

**Heart of the South West LEP Digital Skills Partnership  
Impact Report for the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport  
June 2020**

The Heart of the South West LEP Digital Skills Partnership covers Devon, Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay. This the 2nd largest LEP 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, Further and Higher Education partners and third sector organisations to amplify digital skills awareness and increase provision that maps to the demands surfaced through the Skills Advisory panel and regional strategies; Recovery, Local Industrial and Productivity Plan.

This short review of our impact covers digital inclusion, digital skills for businesses and young people, our approach to raising digital ambition across the region and how digital skills will shape our recovery.

**Digital Inclusion :** [Digital Momentum](#) was one of four projects funded through the DCMS £1m Digital Skills Innovation Fund. The pilot set out to work with 150 individuals who were from groups underrepresented in our region's digital sector; women and those living in deprived wards. Over 12 months the program helped 194 individuals retrain, prepare for or advance a career in digital:-

- 40 people completed 150 hour+ online learning in Data Science, Python & Machine Learning
- 70 female founders attended 5-day boot camps in digital tools and confidence
- 35 people took CompTIA course in IT fundamentals, Networking or Cyber Security.
- 49 people who had no device to access learning, undertook a basic digital skills online course during Covid-19 lockdown assisted by devices purchased through the program.

160 of those taking part were women and 59 individuals were unemployed at the time.

Separately. in collaboration with a Dutch startup Skilllab, we submitted a proposal which was subsequently successful to the NESTA Career Ed Tech Challenge. Skilllab has developed a mobile app which uses Artificial Intelligence to help people with low levels of work experience translate their life skills and experience against the ESCO skills database. This, in turn, helps them to create a CV relevant to modern-day of work or signpost them to next step learning. Our proposal is to refine this mobile app and AI engine for a UK audience specifically focussing on mature workers in our region, who are educated to level 2 whose roles are at risk through the rise of Automation in the workplace. You can read more about this project [here](#).

**Digital Skills for Business and Young People:** [Bounce Back Digital](#) is a live programme of free webinars and short courses on digital tools for small businesses to help online trade and productivity during Covid-19. The programme was developed as a rapid response late April onwards in recognition that there was a need to support businesses to move online. In order to do this safely and effectively the programme was arranged around five strands of critical knowledge that Business Representation Organisations and the Growth Hub were hearing as common pain points from businesses; E-commerce, Digital Book-keeping & Payment Gateways, Productivity Tools, Digital Marketing and Cyber Security. Each strand includes informative webinar 'subject matter introductions' and courses pertaining to the theme. 147 business have accessed the courses from

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June the 8th and there are 293 businesses signed up to future events with the potential for 1000 businesses to engage.

In addition to the above, our DSP worked with partners including Google, Freeformers and Lloyds Bank delivered face-to-face digital skills sessions to over 850 businesses during 2019.

Raising digital careers aspiration in young people is an essential part of the region's future digital capability, over the last 12 month period the Digital Skills Partnership presented to over 1500 young people through year group assemblies and careers events (including parents) about the demand for digital capability across all sectors and the benefits in particular of working in the Technology sector. Subsequently, our Digital Skills Partnership has been selected to pilot a project with the National Digital Skills Partnership School Group and the regional Careers Hub to run a project to raise the level of digital engagement at KS3 with 15 schools. The pilot aims to understand what interventions can help turn the dial and increase the number of pupils selecting digital options at KS4.

**Digital Ambition.** We believe we have an important role to play in raising awareness of digital skills and digital ambition. To do this effectively our role is to highlight insights from research and share examples of where digital upskilling has increased levels of productivity, innovation and social mobility. We share this through our website, regular newsletters, social channels, partner channels and maximising opportunities to talk directly to people through third parties and stakeholder events.

**Build Back Better:** The Digital Skills Partnership has been integral during Covid-19, in the early weeks supporting schools to implement G-Suite and MS Teams for remote teaching. Then sharing weekly updates information on digital learning platforms for; employees as they adapted to remote working, people furloughed, coming to the end of their study or out of work. Developing the Bounce Back Digital programme as a short-term skills support program and more recently working collaboratively on recovery strategies, contributing and helping to shape both the LEP, Devon County Council and Exeter City Council strategies.

The Heart of the South West Partnership LEP Digital Skills Partnership is two years old this month and is immensely proud of the impact achieved through effective partnerships which owes much of its success to the support offered through the Partnership Board, Steering Group and founding Chair of the partnership.

“Looking back at the significant success and progress made by our Digital Skills Partnership across the area, its very important to understand how much difference the uplift in skills will have made in the 2 years, and more particularly in the past 2 months. Continued focus on digital skills is essential for every business and every organisation.”

Julie Hawker, Co CEO of Cosmic and Chair of the Heart of the South West LEP Digital Skills Partnership