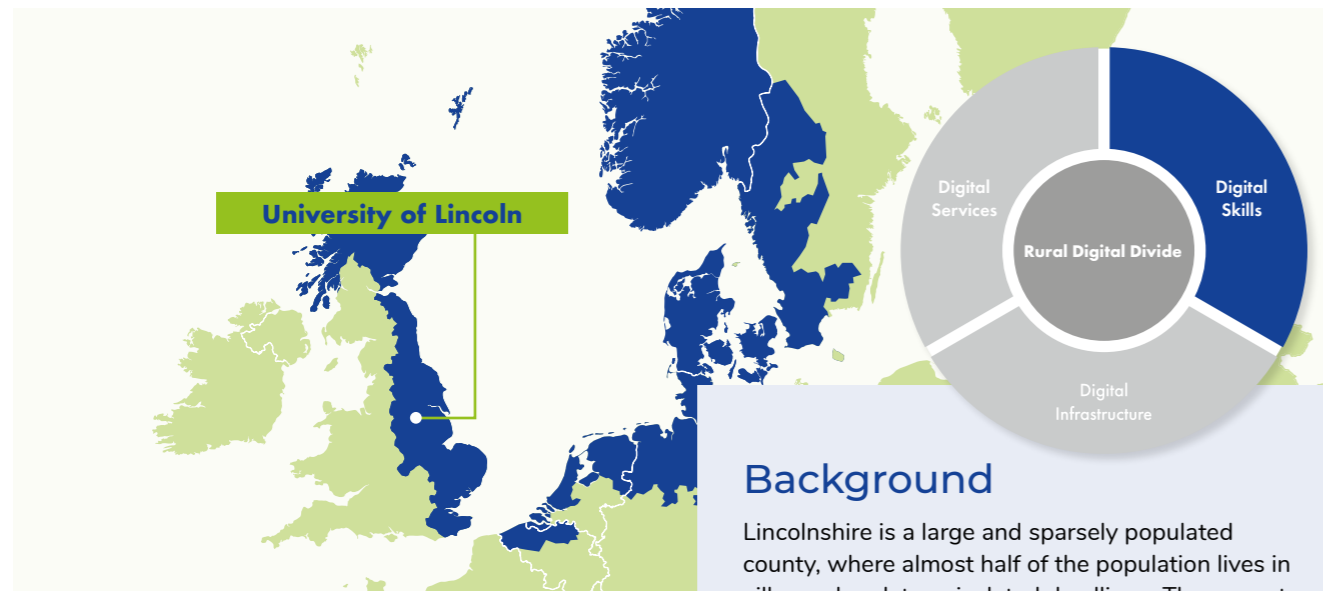


University of Lincoln, UK

# THINK – Technology hubs: Improving Networking and Knowledge

The aim of the THINK – Technology hubs: Improving Networking and Knowledge pilot was to engage Lincolnshire Technology Hubs in selected CORA workshops, in knowledge exchange activities with CORA partners, and in developing the CORA Digital Hub concept. Through this engagement, the hubs and CORA partners contributed to the creation of the CORA Digital Hub Guide, which sets out guidance and support to improve hubs' capacities to enhance digital skills and improve local business activities/processes.



## Background

Lincolnshire is a large and sparsely populated county, where almost half of the population lives in villages, hamlets or isolated dwellings. The current challenge is the low take-up and use of broadband-enabled technologies among both local enterprises and communities. The 'Onlincolnshire.org' initiative, run by Lincolnshire County Council, piloted three interconnected Technology Hubs across Lincolnshire to provide access to broadband-enabled technologies to local businesses and communities. The purpose of the hubs was to demonstrate the use of digital technologies such as 3D printers and scanners, CAD equipment and motion sensor technology, and thereby promote the take-up and use of fast broadband. With several years' experience, the Lincolnshire Hubs can contribute significantly to knowledge exchange within CORA.

Digital Hub Guide, created as part of this pilot, was aimed at local authorities, universities and organisations either considering setting up a hub, or supporting others to set up a hub.

## Designing and delivering the pilot

### How has it been designed?

THINK was designed to be a knowledge sharing pilot, engaging existing hub practitioners from Lincolnshire to contribute to CORA project ideas, and contributing to the creation of the CORA Digital Hub concept and Guide. The Lincolnshire Technology Hubs exemplify an existing, successful, digital hub approach that is based in a rural county of the UK. By engaging with them, the CORA project learned more about hubs in practice, and shared the knowledge within CORA.

### Who is it for?

The target audience of this pilot was the Lincolnshire Technology Hubs and the CORA partners. The CORA

### How has it been delivered?

This pilot engaged with the Technology Hubs from the outset of the CORA project. Hub managers were involved in face-to-face and virtual meetings, invited to CORA events, and participated in local events to describe and motivate future hub developments. The Digital Hub Guide has been developed from a survey of CORA regions, desk research, and has also incorporated feedback from exchanges with Technology Hubs.

## Outcomes of the pilot

### What outputs have the pilot achieved?

The pilot successfully enabled knowledge exchange, gathering information about what makes a successful hub, the challenges hubs have faced, and related issues. The team developed a digital hub guide "Be Bold. Be Innovative. Be a Digital Hub" along with two e-learning modules about hubs, to inform organisations and individuals across the North Sea Region and further afield about digital hubs and what they could look like. This guidance is hosted on the CORA project web platform at coraproject.eu, where it is free to use and explore. It has been disseminated to regions across the UK and Europe, and picked up by local economic development groups, rural businesses and community organisations.



## Lessons learned

### Co-creating and sharing knowledge

- By including successful, existing digital hubs to this pilot from the outset, the University team aimed to co-create knowledge, identifying new ways of working and creating real world guidance for other organisations and individuals around digital hubs.
- This form of partnership can be replicated across any project or local development initiative and is beneficial to maximise benefits of the pilot in a short space of time.

### Challenges

- Working with existing organisations meant that priorities often conflicted and achieving the outcomes necessary for CORA did not always align with partners' needs or staff resource. Creating appropriate and manageable timescales and outcomes that recognised this was a challenge.

## Remaining pilot activities and future plans

The pilot, as part of CORA, has completed its intended activities. Future plans include working with the Lincolnshire hubs for continued knowledge sharing about a 'hub' as a mechanism for rural development and using the Digital Hub Guide to engage with other organisations about the development of digital hubs. The pilot team also hopes to engage the Lincolnshire Technology Hub practitioners in final CORA events.

