Minimum Digital Living Standard 2025

July 2025

Behind the MDLS: Partners and funders

Why do we need a Minimum Digital Living Standard?

- Novel approach to understanding digital inclusion and exclusion based on households not individuals
  - **NOT just a list of kit and broadband speeds**

- Builds on the established Loughborough University Minimum Income Standards model and methodology
  - Built from a **consensus consultation with citizens and households** not from a 'top down' assessment

- Focuses on a minimum standard that **citizens agree a household needs to meet a basic life all would value**
  - Minimum 'basket of digital goods, skills and services' households need for an adequate quality of life and to participate in society, *or*
  - What digital access, kit, skills, and facilities are needed to deliver a social, work, family, educational, entertainment, community, and civic minimum living standard
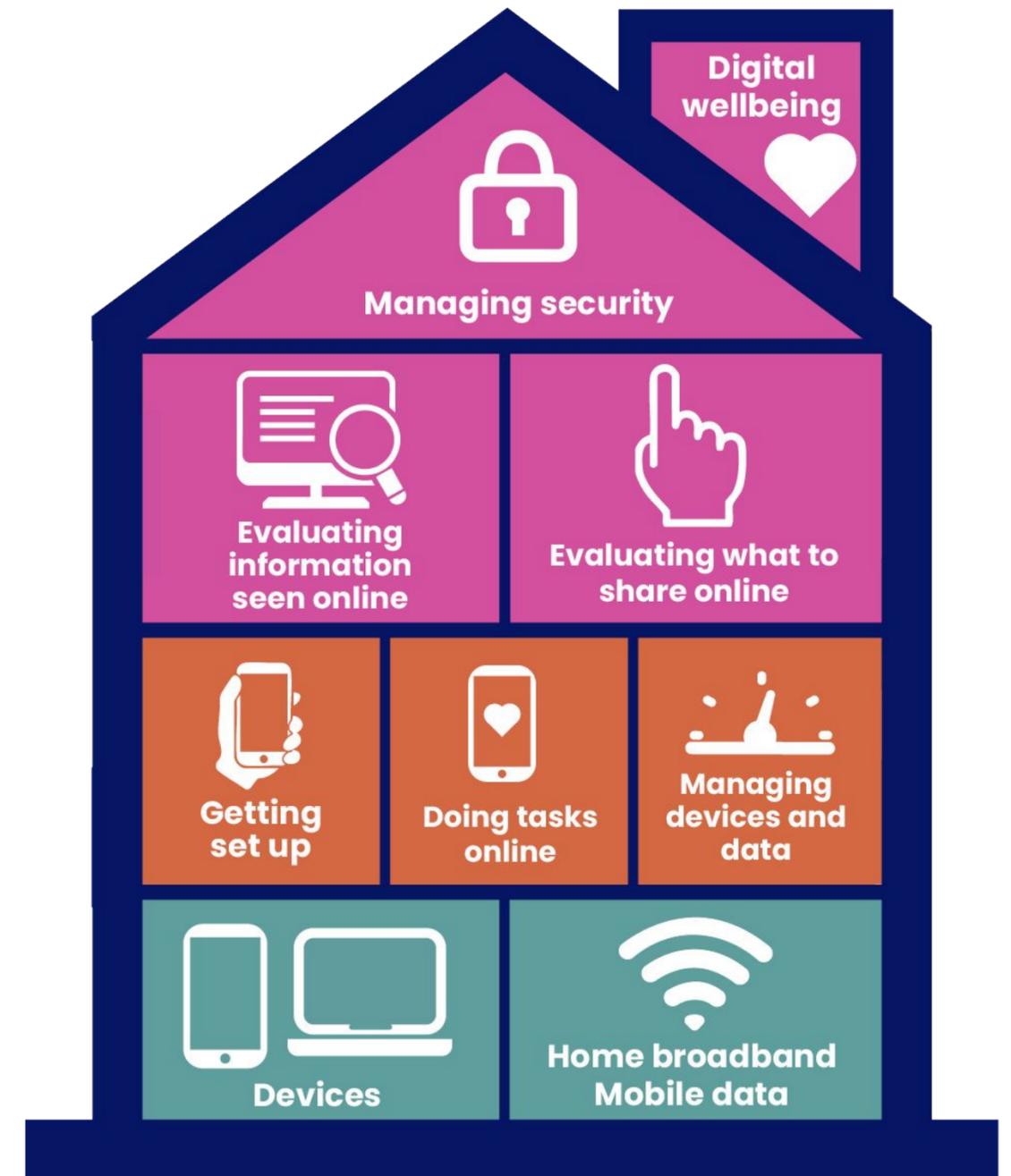
What is unique about the Minimum Digital Living Standard?

MDLS is a minimum that reflects everyday norms. It is:

- **Bottom-up**: developed by members of the public
- **Holistic**: covering goods and services, and knowledge and skills
- **Household**: in contrast to most measures which focus on individuals
- **A starting point**, as some households may have additional needs
- **A reflection of our digital society** in the UK today.

MDLS is **not** just for government.

Digital inclusion is a shared responsibility.

Digital wellbeing

Managing security

Evaluating information seen online

Evaluating what to share online

Getting set up

Doing tasks online

Managing devices and data

Devices

Home broadband Mobile data

Reminder of survey findings: 2024 MDLS for Households with Children

Digital access is essential for family life

Families made clear how this impacts on feeling included, opportunities, and everyday tasks.

Poverty is a barrier to meeting the MDLS

Main predictors of being below MDLS are low socio-economic status, living in a deprived area, being a single parent household, a household with more than 2 children, a household led by someone with disability and/or with non-white ethnicity.

4 in 10 households with children are below the MDLS (45%)

6 in 10 households with children likely meet MDLS for both 'functional' and 'critical' skills (62%); 24% meet this for children only; 9% for parents only; 5% fall short on all

8 in 10 households with children likely meet MDLS for digital goods and services (81%); 6% lack good broadband; 4% lack enough large screen devices; 3% fall short on all.

Digital safety is a big issue for parents and young people

Families saw this as a shared responsibility with schools, state and tech companies.

1 in 4 households with children (27%) have parents missing the critical skills for understanding and managing digital risk.

3.7 million households with children do not meet the Minimum Digital Living Standard.

This is **4 in 10 households with children in the UK today.**

MDLS: Methodology at a glance

Orientation focus groups work together to develop an MDLS definition for all households

Deliberative focus groups – across 'task', 'checkback' and 'final' stages – work to reach consensus on a **basket of contents** for achieving a minimum digital living standard

STAGE 1
ORIENTATION

STAGE 2
TASK

STAGE 3
CHECK BACK

STAGE 4
FINAL

An **animated video** explaining the MDLS and how it has been developed is also available in English and in Welsh

UK
MDLS
2025

Minimum Digital Living Standard definition

A minimum digital living standard includes having **accessible internet**, **adequate equipment**, and the **skills and knowledge** people need.

It is about being able to **communicate**, **connect**, and **engage** with **opportunities safely** and with **confidence**.

MDLS 'core' contents across all household types

Digital goods and services	
Home broadband	• With sufficient reliability and speed to support all household members to access the internet at the same time *OR unlimited mobile data in place of home broadband*
Mobile phone and mobile data	• One entry-level smart phone per adult • 5GB to 15GB per month mobile data for all household members with their own mobile phone *OR unlimited mobile data in place of home broadband*
Large screen device	• One large screen device (laptop, tablet or PC) per household
Television and viewing	• One TV (or TV-capable large-screen device) per household • TV licence or entry-level TV subscription service per household

MDLS 'core' contents across all household types

Functional knowledge and skills	
Getting set up (devices and connection)	• Using device functions • Connecting to the internet • Changing settings and navigating options
Doing tasks and activities online	• Internet searching • Using apps and programmes • Completing online forms • Sending and receiving emails • Making online payments
Managing and maintaining (devices and connection)	• Monitoring and maintaining device storage • Managing and monitoring mobile data

MDLS 'core' contents across all household types

	Critical knowledge and skills
Managing security	• Using secure passwords • Evaluating connection security • Making safe payments
Evaluating information seen online	• Identifying and avoiding scams • Assessing information quality and credibility • Customising, blocking and reporting accounts and content
Evaluating what to share online	• Protecting personal information • Assessing online identities and friend requests • Considering digital footprint
Thinking about digital wellbeing	• Managing time spent online • Managing social expectations and pressures • Practicing empathy online

What are the main differences between household types?

Households with children have the most needs overall. More devices and skills and higher demands on connectivity.

Adults' digital needs are broadly the same but there are some interesting points of variation too.

Rural households can face challenges in meeting needs.

Households *without* children (working age, pension age)

Phones and large screen devices: priority device varies by household type

Landline: an option in some circumstances

Connectivity: different preferences for types of home connectivity and data shopping

Television and viewing: different preferences for shared/familiar viewing vs. individual/streamed content

I watch television, I watch films, on there but I access it through my laptop, so I guess I do need entertainment, but it doesn't have to come from the TV (Working-age group, Glasgow)

I did my car insurance last week on a tablet, I wouldn't try that on the phone because you want to make sure you're ticking the right boxes. (Pension-age group, Newport)

It is hard for people to change when they are just set in their ways.... I wouldn't dream of watching a TV shows or anything on a tablet or a laptop (Working-age group, Belfast)

Households *without* children: Knowledge and skills

Practical skills, like using and connecting devices: accessibility settings, keeping up with changes

Each time I progress onto a new device I get completely stuck and can't make the damn thing work.
(Pension-age group, rural)

Critical skills, like managing online safety and risks: concerns about online banking and scams, digital footprint

We are hearing more and more about fraud with the computer system. And I just lose confidence, you don't know what is safe and what is not. If I had better skills and was reassured about safety I would do it [online banking].... It's the potential impact. You could lose everything.
(Pension-age group, Newport)

Households *without* children: Support

Support

- formal and informal support
- developing independence and confidence
- gaps in support

> You have to have confidence before you're able to do some of these things, and the confidence comes by exposure to using the facilities. (Working-age group, Belfast)

> There are the silver surfers and then the kids are picking it up in schools … but there is an awful lot of people that I know in their 30's to 50's that are not as IT literate, seeing the world disappearing away from them. (Working age rural group)

Households <u>with</u> children: Digital goods and services

Smart phones: for parents and children travelling and socialising independently

Phone use and data needs change over time

Large screen devices: 1 per household, plus a further device for each additional school-age child

Television and viewing: a television set, additional TV content and TV license for family viewing choices

Access to gaming: for social inclusion and friendships

Connectivity: home fixed broadband to meet higher demands

It is more of a social thing because it is like another way of communicating that you would miss out on if you didn't have one [mobile] and can make people kind of feel disconnected.
(Young person group)

I I like my daughter to stream things so we can watch things together, so she is not zoomed in like her whole little world… Instead of being totally separate in the same household.
(Parent group, Newcastle)

It is more the social side now of playing the games with friends. The chat as well. In a way, the gaming is an excuse for them just to kind of get together and socialise and talk.
(Parent group, Newcastle)

Households <u>with</u> children: Knowledge and skills

Practical skills, like using apps and programmes:

- including those relevant to education and parenting (e.g. location sharing).

Critical skills, like managing online safety and risks:

- parents thinking about needs as adults, but also supporting their child's development and wellbeing
- new challenges, e.g. AI

> We sometimes use the chat bots, that helps us revise... Not always using AI for everything .... You can get into the habit of just using it all the time.
> (Young person group)

> AI has just boomed in the last six months to a year. The amount of incorrect information out there... .
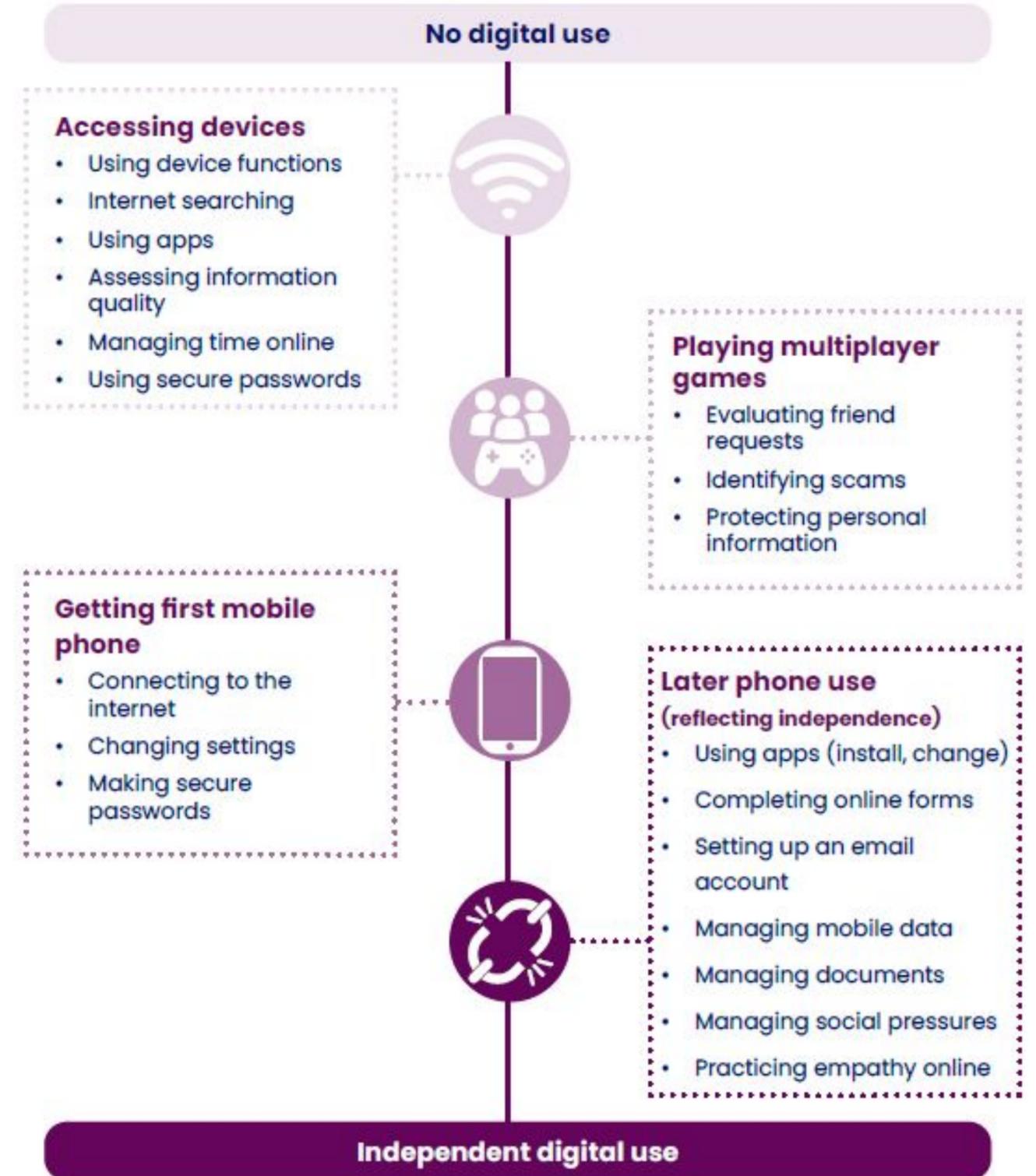> (Parent group, Newcastle)

> The influencers come across as a friendly face, but actually they are getting paid ... If they tell you it is a great product, you don't see that as an ad, you see that as a recommendation from a friend.
> (Parent group, Bristol)

Developing skills through childhood

Four stages of digital use - identified by young people

People might target games because young people are on them. So, it is good to know from a young age, not accepting just any friend requests.
(Young person group)

I think you need to know what is right from wrong, so to be like able to tell that is just mean …
(Young person group)

No digital use

Accessing devices
- Using device functions
- Internet searching
- Using apps
- Assessing information quality
- Managing time online
- Using secure passwords

Playing multiplayer games
- Evaluating friend requests
- Identifying scams
- Protecting personal information

Getting first mobile phone
- Connecting to the internet
- Changing settings
- Making secure passwords

Later phone use (reflecting independence)
- Using apps (install, change)
- Completing online forms
- Setting up an email account
- Managing mobile data
- Managing documents
- Managing social pressures
- Practicing empathy online

Independent digital use

Rural households: Challenges meeting needs across household types

Potential considerations

- Travel, distances
- Online safety

Connection challenges and implications for:

- Everyday activities and tasks
- Mobile data and broadband needs
  - Can't 'shop around'
  - Costs of workarounds - and knowledge needed

> We're only on partial fibre which goes to the box, and we have the copper to the house so we're always on the bare minimum, so it is often a struggle. There is a long way to go compared to those in the city.
> (Pension-age rural group)

> Different [mobile] networks all have different coverage... when he is at school we can't communicate with him if he's out of signal, so we have to pay for a backup SIM.
> (Parent rural group)

> Don't forget with satellite it is not just the connection you're buying, you're also buying the equipment, it cost us £400.
> (Working-age rural group)

Key takeaways

We now have a single MDLS

- across working-age and pension-age households, and households with children, in urban and rural areas
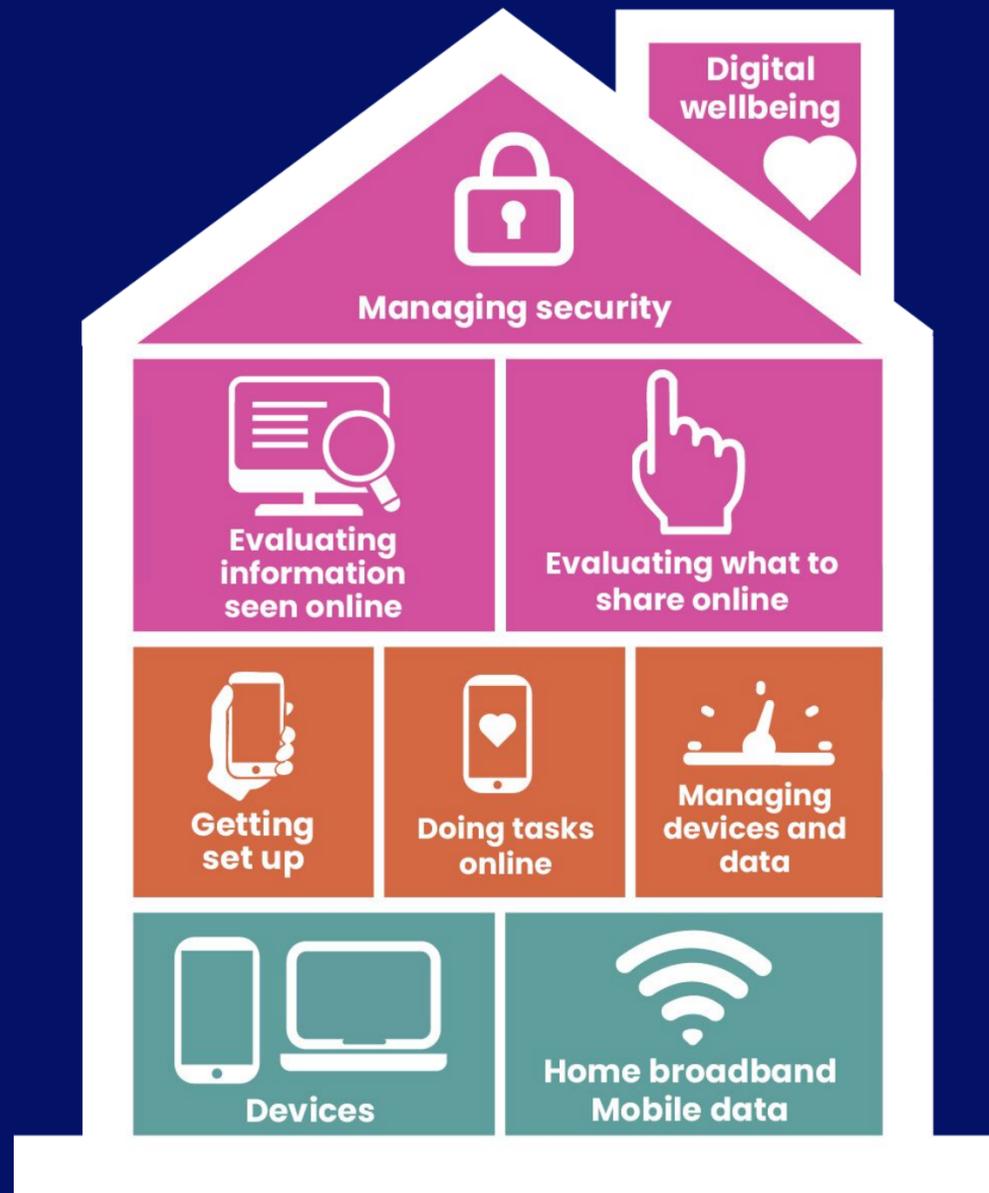- grounded in people's lives today.

<u>All</u> 'contents' are needed, in combination, to be digitally included.

MDLS is not just for government to use … MDLS can help any organisation and partnership to:

- focus on the holistic nature of digital inclusion
- consider how many households may be below MDLS
- consider how this may impact lives, opportunities, using services
- identify what organisations and partnerships can do.

Any questions?

Links to 2025 reports:

MDLS UK Households - Full report

MDLS UK Households - Briefing paper

What is the MDLS - Video explainer

Digital wellbeing

Managing security

Evaluating information seen online

Evaluating what to share online

Getting set up

Doing tasks online

Managing devices and data

Devices

Home broadband Mobile data

Key takeaways

We now have a single MDLS

- across working-age and pension-age households, and households with children, in urban and rural areas
- grounded in people's lives today.

<u>All</u> 'contents' are needed, in combination, to be digitally included.

MDLS is not just for government to use … MDLS can help any organisation and partnership to:

- focus on the holistic nature of digital inclusion
- consider how many households may be below MDLS
- consider how this may impact lives, opportunities, using services
- identify what organisations and partnerships can do.

Welsh Government funded the MDLS for Wales research, and is using MDLS to inform the next National Survey for Wales

London Borough of Camden has set up a working group to explore and use MDLS to inform their work with families and their staff.

Scottish Government is exploring development of the MDLS for Scotland, linked to priorities on child poverty

Service designers and user researchers are interested in MDLS to inform how they make online services more inclusive

Ideas for using MDLS

Inform strategies and interventions

- [ ] Use the MDLS definition to shape a shared vision and goals
- [ ] Use the mapbooks to identify priority areas and target groups
- [ ] Use the findings to consider interventions for families, and who needs to be involved
- [ ] Use the contents to inform evaluation frameworks for interventions

Partnership development

- [ ] Use MDLS to catalyse cross-sector action on digital inclusion
- [ ] Use MDLS as a framework and evidence base in bids for collective action or research

Policy development and standard setting

- [ ] Review policies which impact on children and families in light of the MDLS evidence
- [ ] Use MDLS to consider if and how public or commercial standards should be updated

Improve provision

- [ ] Recognise that some or many of your customers or clients may be below the MDLS
- [ ] Assess how to improve your services to families below MDLS (online and in person)
- [ ] Consider what families need to use any online services you provide; how much mobile data or broadband would they need to use your services? Hardware or software? Level of skills and understanding?
- [ ] Signpost to digital inclusion support, if you can't provide this yourself

Public sector procurement

- [ ] Draw on MDLS as part of your approach to Social Value (buyers and suppliers)

Digital goods and services	
Home Broadband	• With sufficient reliability and speed to support all household members to access the internet at the same time *OR unlimited mobile data in place of home broadband*
Mobile phone and mobile data	• One entry-level smart phone per adult • 5GB to 15GB per month mobile data for all household members with their own mobile phone *OR unlimited mobile data in place of home broadband*
Large screen device	• One large screen device (laptop, tablet or PC) per household
Television and viewing	• One TV (or TV-capable large-screen device) per household • TV licence or entry-level TV subscription service per household
Functional knowledge and skills	
Getting set up (devices and connection)	• Using device functions • Connecting to the internet • Changing settings and navigating options
Doing tasks and activities online	• Internet searching • Using apps and programmes • Completing online forms • Sending and receiving emails • Making online payments
Managing and maintaining (devices and connection)	• Monitoring and maintaining device storage • Managing and monitoring mobile data
Critical knowledge and skills	
Managing security	• Using secure passwords • Evaluating connection security • Making safe payments
Evaluating information seen online	• Identifying and avoiding scams • Assessing information quality and credibility • Customising, blocking and reporting accounts and content
Evaluating what to share online	• Protecting personal information • Assessing online identities and friend requests • Considering digital footprint
Thinking about digital wellbeing	• Managing time spent online • Managing social expectations and pressures • Practicing empathy online

Critical skills, e.g. managing security, digital wellbeing, evaluating what to share and what is seen online

Functional skills, e.g. getting set up, doing tasks online, managing devices and data

Digital goods and services, e.g. mobile phone and data, home broadband, larger-screen device

Critical knowledge and skills

Functional knowledge and skills

Digital goods and services