Leeds Older People's Forum: Be Online Stay Safe (BOSS) Final Report

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Contents

Executive Summary

This summary draws out the key learning from a qualitative evaluation of Be Online Stay Safe (BOSS), a project run by Leeds Older People's Forum, with partnership support from 100% Digital Leeds. Through a Digital Coordinator, BOSS supported 5 Delivery Partners (DP) to provide training to older people from diverse communities to improve their digital media literacy skills and stay safe online. Most learners had very low level digital skills at the outset and felt fearful and distrustful toward the online environment.

Based on evaluation feedback, most learners at all skill levels had taken action to improve their knowledge and skills in some way. Participants provided examples of where they had built up the confidence to critically assess online content and had become more vigilant around what information and/or data they shared.

Supporting recruitment and engagement

Adopting a place-based model
The place based model of BOSS facilitated recruitment and retention of more reluctant learners through working with DPs who already have a presence in their local community and who they already visited and trusted.

Tailoring support to multilingual learners
BOSS tailored training for those who did not speak English as a first language through utilising a translation app (Google Translate) to develop materials and assist during sessions and working closely with staff and volunteers who spoke community languages.

Giving regard to accessibility
BOSS worked closely with DPs and learners at the outset to identify potential barriers to engagement and ensuring sessions were accessible to all. This included running frequent recap exercises, showing people how to increase font size, reading out materials in different languages, and additional one to one guidance and support where needed. Sessions offered WiFi and equipment where needed, and a few learners reported positively about DPs covering transport costs and offering refreshments.

The processes that led to improved digital media literacy

Adopting a flexible approach and evolving the offer through co-design
Working with DPs to evolve the materials and teaching style ensured that the BOSS learning environment reflected the needs and cultural make-up of local citizens. DPs were supported to run different models shaped around varying needs, incorporating one to ones, drop ins, and groups of varying sizes.

Designing sessions so they are suitable for those with low digital skills
As most learners had very low digital skills, literacy training was scaled back and simplified, and introduced alongside building other digital skills, with staff or volunteers on hand to provide tailored support if someone got stuck. Making sessions interactive and concentrating on small areas which were relatively easy to teach worked well. This included

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checking a website is safe, taking action to protect passwords or identifying unknown numbers and blocking if necessary.

Making sessions interactive

Most learners preferred a 'social' rather than a 'classroom' learning space. Ways of supporting this included introducing interactive activities, which did not necessarily take place on a digital device. The trainer kept things on track without inhibiting the informal feel through starting sessions by reminding everyone to stay on topic and give each other a chance to speak.

Introducing peer support

Building in elements of peer support, across current learners or those who had successfully completed BOSS helped to build a positive learning environment and maintain interest in improving digital literacy through hearing how it had made a difference to others.

Supporting people to apply learning outside of sessions

Making it relevant to everyday life

People were more interested in learning about topics that were framed around their interests or needs and helped them see how digital could fit into their lives and be of positive benefit. Exercises which incorporated culturally appropriate content or sessions which covered accessing health related information was particularly well received. A recurring theme across learners of all abilities was concerns toward online banking. Inviting external "experts" to give a talk about how to keep personal data safe reassured some learners to give it a try.

Encouraging participants to develop learning independently

For many participants, a chief "hook" was recognising the need to overcome fear and use digital so they could become more independent – and rely less on family. To ensure that learners felt confident applying digital media literacy skills themselves, sessions included frequent opportunities to practice and recap on learning. Learners were also provided with easy to follow materials to take home and practice. Trainers also encouraged people to show friends and family members how to do something as a way to embed learning. Some evaluation participants felt that they would benefit from ongoing support beyond BOSS to continue applying and building on what they had learnt.

Supporting Delivery Partners to continue offering media literacy support

Creating resources for use beyond BOSS

Learning captured through BOSS has led to the production of a set of workbooks aimed at learners across all skill levels, which offer a consistent approach to building literacy. Most DPs (and Age UK Leeds) have either started to use, or plan to use the workbooks to support their own training sessions. Other resources developed include a Tutor Guide, Practice Guide, recap and feedback sheets.

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Supporting expansion of the offer across other services

DPs provided examples of applying what they have learned into their service offer beyond BOSS. One DP is building media digital literacy into a pathway of digital support already offered. Others are exploring ways to introduce it via regular non-digital sessions (such as running a "taster" activity).

Facilitating the upskilling of staff and volunteers

Some DPs are continuing to run sessions which support online safety or are cascading what they had learned to staff and volunteers who run non-digital led sessions, with use of a translation app particularly popular. A facilitator here was BOSS's use of a 'train the trainer' approach, where staff and volunteers attended sessions with the Coordinator to observe, contribute and support learning outcomes. Most of the DPs were not accustomed to doing more formal lesson planning, so observing this through the Coordinator helped them feel more confident teaching literacy skills themselves.

Building external relationships

A useful route for DPs to access additional resources was to work with external experts, or with organisations that could support capacity. A few DPs invited organisations who specialise in digital into services to speak to members, which included local charities, digital providers, banks and the NHS. DPs are also working with other digital providers to offer general skills – such as with Leeds City Council to test an app aimed at alleviating loneliness.

Building staff capacity

A frequently reported challenge to delivering BOSS beyond the funding period was ensuring resources are in place to build staff and volunteer capacity. As well as digital media literacy, some required support to build basic digital skills and inclusion awareness more generally. Most DPs also felt that a dedicated worker was ideally needed to help support and run training sessions. BOSS continues to work with DPs to signpost to free training being offered and potential funding avenues. To note, training resources rarely consider literacy in much detail. This is where the targeted resources that have been developed through BOSS are of particular value.

1. Context/background

Be Online Stay Safe Intervention Design

Leeds Older People's Forum (LOPF) were funded by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) to deliver Be Online Stay Safe (BOSS hereafter), with partnership support from 100% Digital Leeds[1]. BOSS is a co-designed project which aimed to address and improve digital media literacy for, what DSIT has termed "hard to reach" older people, from diverse communities - through building capacity for the organisations delivering it and capturing wider learning to inform future citywide strategies.

The project was delivered between March and December 2023 and worked with 5 "Delivery Partners" (DPs): Health for All, Feel Good Factor, Hamara, Leeds Irish Health and Homes and Sikh Elders, Touchstone[2]. Each DP is situated within the 10% most deprived areas in the city and has a particular focus on older people from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds. A Digital Inclusion Coordinator ('Coordinator' hereafter) was recruited to deliver BOSS through face-to-face sessions across local community settings. This entailed supporting training sessions in a range of ways, tailored toward the need of each DP. The Coordinator adopted a 'train the trainer' approach across most DPs, to support staff and volunteers to feel more confident running sessions themselves. 100% Digital Leeds worked with the Coordinator and DPs to deliver support to mitigate against assessed organisational barriers.

Digital media literacy

There is no recognised definition of 'media literacy'; for the purposes of this report it refers to:

> *"An understanding of the nature, characteristics and impact of material published by means of electronic media and an awareness of how to protect against its harmful aspects."*

To note, this is a more streamlined version of a definition developed through the DSIT (formerly known as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport)[3] and relates more to the level at which media literacy is being taught through BOSS (i.e., DSIT refers to awareness of processes and systems, which could not be covered in sufficient detail due to the low skill level of participants). BOSS sessions focused on staying safe online (e.g., recognising fake websites, news stories and social media ads, understanding scams and how to prevent them and protecting privacy) and also covered areas of particular interest to learners, such as health literacy skills.

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[1] A citywide programme led by a council team to build the capacity of partners to build digital inclusion

[2] Delivery from Touchstone started later than the others (end Sept 2023)

[3] DCMS, 2021, access here.

Research shows that many people lack the key skills and knowledge to ensure they can remain safe online, which leads to a risk of online harm. Providing media literacy support which is relevant and tailored to the needs and circumstances of vulnerable communities has been identified as a particular challenge[4].

A recent DSIT report shows how "hard to reach" citizens are particularly at risk of online harm, as they:[5]

- are disengaged with the issue of online safety (e.g., do not see its relevance);
- are overconfident in their media literacy capabilities;
- are outside of formal education settings where media literacy education may take place;
- lack access to media literacy education or have limited awareness of how to access support (e.g., digital exclusion).

Age can further shape online experiences, with those over 65 recognised as particularly vulnerable to scams due to limited online experience. Access barriers are also identified for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, with the 75-79 age group in the poorest wealth quintile 3 times less likely to go online frequently, compared to their counterparts in the wealthiest quintile[6].

Yet despite these identified risks, evidence around what works for older people tends to be framed around building digital skills and connectivity, with very few touching on digital media literacy. The evidence base is weaker still for people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Understanding the impact of BOSS and the processes that can help achieve this offered a unique opportunity to build an evidence base, both for services across Leeds and further afield.

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[4] LSE and DSIT, 2023, access here.

[5] DSIT, 2023, p.3, access here.

[6] Good Things Foundation, 2020, access here; James et al., 2014, access here; Matthews and Nazroo, 2025, access here.

2. Evaluation design

LOPF commissioned Imogen Blood & Associates to carry out an evaluation of the BOSS project. The evaluation approach was designed to give regard to Ofcom's evaluation toolkit, the Media Literacy Taskforce Fund's strategic objectives and the logic model developed by LOPF to pick up individual, organisational and system level outcomes and impact (see Appendix 1). It considers the extent to which BOSS increases:

- Participants' confidence in and attitudes towards using digital technology in a safe, responsible, and positive way;
- Participants' knowledge and skills regarding key media literacy topics;
- The capacity of local organisations or individuals to deliver media literacy support to "hard to reach" citizens; and
- Access to and engagement with relevant initiatives for those who are currently disengaged or lacking access to media literacy support across Leeds.

The evaluation also considered processes which helped or hindered impact at each of these levels. As multiple factors can impact on digital media literacy, an in-depth qualitative approach was adopted to ensure learning was picked up and fed into a 'test, learn and improve' approach, this was particularly important as little was known about the target learner at the outset (particularly those for whom English is a second language).

We followed a longitudinal (2 phase) mixed method case study approach (see below) and also report on outputs through information collected via quarterly monitoring.

Evaluation Activities

For this evaluation – change was assessed qualitatively, through speaking to participants across different phases of learning, to pick up on how their self-reported application of digital media literacy skills changed over time.

Scoping and evaluation design phase
A desk-top review of published information relevant to digital media literacy, older people, and ethnically diverse communities was carried out at the outset to inform the evaluation framework. The purpose of this was to establish what is already known, and to identify potential tools that could be adapted to measure objective change. This review showed that the evidence base around what works is limited.

Case study approach
A case study approach was adopted to pick up on the multiple variables which may impact on digital media literacy based on different local contexts and proposed DP approaches. We carried out on-site visit across each DP, to coincide with delivery of an activity. We also carried out cross sectional and longitudinal interviews and assessed monitoring returns completed by each DP.

Once interviews were arranged, the purpose of the evaluation was explained. Early stage interviews explored routes into BOSS, motivations, expectations - initial concerns, aims or ambitions, and perceived digital skills. Follow up interviews tracked the intervention journey and included specific questions to measure positive outcomes and behaviour change as a result of receiving the digital support and the specific mechanisms that facilitated (or got in the way) of this, how these were overcome, and what elements worked particularly well or less well.

Pseudonyms are used for participant quotes in this report.

Data collection

Longitudinal questionnaires
The Coordinator devised and evolved a questionnaire to be used at the beginning and end of training sessions to measure self-reported change (we were unable to include this as a robust measure of change – please see the limitations section for more detail). A copy of the questionnaire developed through BOSS learning is included in Appendix 2.

Quarterly monitoring completed by Delivery partners
Quarterly monitoring was collected through LOPF at 3 timepoints - this was used to build a profile of learners and is presented in Section 3.

On-site visits
Nine on-site visits were carried out across the 5 DPs. A cohort of learners were tracked across all DPs which included a visit during the first session, then subsequent visits either during the final session - or for two DPs who offered ongoing support - once sessions had run for at least six weeks. Site visits entailed: observation, one-to-one and group discussions with participants, DP staff, volunteers and the Coordinator. So this felt more 'natural' the evaluator offered light touch support to learners. Detailed hand-written notes were taken during face to face visits. For sessions that the researcher did not attend, a close ongoing relationship was established with the Coordinator who provided regular updates.

Interviews
Stakeholders
We conducted video, telephone and face-to-face interviews with:

- 7 staff members across the DPs (5 were spoken to across the duration of BOSS)
- 2 volunteers who were present during site visits.
- 2 staff members based at 100% Digital Leeds.
- 3 national stakeholders.

Ongoing discussions were carried out with 3 members of the LOPF programme team to gather their reflections: the Programme Manager, Monitoring and Evaluation officer and Digital Coordinator.

Participants

Interviews were carried out across two timepoints (at the beginning and end of involvement, or when an agreed time period has passed) through a mix of face-to-face, video and telephone.

For interviews with learners, we worked closely with partners to build a sample of older people which was as diverse as possible in relation to demographics and level of digital competency. Around a quarter of interviewees were assessed as having some digital skills (though most were narrow users – they went online frequently). As the overall level of skills was assessed as very low (based on assessment by the Coordinator and DPs who ran sessions), this number was viewed to be proportionate. Nearly all participants (95%) who took part in the evaluation were recorded as being from an ethnic minority background (details on gender was not gathered through fieldwork).

With participant's consent, we audio recorded one to one interviews to enable us to double check the accuracy of quotes. We took detailed hand-written notes during face to face visits.

Participant feedback included in the evaluation

A total of 37 participants engaged in the qualitative element of the evaluation (site visits and interviews, just over a third of the total number of participants), this included:

- 16 early-stage interviews (carried out pre- or post- the first training session)
- 12 follow up interviews carried out up to 2 months after the final training session took place (with additional light touch discussions with 5 participants during training sessions). Follow up interviews included a participant who only attended one session. Of the 4 who did not complete follow up, 2 offered light touch feedback during face to face training sessions, but were unavailable for interview, 1 was admitted to hospital, and 1 was uncontactable
- A further 21 participants provided group feedback through discussions during the on-site observation work. This included being supported through multilingual volunteers to ask questions to learners who spoke limited English. As attrition rate across sessions was low, most learners were spoken to twice – at the beginning and after a period of time had passed.

Additionally, two DPs collected feedback forms from learners early on in the project. Of the 13 who recorded a particular way in which they had applied learning, this has been incorporated into Table 1 below.

Analysis phase

Qualitative data was analysed manually against the evaluation framework, using a staged qualitative analytical procedure, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach has six stages: familiarisation, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, confirming themes, reporting.

Monitoring information collected through the funder was incorporated, with further analysis carried out via Microsoft Excel software.

Limitations

. Whilst the case study and longitudinal interviews generated rich insights which are being incorporated by the funder and DPs, a weak evidence base and lack of benchmarked examples for the target group meant that BOSS was unable to develop a robust quantitative measure of change.

BOSS explored the possibility of developing a two-phase visual quiz to objectively measure an increase in digital media literacy skills. A mix of low assessed baseline digital skills, and the need to build an understanding of accessible language and terminology for target learners meant that this could not be incorporated. Adapting an existing quiz was considered – but this was targeted toward young people with higher baseline digital skills so was deemed unsuitable.

At the outset the BOSS Coordinator developed a two phase questionnaire which set out multiple choice questions to test knowledge on areas of media digital literacy. Some examples of the questions included: "what is the best way to create a strong password", "what is a "clickbait" headline, "what is fake news", "what should you do if you receive a suspicious email", "how confident do you feel in recognising an online scam". Learners were asked to choose the correct answer from a selection. Feedback received from the Coordinator and DPs was that due to the aforementioned lower than expected digital skills and language limitations, many learners struggled to understand the terms used. This reportedly led to some respondents ticking incorrect responses or leaving responses blank. Whilst this feedback was invaluable and helped to shape subsequent question wording – these went through a few iterations before a final version was agreed. As the final version was not tested on learners until a later session run by one DP, completions did not provide sufficient numbers to offer a robust assessment (the finalised questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2).

3. Profile of participants and BOSS delivery

Participants

112 participants benefitted from BOSS, exceeding the original target of 100 (with most attending 5 sessions or more). In addition to those recorded through the monitoring, some older people were introduced to BOSS through a lighter touch approach, with the Coordinator attending existing activities. Of 100 valid responses provided – nearly all learners (95%) attended more than one session, with three quarters attending three or more (where people dropped out, this was due to reported health issues, though in one case a person lacked a device that they were comfortable learning on)[7].

BOSS successfully supported people from the target group. As can be seen in Figure 1, 85.8% of participants were from an ethnic minority background. Where reported, 72.8% have English as an additional language. Of the 86 participants where postcode information was provided, half reside in areas within the most deprived 10%, based on the England index of multiple deprivation, with a further 5% residing in the next decile (i.e., the bottom 20%).

Figure 1: Ethnicity of BOSS participants
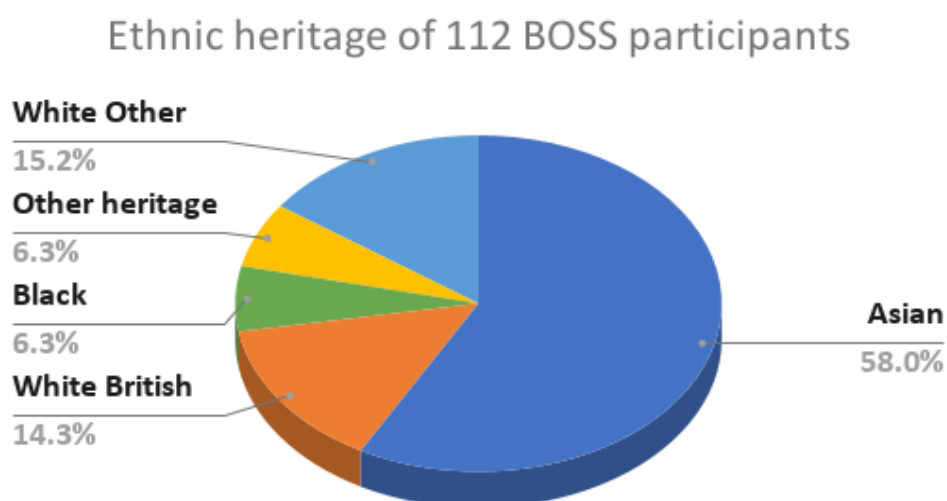
As shown in Figure 2, most learners are aged over 65 (at 70.5% with 2.7% aged over 85). The gender breakdown shows that participants were most likely to be women (at 66.1% compared to 33.9% men).

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[7] Initially, it was intended that BOSS would run a set number of sessions, but as

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Figure 2: Age of BOSS participants

Age of 112 BOSS participants

85+
2.7%

75-84
23.2%

65-74
44.6%

50-64
28.6%
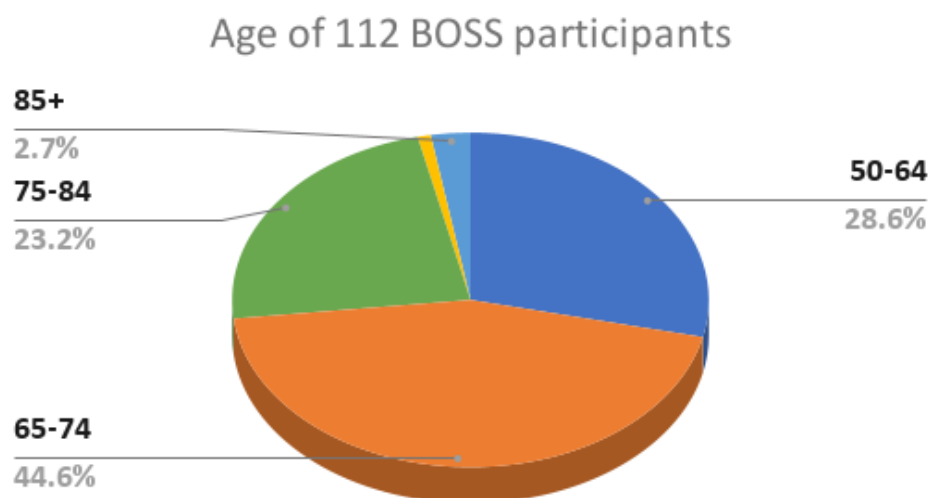
Participants' digital background

We identified 3 broad types of digital user:

- Those who use digital tools and services for some purposes, but not others due to fear or literacy-related barriers
- Those who feel confident online – but are vulnerable to scams/misinformation due to a lack of knowledge and skills around media literacy
- Those with very low digital skills and limited online experience who require support to build this in parallel to digital media literacy

Based on monitoring returns over two thirds of all learners reported experiencing barriers to improving their digital literacy (69%). Where a reason is provided most referred to a lack of confidence and skills (10), followed by Language barriers (7) – 5 reported barriers due to cognitive impairment.

Most fell into the latter category, and many could be described as 'reluctant users'. Of those who used digital, most were 'narrow users' who mainly utilised it for social purposes, with some motivated to learn how to use digital during Covid to alleviate isolation due to shielding. For many, the motivation to learn was the need to support them to carry out everyday tasks, as more of these involved getting online (e.g., local banks closing, GPs sending links via email to confirm appointments). Most participants we spoke to initially lacked confidence and were fearful of scams due to direct experience or hearing negative stories from friends or from the media.

BOSS delivery

As can be seen in Figures 1 and 2 above, the overall learner cohort was diverse – and based on feedback this was the case within, as well as between sessions. For example learners who attended one session spoke three different community languages. Sessions ranged

from 'piggybacking' existing activities, to setting up tailored sessions. The training times and duration were designed to be flexible and work with DPs based on various commitments and resources (such as having space). As time went on the number of sessions increased from 4 to around 6-8, with a few continuing on an ongoing basis – as many learners were motivated to keep developing their literacy skills. Some learners also received 'light touch' and/or tailored one to one support outside of sessions.

4. Participant impact: Improving media literacy for older people across diverse communities

This section reports on the extent to which BOSS achieved outcomes for participants. Section 5 then explores the processes through which this was achieved. Whilst some reported positively on the social aspect of sessions and improved digital skills (such as downloading the NHS app), the evaluation focuses on how the training led to increased digital media literacy and influenced digital behaviours. To note, it is not always straightforward to unpick the "skills versus literacy" aspects of training – as in most cases – these needed to be delivered side by side.

How participants are applying what they have learnt

Based on fieldwork and written feedback provided by 13 learners, nearly all participants provided at least one example of changing their digital behaviour as a result of learning through BOSS – which are listed in Table 1. Interviewees also applied knowledge to keep them independent – such as using travel apps and carrying out online tasks without relying on family. Though these do not directly relate to literacy, some viewed learning these skills as a gateway to building the confidence to try other things in the future (such as online banking).

Table 1: Ways in which participants have applied digital media literacy

Connecting to others	Searching the internet	Shopping online	Keeping safe
Identifying fake images (e.g., fake photo of the pope)	Ensuring websites have the Google padlock symbol	Checking Trustpilot and reviews to ensure company/ product is real (e.g., an advertisement for a Turmeric supplement)	Using Google Translate to ensure meaning of online text is understood
Not accepting Facebook friend requests from people not known	Identifying trusted websites when carrying out a Google search (particularly relevant to searching around health conditions)		Changing to stronger passwords
			Setting up 2-factor authentication
			Blocking, rather than clicking on scam messages
Changing privacy settings on Facebook		Set up apps on the phone (supermarket, NHS)	Confidence handling pop ups and advertisements on free game apps
Not 'oversharing' on social media	Only linking to trusted websites/ apps (e.g., NHS)		Not providing personal information online
Not clicking on email links or texts if unsure of the source			Checking sender email addresses as a way to identify phishing
			Reporting phishing scams

Using emails to sort out practicalities and send attachments			Being more cautious around protecting pin numbers and changing them more frequently Using a trusted website 'Who Called me' to check the identify of unknown numbers

The following sections offer a more detailed discussion on the reported changes which led to increased digital media literacy and actions to apply this.

Improved confidence in and attitude towards using digital technology in a safe, responsible, and positive way

At the outset, learners we spoke to at all skill levels reported being reluctant to provide personal or financial information online, mainly due to fear of being scammed. A few with lower assessed skills were reluctant to get online at all, with a distrustful attitude toward the online environment, and a sense that they were being "forced" to do so.

Most of those interviewed across different time periods reported feeling more confident and less fearful as sessions progressed, with attitudes changing as they found out ways in which getting online could be beneficial to their lives. The journey tended to be different, and for those with very low skill levels in particular, building up the confidence to apply learning took time, applying the learning in a range of ways:

> *"I am building confidence and doing things I never thought I would do… I knew hardly anything before these sessions and was scared of putting things on my [iPhone]. Now I can order medicine, make appointments, send photos as an attachment, I am practicing emails, I can use an app to see when the buses are coming. I was worried about ordering online before, but I have started to do this with ones I can trust and got the apps. I am going to do the Tesco one next." (Shiva)*

Supporting skills around critical thinking and providing reassurance that people could apply choice and control was key to this. A few participants referred to BOSS leading to them being more responsible in how they use and respond to things:

> *"[the sessions] help me think more critically – if the phone rings or I get a text, I will consider if it is real – it is a forethought rather than an afterthought now."(Sue)*

Learners we spoke to reported that building digital literacy skills so they felt confident applying control around how their personal data was shared online was important. One interviewee talked about how she felt more comfortable using the social media platform Facebook:

> *"I wanted to use Facebook as my family are on there and they put videos up. Coming [to the sessions] over the weeks I have started to use it now –*

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*but I am doing it my way. I don't have a photo of me and if I get friend
requests from people I don't know I will not accept them, and I now know
how to block people. I also won't click on adverts and I just ignore them.
Reducing my fear is good, but for me I think it is being able to choose how
to use [Facebook] and limit what information it holds."(Geeta)*

There was a sense that ongoing support would be needed to ensure that some learners
continue to build confidence to apply what they had learned, with many expressing an
interest in doing so. In some cases, learners were able to benefit from rolling weekly BOSS
sessions, which gave them more time to develop their confidence, with follow-ups showing
that it took months for a few to take steps to reduce fear and widen their online use.

All the learners interviewed with more developed online skills reported that they had
benefitted from BOSS training. In some cases these learners attended a one off session or
event – such as around the latest scams or having the opportunity to hear from and ask
questions with "experts". Yet others enjoyed refreshing their skills and supporting their
peers – and attended a number of sessions. These learners fed back that the sessions had
helped them to be "sharper", and less likely to respond to an unknown number, text or
email, and being more mindful of password safety and taking actions to apply this learning:

> *"I already had some digital skills – but it is good to refresh those and
> build confidence around the safety aspect – the warnings are
> 'everywhere' on TV – it feels good to demystify these a bit – knowledge
> is power." (Bryan)*

A good example of where learners reported feeling more confident (and had built knowledge
and skills – considered in the following section) was through identifying mis/disinformation
online (fake news, adverts) (Box 1).

Box 1: Being more vigilant around dis/misinformation

Ensuring that learners are regularly reminded and shown how to remain more vigilant online
worked for all skill levels. Some more 'narrow' users felt able to carry out the tasks they
wanted to do more safely, such as those who surfed the internet through Google:

> *"I did Google searches [before the sessions], but now I can tell the difference
> between an original website and a phishing website – so it has helped me to
> recognise these things. I didn't realise how to identify the phishing ones before…it's
> a padlock in the corner."* (Shanker)

> *"When googling I realise you have to put the right things in, if I am looking at foods
> for rheumatism, or looking at [health] symptoms it will be the NHS [website] now…I
> tread more carefully as there are so many websites to look at – I only go on the high
> quality ones, the [sessions] helped me to know which sites are safer to look at."*
> *(Karan)*

Learners who did not have family living close by described feeling able to go online for social
purposes and keep safe:

"I have Facebook, but I only use it for the basics and just scroll through… I would get friend requests and would sometimes just accept them…I realise now, when speaking to other people [at the session] that you should ignore these…so I don't accept them anymore...I am also more careful when I see news items on there – where have they come from? " (Eileen)

More confident digital users also benefitted – such as one who had recognised that he had developed safer online practices following the training sessions and through hearing "real life" stories from peers:

"I get drawn into clickbait – I get caught out by sensational headlines or when people are selling stuff – I can get drawn in – even though I know some of these are probably unscrupulous – I would look at them and think there was something in it. But I have stopped doing that now, as I have heard more about the potential consequence – if the headline is nothing to do with the page I am on, I don't click. People can get drawn in – I am lucky that I didn't get compromised – but others have. " (Martyn)

These skills were developed through a mix of the interactive learning approach adopted by the trainer and having access to a space to discuss experiences openly with others.

A recurring theme reported across learners of all abilities was shared concerns toward online banking, with interviewees worried about keeping their personal details safe and protecting themselves from scams. Through a mix of raising awareness across sessions and working with external "experts", both in the community and through attending events, BOSS was able to reassure some learners to give online banking a try (Box 2):

B*OX 2 Building confidence and positive attitudes to online banking*

Some learners acknowledged that online banking was becoming a necessity as their local branches closed, yet DPs reported feeling reluctant to support people with online banking, due to the risks of learners doing "something wrong", and not feeling confident that they could explain the processes through which banks kept details safe. A particularly effective way of supporting learners to bank online was through linking with expert staff based at high street banks, which reportedly built trust through demystifying how banks keep people's details safe.

Through BOSS, links were made with Three, Virgin Media, Halifax and HSBC, and activities have involved visiting high street banks with interested learners. Due to positive feedback from learners who attended an event, and assessed demand across citizens, some DPs invited experts to do talks at their local communities. The sessions were received very positively, with interviewees reporting that they were able to ask lots of questions and were provided with one to one support from an expert if needed. An online banking expert visiting a South Asian group brought along an interpreter who interpreted the session into the native language of learners. DPs are also planning future visits to events – with high interest due to peers sharing their experiences.

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Learners reported that they were now taking action to bank online, with feedback that they felt more confident and had increased their knowledge and understanding as they knew what to look out for. DPs also fed back that attendees felt reassured when they heard about the robust security measures in place to protect their money. Those with lower digital skills reported that they had been offered support to set up online banking. Most positively, the learning was flexible and benefitted people at all skill levels, including those with high skills, yet a reluctance to try online banking:

"I have a tech background – but I have always been unsure about banking online, [the session] reassured me – I could see how [banks] take it seriously…they talked through their approach, explained they won't ask for personal details by phone…I also liked that I heard stories from lots of people. I am hoping to go to [another bank] soon, as it is good to hear about the latest technology and scams out there to avoid. I haven't got online yet, but I now plan to." (Dev)

Even citizens with very low skills felt more confident and positive about giving online banking a try:

"I said I wouldn't do online banking – I was too scared that my money would get compromised – but eventually we will have a cashless society. I like to deal in cash but it will be cards, and banks are going to close. I felt pushed into it if I am honest, I set up [online] banking but I hadn't really used it. The session was good. I was able to get lots of questions in…I asked about passwords too, and the importance of not sharing this with anyone who phones or emails me. I am going to start using [online banking] and I feel better about it, as long as I am careful and follow the advice. I will probably start off with a family member being around to help." (Elly)

A few citizens who were introduced to BOSS training through another activity they attended did not wish to take part in the training; one interviewee stated that they were not interested in going online and preferred their family to support them if needed. Though this is of course a choice that individuals can make, there was a sense that the interviewee in question lacked confidence and was fearful of going online ("*you hear about scams all the time – I would rather not get involved*") – and it may be that with ongoing encouragement from the DP, this type of learner may be willing to give it a try in the future.

Participants' knowledge and skills regarding key media literacy topics have been increased

Nearly all learners who fed back at the end of sessions provided examples of how BOSS had improved their knowledge and skills to keep themselves safe online. For those with lower skills it was identified early on by the Coordinator that simple actions which are relatively easy to teach could achieve "quick wins" – such as checking a website is safe or showing people how to take action to protect their passwords (Box 3).

Taking action to prevent scams, such as blocking phishing emails or unknown callers was a frequently reported outcome from attending BOSS sessions (referred to by most

interviewees who provided feedback). Though one participant talked about it taking him time, he was gradually reducing spam emails, which was helping him to worry less.

Some participants interviewed were using the "who called me" digital service to identify unknown numbers after being shown how to do it. This was a relatively simple skill but had a big impact on some who reported getting a number of calls and previously picking up in case they were "important". As unknown numbers are a regular occurrence for some – learners embedded the learning as they practised it often so it became a habit.

BOX 3: Building skills and knowledge to strengthen and protect passwords

Learners enjoyed practising on an online password tracker, as it offered a quick way for them to "test" the strength of their passwords. The trainer also raised awareness of the consequences of using passwords that could be easily guessed (with discussion around using significant dates, pet names) and followed this with advice on how to increase password strength (such as through adding a symbol). This led to a number of people reportedly taking action to develop stronger passwords:

> *"It was eye opening – when I came home after that [session] I went through all my passwords. I used the website [the Coordinator] showed us to check our password strength…they were weak – so I made them stronger using what [the Coordinator] showed. I couldn't believe it –this opened my eyes as I didn't realise how weak the passwords were."* *(Maeve)*

> *"I now know about passwords – keep them safe not on paper – on file online – and I don't use something like a pet or family member password anymore…I am using random letters and numbers – people can't crack it as there are millions of permutations."* *(Nora)*

Some learners shared that they had been using weak passwords for several years, unwittingly putting themselves at risk:

> *"I tend not to have strong passwords – some I had went back years – this is because otherwise I would forget them, it is hard to keep remembering and I need to make a note…I am now starting to change my passwords and making sure I keep these safe, I still haven't done them all but have made a start as I know I need to."* *(Maryam)*

A few learners were concerned about remembering passwords that could not be easily guessed, but felt motivated to identify ways to do so through the exercise. Some wrote out their new passwords and kept the paper safe – with one intending to use an online password management system once she had built up the skills to do so.

This highlights that even with "quick wins", participants with lower skills benefit from ongoing support to both embed what they have learned and continue to build on their literacy skills.

Participants were using the learning to become more independent

For most learners who participated in the evaluation, a chief "hook" to continuing with sessions was recognising the need to overcome fear and use digital so they could become more independent, which required a mix of building confidence and knowledge around digital media literacy, and the skills to apply this:

> *"It's good to come away and learn something – we have a laugh and it's a fun way to learn… I don't have many friends and the family is busy. You have to know how to look after yourself if you get unwell… I won't need to panic so much if I understand more [about how digital] works. I need time to get my head around it but as I get older, I need to think of how I can get food and medication in a convenient way, I need to learn useful stuff ... It is the real life stuff we need…I need bread and milk – I can get a delivery online and not bother my family who are struggling with their own lives – I have to be independent – so IT is needed." (Karan)*

This offers a good example of successfully combining the social element with a motivation to learn both the skills and literacy elements of digital.

Some learners talked about how family members would do things for them, a few said that this tended to happen even if they asked to be shown how to use it for themselves. Families would talk to participants about being scam aware and were likely concerned for the online safety of older relatives. A few interviewees reported initially that they were happy for family members to take on tasks they couldn't do themselves. One reported months after the last session was run that they could now carry out tasks independently, and felt good that they could show their family that they were capable of doing so, though also acknowledging that they continued to need help:

> *"I got a certificate at the end of the training. I didn't tell my family I was doing it – when they came to visit I had it on the table – my granddaughter said you are a sly one…I am doing more things myself now. But the other day my computer went funny, a screen came up and I couldn't get rid of it – I got in touch with my granddaughter who came and cleared it for me – as I was scared of touching the buttons in case I had to pay for something, it was offering WIFI at an hourly rate." (Anna)*

The above quote relates to a theme which emerged from some learners that whilst their skills had improved, they still had fears. In response to this, some wished to continue learning beyond the duration of the sessions.

Another participant said that she was happy for her family to continue taking on tasks that she could not complete as she still preferred not to go online. This participant was part of a single session where the Coordinator visited an existing activity. Though we cannot say with certainty, it may be that this participant had less time to build the confidence to apply digital learning.

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5. What led to improved digital media literacy?

This section considers the main routes through which outcomes were achieved.

Evolving the learning model through co-design

One of the most important learning points was the need to take the time to build and evolve the training environment, materials and style. As so little was known about how to support BOSS's target audience, it was necessary to test, learn and adapt across the duration of the project to ensure tailoring to different learner needs. A co-design approach has led to the development of a training model which most delivery partners (DPs) and wider local stakeholders plan to adopt. A DP with an existing digital skills worker worked with the Coordinator to co-produce resources and activities that could be used for later sessions:

> *"I feel that we have tested and tried lots of different methods to deliver [BOSS] and now we have streamlined the process and been able to concentrate on what has worked best. I will be using these materials to teach now."* (Delivery Partner)

The Coordinator involved DPs when developing learning exercises, as they are well placed to provide suggestions around what their service users may be interested in and what may be culturally relevant to them. One DP made suggestions during a session that materials would work better if participants could read these in their own language, which led to a greater focus on teaching participants how to use Google Translate (Box 5). The Coordinator also encouraged learners to feed back during the sessions, asking if particular exercises and learning activities could work differently.

Another key output is a greater understanding of how learner impact can be measured through what DSIT have described as more "objective" methods – such as utilising before and after "quizzes" that can test the knowledge of learners, which changed and evolved as teaching styles and learning materials continued to be developed.

Whilst initially time intensive, it was felt that co-designing sessions had contributed to ensuring BOSS has longer term impact, as the training materials created have been designed to reflect the demographic and cultural make-up of local citizens, reflecting recent research published by DSIT which linked a tailored approach to improved uptake[8].

Framing the offer around 'place'

The content of sessions was viewed as less important than the environment through which the learning took place. Working with an established community organisation was felt to be critical to creating the right learning environment. Interviewees reported that they decided to give sessions a go as it was through a trusted community setting (identified by research

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[8] DSIT, 2023, access here.

as a key factor to increasing engagement[9]), promoted via a worker they knew, and in a place where they already attended activities and felt more comfortable opening up. For those who did not speak English as a first language, being familiar with staff members or volunteers who spoke their community language was a particular draw. These factors were key to reaching this cohort, particularly as many reported feeling initially fearful of digital.

Learners also reported that they liked having a learning environment which included like-minded peers with whom they already had a relationship. This environment ensured that learners felt more confident speaking up if they had a question and were less likely to feel they would look "silly". Having cultural references within the sessions that members could identify with also offered a useful hook in which to embed learning (see below).

As the Coordinator helped to support delivery of sessions across DPs, it was important for her to work within the local spaces. Some described how the relationship they built with the Coordinator was a reason for returning to later sessions – they used words like "kind", "patient" and "approachable".

Creating the right environment

BOSS sessions have been delivered in a variety of ways. As so little is understood about media literacy training with this cohort, an agile, flexible approach has provided the opportunity to try out different engagement approaches. Ensuring that learners felt comfortable being able to learn at their own pace was frequently reported, with one comparing BOSS positively to previous digital sessions attended where she had felt unable to follow what was being shown and felt uncomfortable asking questions:

> *"I like these [sessions] as I can relax more and don't feel thick when I ask questions... I am not thick - just digitally illiterate as I didn't grow up with digital." (Mina)*

Whilst there were benefits to delivering sessions in an environment where people felt comfortable, there is a balance to be struck to ensure it is also conducive to learning. Some early sessions were not run under optimal learning conditions, and on a few occasions the Coordinator needed to work with DPs to identify alternative spaces in which to teach.

Promoting or offering taster activities to participants who were attending other activities run by the DP (by the Coordinator and DP staff) proved an effective way to encourage participation, though in one group all 25 wished to benefit from sessions. Whilst this proved a challenge, being able to draw on 4 volunteers and some activity participants who provided peer support, delivery was possible in this environment. Whilst it was agreed that small class sizes work better to enable individuals to be supported one to one if needed, this example showed that sufficient motivation and volunteers could still make this work in a larger group.

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[9] DSIT, 2023, access here.

Building in elements of peer support was a particularly effective way to offer support and maintain an informal environment. A learner who had recently arrived in the UK and was part of a larger East Asian group found offering informal support to be a useful way of meeting others from his own culture, whilst picking up some learning around literacy himself. Another DP reported that peers who had recently completed BOSS training were successfully building up interest and motivation through sharing how it had made a difference to their lives.

Blending literacy and skills training

Working with people with lower-level skills offered valuable learning, such as identifying the value of introducing digital media literacy as a foundation alongside other digital skills.

It was established early on that most participants had very low digital skills, with initial barriers to overcome before they could benefit from learning around digital media literacy. This was not anticipated and meant that the Coordinator needed to scale back the planned training sessions to support this. Training sessions needed to cover "the basics" such as setting up an email, using a search engine, or registering for social media tools such as WhatsApp. One session started by showing participants how to use the search engine Google – followed by using this for searching and comparing different websites for fake news stories to build in media literacy.

As highlighted earlier, this meant that not all the intended digital media literacy areas could be covered, as additional time was required to not only build in skills support, but to ensure confidence was developed through providing the opportunity to practice. For example the original plan for the first session was how to keep devices backed up and secure, but this was moved and delivered at the end, after people developed their skills and were ready to benefit from this.

Whilst this blended approach was necessary, it did throw up challenges around how to keep the focus on the literacy orientated purpose as teaching also needed to focus on building basic digital skills and confidence. One interviewee felt that where sessions include those with lower-level skills, more staff or volunteers are required – as it sometimes took up too much of the trainer's time providing one-to-one support. Another participant with more developed skills felt they got less out of sessions as it took time to help learners gain basic skills before literacy could be covered, though they did report that they enjoyed helping their peers.

Playing games on online apps provides a useful example of how people learned skills and literacy/safety in tandem. A learner who was recently widowed learned to download and play online games and does this frequently as it helps her to manage her grief. Prior to attending BOSS sections, she was too fearful to try these, but now confidently does so - she (and another learner interviewed) is no longer afraid of the adverts and pop ups as she is able to deal with them safely.

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Making sessions interactive

The social aspect of BOSS was a draw to participants at the outset – and the Coordinator and DPs identified the need to work with this aspect to help embed learning through encouraging engagement. This sense of a 'social' rather than a 'classroom' learning space was reported by some learners as a reason for returning (a few talked about leaving school at an early stage and not liking to be reminded of classrooms or feeling 'tested'). Ways of supporting this included introducing interactive activities, which did not necessarily take place on a digital device. For example, awareness around online safety was achieved through printing off online articles or magazine promotions and encouraging discussion in small groups as a way to test knowledge and skills. DPs reported that they continue to incorporate games and activities, such as around price comparison and checking product reviews.

Whilst the social aspect may be an important initial hook – it did mean that at times some learners reportedly started discussions that would veer off the purpose of the sessions. The trainer needed to develop a range of methods to overcome this, whilst not inhibiting the informal feel that people preferred. One effective approach was to start sessions by reminding everyone to stay on topic and give each other a chance to speak.

Also to note, most participants valued having an element of structure (the workbooks developed through BOSS have been well received – see Box 6), as long as these were offered within an environment in which they felt comfortable.

Offering reassurance

As highlighted, older people (particularly those over 75) are less likely to use digital and when they do, are more likely to be narrow users. Age in itself was sometimes used as a reason to not pursue online activities, with one group at an initial session stating that they were "too old" to learn. The approach that worked best here was reassuring people that this was not the case, and focusing on a small way in which a digital based tool could improve their lives. Google Translate was received positively, as learners identified many ways to use this to improve their lives, such as making it easier to navigate websites through translating the content in one click. Learners reported that this made them more receptive to returning and practising it at home.

When interviewees reflected on their initial reticence, they frequently referred to fear of the unknown. The Coordinator worked to achieve a balance between making people aware of potential scams – yet not overwhelming them by providing too much information that may increase fear to the extent that they dropped out. This meant that learning sessions needed to be scaled back and simplified.

Another effective way of building reassurance – particularly for those with higher level skills, was to incorporate external speakers to talk about digital safety (either through arranging a visit or inviting the person to the community). We heard examples of staff based at banks or charities getting involved in delivering sessions (such as Age UK who have a scams prevention and support service, funded through Lloyds Bank). As seen in Box 2,

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learners reported feeling more reassured when they had a chance to hear from staff who were able to offer a more "behind the scenes" overview of how information is kept safe.

Building in flexibility to meet different needs

BOSS adopted a flexible approach, testing to see where things worked well or less well – and adapting this to ensure the learning approach was culturally appropriate and flexible enough to meet the needs of a range of skill levels. This is a challenging aspect, as trainers grappled with a wide range of contextual and cultural differences and varying digital skill levels. This meant that DPs ran different models shaped around varying needs, incorporating one to ones, drop ins, and groups of varying sizes – with many requiring bilingual staff or volunteers.

Feedback from a few participants identified a need for more volunteers to be available to provide targeted help where needed. Some felt that those with very low-level skills, particularly those with cognitive impairment, would benefit from one to one support, or at least a hybrid approach to help them embed learning. One learner described struggling in a group as she became confused by all the questions being asked; she described mobile phones as "dangerous" and felt she needed to sit down with one person who would focus solely on her needs. This was being provided by a DP who had a digital worker in place, and in some cases the Coordinator provided this after sessions ended. This of course is not a sustainable approach – and DPs have continued to recruit volunteers and train up staff (though it is not yet clear if this will provide the one-to-one sessions that are needed).

Another area where flexibility was required was around the number of sessions delivered. The Coordinator supported delivery of training on an ongoing basis across 3 DPs. This was due to learners reportedly wishing to continue to build up their literacy skills (most had come from a starting point of very low online skills). On the other hand, learners with higher skills sometimes preferred the option of attending a one off session or event which covered an area of online safety that was relevant to them, (such as scams awareness).

One DP ran a drop in approach, as this was deemed most suitable to give people who attend other activities the opportunity to speak to someone when convenient, this may be the Coordinator, or a dedicated bilingual staff member. This worked particularly well for carers – who come in with the person they cared for – and could ask a light touch question themselves.

A challenge for trainers was ensuring that the material being taught could be picked up by learners using a variety of different devices, with nearly all learners bringing their own smartphones or tablets to sessions. Based on participant feedback, this worked best where there was sufficient staff and/or volunteers to show people how to apply learning on their own device. In the case of a DP where participants learned on the same device (an iPad) interviewees either referred to using a printed step by step instruction tailored to their own device, or receiving ongoing 'light touch' support.

Making it relevant to everyday life

As well as offering the right circumstances (the 'place'), people need to have strong personal motivation and view digital as something that would fit into their lives and be of positive benefit[10]. Whilst the social element was enjoyable, some learners interviewed were very positive about the sessions helping them to learn something new:

> "I enjoy the sessions and we have a joke, but it isn't just about enjoyment…I like that I actually learn something, I can use it, like when I am shopping – this is a part of everyday life now but I worried about using it – I now have 2-factor authentication which makes me feel safe." (Ann)

Some spoke negatively about attending digital learning sessions in the past which had set modules, with some being of limited interest and not feeling tailored to their circumstances and needs:

> "I went to a [IT] class many years ago, it was a structured class – about cut and paste and using a mouse – I didn't have a mouse. There were quite a lot of people in the class – and by the time they all asked questions I couldn't be bothered. It was quite structured and my mind went off on one…I lost interest as I couldn't get what I needed and wasn't taking anything in. For [BOSS] it was more relaxed and we sat around a table, I felt like we were there to look at things in real life " (Amanda)

Most interviewees reported that they liked that BOSS topics were framed around their interests, as they could either relate to the discussion, or see where the learning could be applied (as above, working with DPs was an effective way of gauging this prior to sessions being delivered).

Culturally appropriate content was referenced positively, as was content linked to health – such as using apps, searching for health-related support online, or ensuring a link to make a GP appointment is safe (a few participants referenced Googling health conditions and being signposted to poor quality information which had led to unnecessary concerns). An example of using a cultural reference to stimulate discussion was in a group attended by older Irish people:

> "During the [session] yesterday we were showed some scams – asked us if the pictures were true or false – some you could see – there was a picture of the pope – there is no way he would wear a puffer jacket." (Maeve)

Encouraging participants to develop learning independently

To ensure that sessions led learners to apply digital media literacy skills themselves, sessions involved frequent exercises and opportunities to practice. Ensuring that skills were repeated was viewed as particularly important by DPs, as it gave learners the opportunity to build confidence and apply skills themselves outside of the sessions- as one DP put it:

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[10] Age UK Think Digital, 2020, access here; DSIT, 2023, access here

"I don't just tell… I am showing [learners] how to do it as it consolidates the knowledge. I get people to redo it – unsubscribe, resubscribe – try it again and again." (Delivery Partner)

Interviewees liked being provided with paper resources – including recap sheets with step-by-step instructions, and leaflets (such as the Independent Age Scamwise leaflet on how to protect against scams) which they could take home and use as a reference point if they got stuck. Box 4 offers some illustrative quotes from interviewees who had either completed BOSS, or had been attending sessions for at least 6 weeks.

Some learners appreciated being provided with, or being encouraged to bring a notebook so they could write down information in a way that was easy for them to digest – in some cases learners were supported by a volunteer or the Coordinator to write things "step by step". These notes were then referred to at home if learners got stuck.

Box 4: Embedding learning outside of sessions

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Learners who struggled with memory recall and had lower level skills and confidence in particular valued being able to take resources away with them so they could practice what they had learned when needed:

"We got a book on scamming to take away. I flicked through it last night and I am going to read it over the weekend. It seems useful as I get a lot of people ringing or emailing who I don't know" (Angela)

"The handouts you get are very useful, we [self and wife] sit ourselves down and go through them…They are very helpful as you lose your grey matter as you get older and it's hard to take everything in, so it helps me to remember. I have got them in folders and whatever [handouts] we get I put them in there and flick through anytime I need reminding." (Tom)

"I used a handout recently – it was about reporting phishing – had to look back to remember as forgotten – so reported – usually PC get the scams rather than phone – just junk mail – every now and again scam – so learn to report – so getting less spam through. " (Ann)

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Offering the opportunity for learners to practice and recap within and outside of sessions was also viewed by some as a way for them to continue building confidence to apply new skills, and feel reassured they could do so safely:

"I am looking to do online banking in the future, but I am learning other things first, just to practice and get used to using [digital] first – I am practising [at the sessions] and making lots of notes so I can practice at home." (Roger)

Due to the popularity of providing resources for people to take away and use outside of training sessions, a set of workbooks have been developed to support BOSS trainers moving forward (these are considered in Box 6).

Trainers also encouraged people to show friends and family members how to do something as a way to embed learning:

> *"I didn't know outside people could access my number for WhatsApp – even on your Facebook people can get your number from it. I learned how you can lock profile so people can't get in…I am going to show [a family member] how to do this as it will help her too." (Shanker)*

Based on feedback from DPs and some learners, building in opportunities to practice during and outside of sessions was not always sufficient. Further support beyond BOSS was viewed as necessary to help those with cognitive impairment or who had very low baseline digital skills. This included one to one support to help them continue to build skills and confidence and/or access to someone to provide ongoing reassurance or 'troubleshooting' where needed. For those with higher skills, suggestions included access to: 'light touch' support, more advanced digital media literacy training, one off activities to keep on top of the latest examples of mis/disinformation and scams.

Ensuring sessions could be accessed by those whose who could benefit

Based on information provided, financial factors could potentially impact on ability to attend the BOSS sessions. Learners and DPs reported that some who attended sessions were on a low income, with many impacted by the cost of living rises in the last year. All DPs work within underserved communities and as highlighted earlier, half of learners live in decile 1 based on the England index of multiple deprivation.

A few learners reported positively about financial aspects of the offer, with reference to covering transport costs and offering refreshments highlighted as a good motivator, particularly as some had disabilities which meant they could not attend without using a taxi.

Feedback from DPs is that they had sufficient equipment to run sessions, with all supported to purchase equipment for use in the project through 100% Digital Leeds. These were well received – with DPs able to continue using the equipment to support participants beyond BOSS. DPs have also been made aware of a national databank, hosted by the charity Good Things Foundation, which provides free data for those who need it. Most DPs have access to data, but where a DP struggled to deliver BOSS as they had no access to WIFI (and learners were reluctant to use their own data), 100% Digital Leeds brought in a worker from Three (an international digital network provider) who introduced a mobile plug in router. The DP is now investing in their own mobile router, which they can use at any site where they teach in the future.

Whilst BOSS was free to attend, and all DPs were able to provide equipment where needed during sessions, it was suggested that those who lacked their own device were less likely to attend – as they would be unable to practice at home (a DP reported that someone had

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dropped out for this reason). It may be that citizens can be supported to loan or access equipment through local schemes – but we are unable to comment on this as nearly all those who attended sessions had access to a phone or tablet.

Older people are more likely to have health conditions (or other commitments, such as around caring) which may impact on their ability to learn[11]. Giving regard to specific barriers, particularly sensory, dexterity and cognitive impairments was important. A few participants reportedly have undiagnosed learning disabilities or low literacy levels. One learner reported a previous negative digital training experience due to being unable to read the words on a projector as they were too small, others talked of attending sessions which did not provide handouts or recap, which meant they had "quickly forgotten most of it". Feedback is that BOSS worked with learners to overcome these, such as showing how to increase font size, reading out materials in different languages, and going at pace and aiding recall. A facilitator here was that the DPs running sessions all offered other tailored services designed for older people and were also aware of the needs of their service users and were able to take these into account and ensure they were accommodated.

Training tailored to support multilingual learners

A consistent theme throughout BOSS is the need to support learners who had English as a second language to access and benefit from sessions – this was necessary for learning basic skills, and for applying these to stay safe online (Box 5).

BOX 5: Supporting people with limited English language

Those who know limited English can be particularly vulnerable to online scams and misinformation as they struggle to read and comprehend the information contained – so there was a need to ensure they could access learning through their native language.

A range of resources and tools were adopted to ensure these learners were able to benefit from sessions and improve digital media literacy. The Coordinator worked with DP staff and volunteers to check if translation of handouts created with Google Translate were clear, as well as ensuring someone who could speak the community language was present at sessions to clarify points, answer questions and ensure that learners could participate in practical activities. Where sessions required interpretation, it took longer to go through – many additionally had very low digital skills – which required additional time.

A tool assessed as relatively simple to use was Google Translate. This was used widely across sessions and learners, staff, and volunteers (those supporting BOSS and beyond). Once learners had mastered Google translate, they fed back that it helped them to assess online content more critically to identify any mis/disinformation and helped them feel more confident in protecting their privacy through understanding content written in a language they were less familiar with:

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[11] Good Things Foundation and the Health Foundation, 2014, access here

> *"I will use [Google Translate] in the future, it is only one click to translate, I got this set up during [the session]…I downloaded the app and am using it a lot. I get a lot of emails from […] as I used to live there, I can now see what they say. Before this I struggled – I didn't know what it was saying." (Dev)*

Another learner was reluctant to sign up to online banking due to struggling to read English websites, which meant she didn't feel confident making an informed decision. Using Google Translate – she is now exploring this. Learners also used this tool to translate suggested resources around literacy which were produced in English – so they were able to benefit from the learning. Though it was not always completely accurate, learners fed back that it provided enough guidance to understand documents – with volunteers or staff on hand if they needed to ask questions. DPs have also used Google Translate to upskill staff and volunteers so they can show other citizens how to use it.

Work around Google Translate has provided a hook to generate interest beyond BOSS, including potential interest from the NHS around how they can support patients where English is not their first language to access health information online safely.

6. Supporting the capacity of delivery partners to deliver media literacy support

One of the key aims of BOSS was that DPs would use the learning as a springboard to increase their digital media literacy offer. DPs were at different starting points in terms of their ability to deliver BOSS, and it was necessary to tailor support at different levels to help ensure DPs could move in the right direction, such as providing an appropriate physical environment and additional support where needed.

All DPs expressed an ambition to build on learning to support their digital offer beyond BOSS funding and encouragingly, ways in which this could, or was being achieved noticeably increased across the duration of the project. Through talking with DPs, 100% Digital Leeds are exploring potential funding opportunities with them. Some DPs were also exploring their own funding avenues, with one DP working to secure funding to take BOSS to the next level. LOPF are also taking steps to secure additional funding to allow DPs to further test approaches and embed a training offer within their organisations.

Although most learners were recruited through existing DP networks, one DP had started to recruit people not known to the organisation, including through external activities, such as attending a local shopping centre to meet "Mall Walkers" and talking about what BOSS can offer. DPs described how they have built up support capacity as the project progressed, with the train the trainer approach proving particularly effective, examples include:

- A staff member supported by the Coordinator to train a group of staff and volunteers to run sessions with an East Asian group now feels more confident supporting the group to further develop their literacy skills via group and one to one sessions.

- A DP with a staff member in a digital role has incorporated literacy into skills training and support and will start to use the BOSS workbooks with people who attend other (non-digital led) sessions and as part of one to one support. Within this, the service is looking to tailor approaches to meet the needs of different types of learner through developing a learning pathway. This will involve a triage system to assess people's skills – offering one to one sessions for those with very low skills, so they get to a level where they can access the BOSS training. This in turn will offer a foundation to ensure citizens can fully benefit from the digital health hub they run. The DP is starting to work with "BOSS graduates" to provide peer support for those who are very reluctant to get online, who can explain the benefits and what building skills has achieved for them. Peer learners will also showcase their learning at external events.

- A DP who provided more ad hoc digital support has built more skills to support learners in group and one to one settings as well as to staff and volunteers (such as showing them how to use Google Translate). The worker is now delivering regular sessions with 3 different groups on a rolling basis, using the BOSS workbooks.

- A DP with some staff who offer more light touch digital support talked about their ambition of increasing the overall digital advice and support they offer. They have recently recruited a staff member to deliver BOSS through one of the existing activities they run.

- A DP who required the digital Coordinator to run sessions and identified they had come from a "low starting point" has invited an external speaker to their centre to raise awareness of bank scams and is exploring ways to embed digital in sessions currently run (such as downloading online recipes for those who attend a cooking class) – they are exploring options to run a 'drop-in' for those with low level skills who need initial support to get online.

Building staff and volunteer capacity

All DPs were motivated to continue BOSS as the assessed need to ensure people could go online safely grew as the project progressed. Whilst raising awareness that this should be prioritised is no doubt positive, it also led to challenges around staff and volunteer capacity. Most DPs had a targeted session with 100% Digital Leeds to explore what they needed moving forward – and the need to identify more volunteers and resources to recruit staff members came up most frequently.

Resource issues sometimes meant that it was difficult to apply the "train the trainer" approach consistently. For 2 DPs, staff members could not always be present during sessions (or in some cases were unable to stay all the way through due to other commitments). Some sessions were supported by external staff, such as a 100% Digital Leeds worker, other external visitors, and DP volunteers and peers with more developed digital skills. This meant that classes generally had the ability to provide one to one support where needed for those with low level skills or confidence – but ensuring appropriate support is present will likely be less consistent as BOSS funding comes to an end. In classes where confidence had built over time, or where the trainer was particularly experienced – this was felt to be less of an issue (both felt able to support learners independently through benefitting from the train the trainer approach – albeit with the need for volunteers or other capacity to support them).

Though additional funding avenues to support this are being explored, at the time of writing this is uncertain.

Training and upskilling staff

It was BOSS's intention at the outset to work with DPs to support them to continue delivering training independently through the Coordinator adopting a 'train the trainer' approach. We heard examples of DP staff and volunteers attending sessions with the Coordinator to observe, contribute and support learning outcomes (such as translating instructions into a learner's first language, helping them to use equipment and tools). Most of the DPs were not accustomed to doing more formal lesson planning, so observing this through the Coordinator was reported as useful to them (with the workbook developed through BOSS offering further support to help them structure training sessions - see Box 6).

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Some DPs supported through BOSS reported cascading what they had learned to staff and volunteers who run non-digital led sessions, particularly where more light touch or "in the moment" digital support may be of benefit to service users. As highlighted in Box 5, demonstrating how to use Google Translate was being rolled out across some DPs and was proving very popular, as it ensured people were better placed to understand text not written in their first language. The Coordinator has shown DPs how to use translation apps on their own phones so they can continue to support service users to go online safely.

An ambition is that BOSS would act as a springboard for DPs to engage with the Leeds-wide Digital Inclusion Network (which has over 40 members). Most DPs are now linked into the network, and through this have been provided with access to a range of shared resources across different themes – with DPs planning to attend meetings in the future.

As well as training specifically around digital media literacy, DPs felt that staff needed support around basic digital skills, and issues around digital inclusion awareness more generally. 100% Digital Leeds have been working with DPs to signpost to free training being offered across the city, which some DPs reported that they planned to attend.

Linked to staff and volunteer recruitment challenges more generally, finding the capacity to train and support volunteers to help deliver BOSS has been a challenge, particularly where training is offered and volunteers subsequently leave, as one DP put it:

> *"There are so many groups interested [in learning digital media literacy], funding for a teacher would be helpful – maybe even if once a month to help people delivering different groups. We have to keep starting from scratch with new volunteers…I trained up 2 recently but they sometimes leave after a few weeks. If I train volunteers and they go, it isn't good for us as we are so busy."*

Whilst there are some useful resources that can be offered, such as free training – these rarely touch on literacy and were not assessed as sufficient to offer support to ensure people are safe online. This is where the targeted resources that have been developed through BOSS are of particular value.

Developing resources that can be used beyond BOSS

DPs discussed picking up a range of ideas and resources through working with the Coordinator, which they will continue to adopt across future training sessions. As highlighted earlier, DPs will carry on using step by step skills recap sheets. The main resource that has been created by LOPF through BOSS which is being utilised by most DPs (and some stakeholders citywide) is a set of workbooks, which offer a consistent approach to building literacy through blending with a core set of skills (Box 6).

BOX 6 Building a learning resource: workbooks

Based on ongoing learning through co-design and taking on board learner feedback across diverse settings, a key output of BOSS is the development of 6 workbook modules. The modules cover the foundation skills required to learn and embed digital media literacy learning and contain exercises with accompanying handouts as needed, with

space for learners to write their own notes, such as the steps required to apply learning on their own device.

The workbooks themselves offer a "tried and tested" template based on the Coordinator working closely with DPs to try the content out with learners, including those with low skill levels and who speak different languages. They offer a level of structure – but are designed to be used flexibly and can be adapted to suit different local and cultural contexts, teaching styles, skill levels and ongoing feedback. With support from staff and volunteers who speak community languages and through Google Translate, the workbooks have been translated into different languages. The workbooks are designed to be used by trainers who have knowledge of local community needs and can tailor appropriately to fit their unique environments, though they can be used more widely.

The workbooks have been designed to factor in challenges highlighted throughout delivery of BOSS, such as helping learners with more developed skills to go at their own pace, whilst trainers can work more closely with those who require additional support.

Most of the DPs appreciated an output which felt tailored to their needs and clients, blending skills and literacy where needed and were either using, or planning to use the workbooks moving forward (to note, some DPs have concerns about their capacity to deliver sessions – but plan to do so where they can). DPs using the workbooks reported positively that the sessions were going well.

One DP who is trialling the workbooks reported that he had built up confidence to deliver training through attending earlier sessions and benefitting from a train the trainer approach from the Coordinator. The DP described the workbooks as a resource that had been missing from their service, and which they intended to make use of in the future:

> *"I know if a new person comes to a session, I can use these workbooks. I can help them with translation first if they need it – then go on to the next step – that could be email or simple copy and paste. It has given me a structure rather than sessions being unplanned and perhaps not meeting what people need…I wish these had been available at the start."*

A DP who already runs digital sessions and is due to start trialling the workbooks felt that they allow for a balanced teaching environment that does not feel "class based" – offering the opportunity to deliver practical exercises – and that learners can ask questions as they work through them. She also felt that the workbooks saved time:

> *"There are hundreds of resources out there – doing research around what to use is time consuming –so having resources in one place is invaluable. I now don't need to waste time looking for resources – BOSS [resources] is my first port of call… it can be differentiated for a variety of learners and the learning outcomes that we are hoping to achieve [with the workbook] feel clear and I think it will be very easy to track clients' progress."*

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Another DP felt that the level of need, coupled with the workbooks may help them to secure future funding, as it shows they have a delivery plan in place.

Building on learning around blending skills and literacy – one DP is due to deliver training based on the workbooks with learners who have never used a device (with support from the BOSS Coordinator).

The workbooks are also intended for wider use, by grassroot community groups, and other organisations who may find them useful. With stakeholders interviewed observing that a "core offer" would be valuable as at present there is a lot of wasted effort, with small organisations designing training sessions from scratch. 100% Digital are looking to share links to the workbooks through their wider Leeds digital networks, and a Coordinator who runs digital training sessions for Age UK Leeds has started to trial these, running the first session in early January, which reportedly went well (with plans to trial the workbooks across 2 learning groups). Age UK found that learners with lower skills in particular value having a paper module to work through and that they can refer back to, with the set exercises viewed positively. The Age UK worker also felt confident that he could tweak the workbooks to suit his learning environment.

Feedback to date suggests the workbooks offer a great standalone resource to those with teaching skills who need guidance around how to deliver training. For those without teaching skills who require more support, LOPF has applied for additional funding to scale up the learning and offer more directed support. The Coordinator is also finalising tutor guides, providing a checklist of what to cover.

Embedding digital media literacy across other services

Evidence highlights low awareness of the importance of digital media literacy across the digital sector[12]. Through linking across different timepoints, the evaluation identified that the importance of digital media literacy skills evolved and increased across most DPs – with one reporting that they now viewed it as less of an "add on" and more something that should be embedded across service provision as it is increasingly becoming a part of everyday life.

Opportunities to embed digital media literacy include moving beyond viewing it as a specialist offer and instead building it across activities and services that people already use, as highlighted in recent research.[13] DPs agreed that it makes sense to introduce digital into activities which may have online elements (e.g., based on hobbies that can be explored online) – but agreed that a particular challenge is that many have very low level digital skills – and it would be difficult to support literacy (or indeed other digital skills) as it would likely cause too much disruption. There are some examples of DPs embedding elements elsewhere, including:

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[12] LSE and DSIT, 2023, access here.

[13] LSE and DSIT, 2023, access here.

- Staff and volunteers being shown how to use Google Translate to help service users access information online – which as highlighted earlier, is a potential gateway to increasing online digital safety
- Offering additional support around literacy skills on a one to one basis, either for those who have completed BOSS, or those who are using other services and have a particular issue
- Introducing digital media literacy skills where events are held, for example at a "moon festival" (celebrated in Chinese culture), where staff applied BOSS learning to organise exercises
- Piggybacking a regular, non-digital group to show attendees how to block scam calls and emails
- Inviting external guests to non-digital groups to discuss elements of digital safety (such as safe online banking, see Box 2)
- Having iPads on display at a lunch club to generate interest in going online – and offering support to build skills and use them safely
- Encouraging service users across activities to join a WhatsApp group or look at the website and show them how to do this safely
- Two of the delivery partners offer a digital health hub service (with an additional DP hoping to join, following involvement with BOSS) and were exploring ways to use BOSS to ensure people can maximise benefits
- Building literacy into other digital skills sessions – including a DP which runs a session based on building learner confidence and competence to use transport apps to support them to use public transport.

Whilst embedding digital across services is an ambition, most DPs felt that a dedicated worker would be beneficial to help support and run training sessions. The worker could then ensure learners can benefit from digital elements across other services, where offered.

Building external relationships

A useful route for DPs to access additional resources was to work with external experts, or with organisations that could support capacity – such as one DP that linked in with a charity to help to bolster their volunteer pool. A few DPs invited organisations who specialise in digital into services to speak to members, which included local charities, digital providers, banks and the NHS. DPs are also working with other digital providers to offer general skills – such as with Leeds City Council to test an app aimed at alleviating loneliness.

One DP was inviting a range of external speakers to visit a South Asian group who were benefiting from BOSS sessions, including a local councillor to guide them through the council website and a scams awareness officer based at Age UK (funded through Lloyds Bank). An additional benefit, beyond the scope of BOSS, is that recent immigrants were introduced to citywide services through a trusted space.

7. Informing digital strategy citywide

As a short project which is near completion, it will take time to assess the full impact of BOSS, for DPs, across the city (and beyond). LOPF and 100% Digital Leeds have increased their awareness of the need to widen learning and support around digital media literacy and are considering ways to support scaling the resources created through the project.

Limited sharing of best practice and scaling up of activities that work has been flagged as an issue across the wider digital media literacy sector[14]. Stakeholders interviewed at the outset referred to inconsistencies around digital training styles and resources across Leeds, with a lack of coordination meaning overstretched staff were sometimes "reinventing the wheel" – starting anew each time with a new digital worker not knowing what to deliver and creating resources from scratch. On the back of the BOSS project, there are ambitions to continue to roll out resources that have been developed, with workbooks already being used by most DPs and by Age UK Leeds.

The questionnaire design evolved through learning and has now been finalised, informed by feedback from participants and DPs. This should generate more consistent quantitative information if used in the future.

A toolkit is being developed and will be shaped by the learning captured through BOSS. Whilst there are toolkits out there which focus on digital skills (and to a lesser extent literacy), as far as we are aware, none focus on building-in digital media literacy specifically for older people, with a focus on underserved communities. The plans are for the toolkit to be completed by the end of March 2024, and to promote it via an event held in Leeds.

100% Digital Leeds are also exploring ways to utilise the learning and resources across the digital inclusion networks they run across Leeds and potentially alongside digital inclusion offers being developed across West Yorkshire.

As highlighted earlier, particular tools taught through BOSS – such as Google Translate - have provided a hook to generate wider interest, with the local NHS identifying this as an important skill for staff to support patients who have English as a second language around their online health literacy.

Finally, it is hoped that BOSS can help LOPF to embed digital support more generally, building on other activities, such as the Coordinator offering digital training sessions to upskill staff based at one DP who are working on another LOPF project to use tools such as Google Translate and the NHS App. LOPF are also designing a webpage which focuses on digital, this will include the workbooks and toolkit being developed through BOSS.

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[14] LSE and DSIT, 2023, access here.

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Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, BOSS has successfully achieved a range of positive outcomes and impact for participants, and even those with very low skills have been able to apply the learning successfully to enable them to keep safe online. There are also positive examples of DPs building capacity to continue applying what they have learned, both around the importance of literacy knowledge and how to embed digital support more widely across their service offer. BOSS is also showing signs of achieving wider impact. To further build on the learning and outputs developed through BOSS, we make the following recommendations:

- As part of a wider system change strategy, LOPF should come up with their own definition of digital media literacy, ensuring that it aligns to the target group and the workbooks. This will help ensure that all those involved are clear about what is meant by digital media literacy. This can then be shared alongside other resources produced through the project.

- LOPF should continue to explore funding options to bolster capacity, working with DPs to support them to build their digital media literacy offer through digital and non-digital activities. Ideas include exploring ways to resource recruitment of a dedicated worker, which many felt was required to embed digital media literacy to its full potential. Other options, which are currently being explored, is to fund a Coordinator to continue to work with DPs (and other local grassroot community organisations across Leeds) to support trialling of the workbooks. A medium term ambition (likely conditional on accessing additional funding) is to support DPs to promote support more widely, including promoting the offer to those not currently involved in their service.

- The assessed impact and quick wins offered through 'hard hitting' exercises such as encouraging people to consider the strength of passwords suggest that DPs (and other services) should be encouraged to try out more quick activities to introduce the importance of keeping safe online across non digital activities. This of course requires staff and volunteers to build their own skills and confidence to introduce this. There are step by step resources to support individual activities that can be shared alongside the workbooks.

- Ensure that good practice is shared, such as the 2 DPs who are successfully achieving increased uptake through adopting peer approaches. The toolkit which is being designed should also help to support this.

- Explore ways to capture areas where BOSS is contributing to wider system change, such as tracing uptake and capturing feedback on the standardised workbooks and tutor guides (where used). This can help support applications for future funding and help raise the profile of digital media literacy more widely across the city. LOPF should look to share these resources through their website, wider Digital Support Networks and through promotion across other contacts. Developing a method of capturing how the workbooks are used fit within particular contexts, teaching styles, or based on learner feedback will provide invaluable learning and help further develop the workbooks. One idea to keep track of uptake could be to request that those who plan to use them register their details

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and also request that organisations or individuals inform LOPF if they make changes to feed back. This will support ongoing development of the workbooks – such as adding or changing text or suggesting particular activities which better reflect different cultural preferences, for example. In the medium term, and once the workbooks have been tested citywide, there is potentially an opportunity to share them with wider existing networks, such as the national digital inclusion charity Good Things Foundation.

● Where possible, opportunities should be identified to adopt more robust measures to identify learning outcomes and resulting behaviour change, with the roll-out of workbooks offering an opportunity to adopt a more consistent approach which is more amenable to comparison. This could involve further testing the developed "before and after" questionnaires – as well as exploring more creative ways to pick up impact, such as through a visual quiz (this was considered, but due to the requirement to better understand the cohort of learners, and timing challenges – could not be applied during the first phase). Realistically, further funding will need to be secured to support the testing of the measures developed around the particular needs of BOSS learners.

Appendix 1: BOSS LOGIC MODEL

Leeds Older People's Forum – BOSS Logic Model		
Inputs/Activities	**Outputs**	**Outcomes - short to medium term**
5 projects delivered across Leeds working to improve digital media literacy of people aged 55+ from ethnic minority backgrounds. Delivering community-based learning and partnership to share learning. Digital Coordinator recruited to upskill ('train the trainer" approach) and develop resources. Train the trainer approach develops skills and knowledge of staff/volunteers to engage/deliver digital media literacy learning. Tech loan scheme provides capacity to delivery partners and appropriate tech to organisations and learners *Staff/Volunteers* Delivery partners develop innovative ways to deliver digital media literacy training to people aged 55+ from ethnic minority communities. *Older people* Partners work proactively to understand barriers/needs/hooks to deliver collaborative, community-based learning. *Learning* Share learning on an ongoing basis; peer to peer, reports, social media to develop understanding of what works.	At least 100 Older people benefit directly through group sessions 40 have 1:1 sessions 20 staff/volunteers supported through train the trainer approach Resource provided to support organisational capacity and 55+ individuals ability to engage in online learning/activity 1 x learning event	*Older people* Increase in media literacy knowledge, skills and confidence Increase in proactive engagement using apps/websites/forums. Increased safe online engagement for practical/personal/ leisure/ cultural activities. *Delivery partners* Increased availability of community-based learning opportunities across 5 areas of Leeds. Increased partnership with older people, third sector and public and sector stakeholders. Extension of engagement with local communities and community partners.

Appendix 2: BOSS learner two-phase self-report questionnaire

Name	
Start date	
End Date	

Welcome to the "Be Online, Stay Safe" course. Over the next few weeks, you will learn how to use the internet effectively and stay safe while doing so.

Please complete the following questions:

How confident do you feel in your ability to identify online scams and fake news online Please circle the answers:

1 - Not confident at all
2 - Fairly confident
3. Confident

Why are you interested in improving your digital media literacy skills ? (Select all that apply)

a)   Stay connected with family and friends
b)   To search the internet and find information
c)   To send emails to businesses to save time on the phone
d)   To feel more confident going online
e)   Learn more about scams and how to prevent them
f)   I want to be able to do things online independently without asking friends or family
g)   other please state

Do you have any concerns before starting the course?

Do you have any health conditions we need to be aware of e.g dyslexia vision or hearing impairment?

Below is a list of skills which you will learn whilst on the course please complete the table below using the following as a guideline

Confident - You feel confident and capable of completing the skill independently.

Fairly confident - You have some knowledge or understanding of the skill.

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Not confident - You have not yet acquired the knowledge or skills required for this task and need instruction and support to learn how to do it.

	Start of course assessment		
Skills	**Confident**	**Fairly confident**	**Not confident**
Connect your phone to WIFI			
Arrange your apps on home screen			
Understand phone settings and how to use them			
Send an email			
Delete an email			
Unsubscribe from emails and block scam emails			
Recognise a scam email			
Attach a photo to an email			
Find information on the internet			
Identify fake news and scams online			
Recognise online scams			
Know how to protect yourself from online scams			
Find trusted health information online			
Contact your Dr online			
Use Google Translate (optional)			

Final assessment

Name:

Skills	End of course assessment		
	Confident	Fairly confident	Not confident
Connect your phone to WIFI			
Arrange your apps on home screen			
Understand phone settings and how to use them			
Send an email			
Delete an email			
Unsubscribe from emails and block scam emails			
Recognise a scam email			
Attach a photo to an email			
Find information on the internet			
Identify fake news and scams online			
Recognise online scams			
Know how to protect yourself from online scams			
Find trusted health information online			
Contact your Dr online			
Use Google Translate (optional)			

1 What are the most important things you learned during the course?

2 What changes have you made to stay safe online

General Feedback Please let us know what you enjoyed/didn't enjoy about the course and what changes and suggestions you have to improve the course (Please continue over page)