

Navigating Digital Barriers

Insights on Digital Exclusion in Scotland



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Introduction

In 23/24 Audit Scotland conducted a performance audit to evaluate how effectively public bodies in Scotland are addressing digital exclusion in a world that is increasingly online. To support this work Audit Scotland commissioned Corra Foundation (Corra) in May 2023. Corra's role was to facilitate focus groups and workshops with people with lived experience of digital exclusion in two local authority areas (Renfrewshire and Argyll and Bute).

This report details the key findings for the work delivered by Corra including an overview of the approach taken and engagement of people with lived experience.

Approach

Corra is a Scottish grant-making charity that is about strengthening and amplifying people's voices and their power to make change. We have significant experience in delivering community-led approaches that centre participation and inclusion.

Initial conversations with Audit Scotland explored national and local contexts and supported us in making connections to key partners in the two local authority areas. From this we developed an engagement plan (how to reach people with lived experience of digital exclusion) and facilitated focus groups (supporting people to participate). A reference group was formed with five people who attended the focus groups. The reference group reflected and analysed the findings with support from Corra staff.

Diagram 1 below shows the delivery path which commenced in August 2023 and took place over a nine-month period.

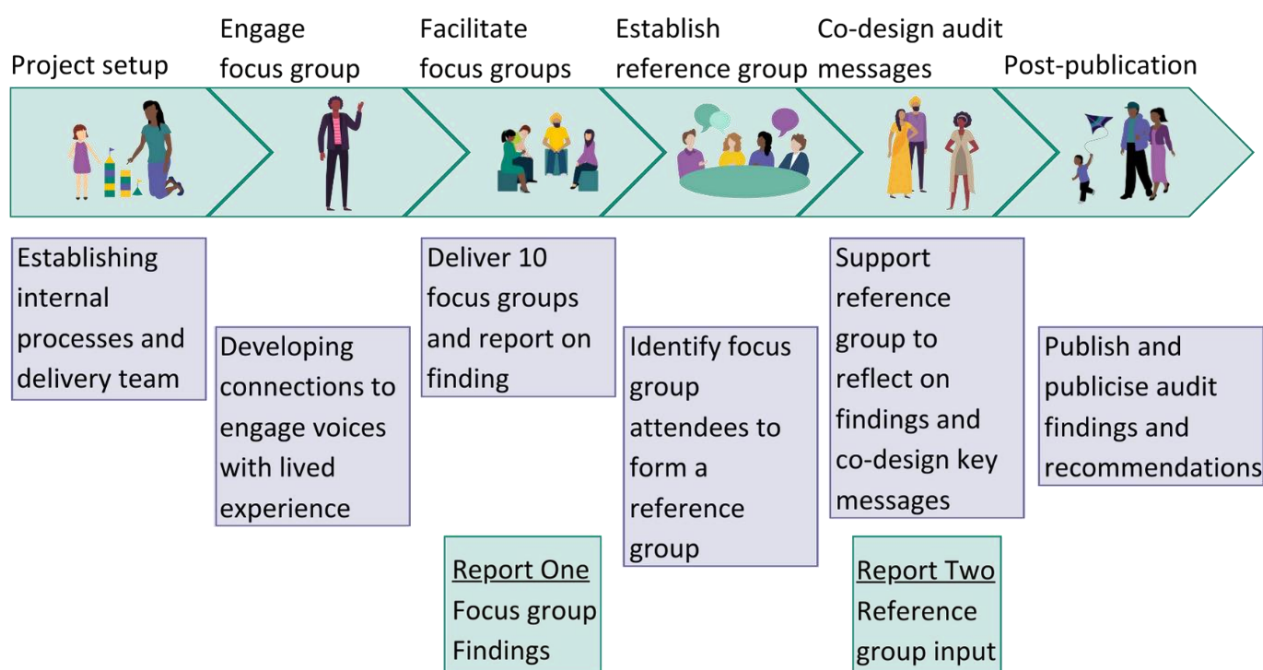


Diagram 1: Audit Timeline

Nine focus group sessions were delivered - three in Argyll and Bute and five in Renfrewshire. A further focus group was held in Glasgow. A total of 110 people took part in the sessions.

There were two focus groups engaging with young people, one with members of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, one for parents with children in education, and one with people who are older.

As is shown in diagram 2 below there was a balanced demographic across most age groups. A higher proportion of people participating identified as women.

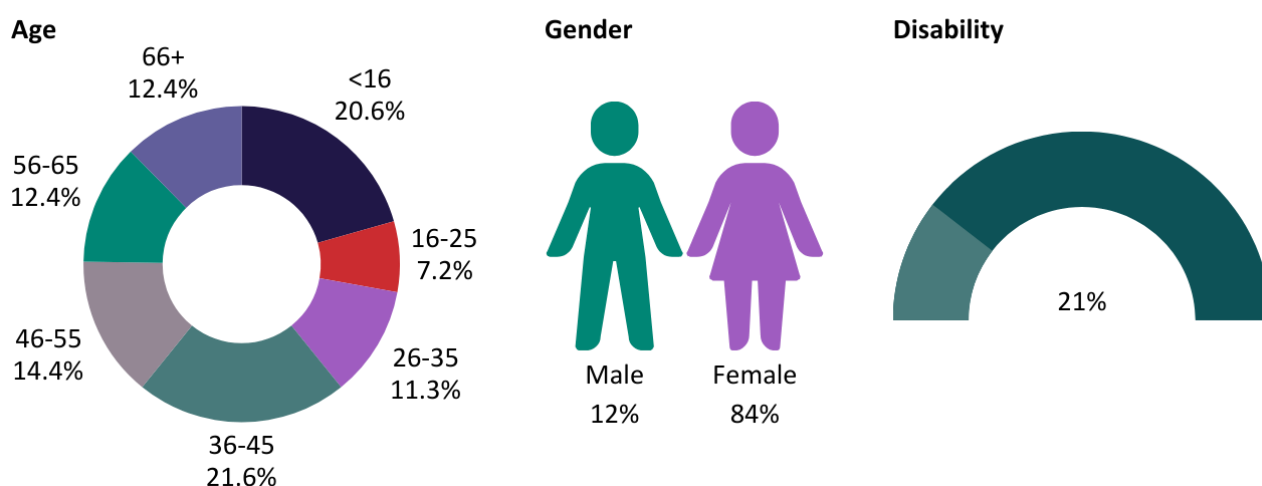


Diagram 2: Focus Group Attendee Demographics

Corra guided the focus groups with a set of questions to support conversations:

- Who is excluded?
- What does digital exclusion look like?
- What are the issues?
- What does a digitally inclusive world look like?

Overarching insights

The insights and findings from this report were co-produced alongside the reference group. It highlights the experiences shared by those in the focus groups and the barriers created by digital exclusion. More details on emerging themes from each focus group are included in Appendix 1.

Digital exclusion describes “the inability of someone to access the digital space in an equitable way.” (Focus Group Key Finding)

People participating in the focus groups recognised that there were many ways that digital exclusion can be felt. There was an understanding that it was a complex issue and illustrated in multiple ways including:

- Financial constraints (costs).
- Unequal access to devices.
- Unreliable internet connections.
- Limited skills and knowledge.

Costs

People spoke about three main areas where costs were factors of digital exclusion. These costs are:

- Costs of obtaining and maintaining an internet connection.
- Costs associated with having an internet connection (including device maintenance and additional services).
- Costs of not having an internet connection (difficulty accessing essential services, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities).



It's not just the cost of the internet into your home. It's the things you then need to pay to access. People (with larger families) need to pay more for bigger packages and allowances – these are advertised and spoken about in terms people don't understand so it's hard to know if you are making the right choice. (Focus Group Key Finding)

Access

Access was another key theme. The focus groups talked about exclusion relating to digital technologies and services including:

- Availability of a stable internet connection.
- Skill level and digital literacy.
- Device availability and compatibility.
- Website and app navigation/design.



Not being able to fully participate within society and being left behind while battling with a real desire to engage and connect but not knowing where to start. (Focus Group Key Finding)

Capacity

There were several factors that appear to influence people's capacity to use digital technologies effectively, these included:

- Language and cultural barriers.
- Confidence levels.
- Personal interest or desire to engage with digital technologies.



These services need to realise that not everyone has access or even wants to engage with them online. (Focus Group Key Finding)

Impact of digital exclusion

The insights shared through this work show that digital exclusion can have significant negative impacts, such as:

- Social isolation and difficulty accessing essential services.
- Educational disadvantages.
- Employment challenges due to lack of digital skills.



As activity moves online digitally excluded people become real life isolated people which leads to exclusion and isolation from your community. (Focus Group Key Finding)

Setting Specific Impacts

There was evidence that digital exclusion is further impacted by a set of specific circumstances, some of which are outlined in this section.

Education

The COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to adopt digital approaches fast, changing how education was delivered and engaged in. While this has improved communication between schools and parents, people did share some of their issues:

- Inefficient setup of school communication applications.
- Limited flexibility in engagement options outside digital platforms.
- Lack of uniformity in applications used by teachers.
- Multiple communications for families with multiple children.

Families are looking for easy and efficient access to information about their children's education and what is expected of them. They also want flexibility in how they engage with schools, including non-digital options, in order to stay connected with their children's education, irrespective of digital access or skills.



School communication to parents has all gone digital but they are using multiple platforms to communicate information and it can be confusing, one school is using Facebook, Twitter, See Saw and Teams to communicate with the parents and it can be quite overwhelming. (Focus Group Key Finding)

Services Engagement

The shift towards digital approaches in public services has created both conveniences and barriers:

- Local Authorities: Online payment systems for rent and Council Tax as well as reporting issues.
- Energy suppliers: Challenges with AI chatbots and online payment portals.
- Department for Work and Pensions: Digital platforms for Universal Credit claimants.
- National Health Service: Text and internet-based services for appointments and prescriptions.

Many people told us they support making public services more digitally accessible. There is a desire to maintain traditional methods of engagement alongside digital options.

Digital inclusion requires collaborative efforts from government, services, businesses, and the third sector to ensure that technology serves as a tool for empowerment rather than a source of exclusion.



There is a lack of communication and involvement of the community in what they need when their services are moved online and there is no practical support to navigate these new systems when they are implemented. (Focus Group Key Finding)

Focus group attendees largely supported making the services delivered by public bodies more accessible and offering digital options for this engagement but not in place of traditional methods of engagement. It was also felt that when public services move to digital engagement people who use the services should be involved in the design of the platform.

Island and Rural Communities

Island and rural communities present a unique challenge when it comes to designing and implementing connectivity networks. Both physical barriers and general topography have a huge impact on service provision:

- **Connectivity:** Many rural areas struggle with unreliable connections. We heard that some communities also have limited mobile phone reception, due to dated or non-existent infrastructure. This is a particular issue in some rural areas situated near Ministry of Defence sites which limit the area's ability to upgrade their connectivity networks.
- **Limited options:** Some homes are not covered by the existing telephone grid network, meaning satellite internet is the only option but this can be both very expensive and unreliable in a Scottish climate.
- **Economic opportunities:** The lack of reliable connectivity has an impact on employment opportunities, leading to outward migration of young people seeking employment opportunities in urban areas.
- **Accessing services:** As services increasingly move online people in rural and island communities find increased challenges to accessing these services.

The issues people participating in the focus groups told us about create distinct challenges that differ from those faced in more urban areas. This results in a significant urban-rural divide in both digital skills and access.

Understanding and mitigating the barriers specific to island and rural communities will ensure that all communities can fully participate in the digitally connected world.



Actually, getting an internet connection can be impossible for some houses with current technology. (Focus Group Key Findings)

Importance of public involvement

Planning for public participation in audit processes allows for increased engagement, transparency and accountability. The insights gathered through this participatory approach reflect the importance of incorporating public participation in audit processes, particularly when addressing complex issues like digital exclusion.

Supporting public involvement at pace and across different geographies presented some challenges and required a flexible approach to delivery. It also provided learning points which can support the continued enhancement of public participation infrastructure in Scotland.

For Audit Scotland this could include the development of structured opportunities for public involvement in future audits – engaging a wide range of voices and providing opportunities for people with lived experience to be involved in designing solutions to the issues that have affected them.

We would encourage factoring in more time to build relationships – in particular with local organisations whose connections were key to reaching people. Time for in-person conversations could enhance their understanding of the work and increase the quality of the information shared with potential participants.

In remote and rural areas, bringing people together over a couple of days for a residential could allow for more in-depth engagement with an issue (but does come with additional accommodation and other costs).

Overall, this work has provided a platform for people from different geographical areas, age groups and perspectives to use their voice and get involved in audit processes. This delivers a sense of ownership and builds trust from the public in the audit's findings and recommendations. As a result, the work has shown that including individuals with lived experience of digital exclusion significantly improves the audit process by ensuring solutions address real-world needs. It also contributes to more effective recommendations.



Digital migration of services is all but inevitable... we cannot afford to leave people behind. (Reference Group)

Appendix 1 Focus Group Notes

Argyll & Bute 1

Digital Exclusion – Who is affected

- Seniors
- Dyslexia and other learning difficulties
- People on benefits
- People struggling with cost of living
- People with limited language skills
- People with low or no literacy level (one session participant 90+ completely illiterate)
- Disabilities – cognitive issues and those with sight loss highlighted

Digital Exclusion – What is it?

- Not being able to decipher scam calls, texts, emails and websites
- Not having the devices to get online
- Not knowing how to work these devices
- Not having internet or not having stable/reliable internet connection
- Not being able to afford the large ongoing costs of maintaining an internet connection past an introductory offers
- Not wanting to learn or engage with digital

Issues

- Actually getting an internet connection can be impossible for some houses with current technology
- Satellite internet providers saying they aren't taking on more customers in certain areas of the peninsula or on surrounding islands because the connection is so poor (33mb when not raining, 0mb when raining for one resident at the session) they can't reliability provide the service for them
- As activity moves online (e.g. no more community information point, Facebook becomes the new local notice board) digitally excluded people become real life isolated people which leads to exclusion and isolation from your community
- Less innovative approaches with digital in places like Campbeltown because the internet service is so poor that people can't work from home and businesses can't run properly so that youth and talent leaves and doesn't come back to share their skills, learning and experience
- Getting deliveries from online stores is more expensive and takes longer not to mention the difficulties with trying to return goods and needing to go online and get codes and things to print "It's exhausting"

Public Services

- Library staff are very helpful but most people locally don't even know they can pop in and speak to them, it isn't a formal service they provide so they can't advertise or promote it
- All support for local activity has disappeared since the local CVO was closed down, the TSI tell you to check their website for funding info and support where CVO had local relationships. The support for third sector and volunteer led groups disappeared as things went integrated and digital
- "These services need to realise that not everyone has access or even wants to engage with them online"
- (Council tax reduction) Scotland Loves Local Gift Card comes in the form of a gift voucher – this cannot be used until the person goes online and makes an online account then activates the card. Imagine lots of people won't bother and that is just money in the councils pocket instead of ours
- Lots of older people still bank with RBS because they have done so for a long time, the closest is in Oban and if digital banking isn't an option for you then it's a lengthy travel to do some banking and that costs money too
- Several local shops don't pay for internet because the service is so poor anyway – this means they don't take card payments so people very much rely on cash in places like Campbeltown and this needs to be taken into consideration when decisions are being made around closing banks and cash machines
- "Ring and Ride" service used to be booked via phone but since covid this now has to be booked online, so less people are using the service because the people that did use it are largely the same kinds of people that struggle with digital exclusion

Digitally Inclusive World

- Improved communication around how and where people can access support
- More tailored support that meets each person's specific needs
- Intergenerational work between schools and older people so the groups can learn from and with each other
- Always offering (proactively) alternatives to digital as a way of engaging with any service
- "To live a fully connected life in Campbeltown it costs way more than in more central areas like Glasgow. You have more options for service providers, so they have to be more competitive with their pricing" – removal of postcode lottery with the introduction of universal and equal access to internet for the whole country
- Things like bus timetables and tide times would be easily accessible in non-digital formats like the used to be because not everyone wants to check online

Renfrewshire 1

Digital Exclusion – Who is affected

- Disability
- Age (old and young)
- Elderly – especially those that don't have family close by/at all
- People who are already living under a large amount of stress or who have mental health problem sometimes exclude themselves because if they don't it has a massively negative impact on their stress or mental health problems
- Cost barrier for people on benefits and living in poverty
- "New Scots" – English not first or even second language

Digital Exclusion – What is it

- Lack of skills
- No confidence
- Lack of knowledge
- No internet access
- No devices to access internet
- Limited data to access internet fully/all the time

Issues

- Needing to regularly update passwords for sites might be better for safety but for someone with learning difficulties it just creates more barriers to participation
- Navigating the internet when you don't have the vocabulary to describe what you are looking for is very difficult, at least when you phone you can speak to a human and they can help you figure it out or interpret what you might be asking for from what you say to them – a computer can't do this
- "Covid and the cost of living crisis have just floored some families. There's just so much going on and so much you need to constantly be thinking about and doing so it's just hard for people to retain information and if they do learn how to do something it's remembering it next time or even having the head space to cope with the new ways of doing things now everything is moving online. It's just something else to be stressed about."
- When everyone around you seems to be coping with stuff it's hard to get over the embarrassment you feel when you don't know what to do or how to fix it when problems happen
- (Utility supplier) When you go onto the online chat to get help because there is a problem with your meter (pre-paid) or your key they can be helpful at the start but when they can't fix the problem straight away your messages just go unanswered

- AI chatbots don't understand the message you type in if your English or spelling isn't great so it sends you the wrong information or to the wrong places for answers so things always take longer than they should
- Costs – it's not just the cost of the internet service into your home, it's the things you then need to pay to access (e.g. music streaming used to be free and easier, but services make it much more difficult for people to do this now they have figured out how to charge you for it) which can mount up in families
- Costs – as we have more and more devices that need to use the internet it makes the service slower, so people need to pay more for bigger packages and allowances – these are advertised and spoken about in terms people don't understand so it's hard to know if you are making the right choice
- Social tariffs are only suitable for light users and not for families or houses with lots of users
- Free devices distributed throughout, and post-pandemic came with no training and limited support and most of these devices are now out of date and can't be updated or the batteries are dying, and people don't have the money to replace them and because they weren't ever trained or supported to use them they never got to appreciate the benefits of having them

Engaging with public bodies

- Language used on council website is quite complex and there isn't obvious ways to access support to find the info or access the services you need
- Some people just prefer face to face conversations, or some activities are best done (sometimes only achieved) by connecting directly with a human (phone or in person)
- Forms associated with PiP (Personal Independence Payments) are difficult for some individuals with disabilities or low computer skills and there isn't any support or help provided so it is down to the person to find someone in their family or friends group to help with these tasks or they face having their income affected
- Apps or sites designed to be fully functional on a mobile browser are better because of the devices people use to engage with the info/services that public bodies provide but they aren't integrated well (different council depts have different ways they want you to engage with them). When people change between doing things on their phone and a computer it is quite confusing to navigate – you think you have learned how to do something then you do it on a different device and it knocks you back a bit because you realise you don't know what you are doing “makes me feel like I'm stupid but I know I am not”
- If you phone Renfrewshire council about your council tax and get through to the right people then you get the answers you need on that call or they call you back. If you go onto the online form, which is actively encouraged by the council, it can take 25 days for them to respond sometimes and the problem just gets worse. (not just the problem but the impact on wellbeing and mental health then sometimes relationships)

- Online form for missed bins takes a long time for a response, if you phone the bin will be cleared much quicker
- Having really easy to access options for accessibility functions on websites for public bodies especially around language and translation of information on the site to other languages and options for changing colours of sites for people with dyslexia and other learning difficulties
- There is a lack of communication and involvement of the community in what they need when their services are moved online and there is no practical support to navigate these new systems when they are implemented
- There is an assumption that everyone has internet access, the skills to 'just go to our website' and the devices to be able to get online and access their services fully
- There should be an obligation that any service that is being made digital should be tested by a percentage of people that actively use the service non-digitally. Testing group should be a mix of ages, background, skill levels, etc. Then their experience should be used to improve the digital service before it is rolled out to the public. When it is rolled out there should be an overlap where people can access the services digitally and non-digitally and during that time there should be support and training offered out to people so they can learn how to transition.
- Public bodies that move their services online should do surveys and consultations with service users to understand the impact on them of moving the services online but not just ask people through the digital service because then you are only reaching the people who are able to access it

Digitally Inclusive World

- Older people and people with eyesight problems might have the ability to learn digital skills but what little support there is available to help/train them don't seem to have a full understand of accessibility and the things that can be done to make the process easier (e.g. larger fonts on mobile phones, changing screen colours, etc).
- Having trained digital champions working at a grassroots level – not JUST to deliver training programmes but that offers a drop in service so people can come in to get help to do something they need to do online or on a computer and being supported to learn the skills they need to do that thing will help people build confidence and skills which will mean people are more likely to develop an interest and want to learn more for themselves.
- Places like the Tannahill Centre, that already work within the communities and help people are the best place for people to get support. The library is good but if you aren't used to going in there then you probably don't see it as a place to go to get online or even know if there is someone there who can help you.
- Having a button on websites so if you can't find what you need or you aren't getting the answers you came for you can hit the button and someone will call you from the service

you are trying to engage with (or use AI to detect when someone is struggling and offer a call from a human?)

- Have training and support for using digital and accessing the internet that is targeted at different groups, like family sessions at weekends/in evenings so they can learn together.
- Volunteers in the Tannahill Centre have been using Google Translate app to engage with a Ukrainian family and it has been a huge success. This should be shouted about and the council, CAB, schools, etc should all be getting their staff trained in how to use it so they can engage better with other people in the same situation.
- Make the internet free for everyone and just have it everywhere then because internet cafes will shut down these spaces can be used as training hubs and then put training hubs into every community centre and library so people can drop in for tailored support and sign up for training courses

Glasgow 1

Issues

- Maintaining an internet connection at home has become too costly, cheaper packages mean you are compromising on reliability of service
- Lots of assumed knowledge on websites which presents difficulty when things don't work (e.g. a payment doesn't go through and it doesn't give you enough info to resolve the issue)
- Often directed to get children to help but this isn't always appropriate, e.g. with health appointments or financial business and even just having a right to shop and do things in private from other family members needs to be sacrificed
- Digital by default might be practical for some/most but being able to do things non-digitally still needs to be an option, e.g. Booking a GP appointment has to be done online and that doesn't always work and can lead to treatment/support not being sought at initial point of need
- Lack of skills and confidence to learn is holding people back
- Feelings of not being able to fully participate within society and being left behind while battling with a real desire to engage and connect but not knowing where to start
- Unreliable connection at home – ISP runs checks and claims everything is working as it should but independent checks show lower than advised speeds and connection reliability but there isn't anything that can be done to fix these problems
- Children are too digitally savvy, they aren't developing skills previous generations developed like basic math and writing skills. There is also a lack of imagination in children as they spend too much time on digital devices which is affecting knowledge retention and brain development

Solutions

- Digital skills and confidence improves with use – during covid the group were provided devices from Corra which meant they could connect with each other and maintain their exercise classes. This was an adjustment and difficult at first but it improved with time and practice

Public Bodies

- Banks shouldn't be advising people to seek help from a family member because it isn't always appropriate
- Schools have introduced apps that parents can use to keep tabs on children's progress and these have been very beneficial for parents as they can access when it suits them and is seen as a positive alternative to letters in school bags, which parents weren't always getting
- Automated phone lines, e.g. when calling the council, do not recognize strong accents so callers are often redirected to the wrong place which causes frustration and costs money on calls

Digitally Inclusive World

- Having a central place you can go (physical and digital) when stuck – no matter what it is. A one stop shop for all things digital where you can get help with specific tasks or general training
- Community based training that covers topics like online safety, bullying, inappropriate content for families so children learn and parents know how to support them is readily available
- Community based training that takes into account different cultures and languages is readily available
- Universal free access to internet would help everyone have internet access without needing to worry about costs
- There would be a feature on all public body and services (such as banks) websites saying something like 'I'm having problems, please phone me' so that people can connect with human beings
- Schools are able to strike a balance between digital and non-digital education (i.e Some children aren't picking up basic math or writing skills because the focus is on using digital and devices such as calculators and aren't learning these important skills)

Argyll & Bute 2

Digital Exclusion

“The inability of someone to access the digital space in an equitable way”

What does it look like?

- Rural exclusion
- Submariners young people working (at sea) for 6 months without digital access - Mental Health Issues from disconnection
- Older People might struggle with technology
- But also younger adults (middle aged) who aren't interested in keeping up to date
- Affordability might be difficult.
- fear -confidence in knowing what to do
- Over-reliance on sharing of info on social media, if you need to know how do you find out?
- Having to adjust new apps & ways of working
- Starting Uni- You have to access the internet... Uni – scan an app to prove you were in a lecture – no other way to prove you were there. The number of apps + places you need to have

Issues/Challenges

- SCHOOL COMMUNICATION -Parents can get same announcements x however many children you have
- PARENTS NIGHT -All bookings are online but not done sensibly
- No school lunches if they've not got the app - S1's aren't allowed off site – have to use app or packed lunch
- LEISURE CENTRE -All class booking app
- Numbers of people sharing makes it really slow
- Signal might not reach (boosters)
- Move devices connected, means slower speed
- Single point of access instead of lots of apps. University - many different websites, many different apps.
- Easiest thing to do is contact council using 'Contact us'. box but no receipt or anything... Not easier
- Single point of contact → Clearer explanations on apps & websites how to use. Easy to see, easy to access tab
- Privacy & Cookies not accessing information because of concerns over privacy.
- Concerns over digital footprints too. Sometimes being digitally connected makes you feel more unsafe...

Digitally Inclusive World

- free choice re: information (what are cookies and how are they used?)
- Better security to help people feel safe
- Schools providing devices.
- No cost barrier
- Internet access is everywhere, No postcode Lottery
- Spaces where you can access digital devices + THE ACTUAL FACTS internet for free
- Ways to build knowledge +confidence.
- Identifying fake information - Confidently identifying this. Training & skill
- More streamlining in apps+ websites
- Sites, apps, accessible & forms are easy to use
- Equity

Renfrewshire 2

Issues

- When you are trying to do something new or complicated with someone you are more like to persevere but when you are trying to do the same thing yourself on a mobile or computer it is much easier to just walk away when frustrated so less likely to reach a solution.
- Even if you do find instructions or a walk through for what you are trying to do online it was probably designed with a desktop browser in mind and not a mobile phone user so the layouts are completely different – they should be made make instructions for mobile and desktop browsers
- Sometimes services are different when done via digital and aren't as good or they don't offer all the options you get when you deal with a real human – e.g. Kids for a Quid tickets can only be purchased at a staffed ticket office (so the machines they have in stations are pointless for parents) or from a human on the train – but it's difficult because they keep closing ticket offices
- Disability access support to get on and off the train has to be booked online to ensure it is definitely in place when you arrive at the station – they say you can turn up a go but it's pretty much guaranteed that you won't get the support you need. What about people who can't book in advance? (e.g. those that can't phone or get online to book – these are the same people who often can't use the Help Points in the station – when they are working)
- "You need to know what you don't know to be able to search and find what you need online"
- When you contact your ISP about slow connections or line issues they constantly try to get you to move up your package, why is that normal? Why when they can't provide the service you pay for should you be expected to pay them more money and why does that fix

the problem – there seems to be an acceptance that ISPs can decide what level/quality of service they give people irrespective of what they are actually paying for.

Public Bodies

- Renfrewshire council website is a rabbit warren, it is too difficult to find the info you need when you go on it
- Pre-pandemic there wasn't anywhere near as much online access required for school (maybe covered by a trip to the library if needed) but there is so much reliance on it for both school work and homework that it is impossible for the kids to get it all done without having internet access at home – so mandatory education requires parents to pay for costly internet access at home (and the bigger the family the higher the cost)
- School communication to parents has all gone digital but they are using multiple platforms to communicate information and it can be confusing, one school using Facebook, Twitter, See Saw and Teams to communicate with the parents and it can be quite overwhelming
- Schools need to look at the impacts on GIRFEC if they are going to take a broad-brush approach to online learning because teachers don't seem to have a good idea of the skills/confidence and access level for families in being able to support their children to learn in these environments
- Schools seem to stall at the beginning of the school year to get parents onto the ParentPay system, while refusing to accept money in other ways, so parents end up in debt very quickly at the start of the school year which can have a knock on effect within families
- Too many systems are interlinked (though not well) and rely on each other to keep up to date and for adding new people (e.g. Free bus travel could only be accessed if children already had an NEC card but that's only for 11+ so it was very confusing and a bit of a maze trying to get the correct info but also the ID needed to get the cards for free bus travel cost money!)
- Job Centre – The processes have increasingly moved to digital approaches over the years. We've now got to a place that there is very little opportunity to interact with a human during this process
- There is a requirement at one local GP practice that prescriptions be ordered on an app – this is great because it reduces the amount of paper being used and the GP doesn't need to spend a few mins printing and signing off a prescription but it is terrible for those who are digitally excluded and the practice is not forthcoming with solutions for people.
- Physical banks are closing and their opening times are reducing so it forces people to move to online banking but that isn't actually an option for everyone

Solutions/Ideas

- Introducing easier ways to filter information on search results so you know you are getting information relevant to where you are (often search results show info on council websites in parts of Australia)

- Having a central location where people can go and there are straightforward answers on where to go for support and dispelling myths around engaging with digital – if you have a tax issue you go to HMRC, if you have a finance issue you go to the bank, etc. but there doesn't seem to be an obvious place you can go for definitive support/answers.
- Free internet for all everywhere – there are free Wi-Fi hotspots in places BUT if it is free to access and you can be in the space without needing to pay to be there (e.g. buying coffees in a café to be able to sit there and access Wi-Fi) there will always be other restrictions, e.g. opening times in a library, and these often don't align well with parents and the things they need to do but also if you have been working all day the evening is when you would be doing things online and the library is shut.
- Flexibility in the system – increasing opportunities for people to engage in digital but not force them to by making it the only way to engage with services or opportunities
- Integrate or link children's files on the school system so they are linked with their siblings – do this so when emails are going out to parents you get one email about all your children rather than one email for every child.

Impacts

- Frustration when needing to use online systems
- Self exclusion – just giving up when you can't work something out and there isn't any obvious support, this has a big impact on wellbeing and knowledge levels
- Stigma prevents people from reaching out but the knock on of this is further digital exclusion
- Financial – cost of upgrading devices is steep and never ending because they go out of date so quickly

Digitally Inclusive World

- Internet as a right (like home energy or education)
- Create a govt dept that would deal with online security and safety
- AI would be used to determine who is using a device and then what they and see would be restricted based on age, etc.
- Govt should purchase the older 4g infrastructure instead of private companies decommissioning it as they install 5g – the 4g should then be publicly owned and made available free for all
- Govt should address private company ownership of personal data
Family groups are linked on online system, e.g. schools should link sibling groups for more streamlined communication with parents

Renfrewshire 3

Digital Exclusion – Who is affected?

- Grans are not online much. Lots of Mums doing things. Tutorials are needed! (From family)
- Elderly lady (participants neighbour) with no online presence. Doesn't affect her day-to-day might but an inconvenience. Might not know where to go - how to access things.
- My nan
- Older people

Digital Activities

- Texting
- YouTube (content creator),
- Twitch streamer
- Snapchat
- WhatsApp
- Tik Tok
- Research - chrome books
- Cool Math Games, Sum Dog, Top Marks.
- School work
- Internet Rabbit Holes.
- Homework
- Use GLOW.
- TEAMS
- SATCHEL 1
- Video games /online games
- Netflix
- Still using Show my Homework
- Information gathering and research

Challenges

- Glitches and teacher error (lack of expertise) → can make it difficult
- Lack of knowledge devices. on It can feel quite difficult.
- New apps don't work on old phones. Parents don't use it. (sometimes because they trust me though).
- I found it hard (online learning) because school's Wi-Fi was bad so teachers weren't online.
- It was confusing to do school online as we needed to adapt.
- Homework seems more complicated than it is (when it's on the apps).
- Satchel 1 - its finniky. Every period Satchel 1 sends an email which over-rides Silent mode
- Get loads of emails from GLOW! (oversaturation of alerts)
- Speeds at home are ok but can be patchy.

- Have to know someone who can help you.
- Concerns about safety online.
- Free bus pass - has been a bit of a challenge -needed to apply online - then photo booth - then back online again. Really challenging to apply. NO updates.
- Chromebooks given out during pandemic but taken back afterwards (possible transition to High School)
- FORMAT PDFs are an issue -if you want to edit, its behind a paywall. Applications for jobs, etc (youth worker)
- People now seem to be a bit more apprehensive (post pandemic) about receiving devices.
- Too young to get a phone - use a timeslot from adult to access internet.
- Hard to transition from school to the new way of working. Suddenly introducing Zoom when never had to use it.

Comments

- We feel safe online because it was drilled into us at primary School
- Got my first phone at 8 years old
- I find it all straightforward, it's all I've ever known
- It was good to know that the school has devices we could access
- My schools wifi doesn't work where it needs to - graphics + computing.

Solutions

- Better communication – sometimes too many notifications, more streamlined!
- Better layouts or no layout changes between different devices so transitions (instructions are for desktop browser but you need to follow along on a mobile browser) don't take as long

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Digital Exclusion – Who is affected

- Older people
- Disability groups – additional support needs
- Young people
- Parents
- English as an additional language

Digital Exclusion – What it is

- No device or devices that you don't know how to use
- Lack of skills or knowledge in engaging with technology
- Lacking in confidence to try and learn
- No internet access
- Fears around privacy and scams off-putting

- Overwhelmed by the scale of it all

Digital Exclusion – Impacts

- Older people not being able to use apps on smartphones means they can't access discounts and service for things like online shopping
- One participant spends time collecting info from a neighbour so she can submit his meter reading each month because they can't/don't have capacity to
- Young people can use internet to a level, they can access things like YouTube but not operate the Microsoft office packages so what they know will provide limited help for things they will need to do later in work and life but there is an assumption that they can learn it easily and themselves
- Parents not able to access ParentPay – only way to pay for school lunches/activities. Also need to use ParentPay to access School Clothing Grant. A parent was not able to access ParentPay and had lost out on the money as a result
- People struggling to access health care (GP appointments/repeat prescriptions) due to complex phone systems with multiple options.
- People not accessing all of the benefits they are entitled to – due to lack of digital skills and complexity of online systems
- When you can't get online or navigate the internet to make payments for things you can incur fines or penalties as a result so it can have a detrimental impact financially on a person because they don't have internet or skills/confidence to do it.

Issues

- Parents are struggling to keep engaged with children's education, different platforms and apps that need to be used. One participant couldn't access one of the school online services to credit a lunches account, so she ended up building up debt without even realising because she didn't receive any of the messages through the app.
- Participant shared details of phone scam they had experienced – scammer pretended to be from their bank and built urgency/fear from their lack of digital confidence.
- People not being able to pay rent and bills in a timely way due to online billing/not using online banking/not being able to pay in person
- Participant not able to complete online form to register their marriage
- Ren Council Tax portal mentioned as a barrier. Digitally confident participant took 1.5 hours to complete the process on behalf of someone.
- Funding for groups and services is now accessed mainly online and while this may be convenient it is a barrier for smaller groups and organisations who maybe don't have the skills in-house to navigate these online applications

Public Bodies

- When support is offered, e.g. via training, then this needs to be sustained and reliable. People need time to build confidence that they can rely on the support before they open up or even access it
- Allow people to pay for things in person e.g. paying rent or council tax, payments to school
- More resource needs to be dedicated toward supporting people to access the services they have moved online and not within the council; it should be allocated out to orgs working on the ground with people
- Solutions/Ideas
- Jobcentre offered a computer course but the uptake was low, this isn't because people don't need the support. It is just being offered in the wrong way and in the wrong setting. Help and support should come from where people are already engaging like Our Place Our Families, but they need the resources to be able to provide that support
- Relational approaches are key for people building trust so they can learn from the person offering support and confidence comes from knowing they can reach out and not be judged for needing help or if they are unsure about something
- We need to change how we talk about the internet, it is often negative news stories and scare stories and that puts already digitally excluded people off. We need to show people the positive side and how being digitally savvy has huge benefits
- Consistent and affordable internet access for everyone

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Issues/Negatives

- Education – paying for school meals needs to be done online and there is no reminder system so if you forget you end up in debt to the school and on one occasion it was only highlighted at the point of sale to the young person in front of peers which led to a big fight at home.
- Home Energy – the online system (live chats) for getting help from energy supplier (Scottish Gas) takes too long and often the conversations are challenging because the person has broken English or because frustration builds at the time it takes to get a response.
- Local Authority – Council has an online form for a missed bin pickup, but no response is ever received, and the bin goes unemptied but when you phone and report this they come out quite quick to empty the bin so what's the point in the online service if it doesn't work and is slower to access?
- Information – There is a lot of scaremongering about online safety and privacy but no clear place to go for straight forward advice and information. Lots of individuals highlighting concerns about targeted ads but no real knowledge of what they are doing online that triggers these ads (i.e allowing cookies and targeted ads)

- Purchasing – Bus tickets are cheaper when bought as part of a season ticket or pass but this can only be done via an app and after signing up, giving info and creating an account with First Bus but what if you don't have a smartphone or internet access? You can't get the benefits without being online.
- Costs – Access to the internet is expensive but it's not just the cost of having it at home, it's the additional services (streaming services) and fees on top of expected costs that it has brought (e.g. buying a ticket for an event now includes booking fees, admin fees, etc where you used to just be able to buy a ticket for an event)
- Costs – Maintenance and replacing devices is too much, the devices (even the really expensive ones) are designed with a very short lifespan in mind and replacing a phone every few years, at a cost of hundreds of pounds, is completely unrealistic. Most people end in debt or in lengthy contracts to pay up the cost of devices which are needed to function and be part of society. It is also cheaper to buy new devices or retailers stop fixing certain issues after a short period of time so it is a very wasteful industry.
- Digital Impact – There has been evidence to show that spending too much time online has detrimental impacts to individuals wellbeing, so while the NHS is telling us to get out into nature and connect with people they decrease appointment times and encourage you to seek support from online and app based services – how does this make sense?
- Council – There has been a move away from being able to pay for services using cash, e.g. you have to book and pay for a council rubbish uplift online, so for people who find it easier to withdraw their money from their account and work with the cash they are excluded from these services. Same for rent and council tax accounts. (since found out this is not the case in Renfrewshire but it is believed to be the case so the issue still exists)
- Information – Lack of plain English advice and information resources to guide people through their internet use and any support to use/engage online is often online so inaccessible.
- Information – The language used to publicise and promote internet packages is confusing and it is also virtually impossible to understand if you are receiving the service you pay for, there doesn't seem to be anywhere you can get independent advice or advocacy that ensures you are receiving the service you pay for, that it is worth the money and that you understand the differences between different ISPs
- Banking – With more and more services moving online and now you get banks that only operate online it makes it impossible to get support and you are forced to change the way you manage your money.

Solutions/Positives

- Education – There is a role for schools as a single point of contact for lots of families to be taking the lead on projects that support families in managing their child's interactions online. "The head teacher should be saying this is what is allowed, and this is what your children can do online, and this is what they need to not be doing. This way when a parent

says no to certain online activities the child can't come back and say "such and such's mum lets him play it" and if they do the parent has recourse to go to the school and highlight the violation of the rules and the school needs to action something with the family.

- Attend Anywhere – NHS appointments that are attend anywhere give people to flexibility to engage with health care without it costing money in travel, parking, childcare, etc so if people have the device, the internet and the skills/confidence these are a great way to adapt to the patient rather than the patient adapting to the way the service is delivered.

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Digital Exclusion

The group initially felt digital exclusion was about not having access to the internet and so being excluded from accessing things that are online. This continued into a discussion about the wide range of issues that come under digital exclusion, e.g. not being able to afford the internet despite it being available, not having the correct devices, maintaining these devices, etc.

The group then discussed how digital exclusion could be considered a bit differently for island communities because their starting point isn't the same as those living in more connected areas. One pupil said "Even if you do have internet access and you don't need help to use it, it doesn't mean you are fully connected anyway. Like we can't get deliveries from lots of online shops up here, even amazon deliveries take weeks... the local chippy isn't on Deliveroo. I have downloaded it so maybe one day..." and everyone in the group laughed.

It seemed more appropriate to talk about situations when people are digitally excluded (given the acceptance by the group that the whole island is digitally excluded post-conversation about the wide-ranging nature of digital exclusion), and the group noted the types of people/situations where people are digitally excluded:

- Older people
- People who have jobs that require internet/computer usage
- People who need to attend regular medical appointments (appointments anywhere service)
- Areas of island with poor/no signal for phones or internet (4g mast on Coll and only coverage by Vodafone, O2 and EE but this is also intermittent across the island)
- People who don't have friends that can help them – lack of peer support within friend groups because none of them have the skills to share
- People with disabilities – less groups and services on the island that can support
- People that can't afford the internet or devices

The group highlighted two other issues around accessing the internet:

- Joint Military Exercises are delivered by the MoD regularly and often these take place in the waters off the North coast of Scotland, while these are taking place there is limited, if any, mobile reception and no internet access which has massively disruptive impacts on

education – especially due to their placement within the school calendar year and the proximity to exam/test times.

- In the winter months it is not unusual for the island to experience power cuts, which then knocks out the internet for the island for periods of time.

Impacts

The group also noted the impacts of digital exclusion on people:

- Difficulties in working from home – limiting the types of jobs and work that people can do, which leads to people leaving the island
- Social isolation – not being able to play online games with friends, not being able to connect with people that have the same interest and hobbies as you but aren't islanders (who may not share these interests)
- Young people – if there's no internet or patchy signal at home doing homework and studying can be impossible

Service engagement

The group was asked what they (or their families) would do if they were trying to engage with a service that was online or based on the mainland and they were having difficulty with the website, how would they deal with this? One participant said, "If the website for internet banking wasn't working and you couldn't get through on the phone you'd just need to wait and try again another day" and there was significantly less frustration coming across than in other focus group sessions – this could be down to having a different pace of life within island communities (cultural differences) or the need for acceptance in these situations is instilled in island communities from a young age due to their being no solutions rather than a feeling of just giving up.

About Corra Foundation

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.

Our ways of working

At Corra we have a set of principles that we strive to put into practice across our roles as an employer, independent funder, charity and partner, as well as in our influencing activity.

We will:

- Listen and respond to people, communities and organisations and amplify voices that are less well heard – their wisdom is at the heart of Corra's approach.
- Build relationships, always working alongside others on the basis of shared power, mutual trust and shared learning.
- Pursue diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), trying to challenge structural discrimination and contribute to radical shifts in the funding sector.
- Be an open, trusting and flexible grant maker.
- Ensure we contribute to tackling climate change, through our investments, operations and grant making and encouraging others to take action alongside us.
- Be bold, taking considered risks and supporting others to do the same.

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Corra Foundation
Office Suite 30 Pure Offices
4 Lochside Way
Edinburgh EH12 9DT
e: hello@corra.scot
t: 0131 444 4020



www.corra.scot

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