Heart of the South West Digital Skills and Inclusion Evidence Base

LEP-Level Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2015 ERS was commissioned by the Heart of the South West (HotSW) Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to compile a robust evidence base on the digital skills and inclusion needs across the HotSW area. The agreed outputs included one report providing evidence at the LEP level and two additional reports at each county level:

> - **Devon**: East Devon; Exeter; Mid Devon; North Devon; South Hams; Teignbridge; Torridge; West Devon as well as separate sections for the two unitary authorities of Plymouth and Torbay; and
> - **Somerset**: Mendip; Sedgemoor; South Somerset; Taunton Deane; West Somerset.

The evidence gathering has been based around three main priorities, each with two themes within them, which also comprise the evidence framework for these reports, as defined by the HotSW Digital Skills and Inclusion Task and Finish Group:

Priority 1: Digital Inclusion	Theme 1: Inclusion issues (access, motivation, trust)
	Theme 2: Basic skills and digital literacy
Priority 2: Digital Working	Theme 1: Higher level digital skills
	Theme 2: Specialist digital skills
Priority 3: Organisational Infrastructure	Theme 1: Communications
	Theme 2: Support Staff

This study has sought to collect evidence on these issues at a national, LEP and county level. This has been done largely through face-to-face interviews with relevant parties in Somerset and Devon, in order to generate interest and project buy-in as well as providing an opportunity to explore some of the perceived needs of different organisations. In order to elicit evidence, a series of follow-up emails were sent and telephone calls made to these and a broader range of stakeholders across the HotSW LEP area, utilising a pro forma approach, supported by the Digital Task and Finish core team. Further telephone consultations were necessary given the lack of evidence forthcoming from specific areas.

This process has also been supported by detailed desk research in order to fill any gaps left in available evidence, particularly at the LEP level where few combined reports and data have so far been collated. In general, this process has highlighted a lack of coordinated data gathering and shared understanding of digital needs across the HotSW LEP area.

Digital Inclusion

UK Government strategy around digital issues highlights four main barriers to digital inclusion: Access; Skills; Motivation; and Trust. Within this area there has been a recent advancement in planning and project monitoring tools, with a digital project evaluation framework and logic model produced by the Government Digital Service (GDS).

Access

Access issues are found to focus around two particularly relevant factors: the rurality of a location and the demographics of the person seeking to access the digital resource. There are particular problems associated with implementing high speed broadband in rural and remote areas, not least of which is that the nearest telecoms provider 'relay box' (to which the fibre optic cables will be connected). This can be a significant distance from the final destination, meaning that traditional copper cables will make up the remainder, resulting in rapid deterioration of the broadband signal.

It has also been shown that older people in any location are much less likely to use the internet than younger people. Both issues of rurality and age are pertinent to the HotSW LEP area, with some of the highest percentages of rural land coverage in the country alongside specific pockets of ageing populations. As examples, in Plymouth, there is 97 per cent super-fast broadband coverage, 73 per cent in Torbay, dropping to 41 per cent in Somerset and 37 per cent in Devon (although these latter two will vary between urban and rural areas). It is noted that this was the latest coverage figure available at time of writing; the work of the Connecting Devon and Somerset programme will see a significant increase in these levels in rural areas. Areas with especially high proportions of people over 50 include West Somerset, South Hams, and both East and West Devon.

Motivation

Motivation for using digital resources is found to be lacking or not apparent in some socio-economic circumstances. The Government's movement towards 'digital by default' (DbD) for many resources means that numerous payments, claims, applications, communications, job search etc. would be primarily carried out via online portals.

At a national level there is evidence that people in more deprived or less socio-economically fortunate situations would be adversely affected by the move towards DbD as they are less likely to have either the basic digital skills or the means by which to access online services. Furthermore, the digital 'poverty premium' (the extra cost borne by those financially less well-off due to not having access to the best deals) also affects a similar spectrum of people around the country.

There is thus a motivational factor in getting people to realise and utilise the online resources that are available to: a) provide access to job applications, benefits, contact etc.; and b) reduce costs incurred due to not accessing services online e.g. certain energy accounts or some retail options.

These factors again affect specific areas of the HotSW LEP area disproportionately, with parts of both Devon and Somerset noted for having especially high levels of benefits claimants (e.g. Plymouth, Torbay, South Somerset, Sedgemoor), deprivation (e.g. Torbay, Torridge, West Somerset, Plymouth) and overall risk of poverty (e.g. Plymouth, Sedgemoor, Exeter, North Devon).

Trust

There is less robust evidence around trust in digital resources although a growing body of anecdotal evidence points towards user mistrust generated by security flaws, scares and human error. This was prevalent in discussions with stakeholders within both Devon and Somerset as well as from the national literature examined.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy and basic skills have been found to be absent in around a fifth of the UK population, although the criteria for ascertaining what 'basic digital skills' are does vary depending on the model used. This issue represents one of the main barriers to digital inclusion, with work from the BBC and Go-ON UK positing a digital inclusion spectrum based primarily around digital skills and confidence.

One group that has been shown to be affected by digital illiteracy especially when compared to their peers is those who are 'not in employment education or training' (NEET). There have been shown to be various impacts for this group in terms of confidence in using digital resources, as well as the knock-on effects in terms of positivity around gaining employment and having the skills necessary for today's (and tomorrow's) employment. There is not much variance noted across the HotSW LEP area in terms of NEET population, although a slightly higher proportion in Plymouth than elsewhere.

A number of digital literacy and support projects are also considered at a national and local level within the reports.

Higher Level Skills

In terms of 'in work' digital skills there is seen to be a continuation from the basic digital skills within the Inclusion remit that extends to working skills and knowledge. The digital skills pyramid below (adapted from work by Cosmic in the South West) shows how basic digital literacy 'life skills' underpin the layers of working skills necessary for modern business.
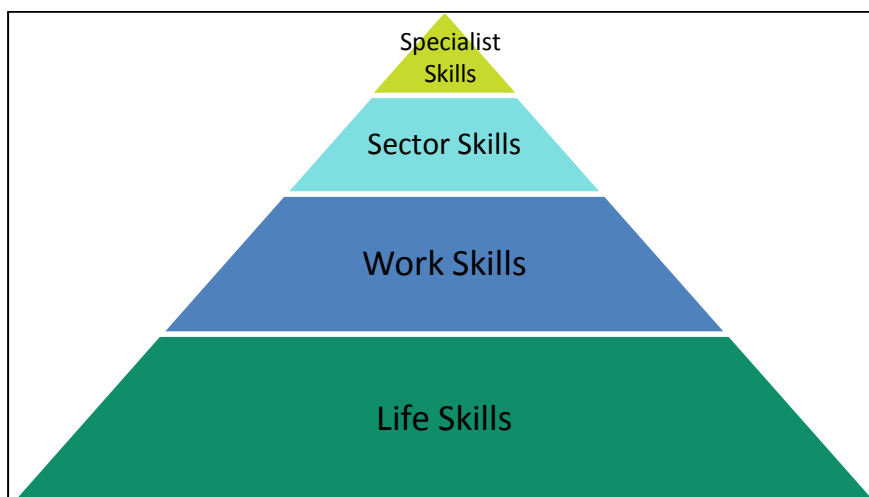
In terms of 'work skills', there are many areas of employment that increasingly need more advanced digital skills in order to carry out the job as automation and digitisation roll forward. The size of the digital and creative sector in the UK is another factor, with optimism both at the national and HotSW LEP area level in terms of job availability and expansion. Further to that, there are highly specialised skills around programming, cybersecurity and research, for example, which usually require an advanced (Master's or PhD) degree.

There is seen to be a skills gap both nationally and at a local level in the HotSW LEP area, with issues arising around creating interest in the full range of subjects in which digital working is expanding, including science, technology, engineering, art, mathematics (STEAM). The need to support digital training across different disciplines and not silo it into a specific 'subject' is important, both academically and within the workplace.

Three areas of work which have been highlighted at the sector level as increasingly exploitable for skills development are: big data, cloud computing and digital marketing. It is felt that the structure of SMEs around the HotSW LEP area could benefit from increased utilisation of these resources.

Specialist Skills

Within the specialist skills sphere, pockets of activity are highlighted in the HotSW LEP area (e.g. the Met Office in Exeter, the UK Hydrographic Office in Taunton). With respect to national needs at this level, several technical areas of expert skills are seen as being important for further innovation and research, including: big data, cybersecurity, mobile technologies, green IT and cloud computing. Note that whilst some of these were included as areas that any business could be exploiting in the near future, this section considers them in relation to businesses that will utilise the skills within their primary area of work.

Within the HotSWLEP area it is highlighted that graduate and postgraduate retention is an ongoing issue, with highly skilled (potential) staff being drawn to larger population centres and bigger salaries. It has therefore been suggested that a mixture of support for apprenticeships, graduate placements and in-house training could help to alleviate some of the skills demands in this area.

Communications

This area of evidence collection was focussed on the relevance of a combined partnership brand across the HotSW LEP area, for example pairing with Go-ON UK. Whilst other examples from around the UK provide support for such an approach, evidence from the individual counties suggests that a first step needs to be taken within each local authority, around communicating the value and successes of digital working in action within the districts and county councils, as well as affiliated organisations.

Fundamental to this process is the recognised need for transformational change within council culture, from a 'traditional' organisation towards one that can embrace digital working as a matter of standard practice. In doing so, the need for upskilling or reskilling support staff becomes apparent as well as it being necessary to allow for support of the new digital ways of working. It has been found in work with other county councils in England that once the success of newer approaches (e.g. in terms of efficiency savings, positive feedback or staff well-being) are communicated back to management, this is likely to support increased buy-in and investment in such approaches.

Support Staff

Closely related to the issue of communication, the training of support staff in order to accommodate new ways of working is regarded within both Devon and Somerset councils as an important step towards a digitised provision of services. There is an understanding (albeit anecdotal) that staff are fearful for job security in the face of increased digitisation and automation of roles. This may result in staff deciding to not signposting customers towards online resources that are available. Therefore, it has been suggested that providing staff with training that could instead support the digital resources as opposed to competing with them would provide an approach that is beneficial to all concerned.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Clearly, there are a variety of factors that are facilitating or hindering digital inclusion, many of which are outside of the LEP's control. The recommendations set out on the following pages are based on evidence from all three reports created for this evidence gathering exercise. The recommendations focus on actions that the LEP could lead or support and are divided between those actions that could be implemented/generate impacts quickly and those that can only be delivered over the longer term.

Overarching Recommendations

Quick Win

- **Appoint a LEP Board Digital Champion.** This is seen as crucial in symbolic and practical terms in order to demonstrate and deliver the LEP's commitment to addressing the digital agenda.

Longer Term Actions

- Co-ordinated research and evaluation **should be undertaken to understand digital needs within the HotSW area.** Whilst this report has presented all of the evidence made available, there are inconsistencies in the level of detail and the spatial area to which data relates. Consequently, there is believed to be scope to improve the evidence base whilst supporting the **monitoring and evaluating of projects** or initiatives supporting digital skills and inclusion. This would also support creation of digital tools or processes implemented internally for the benefit of staff and/or service-users. Obtaining a unified and comparable set of data for all districts and authorities across HotSW would then be used to 'prove' and 'improve', i.e. to establish what works well and why to inform future delivery. Future HotSW LEP work should therefore also **refer to the overarching GDS Outcomes Framework when planning new projects and proposals.** The logic framework model (evidenced in the Digital Inclusion Outcomes Framework) provides a well-trusted best practice methodology for linking the design of a project to its (evaluated) outcomes.

- It is important to **avoid strict 'digital silos' i.e. the artificial separation of 'digital' as a standalone tool, process, or topic.** Emerging thinking points to a more holistic view of digital within education i.e. cross-curriculum integration of digital skills. Interestingly, a similar viewpoint is emerging from various local authorities in the way they embed digital working.

Priority 1: Digital Inclusion (Themes: Inclusion and Literacy Issues)

Priority areas

- **Provision should focus on localised support for places that rank highly in terms of various metrics including:**

  > - Multiple Indices of Deprivation
  > - Risk of Poverty
  > - Number of NEETs
  > - Number of people aged 65 and over
  > - High speed broadband availability
  > - Benefits claimants

The heat map below provides a general indication of priority areas when taking into account the interaction of the above social metrics at a district-level.
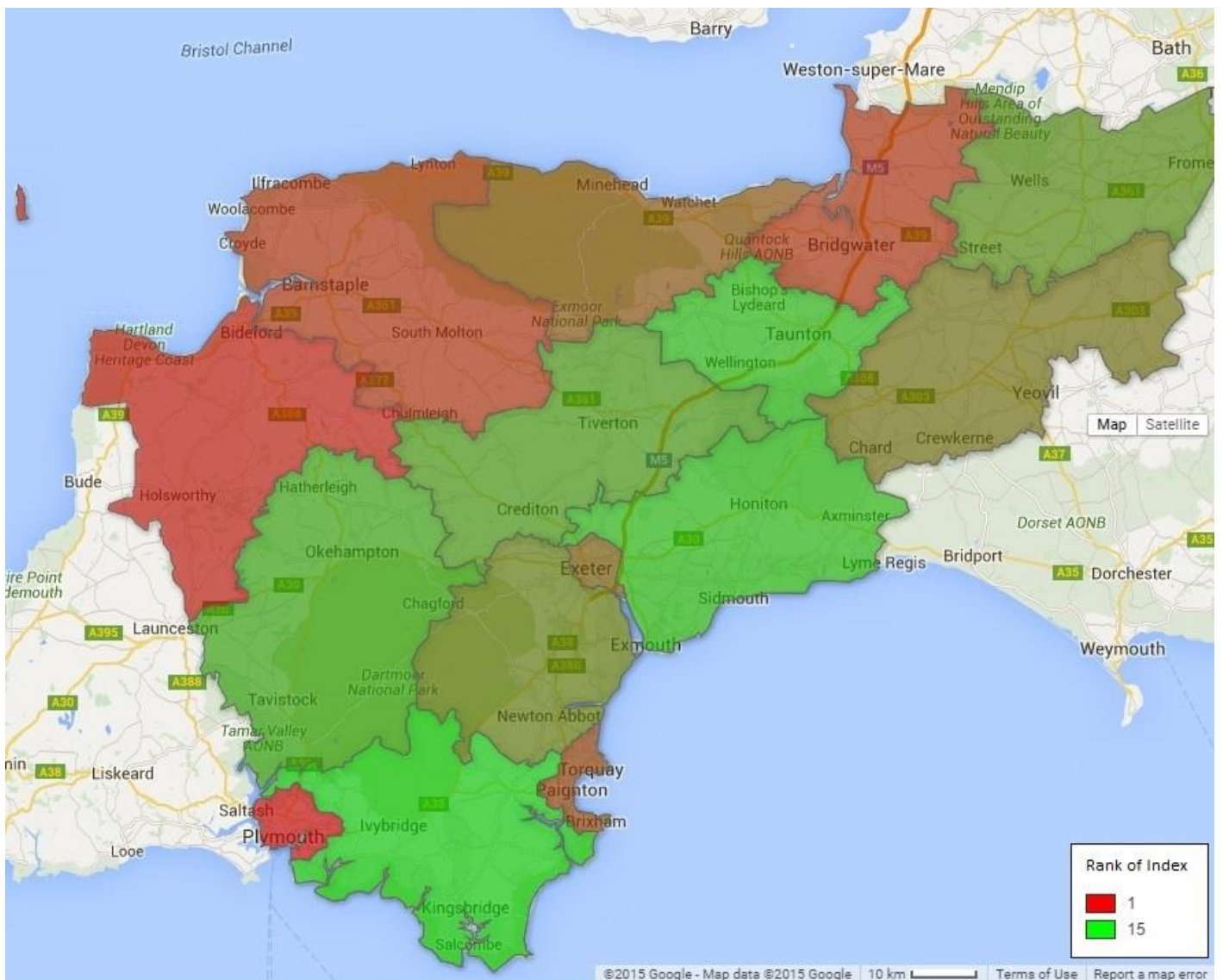
It should be noted that further breakdowns at ward level, as well as accounting for particular socio-economic factors (e.g. low-income families, other groups at risk of digital exclusion within specific geographies) should be considered. In addition, the methodology has not included weighting of particular metrics so each has an equal impact on the overall mapping (further explanation of the methodology is provided in Appendix 1).

Access

Quick Wins

▪ Undertake a refreshed **audit of digital access** which would cover wired access points and Wi-Fi, as well as quantifying capacity where equipment is made available. This will help to establish coverage and gaps and in so doing measure progress that has been made and where more needs to be done to facilitate digital inclusion.

Longer Term Actions

▪ In response to the above, **continued and expanded provision of physical access points (through PC or WiFi) in key locations** (by greatest need) should be prioritised to support groups most at risk of digital exclusion. Libraries, for example, constitute an important source of free (at point-of-use) internet which can be further built upon. In rural areas, village halls and such have also been used and a scheme across the LEP area could be extended, for example considering the Landfill Communities Fund. **Collaborations in the form of delivery partnerships and co-design with service users should also be promoted.** These will be required to maximise coverage and efficiencies. This may also require investment in buildings, equipment, systems and staff training. These might provide the best opportunity for focusing Big Lottery funds, for example.

▪ **Online services should be optimised for smartphones** as this remains the only method through which many JCP claimants are able to access the internet. Whilst penetration rates for this technology vary, it is very important for some target groups (as evidenced through several Somerset reports, for example). Data on methods of access could be used to further support lower access as well as helping guide where Wi-Fi services in job centres might be most useful.

▪ **Continue to support the roll out of broadband to rural areas** through the Connecting Devon and Somerset programme, and the associated community engagement programme; Get Up to Speed.

Literacy

Longer Term Actions

▪ **The provision of informal (and on-going) face-to-face support and coaching** to enable those with low digital literacy access important services continues to be valuable at key access points (as mentioned above). Resources could be sought, for example, from the Tinder Foundation (as is currently the case in for Somerset Libraries) or through wider remit digital inclusion funds (e.g. BIG Lottery fund).

▪ **Digital life skills for digitally excluded individuals can be improved through fostering appreciation and understanding of the value of digital to them personally**. Training for these groups should focus on engagement through existing interests and hobbies to help individuals understand the benefits holistically, with training on specific council services incorporated as part of this process rather than in isolation. Success from previous initiatives should also be built upon, e.g. Cosmic's success in HotSW in in delivering support through well-established intermediaries and the success of Housing Associations in the area.

Priority 2: Digital Working (Themes: Higher Level and Specialist Skills)

Quick Wins

▪ **A focus for the HotSW is to support Higher and Specialist skills through leveraging targeted funds across the LEP area,** particularly focused on the rural-urban divide. This could include European Social Fund (ESF) or European Agricultural and Rural Development Fund (EARDF) rural funds for a programme of higher skills support based on specific needs. In all cases, there is a requirement for detailed surveys to establish clearly defined need/(s). There may be scope to utilise existing VCS organisation experience in relation to such projects. Likewise, **there is potential scope for ERDF funding based on 'innovation training', or digitally-focussed enterprise and start-up support**. If such projects were funded in HotSW, a core component for new businesses could be around basic digital skills, for example. Universities or other larger organisations could be approached as potential leads for such projects, where applicable.

Longer Term Actions

- **Support for the development of informal groups and networks e.g. coding clubs, skills exchanges, and digital clusters** could contribute to both development of new 'homegrown' talent as well as up-skilling/re-skilling of existing talent. This was well-documented in the LEP-commissioned digital skills shortages report, which also suggested establishing a 'digital cluster' around Devonport Market Hall. An example in Somerset is SRYP, which provide some informal support for young people seeking coding and associated skills; in Devon, Torbay Tech Jam runs dedicated projects and support for anyone interested in coding, Raspberry Pi and further tech. Nationally, a number of groups have supported individuals to gain new, up-to-date skills, connected businesses to talent, and a number of women or girls-only groups have contributed towards addressing the gender imbalance within STEM-related sectors.

- **Strengthen links between businesses and the skills pipeline** (schools, colleges, and universities) to support local talent growth and retention, and awareness of opportunities. This is something the LEP could support through the development of dedicated websites, for example. This can be supported by provision of 'more and better' IAG on analytical career prospects and role models[1] (including diverse role models to avoid further alienation of particular groups from STEM disciplines).

- **There is scope for the development of business forums to support small businesses to share relevant digital CDP and training approaches across member companies**. For example, in the past the Torbay Hi-Tech Forum has supported its members in considering a combined CPD offer to maximise training time for courses not offered in the South West, necessitating trainers from further afield. In providing a group of businesses support for specific digital skills issues there is the possibility to enhance a sector or sub-sector in one location with e.g. digital marketing or cloud computing skills. Workshops are also well-regarded for training of SMEs so these should be utilised where possible.

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[1] Nesta (2015) Analytic Britain: Securing the right skills for the data-driven economy

Priority 3: Organisational Infrastructure (Themes: Communications and Support Staff)

Quick Wins

- **Establish benchmarking procedures to assess digital skills held by frontline organisation staff** to ensure they can effectively train and support clients and customers in developing basic digital skills. It is important to ensure that the workforce possess the skills to respond to new ways of working but also that they understand the value of, and do not feel threatened by, this change e.g. through upskilling alongside clearly communicating the value and aims of digital working, and hence supporting digital culture as well as digital capacity. It is noted that within the libraries services, which are more centrally oriented to support staff, there is a unified system supporting basic digital skills of staff, as well as development through the 'digital champions' roles[2]. The GDS Digital Inclusion Outcomes Framework also includes surveying materials for assessing basic digital skills while the e-business adoption ladder provides a standardised approach from an organisational perspective.

Longer Term Actions

- **A key step which must precede any unified LEP-level 'brand', involves establishing clear communication, gaining buy-in, and achieving culture change around digital at a county-level.** This can be achieved by knowing what works well in terms of a digital resource or approach, and clearly communicating project-specific successes and benefits of digital working to the management as well as the public; this would increase 'buy-in' and potentially open up willingness to invest. It is therefore important to ensure that the **workforce possess the skills to respond to new ways of working** but also that they understand the value of, and do not feel threatened by, this change e.g. through upskilling alongside clearly communicating the value and aims of digital working. To bring this about, it will be necessary to **identify where training is needed and by whom.** There is scope for many support staff that current problem solve customer issues to be retrained to support the digital infrastructure in place. By finding parallels between work currently undertaken and that which might be needed in future delivery there is the opportunity to more easily transfer skills from one domain to another. This will ensure that **face-to-face support is reduced not replaced by digital** as there is a need to maintain sufficient levels of support staff to continue to assist individuals requiring face-to-face or phone service provision in spite of a digital channel shift

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[2] Society of Chief Librarians, Digital information skills for library workforce

- **Implementation of a 'minimum standard of service' as a way to ensure that all districts provide and record the same support and online services.** By having a shared approach to what is expected from staff at all levels in Devon and Somerset there would be increased understanding and enhanced morale with regard to digital working. In turn, this could support customer trust and confidence in the resources they are using online as support would come from local staff as well as central government.

APPENDIX 1: HOTSW DIGITAL INCLUSION MAPPING METHODOLOGY

The mapping methodology ranked all 15 districts/unitary authorities in HotSW against the raw scores for each of the six metrics used, thus treating each metric as a single item in an overarching scale or index of Global Inclusion. This is shown in the Table below. The final Global Inclusion Index score was calculated from the mean of these individual item scores (as is usual practice e.g. with ordinal scales). For clarity, these mean scores were rank ordered, providing an overall ranking from 1 to 15, where 1 has the highest individual rankings (and therefore the highest likelihood) for digital exclusion risk factors and 15 has the lowest risk factor rankings[3].

It is noted that the biggest different between the Go-ON mapping and this approach is around the relative impact of urban deprivation (in particular Plymouth, Exeter and Torbay), which has greatly impacted in this mapping exercise but is outweighed in the Go-ON work by better infrastructure, and greater income and digital skill use associated with those areas.

District	Median Deprivation Score[4]	Rank Deprev'n	Overall Risk poverty, ranked[5]	Rank Risk Poverty	% 16-18 y.o. NEET[6,7]	Rank NEET	% Super-fast avail-able[8,6]	Rank Super-fast
Plymouth	12,431	4	51	1	6.2	1	97	15
Torbay	10,045	1	159	5	4.1	15	73	14
East Devon	22,872	15	247	13	4.2	11	37	5
Exeter	17,481	8	121	3	4.2	11	37	5
Mid Devon	15,788	7	192	9	4.2	11	37	5
North Devon	14,350	5	151	4	4.2	11	37	5
South Hams	18,887	13	273	14	4.2	11	37	5
Teignbridge	18,749	11	235	12	4.2	11	37	5
Torridge	11,811	2	166	7	4.2	11	37	5
West Devon	14,910	6	278	15	4.2	11	37	5
Mendip	17,526	9	183	8	4.4	4	41	11
Sedgemoor	17,796	10	114	2	4.4	4	41	11
South Somerset	18,821	12	198	10	4.4	4	41	11
Taunton Deane	18,991	14	165	6	4.4	4	41	11
West Somerset	12,223	3	232	11	4.4	4	41	11

(Continued overleaf)

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[3] It is acknowledged that a more detailed approach could account for a) the relative difference between individual metric scores and b) estimate weightings for different metrics dependent on the relative importance or impact of each variable. However, that level of detail is outside the scope of the current evidence gathering study.
[4] DCLG (2015) English Indices of Deprivation
[5] Guardian (2012) Poverty Maps of England
[6] DEF (2015) NEET data by local authority
[7] Data only available at a county/unitary authority level.
[8] Ofcom (2013) Broadband coverage

District	% Pop. Over 65[9]	Rank Over 65	No. on Benefits[10]	Rank Benefits	Mean Index Score	Rank of Index
Plymouth	33.2	14	26240	1	**6.00**	**1**
Torbay	44.3	7	14220	2	**7.17**	**5**
East Devon	47.8	3	6610	9	**9.00**	**12**
Exeter	28.7	15	8490	5	**7.67**	**7**
Mid Devon	42.3	10	4520	12	**8.83**	**11**
North Devon	43.0	8	6350	10	**7.00**	**3.5**
South Hams	48.5	2	4480	13	**9.67**	**15**
Teignbridge	44.8	6	7920	6	**8.50**	**9**
Torridge	46.4	5	4760	11	**6.50**	**2**
West Devon	47.2	4	3210	14	**9.17**	**13.5**
Mendip	41.7	12	6870	8	**8.67**	**10**
Sedgemoor	41.9	11	8760	4	**7.00**	**3.5**
South Somerset	42.7	9	9320	3	**8.17**	**8**
Taunton Deane	40.2	13	7000	7	**9.17**	**13.5**
West Somerset	53.7	1	2410	15	**7.50**	**6**

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[9] ONS Mid-year population estimates 2014
[10] ONS Claimant Count Feb 2015