Digital Skills Blueprint

A Guide for Providers

West Midlands Combined Authority

Good Things Foundation

# Contents

Who is this guide for?

This guide will help providers to better understand the barriers West Midland residents face to getting online and should provide useful insights on how to support residents with their digital journeys.

It will also provide guidance on how to use the new Curriculum Framework, co-designed with Good Things Foundation, to promote a highly personalised approach to digital skills support, focused around a resident's skills needs.

The Co-Design Process

We ran workshops, 1:1 interviews and an online consultation with a range of stakeholders. They told us about their successes, and the problems and barriers they face in supporting digitally excluded residents.

We developed a branching curriculum framework based on typical personas of digitally excluded residents and shared these with stakeholders to ensure our recommendations were created around lived experiences.
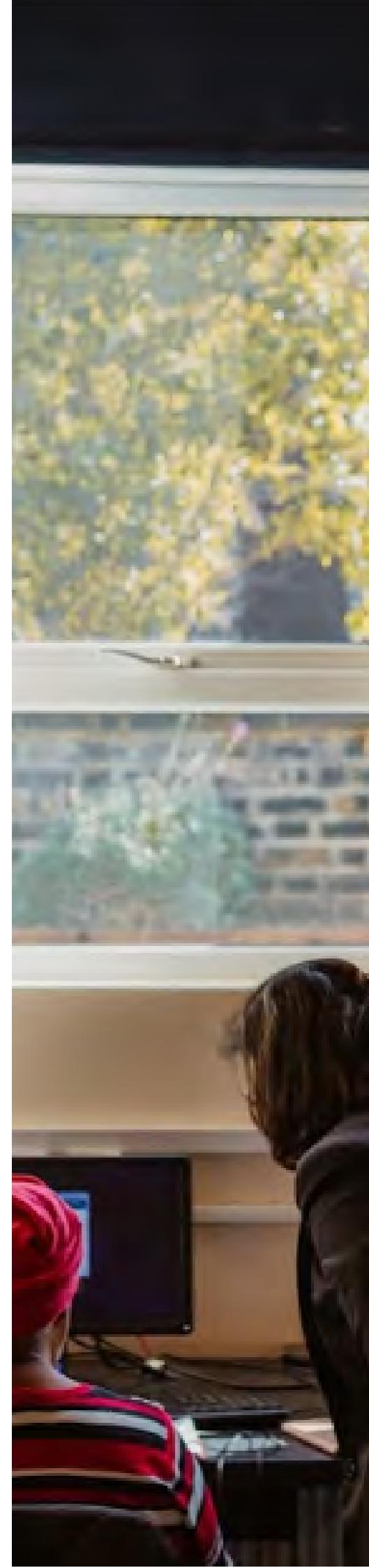
Digital Skills Pathways

Building on the Pathways work developed through the UKCRF Digital Futures Project, we designed a curriculum framework for basic digital skills that could be delivered to residents by Community Organisations, Adult Community Education providers and FE Colleges - providing a stepping off point for residents onto higher level journeys, including; further learning, employment, and digital confidence in the use of online services.

Drawing on Good Thing's experience, three personas were created that typified the profiles of digitally excluded residents.

This resulted in three branching pathways - linked to a residents stated goals;
- Employment;
- Learning;
- Personal and Social Development.

In our consultation, all stakeholders recognised the potential of these pathways to deliver both social and economic value to the region, as well as improving the lives of residents.
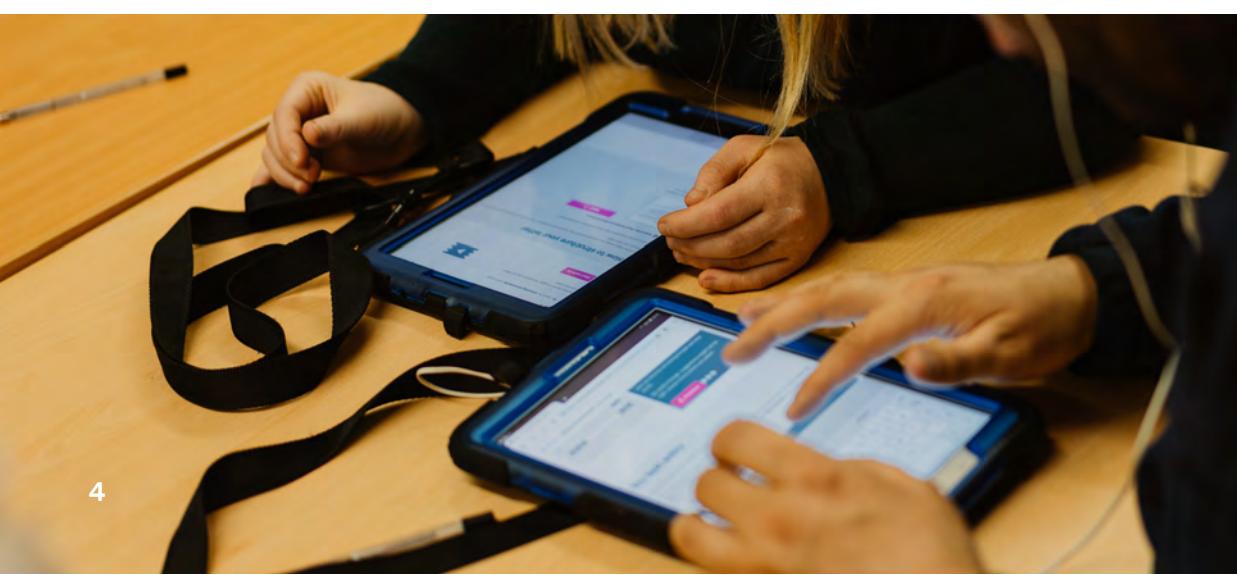
Personas

Ibrahim: No skills, No access

Goals
- To come off benefits and get into work
- To search for and apply for jobs online
- To support his children with homework

- 45 He/Him
- In rented accommodation
- Unemployed
- Universal credit

Overview
- Originally from outside UK
- Has no access to computers and no digital skills

Needs
- A National Insurance number to work
- Basic needs: food, clothing and accommodation
- Sense of belonging
- Encouragement, emotional and financial support

Behaviours
- Shy and unsure
- Low self-confidence
- Taking an ESOL class
- Rarely used the internet
- May have to relocate

Barriers
- Language barriers
- Poor mental health
- Unaware of support
- Cash poor
- No access to a device
- Internet affordability

Opportunities
- Offer device and data
- Refer to specialist services
- Provide language support
- Support to learn digital skills in community
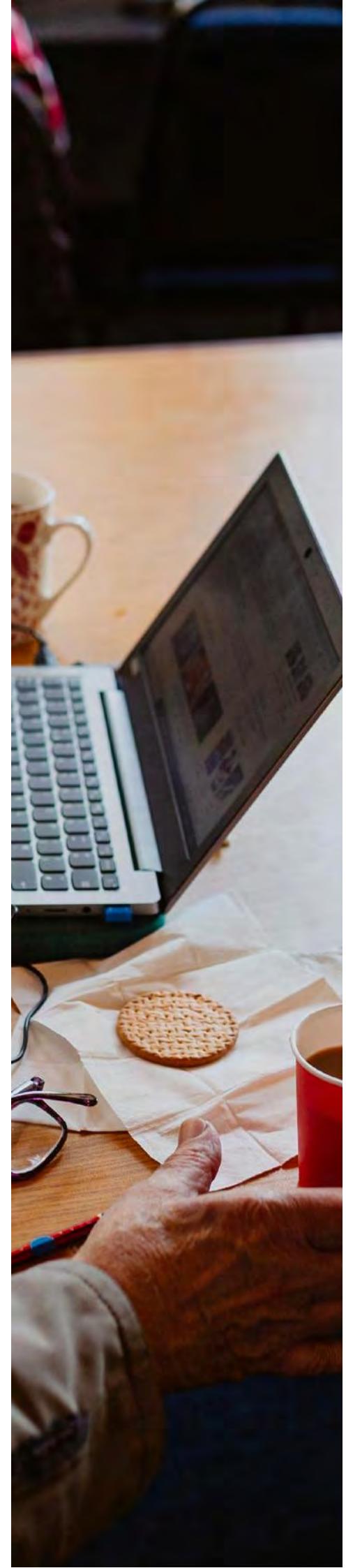
Fatima: No skills, Some access

Goals
- To use the internet to book appointments online
- To access support groups
- To get involved in her children's education

- 36 She/Her
- Council property
- Economically inactive
- Benefit dependent due to long-term health condition

Overview
- Originally from outside UK
- Has long-term health issues
- Family has access to a computer but no digital skills
- Suspicious of the internet

Needs
- Access to support remotely
- Access to digital services
- Social contact
- Motivation and confidence to learn new skills

Behaviours
- Low self-esteem from ongoing health issues
- Texts and calls on smartphone and Wifi at home
- Children carry out online tasks for her

Barriers
- Limited mobility
- Low income (disability benefits)
- Childcare responsibilities
- Limited English skills

Opportunities
- Offer remote support
- Offer connected device
- Offer personalised support
- Provide social contact, peer support
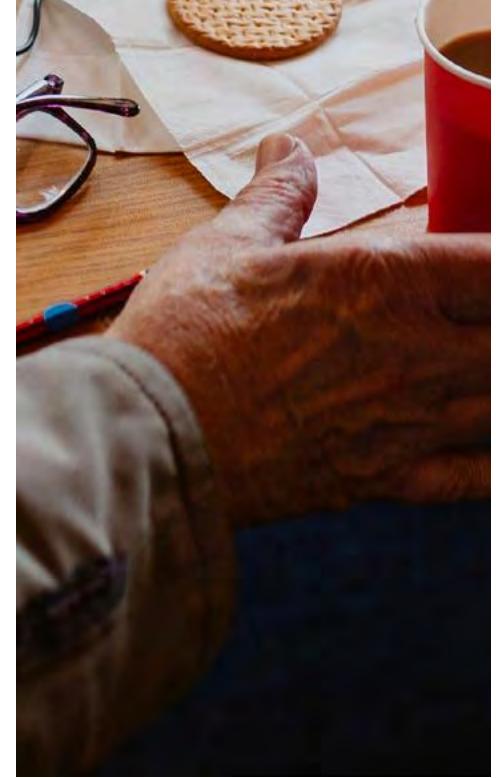
Erika : Some skills, Some access

Goals
- Career advancement - looking for a permanent role with progression
- Opportunities to learn on the job and apply for managerial roles

30 She/Her

Rented accommodation

Retail Assistant (Temp)

£18,000 per year

Overview
- Has access to a device at home and basic digital skills
- Limited IT use at work

Needs
- CV and LinkedIn profile creation
- Digital upskilling

Behaviours
- Uses internet on tablet
- Lacks collaboration and leadership skills
- Uses social media
- Has never used LinkedIn
- Bad experience of school, low grades

Barriers
- Busy schedule/time poor
- Lacks digital skills with computers
- Lack of confidence to return to learn
- Cash-poor, struggling to pay living costs and for connectivity

Opportunities
- Offer support with building a CV and joining professional networks
- Offer flexible learning opportunities
- Offer advice and guidance

Based on these personas the Curriculum Framework was developed at three levels: Starter; Novice; Ready to Progress.

At the final level these the skills become contextualised into the three Pathways
- Learning
- Employability
- Personal & Social Development
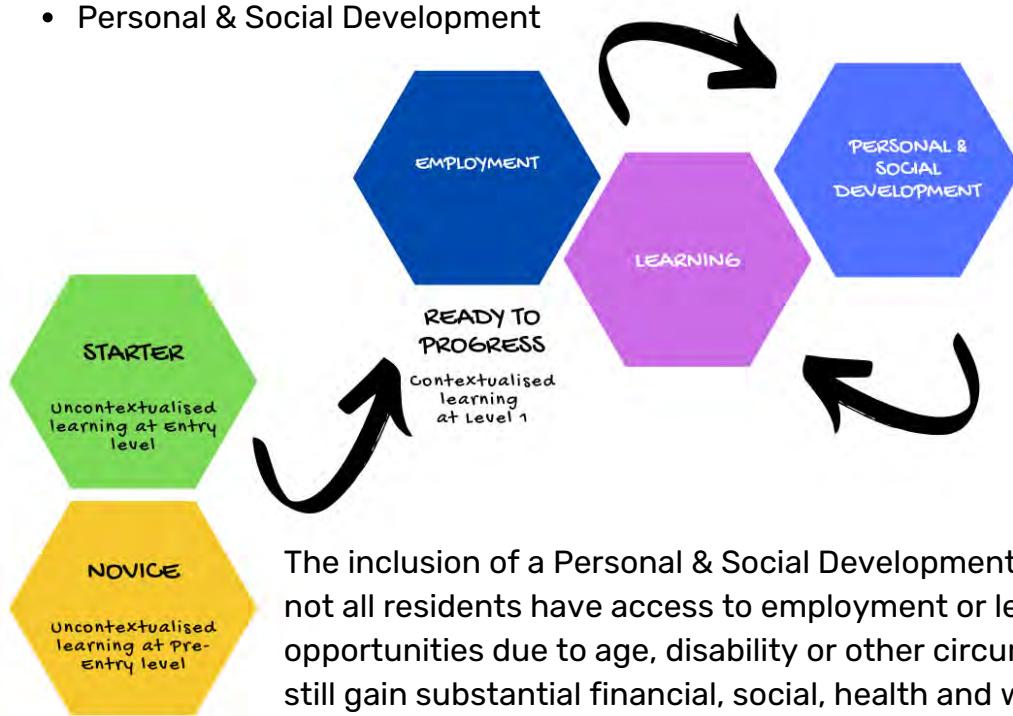
The inclusion of a Personal & Social Development recognises that not all residents have access to employment or learning opportunities due to age, disability or other circumstances, but can still gain substantial financial, social, health and wellbeing benefits from being online.

Engagement and Meeting Needs

It is important to understand that each person has their own digital skills journey with a unique entry point.

In this section we explore our personas in more detail and how providers might help engage residents with these needs.

DIGITAL NEEDS

Motivation to get online · Support to learn digital skills · A device · A data package
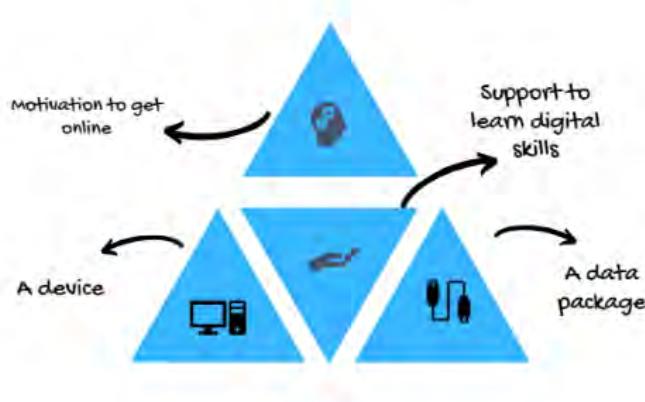
Engagement activity needs to create a desire to get online, provide the means to do so, and allow residents to gain the skills and confidence they need to develop digital skills.

All these factors are important ingredients of a future blueprint. Digital Skills support is at the heart of our pyramid of needs.

On the next few pages we will explore what providers have told us are the essential ingredients of an engagement offer and how they relate to the personas we have created.

Belonging

Create a sense of community connection with learners who may feel isolated.

Provide an environment where people feel safe to help them create strong connections with peers and staff who can support them on their learning journey.

Empathy

Seek to understand people's backgrounds and goals to help them plan their future.

Provide support and advice to help overcome other barriers, including financial ones.

Offer encouragement, and celebrate success at all stages of their journey.

Trusted Place & Face

Provide support in community venues, which are accessible via public transport.

Focus on building trust with tutors and peers.

Help to overcome misconceptions around digital and the internet- feeling safe online is essential before digital skills can be built upon.

Flexibility

Provide flexible support as and when it's needed - to fit around a their busy life.

Offer support where residents are - In libraries, one stop shops, job centres & food banks.

Use peers as learning mentors - to provide language support or to guide them to interesting content.

Empowerment

Empower individuals to realise their full potential - building learners confidence to progress.

Provide a connected device - Help residents gain access to quality and affordable equipment and data to continue their journey and reduce their reliance on you as a provider.

Some Access, Some Skills

Overcoming barriers such as: language, basic survival needs, emotional safety, digital skills and better access to technology.

Offer support by:

- Ensuring that basic needs are met before digital skills can start to be built.
- Creating a safe space in which to learn.
- Encouraging connection and support from staff and peers.
- Allowing space and giving encouragement to start building confidence.

Some Access, No Skills

Overcoming distrust for computers, as well as internet safety and privacy concerns. They receive holistic and personalised support to help them gain digital confidence and meet their life skills goals.

Offer support by:

- Making access to learning as simple as possible and offering remote support.
- Showing how to use the internet safely to manage their day to day lives.
- Understanding and maintaining control of their privacy helps them feel safer learning new digital skills.

Some Access, Some Skills

Through reassurance and encouragement they progress to a level of digital independence to learn online and progress at work.

Offer support by:

- Reassuring them they will be supported at all points on their learning journey.
- Encouraging them to take charge of their career and learning.
- Empathising with their wider challenges.
- Offering emotional support - beyond teaching skills.

Motivations will not often be expressed as a desire to learn digital skills - taking a 'do one thing' approach, often for a particular purpose, is vital in motivating residents to start their journey.

Evidence suggests most people will wish to build their skills beyond the basics, given the the encouragement and the opportunity to do so.

Turning Barriers into Opportunities

The main barriers residents might face to digital inclusion

- Lack of access to connected devices
- Lack of trust with technology
- Uncertainty and lack of confidence
- Lack of language and low reading level in English
- Feeling unsafe online
- No idea what steps to take, and in what order
- Scared to do the wrong thing
- Learning digital might not be a priority in order to survive
- Time poor and cannot commit to regular course times
- Cannot afford travel costs to get support

Some ways in which providers can help overcome these barriers:

- Offer connected devices with data to support building skills
- Simple (not childish) language in content - use of visuals
- Flexibility to learn online and offline
- Personalised support
- Hands-on experiential support
- Bespoke learning plans
- Collaboration with statutory services
- Refer onto Basic Maths and English training
- Mental health support
- Online safety classes
- Financial support for transport and food

Do other local organisations know about the services you can offer?

Doing a partnership audit will help you understand more about the referral partnerships you have in place and how to make the most of these. Use these heading to start your audit:

- Community groups - all groups from Mother and Baby through to Faith groups
- Food Banks
- Social prescribers
- Doctors
- Neighbourhood elderly support groups
- Job centres
- One stops
- Local Adult Education Providers

Partnership working across providers is vital

To ensure all those who are in contact with a resident who lacks basic digital skills can signpost them to appropriate support we need a 'no wrong door strategy'. This will ensure residents who are digitally excluded will get the support they need, and a warm hand-over.

All organisations have a role to play, those in the community, those funded through Adult Education budgets and wider stakeholders. Creating partnerships across agencies and organisations takes significant resources and time but is key to successful implementation.

Digital Skills Support

Mixed Economy of Provision

One size doesn't fit all. Residents who are experiencing both social and digital exclusion and who have had a negative experience of compulsory education, are unlikely to start their journey toward digital inclusion by signing up for a qualification.

Formal & Informal

Support needs to be both formal and informal to allow residents with different levels of skills and prior experience to start their journey in a location, and at a time and a pace, that is right for them. This may include taking support to residents through outreach.

Personalised

Support needs to be personalised - offered one to one and through small group sessions. Accessible provision needs to be available for those with specific needs with the equipment and specialist software to enable them to develop the skills they need.

Recruitment and training of staff and volunteers

Staff

Providing sufficiently qualified and trained staff to meet the demand for digital skills support is a challenge.

Many providers experience difficulty in recruiting sufficiently qualified staff at agreed salary levels, and minimum qualification expectations, to 'teach' across their digital programmes.

Volunteers

Volunteers are a vital part of providing cost-effective one to one and small group support for some providers - acting as 'peer mentors' or 'learning guides'.

There are still significant costs in recruiting, training and managing a volunteer workforce but providing access to high-quality online content and Ambassador training can help.

Curriculum Framework

The Framework we have designed contains units - with the ability for a resident to start anywhere, and take any journey through the units which meet their needs.

The Framework is built around a number of principles.
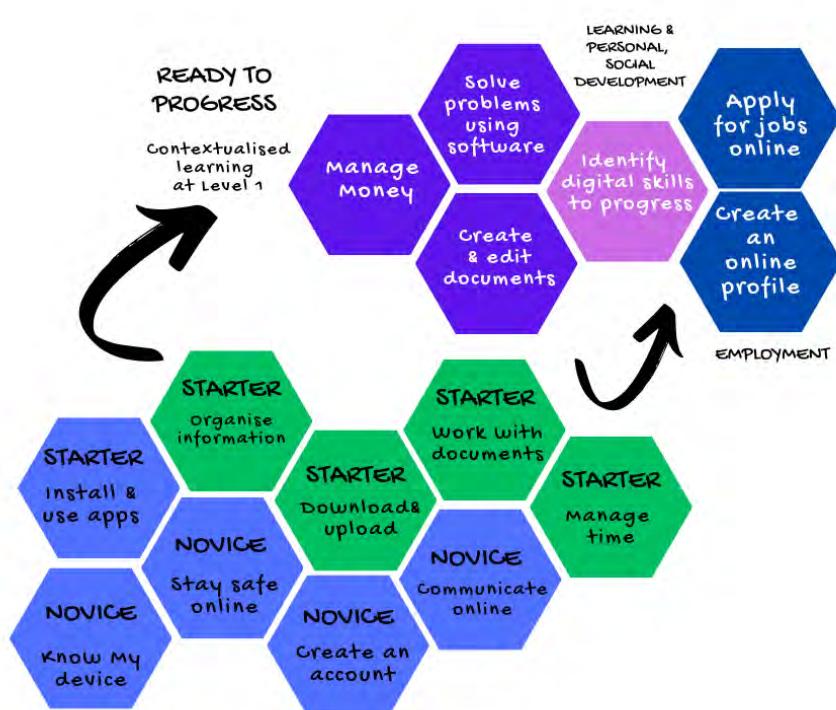
CURRICULUM PRINCIPLES

Pick and mix

A pick and mix approach to units with no defined start and end point, unlike a qualification.

Accessable

Creating units around a series of 'Can do' statements, simplifying the language, and framing in terms of experiences and application of skills, rather than knowledge.

Levelled

Using three levels, but making the first two levels; Novice and Starter uncontextualized - recognising these form the building blocks for the final level.

Branching

Creating branching pathways at the final level; Ready to Progress, where the units and 'can do' statements reflect the chosen pathway, and a personalised learner journey.

'I like this breakdown. It puts real life situations into levels. It is clear to see what types of skills are considered novice, starter and ready to progress, and allows more of an opportunity to work at a suitable pace.' (Consultation Response, March 2023)

Identifying Skills Gaps

Before starting residents on their journey it is useful to identify their digital skills so you provide the right support and signpost them to content that will meet their needs.

There are lots of commercially available tools to do this, but for individuals with low or no skills there is a simpler approach -

- Ask questions about what they are able to do now;
- Undertake a practical assessment of everyday digital tasks, like downloading an App.

Don't know where to start?

There are a number of freely available tools which help with identifying basic digital skills needs.

For residents with low to no skills providers may need to support learners to complete them.

SCVOs Essential Digital Skills Checker is a useful tool which is available free of charge and includes three checkers, one for basic skills, one for life skills and one for work skills.

In the following pages we go back to our personas to explore their journeys through our curriculum.

Learner Journeys

Ibrahim's Journey
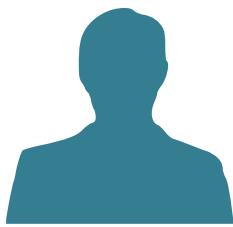
Goals
- To come off benefits and get into work
- To search for and apply for jobs online
- To support his children with homework

Ibrahim's Journey is shown by the coloured blocks
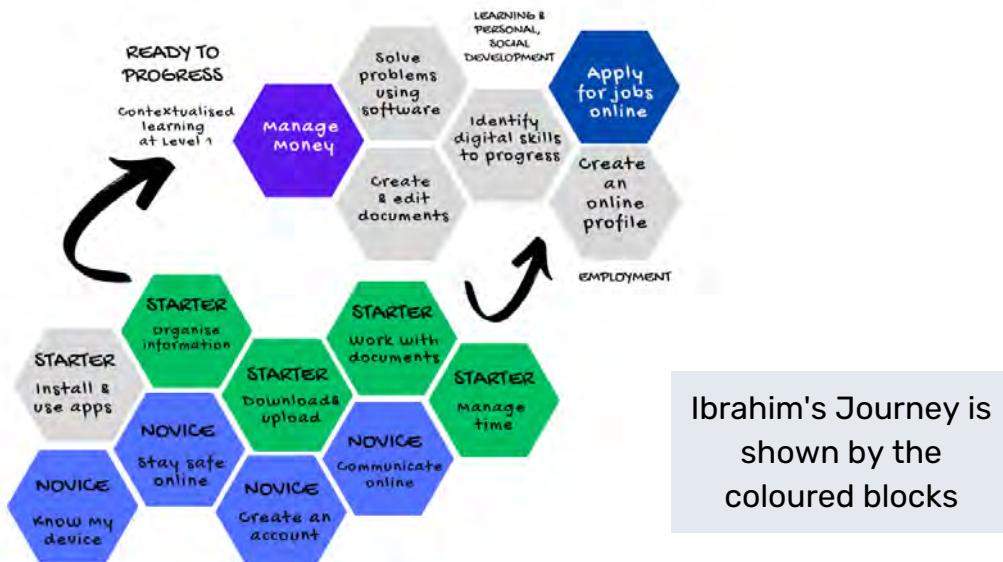
Fatima's Journey

Goals

- To use the internet to book appointments online
- To access support groups
- To get involved in her children's education.

Fatima's Journey is shown by the coloured blocks
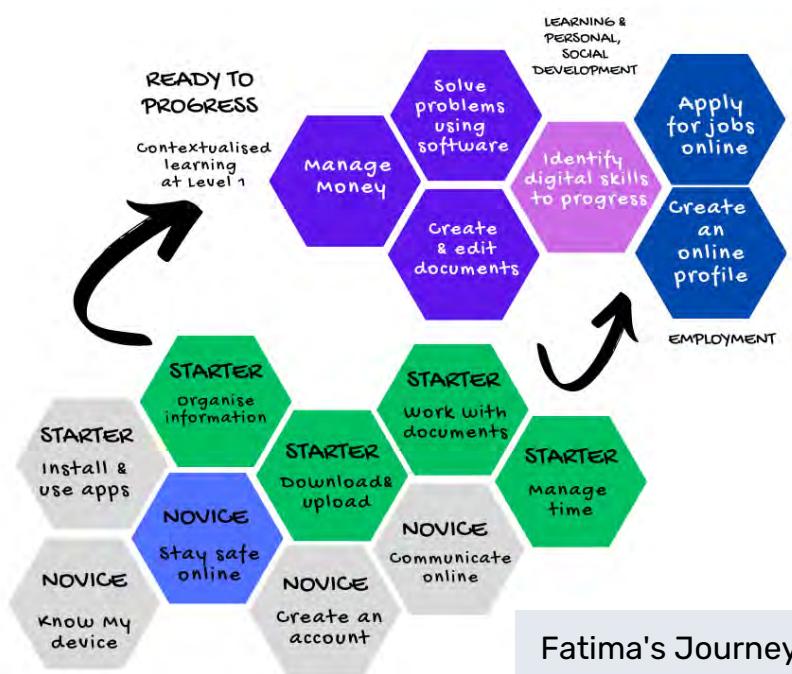
Erika's Journey

Goals
- Career advancement- looking for a permanent role with progression opportunities
- to learn on the job and apply for managerial role

Erika's Journey is shown by the coloured blocks
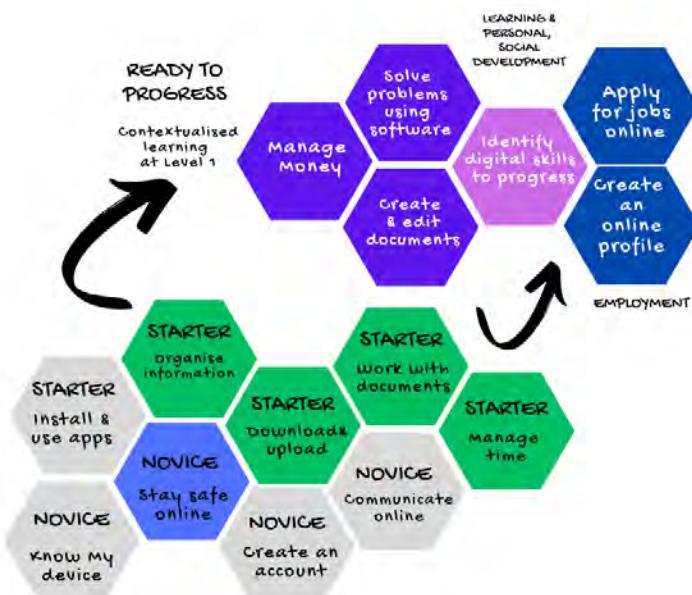
Content and Tools

Digital Skills Mapping

Providers and stakeholders identified a range of third-party content they use to support residents who are digitally excluded. As well as in-house content, this included content developed by Microsoft, Barclays (Digital Wings) and Good Things Foundation (Learn My Way).

Commonly used content has been mapped to the proposed Curriculum Framework. This mapping can be further developed with providers input, to identify high-quality third-party content and in-house content that is freely available to support residents to improve their digital skills.
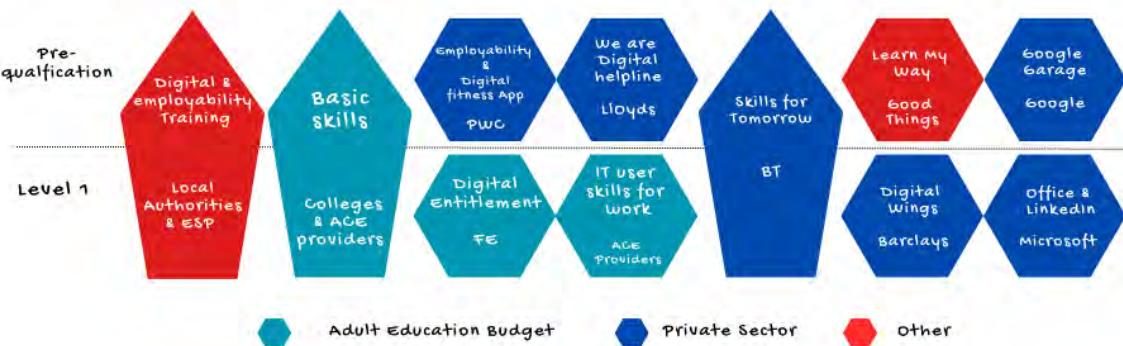
We have produced a Curriculum Mapping document, which is available to download in XLS format or as a PDF.

💡 **Tip** Why not add your own resources to our list to provide a handy guide for staff and volunteers who are supporting residents to get online.

Further Resources

Learn My Way

This free content is perfect for people early on in their digital skills journey who want to develop their basic digital skills.

Learn My Way is divided into subjects with each subject divided into topics to make finding the topics the learner is interested in easy.

Content is bite sized and can be accessed on a tablet, computer or mobile device.

www.learnmyway.com

The National Databank

Good Things Foundation runs the National Databank providing free mobile data, texts and calls to people in need via Good Things Foundation's Network of Digital Inclusion Hubs. Think of it like a 'food bank' but for internet connectivity data.

Community organisations can apply to access the Databank, enabling them to provide data to people in their communities who need it. Why not sign your organisation up? Find out more about about the benefits of being a Digital Inclusion Hub here.

Good Things Foundation

Over 100 topics in 11 subjects covering:

01	Using your device	05	Staying in touch	09	Employment and work
02	Starting to use the internet	06	Spending money online	10	Managing your health online
03	Using email	07	Online entertainment	11	Managing your money online
04	Safety and security online	08	Working with office programs		

Need more information to advise residents about connectivity?

Supporting people with data connectivity is a guide for organisations who reach and support people who are struggling to afford the internet because of poverty and the cost of living.

If you have any feedback about our guide we'd love to hear from you:

Contact us at Hello@goodthingsfoundation.org

Created by:

Good Things
Foundation