents (20/33) and wider stakeholders consulted, thought that changes needed to be made to the existing model. Examples of responses included:

- "Yes (continue) but linking more widely with other tech agendas, to be the digital partnership rather than the digital skills partnership" (Regional Coordinator); and

<sup>18</sup> HM Treasury (March 2021) "Build Back Better: our plan for growth", [Build Back Better: our plan for growth - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/build-back-better)

<sup>19</sup> DfE (January 2021) "Skills for Jobs", [Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/skills-for-jobs)

- “For Local DSPs to be serious, then government departments (BEIS, MHCLG, DfE etc) need to coordinate together on digital skills initiatives and then go through the DSPs”.

### 8.1.2 *Suggested improvements to the existing DCMS Local DSP model*

Changes or improvements suggested by key stakeholders fell into the following categories:

- **Resources** – almost all respondents commented on the current remit being too big for one person to manage and deliver effectively. The longevity of support and the need for a minimum of five years funding was also raised as a key issue, in order to retain the commitment, seniority and skills of the Regional Coordinator. In addition, some commented on the need for additional funding to support delivery. This view was not held by all, with mixed opinions regarding direct delivery vs strategic oversight and coordination.
- **Remit** – there were mixed views on whether Local DSPs should retain their focus on skills only or encompass wider digital issues e.g. infrastructure, connectivity, inclusion. Many partners were concerned that the digital skills agenda was already broad and extending the remit further would risk diluting the impact of the Local DSPs.
- **Access to funding for innovation** – a number of consultees raised the importance of piloting new ideas and new ways of working at the local level in response to emerging technologies. Many believe this is a key role for the Local DSPs which could be strengthened through access to small scale feasibility funding.
- **Geography** – there was broad consensus that Local DSPs should continue and be extended across the country (contingent on DCMS resource for support). However, there were mixed views with regard to the most appropriate geographic level for Local DSPs: Local Authority level, sub-regional (LEP / county) or regional. Given the skills focus, a Travel to Work Area (TTWA) geography is appropriate. The LEAs / CAs (which were initially designed to reflect functional economic areas) currently provide the best fit administrative geography for TTWAs.
- **Cross-governmental support** – a number of stakeholders commented on the need for a more joined up response from Government, with resources drawn from other departments to support the broader objectives that digital skills can help to address.
- **Communications** – this related to improving the messaging in relation to the Local DSPs and in particular: what it is and what it does; how people can get engaged; and the difference it makes. This is challenging as many partnerships do not have formal targets or KPIs.



## 8.2 Models for sustainability

### 8.2.1 Stakeholder feedback

The Local DSPs, LEPs / MCAs and key partner agencies suggested a range of options for funding Local DSPs in future, shown in Table 8.1. While there was no consensus on the preferred option, all respondents agreed that they should ‘definitely continue’.

Table 8.1: Potential options for funding LDSPs	
<b>Public Sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Central Government</b> (across departments) – some argued there should be dedicated, 100% funding for Local DSPs, if digital skills are a national priority.</li> <li>● <b>Local funding</b> – it was recognised that this would be challenging given budget constraints for LEPs and Local Authorities. (Whilst the Humber DSP initially funded its Coordinator from local resources, there is insufficient local funding for a long-term role).</li> <li>● <b>National and Local Co-funding</b> ensures costs are shared. This model has been introduced for the two CA Local DSPs, with West Yorkshire and West Midlands receiving 50% match funding from DCMS for the second and third year of operations respectively.</li> </ul>
<b>Private Sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>National model</b> - with corporate funding facilitated through DCMS.</li> <li>● <b>Local contributions</b> – dependent on the local business base.</li> </ul>
<b>Combination / other funding opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Top slice funding from projects</b> – to provide a levy that will ensure there is a digital focus and the provision of a suitably qualified pipeline of skilled individuals to meet future demand from employers.</li> <li>● <b>Explore new funding sources:</b> e.g. Covid-19 Recovery Funds; Community Renewal Funding; Shared Prosperity Fund; National Skills Fund.</li> </ul>

### 8.2.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the different funding models

Each funding model has advantages and disadvantages:

- Increased private sector funding towards core Local DSP costs (the Regional Coordinator) could make the programme more affordable for the Government. However, there were widespread concerns amongst consultees that some geographies would be less attractive for corporate businesses and therefore less able to generate private sector funding. A second concern was that the interests of private sector funders would influence Local DSP priorities.
- Public sector funding potentially avoids the tensions of conflicting priorities which could arise from private sector funding. The key issue is the balance between local and national funding:
- A wholly centrally-funded model would have significant resource implications for DCMS, although these could be reduced if other departments whose policy agendas

- are being taken forward by the Local DSPs made a contribution towards the costs (e.g. DfE, BEIS, DWP);
- Some Local DSPs are moving towards a greater local funding contribution (e.g. the co-funding from CAs identified in table 8.1; a revenue model is being developed in Lancashire linked to the development of a digital office hub; Cornwall and Isles of Scilly DSP is securing LEP funding to continue its work). However, there are disadvantages in moving to a locally funded model. Many LEPs face tight constraints on staffing budgets. There is a risk that areas most in need of a Local DSP would be least able to meet the costs.

The advantage of a central-local co-funding model is that costs are shared between national government and local partners. The example of the Careers and Enterprise Company was cited by a number of consultees as providing a useful model.

The use of alternative public sector funding sources would spread the cost of the Local DSP programme beyond DCMS' core budget. The UK Community Renewal Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will be targeted at places most in need of "Levelling Up", where digital skills needs are likely to be significant. However, as competitive funding streams there is no guarantee of resources being available.

## 9 Conclusions and policy considerations

### 9.1 Key findings

There is clear evidence from this evaluation that the Local DSP model is working effectively and Local DSPs are having an impact in improving digital skills capacity in the areas where they operate. During the evaluation process a wide range of stakeholders were consulted – LEPs, CAs, regional employers, Local DSP Board members, and other Government departments. All were supportive of the partnerships and most viewed Local DSPs as a positive development in tackling the digital skills challenges faced in each region and nationally.

The Local DSPs have delivered a wide range of outcomes (e.g. people trained, businesses supported, young people engaged in digital opportunities, digital devices distributed), reflecting the varied nature of the activities which they have supported. Individuals and communities, businesses and the public sector as a whole have benefited from their work. In addition to these ‘activity’ outcomes, the development of the partnerships has created local capacity, strengthened relationships between the public and private sector, and catalysed new ways of working. These partnership outcomes are likely to lead to significant longer-term impacts.

The Local DSPs contribute to a number of important policy priorities, including the government’s “Levelling Up” objectives. Within the Local DSP areas some activity has been focused on people and places particularly at risk of being left behind. At the national level, DCMS has facilitated new relationships between the Local DSP areas and corporate businesses and digital skills organisations. National organisations have been encouraged to focus digital skills activity on the Local DSP areas which might otherwise have been delivered elsewhere.

### 9.2 Lessons learned

To assist other areas wishing to establish a Local DSP, the evaluation has identified the following prerequisites for success:

- a dedicated coordinator to drive the work of the partnership with an ability to balance strategic oversight and operational delivery, and coordinate partnership working. This post should ideally be embedded in an existing employment and skills team (LEP / CA) to benefit from wider support and integration;
- a strong board or steering group with good cross sector representation and businesses that represent the local area. An influential, impartial and enthusiastic chair is key to attracting and retaining members;

- a clear vision and priorities informed by local research to focus activity and maximise the impact of limited resources. This needs to be jointly owned from the outset, with mechanisms built in for measuring and reporting on performance and impact;
- alignment with the wider skills agenda of the SAP to ensure that interventions add value to existing activity e.g. through enhanced promotion and profile; scaling up; accelerating or trialling innovation / new concepts; and
- sharing best practice and networking / collaborating with other areas or partnerships to understand what works, for whom, why and in what circumstances.

### 9.3 Considerations for the future

There is a strong rationale for the continuation of the existing Local DSPs, and the extension of the model to other parts of the UK. Key issues to be addressed include:

- **Funding:** how the costs of the Regional Coordinator role should be met, including the balance between local and national resources; contributions from DCMS and other Government departments whose priorities are addressed by Local DSPs; and the potential to secure private sector contributions without adversely affecting Local DSP independence. Flexible resources to pilot new activities should also be considered;
- **Remit:** whether Local DSPs should have a broader remit, given the interlinkages between digital skills and access to digital infrastructure, devices and connectivity; and
- **Maintaining additionality:** which could potentially be reduced if there are a larger number of Local DSPs and DCMS support is diluted. There will also be a continuing need to encourage corporates and national organisations to engage in new areas, in support of the government's "Levelling Up" objectives, as well as other objectives.

As evidenced throughout this evaluation report, ensuring there is strong leadership in place is critical to the future success of regional collaborations and partnerships. The Regional Coordinators, Local DSP chairs, and LEP / CA Skills Leads have all played an important part in developing the Local DSP and building a framework that can be built upon and its remit broadened.

There is an opportunity for DCMS and possibly other Government departments to expand these partnerships across the country and join up other DCMS policy areas with an interest in regional and place-based delivery. This will ensure no individual or place is left behind, that long-term digital prosperity is evenly spread across the country and that all have an equal chance of improving their digital skills capability. This will require adequate funding to be directed towards these partnerships to deliver effective digital skills training.

Policymakers in DCMS should consider how best to expand the Local DSPs into other regions of the country. More broadly, enabling wider regional "Digital Partnerships" will ensure DCMS has a footprint in every region of the UK and is well positioned to deliver on "Levelling Up" objectives and the DCMS Secretary of State's ten tech priorities.

## Appendix A – Local DSP area profiles

A summary of the headline statistics for each DSP area is provided below, which demonstrates how the characteristics of the areas vary significantly in terms of their size and economic geography; the structure of the business base and size of the digital sector; productivity and levels of prosperity; and the existing level of skills in the area.

Headline statistics for each DSP area							
	Lancashire	Heart of the South West	West Midlands	Cornwall Isles of Scilly	Cheshire and Warrington	South East	West Yorkshire
Population <sup>20</sup>	1,503,241	1,762,964	2,928,592	571,802	937,237	4,089,654	2,332,469
Jobs <sup>21</sup>	668,000	773,000	1,285,000	238,000	518,000	1,683,000	1,094,000
Businesses <sup>22</sup>	52,810	72,840	91,150	24,825	43,005	176,410	79,760
% SMEs <sup>23</sup>	99.6%	99.7%	99.5%	99.7%	99.6%	99.7%	99.5%
% digital sector employment <sup>24</sup>	2.7	2.3	2.7	1.9	3.7	3.4	3.7
GVA per hour <sup>25</sup>	30.42	27.89	30.40	23.81	35.05	31.63	29.23
% L4+ qualifications <sup>26</sup>	39.1	38.4	36.4	37.7	47.4	36.1	38.9
% L2 qualifications or below <sup>27</sup>	31.8	30.6	34.6	30.8	27.7	36.3	32.1

<sup>20</sup> ONS Population estimates – local authority based by single year of age, 2019

<sup>21</sup> Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES), 2019

<sup>22</sup> UK Business Counts – enterprises by industry and employment size band, 2020

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> BRES, 2019

<sup>25</sup> ONS Subregional productivity: labour productivity indices, 2017 (published in the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy's (BEIS) LEP Outlook 2019 Indicator Handbook)

<sup>26</sup> NOMIS Annual Population Survey (APS) Qualifications of economically active, 2018 (published in BEIS' LEP Outlook 2019 Indicator Handbook)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

Lancashire DSP	
<b>Key economic characteristics</b>	Lancashire has a diverse economy of 1.5m people and includes areas of urban deprivation, large rural areas and coastal towns. Its key sectors include aerospace, advanced manufacturing and energy, with concentrations of employment in food manufacturing and the visitor economy.
<b>Administrative structures</b>	The LEP area covers Lancashire County Council, 2 unitary authorities and 12 district councils.
<b>Date DSP established</b>	The DSP was established in April 2018, with the Regional Coordinator appointed in Autumn 2018.
<b>Route to becoming a DSP</b>	The Lancashire LEP Skills Hub approached DCMS following the announcement of DSPs in the Industrial Strategy White Paper. Lancashire was the first Local DSP.
<b>DSP Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Steering Group includes business (Digital Lancashire, Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre), NHS, third sector, education and inclusion representatives. It is chaired by a local business owner.</li> <li>● The sub-groups align with the Lancashire Skills and Employment Framework themes. These are productive workforce (workplace skills), inclusive workforce (digital inclusion and diversity) and future workforce (engagement with educators and young people).</li> <li>● The structure is currently being re-modelled to reflect 8 'pillars' identified through digital skills landscape research, with Task and Finish groups taking forward priorities.</li> </ul>
<b>Vision and Objectives</b>	The DSP vision and objectives are aligned with the Lancashire Skills and Employment Framework
<b>Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Future Workforce</b> – includes work with the Careers Hub, strengthening digital within the Enterprise Ambassador network, a Teen Tech festival for schools, supporting the roll-out of Digital T-Levels with Continuing Professional Development for educators, close working with STEM Learning and gaming projects.</li> <li>● <b>Skilled Workforce</b> – includes bootcamps and Fast Track Funding, as well as Google Digital Garage delivery for SMEs and charities.</li> <li>● <b>Inclusive workforce</b> – includes Tech Talent Charter work to support increased diversity within the Lancashire digital workforce, digital marketing training for women business owners, Freeformers training for the unemployed / digitally excluded, digital devices for the over 50s, and re-focussing Lancashire Adult Learning provision.</li> <li>● <b>Informed approach</b> – includes digital skills landscape research to feed into the Local Industrial Strategy and Skills Framework refresh.</li> </ul>
<b>Alignment</b>	The DSP is chaired by a LEP Board member, whilst the Regional Coordinator reports to ESB (SAP). A Digital Sector group has been established by the LEP following the set-up of the DSP, and the Regional Coordinator connects with this group on skills issues.

<b>Heart of the South West DSP</b>	
<b>Key economic characteristics</b>	The Heart of the South West is the second largest LEP covering Devon, Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay. With an economy worth £35bn and population of 1.8m, it is equivalent to that of a major UK city. The LEP covers a varied landscape with a mix of urban and rural environments (including 2 National Parks). It is home to over 83,000 businesses which are predominantly sole traders, micros and SMEs, with clusters of excellence in marine, manufacturing, data analytics and clean growth.
<b>Administrative structures</b>	The LEP covers 2 county councils, 2 unitary councils and 12 district councils, as well as 2 Higher Education establishments – Exeter and Plymouth Universities.
<b>Date DSP established</b>	The DSP was established shortly after Lancashire DSP in June 2018.
<b>Route to becoming a DSP</b>	Heart of the South West was invited to become a pilot Local DSP following discussions with DCMS at an early stage.
<b>DSP Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Chair</b> – who has significant experience in the Industry (being the owner of a digital skills training company) and has advised national government.</li> <li>● <b>Board</b> – which has 25 representatives with key employers including the Met Office, UK Hydrographic Office, Leonardo Helicopters, Microsoft, BT, Bluescreen and Cosmic</li> <li>● The DSP is moving to having a <b>new quarterly conference-style meeting</b> with extended membership and use of 4 Sub-Groups to drive initiatives focused on key target groups – professionals, businesses and employees developing digital skills, young people and citizens.</li> </ul>
<b>Vision and Objectives</b>	The vision of the DSP is “to make the Heart of the South West a place where individuals and businesses have the digital skills to succeed and thrive”. Workstreams in 2021 have focused on activities to address the new sub-groups referenced above.
<b>Activities</b>	<p>Key activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Train 4 Tomorrow ‘digital bootcamp’ – part of the DfE National Skills Fund Pilot</li> <li>● Digital Momentum, a Digital Skills Innovation Fund pilot for 150 people from under-represented groups</li> <li>● Bounce Back Digital for Business and Young People (initiated following Covid-19)</li> <li>● Digital Ambition, which involves raising awareness in schools</li> </ul>
<b>Alignment</b>	<p>The DSP is well aligned with the SAP, with the improvement of digital skills for learners and businesses referenced in the action plan.</p> <p>A member of the DSP (Cornwall and Devon Partnership) is represented on the SAP.</p>

<b>West Midlands DSP</b>	
<b>Key economic characteristics</b>	The CA area covers a population of over 2.9m people. The digital sector is one of four key growth sectors for the West Midlands economy. The other three are construction, engineering and manufacturing, and professional and business services, which also have significant digital skills needs.
<b>Administrative structures</b>	The CA area covers three LEP areas – Greater Birmingham and Solihull, Black Country and Coventry & Warwickshire. AEB funding (£140m) has been devolved to the CA since 2019.
<b>Date DSP established</b>	The DSP was established in December 2018.
<b>Route to becoming a DSP</b>	The DSP was requested as part of the WMCA’s devolution Skills Deal. This included £5m of funding for Digital Re-Training (bootcamps), and the DSP was set up to oversee the use of this funding.
<b>DSP Structure</b>	The DSP Board includes senior representatives from multi-national corporates (Amazon Web Services, BT, Microsoft, Cisco, Fujitsu), plus smaller local tech companies and the education sector. Sub-groups are now being established including one which will take forward marketing activity.
<b>Vision and Objectives</b>	There is no DSP-specific vision. Instead, there is already a vision in place through the Mayor’s Digital Board (and new Digital Roadmap published in 2021), which covers all aspects of digital including connectivity. The CA’s Regional Skills Plan and the Local Industrial Strategy also prioritise digital skills. The West Midlands DSP took on responsibility for the digital skills elements of these existing strategies, with a focus on L3+ digital skills.
<b>Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Influence</b> – the DSP Board members speak at events, influence their peers (through business networks), and encourage the take up of bootcamp graduates.</li> <li>● <b>Advise</b> – on the scope of the digital re-training fund, as well as reviewing bids and bootcamp performance and developing a specification for use of EdTech fund.</li> <li>● <b>Guide and steer</b> digital skills work in the West Midlands.</li> <li>● The DSP is not involved in digital inclusion / essential digital skills, which are picked up elsewhere in the CA / local authorities.</li> </ul>
<b>Alignment</b>	<p>The DSP reports to the Skills Board (which is the SAP). The chair of the DSP is on the Skills Board.</p> <p>The West Midlands has similar employer-led Boards in other key sectors – for example automotive and construction - with CA-funded Skills Project Managers.</p>



<b>Cheshire and Warrington DSP</b>	
<b>Key economic characteristics</b>	Cheshire and Warrington is one of the fastest growing economies in the country. The economy has doubled in the last 20 years (£32.5bn) with potential to double again in the next 20 years. The ageing population and strong economy is putting pressure on the skills system, with 75,000 more people qualified to L4+ required by 2027. Twenty percent of employees earn less than the real living wage.
<b>Administrative structures</b>	The LEP area covers three local authorities - Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, and Warrington.
<b>Date DSP established</b>	The DSP was launched in May 2019 and the Regional Coordinator has been in post since August 2019.
<b>Route to becoming a DSP</b>	Cheshire and Warrington was chosen as part of the second phase, following the submission of an EOI.
<b>DSP Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The DSP has a small board which comprises a mix of private sector and SME representatives.</li> <li>• No formal ToR or working groups exist – instead the DSP works on a task and finish basis as and when required.</li> <li>• Board members are actively engaged in the work of DSP and are linked to the three flagship programmes: Accelerate (£30m project to reskill / upskill the workforce), Pledge (a programme which includes funding from ESF, the National Citizenship Service and Careers Enterprise Company to support businesses to work with educators to provide every young person with what they need to succeed in the world of work), and Local Growth Fund Projects (£5m investment in projects specifically targeted at helping Accelerate and Pledge to deliver the digital skills needed).</li> <li>• The DSP Board are developing a 12-week Digital Bootcamp pilot, aimed at furloughed staff from companies employing up to 50 people.</li> </ul>
<b>Vision and Objectives</b>	The DSP vision is aligned with the LEP's Employers' Skills and Education Board (SAP) and is delivering through existing structures rather than developing new projects (Pledge, Accelerate, Local Growth Fund).
<b>Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion – spreading the word about the importance of digital and improving digital capability of people in Cheshire and Warrington.</li> <li>• Develop Programmes - which enable businesses to acquire the digital skills they need to grow and adapt.</li> <li>• Influence and support the development and delivery of a digital inclusion programme.</li> <li>• Share good practice and work together effectively to maximise the benefits to local businesses and local residents.</li> </ul>
<b>Alignment</b>	The DSP Board reports to the LEP's Employers' Skills and Education Board (SAP) and the deputy chair of this Board is also the chair of the DSP Board and a member of the main LEP Board. Links are therefore clear and strong.

<b>Cornwall and Isles of Scilly DSP</b>	
<b>Key economic characteristics</b>	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly is a rural peripheral region with dispersed communities. The area has a large number of jobs in low-wage sectors (tourism and hospitality, retail, health and social care); productivity levels below the national average; a large proportion employed in very small businesses; a smaller working age population; lower levels of higher-skilled individuals; skills gaps and shortages; and areas of deprivation.
<b>Administrative structures</b>	The LEP covers 2 district councils – Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.
<b>Date DSP established</b>	The DSP was launched in May 2019. A Regional Coordinator was in place in mid-2019, however they left the role in February 2021.
<b>Route to becoming a DSP</b>	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly was part of the second selection phase, following submission of an EOI.
<b>DSP Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Chair</b> – who has extensive industry expertise (specifically in software development)</li> <li>● <b>Executive Board</b> – has 15 members covering 6 private sector organisations, an ESB board member, Software Cornwall, Tech SW, Cornwall and Truro and Penwith Colleges, Falmouth and Exeter Universities, Cornwall Council, Digital Peninsula Network and RCHT.</li> <li>● <b>Advisory Committee</b> – consists of sector representatives, the growth and skills hub, the careers hub and T&amp;I.</li> </ul> <p>There are no formal sub-group structures, with task and finish groups instead used to address issues and develop projects e.g. Digital Exclusion.</p>
<b>Vision and Objectives</b>	<p>There is a clear differentiation of skills challenges, for example between basic digital literacy skills, digital skills for the workforce (upskilling) and digital skills for ICT professions. The overarching vision is that “digital skills are driving economic growth and improving outcomes for the economy, business, individuals and communities.” There are three key priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Priority 1 – Creating the conditions for growth - ‘Transform’ the education landscape (PLACE).</li> <li>● Priority 2 – A productive workforce – ‘Innovate’ in business (BUSINESS).</li> <li>● Priority 3 – The workforce of tomorrow - ‘Inspire’ future generations (PEOPLE).</li> </ul>
<b>Activities</b>	The work of the DSP has been impacted by the absence of a Regional Coordinator for a number of months. Nonetheless, projects include Virtual Work Experience, Healthwave, Kit for Kids, and Tech Girls.
<b>Alignment</b>	The acting Regional Coordinator is part of the LEP skills team responsible for developing the SAP. The Chair of the DSP also attends the ESB, which is responsible for oversight of the SAP. Digital skills is embedded as one of 5 key priorities, principally ‘to create a step change in access to digital infrastructure, digital usage and digital skills across the area, supporting sectors, businesses and people to make the transition to a digital world’.

<b>South East DSP</b>	
<b>Key economic characteristics</b>	Of all businesses in the South East LEP, 97% are SMEs. The digital sector in Essex is significant, comprising 7,500 companies. The region is behind the national average with respect to skills level, particularly at Level 4 (29th out of 32 LEPs), while some neighbouring LEPs are within the top 10 (for example Hertfordshire). Work-based earnings rank 20th out of all LEPs, below Liverpool City Region, South East Midlands and Greater Birmingham. Skills levels are below the national average at all levels although the gap has reduced compared to previous years.
<b>Administrative structures</b>	South East is the largest LEP in the country outside London in terms of size and economic output. However, there are very different 'flavours' between the localities that make up the region, with the LEP encompassing the local authority areas of East Sussex, Essex, Kent, Medway, Southend and Thurrock.
<b>Date DSP established</b>	The DSP was launched in June 2019 and the DSP Regional Coordinator was in post from July 2019.
<b>Route to becoming a DSP</b>	The South East DSP was part of the second selection phase, following submission of an EOI.
<b>DSP Structure</b>	The DSP has co-chairs from Pfizer UK and the FSB. There is no formal ToR. The DSP consists of five working groups (aligned to priorities which were developed with the Board following a consultation / survey) which are led by a Board Member: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Alignment Between Education and Industry Need</li> <li>2. Support to Educators and Students</li> <li>3. Support to SMEs and Charities</li> <li>4. Digital Inclusion</li> <li>5. Development of a regional Digital Skills Prospectus</li> </ol>
<b>Vision and Objectives</b>	No formal vision has been developed and this is not something that has been pushed by the Regional Coordinator or Board, although the co-chairs are increasingly discussing the impact of the DSP and how to quantify this so a vision / objectives may be developed in the future.
<b>Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Gatekeeping</b> – this includes meeting and presenting at boards, business groups and business hubs, as well as passing contacts on to the Board.</li> <li>● <b>Promoting the DSP</b> – there has been an ambassadorial role, engagement, outreach, partnership working, and running of events.</li> <li>● <b>Influencing LEP</b> – such as skills/business support funds.</li> </ul>
<b>Alignment</b>	The DSP reports into the SAP Board every time they meet, and into the LEP Board annually. Several SAP members are also members of the DSP and in October 2020 there was a joint SAP and DSP Conference attended (virtually) by over 200 delegates. Moving forward, DSP meetings will be aligned with SAP meetings and there will be a closer relationship between the SE LEP Board and the DSP.

<b>West Yorkshire DSP</b>	
<b>Key economic characteristics</b>	West Yorkshire's economy comprises 2.3m people and includes major urban areas such as Leeds, Bradford, Huddersfield, Wakefield and Halifax, plus more remote rural areas. The CA has an important digital sector however productivity, qualification levels and earnings are below the national average
<b>Administrative structures</b>	The CA covers the local authority areas of Leeds, Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield. A devolution deal was agreed and the first Mayoral elections were held in May 2021. The AEB is to be devolved from August 2021.
<b>Date DSP established</b>	West Yorkshire is the most recently established DSP, having launched in October 2020. The Regional Coordinator has been in post since September 2020.
<b>Route to becoming a DSP</b>	Leeds City Region submitted an EOI to become a Local DSP but was (narrowly) unsuccessful in being selected by DCMS. Interest in the model was maintained and the Devolution Deal agreed with the West Yorkshire CA in 2020 included the establishment of a DSP.
<b>DSP Structure</b>	The DSP Board is co-chaired by the Finance Director of an aerospace manufacturing SME (who is also on the LEP Board) and a Further Education College Principal. Other Board members include national partners with a West Yorkshire presence, major local businesses (e.g. ASDA), local digital businesses and business representative organisations, education sector representatives, and charitable organisations. Four workstream groups are being established to agree priorities and develop action plans.
<b>Vision and Objectives</b>	The CA has a Digital Board which oversees the wide-ranging Digital Strategy. The DSP is the mechanism to deliver on the digital skills element of the strategy, rather than having its own distinct vision and objective. The four priorities agreed for the DSP are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Preventing Digital Exclusion</li> <li>● SME and Charity Digital Growth</li> <li>● Supporting Educators and Students to grow digital skills</li> <li>● Development of a regional skills prospectus and mapping of funding opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>Activities</b>	Activities to date include establishing the Board and workstream groups and agreeing areas of focus. Some pilot delivery has been underway ahead of the full roll-out from September 2021, including: digital skills training for SMEs / under-represented groups; collaboration with other DSPs on Google Digital Garage training; and work with DWP and local authorities to support the unemployed to gain the digital skills they need to secure work.
<b>Alignment</b>	The DSP reports to the Employment and Skills Board (SAP) and Digital Board and, via them, to the LEP Board and CA Board.

## Appendix B – Comparator areas

<b>North East LEP</b>	
<b>Key economic characteristics</b>	Whilst the digital sector has grown rapidly in the North East, overall economic performance lags behind the national average and the North East LEP area has a lower qualifications profile than England excluding London. Digital skills needs are evident across the North East's key sectors including the manufacturing, process and energy sectors
<b>Administrative structures</b>	North East LEP covers Durham County Council, the Tyne and Wear authorities (Newcastle, Sunderland, Gateshead, North Tyneside and South Tyneside) and Northumberland County Council. There are two Combined Authorities – North of Tyne (with devolved AEB) and North East Combined Authority.
<b>Background to Local DSP position</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed discussions were undertaken with DCMS prior to the submission of a joint EOI with Tees Valley CA, to create a pan-regional DSP.</li> <li>• The complex geography and administrative structures impacted on the coherence of the proposals.</li> </ul>
<b>What they have in place of a DSP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NE LEP has established a Digital Steering Group and recruited a Digital Sector Lead.</li> <li>• The LEP developed 'Digital for Growth', the North East's Digital Strategy. The Skills Lead reports progress on digital skills to the Steering Group, which includes FE and HE representation.</li> <li>• Similar structures are in place in other sectors – energy, advanced manufacturing, health and life sciences – but with ring-fenced funding for activity through Sector Deals, Made Smarter and UKRI.</li> <li>• The LEP is working with Barclays and Lloyds on digital skills, has submitted a bid for Bootcamp funding, and has influenced the use of devolved and non-devolved AEB to address digital skills needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Vision and objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital for Growth focuses on four immediate priorities: data; infrastructure and connectivity; digital collaboration and enterprise; and addressing the digital skills gap.</li> <li>• The Skills Lead worked closely with Digital Sector Lead to identify priorities. The SAP endorsed the skills element of Digital for Growth</li> </ul>
<b>View on the added value of a DCMS-funded Local DSP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A DSP enables a place-based approach to digital skills, and needs cross-departmental contribution to a flexible pot for digital skills provision.</li> <li>• Resources for a Regional Coordinator are welcome (i.e. £75,000 per annum) but not sufficient – a DSP would require significant associated funding to add value in the North East.</li> </ul>

<b>Humber DSP</b>	
<b>Key economic characteristics</b>	The importance of digital skills to the Humber economy is highlighted in the SAP-funded deep dive research. There is a risk of automation having a significant impact on employment levels, whilst digital skills are crucial to key Humber growth sectors including energy, advanced manufacturing, and logistics.
<b>Administrative structures</b>	Humber LEP, which covered the north and south bank of the Humber, closed in March 2021. A new Hull and East Riding (HEY) LEP has been established and Lincolnshire authorities have joined Greater Lincolnshire LEP. HEY LEP is one of the smallest LEPs.
<b>Background to Local DSP position</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although the Humber ESB was very interested in the concept, Humber was not in a position to bid when EOIs were invited, as key partners were not able to commit to the DSP.</li> </ul>
<b>What they have in place of a DSP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The LEP maintained their interest in the DSP model and after the SAP research confirmed the importance of digital skills, LEP reserves were used to establish an 'independent' DSP and fund a part-time Regional Coordinator post for a fixed term.</li> <li>The DSP Board is chaired by the University of Hull's Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education and brings together public, private and education organisations to help increase the digital capability of individuals and organisations in the Humber.</li> <li>Three sub-groups are producing a digital skills manifesto (a mapping of provision), a self-assessment tool (for use with businesses to identify digital skills needs) and case studies to engage and illustrate the transformational effects of digital on organisations.</li> </ul>
<b>Vision and objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To raise the digital skill level in the Humber area by raising the level of ambition of employers, employees, residents and training providers to engage with digital skills.</li> <li>The aim is to deliver tangible outcomes within 12 months to inform decisions about further funding.</li> </ul>
<b>View on the added value of a DCMS-funded Local DSP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Humber DSP was deliberately modelled on the DCMS model.</li> <li>Being a 'DCMS DSP' would add value through connections to major digital corporate organisations, and to the wider DSP network (although this has been accessed through the West Yorkshire Regional Coordinator).</li> <li>Resource for the Regional Coordinator post would be very valuable – it is currently being funded from LEP reserves but this cannot be sustained in the medium-term.</li> </ul>

<b>New Anglia LEP</b>	
<b>Key economic characteristics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The population is projected to grow by 11% between now and 2038.</li> <li>• Growth in median annual wages has been above the national average.</li> <li>• Over 100,000 jobs need to be filled between now and 2024 due to people leaving the workforce.</li> <li>• Digital Tech accounts for 4% of GVA (£1.4bn), 24,000 jobs (3%) and 4,400 enterprises (7%). GVA per digital job is £58,100.</li> </ul>
<b>Administrative structures</b>	The LEP covers Norwich City Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Suffolk County Council, Norfolk County Council, and Breckland Council.
<b>Background to Local DSP position</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The LEP worked very closely with DCMS and a Business Network to develop a DSP proposal as they were overseeing the sector skills plan for digital.</li> <li>• The LEP wanted to be a DSP to secure funding for the post (they saw this as crucial). The LEP recognise they have not progressed as much as they could because of this, but this is still something they want to explore and are hoping the LEP review may help with resourcing this going forward. The LEP saw the DSP as an opportunity to help them to achieve their aspirations for growth in the economy and wanted to share best practice, and in their proposal said they would lead this for the LEP Network as a whole – not just DSP areas.</li> </ul>
<b>What they have in place of a DSP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The LEP Skills Board worked with sector partners to develop skills plans for the key growth and employment sectors in the region, identifying the main skills needs and agreed actions to help meet these needs (digital is one of 15 reports).</li> <li>• Evidence packs for each of the above have been produced and complement the LEP's Economic Strategy evidence.</li> <li>• A Digital Tech Skills Plan (the first regional tech skills plan in the UK) has been developed by the ICT / Digital Tech Sector, in partnership with the New Anglia Skills Board.</li> <li>• In response to this report, the New Anglia Digital Tech Skills Taskforce was established – led by Tech East (ICT and digital body for the region).</li> </ul>
<b>Vision and objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The LEP has three strategic opportunities which link to three sectors. ICT and digital is one of those sectors, agri-food and clean energy are the others.</li> <li>• The DSP proposal stated three priorities: accelerate digital research and innovation; stimulate wider industry growth through digital skills; and provide the foundation of basic digital skills required for inclusive growth.</li> </ul>
<b>View on the added value of a DCMS-funded Local DSP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Regional Coordinator role – the LEP wants to embed digital in everything they do, but it is hard to do that when there is no-one 'pushing it'. However, there is also a sense that the LEP have just carried on anyway.</li> </ul>

## Appendix C – DSP roles and activities

### Roles:

Intelligence and data gathering  
Stakeholder engagement  
Raising the profile of digital skills

Building local capacity  
Encouraging collaboration

Developing and delivering projects  
Influencing mainstream provision

### Activities

#### *Inclusion:*

- Distributing devices to vulnerable / excluded people – 50+, schools children, disabled
- Working with organisations to reach the digitally excluded – Housing Associations, Jobcentre Plus, Local Authorities etc
- Working with organisations looking to increase use of digital e.g. NHS

#### *Supporting Job Search and Career Change:*

- Online and virtual job fairs
- Opportunities portal – online job funder
- Partnership with Jobcentre Plus
- Careers Expos

#### *Developing Digital Skills through different funding streams and programmes including:*

- Digital Skills Innovation Fund
- Fast Track
- Digital Bootcamps (DfE funded)
- Code Nation Bootcamps
- ESF Funding
- Coursera online provision
- Private sector provision e.g. Lloyds Digital Knowhow

#### *Engaging and developing the future workforce (careers / digital skills in education):*

- Providing information on digital careers / opportunities e.g. Teen Tech, Careers Expos, Industry Insight days
- Liaising with schools, colleges etc to help them to integrate digital skills and provide Continuous Professional Development
- Developing new online approaches to assessment
- Virtual work experience

#### *Business Support:*

- Amazon Small Business Accelerator
- Digital Boost (mentoring)
- Google Digital Garage
- Creative Crowdfunder
- Virtual Town Takeover
- ERDF funding for digital sector businesses

#### *Promoting diversity in digital:*

- In recruitment to tech roles e.g. Tech Talent Charter
- Diversity and inclusions in schools
- TecGirls project



## Appendix D – Case studies

## Aligning the Cheshire and Warrington DSP with local governance arrangements

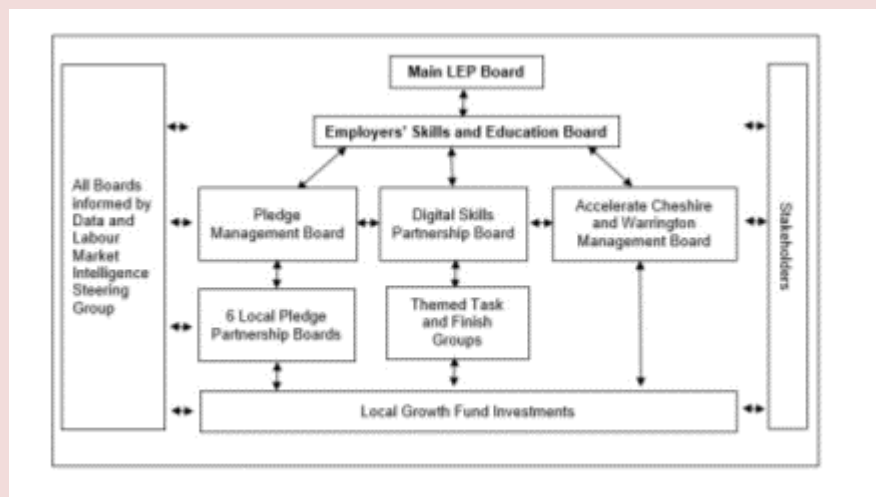


The overarching vision for the Cheshire and Warrington DSP is simply ‘to spread the word about the importance of digital’. One board member commented “*you can have the best companies in the world, with the best technology, but if you don’t influence how the skills are delivered, and what businesses know about those opportunities, then you are never going to open up the possibilities, and I think that’s what we’ve achieved*”.

A clear decision was made at the outset to deliver the ambition through training, case studies, role models, events and through existing programmes and partnerships.

The organizational chart demonstrates how the DSP is integrated into the existing partnership arrangements. This required a clear understanding of the existing operating environment, to identify how and where the DSP could add value.

There are clear reporting lines from the ESB (Cheshire and Warrington’s SAP) to the three thematic partnerships: **The Pledge** - which aims to inspire the next generation; **Accelerate** - a £30m programme focusing on reskilling and upskilling; and the **DSP** - which sits in the middle to demonstrate how digital skills run through all sectors.



The Local Growth Fund underpins all activity, and £5m has been allocated to the Pledge and Accelerate Programmes to deliver digital skills. Relevant data and labour market intelligence informs all partnership structures, and stakeholders are consulted where required. Alignment of the DSP with the local skills agenda maximises impact through:

- increased business confidence in the work of the Pledge and Accelerate boards because of the digital skills partnership’s expertise
- rationalised partnerships/initiatives and alignment with existing programmes, bringing a new level of coherence and coordination
- improved partnership working and collaboration within existing programmes
- embedding digital skills into all sectors

## Securing external funding to deliver digital skills



The Heart of the South West's award-winning Digital Skills Partnership (DSP) was launched in June 2018, bringing together the public, private and third sector to tackle the digital skills divide in Somerset, Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.

Since its inception, the DSP's 25 core partners, including key local employers and digital leaders such as the Met Office, UKHO, BT, Bluescreen IT, Cosmic, Microsoft and Leonardo Helicopters, have worked together to champion local digital skills development and delivery through a shared approach.

The partnership has delivered an evidence-based Action Plan based on the 2018 research base 'The Use and Provision of Digital Skills in the Heart of the South West'. This has seen the partnership drive forward the following projects and secure a number of successful external funding sources:

- **Bounce Back Digital** - during the Covid-19 national lockdown 800+ businesses were supported with online tutorials through 'Bounce Back Digital' a programme designed to help businesses digitally upskill and embrace and adapt to working online.
- **Lloyds Bank, Google, Microsoft** – this partnership has been successful in attracting national digital skills programmes into the region reaching 700+ businesses; and bringing Microsoft's 'Make a Champion' event, previously only run in their Reading HQ to Exeter and Plymouth to engage with 100+ female pupils.
- **Digital Momentum** - £250,000 to deliver Digital Momentum a 12-month programme which supported 194 women and individuals from deprived wards to pivot into the digital sector through digital skills programs in cyber, software, data and digital for business.
- **Digital Ambition** - £95,000 to deliver (in conjunction with the Careers Hub) 'Raising Digital Engagement at KS3'. This programme seeks to increase the pipeline of students who go into to take digital options by testing which extra digital activities at KS3 stimulate and inspire pupils to take digital subject options at KS4.
- **Nesta** - £50,000 to be part of the Nesta Career Ed-tech finalist programme and develop an app to support mature workers whose roles are at risk of automation to pivot through training to roles more resilient to economic downturn and automation
- **Train4Tomorrow** - £2.2m secured as part of the pilot wave of six areas delivering digital and technical bootcamps through the DfE led National Skills Fund. The resulting project Train4Tomorrow will enable 1000 individuals to access 12 week digital or technical bootcamps co-designed with employers that map to known skills shortage vacancies in well paid roles.

As a result of work carried out to date, the Digital Skills Partnership was awarded the Tech South West 'Community' winners award in 2020.

## Local DSP work with national partners: Tech Talent Charter



Tech Talent Charter (TTC) is a non-profit organisation which seeks to promote diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the digital sector and digital roles. TTC's goal is that the UK tech sector reflects society; however, currently women, people from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background and people with a disability are under-represented within the tech workforce overall and particularly in senior positions. TTC was established in 2016 by organisations working across the recruitment, tech and social enterprise fields, and is supported by DCMS.

TTC curates an open playbook of best practice and toolkits which companies can use to improve their D&I practice. TTC raises the profile of D&I within the sector, offers organisational benchmarking so employers can assess their own performance, and can also develop bespoke support where required. The intention is both to address the talent shortage in tech, which arises partly because not all of the talent pool is being accessed by most employers, but also to support businesses to develop better products and services through more diverse teams, having a positive impact on the bottom line, as well as creating social value. Generally, businesses begin to experience the benefits of improved D&I within one year of committing to the Charter.

TTC does not see itself as a delivery organisation or provider of training. It operates as a business-to-business network, which works through partners to engage with businesses on the ground. Many of the organisations which have signed up to the Charter are London-based, larger companies. The Local DSPs present an opportunity for TTC to increase its local reach and engage with smaller businesses.

TTC is one of the many digital skills partner organisations which has been introduced to the Local DSPs by DCMS at the monthly Regional Coordinator meetings. To date, TTC has worked most closely with Lancashire and the South East:

- **South East DSP** – the approach has been light touch but successful, with the Local DSP promoting TTC's existing support and toolkits through its events and mailing list
- **Lancashire DSP** - a more intensive and bespoke approach has been developed to help companies to build a more inclusive culture. This has included workshops with local companies, use of a facilitator to develop similar approaches for new companies, and provision of support from Central Lancashire University to help local businesses implement the agreed approach.

Working with the two Local DSPs highlighted the need for different approaches tailored to the circumstances in each local area. In some cases, the Local DSP's role is to simply raise awareness of existing provision and help businesses to take advantage of it; while in others, more bespoke support is needed to fill gaps in provision.

**Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Crowdfunder Campaign**



**'Connect Cornwall's kids with the kit they need'**

At the start of the Pandemic, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly DSP launched a crowdfunding campaign to provide hundreds of children with the kit they needed to access online learning. Despite 500 laptops being provided by the Department for Education, estimates suggested there were approximately 2,000 children in the region without access to a computer or affordable data putting them at risk of falling behind in their education.

The DSP teamed up with Newquay-based Crowdfunder, Cornwall Council and local businesses to launch the 'Kit4Kids' campaign to help bridge the gap. The campaign requested support from businesses, community organisations and individuals to raise a minimum of £75k to buy laptops and data dongles for Cornish primary and secondary schools to loan to families in need, with £200 being enough to provide a laptop.

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) kicked off the campaign with a £20,000 contribution, enough to provide 100 laptops. Frances Brennan, who chairs the LEP's employment and skills board, said: *"Digital inclusion is vital to give our young people the opportunities they deserve which is why we have asked our Digital Skills Partnership to lead this campaign and have pledged enough funding to buy 100 laptops". This equipment will help deal with immediate home-schooling issues and create a legacy by bridging the digital divide for hundreds of children and their families long after the pandemic is over. Now more than ever we need to support families to have full access to online learning and they should not have to choose between food, heating or educating their children.*"

Caitlin Gould, chair of the DSP said: *"At the Digital Skills partnership we understand that access to computers isn't just about learning technical skills for digital jobs, its about learning how to use the tools all people will need to do any job in the future. With the Pandemic, we also learned that for children digital skills and digital access can be a barrier to even the basic levels of education and engagement with their classmates and teachers. The ability for families to have laptops and access to the internet in their home will help ensure students across Cornwall aren't left behind. It will also help parents and carers to connect with schools for critical updates, find support from local community groups and create new opportunities for family learning. It isn't just a laptop, it's a lifeline that can make staying home and staying safe possible."*

Kit4Kids was supported by Crowdfunder which waived its usual fees and launched similar campaigns in other parts of the country. Founder Rob Love said: *"It's great to see so many people – including parents, friends, family and local businesses – coming together to get hundreds of children the kit they need to access vital online learning resources. Crowdfunder is delighted to bring this all together in one place with the LEP's backing and will be making a matched donation of up to £4k as an additional contribution."*

## West Midlands Private Sector-led Board – providing a ‘voice for business’



The DSP in the West Midlands differs from the other DSPs in several ways. The DSP covers the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) geography, taking in three LEP areas (Greater Birmingham and Solihull, the Black Country and Coventry and Warwickshire) and was the only Combined Authority until the West Yorkshire DSP was established in autumn 2020.

The DSP was established as part of the Skills Devolution Deal which WMCA agreed with Government in 2018. The Deal included £5m of funding for digital skills pilot activity (the Digital Re-Training Fund, DRF) to test new ways of equipping the region’s workers for current and future local jobs, highlighting another differential with the other Local DSPs. At the time of establishment, the WMCA DSP already had a significant sum of money dedicated to delivering digital skills activity, and the CA wanted to ensure that the funding responded to employer needs. The specific roles included:

- guiding the work on higher level digital skills
- advising on the scope of the DRF, reviewing bids and bootcamp performance
- influencing peers within the business network to recognise the importance of digital skills and encourage the take up of bootcamp graduates

The West Midlands DSP was therefore established with a very specific remit, more tightly defined than the other Local DSPs. Work on digital inclusion, essential digital skills and engaging young people in digital is picked up by other groups.

This influenced the membership of the Board, which is predominantly the private sector, including multi-national corporate businesses, smaller local tech companies plus representatives from the education sector. Board members are senior, credible figures within the industry, with an ability to influence other sector peers and investment.

In considering the progress made on digital skills in the West Midlands, it is difficult to differentiate between the CA and the DSP. The CA was already committed to innovation and doing things differently in addressing digital skills challenges. However, the DSP has added value by bringing credible industry insight to the design of the DRF and promotion to the wider sector. On the advice of the DSP, a diverse set of providers was selected to deliver the bootcamp training with only four of the 21 already part of the AEB provider group. *“They provide really relevant industry content that we wouldn’t get from anywhere else”*

As the DRF funding comes to an end and activities are mainstreamed into AEB delivery, the Board is revisiting its Terms of Reference to assess how it can add value. This includes greater promotion of the digital skills provision and drawing together personal and organisational networks for the benefit of the region as a whole.

## Building capacity and influencing existing provision



One of the ways in which Local DSPs can have an impact on digital skills is by building capacity and influencing existing skills provision in the area. This approach is beneficial and has the potential for a longer term, more sustainable impact as it is not dependent on securing time limited external funding.

An example is provided by Lancashire DSP's work with Lancashire Adult Learning (LAL), one of the UK's largest adult and community learning providers, who work with 200+ partners to deliver 2,000 courses to over 14,500 learners from 300+ venues across the county.

LAL's learners have very diverse motivations for learning and come from a wide range of backgrounds. Their vision is to enable all adults in Lancashire, to learn something new and shape their own futures.

LAL works closely with Lancashire's Skills and Employment Hub, which hosts the Local DSP's Regional Coordinator, so became aware of the Local DSP soon after it was established. The LAL team have a close working relationship with the Regional Coordinator and examples of how the Local DSP has influenced delivery include:

- Using the findings from the Local DSP's digital skills landscape research to inform the re-design of LAL's digital curriculum, providing evidence of its relevance to Ofsted.
- Making connections with new organisations through the Local DSP's digital inclusion sub-group.
- Being one of three local providers involved in delivering Freeformers training to over 2000 Lancashire residents, upskilling people who had limited digital skills and increasing their digital confidence. This included upskilling LAL staff who were then able to deliver the training themselves to others.
- Promoting LAL's digital inclusion offer to over 130 partner organisations whose clients may have digital skills needs, through a specific event which the Regional Coordinator helped to promote. These partners included health services, Borough Councils, voluntary / community sector, employers, GPs, social prescribers, housing associations, and Jobcentre Plus.

Overall, the LAL consultees concluded:

*"We could have done some of it without the Local DSP, but the impact wouldn't have been as great, as our reach wouldn't have been as wide without the Local DSP. For our digital launch, we have had a much better response than other things in the past. We know that organisations are signing up because [the Regional Coordinator] has sent it to them."*

## Harnessing the interest of partners and stakeholders



The South East DSP is the largest of the six initial Local DSP areas. It covers a population of 4.2m people, across Kent, Essex, East Sussex, Medway, Southend and Thurrock. There are over 177,000 businesses in the area, employing some 1.9m people. It is estimated that 1.3m people across the Local DSP area lack digital skills.

Despite the scale and complexity of its diverse geography, the South East DSP has successfully engaged a large number of partners and stakeholders with an interest in digital skills.

Over 130 people attended the DSP's launch in 2019 with 120 subsequently signing up to the Working Groups. The DSP's Steering Group is made up of 41 organisations from the private, public, voluntary and education sectors. It is co-chaired by senior leaders from Pfizer UK and the Federation of Small Businesses, reflecting the DSP's success in engaging businesses of all sizes, from global corporations to small local tech businesses.

Following an initial survey and consultations, the Steering Group identified five priorities: supporting SMEs; supporting educators and students; supporting residents; ensuring alignment between education and industry; and the development of a South East Digital Skills Prospectus. Working Groups have been established to take forward activity in each of these areas.

In the absence of significant funding for digital skills activity in the South East to date, the Regional Coordinator has drawn on the skills and enthusiasm of the volunteer Working Group members to take forward the DSP's priorities. This has been achieved by aligning the DSP's ask of the volunteer members to their day jobs, ensuring that they see practical benefits from the time they invest in the DSP.

The five Working Group Leads and Co-Chairs of the DSP convene as the DSP 'Board', with a wider group of partners and stakeholders from across the South East invited to observe their discussions. The DSP and Working Group members act as very effective ambassadors for the DSP, with good awareness of the Partnership and a keen interest in its activities.

Bringing together such a large group of diverse stakeholders with a shared interest in digital skills has created "*fertile ground for conversations*" and encouraged collaborations which might not otherwise have occurred. Through the work of the Regional Coordinator, the DSP has also effectively connected people and organisations who might otherwise have been operating "*in silos*". The South East DSP has encouraged the development of a shared purpose between a wide range of organisations working across the digital skills agenda, giving a clear focus to digital skills activity in the region.