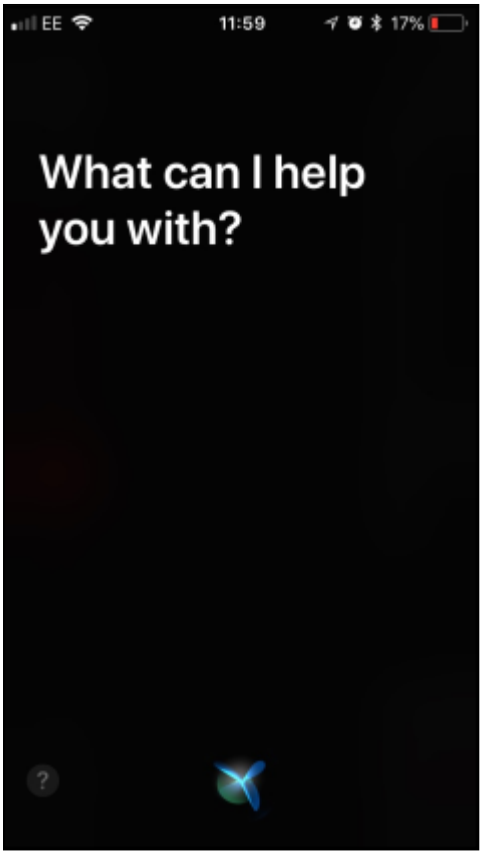
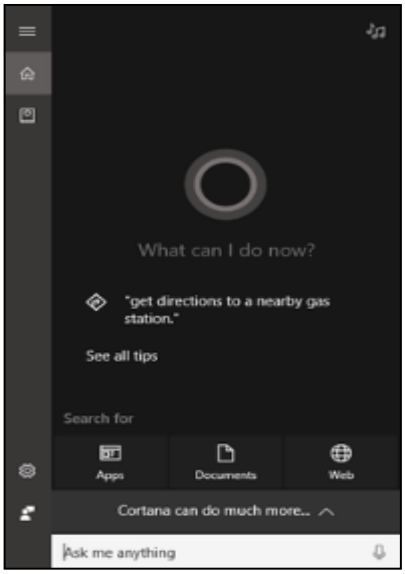
Session Booklet – Virtual Assistants

Virtual assistants are a piece of software that can come pre-loaded on a device or downloaded onto a device. This piece of software reacts to the voice of the user and completes tasks for them. We are going to take a look at some of the popular virtual assistants and ask them to complete tasks for us.

Virtual Assistants

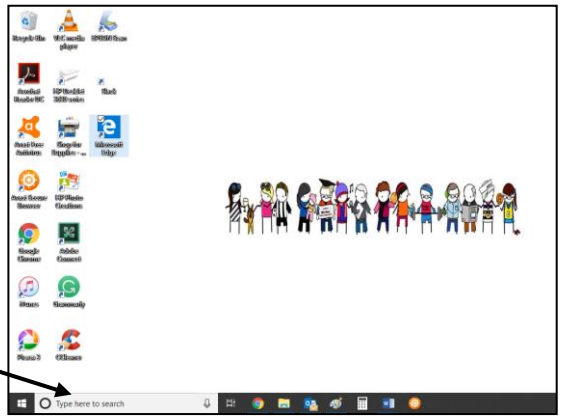
1	We are going to take a look at 5 of the most popular virtual assistants. 1. Siri 2. Cortana 3. Alexa 4. Google Assistant 5. Bixby All 5 of these assistants have a lot in common and feature a lot of the same functionality and capabilities.	
Knowledge check – What's the biggest similarity between the virtual assistants?		
2	The first assistant we are going to look at is Siri. Siri, released in 2011, is part of Apple's operating systems and can be accessed through multiple of Apple's devices and Apple's devices only. Siri adapts to the users' individual language use, searches and preferences and returns answers with individualised results. There are 3 ways you can access Siri on an Apple device. You can either press the Home button, press the Side button, or simply say 'Hey Siri'.	

3	Once you activate Siri, a line appears along the bottom of the screen that moves as you talk. This is Siri listening to your voice. At this point you need to talk loudly and clearly so that Siri can pick out your voice. This is especially important if you are in a public place where Siri may pick up background noise. Siri can perform multiple tasks with both Apple apps and third-party apps. With the new Apple update (iOS12) due in Autumn of 2018, a new shortcut feature will be added within the Siri section of the Settings app. This feature will allow you to get Siri to perform more complex tasks, without having to ask it to perform multiple tasks and will even recommend actions based on your location or what time of day it is.	
Knowledge Check What is a third party app? How do you turn on 'Hey Siri'?		
4	Siri performs well when completing tasks but what separates Siri from the rest of the virtual assistants is its ability to be used on a multitude of Apple devices. Whereas most virtual assistants are only available on newer devices, Siri's compatibility reaches back through the Apple catalogue of devices and has a consistent feel to it regardless of the age of the device in question.	

5	Next, we are going to look at Cortana. Microsoft created Cortana, for use with Windows 10 laptops and tablets, Windows mobiles, Xbox One and even some Apple and Android devices. Cortana can set reminders, recognise natural voice without the requirement of keyboard input, and answer questions using information found by Microsoft's search engine, Bing. Cortana was released in 2014, 3 years after Apple released Siri and is available in 9 different languages.	

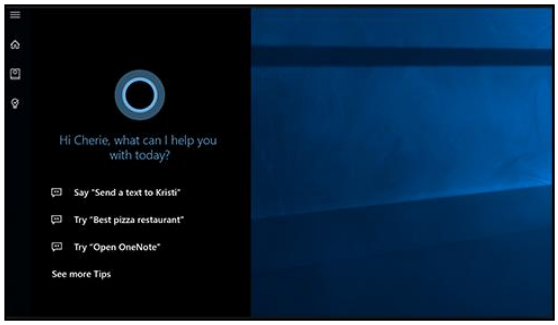
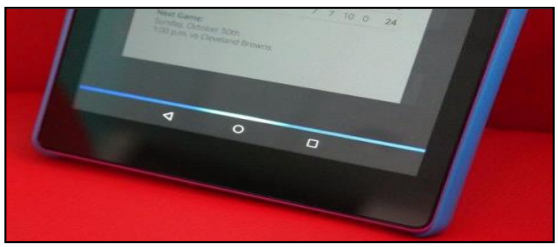
Knowledge Check – What are the 9 languages that Cortana is available in?

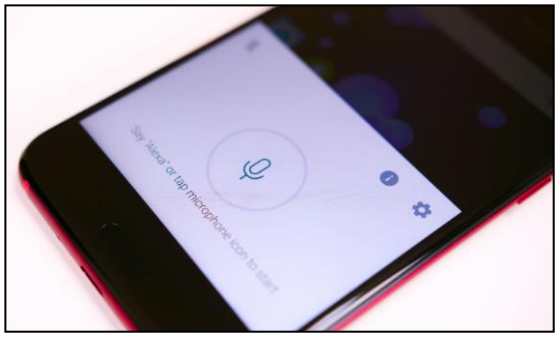
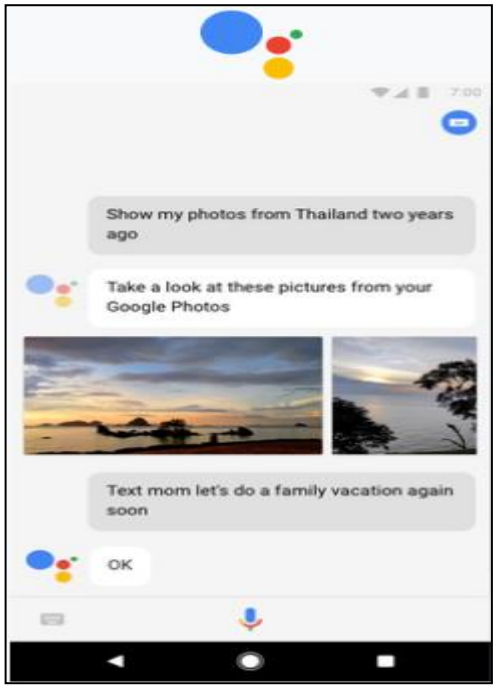
1.	4.	7.
2.	5.	8.
3.	6.	9.

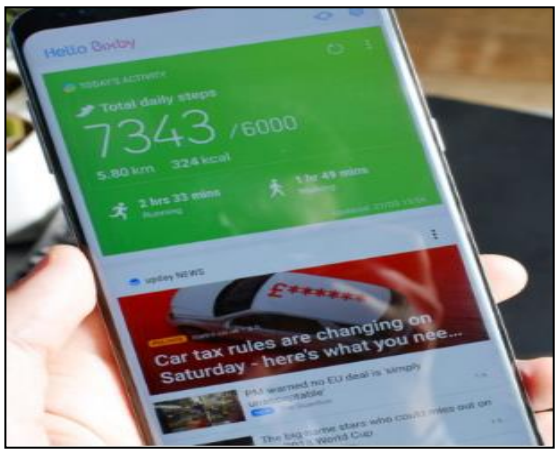
6	To get Cortana to work on your Windows device (smart phone or tablet), you must press the magnifying glass. This then activates Cortana, meaning you can ask it to complete whatever task you need it to. With Windows laptops, Cortana needs to be activated to use with voice search but there is a search bar in the taskbar that runs along the bottom of the screen where you can type in a task you wish for it to complete.	

Knowledge Check – How do you turn on the ability to say 'Hey Cortana' on a windows device?

The Property of Starting Point Community Learning Partnership

7	Cortana's biggest strength lies in that it is available everywhere, including Apple, Android, and a range of Microsoft products. It is available on more devices than any other virtual assistant but where it struggles is with third party apps and more advanced, linked tasks.	
8	The third virtual assistant we are going to look at is Alexa. You may have seen adverts advertising Alexa as part of Amazon's range of smart speakers. If you are interested in learning more about smart speakers, ask a volunteer and they'll be able to help you access the guide. Due to Alexa's success as a smart speaker, Amazon have rolled it out on to some of their mobile devices. Alexa, released in 2014, is capable of various virtual assistant tasks such as controlling music, managing alarms, and viewing shopping lists.	 This is the logo for the Alexa app, should you wish to download it on to a device.
Knowledge Check – What devices is the Alexa virtual assistant available on?		
9	To activate Alexa on your Fire tablet, you need to hold down the Home button until you see a blue line. When this blue line appears, Alexa is ready, and you can give it a command or ask it a question. An area that Alexa performs well in is the ability to perform complex tasks that involve third-party apps.	

10	Amazon's Alexa is the most customizable of the virtual assistants we are looking at but to get the full benefit of it, you need to install various 'skills', which take time to do. It works well with third party apps but it's biggest drawback at the moment is that there aren't a lot of devices that run Alexa.	
11	Google Assistant is the next virtual assistant we are going to look at. Released in 2016, Google Assistant can search the internet, schedule events and alarms, adjust hardware settings on the users' device, and show information from the user's Google account. Google Assistant can maintain a shopping list, allows you to input via keyboard, purchase products and send money. To activate Google Assistant, you press the Home button down and Google Assistant will be activated, and ready for you to give it a command or ask it a question.	
Knowledge Check – What is Google Duplex?		

12	Google Assistant performs well when completing multiple, chained tasks together and has excellent context skills allowing you to get answers to questions even if the command given isn't always the same. The negative with Google Assistant is that most of the fun features such as calling a taxi or ordering a pizza are exclusive to Google Home. For more information on Google Home, ask a volunteer and they can help you access a guide on smart speakers.	
13	The last virtual assistant we are going to look at is Bixby. Bixby was launched by Samsung in 2017. Previously Samsung devices worked best with Google Assistant as Samsung mobile phones and tablet devices use Android, which is powered by Google. Bixby can be used by various Samsung devices including TV's and refrigerators! Bixby, like the other virtual assistants, can be triggered by pressing and holding a particular button and then giving it voice commands.	
14	Bixby completes most tasks when asked and has a real, personal touch to it. It can perform all kinds of tasks that other virtual assistants can't such as rotating images in your gallery, downloading apps, erasing your browser history and a lot more but is only available on a handful of Samsung devices, which the users of may already have Google Assistant installed on.	

www.startpoint.org.uk

Tasks

Below are some tasks for you to complete using the virtual assistant on your device.

- Find out what the weather is like tomorrow in Stockport.
- Find out how long it would take to get from Stockport to Glasgow using public transport.
- As your virtual assistant, how many dollars are in a pound?
- Find out the phone number for Startpoint Coffee Shop, Stockport.
- Find out what 473 multipled by 281 is.
- Ask you virtual assistant to flip a coin. Heads or Tails?
- Find out what planes are overhead.
- Email somebody in your contact list.
- Find out who the Detroit Lions next NFL match is against.
- Ask your virtual assistant to set a timer for in 30 seconds.

The Property of Starting Point Community Learning Partnership