

Heart of the South West LEP Digital Skills Partnership
Annual Report for the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport
October 2019

Executive Summary

The Heart of the South West LEP Digital Skills Partnership covers one of the two largest LEP geographical areas, encompassing two County Councils, two Unitary Councils, 12 District Councils and two National Parks serving 1.75 million inhabitants. Given the size of the area and the varied landscape, digital skills need, and capability varies greatly across the region. The Digital Skills Partnership (DSP) fills a previous void, providing a resource which brings together representatives of local government but also key private sector organisations (the Met office, UK Hydrographic Office, Leonardo Helicopters, Microsoft and BT), alongside SME's and third sector organisations (CodeClub and Libraries Unlimited) from across the region to foster digital skills collaboration and develop joint digital strategies both as a partnership and with wider stakeholders.

“Digital skills in the Heart of South West area have been the central plank of my career at Cosmic, and so developing and driving plans for our Digital Skills Partnership felt like a challenge I should take up. As this report clearly demonstrates, what began in the summer of 2017 as a discussion with partners, national and regional, has evolved into a successful programme of digital skills provision, campaigns and events all of which are evidencing increasing collaboration and impact for the benefit of individuals and businesses. Looking ahead, and with the full support of the DSP Board, I will continue to Chair and support the growing DSP team in 2020, making real impact and furthering the economic success of our region and people through digital skills.”
Julie Hawker. Director, Cosmic.

This is a region home to 83,000+ businesses, predominantly soletraders, micro's and SME's. In addition there are clusters of excellence fuelled by developed digital capability :-

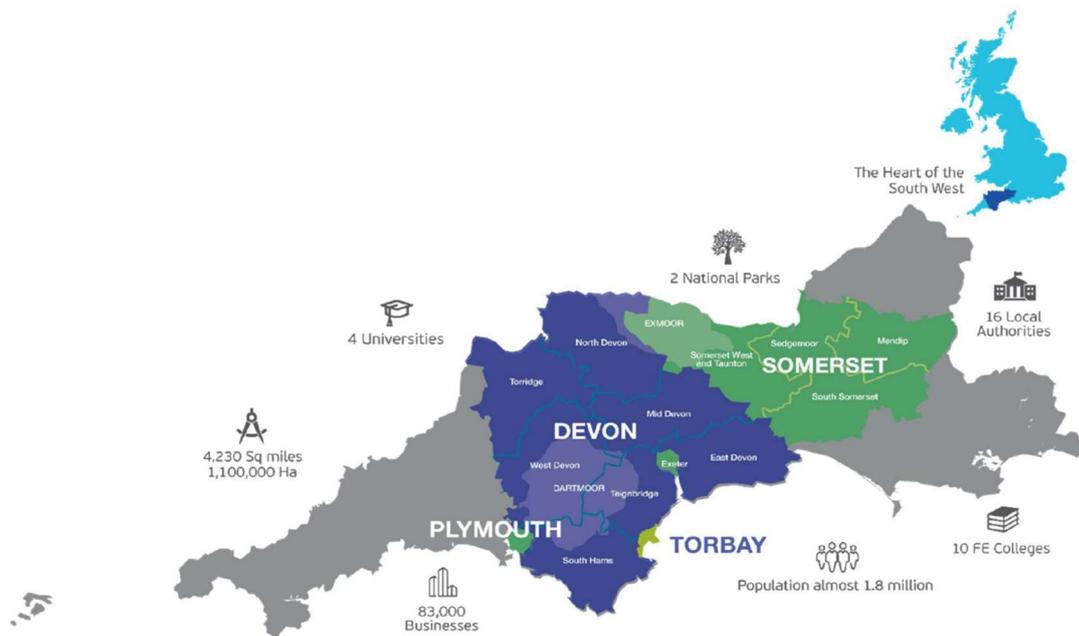
- Blue Economy; Plymouth has significant marine capability and autonomous fleet testing on Plymouth Sound, offshore renewables are in-development off the North Devon coast, and UK Hydrographic Office in Somerset supplying 90% of the world's shipping data.
- Manufacturing; Plymouth is recognised for its manufacturing strengths home to companies such as Plessey who manufacturer the UK's only micro LED's which will be key to the future of wearable tech.
- Data Analytics and Clean Growth cluster in Exeter centred around the presence of the Met Office and its supercomputer dedicated to weather and climate, (cited as one of the world's 50 most powerful computers) but also including organisations like the Impact Lab, Exeter City Futures who are harnessing data to propel SME and green technologies.
- Clean Growth; The Hinckley C project in Somerset (the largest construction project in Europe) will see Somerset in partnership with EDF will lead the way on the latest renewable energy application.

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Whether across the clusters or through the sizeable food production, farming and tourism sectors the acquisition and continual investment in digital skills across businesses of all sizes will be the catalyst to optimum productivity and clean growth.

“The delivery of Digital skills is key to the delivery of the Heart of the South West Productivity Plan – Stepping up to the Challenge – and our Local Industrial Strategy. However, as well as driving up productivity, which remains a challenge to our area and the UK generally, Digital Skills are a core functionality of day to day business, are essential for upward mobility and individual’s well-being in an ever-increasing connected world. The rise in digital skill level will drive our low carbon economy fit for the 21st century”

David Ralph. CEO, Heart of the South West LEP



The report that follows, outlines the significant traction the Partnership has had across the business community and within education. As we move into the second year of delivery we will be focusing on inclusion and diversity. Identifying areas of digital skills deprivation and working with existing and new partners to move those digitally disadvantaged into a connected community that space the Heart of the South West.

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The role of the Regional Coordinator

I often describe the Partnership as an umbrella organisation covering Devon, Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay. My role is to hold up that umbrella, to be an accessible and present figure within localities and to the organisations operating therein. Given the scope of the geography, seizing every opportunity to present to different bodies is an essential tactic utilising time effectively to reach many. On average presenting twice a month with a portfolio of presentations tailored to different audiences; strategic groups, businesses, young people. In addition, supporting third party events is equally important, networking with an added bonus of maintaining a LEP presence which is challenge across a small core team. The dedicated role ensures a constant digital skills voice, authenticated with national and local intel on the digital skills position participating in a wide range of sector and organisational conversations.

Stakeholder engagement is a big part of the role and despite delivering this at pace, there remains many organisations and individuals that are not yet aware of the Digital Skills Partnership. Going forward, continuing new engagements whilst strengthening those partnerships already formed are key. Establishing a strong and clear online presence, delivering content through our social channels, website and newsletter are essential to being effective.

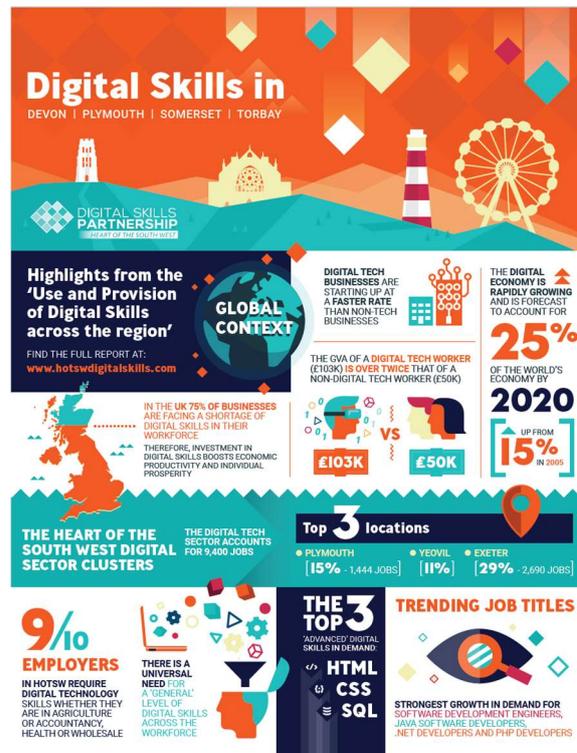
At the offset, I came into post able to act on research funded by seven organisations within the DSP who had contributed £21,000 to fund 'The Use and Provision of Digital Skills across the Heart of the South West'. This report published November 2018 acted as a benchmark to inform the direction of the Partnership going forward and in my first meeting in post of the Partnership I lead a working session to prioritise the research's recommendations by Impact and Feasibility forming our Strategic Action Plan for 2019. This was important milestone as it gave me a mandate to work too, enabling me to match requests that otherwise could derail progress to the agreed strategic focus.

To create impact around the launch of the Action Plan we worked with a design agency to establish a brand for the Partnership which has been carried across a toolkit which includes the Action Plan, an infographic on the areas skills needs, a Mailchimp newsletter, social media banners, slide decks and the #SPARKDIGITAISKILLS campaign.

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Action Plan [link](#)



Use & Provision of Digital Skills [link](#)

Sharing opportunities and evidencing impact is essential – again back to that constant digital skills voice – and we communicate through our newsletter and with different groups via monthly reporting. Key Performance Indicators track progress against the Action Plan across binary and qualitative markers and we are committed to publishing an annual report in February 2020 to share the results of our first year in action.

“Charlotte curates a wide range of programmes that highlight the need to develop our digital skills in the South West. Being on the Steering Group for those programmes gives me credibility when I talk to Rural Small Businesses about the impact of Digital Transformation”

Dave White. Director, WhiteBruce

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Regional Collaboration – National Providers

Following last year's pilot, where no HotSW schools or colleges participated in the **British Esports Association Championships**, the DSP has helped to raise engagement across the region. Besides developing team work and strategy skills Teachers cite the benefits of participation in the after-school league as a key influencer in connecting pupils who have traditionally not engaged with IT and computer science with IT teachers and the faculty. Given that raising the aspiration of British white boys and the takeup of computer science with girls, all tactics that increase the number of pupils finding out about game design, networks and streaming platforms is to be encouraged. As a result of the effort we have 13 teams from Bridgwater & Taunton college, South Devon college, Weston College and Millfield school have registered for the Autumn 2019 league. With 4 other schools and colleges and SPACE who are looking to provide a facility for Tiverton High school pupils hoping to sign up to the Spring 2020 league.

BT, STEM Learning and **Code Club** sit on our Partnership and there is close collaboration. We work with STEM Learning to promote STEM Ambassadors and are on the cusp of registering as STEM Ambassador to promote digital skills throughout schools. When speaking to school and colleges we constantly reference the NCFE computer CPD for teachers and promote the areas new Computer Hubs. Charlotte has undertaken the Barefoot Computing training and recommends it's take up to primary schools. Likewise, we are working to ensure the Code Clubs that are on the verge of launching but are awaiting a volunteer to run, receive maximise publicity.

BT were a founding partner of the DSP, and despite our Regional Director becoming the English Regions Director we have an active working relationship and receive input across a range of DSP activity. As BT announce their commitment to train 10 million children, young people not in education or training, businesses and families we are looking forward to the Partnership playing an active part in targeting this activity at those furthest removed and encouraging uptake.

"In an increasingly digital world it is vital that we put a strong focus on digital skills. There are very few consumers and businesses unaffected by what living and working in a digital world means. Digital Skills Partnerships help determine the local priorities for closing any existing skills gaps and accelerating the skills levels of those already engaged in digital. DSPs also play a strong role in landscaping digital initiatives in their geography and then sign-posting people and businesses to them.

Government should seek to give them more empowerment and funding to enable them to go further and faster with their work.

With my day-job hat on, as BT Group Director for England, the HOTSWS DSP is a going to be a vital route for promoting our new "Skills for Tomorrow" initiative which aims to reach 10m people with digital insight and skills access. "

Paul Coles. English Regions Group Director. BT

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Following low take-up in the South West of the **NESTA Longitude Explorer Prize**, NESTA been given financial support from BEIS to deliver outreach activity ahead of the registration phase for this year's schools competition. The competition will see pupils age 11- 16 engage in a year long period of activity around AI for social good. To support take-up the DSP is brokering venues, school participation and NESTA's outreach activity.

Stemming from a DCMS introduction, our DSP is working closely with new Partner Nicola Dillion (South West region Local Government Director) to deliver a host of activity: -

- For the first time **Microsoft** will trial delivery of their female focused **hackdays** aimed at year 5,5,7 & 8 pupils. The DSP is brokering the venue, the schools engagement and the outreach activity which will offer places to 160 pupils from 16 schools this November.
- Following the impact seen at the **Microsoft EduLive conference** at Exeter college. We have a target date of February 2020 to run a similar event to raise internal skills within Plymouth, Torbay, Somerset and Devon County Councils. Enabling staff to feel confident about the tools they have available and increase productivity through their use. This will then be embedded through in work training which is offered as part of a formal CPD program
- Promoting the **Microsoft for Startup** initiatives, a competitive process, that offers training, software and a platform to apply for venture capital to successful startups.

Barclays have selected Taunton as one of their three cities nationally to support with the Thriving Local Economies, a three-year digital business support program. The launch event is planned for this month and the program will commence with an in-depth analysis into the digital skills needs of the business community. This initiative is well placed as our evidence shows Taunton as the third top location across the region that employs people in both the technology sector and in digital roles across sectors. With the city's rising strength supported by a varied and leading edge digital curriculum through Bridgwater and Taunton college, Digital Taunton which launched this year and attracts regularly 100+ attendees to its monthly meetups and key employees such as Leonardo, EDF energy and the Hinckley C supply chain (Hinckley C being the largest the largest construction project in Europe, constructing the first new nuclear power station in the UK for a generation).

Finally the DSP is keen to explore an initiative put forward by the **National Digital Skills Partnership** and the **Digital and Enterprise Delivery Group**, working with an Exeter consortium to submit a promotional overview on why the city would make an excellent host city for a DCMS, Lloyds, Deloitte backed Digital Skills hubs. Decision pending.

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Regional Collaboration – Local Providers

We work closely with Schools (mostly through the Careers Hub) but are building our own direct links into schools, with the 10 FE colleges and the two universities of Plymouth and Exeter. With 5 of the 33 Partner places being held by FE and the Universities.

With each of these education groups we rely on single points of contact to disseminate the offers both to and out of the organisations. With each of the groups we have been able to bring in new opportunities that otherwise would have struggled to find traction within these large organisations. We have also offered official support to the regions two new Institute of Technologies and will be working with them to signpost as their expanding STEM curriculum gets underway.

“The University of Exeter has already established considerable links with and through our activities with the DSP. Work in this field is absolutely critical to growing our regional economy and the DSP has already interacted positively with a number of new developments involving the University, including: the Data Analytics Skills Escalator; building the case for the successful South West Institute of Technology application; identifying markets for our Degree Apprenticeships in Data Science and linking with the Environmental Futures and Big Data Impact Lab”

Andrew Dean, Exeter University

“The digital skills partnership and partnership coordinator and exposed Exeter College to many wider regional opportunities and connected the College initiatives to relevant parties. This has in turn led to the College hiring events and feeling more connected to the digital community. Charlotte has also been to the college leadership team and up-skilled / shared knowledge of the national initiatives for our students and staff. Overall this has led to a much more joined-up and coherent approach to a system-led digital south west.”

Rob Bosworth. Vice-Principal, Exeter College.



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City College Retweeted



Becky Boyd @beckyboydgeek · Oct 3

I've come a long way baby. #Plymouth to be exact! Here doing a #DigitalGarage from @GoogleUK on #Analytics & #scalingyourbrand. Excited to be working with @LBGDigi at @cityplym! 🙌🙌🙌



Google UK and 2 others



“Excellent regional knowledge and signposting to opportunities and resources. The staff, students and the wider community have benefitted from a range of free workshops from the likes of Lloyds, Google and Facebook.”

Mark Trewin. Director of Creative, Cultural and Digital Industries, City College Plymouth.

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Digital Skills Training

We have worked closely with Lloyds Banking group to run **Lloyds Digital Knowhow Sessions** to circa 400 sole traders and micro businesses in Yeovil, Barnstaple, Frome, Plymouth, Taunton and Exeter covering Digital Marketing, Social Media and Analytics. These courses are aimed at those with basic moving to intermediate levels of digital skills and it would be wrong to assume that despite these topics being available through digital workshops for a long time now, that demand has been saturated. An example being the Barnstaple workshop were all 50+ attendees had a website but when asked to raise a hand who knew the traffic visiting their site only one hand remained up. This is supported through the findings in the Lloyds Bank Charity and Business Index 2018 which found the key opportunity for uplifting digital productivity was through upskilling sole trader.

“Increasing digital skills across the community is at the heart of our economic work and fits within our Digital Strategy for Northern Devon (2018). The Digital Skills Partnership therefore offers an exciting opportunity to change digital perspectives in Torrridge and across wider northern Devon. The recent Lloyd’s Bank workshop hosted in Barnstaple was the perfect example of the coordinator facilitating an opportunity to provide a high-quality upskilling event for the region which could then be backed by the two District Councils. Having the one central coordinator to oversee and understand where impact can be achieved will be of ever-growing importance moving forward.”

Chris Fuller, Economic Officer, Torrridge District Council

The feedback below is from the **Lloyds Digital Knowhow** Frome workshop but is typical of all the feedback received from the other locations. Due to the sessions being so well we will look to plan further topics with Lloyds.

86% will follow up with the resources introduced at the event

83% said the event helped them better understand the opportunities of using Digital within their organisation

76% said the event helped improve their digital skills

90% said they found the event useful.



Lloyds Digital Know Frome Town Hall September 2019

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“Frome has a population of around 27,000 and is a rural market town in Somerset. The majority of businesses in the town are micro-businesses and Frome Town Council works closely with the business community to provide relevant networking and training opportunities to ensure businesses have the skills they need to continue to thrive. The Digital Knowhow training delivered by Google was a great success with over 50 people attending the training. This was a very high level of attendance for a business event in the town and feedback from the businesses that attended was extremely positive.”
Vivienne Whitacker, Frome Town Council

Buzz Start Academy deliver Freeformers (Facebook) workshops to large cohorts teaching digital entrepreneur techniques through hands on wireframing and app design. The program has 6 modules covering Innovation, Social Media, Web Presence, Cyber Security, Data, AI and to date we have run two modules to over 150 people from the community, apprenticeship programs and adult learners through Exeter College and City College Plymouth.



Buzz Start Academy Freeformers workshop at Exeter College 8th of October 2019

The inaugural **Exeter Data Analytics Conference** was been organised by an Exeter consortium including the Digital Skills Partnership. Held at the Impact Lab, October 2019 the event was aimed at businesses holding data who hadn't yet started to explore the potential for that data to inform their business process and operations. The conference covered Data Analytics - the art of the possible, followed by a series of Exeter business case studies and resources and organisations that could help business access analytics going forward.

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“Charlotte and the DSP have been instrumental in helping to organise an event of the Exeter Analytics Network, focussed on bringing together and supporting Exeter-based businesses that can benefit from greater use of analytics including digital skills. The event is taking place later in October, and we're expecting it to be highly impactful for the organisations involved as well as shaping the broader analytics and digital skills agenda in the region.”

Tomasz Stefanski. Head of Data Science, Sparx

Partnership working with **Google** has improved recently, and we are now able to have visibility of when they will be in the region which helps us promote their events. To date Google have delivered 10 workshops across the region benefitting circa 400 people from the business community.

The DSP were one of four LEP's to successfully bid and receive a quarter of the £1 million **Digital Skills Innovation Fund**. This fund is now an active program having recruited an experienced project manager and is delivering five different programs delivered by local digital training providers to 150 learners across the LEP. The learning is targeted at women returners, career pivoters or business owners or individuals resident in the LEP's bottom 20% most deprived wards. Take -up for the program is going well and we expect to over deliver the number of learners. The program will be independently evaluated and learnings will be shared with Government to inform future retraining schemes and be taken forward into our ESF and National Retraining schemes.



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Case Studies

Case Studies demonstrating individual impact have not been captured to date but these will be forthcoming as the Digital Skills innovation fund nears completion. In this section we highlight DSP campaigns that are raising digital skills ambition.

Digital Skills Slide Deck for Young People age 11-18. We have developed a presentation for schools and colleges that raises awareness of the pervasive requirement for digital skills across all future jobs. It explains the breadth of digital and technology roles, the growth in demand and the financial set against a backdrop of failing uptake of computer science and the gender imbalance. To date we have delivered this to over 1400 pupils across the region and have an open offer to schools to invite the Partnership in to present. A next step will be to offer this out to schools through the STEM Ambassador program that schools are able to draw down offers through.

Below are a selection of slides from the presentation.



Move their mind set forward – future gazing



The stark facts. But what are Digital Skills?



Tailored to their city – show the demand rising



But there is a broken link



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GIRLS - THE DIGITAL WORLD NEEDS YOU!

Out of 2,000 A-Level Students interviewed

- only 3% of girls said a career in tech was their first choice
- and only 27% of girls compared to 62% of boys would consider a career in tech
- maybe because less girls had technology suggested to them as a career - don't wait for the slim chance of suggestion!

UK	UK	UK
27%	3%	16%
of females would consider a career in tech, compared to males	of females say a career in tech is their first choice	of females have had technology suggested to them as a career, compared to males
Source: PwC Women in Tech	Source: PwC Women in Tech	Source: PwC Women in Tech

Girls – we need to balance the imbalance

BUT DON'T ASSUME ALL HIGH SKILLED DIGITAL ROLES MEAN YOU NEED TO BE A CODING GENIUS.....

Kat Woolley
Associate Producer | Unity Technologies

Video showing how not all digital roles are coding

In addition, **#SPARKDIGITALSKILLS** is live campaign to encourage experts from regional digital and technology businesses to volunteer with Code Club, BT Barefoot and STEM. The campaign targets larger organisations with CSR / employee volunteering policies and asks them to display the poster and share with their teams to encourage their support of digital initiatives in the community. A next step on for this initiative is to encourage larger organisations to formalise their support to local initiatives through sharing examples such as the case of a North London school that saw its computer science A-C pass grade rise from 47% to 90% after a team from Morgan Stanley supported the delivery of the GCSE over a period of a year. By matching scenarios of need with those able to provide digital knowhow we can create a community where knowledge and confidence is cascaded.



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DIGITAL SKILLS PARTNERSHIP

#SPARK DIGITAL SKILLS

GET INVOLVED IN DIGITAL INITIATIVES & GIVE BACK TO NEXT GENERATION

- 31%** drop in computing hours in schools since 2012
- 2018** saw the number of pupils taking IT or computer science fall
- 75%** of UK businesses are facing a digital skills shortage
- 90%** of new jobs will require digital skills
- 1 in 4** jobs globally will be in the digital economy by 2020
- 29%** higher pay in jobs with digital skills (on average)

MATCH YOUR SKILLS & VOLUNTEER WITH A DIGITAL PROJECT

Barefoot
COMPUTING FOR ALL

Learn how to deliver training to primary school teachers on the Barefoot online resource. It's free to use and teaches fun computational thinking across the curriculum. This will help increase the number of schools using Barefoot locally from 70%.

BAREFOOTCOMPUTING.ORG

{code} club

Join your local Code Club volunteers running coding clubs for 9–13 year olds in schools, community spaces and libraries.

Or as a team, why not start your own club for a community that doesn't have a Code Club?

CODECLUB.ORG

STEM LEARNING

Join the STEM Ambassador network and help your local school with hackathons, extra-curricular STEM clubs and mock interview days.

Did you know 43% of UK STEM ambassadors are women? We'd particularly love to hear from you if you're female so we can raise that to 50%!

STEM.ORG.UK

FOR MORE INFO ABOUT DIGITAL VOLUNTEERING
CONTACT: charlotte.collyer@heartofswlep.co.uk

Training (and DBS where required) supplied. This is a Heart of the South West LEP Digital Skills Partnership campaign. Inspiring the development of digital skills and their adoption for everyone in the region.
www.heartofswlep.co.uk

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The idea of **Digital Skills roundtables** was suggested by one of our Partnership colleges keen to ensure digital curriculum was developing in line with the needs of industry. The format for the roundtables is an introduction from inspiring digital employer (generally also the host the venue) followed by a series of flash talks covering digital T-Levels, Apprentices, Tech Industry skills gaps and routes to in-workforce digital upskilling. Each flash talks poses a question to the attendees that they discuss and work through as a group. The objectives of the events are to provide information but also bring employers and training providers together to network with a hope that the connections lead to continue working relationships. Examples of some of the challenges and solutions the sessions surfaced:-

[FE college] We would welcome you [Digital Business] visiting to give guest expert topic lectures

[Business] We're still trying to understand and navigate apprenticeships. Where do we start?

[Business] There's a lot to be gained from peer to peer learning when you mix the digital skillset of Gen Y and the experience of the older workforce. However, don't overlook with a potential age difference of 30 years, both groups need supporting to enable this to flourish.

With five **Digital Skills roundtables** events scheduled across the year in high profile employer venues such as the Met Office and The UK Hydrographic Office this may be an engagement format, that enables us to connect locally with key business and training providers, that we look to repeat annually.

The DSP coordinator is active across the **business community** both at a strategic level engaging with cross sector bodies such as the South West Business Council, Chamber of Trades, North Devon Innovation Board and Plymouth Employability and Skills Board.

My role with the Digital Skills Partnership has informed my work assessing AgTech and CleanTech proposals for the Horizon 2020 SME Instrument. [Partnership working] And the eighty or so assessments I have completed to date have allowed me to promote those important regional sectors within the Digital Skills Partnership.

Dave White, founder of WhiteBruce

Digital and technology grass roots groups such as Digital Taunton, Exeter, Plymouth, Torbay and North Devon are attended, and we play a keen role in supporting the work of Tech South West.

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"The co-ordinator role gives Tech South West a direct way to feed in and input into the digital skills strategy, on behalf of our members. With every local tech cluster and hundreds of businesses being part of Tech South West, it's incredibly useful to have a two-way interface with an organisation that appears to be linking so well with a range of stakeholders - including LEP and councils - which we just do not have time to engage with on an individual level. One specific example was being able to engage with and brief Charlotte directly on the Shaping the Future initiative by Tech South West - an assessment of the skills needed according to our members, over the next 5 years, which led to the creation and dissemination of the Shaping the Future Skills report. It meant we were able to feed that in directly to the regional 'digital skills agenda' rather than engage council by council, area by area."

Dan Pritchard, Tech South West

There are many of the case studies of DSP impact though that go untracked. The role of the coordinator and the culture carried by the Partners is to signpost and connect digital skills needs with solutions. Whether that be an individual with learning, a delivery partner with funding opportunity or organisations that can benefit through collaboration and knowledge exchange. These conversations happen multiple times a day with the end result being a more connected and therefore more effective region to learn, live and work.

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Opportunities

There is a huge opportunity for uplifting the digital skill level of cross sector workforces, if we work to **educate business leaders** that there is a huge return on investment in developing in-workforce digital skills at all levels. Highlighting that raised digital skill levels increase individual productivity contributing to an organisations productivity, workforce satisfaction that supports workforce retention and at an organisational level agile and lean processes. To support this the Digital Skills Partnership takes every opportunity to raise awareness of the Partnerships work through exhibiting at events such as Venturefest, Tech Exeter, the LEP annual conference and the South West Business Council conference. We have also developed a presentation which is tailored for business groups which highlights the opportunity presented by digital upskilling, the present regional skills climate and how businesses can identify their own digital maturity and access tools and initiatives that map to their identified needs.

As part of the **Digital Skills Innovation Fund**, we have a program of learning that is aimed at employees interested in moving from novice to early practitioner in Data Science. Whilst we expect the individual to benefit from an uplift in skillset, there is a double incentive from the tactic which is to be able to provide case studies back to a range of sectors about the added value this type of training bestows on the organisation. We need to look beyond an environment where digital CPD is financed by Government and multinational CSR programs to a sustainable culture where digital CPD becomes an annual part of every organisations budget.

We are currently discussing with DCMS, Careers Enterprise Company, the British Computing Society and National Centre for Cyber Security a business case into Government for a **Digital Skills in Schools Proof of Concept** project which deliver tactical digital skills interventions to secondary school pupils. This will enable us to accelerate our impact on young people with objectives of increasing the uptake of technical, IT and Computer Science at GCSE and A'Level. Alongside increasing activity with schools previously mentioned this could incorporate conceptual ideas such as a range of video assets which showcase the breadth of digital roles, the people and the employing organisation behind them and their learning pathways.

We would also like to explore a business model franchised from the School of Code, whereby a digital skills program is part funded by employers who understand investing in rapid technical conversion as a credible alternative to the labour shortage. The model works by the employer investing what they would normally pay a recruitment company when appointing (e.g. 15% of a £30k = £4,500) into a co-developed 16-week intense training program. With employers and the learners then entering into closed interviews at the end of the program.

Finally access to evidence through the **DWP tool Examine A Place, Burning Glass Data, Lloyds Bank intel and other evidence bases** mean the DSP has been ideally placed to contributing to the LEP's Local Industrial Strategy, Digital Strategy and Skills Advisory Panel. The DSP maintain raising levels of digital skill at all competency levels are central to the LEP achieving its ambitions around raising productivity and propelling clean growth.

The greatest opportunity is afforded through the support offered by the **Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport**. This enables local Partnerships to leverage support from national providers

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and provides a framework to work to. There is a genuine two-way dialogue which enables Government to receive local intel from individuals, businesses, charities and training providers to influence national policy.

Furthermore the endorsement of DCMS elevates Digital Skills Partnerships status which shortcuts to faster and more credible collaboration.

“As a responsible employer with vested interest in developing science and technology skills across the region we find that whilst there are many laudable initiatives in place, they tend to be fragmented and lack coordination and therefore impact. The Digital Skills Partnership supported by a permanent skilled lead is one of the few initiatives that we have been able to meaningfully engage with to create regional scale impact and we are delighted to be able to support it.”

Charles Ewen. Technology Director, Met Office

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Challenges

The scale of the geography provides a challenge to the rate that digital skills awareness and engagement with stakeholders one person can achieve and the number of practical interventions that can be delivered are restricted. Similarly, geography poses the same barrier to learners and therefore training providers should look to harness online delivery and video conference classroom environments where suitable.

Given that the Partnership is in its inaugural year, there have been some challenges around the membership of the partnership, but this has been reviewed and recommendations to increase transparency and clarify terms of engagement have been adopted.

A new Partner highlighted a problem that the Digital Skills marketplace was confusing with many national, regional and local initiatives nosily competing. If it was confusing to stakeholders we can assume the same for individuals and businesses. Taking this feedback on board the DSP set out to create a Digital Skills Blueprint for the region. Content was collated into a document and methods of publishing this content reviewed. After some consideration we became cognisant that as soon as the blueprint was published it would be an asset that needed maintaining as the landscape and new providers, programs and opportunities surfaced. At the same time, we came across the South West Creative Technology Network's open call for 'Automation Prototype' and started to think through whether this provided a more sustainable solution to producing the blueprint.

Research into similar tools led us to the South West communities calendar and we explored what a collaboration might look like with the end result in us submitting a bid that uses automates content through data scraping and begins to utilise machine learning to maintain a 'live' resource. The West of England LEP has a similar static feed [tool](#) but an automated live resource would be a LEP first, supporting digital skills mobility and inward investment for the region. The application is pending with shortlisting date set for November.

Recommendations

- Following the pilot of Digital Skills Partnership the Government should empower and increase funding to enable them to go further and faster with their work.
- For its part, the LEP believes that the DSP resource issue over the medium term should be discussed with BEIS and other Departmental leads as part of the wider settlement for LEPS across government, allowing for a mixed approach to sustainability for clearly national and locally critical policy approaches.
- There should be a cross-government department commitment to ensure that all future funding streams with a digital element, encourage bids to work with their local DSP.

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- Closer working with the Department for Education to ensure technical curriculum meets the need of industry.
- Closer working with industry to develop programs that support an increase in the number of technical T-Level and Apprenticeships.