

Think Digital Programme

Evaluation of Phase 2 (2021)

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Introduction and overview

a) The Think Digital programme

Age UK, with funding provided by Santander, supported five local partners: three Age UK partners (Age UK Blackburn with Darwen, Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland, and Age UK South Lakeland), and two Age Cymru partners (Age Cymru Dyfed and Age Cymru Gwent) to run the Think Digital programme in their local areas. The programme aimed to engage, inspire and support people over 50 years old to develop their digital skills through individually tailored support. Each area employed a Digital Coordinator to offer training and support to staff and volunteer Digital Champions (DCs), as well as to oversee the programme.

The local partner delivery of the first phase started on 1st June 2020 and ran until 30th November 2020. The programme was delivered through a mainly remote model, in line with COVID-19 restrictions. An evaluation of Phase 1 identified important behavioural impacts such as reduced anxiety, greater confidence, greater degree of social connection, a more discerning approach to weighing up risk and greater ability to carry out everyday tasks (the first evaluation report [can be found here](#)).

Santander provided funding for a second phase of the programme, which began on 1st December 2020 and continued until 31st May 2021.

b) The purpose of the evaluation

Age UK commissioned Imogen Blood & Associates to evaluate the ongoing impact of Think Digital for participants who had finished engaging with digital skills support provided as part of the programme. The fieldwork was carried out during March and April 2021 and aimed to explore the extent to which participants had continued or had not continued to use their digital skills, understand why this had been the case, and whether and how it could have been different.

The primary purpose of the evaluation is to inform learning for Age UK, as well as Age UK's brand partners across England and Wales.

c) Method and participants included in the evaluation

Local partners across the five areas identified participants to interview by telephone. A total of 13 semi-structured interviews were carried out, of which six were follow-up interviews from Phase 1. In all cases, interviewees had ended their engagement with the programme at least one month before. All had at least three sessions with a Digital Champion.

Of those interviewed, nine identified as female and four as male, the age range was 62-85; all bar one was retired and ten lived with at least one long-term health condition (with six reporting more than one condition).

d) Structure of the report

The findings from this evaluation are presented across five sections:

Section 1: *The extent to which participants have continued to use digital:* This section explains the extent to which participants had continued to use or further develop their use of digital after the support had ended.

Section 2: *How digital learning is being applied:* This section provides examples of the ways in which participants continued to apply their digital learning after the programme support.

Section 3: *Factors which enabled ongoing digital use:* This section draws out the enablers of participants' continued use of digital, and how the Think Digital programme contributed to these.

Section 4: *Factors which hindered ongoing digital use:* This section considers participants who were either not applying all of what they had learned or had developed additional learning needs.

Section 5: *Sensory impairment, a deep dive:* This section explores how the Think Digital programme supported continued digital use for participants with a sensory impairment.

Section 6: *Learning and recommendations:* This section summarises the learning for Age UK and its local delivery partners in relation to supporting ongoing use of digital.

1. The extent to which participants had continued to use digital

All participants reported that they had continued to apply what they had learned through the Think Digital programme to at least some extent, influenced by a mixture of programme and non-programme related factors, more specifically:

- a) Five individuals reported that they had **continued to develop** new skills beyond the programme's support. Examples included:
 - Progressing from text to video via a tool they had already learned (e.g., WhatsApp).
 - Applying new skills to support others, this included examples of participants supporting older relatives to get online, and one who worked with an ailing charity to get it back on its feet.
 - Setting up an account on Gumtree to try and sell items online.

- b) Five participants indicated that they were applying digital skills, but would benefit from further support, of which two specific themes emerged:
 - Two individuals were applying what they had learned but **wished to expand their digital skills**. Examples of this included communicating via video, sending attachments, and learning to use a different social media platform.
 - Three individuals were applying some of the digital skills they had learned, but due to a combination of technical and support related factors, were **no longer applying all that they had learned**. An example of this included a participant who had learned how to send emails and open attachments but was no longer able to do the latter after purchasing a new tablet.

- c) Three participants had **continued to use what they had learned and were satisfied that digital offered what they needed** at that point in time. This was particularly the case for people who had a specific goal or task in mind at the outset (e.g., using Zoom to keep in touch with family).

2. How digital learning is being applied

The following subsections draw on specific examples of where participants had continued to apply their digital learning, briefly, these are:

- a) Keeping in touch.
- b) Supporting interests, creativity, and culture. c) Making online transactions.
- d) Accessing health support.
- e) Saving money.
- f) Using Apps.

a) Keeping in touch

The most frequently reported reason for participants continuing to apply their digital learning was to keep in touch with family and friends, including distant relatives, and those closer to home, which had been especially important during the ongoing pandemic.

Supporting participants to use tools that enabled them to connect with others not only encouraged increased digital use, but also inspired some to continue advancing their learning independently. Examples included individuals being supported by a Digital Champion to send text messages, then progressing on to sharing photos, or as in the example of Robert (Box 1) communicating in new ways via a video platform.

Box 1: Robert - advancing learning through Zoom

After working with a Digital Champion to help him get started with Zoom, Robert has continued to develop his skills. Robert now uses Zoom for different purposes, including recently joining a weekly male support group run via Zoom, which is attended regularly by around ten retired men.

Robert described how the group was helpful to him and how he also uses it as a vehicle to support others in the group, for example by recommending tradespeople from among his contacts.

Robert has continued to develop his skills and now holds art workshops for various groups on Zoom.

For some participants, the initial support received through Think Digital to keep in touch with family encouraged them to broaden their knowledge. For example, Mary (Box 2) was supported to use Zoom to catch up with family and friends, but more recently used it to explore wider hobbies and interests.

Box 2: Mary – keeping in touch and enjoying hobbies through digital

Mary has family across the world and was supported by a Digital Champion to send photographs digitally, which then evolved into video chats through Zoom. After the programme support ended, Mary has used Zoom in other areas of her life, such as for national and international Arts Council lectures, theatre productions and church services.

Though Mary prefers to meet up with friends face to face, she intends to continue to tune in online, as it means she can catch up with things happening across the world.

b) Supporting interests, creativity and culture

During the Think Digital support, participants were encouraged **to utilise digital to pursue things that they enjoyed, and most had continued to apply the learning for this purpose**. Some interviewees mentioned that they had particularly valued being shown how to use digital to continue enjoying activities that were only available via remote access during COVID-19 restrictions.

A participant who was supported to tune in to a local church service online described how she discovered via Google that she could tune into services being streamed at different times across the world:

“My DC helped me link up through Zoom to a service at my local church...I have [since] attended services across the UK and even the Pope service in the Vatican, I have been all over...it’s great to be able to tune into a service at any time of the day” (Mary)

Another interviewee was encouraged through Think Digital to explore her artistic side and felt confident enough to experiment independently after the support had ended:

“I let the internet teach me things...yesterday I managed to do a drawing with my finger... one of my heroes [an artist] did beautiful paintings on his computer, so I thought I want to have a go. I got it so I put up crayons and I chose a colour.” (Deborah)

c) Making online transactions

The Think Digital sessions had successfully supported a few participants to build up the confidence to go online to carry out online shopping and banking, which all but one had continued to do regularly.

Participants described digital financial transactions as being more convenient, and supporting independence. For example, one interviewee explained how she had previously relied on her partner, who she described as “frail and ailing” to do the shopping and banking online. She had initially felt fearful of using digital for financial transactions, and described how **her Digital Champion had supported her to feel “brave” enough to do these things independently**.

d) Accessing health support

A few participants were using digital to manage their health and increase their health literacy. This included using the NHS App to order repeat prescriptions, surfing the internet for information about a particular health condition, and using the NHS COVID-19 ‘contact tracing App.

One person described feeling confident enough to explore information about their health through different sources identified via a Google search. This participant referred to taking forward learning from Think Digital around accessing information through a search engine and applying it to support health related needs after the support had ended.

Participants mainly attributed continued use of digital to support health to **the tailored advice and signposting provided through the programme**. In one case, a participant felt confident continuing to use the NHS App after the support ended, as it was identified by her Digital Champion as a trusted resource.

e) Saving money

Some participants talked about using digital to save money, such as one who used it to look for the best value broadband deal. Another example is Trina, who recently searched for information which she felt had saved on vet's bills:

"I went onto a vet website this morning. My dog has a problem and I wanted to check it out. I found out [the dog] is okay which was great, otherwise I would have had to phone the vet and have a long conversation, and maybe take him in for visit, but a quick look sorted it out." (Trina)

f) Using Apps

A few participants talked about how they **had learned to explore different Apps with their Digital Champion** and had been motivated to continue doing so, due to the wide range on offer that met their needs and interests. Another person talked about recently downloading a free sleep App. Though the App was recommended through her psychiatrist, the participant felt confident applying what she had learned to navigate the App store and download it. Another interviewee was introduced to Apps through his Digital Champion and had continued to search for and download those that supported him in his everyday life:

"If I want to go anywhere, I can use the Google Maps. I can type in the address and can go there. I didn't know you could do this but found it [via the Apple App store]." (Malcolm)

These examples demonstrate the effectiveness of **supporting participants to get to grip with the basics of a particular tool**, providing a foundation which they can build on once the support ends.

3. Factors which enabled ongoing digital use

While the previous section touches on some of the factors which led to continued use of digital, this section explores these in more detail. The main assessed factors which contributed to continued use of digital after the Think Digital programme support can be organised under the following headings:

- a) Programme-led practical enablers
- b) Programme-led support enablers
- c) Participant-led enablers

a) Programme-led practical enablers

I. Access to written learning materials

One of the factors that **supported continued use of digital after the programme support ended was having access to written learning materials**, including:

- Written notes that participants had taken themselves, often supported by the Digital Champions, who would patiently repeat information so participants could write it down. Participants continued to refer to these notes to recap on what had been learned.
- Step-by-step instructions provided by their Digital Champions, which some participants said they continued to use in order to “go back and check things”. One interviewee reported that, without having this information, they would have struggled to continue applying digital skills – especially those that they used less frequently:

“The [DC] would send an email with detailed content of the session, I stuck this into a notebook, and pick it up and use it if I get stuck and have forgotten what I learned... something I don’t do every day, like send photos to my grandchildren” (Annette)

II. Access to devices and connectivity

Offering a device lending service supported continued use of digital after the programme support ended. Those who benefitted from this reported that it had helped them to continue using digital due to being able to practice on a device that was familiar to them. Being **set up with features tailored to their needs and preferences** further helped:

“The DC set up Zoom and Facebook on the tablet so I could communicate that way, and team viewer [for mirrored access] - I needed this” (Trina)

The device loan scheme offered by partners also included connectivity devices (MiFi units). As none of the interviewees had taken advantage of this, we are unable to comment on how it may have contributed to continued digital use.

Though wider research suggests connectivity can be a barrier to using digital, no interviewee reported any ongoing issues with connectivity. All participants reported that they had WIFI set up at home and where discussed, this was described as being part of a wider broadband package. One person referred to the additional expense of broadband, however this had not impacted on their digital use.

III. Setting up sessions which facilitated putting learning into practice

A particularly effective way of embedding what had been learned was through the Digital Champion **supporting participants to practice what they had learned outside of the sessions**. In one example, a Digital Champion supported an older person to practice using email until they felt confident sending an email themselves.

“The [Digital Champion] sent emails backwards and forwards to get me used to using it...which helped, and I am now using email quite regularly” (Robert)

b) Programme-led support enablers

Most participants attributed the support they received from their Digital Champion as a key enabler to continuing digital use after the programme support ended, with participants referring to the following:

- **Overcoming fear and building confidence through the Digital Champion personalised support sessions** was commonly viewed by interviewees as being instrumental to continuing digital:

“There is no way on this Earth [I would have had] the confidence to do things [online]... I have ‘a natter’ with other friends through Facebook, ‘it comes easy now’.” (Anne)

- Reassurance from Digital Champions that they did not need to be “technically minded” or “learn everything” to benefit from digital, but rather, **view digital as a tool that could be used to support whatever was of relevance or interest to them**. Each of the themes referred to in Section 2 highlighted the importance of both ‘hooking’ digital to something that is of interest to the older person and exploring the most appropriate tools as a way of encouraging continued use after the support has ended.
- Being able to **work with the same Digital Champion across the sessions to build up trust**, with one reporting this as necessary in supporting her to keep using digital for financial transactions.

- Digital Champions **instilling a sense of enthusiasm toward learning new things**, which led to participants continuing to “experiment” after the support had ended, such as working out how to do a selfie on an iPad or use Google Maps.
- Feeling more comfortable asking family or friends to help if they got stuck, through **building self-efficacy**:

“I struggled to learn [digital] with my husband before I got the [Digital] Champion, as I felt silly. But I am more comfortable now... My Champion knew how to help me, it was the difference between her professionalism and knowing exactly what I needed to do. I now feel better able to learn the next thing that crops up, it is not out of my range now” (Claire)

c) Participant-led enablers

Though most participants attributed the initial support provided through Think Digital as a key factor in their continued use of digital, **ongoing use was also clearly driven by the strength and nature of their own personal motivation and circumstances**. For example, those who had continued to use and develop digital use were most likely to report one or more of the following drivers:

- **To meet an interest or need**. As presented in Section 2, keeping in touch with others was identified as a chief motivator to continue using digital. Other motivators included being able to pursue a hobby, save money, and meet financial or health related needs.
- **To support independence**. Specific examples included being able to carry out online transactions in the event of being unable to drive or carry shopping, due to physical health deteriorating. This was referred to by participants in both urban and rural areas.
- Some interviewees referenced **broadening their horizons** and “exploring the wider world” as a motivation to continue applying digital learning, with many viewing that it was becoming increasingly necessary to use digital in order to keep at pace with the “outside world”. This sense of necessity, though arguably not the most positive of ‘hooks’, contributed toward participants working to keep up the digital skills learned and for some, continuing to advance and flex these.
- A particular driver for a few of the oldest interviewees to continue applying what they had learned was a **sense of satisfaction in being able to get to grips with digital when other acquaintances had not done so**. This was generally due to a perception that they were “too old” to adapt to it.
- A few referred to **cost** as a key motivator, as using digital platforms such as Facebook Messenger and Skype were free to use, making it more affordable to maintain contact.

4. Factors which hindered ongoing digital use

While all participants had continued to use digital to some extent, the interviews suggested that some were not applying all of what they had learned or had stalled in their digital journeys due to:

- a) Equipment.
- b) Affordability.
- c) Lack of confidence or fear.
- d) Additional learning needs.
- e) Remote support ending early due to communication barriers related to sensory impairment (covered in Section 5).

Though in some cases, the assessed issues were beyond the control of the Think Digital programme, there are identified ways in which partners could potentially mitigate these, which are considered below.

a) Equipment

Some participants purchased a new tablet following their sessions, either because they had needed to return loaned equipment, or due to having older equipment and needing to upgrade. In some of these cases, and especially where they had changed model, participants struggled to navigate the different settings and functions. An additional issue for some participants was losing the tailored 'set up' which Digital Champions had provided them with during the programme.

One of the partners provided a new, higher grade tablet to a participant, yet as it was different to the one used for the sessions, she struggled to work with the different functions. The participant was no longer sending emails to her daughter or using Zoom due to being unable to work out how to do so on the new device. Another, who had used email to communicate regularly with family and a local group, could not work out how to send attachments after purchasing a new device.

On the other hand, one participant had been able to purchase the tablet she had loaned, and was finding it much easier to continue applying what she had learned through being able to retain the settings downloaded by the Digital Champion. This suggests **that providing tablets that match what the participant had learned on, and setting up equipment in a way that best suits a person can make a real difference.**

b) Affordability

For a few interviewees, cost was the main barrier to them applying their digital learning, after the return (or expected return) of a borrowed device.

One interviewee explained that he was struggling to afford a replacement after returning his loaned tablet, referring to additional heating costs due to the cold weather. Though he has access to digital through his smartphone, he could only use it for limited functions as he had not been supported to use digital on this device. Another participant said she would need to borrow money once she returned her loaned tablet to buy a new one. She was looking to do this via 'hire purchase' but was concerned about the expense.

One participant referred to high data roaming charges. Though she had continued to use digital, some potential support related to her current tariff may have been useful.

Cost was also a reported reason for two participants purchasing a different make of tablet to that on which they had received their initial support, even though they would have preferred the latter option due to being familiar with the functions.

To some extent, affordability is outside of the control of the programme, though **working with participants who borrow a device to develop a clear exit strategy could help to maintain digital use**. This might include signposting to a free library type resource or referring participants to financial advice services to verify if their income can be boosted.

c) Lack of confidence or fear

Some participants expressed a reluctance to use digital for financial transactions regardless of how training is delivered, generally due to concerns around online safety and personal preference. Of the few who were willing to give it a go, there was a view that remote support was not suited to this purpose, with one describing this kind of learning as more "advanced" and needing a classroom style training group. Another felt they needed someone physically present to ensure they "didn't press the wrong button."

Health was another area that a few participants were unsure about exploring online, yet this was generally due to factors outside of the control of the programme, such as being advised by family or a GP to be cautious around the quality of information available.

The findings across the interviews highlight the need to **widen the offer to include face-to-face options for those who express a wish to learn something, but do not feel comfortable doing so remotely**.

d) Additional learning needs

Two participants had continued to use the skills they had gained during sessions but felt they required additional sessions to further enhance and develop their digital skills, for example:

"I am just getting the confidence up to use Zoom, but feel I will need to speak to the DC again to move forward with this. This is my next challenge, and I am not sure I can do it without help" (Marie)

More specifically, participants suggested they needed:

- Advice and support on how to advance existing digital skills, such as moving from text and emails to video chats on WhatsApp.
- Refreshing their memory around how to carry out 'forgotten tasks', such as downloading an App or setting up an email address.
- Gaining reassurance, such as it being safe to accept 'cookies', or not needing to pay when signing up to something.
- A 'refresher session' when a new tablet is purchased (as discussed above).
- Technical advice around the most suitable tablet or best value broadband deal to purchase. In one case, lack of support had hindered ongoing digital use as an interviewee felt she had not purchased the right laptop due to going into a shop and feeling uncomfortable asking too many questions.

In most cases, **additional learning needs could potentially be met through offering intermittent 'check ins' or perhaps a refresher.**

Older people may choose, for whatever reason, to not seek ongoing help or advice, with an example of a participant who had not taken up a partner's offer of further support, despite identifying areas where they needed help (the individual did not provide a reason for this).

5. Sensory impairment: a 'Deep dive'

This section explores the extent to which the Think Digital programme supported ongoing use of digital for older people with sensory impairment. We interviewed six participants with a sensory impairment: five with a sight or hearing impairment, and one with difficulties due to sense of touch.

a) How participants with sensory impairment are continuing to apply digital

All six interviewees with sensory impairment had continued to use digital to some extent. This ranged from running workshops, attending groups, communicating with others, and enjoying hobbies online. The case study in Box 3 offers an example of how Graham, who has sight impairment, was able to build on the foundations of the support offered through Think Digital to continue advancing his use of video technology.

Box 3: Graham – adapting video technology to meet digital needs

Graham is registered blind, with 20% vision in one eye and no vision in the other. Though he described how the practicalities of learning digital over the phone were 'extremely difficult', he was able to learn what he needed and continue to apply this learning.

Graham attributed his ongoing digital development to:

- The patience and perseverance of the Digital Champion in developing his skills and confidence to use a video platform (Zoom).
- Referring back to the extensive notes he took during the sessions, which he has adapted (using black dot printing and an electronic reader) for reference if he gets stuck.
- Receiving advice (both within and outside of the programme) to facilitate the setting up of visual aids.
- Being able to ask his wife for support around connecting to online meetings, putting in passwords or pressing links.

The last two factors required support outside of the original programme.

b) How the Think Digital programme contributed to continued use of digital

I. Developing learning through Digital Champion support

Interviewees with sensory impairment mostly attributed their continued use of digital to the specific **qualities of the tailored Digital Champion support, with patience and adaptability (e.g., around length of sessions) particularly important** at these early stages.

II. Being supported in an accessible and tailored way

Though the Think Digital remote offer had supported people with sensory impairment to learn digital and feel confident taking this forward, having the right technology set up and session format at the outset was crucial. For some participants, **having a video platform set up for use from the outset** was helpful, due to enabling additional visual cues, with one

participant requiring this so he could lipread. One participant reported that the video enabled sessions had been essential to completing the programme of support effectively and developing the skills he needed to use digital independently after the support ended.

III. Offering advice around appropriate tools and adaptations

In most cases, participants needed to adapt their technology or use additional accessories to continue benefiting from the learning. Examples were provided of using a digital 'pencil' (a stylus) to support calibration of finger swipes, moving from a tablet to a computer which has a bigger screen, and screen magnification.

Some needed to purchase specialist assistive software, which of course may take time. In most cases, participants valued the **advice offered by Digital Champions about how to access and use adaptations, aids or Apps to support digital use**. One participant identified this as crucial to them continuing digital use independently, as it meant they had the necessary tools in place.

As well as advice on specific tools or Apps, this also related to **advice on the functions available within a tool**. For example, Martin, who has sight impairment, referred to his Digital Champion showing him how to raise his hand when using Zoom if he wants to speak. This contributed to him feeling more confident taking part in Zoom sessions, which he now does regularly.

Though one participant spoke positively of the support he received through Think Digital, assessing it as instrumental to supporting him to use it independently, he highlighted that the Digital Champion had initially struggled due to not having previously supported someone with a sensory impairment. This highlights a **need for Digital Champions to be offered training and support when running remote sessions for those with additional needs**.

c) Barriers to ongoing digital use

I. Programme based factors

The programme support finished early for a participant with a hearing impairment due to a combination of her Digital Champion being unfamiliar with the functions of a newly purchased tablet, and the older people struggling to hear instructions by telephone. This meant she was not able to learn some of the digital functions she had wished to:

"I have been struggling since I gave back the borrowed [tablet]. All my family are in America and that's why I wanted email. I still use and receive these, but I can't do the photos. I can receive them but not send them" (Ellen)

Ellen felt that she **required either face-to-face, or potentially a 'mirrored' device¹ to be able to pick up where she left off and continue to advance her digital learning** (a mirrored device had supported her to learn some digital skills at early stages of the programme before she purchased a new device).

¹ 'mirroring' technology allows the Digital Champion to wirelessly view the participants screen.

The remote learning process itself was perceived to present hurdles, due to the process being much slower and due to lack of visual cues. Where discussed, interviewees viewed that face-to-face should ideally resume once restrictions were lifted, as this would increase the likelihood of participants with a sensory impairment being able to apply learning beyond the programme. It was suggested, though, that **remote support could work in some circumstances, perhaps for 'check ins' or follow up discussions.**

II. Factors outside of the programme

Through discussion with participants with sensory impairment, assistance and support beyond that which can be offered through the programme is necessary to ensure the digital learning continues to be applied after the programme support ends. This included:

- The need for friends or family to be on hand to provide additional support as required – as in Graham's case (Box 3).
- Needing to limit digital use due to impact on impairment. For example, an interviewee with sight impairment needing to use a magnification tool, which could cause eye strain.
- Cost was an identified factor for a participant with severe sight impairment, who suggested that an iPhone has a range of functions which could support his condition, but he could not afford to purchase one.

6. Key learning and recommendations

This section draws out the main themes which have emerged through the research as impacting on the ability of participants to continue using digital to support their lives beyond the programme.

Hooking participants through matching interests and needs

All participants reported that they had continued to apply what they had learned through Think Digital to at least some extent. Ongoing learning could be traced back to the programme focus of encouraging participants to learn about things that interested them and exploring the most appropriate ways to do this.

Access to learning materials

One of the factors that supported continued use of digital after the programme support ended was having access to written learning material, either provided by the Digital Champion or through their own notes.

Access to devices

Loaning devices and ensuring it is set up to support the needs and interests of participants can support learning beyond the programme. However, comprehensive exit planning for those who need to return the devices is key or this can disrupt the progress made.

Person-centred and tailored support element of Think Digital

All participants referred to the one-to-one tailored support offered through the Digital Champion as leading to continued digital use, with reference to increased confidence, a sense of control around setting digital tasks to suit their own goals and interests, and reassurance around future independence.

Remote support will not suit all learning needs

For some, this was due to needing additional reassurance around online safety; for others it was due to barriers resulting from impairments.

Some participants require ongoing support

Some participants required additional support due to encountering hurdles, wishing to expand existing knowledge or technical support when looking to purchase devices or set up broadband.

The need for additional factors to be considered for those with sensory impairment

Overall, people with sensory impairment will likely require additional advice and support to help them to continue to benefit from their engagement with the remote digital training.

Recommendations

Based on the learning discussed throughout this report, we recommend the following should be considered when looking to apply a programme such as Think Digital to maximise the likelihood of the digital learning being used after the programme ends.

a) Explore wider needs and interests at the outset

A key enabler to building confidence to encourage older people to continue using digital was Digital Champions taking an exploratory approach to working with older people around how digital can fit into their everyday lives. It is therefore necessary to work with participants to identify what kinds of support, advice, signposting, devices, and any specialist aids or adaptations they may need to keep up with what they have learned during the sessions. **Particular attention should be given to those who will need to return a loaned device once the sessions end or those who may need additional support due to an impairment.**

b) Consider access to equipment and connectivity

To ensure that participants can continue their learning beyond the programme, **consideration needs to be given to access to equipment and connectivity.** Ultimately, digital skills and access often go hand in hand, and this report highlights examples of where digital use is at risk of ceasing due to access issues, rather than a lack of skills or confidence.

Participants suggest the need for **technology (loaned or owned) to be set up so the Digital Champion can more readily work remotely with the older person** and ensure the older person can learn and continue to apply the learning after the support ends.

A few people with **sensory impairment expressed the need to learn via video**, especially those with hearing impairment who valued the additional visual cues. Some will need support around setting up and using video technology initially, which will likely require face-to-face contact. While the logistics of setting up equipment proved difficult during the pandemic, this should become more straightforward as restrictions ease.

To some extent, equipment related issues may be outside of the control of the programme, though **ensuring a good exit strategy is in place for participants who loan equipment that needs to be returned should be considered.** This may include: extending a loan (if appropriate); support around purchasing new equipment (including around set up and familiarisation with functions); signposting to a free community technology provision, for example libraries; referring participants to financial advice services (where affordability is an issue).

c) Provide supplementary learning materials

Another effective way to ensure learning continues beyond the Think Digital programme is to **provide a range of supplementary learning materials, or ensure the sessions give time for participants to make their own notes if they wish.** This was identified as a key mechanism through which some people were able to refresh and continue using their digital skills.

It might be worth exploring how to **develop written resources based on the learning to date, the content of which can be agreed through collating feedback from the Digital Champions and Digital Coordinators** who are running services. Some ideas based on what has been useful to participants include: step by step visuals on getting started across various devices; more general advice around online safety, sending emails and linking to attachments; guidance around carrying out particular tasks, such as banking, shopping, or “surfing” the net.

d) Be flexible around the support offer

The findings identified the need to **adopt a flexible approach through asking older people what they feel comfortable doing online**. This will ensure that those who are happy to try remote support are given the opportunity to do so, with those who would prefer face-to-face being signposted accordingly. For those who prefer to learn specific digital tasks (e.g., financial based) in a face-to-face setting a hybrid approach, which incorporates a mix of remote and face to face support, would work well.

For those with a sensory impairment, remote support was to some extent successfully adapted due to the unique circumstances presented by COVID-19. A hybrid approach is recommended, as it was generally acknowledged that remote was best employed for light touch support or catch-up calls.

e) Be open to delivering further support where needed

The interviews suggested that **potentially extending the offer so it includes some level of ongoing support where needed can support some older people to continue applying what they have learned**. This might include ‘light touch’ support to ‘troubleshoot’ unpredictable obstacles or to offer “quick fixes” when people get stuck on a particular task. In a few cases, partners were already offering this, and a few participants reported that they were advised to get in touch if they needed further help.

An additional consideration is for those who may wish to advance their digital skills at a later stage. The follow up interviews uncovered ongoing concerns about using digital for financial or health related tasks. While some could not foresee using digital for these purposes in the future, a few viewed that they might if, or when, circumstances change (with reference given to eyesight deterioration or the potential closure of a local bank branch), or once they become more confident.

f) Offer additional training to Digital Champions

To ensure participants take learning forward, having the right support in place during the programme is important, and it may be necessary to offer additional training to Digital Champions. One participant who is registered blind referred to their Digital Champion having no real experience of offering support tailored to his impairment (though he was positive about the support he received). This highlights a broader issue that **staff and volunteers may not necessarily have experience of supporting people with accessibility needs remotely and may require additional training and support in this area**.