Exploring Impact
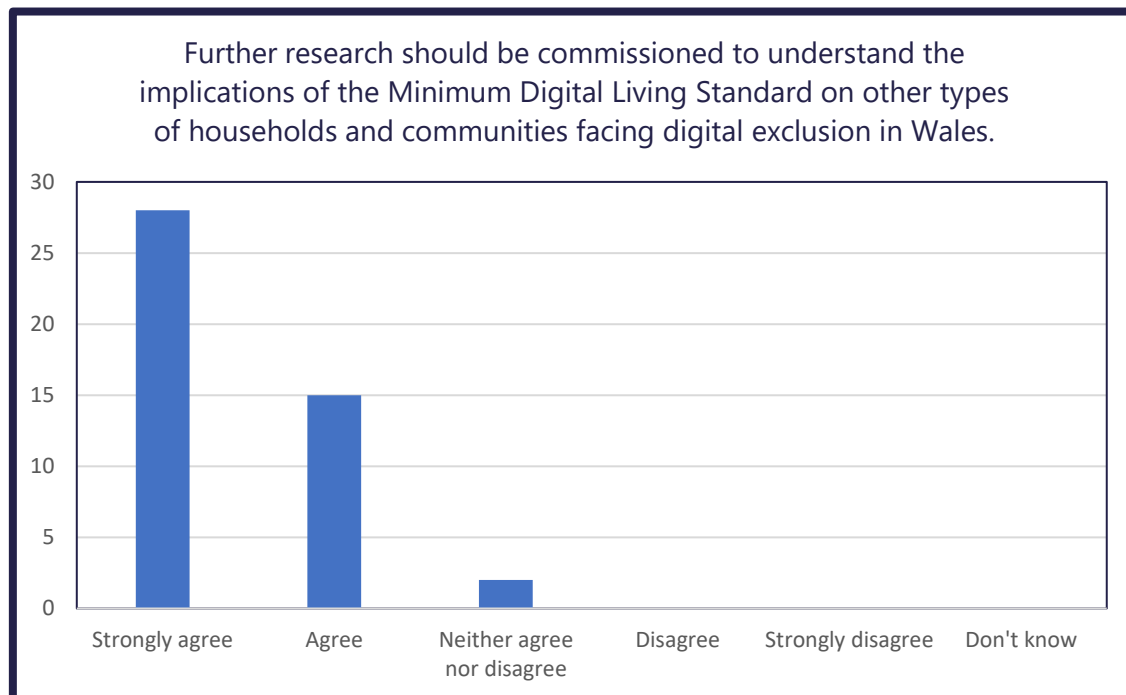
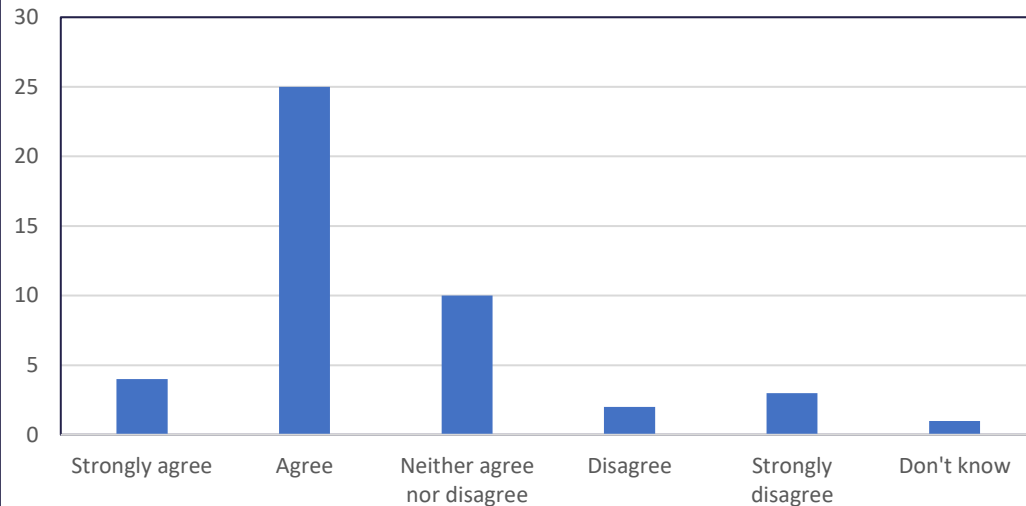## Priority 5: Implementing a new Minimum Digital Living Standard

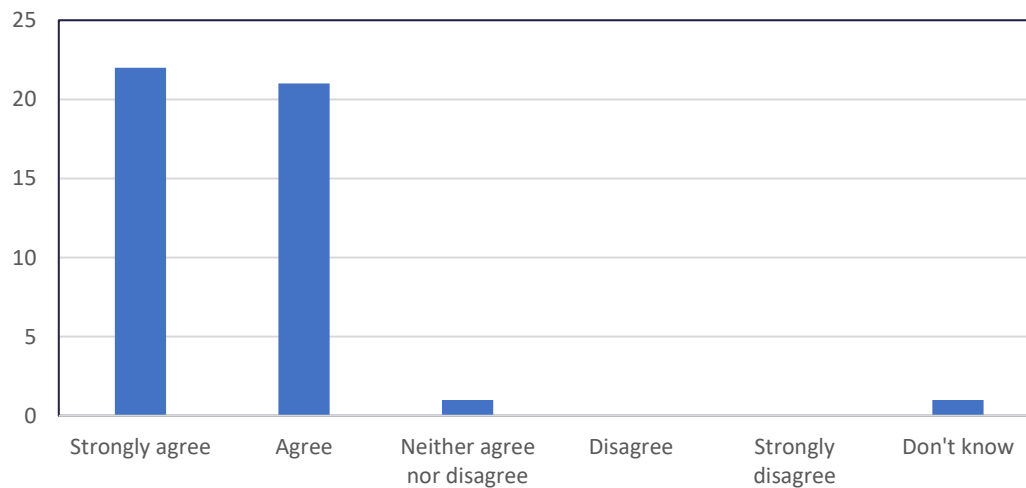## June 2024

Quantitative results from survey

- There were 45 responses to the survey.
- 43 out of 45 respondents agree that further funding into an MDLS for other household types should be commissioned.
- 64% feel that they understand how to utilise the current research to support the communities they work with. Further efforts in this area are necessary for full take up of the research.
- 96% of respondents agree that DIAW has had a positive impact on the work to create the MDLS.
- Just over half of the respondents belong to groups or partnerships where they discuss the MDLS. This indicates a need to expand the conversation around an MDLS and to spread the news of it further.


Further research should be commissioned to understand the implications of the Minimum Digital Living Standard on other types of households and communities facing digital exclusion in Wales.

I understand how I can utilise the current research into an MDLS for households for children to support the communities I work with.

Response	Count
Strongly agree	4
Agree	25
Neither agree nor disagree	10
Disagree	2
Strongly disagree	3
Don't know	1

Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales has had a positive impact on the work being done to create a Minimum Digital Living Standard for Wales.

Response	Count
Strongly agree	22
Agree	21
Neither agree nor disagree	1
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0
Don't know	1

Are you a member of any boards/partnerships/groups where you discuss the Minimum Digital Living Standard?

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23

■ Yes ■ No
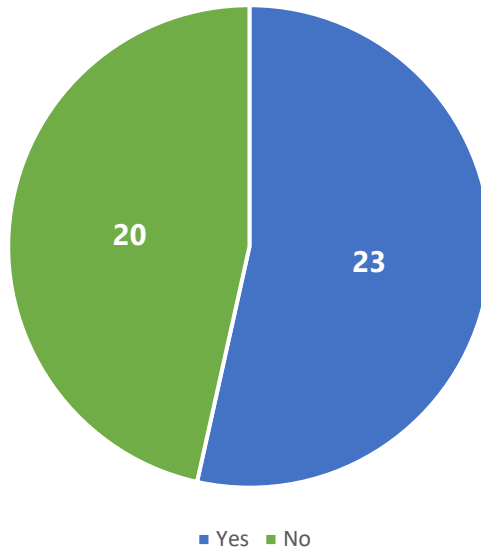
Views from the DIAW Network

The Minimum Digital Living Standard has not been fully researched and it is, therefore, not expected that there will be mentions of it in current policy and strategy documents.

DIAW's ask of its members to begin utilising the research should mean that aspects of it are being used as a baseline for supporting people and could now begin being mentioned in organisational strategies. For now though, this report will not contain the usual content analysis as found in previous Exploring Impact Reports.

During the DIAW Network meeting on June 20th, 2024, Members were asked three questions in breakout rooms relating to the use of the MDLS research, how we should work together to implement MDLS and the challenges in implementing the standard. These compiled facilitator notes have been included to share the views of the Network on the MDLS work so far.

How can you use the MDLS research now to support the communities that you work with?

1. **Policy Influence:** MDLS can guide local authorities and councils in prioritising activities, funding, and digital inclusion initiatives. It helps identify areas of greatest need, informing targeted projects and resource allocation.
2. **Digital Inclusion:** MDLS highlights the broad scope of digital exclusion, challenging the narrow view that it only affects certain groups. MDLS can help organisations assess the digital skills and needs of their users, employees, and volunteers and create training or resources for inclusion.
3. **Health and Social Care:** In healthcare, MDLS supports efforts to ensure patients are digitally included, helping patient-facing teams understand technology's role, the importance of patients being digitally included and a guideline to assessing this.
4. **Workforce and Employers:** MDLS can be used by employers to support staff with their digital needs, offering learning opportunities and access to devices, especially in rural areas where internet access may be poor.
5. **Voluntary Organisations and Rural Areas:** Voluntary organisations and rural communities may struggle to meet MDLS, so tailored training and approaches are needed to engage and include them digitally.
6. **MDLS Application:** MDLS provides a framework to challenge assumptions about who is digitally excluded and suggests integrating digital inclusion into project planning, policy design, and community support programs.

The MDLS research is seen as a tool for evidence-based approaches to raise awareness, influence policy, and help organisations and communities tackle digital exclusion.

How can we work together to implement the MDLS? What partnerships/ collaborations/ joint working will be necessary and who needs to be involved?

1. **Unified Language & Messaging:** A consistent definition of digital inclusion should be adopted across all public services in Wales. Clear, non-technical messaging is important to reduce fear and hesitation around technology.

2. **Collaborations Across Sectors:**
   Public Sector Responsibility: Although the private sector drives digital transformation, public and third sectors disproportionately manage digital inclusion. This responsibility should be balanced, with private sector involvement in supporting inclusion efforts.
   Key Stakeholders: Effective partnerships should include local authorities, housing associations, health boards, policy leads, senior managers, and third-sector organisations. Schools, libraries, and community centres can play roles in delivering support.
   Youth Engagement & Safeguarding: Involve young people directly to understand their needs. Collaborate with schools and libraries to provide online safety training for parents and carers, helping them safeguard children.
   Networking & Awareness: Building communities of practice at local and regional levels is essential. Informal networks should be leveraged to avoid bureaucratic slowdowns, while collaboration between various stakeholders ensures information sharing and the avoidance of duplication.
   Centralised Information: A centralised directory or resource for digital inclusion efforts should be created to consolidate available support and services. This directory would require upkeep and potential funding, and local authorities could play a key role, though there are concerns about reduced services.
   Private Sector Engagement: Private companies, like Barclays, could assist in supporting digital inclusion by offering services that public and third sectors typically manage.
   Rural and Local Support: Rural areas require collaboration between stakeholders to identify gaps and direct people to available support. Regional steering groups already exist, but promotion of available services remains a challenge.
   National Strategy: A national digital inclusion strategy supported by the Welsh Government is essential to coordinate efforts, identify gaps, and ensure digital inclusion becomes a necessity for families, not just a "nice to have."
   Community Involvement: Utilise local resources such as community centres and village halls, which have become digitally equipped post-COVID, to facilitate digital inclusion initiatives. The overarching goal is to foster collaboration, streamline resources, and ensure digital inclusion efforts are comprehensive, sustainable, and accessible.

What do we need to think about in Wales when implementing an MDLS (barriers/challenges) and how can we overcome these?

1. **Key Barriers and Challenges**:
   Organisational Prioritisation: Many organisations, such as housing associations, do not view digital inclusion as a priority, often considering it a non-essential "add-on." Leadership buy-in

and recognition of digital inclusion as an essential living standard are lacking in sectors like local authorities, health boards, and social care.

Sustainability and Turnover: High staff turnover in sectors like social care creates instability. Digital inclusion efforts often rely on key individuals, causing progress to halt when they leave.

Funding Gaps: There is significant difficulty in securing consistent funding to scale up digital inclusion initiatives. Local authorities need to take a bigger lead in providing funding and coordinating efforts across regions to avoid duplication and ensure equitable support.

Infrastructure Challenges: Broadband and digital infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, is poor, with financial incentives for providers to improve infrastructure lacking. The transition to digital systems (e.g., the BT switchover) poses risks to vulnerable individuals.

Digital Literacy and Confidence: Digital inclusion is not just about access to devices but involves a broader set of issues, including literacy, confidence, and engagement with services. Many people require ongoing support, and the current "train the trainer" model is struggling in some cases.

Systemic Issues Beyond Digital: Broader societal problems (e.g., poverty, lack of literacy) impact digital inclusion. Many people face multiple barriers to accessing services, whether they are online or offline, and digital inclusion alone cannot resolve these systemic issues.

Lack of Awareness and Access: People are often unaware of available digital inclusion resources, even at the local level. A lack of centralised information prevents people from accessing services that could help them meet digital living standards.

Accessibility: Accessibility challenges include a lack of provision in formats for people with sensory or communication needs. People in rural areas face additional barriers like transportation issues and poor internet access.

2. **Proposed Solutions**:

Organisational Integration and Leadership: Digital inclusion should be embedded into strategies across organisations. Senior leadership, especially in health and local authorities, must recognise its importance. MDLS can be used to raise awareness and prioritise digital inclusion beyond "digital champions."

Sustainability through Networks: Creating more robust networks to share resources, support ongoing efforts, and ensure sustainability beyond individual staff members.

Centralised Data and Information Sharing: Establish a central hub for collecting anonymised data across organisations and sectors and create a cohesive directory of digital inclusion services to avoid duplication and promote awareness.

Targeted Funding and Resource Allocation: Ensure a more structured allocation of Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) funding to avoid duplicating projects. Tenders should require evidence of research into existing services to streamline efforts.

Broadband as Essential Infrastructure: Digital infrastructure should be treated as an essential utility. This is critical when commissioning services like care homes, ensuring staff and residents have suitable access.

Collaborative Networks: Local authorities and voluntary sectors should work together through community of practice models, linking small projects to larger networks to maximise their impact.

Long-term Support for Digital Literacy: Ongoing digital literacy programs are needed, not just one-off support. This includes addressing the public's concerns about online safety and gaming and ensuring people understand the importance of digital access.

Mapping and Promoting Services: Local provision needs to be mapped and promoted widely to ensure people know where to find support. Provision should also be given in multiple formats to meet various accessibility needs.

By addressing these challenges with a coordinated, well-funded, and inclusive approach, Wales can successfully implement the MDLS and reduce digital exclusion.

Additional Information

1. Cross-Sector Alignment: Local authorities (LAs), third sector organisations, health bodies, and housing associations need to align their strategies for digital inclusion. Collaboration will ensure buy-in and support for the MDLS. A community of practice could help unify efforts, especially in health board areas.

2. Preventative Approach: There is a push to adopt a long-term, preventative approach to digital inclusion. Getting partners and stakeholders on board early will help reduce demand later. However, day-to-day pressures often overshadow this long-term vision, making it difficult to drive progress.

3. Responsibility Gaps: Digital inclusion is considered everyone's responsibility, leading to confusion over who is ultimately accountable for driving MDLS implementation.

4. Gifting and Guidelines: In Denbighshire, the MDLS was used as a guideline for choosing equipment to gift, though there was discomfort with items like consoles and TVs. There is a need for clearer guidelines on what technology to provide.

5. Gaming's Role: Gaming consoles should be viewed not just as entertainment devices but as community gateways for younger generations, promoting social interaction.

6. Funding Challenges: There are concerns over funding for MDLS implementation, as Welsh Government funding alone may not be sufficient. A cross-party approach may be necessary to secure resources.

7. Older Adults and Digital Literacy: There is a need to focus on older people, helping them safely navigate the internet and benefit from digital inclusion.

8. Clarity in Policies: Policies around digital inclusion need to be transparent and accessible so end-users can understand how to access services and equipment provided under MDLS.

9. Data and Measurement: Capturing data is crucial to demonstrate the impact of digital improvements and justify continued funding. Data collection will help show how digital standards are improving within targeted households.

Case Study

Case Study – Utilising Minimum Digital Living Standard Research
Scott Tandy, Digital Inclusion Officer, Newydd Housing Association

How are you using/planning to use the MDLS research produced so far?
At the moment, the Newydd Housing Digital Team receives digital referrals through the front line housing team who fill out a form which details the tenant's needs. Scott has been working with his Housing Directorate to try to map the journey of the tenant from the time they move in. When they arrive, a digital audit using questions based on the basket of goods from the MDLS research will be completed of everyone in the house, not just the primary tenant. That will build a profile of the house's digital needs which will be received by the digital team who will provide tailored support over time, monitoring the progress. They will do a case study on what support was provided and what will be needed in the future and the tenant is asked to answer a survey, again related to the MDLS basket of goods, which will hopefully show the progression over time.

One challenge is that the basket of goods contains language which might be difficult for some tenants to understand. For example, terminology such as "cyber security", "digital footprint" or "phishing" might pose issues for people who are not digitally confident. Scott does not want to amend the questions because then they will be asking different questions from others, resulting in data which is not comparable. The solution might be to create brief definitions to accompany the questions which explain the terminology for the tenants and the front line housing team.

Scott would eventually like to see other organisations such as local authorities and housing associations collecting data in the same way and sharing that anonymised data to create a picture of digital inclusion across Wales and to chart the progress towards implementing an effective Minimum Digital Living Standard. Draft documents for the pre-assessment, assessment and referral pathway have now been created and can be shared with others who are interested in the process.

How has being a part of DIAW helped this particular project?
Being a part of DIAW raised my awareness of the Minimum Digital Living Standard and it gives me the opportunity to ask questions, share what we're doing and learn from what others are doing. Members are forthcoming not just with their successes but with things that haven't worked out as they expected and that is where we can learn the most from each other.

Do you hear about MDLS outside of DIAW meetings? Is anybody talking about it?
No, most people don't seem to be aware of it. There is so much new information and new reports, standards and strategies coming out that it is hard for people to keep up. If digital isn't their specific remit, it won't be on their radar.

What can DIAW do to raise the profile of this work and push for its implementation once research is completed?
Case studies like this are great, people want real examples of the frustrations and successes; the whole journey.

I brought this up with the local authority that I work with and now we're meeting about it next week. So DIAW members bringing it up in meetings and groups and telling people about it is essential to bring it to the attention of everyone.

Thank you for reading.

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