A Fair Digital Foundation: Supporting Children and Families Experiencing Poverty Across Scotland

Research Report

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Jeanette D'Arcy, Naomi Adam, Simeon Yates (University of Liverpool), Emma Stone (Good Things Foundation), Chris Ross, Parisa Shirazi, Sara Kemal (Children in Scotland), Shona Munro, Irene Mackintosh (Mhor Collective), Aaron Slater, Darran Gillan (SCVO)

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Children in Scotland · Good Things Foundation · mhor collective · scvo · University of Liverpool

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Executive Summary

> *"A few years ago, (digital) was a luxury but now most people would see it is as an essential. It's access to everything we need. Everything a young person needs".*
> (Young person)

Digital exclusion and child poverty are intersecting and nuanced issues facing Scotland today. This report shares findings from research with children, young people, and practitioners in Scotland about how digital exclusion and child poverty intersect, and what this means for children and young people, including those experiencing care. The findings build on prior research on a Minimum Digital Living Standard for Scotland published in 2025, and have shaped the development of a practical toolkit for practitioners in the third and public sectors. The toolkit (LINK) includes case studies from other organisations, ideas for activities, and links to resources. It aims to support teams who want to play their part in ensuring a fair digital foundation for all children and young people across Scotland.

Top takeaways from the research

1. **Digital must be treated as an essential, not a luxury**
   Digital was repeatedly seen as a key route into education, housing, income, health, social security, social connection and even basic shopping, citing examples such as college work, council forms, basic bills, and access to healthcare (including sexual and mental health care). When the digital route is blocked, everything else becomes harder, and opportunities are lost.
2. **Digital inclusion for children and households needs joined-up support**
   For young people with experience of care and practitioners we spoke to, educational settings were seen as major sites of digital inequality. College and school systems assume stable access, skills and support - which are not present for all children. A device is 'just like dropping your child at the school gate - it's only the door in. You need the supportive environment, the trusted adult.'
3. **Wellbeing and safety are linked to practical and critical digital skills**
   Shame emerged as a recurring emotional barrier, not just around a lack of access to devices, but a lack of familiarity with their use, and a reluctance to reveal skills issues. This is compounded by expectations that 'everyone' can do digital. Secondary school children sought more coverage of safety and well-being on social media.
4. **Digitisation is leaving behind those most in need**
   Digitisation of key services, including education, has accelerated. Parents/carers may lack the skills or access to use key support services for their children, especially if they have a disability or health condition. Digitisation risks were especially high for young people with experience of care. Further research is needed on specific groups already made vulnerable by wider inequalities and/or experiences of trauma.

5. **Digital inclusion should be embedded across policy and practice areas on child poverty and young people with experience of care**
   While the Scottish Government's *Bringing Hope, Building Futures* child poverty strategy cites internet access as an enabler in tackling living costs for low income families, it falls short of recognising how digital exclusion impacts lives and futures. The same is true of The Promise Scotland's Plan 24-30. Child poverty is also rarely mentioned in digital (inclusion) policy documents.

Policy Recommendations

1. **A shared digital inclusion benchmark for Scotland.**
   The Scottish Government should consider adopting the Minimum Digital Living Standard for Scotland formally, following Audit Scotland's (2024) recommendation, and report annually on progress.
2. **Joined-up policy and practice on child poverty in local authority action plans.**
   Local Authorities should name explicit digital inclusion actions in their child poverty strategies and report in their local child poverty action reports as well as children's services plans.
3. **Joined-up policy and practice on children and young people experiencing care.**
   The Promise Scotland should review 'Plan 24-30' in the light of these findings, and work with key agencies to identify digital inclusion risks and actions.
4. **Improved funding approaches for digital inclusion support.**
   Funders tackling child poverty should identify digital exclusion risks and budget to address them, prioritising long-term trusted adult support roles.
5. **Guidance on supporting parents/carers and children to engage safely.**
   Guidance should prioritise digital skills, online safety, wellbeing, and managing (social media) pressures.

Recommendations for further research, and for organisations working with children, young people (including with care experience), and parents/carers are set out in the Recommendations section of this report.

Introduction: Research approach and literature review

Digital exclusion and child poverty are intersecting and nuanced issues facing Scotland today. This summary report offers findings from three strands of the work undertaken as part of the *A Fair Digital Foundation: Supporting Children and Families Experiencing Poverty Across Scotland* study, funded by the Scottish Government. This study aims to produce evidence-based resources to help organisations working with children and families in poverty to identify digital inclusion issues and embed appropriate support. The study was led by the Digital Media and Society Institute (DMSI) at the University of Liverpool, with partner organisations Children in Scotland, Mhor Collective, Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), and Good Things Foundation covering expertise and experience in both digital inclusion and child poverty.

One strand of work, led by Children in Scotland, involved engaging children from one primary and one secondary school in interactive workshops where children were asked to think about their engagement with digital technologies, potential barriers to access, as well as potential solutions. Children in Scotland used a range of creative approaches to support school based sessions. These included a road map activity to consider the barriers to digital inclusion and what can support children and young people; a character design activity exploring the role of practitioners who could support digital inclusion; as well as a range of games and discussions to support wider conversation about access to digital spaces for children and young people. Children in Scotland also engaged with third sector practitioners to gain their insights on children, young people's and their families' engagement with digital technologies, barriers and potential solutions.

A second strand, led by Mhor Collective, involved engaging young people with experience of care, and the practitioners who work to support them, exploring their experiences of digital inequalities, and challenges and best practice in support for digital inclusion. Using Participatory Action Research, Mhor Collective brought together young people with lived experience and a collection of supporting practitioners over a series of 3 online focus groups. As part of Mhor's wider participatory action research approaches, the team designed a semi-structured workshop framework built around a core set of predetermined questions, which allowed both clarity of direction in terms of specific questions but also flexibility to engage deeply in emerging topics where appropriate. The sessions were hosted online, utilising a dual-platform approach to widen participation. Furthermore, participants were able to contribute anonymously, ensuring an inclusive environment in which contributions were not affected by fear or embarrassment.

A third strand, led by DMSI, involved a desk research review of the current digital inclusion and child poverty policy and practice landscape in Scotland, based on a review of both academic and non-academic literature (including policy documents, webpages, and reports). This summary report brings together these three strands of work to identify challenges, outline examples of best practice, and offer recommendations based on analysis of data gathered from children and young people, as well as published strategies, interventions, and the work of organisations tackling child poverty and digital exclusion in

Scotland. This report will focus on Scotland-specific policies, interventions and organisations, with the caveat that these are affected by UK-wide frameworks.

A Minimum Digital Living Standard for Scotland

The Minimum Digital Living Standard Scotland research[1], commissioned by Scottish Government, assessed what households with children need at a socially acceptable minimum level to be digitally included in today's society. This was based on UK-wide MDLS research, conducted by a consortium of universities and third-sector organisations led by the University of Liverpool[2], which shows that four in ten households with children in the UK lack the digital equipment, connectivity, and/or functional/critical digital literacy skills to live an adequate life in the digital age. MDLS Scotland's project work with households emphasised the need for devices in households with children, for a connectivity service tailored for rural and urban contexts, and for support and resources that address both functional and critical digital competencies, including those related to safety. From a policy perspective, the MDLS Scotland project highlighted the importance of embedding digital inclusion across different policy areas, including alignment with existing standards (housing, care, etc.), and recent research has found that collaborative, place-based approaches work well[3].

The evidence gathered in the current study reflects the findings of the MDLS Scotland research, demonstrating that digital exclusion is a key issue in the lives of children and households experiencing poverty in Scotland, and that there is a real need for the MDLS to be embedded across policy and practice when it comes to the needs of those most likely to be excluded, including those with care experience.

Research has shown that social exclusion and digital exclusion go hand in hand, since gaps in digital access and skills are intertwined with broader socio-economic inequalities and explained by factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, and disability[4]. Digital inclusion relies not just on digital access but also on digital skills and motivation to use digital technologies. The 'digital divide' comprises three levels: differential access to digital devices; variation in levels of digital competencies; and disparities in the tangible outcomes of using digital technologies[5]. It is now common practice in academic literature to see digital exclusion/inclusion as a spectrum ranging from 'non-users' and 'limited users,' who lack digital access and/or the skills to fully pursue online opportunities, up to 'extensive users,' who know how to benefit from what digital technologies offer[6]. Also important is the initial confidence and motivation in using digital technologies[7].

The ability to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by digital technologies is, therefore, a more nuanced discussion than a simple binary of 'access' or 'no access' (though initial access to devices is still an important factor). Recent research by Children in Scotland which takes into account the voices of children and young people in response to the 2026 government consultation *Growing Up in an Online World: A National Consultation* (GUOW) also suggests that it is unhelpful to frame discussion solely around the binary question of whether the benefits of social media outweigh the risks, instead calling for nuance in considering factors such as screentime, activities, experiences, and use[8]. Similarly, SCVO's response to the GUOW[9] reveals the nuances of online experiences through responses to the possibility of a social media ban for under 16s, with, for example, tensions between

viewing restricted access as an opportunity for children to develop a greater sense of self in the offline world and to experience a more gradual introduction to digital environments; and a 'forbidden fruit' effect where children denied the opportunity to develop healthy online habits may be ill-equipped to manage unrestricted access post-16.

Work focusing on families and children in Scotland found that digital inequality is a household-level, systemic pressure rather than an individual one, with safety, anonymity and trust paramount[10]. Academic studies focused on marginalised populations concluded that digital inequalities in Scotland, as elsewhere, intersect with multiple other factors (e.g., disrupted education; food poverty; socio-economic stressors), and can have a detrimental effect on mental health and wellbeing[11]. In an increasingly digitised housing sector, digital exclusion also creates difficulties in securing long-term housing in Scotland[12]. Mackinney et al.[13] use data from Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation to gauge the reality of child poverty across Scotland, including the effects of 'access to computer or internet for homework', and conclude that children with limited resources are more likely to be living in rented accommodation in deprived areas, in lone parent households with three or more siblings, and/or a disabled adult – all predictors of not meeting the Minimum Digital Living Standard**.**

Digital barriers faced by children, young people, and families experiencing poverty and vulnerability

Recent research has highlighted the experiences of children and families experiencing poverty and vulnerability in today's digital society. Family Fund's 2026 work[14] surveyed families raising disabled children (including families in Scotland) and found that parents feel it is essential for their child to have access to appropriate technology, both as a crucial way to take part in education, play, and social opportunities, and also as an important self-regulation tool for neurodivergent children. Other work surveying children, young people, parents and caregivers (including Scotland) has found that children with additional support needs spend on average 5 hours more per week online than their peers, spending more time engaged in interactive, social, creative activities like creating and posting online content and livestreaming, using forums and chatrooms, and playing multiplayer games. Online spaces can have particularly important social benefits and raise confidence for children and young people with additional support needs[15].

However, Family Fund found that only 7% of families met the criteria for digital inclusion, with over half of families digitally excluded due to a lack of access to devices or connectivity, and/or digital skills and confidence, and 37% online but at risk of exclusion due to financial vulnerabilities and the need for support to carry out online tasks[16]. Children with additional support needs report a polarised experience, encountering both more positive and more negative aspects of online life; they are more likely to encounter harm online, with girls facing higher risk, and struggle more than their peers to control the amount of time they spend online[17].

Some studies focus on evaluating digital exclusion interventions, which often target demographics associated with child poverty. Brown et al.[18] focus on the first phases of Connecting Scotland, set up in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and aiming to support those most digitally excluded, including families with children on low incomes. The

study identifies challenges to delivering digital inclusion at scale, including time-consuming, logistically complex setup processes, the capacity of organisations to provide digital champion support, and issues with remote support. They also identify key best practices underpinning principles, such as trusted intermediary organisations that provide access and reach to target those most digitally excluded; a gifting model rather than a lending one; provision of data as well as devices; offering ongoing support with using devices; and use of a digital champions model. While the Connecting Scotland programme of digital inclusion helps identify best practice principles, it also underscores the need for sustainable and long-term provision, as the ending of this programme caused uncertainty for the sector and can be seen as part of a UK-wide diminishing focus on digital inclusion since the end of COVID restrictions[19].

Research Findings: Engaging with children, young people, and practitioners in Scotland

The following sections discuss key findings from our engagement with young people and practitioners, along with the current landscape in Scotland, in terms of addressing the intersecting issues of child poverty and digital exclusion.

1. Digital must be treated as an essential, not a luxury
2. Digital inclusion for children and households needs joined-up support across different settings
3. Wellbeing and safety are linked to practical and critical digital skills
4. Digitisation is leaving behind those most in need
5. Digital inclusion should be embedded across policy and practice areas on child poverty and young people with experience of care

1. Digital must be treated as an essential, not a luxury

Across all focus groups with children and young people, there was agreement that digital technologies should be accessible to all. Across the data from young people with experience of care, carers and practitioners, digital access is framed as a basic condition for participating in everyday life, not an optional extra.

> *"A few years ago, (digital) was a luxury but now most people would see it is as an essential. It's access to everything we need. Everything a young person needs".*
> (Young person)

Participants repeatedly described digital as the route into education, housing, income, health, social security, social connection and even basic shopping, citing examples such as college work, council forms, basic bills, and access to healthcare (including sexual and mental health care). When the digital route is blocked, everything else becomes harder, and opportunities are lost.

Secondary and primary school children we spoke to all said that digital should be accessible to all and is an essential part of their lives. They discussed the positive and negative impacts of digital technologies that they engage with, and recognised some issues with device use, such as "screen addiction", but were also aware of the negative impacts of lack of access, discussing isolation and lack of social contact as potential outcomes of exclusion. Primary school children pointed out that the internet is often their only source of information on new topics or specific subjects, and argued that it is difficult to find information elsewhere.

Secondary school children discussed regulations and restrictions in more detail. They were keen to discuss parental restrictions on screen time, which vary significantly between households, and how tight restrictions can mean they miss out on social interactions (e.g., messaging past 9pm) and essential services they access only digitally (e.g., online banking). They also noted the contradictions of some regulations, for example, those related to banking, where young people are allowed a bank account at 11 years of age, but their access to an online banking app will be monitored and restricted. They pointed out that it is "normal to have YouTube" despite a school ban (and age limitations), and that phone access was limited at school, yet they are expected to pay for food using their phone.

Young people also discussed issues of privacy and negotiating parental boundaries, expressing how apps that allow parental locks should not be allowed as they violate privacy, suggesting that, like young people with experience of care, restrictions on access to digital media can be experienced as punishment and/or control. Digital is therefore experienced as a precondition for exercising rights, especially for young people with care experience, who are already navigating complex systems with fewer safety nets than their peers. It also impacts heavily on throughcare and aftercare, as young people move into independent adulthood, dealing with complex layers of digital life administration.

1.1. Children need access to digital technologies to take part in everyday life

In today's society, digital devices are an important part of everyday life for children and adults alike. Children in our data set described a world in which digital technologies are the norm, offering opportunities for entertainment and information. Across age ranges, children emphasised the importance of digital access for learning new information, social interaction and communication, and entertainment. Young people are aware of barriers to digital access and online safety issues, and they want more support for parents and children to navigate the digital world together. They offer thoughtful solutions for practitioners supporting families with digital inclusion.

Primary and secondary school children we spoke to identified a range of digital technologies that are commonplace in their lives. This included specific devices like laptops and tablets, brands such as iPhone and PlayStation, and social media apps like Instagram and TikTok. There were distinctions by age: headphones were mentioned exclusively by secondary school children, whereas primary school children were more likely to discuss tablets. Children were aware of current debates and challenges associated with digital technologies and discussed the role of AI, cyberbullying, and the ban on social media for under-16s, which was being debated at the time of the sessions.

Children spoke about using digital technologies for a wide range of activities, distinguishing between educational and social purposes. For the former, this included accessing websites for learning and revision (e.g., the BBC) and using TikTok to learn about new topics; for the latter, this included communicating with friends and organising in-person meetings. They also talked about technology as beneficial when accessing public services, such as information on public transport timetables.

Primary school children discussed using AI for chatting and arguing, and editing photos. One primary school child commented that it 'will take over the world', suggesting children are well aware of the changing landscape and roles of digital technologies. Secondary school children spoke more about using social media, utilising headphones for 'focus', and contacting family members if something happens.

There are some organisations whose digital inclusion provision is tailored for children and families on low incomes. Some examples include Young Scot, which offers online services for young people across Scotland which include the DigiKnow programme, launched in 2018 and still ongoing, a project that helps young people build skills and knowledge around cyber security and wellbeing, misinformation, and digital careers. Digi Bytes offers take-home kits and in-person learning sessions for families to develop digital skills and confidence. Digital Xtra aims at widening participation for those often excluded from extra curricular computing activities.

Our work with young people with experience of care, carers, and practitioners, however, revealed that provision is not always reaching those who need most support. Children are expected to complete work online outside of school or college, and those transitioning to independence and the world of work may be assumed to have access to appropriate technologies:

> *"Young people don't always have the device they need or one that works well. One young person had a device, and her camera wasn't working... she was working as a (lived experience) consultant but didn't have the equipment".* (Practitioner)

A consistent theme throughout the data from young people with experience of care and practitioners was not just 'no device', but 'the wrong device', 'old device' or 'shared device' that doesn't meet the changing realities facing young people with experience of care. Smartphones are common but deeply inadequate for many tasks:

> *"Devices are sometimes given but rarely kept up to date and often 10 years old".* (Practitioner)

> *"Most young people have a smartphone, but not always a laptop device".* (Practitioner)

> *"A lot of young people have a mobile phone, but this can be really restrictive in so many ways".* (Young person)

For some, even basic phone use is constrained:

> *"I didn't have credit on my phone, so I couldn't contact you".* (Practitioner)

Connectivity was raised as a major fault line, especially in kinship care (see below).

Practitioners spoke about sharing devices becoming problematic if families separate or relationships break down, with conflict over access to a device making a difficult situation even more difficult.

1.2 Access is inconsistent and not guaranteed for those most in need

Local authorities and third-sector organisations do undertake projects at the intersection of child poverty and digital inclusion, but while these are important, they are disconnected and not offered consistently or long-term. Practitioners told us that digital exclusion is often misunderstood and/or is an 'invisible issue', with little data to draw on and limited awareness of who will be impacted by its effects.

Some organisations undertake research aimed at addressing both child poverty and digital inequalities. For example, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) investigates the causes of, and solutions to, child poverty and provides insights into digitalisation and barriers to accessing Universal Credit; Children in Scotland offers insights into children's perspectives on how their data is used; Children First can provide advice for families about the online world, screentime for children, and online safety; Good Things Foundation have hosted a national roundtable on child poverty and the digital divide which was part of the inspiration for the current study; the ALLIANCE created Digital Human Rights Principles during Covid.

Some provide evidence-based guidance, resources and toolkits, including Child Poverty Action Group's resources on the Cost of the School Day, with step-by-step guidance for schools to investigate cost barriers and poverty-related challenges, and help ensure equal access to opportunity, with examples of schools offering digital devices and connectivity to widen opportunities for children in low-income families. Some offer training and development for practitioners in the children's sector, undertaking a wide range of project work and/or work aimed at influencing policy, contributing to calls for evidence and

publishing responses to consultations such as the UK Government's Growing Up Online (Aberlour; SCVO). Some offer services such as creative media and film programmes for young people in areas of deprivation (Station House Media Unit).

There is some evidence of public and third sector organisations offering access to devices and data/connectivity in some form, though often not specifically tailored for families in poverty or young people with experience of care; for example, refurbished smartphones for people in financial hardship (Citizens Advice Scotland), or devices, connectivity and skills support for those at risk of drug-related harm (Digital Lifelines Scotland) or homelessness (Simon Community Scotland). Some libraries offer free WiFi and access to devices (dependent on funding), some targeting specific populations such as housebound library users at risk of digital exclusion (Edinburgh Libraries). Digital resources are often put together in digital hubs, in locations such as libraries and youth centres (Renfrewshire Council; SCVO), while some are portable 'on the move' provision with packages of laptops that can be booked for certain locations (Dundee Digital). Often programmes are targeted at specific issues, such as financial support (Aberdeen Cyrenians), or at populations, such as children and young people (Govan Youth Information Project) or those at risk of homelessness (Simon Community Scotland). Schools are also an important part of providing access (see below).

However, the initiatives described above are short-term and time-limited, with no core funding, and thus not stable or sustainable provision. Practitioners told us that there is a lack of understanding that digital inclusion is more than just a one-off cost, that equipment needs to be updated on a regular basis, and factors such as rurality can amplify those issues. Practitioners consistently raised the issue that funding is short-term and/or project-specific:

> *"There was initially money through Connecting Scotland to help support parents buying SIM cards and connectivity, etc., but that seems to have dried up now".*

Public sector provision is not consistent across all local authorities, can require advance booking, and often depends on people being able to reach the physical locations where the technologies are on offer. (e.g., libraries). Practitioners commented on remote and rural contexts where equipment and connectivity is often not good, and that in-person training must be at times when people who are often working in the day and have busy family lives in the evening can attend.

It is often unclear whether provision of devices such as laptops to targeted groups is permanent or temporary, with research showing that gifting, rather than lending, devices can make a positive difference to digital inclusion[20]. While place-based approaches can result in improved outcomes and better joined-up working[21], recent commentary on research from the SOAS Food Studies Centre into the digitisation of food assistance also points to risks of 'hub-ification' of welfare provision where digital support is temporary or dependent on finding funding, and viewed as a low-cost option[22]. Previous research has found that third sector organisations offering digital inclusion support face the challenge of funding that is short-term, inconsistent, and often prescriptive[23], meaning that organisations face precarity and uncertainty, and service users face inconsistency as projects are forced to shut down or change provision due to shifts or cuts in funding. We heard from third sector practitioners about how a shift to online working and delivery have impacted those who have not been equipped with the skills or technology to match this growth. Throughout our conversations

with children, young people, and practitioners, participants noted that while some local authority areas might provide direct support to access technology such as mobile phones, others did not. There was also a lack of clarity, even within local authorities, about potential pathways:

> *"It's [access to digital] a postcode lottery. It's so sad".* (Practitioner)
>
> *"Between local authorities there's no connection – no pathways".* (Practitioner)
>
> *"We need a clean, clear pathway to devices and data".* (Young person)

Public provision was often not a realistic substitute for continuous at-home access:

> *"It's all very well saying there's a library but are you supposed to go in every day to check to see if you have an interview? How would that work? We wouldn't expect to do that".* (Practitioner)

Practitioners praised the support available in libraries, and emphasised the need for long-term funding of library services. However, while provision in libraries, hubs, and other community settings is important – especially because of the opportunity for wraparound support it offers – a range of long-term, sustainable options that include both community and home provision has the potential to be more enabling for households. This is especially important for children and young people with experience of care, whose access depends on a stable and predictable surrounding support network.

2. Digital inclusion for children and households needs joined-up support across different settings

The MDLS Scotland research[24] underlines the importance of approaches covering devices, connectivity and skills, with skills emerging as a particular concern for parents and children alike, and staying safe online a key concern. Both practical and critical skills need support, as functional skills are necessary to use technology and build confidence, and critical skills are necessary for mitigating risks. Skills are a key component to digital exclusion in Scotland, with Audit Scotland[25] finding that 15% of Scotland's adult population lacked foundational digital skills. The MDLS research sets out a range of digital knowledge and skills identified by households and stakeholders as essential for taking part in society, from functional skills to set up, manage and maintain devices and use them for tasks and activities (e.g., connecting to the internet, sending and receiving emails, monitoring data use); to critical knowledge and skills for managing security, evaluating online information and paying attention to digital wellbeing (e.g., using secure passwords, identifying and avoiding scams, assessing information quality and credibility, managing social expectations and pressures). Critically, skills must be supported for both parents and children.

In terms of learning, a lack of digital access and skills can have detrimental effects on children's mental health and well-being. Naven et al.[26] use focus group data from across Scotland to examine the effects of poverty on children's experience of the school day. They highlight digital exclusion barriers to learning at home, such as the requirement to complete homework on a computer, with the attendant need for internet access, memory sticks, and printing costs. They also identify barriers to public library access, such as distance and the need for parental accompaniment. These kinds of exclusionary experiences are exacerbated by stigma and cause feelings of shame, and digitally excluded children can perceive themselves as being excluded from social groups. Additionally, care-experienced children face complexities in their surrounding support networks that present different needs for each household in terms of support[27].

2.1. Educational settings

In terms of digital skills, addressing child poverty is a factor in both formal education for children 5-18, and lifelong/adult learning strategies and practice for holistic support of adults and families. Scotland's *Adult Learning Strategy 2022-2027*[28] outlines digital skills training for practitioners and support for access to devices and connectivity for adult learning, and the *Digital Economy Skills Action Plan 2023-2028*[29] focuses on inclusion and place-based approaches.

In terms of formal educational settings, the Curriculum for Excellence includes the 'Technologies' theme, which aims to ensure that Scottish children become responsible digital citizens with a wide range of functional and critical digital skills. The training is designed so that children understand the role and impact of technology in changing and

influencing societies, and gain the skills and confidence to embrace and use technology now and in the future, at home, at work, and in the wider community[30]. At the time of writing, Scottish Government is undertaking a Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC), which is due to be implemented from 2028.

The Scottish Government pledged in 2021 to provide every school-aged student in Scotland with an internet-connected device and support. However, through a series of funding shifts, along with national- and local-level decisions, this is inconsistent. Provision is determined at the local authority level, and a recent FOI request showed that 10 of the 32 LAs across Scotland provide 1:1 devices for secondary-age pupils[31]. Examples of such Local Authority provision are Connected Falkirk, launched in 2020, providing 1:1 digital devices for all Primary 6 to Secondary 6 pupils, as well as devices for class teachers and skills support, which has had considerable impact, and Fife Council's Transforming Learning Programme, which aims by the end of the 2025/26 academic year to distribute over 35,000 devices across schools, with both allowing students to take the device home so families can also be digitally connected to their child's learning[32]. Glasgow Life reported that in 2025 it provided laptops and connectivity to more than 200 learners from low-income households, with access to online training and learning[33]. Highland Council was one of the first LAs to roll out access to devices from P7 onwards. Their provision pre-dated COVID which meant they were uniquely positioned for response, and their position meant that rurality and vast geography made this provision particularly helpful during COVID restrictions, but also in the combination of crises (extreme weather, cost-of-living) residents have experienced in recent years.

However, the restricted and inconsistent access to, and quality of, devices described by young people we spoke to can mean that, despite efforts to address inequalities in the classroom through the provision of devices, this is a double-edged sword as the digitisation of education deepens inequalities. This reflects the MDLS Scotland work[34], which found that families often spoke about how the digitisation of schools – expectations for homework to be completed/submitted online, the use of eBooks rather than physical books – created an expectation that there are appropriate devices at home. Indeed, the MDLS Scotland research found households identified the need for an entry-level smartphone for each parent and for each child who is socialising and travelling independently, as well as an entry-level 'large screen device' such as a laptop or tablet per household, plus another per school-aged child.

Research has shown, however, that across the UK, this access is far from guaranteed, with very little change over the last three years, according to Ofcom's 2025 findings that 30% of parents of school-aged children reported their child did not have continuous access to an appropriate device on which to do homework, rising to 39% for primary-aged children[35].

For young people with experience of care and practitioners we spoke to, educational settings were seen as major sites of digital inequality and referred to repeatedly. College and school systems assume stable access, skills and support:

> *"Definitely college - all college work has to be done online, and we have young people who have to engage with housing".* (Practitioner)

> *"At college, you have to use Moodle. I didn't know how to. I couldn't have done it without a laptop".* (Young person)

Participants describe how simply providing a device is 'just like dropping your child at the school gate - it's only the door in. You need the supportive environment, the trusted adult.' Without someone at home to help, 'learning online… just doesn't work.'

Young people who have 'stopped going to school' or 'haven't had the easiest transitions' miss out on basic digital skills. Participants strongly challenged the assumption that all young people are 'naturally digital':

> *"It's a nonsense belief… We have this inherent belief that all young people can [use digital] - but computers are so different from smart screens".* (Practitioner)

> *"One in 8 kids in Scotland go to a school with no computing teacher. There's absolutely nothing about being young that means you have digital skills, nor that you've ever experienced a laptop".* (Practitioner)

2.2. Care settings

An increasing number of children with care experience in Scotland are in kinship arrangements (when a child or young person lives with relatives or close family friends), with the majority living with grandparents. This can be a factor in digital exclusion, as a large proportion of people who do not use the internet at home are retired or over the age of 65[36]. Kinship carers are more likely than the general population to have health problems and to experience financial challenges; children with experience of kinship care show lower attainment and attendance rates and higher exclusion rates than their peers[37]. Research by the SCRA[38] found that children and young people in care experience additional barriers to digital inclusion, highlighting challenges such as difficulty accessing digital connection and suitable digital devices in residential and foster homes, lack of digital skills, prohibitive costs of digital devices and a 'double loop' of inequalities in which online and offline inequalities compound and exacerbate each other. They point out that a risk-averse culture surrounding internet use for care experienced children shapes practitioner responses and prevents the children in their care from engaging fully in the online world and its benefits described above. Mhor Collective and SCRA have previously called for corporate parents and/or Scottish Government to take responsibility for provision of device, connectivity and confidence for every young person with care experience, as well as parity across placement types through embedding the Minimum Digital Living Standard into care frameworks.

Throughout data gathered from children and young people with care experience and those supporting them, particular issues emerged related to particular types of care.

In foster care, where a child or young person lives with an approved foster carer who is not a family member, digital access depends heavily on the foster carers' resources, confidence, and attitudes to risk and opportunity online. Kinship care emerged as one of the most consistently disadvantaged groups, with a lack of broadband or home infrastructure, as well as a lack of digital equipment or skills support for carers, and an explicit call for consideration of MDLS as a means to address this via social frameworks and policies:

> *"Kinship care, young people staying with older adults, grandparents – often didn't have broadband or good connections. Young people couldn't access college course learning material and education due to this".* (Practitioner)

> *"My grandparents took all four of us in. But there was no support for them around digital things".* (Young person)

> *"If social work applied the MDLS it could help… equipping a grandparent's house to be digital would be absolutely amazing".* (Young person)

Despite digital access being so important to young people with experience of care, in some settings, devices are not just scarce, they are controlled, shared, or used as leverage:

> *"Devices are used as a weapon and can be removed as a punishment".* (Practitioner)

> *"[A] young person breaks the device in a state of crisis, and then has to wait months, maybe even a year because of one incident this can feel like a punishment, a lack of care".* (Practitioner)

Carers' attempts to protect can also create exclusion:

> *"Often carers will place restrictions on the access – trying to protect the young people but often creating barriers to access".* (Practitioner)

These restrictive and/or punitive approaches sit in tension with young people's rights to social connection, learning, and fun.

On leaving care, young people must transition to independent living in a digital world, which means engaging with high-stakes digital systems such as Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, and health services. Digital exclusion was found to be a major barrier during transition, both as part of throughcare – the preparation and support offered to young people as they go through this process, and aftercare – support provided once they are living independently.

As in other settings, connectivity can be an issue, as young people struggle with affordability and also with securing mobile phone contracts with no credit score and little adult support:

> *"Young people leaving care and into their own flats, just absolutely couldn't afford to buy or have the connection".* (Practitioner)

There is real concern about doing things wrong that links to low digital skills:

> *"There's this fear around making mistakes – and the consequences… losing access to services".* (Practitioner)

This is not an unfounded fear, as losing such access has material consequences for young people, affecting their housing, income, access to positive opportunities, and ultimately survival.

3. Wellbeing and safety are linked to practical and critical digital skills

There is little research exploring whether digital skills improve wellbeing, with studies more focused on learning outcomes[39]. Work with MDLS groups found that, while some aspects of digital wellbeing might be linked more to functional skills like setting time limits on apps or using a do-not disturb function for bedtimes, critical and emotional skills and knowledge are just as crucial, such as the ability to manage social expectations and pressures, and to take part in, and contribute positively to, online culture through practicing empathy in online interactions and spaces.

3.1. Emotional barriers

Our work with care-experienced children, young people, and practitioners found that shame is a recurring emotional barrier, not just around a lack of access to devices, but a lack of familiarity with their use, creating a reluctance to reveal underlying skills issues:

> *"Young people often don't feel comfortable disclosing their situation immediately".* (Practitioner)

> *"There's a lot of shame around these conversations with young people. The balance between not finding out and prying...."* (Practitioner)

This shame is compounded by expectations that 'everyone' can do digital:

> *"Not everyone knows how to do these things".* (Young person)

> *"They feel silly or stupid, they don't want to learn then because they don't quite understand it, which impacts their ability to grow in a way others might".* (Practitioner)

Pride and self-reliance also play a role:

> *"Pride and 'I can survive on my own' can stop people from asking for help".*

Young people are acutely aware that mistakes online can have serious consequences:

> *"The fear of that lack of knowledge, not having all the knowledge and making mistakes that have real-life consequences - the threat of losing access to services or support".* (Young person)

This is especially intense for those without consistent support:

> *"Young people with care experience feel more fearful as they don't have the constant point of contact and support to help".* (Practitioner)

Digital skills development thus requires support from both home and school settings. Children from our focus groups in formal educational settings discussed how their school covered digital skills and staying safe online, as well as where else they might get information and support. Primary school children talked about a range of support, from parents helping them to self-taught skills. They described a scheme at their school where they become 'digital leaders' and help younger people learn digital skills. When asked about how they learned the information to teach others, they responded that they 'just kind of

knew'. They felt that sometimes children knew more than adults and that adults should know more – in particular, that parents should be taught about online safety in order to better support children. However, both primary and secondary children also described a reciprocal learning process in which adults teach children about safety and the practicalities of using technology, and children teach adults about new technologies and social media.

Secondary school children described their use of social media, praising it as a source of real-time information about the world beyond their own context, where they could find out about different views and perspectives. They felt it was important to be able to get information and news from people their own age.

UK-wide organisation Internet Matters has created resources to help parents and professionals to support young people with experience of care online, including a Digital Passport communication tool to support children and young people to talk with their carers about their online lives[40]. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (along with other partners) have developed an online resource called Aye Mind aimed at increasing confidence of practitioners working with young people to use digital tools for supporting mental health, including a toolkit of conversation starters for digital wellbeing[41].

3.2. Online Safety

MDLS Scotland found that online safety is a key concern for parents and children, with an emphasis on the importance of digital skills for both parents and children to minimise risk while engaging online to socialise and access services and opportunities.

Secondary school children suggested that they learned many digital skills on their own, relying on 'common sense' to stay safe. There was also a desire for online topics to be covered in more depth at school, with secondary school children suggesting they found the curriculum repetitive and shallow, as they described how lessons on internet safety from primary (e.g., how to create strong passwords and avoid online dangers) are reiterated as they get older but are not expanded upon. They expressed the desire for more in-depth coverage in school of topics such as safety and well-being on social media.

In terms of online safety, secondary school children told us they want to be able to contact people their own age and felt they should not be able to contact or be contacted by strangers, particularly if they are older. They thus expressed a desire for age-based restrictions and controls around who could see certain social media content. They suggested that being able to link young people's social media accounts to their parents' would allow parents to manage safe use, alongside allowing the young person to demonstrate responsibility and ability to self-regulate screentime. Another suggestion was to follow Roblox's age-based restriction model, although AI facial recognition software often gets ages wrong. Children also wanted to discuss the upcoming social media ban, pointing out that people will inevitably find a way around such restrictions.

A further issue discussed in the data from young people with experience of care and practitioners was the potential longer-term issue of *unsupervised* access, especially in younger years, and how this might impact learning and participation:

> *"We see two ends of the extreme - having devices, access and opportunity - but then the issue of unregulated access in early years is an issue. This has a huge impact on education with regards to attention…it's almost a mark of privilege when young people at primary talk about going on walks and things, rather than games and Netflix".* (Practitioner)

This again highlights the issue that the well-being and success of young people with experience of care across Scotland often look very different to those of their peers in the general population.

In terms of policy, Scottish Government has published the *Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change: Guidance for Organisations, Systems and Workforces in Scotland*[42], supported by the National Trauma Transformation Program, across all sectors. Mhor Collective has implemented Trauma Informed Practice across all their work, including staff training, and implemented this across all their digital inclusion work. They have explored trauma as an element of digital inclusion work (so both as barrier to participation but also as a possible source of trauma), and found that this is particularly relevant to their work with those made vulnerable by wider inequalities, for example in their work addressing violence against women and girls, with refugees, and regarding mental health.

4. Digitisation is leaving behind those most in need

Digitisation of key services has accelerated in recent years. Digitally excluded people are more likely to need services such as state benefits and disability support, more likely to have low (digital) literacy skills, and are more likely to face barriers accessing such services online. Design of online services is often not accessible enough[43], for example the Universal Credit digital claims process makes it more difficult for those who have limited access, older devices, or limited digital literacy to access the financial support they are entitled to[44]. Parents may lack the digital skills and/or connectivity needed to access key support services for their children, especially if parents themselves have a disability or health condition[45]. For households with children, MDLS Scotland found that parents and young people reflected on how 'everything is going online', affecting access to areas of life as varied as banking, bus passes, football tickets, shopping, and gigs[46]. Digitisation of educational spaces is discussed below in relation to digital skills and literacies.

In our conversations with young people with experience of care and practitioners, a repeated theme was around how digitisation leaves behind those made vulnerable by wider inequalities. In terms of the systems that young people have to engage with, particularly those in throughcare and aftercare, participants repeatedly described systemic, infrastructural issues of inequality, where 'the biggest barrier is the whole system- you can talk about the nuanced elements, but the whole system, digital first, is the problem.'

4.1. Benefits, housing, and identity systems

Digital-first benefits and identity systems are experienced as hostile and high-stakes:

> *"Universal credit - I have seen that young people are very capable and able to work their way into the systems but it's so hard".* (Practitioner)

> *"Housing support - it becomes very stressful as the risk is homelessness - they don't always have the means to access the services".* (Practitioner)

Navigating HMRC and ID is described as cumbersome and not user-friendly:

> *"To get your HMRC login details, what a faff that is, it's ridiculous, in order to get your national insurance and tax numbers, it's so difficult".* (Young person)

> *"Digital ID... a lot of places won't actually accept it, you're showing your digital ID, but they say they won't accept it. They can pick and choose when they want to accept it".* (Young person)

The Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) administers funding, bursaries, and tuition fee payments for eligible HE students who normally live in Scotland; navigating this crucial system for support was highlighted as being more difficult for those with care experience, as unanticipated variations such as name changes expose how digital systems fail to recognise complex care biographies:

> *"SAAS - it's a system where I've seen particular impacts on young people in care when their birth certificate doesn't match their ID, or a family name change. Something in the biography story has shift[ed]... When there's a change in the narrative story, it can be so challenging to change. And the reasons for change can be so deeply personal".* (Practitioner)

4.2. Financial and healthcare systems

Digital banking came up as a system locked behind digital gates, despite the potential to give young people a greater sense of control and autonomy, as well as improving financial resilience:

> *"Banking is a massive one - I went into the bank to get help and they just said use the app".* (Young person)

There were several examples of the way young people with experience of care are disadvantaged when trying to access essential healthcare:

> *"Sexual health services - trying to get help at 9:00 on a Monday morning - if you don't have reliable Wi-Fi how can you get in? Getting sexual health stuff is like that panic trying to get concert ti[ckets]".* (Young person)

4.3. No real offline alternative

Even where paper options technically exist, they are discouraged or more expensive:

> *"Some things have the option to do a paper application (e.g., passport) but they push you to do it online because it's cheaper, people are thinking, 'well, what's the cheapest way to do it?'".* (Young person)

> *"Some of the online systems are so hard that you can't actually use them and there's no paper alternative".* (Practitioner)

Practitioners emphasised that they are often meeting people in a moment of crisis, and stressed the importance of having physical resources (leaflets, e.g.) that can be handed out in the moment, as well as online resources.

5. Digital inclusion should be embedded across policy and practice areas on child poverty and young people with experience of care

There is a clear commitment in Scotland, through the *Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan* and *The Promise*, to ensuring that children and young people, especially those with care experience, have the opportunity to flourish, whatever their background or start in life. While the ambitious targets of the *Child Poverty Act 2017* for addressing child poverty by 2030 are unlikely to be met, Scotland has made significant progress in reducing child poverty rates since its inception. The United Kingdom has one of the highest rates of child poverty in high-income and upper middle-income countries in the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and it is growing faster than in any other country measured by UNICEF[47]. Scotland's rates of child poverty are lower than other parts of the UK: the relative child poverty rate over the period 2022–23 to 2024–25 was 21%, compared with 28% in the UK as a whole and 38% in Greater London, in part due to devolved tax and benefit policies such as the Scottish Child Payment and mitigation of benefits caps[48]. Indeed, Scotland has been praised as 'the only part of the UK where child poverty is still a target being taken seriously'[49]. Morelli and Seaman[50] point out that the success of Free School Meal provisions in Scottish primary schools acted as a policy crucible for nationwide change. Congreve et al.[51] found that political and economy-wide barriers to this would be significant. Ambitious child poverty targets could be met solely using the Scottish Child Payment (SCP).

In 2017, the Scottish government moved away from the UK's austerity strategy and introduced the *Child Poverty Act* (henceforth *CPA*), which continues to be a guiding force, alongside *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*[52], the latest update on addressing its targets. The *CPA* paid close attention to the EU Rights of the Child and, unlike the rest of the UK at the time, set clear targets to address child poverty in Scotland by 2030. This can be a source of criticism as targets are unlikely to be met, however, it is often praised and pointed to as one of the reasons that Scotland has lower child poverty rates than other areas of the UK. Alongside the pivotal *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*, other key national frameworks include *Getting it Right for Every Child*[53], *The Promise*, and update on progress *Keeping the Promise*[54], and *Scotland's Population Health Framework 2025-2035*[55]. Scotland's *Adult Learning Strategy*[56] also focuses on addressing child poverty and the poverty-related attainment gap through support for family learning. Key Scottish Government interventions for child poverty include the Scottish Child Payment, School Clothing grants, and Best Start and Best Start Foods grants. The Scottish Government has provided funding for projects relating to child poverty through their Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund from 2023 to 2026.

The years 2025–26 have seen the publication of several key Scottish national digital and child poverty strategies, including flagship policies *Digital Strategy for Scotland* and *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*: *Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Action Plan.* However, there are few strategies which explicitly bring these two issues together.

Policies for digital inclusion and policies targeting child poverty are, for the most part, siloed. Digital inclusion appears as a subset of some child poverty policy documents, and is overlooked in others. Conversely, child poverty is rarely mentioned in digital (inclusion) policy. This can perhaps be attributed to approaches to child poverty, which tend to be holistic and cross-departmental, covering areas such as housing, finance, and health as part of their remit. The document *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*, for example, includes internet access as a key enabler in tackling the cost of living. Part of these more holistic approaches is also to treat the family as a unit, taking a holistic approach that includes children and their parents, guardians and/or carers as all requiring support in order to lift children out of poverty[57]. National policy does pay some attention to digital inclusion and care-experienced (young) people; the 2025 Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland's report[58] on Children Experiencing Poverty in Scotland includes a section on 'the digital divide: the impact on rights of care-leavers in Scotland', and the Edinburgh Poverty Commission's updated 2025 report[59] includes an explicit call to deliver a Minimum Digital Living Standard across Scotland.

Policy documentation varies across Scotland, and while some digital strategies have a distinct and detailed section focusing on digital inclusion, many are wider digital *innovation* or digital *transformation* frameworks with much focus on increasing digitalisation of services, with digital skills planning focused on the council workforce, or aiming to make better use of data to address citizens' needs[60]. In some cases, digital inclusion is part of wider equality and diversity frameworks[61]. Previous research has noted a decline in separate policy focus on digital inclusion since the end of COVID-19 measures[62], and this is reflected in several policies, where updated versions contain less digital inclusion content. There are yet few separate digital inclusion policy documents, with this provision instead rolled into wider strategies.

Several local policies for addressing child poverty talk about developing digital hubs, offer advice on digital affordability and digital/data literacy[63], accessing specific services in health, and having control over medical information and treatment options[64]. Some policies discuss provision of connectivity for families and collection/use of data[65] and training in digital skills for specific demographics and areas, such as training children in safe and responsible online behaviour[66]; council workers[67]; parents[68]; and people seeking employment and priority families[69]. SCVO's *Making digital inclusion everyone's responsibility: a roadmap for Scotland*[70] calls for policy activity like that in the Digital Health and Care Directorate to be rolled out consistently across policy areas, and for the development of a framework and assessment tool to explore how new policy initiatives can support the development of digital inclusion.

Renfrewshire Council stands out in terms of policy addressing these twin issues, with its recent *Keep the Promise in Renfrewshire Action Plan* and *Digital Strategy 2025-2030*[71] including a detailed strategic theme on digital inclusion, and reporting on child poverty is directly linked to digital inclusion efforts, with their *Child Poverty Action Report*[72] including progress on a range of digital inclusion projects. A number of areas in Scotland are moving towards integrated local planning arrangements with child poverty and children's services more aligned; this could be an opportunity to also align these plans with digital inclusion plans and interventions.

5.1. Collaborative work between the government and third sector organisations

National and local government and third sector organisations play a crucial part in digital inclusion provision in Scotland. National organisation SCVO supports the voluntary sector with an extensive digital inclusion platform through which it coordinates third sector delivery of digital inclusion initiatives, administers funding, supports evaluation and reporting, and facilitates shared practice and collaboration. They run and maintain Scotland's Digital Inclusion Charter, where organisations sign up to pledge specific actions to tackle digital exclusion. Mhor Collective takes a human rights-centred approach to digital inclusion and provides research, co-designed services, and evaluation, delivering a range of projects to address digital inequalities, including those affecting disabled people, refugees and people seeking asylum; people living through addiction; people with experience of homelessness; people who are victims of poverty; women and girls who are victims of violence; people with experience of the justice system and young people with experience of care. The National Device Bank and Data Bank, run by Good Things Foundation, operate across Scotland, providing access to new and refurbished devices, data and connectivity, and digital skills. The national Digital Inclusion Alliance will be hosted by Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS) and supported by the Digital Poverty Alliance (DPA). Over £750,000 of funding from the Digital Innovation Fund (UK Gov) will be distributed in Scotland between 2025 and 2026 to digital inclusion projects and interventions via the CivTech Challenge and Connecting Scotland programme. This programme was set up in 2020, as a response to the COVID-19 lockdowns, providing digital access through provision of devices, data and digital skills support focused on people on low incomes[73].

Organisations may work with local governments to provide opportunities. This can come in the form of free in-person digital skills courses (Glasgow Life); workshops or drop-in sessions, sometimes with a clear focus on accessing certain services, such as health (Inclusive Living Perth & Kinross). Many organisations train digital champions, with SCVO leading in providing training, support, toolkits, and learning pathways for organisations that provide digital champions for frontline digital inclusion support. Some upskill staff to offer support for specific issues, such as digital harm (Digital Lifelines Scotland) or mental health (Scottish Association for Mental Health), and many libraries have digital champions providing support and buddy programmes, including one-to-one sessions (Glasgow Life; East Lothian; North Ayrshire).

Limitations

- The fast-changing nature of both digital technologies and the policy landscape surrounding the digital society means that policy quickly becomes out of date; to address this, most of the grey literature referenced here has been published between 2021 and 2026
- Policies are future-facing documents, with time needed to see their effects; it is the work that will happen on the ground in response to these statements that will have real effects on the lives of Scottish citizens. There may also be substantial work going on which has not yet been published

- There will always be a gap between policy and implementation – between what is said and what is done; targets and intentions expressed in policy documents are not always acted upon
- This research is reliant upon web-based research, where sources are sometimes difficult to date and may be outdated, and is also reliant upon government and organisations to be publishing and updating work online (maintaining an online presence) which is not consistent
- This study represents small-scale, qualitative research so it is not generalisable, but rather provides key in-depth insights into the areas of study

Conclusions

Based on the evidence presented in this report, this study concludes with six principles for policy and practice across Scotland:

- Digital as essential, not optional
  - Digital access and skills must be recognised as essential infrastructure for all children's rights, wellbeing and life chances
- One shared benchmark for Scotland
  - The Minimum Digital Living Standard should be established across both child poverty and digital inclusion policy, provision, and procurement
- Keep non-digital routes open
  - Essential services must include offline options as well as support for digital access
- Ask, don't assume
  - There must be a proactive approach to finding out whether children, young people, and parents/carers have the combination of devices, connectivity, and skills they need to thrive
- Gift, don't lend
  - Permanent provision should be prioritised over short-term lending, in order to avoid recreating inequalities, stigma, and precarity
- Fund relationships, not just equipment
  - Providing a device is only the first step. Enabling children to take full advantage of opportunities means cultivating secure support networks of trusted adults, secure connectivity, and ongoing support

Recommendations

Policy

1. **A shared digital inclusion benchmark for Scotland**. Scottish Government should consider adopting the MDLS Scotland formally, following Audit Scotland's recommendation, and report annually on progress
2. **Joined-up policy and practice on child poverty**. Local Authorities should name explicit digital inclusion actions in their child poverty strategies and report in their local child poverty action reports, as well as children's services plans
3. **Joined-up policy and practice on care-experienced children and young people.** The Promise Scotland should review Plan 24-30 in the light of the findings, and work with key agencies to identify digital inclusion risks and actions
4. **Improved funding approaches for digital inclusion support.** Funders tackling child poverty should identify digital exclusion risks and budget to address them, prioritising long-term trusted adult support roles
5. **Guidance on supporting parents/carers and children to engage safely**. Guidance should prioritise digital skills, online safety, wellbeing, and managing (social media) pressures

Organisations supporting families affected by child poverty

1. **Ask, don't assume**. Measures like the three Indicators of Digital Inclusion (Good Things Foundation) can help organisations ask about digital access, skills, confidence and wellbeing
2. **Ensure school devices go home**. Guidance like Cost of the School Day resources (CPAG) can help support households with device access and connectivity for homework
3. **Provide routes into available local resources**. Referrals to local provision of devices and data/connectivity can offer support to families via, e.g., food banks, health visitors
4. **Guidance for schools, youth workers and digital champions**, understanding how to support children's/parents'/carers' skills and confidence, prioritising digital skills, wellbeing, and safety
5. **Write digital inclusion 'asks' into current and future funding bids**, to ensure digital inclusion is not forgotten or treated as an afterthought

Organisations supporting young people with experience of care

1. **Ask, don't assume**. Measures like the three Indicators of Digital Inclusion (Good Things Foundation) can help organisations ask about digital access, skills, confidence and wellbeing
2. **Set minimum Wi-Fi standards**, ensuring reliable internet access across different care settings, including foster, residential, and kinship care
3. **Ensure consistent, clear provision of an up-to-date, usable device**, not just for those in the care system, but for young people transitioning to independence
4. **Avoid punitive/restrictive approaches** such as device removal as punishment in care settings; prioritise fast repair/replacement of lost or broken devices
5. **Guidance on how to provide trauma-informed support** for children and young people who seek support with their digital access, confidence, and safety

Research

1. Conduct further research on the views and experiences of organisations and policymakers on how to effectively embed digital inclusion across policy areas
2. Conduct further research exploring the views, experiences, and minimum digital needs of specific groups, such as disabled people, refugees, people seeking asylum, Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, and women with experience of violence against women and girls (VAWG)
3. Widen the scope of this study by focusing on the whole of the UK and/or the UK in comparison to other European countries

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