

Although impact data collection to date has been varied in quality, organisations are confident that the programme has had a significant positive impact on their service users. They reported that the programme has helped to reduce social isolation (particularly during the peak of the pandemic) by supporting people to connect with family and friends; has supported young people and their families to access education and training opportunities; supported employability; supported health and wellbeing by enabling people to connect in to a wide range of health services online; ensured continued access to welfare benefits; and facilitated access to a wide range of services online.

It has also positively impacted on participating organisations by upskilling their staff; increasing their capacity to deliver and support online services; speeding up the implementation of online service delivery; and encouraging more advanced thinking in relation to opportunities to deliver services online.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Connecting Scotland programme has been efficiently and effectively implemented, and has had a significant positive impact on both recipients of devices, and the organisations funded to distribute these to date. There continues to be a demand for the programme, particularly in relation to the provision of a free internet connection.

While the Connecting Scotland model was designed to be an emergency response to reach people quickly and get them digitally connected, it has been instrumental in helping organisations to understand how they might deliver services differently in future. Many intend to continue to apply a blended approach to service delivery in future – offering support through a mix of online and face-to-face support.

However, whilst the model has been highly successful, there are real question marks over whether it is sustainable in the longer term – both in relation to continuing to make devices and, more significantly, free data packages available. Many organisations highlighted the unaffordability of an internet connection for many of the households they support. Similarly, some organisations questioned organisations' ability to continue to devote the current level of support to service users, and staffing to administer the programme.

Many organisations emphasised the need to plan well ahead of the end of the programme to ensure seamless transition. The following recommendations have been developed on the basis of feedback received throughout the evaluation:

Strategic recommendations

Consider continuing the provision of free data beyond the end of the current two-year period, but for a fixed time period with a clear transition plan to ensure this can continue to be supported beyond the lifetime of the programme.

Consider contributing to the cost of administering the programme and providing financial support for the digital champion role to ensure that the programme can be sustained beyond the current timeframe.

Chapter 2: Programme overview and implementation

In this chapter we provide an overview of the experiences of organisations and SCVO in implementing the programme. This chapter has been informed by data provided by SCVO, survey data, interviews with representatives of applicant organisations, and interviews with key members of the SCVO team responsible for the programme.

Programme overview

Connecting Scotland has funded 670 unique organisations which between them have delivered a total of 1,737 projects. Across these projects, 17,700 Chromebooks, 18,400 iPads and 32,391 MiFi devices have been issued to people in need across Scotland. The table below provides details of the three rounds of funding to date.

Phase	Date phase announced	Funds £	Target group	Target numbers	Applications open	Dates phases delivered
1*	May '20	5M	People at a high clinical risk of Covid-19	9,000	Jun-Jul '20	Pilots: Apr-Jun '20 Main roll out: Aug-Oct '20
2	Aug '20	15M	Young care leavers & families with children	23,000	Round 1: Aug-Oct '20 Round 2: Nov '20-Jan '21	Dec '20-Mar '21
Winter Support	Nov '20	4.3M	Socially isolated / older and disabled people	5,000	Round 1: Dec '20 Round 2: Jan '21	Jan-Mar '21

The total value of the programme to date is £48,095,700 and it has a target of delivering a total of 60,000 devices by the end of 2022. Devices have been distributed widely across Scotland as can be seen in Figure 1 on the next page.

Chapter 3: Programme impact

To date, information on the impact of the programme on participants and on applicant organisations has largely been anecdotal. While 82% of survey respondents indicating that they undertook some form of evaluation, our sense from conversations we had with interviewees and the data currently available, is that there is little systematic collation of impact data being gathered currently. While some organisations are undertaking formal evaluation work with participants, many are not.

While further, more in-depth, evaluation will be undertaken later in relation to impact, this evaluation was an important opportunity to begin to gather evidence of impact from participating organisations. We did so through the survey and interviews, in addition to analysing a small number of evaluation reports which organisations submitted alongside their survey response to us.

Responses to our survey indicated that the programme has had a significant impact. Figure 7 below shows the range of outcomes that have been delivered:

Figure 7: Outcomes delivered (n=547)

Impact on Participants	%
They have a device to access the internet	90%
Better able to stay in touch with friends and family	87%
They have a WiFi connection	86%
Improved wellbeing	79%
They have gained IT skills	74%
Improved mental health	74%
They are more connected with local services	71%
They can access advice and guidance on important issues	62%
They are more engaged with their local community	59%
Family members benefitted from Connected Scotland devices	56%
Able to access public services such as the benefits system	55%
Able to access health services	52%
They are better able to engage with their children's education	51%
They can search and apply for jobs	47%
They are more employable	27%
Able to save money on bills	24%
Other	12%
Have made money online (e.g. through selling things)	3%
None of the above	1%

N.B. Multiple responses to this question were allowed.

In the next sections we give further details of the impact the programme has had on participants.