



A blueprint to fix the digital divide

September 2021



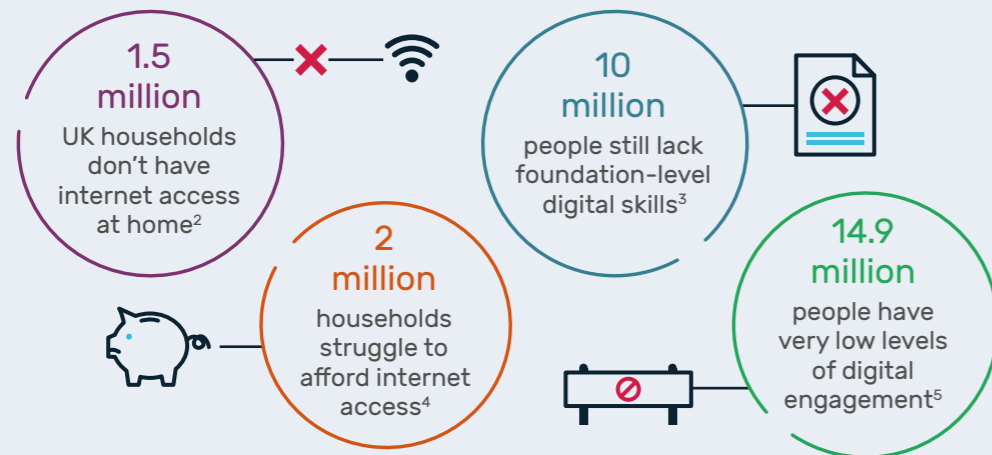
#FixTheDigitalDivide

Let's put digital at the heart of our recovery

- So everyone has better lives through digital.
- So prosperity is evenly spread, levelling up our nation.
- So no-one is left behind in the digital revolution.

In the UK we're world-leaders as a tech powerhouse, but the digital divide holds us back. It is blocking progress on the Government's Ten Tech Priorities for a tech-savvy nation.

This is a fixable problem, so we must and should fix it.



That's why we're calling on this Government to put digital inclusion at the heart of COVID-19 recovery, harness the appetite for change, and take decisive action to fix the digital divide.

A dynamic Digital Strategy for a tech-savvy, digitally-included nation will deliver against these three goals:

- Digital Skills:** So everyone can use the internet for life and work
- Community Support:** So everyone has somewhere local to go for internet help
- Affordable Internet:** So everyone has the everyday internet access they need

Our call to action

To fix the digital divide, we must focus on priority actions.

- ### Digital Skills

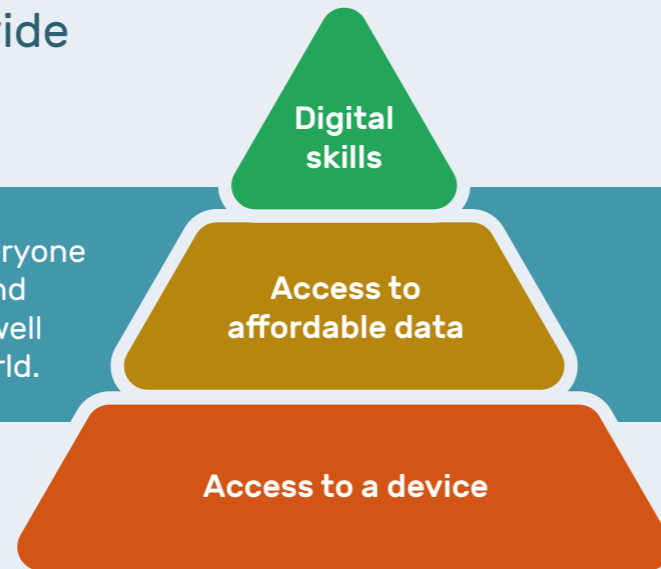
 - So everyone can use the internet for life and work
 - The Government to lead a national plan with clear actions to up-skill the 10 million people¹ who lack the very basic foundation skills needed for our digital world.
 - The Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to lead cross-Government work so digital inclusion is built into all policies and initiatives that support the Levelling Up agenda.
 - HM Treasury to back the Combined Authorities leading the way on digital inclusion, investing in pilots to deliver shared prosperity and recovery.
- ### Community Support

 - So everyone has somewhere local to go for internet help
 - Growing a national network of at least 10,000 trusted places where people can get community help with digital inclusion - reaching into villages, towns and cities, and supporting COVID-19 recovery.
- ### Affordable internet

 - So everyone has the everyday internet access they need
 - As part of its Digital Strategy, the Government to work with telcos and others to drive the actions needed to end data poverty by 2024.

The UK's digital divide

Digital inclusion means everyone can access a device, data and digital skills support to live well - and safely - in a digital world.



This year, the dial has shifted.

Around 1.5 million more people have gone online this year.⁶ For work. For family. For health. One in four adults in England had registered for the NHS App by the end of July 2021.⁷

It is fantastic that - according to Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index - we've reached the levels of high digital engagement in 2021 which we expected to reach in 2025.⁸

6/10 | Six in ten people have high digital engagement (**60%**)

3/10 | Three in ten people have very low digital engagement (**29%**)

Among those who are offline, old age remains the strongest predictor. Low income and low education stand out across all age groups for those who only use the internet in a limited way.⁹

There may have been progress in 2020 and 2021 but there is still a huge problem. And for many people, the implications of being excluded from the digital world are now a lot worse.¹⁰

➤ **The pandemic has deepened the digital divide.**

1. Digital Skills

➤ So everyone can use the internet for life and work

Digital goalposts have shifted. While millions have learnt to do new things online, many are left further behind - lacking the skills to keep up, while technology speeds up.

You may own a smartphone and be able to video call your friends, but not know how to book a health appointment, use mobile banking, or apply for a job online.



Nine in ten businesses say a basic level of digital skills is important for employees¹¹



One in four employees have had digital skills training from their employer.¹²



Two in three people would improve their digital skills if they knew there was support available to help them if they needed it¹³

Regionally, there is a gap of ten percentage points between areas with the highest and lowest proportions of benefit claimants with very low digital engagement.¹⁴

Conservative Metro Mayor Andy Street has pledged a 'Digital Catch Up' programme in the West Midlands to help those who can't use the Internet to learn digital skills.¹⁵

Labour Metro Mayor Andy Burnham has set an ambition for Greater Manchester to help all under-25s, over-75s and disabled people to get online.¹⁶

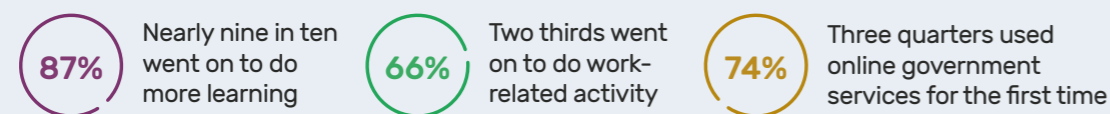
The Government's entitlement for people to get full funding for Essential Digital Skills qualifications is welcome - but it's not enough for a tech-savvy nation. Level 1 qualifications aren't meeting the needs of local employers, while those who stand to benefit most are least likely to engage without first getting informal, community-based help.¹⁷

Building a pipeline into essential digital skills

The 2021 Essential Digital Skills Survey from Lloyds Banking Group shows that 19% - almost 2 in 10 - of all adults cannot carry out the seven most basic tasks online; while 8.7 million employed people (16% of the total adult population) have the Essential Digital Skills for Life but not for Work.¹⁸

Future Digital Inclusion - delivered by Good Things Foundation and community partners, funded by the Department for Education (2014-2021) - shows what we can achieve together, and at scale, to

1.5 million people learnt basic digital skills through Future Digital Inclusion



Discovery work by Good Things Foundation with Combined Authorities, community partners and others is pointing the way ahead. We've co-created an approach to bridge the gap between informal skills support in community settings, and formal courses and qualifications.

Working together we can create a better user journey and build a pipeline to digital skills.

Our call to action

- The Government to lead a national plan with clear actions to up-skill the 10 million people²⁰ who lack the very basic foundation skills needed for our digital world.
- The Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to lead cross-Government work to ensure digital inclusion is built into all policies and initiatives that support the Levelling Up agenda.
- HM Treasury to back the Combined Authorities leading the way on digital inclusion, investing in pilots to deliver shared prosperity and recovery.

2. Community Support

> So everyone has somewhere to go for internet help

With 10 years of experience, we know 'trusted faces in local places' are the key to success in delivering digital inclusion at scale.

"Our network of hyperlocal community partners is vital - the network helps people to get online, improve their digital skills, access devices and data projects, and lead better lives in every community across the UK"

Helen Milner, CEO, Good Things Foundation, May 2021

Not everyone knows where to go for help. Not every community has a place that can meet their needs. According to Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2021, seven times more people now want to be able to access local support with digital skills, compared with 2020.²¹



In 2021, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Loneliness called for a 'connected recovery' and action to close the digital divide, recognising the valuable role technology can play in reducing loneliness.²⁴ Their report backed our call for more Government funding to deliver a 'Great Digital Catch-up' in communities across the country.

Our call to action

- For support to grow a national network of at least 10,000 trusted places where people can get community help with digital inclusion - reaching into villages, towns and cities, and supporting COVID-19 recovery.

3. Affordable Internet

➤ So everyone has the everyday access they need

Affordable internet access is essential for adults of all ages - for finding and securing a job, for applying for benefits, for working from home, for health and wellbeing, and for being connected to others.

It's vital that the needs of low income and vulnerable adults experiencing data poverty are not forgotten.



Households with the lowest incomes spend nearly four times more out of their disposable income on fixed broadband, compared to average households.²⁸ Ofcom estimates that at least 100,000 households say cost is why they are unlikely to gain internet access in the next year; this could be as high as 300,000 households.²⁹ Ofcom research found 4% of families with school-age children relied solely on mobile access in the pandemic.³⁰

In 2020, we proposed a Data Poverty Lab to co-create sustainable solutions. With support from Nominet, the Lab is now live. Telco and tech partners have stepped up, with innovative partnerships and improved social tariffs. A world-first National Databank now exists, piloted by Good Things Foundation with strong support from industry.

Our call to action

- As part of its Digital Strategy, the Government to work with telcos and others to drive the actions needed to end data poverty by 2024.

It's time for leadership

➤ Let's put digital inclusion at the heart of our recovery

This year, we've seen **communities, charities and businesses** come together with emergency solutions for digital exclusion for families and those at most risk.

We've seen the dedicated work of **community partners in our national network** as they help people get online and experience the benefits.

We've seen leaders in **Combined Authorities** and at every level of devolved government³¹ recognise the importance of digital inclusion to recovery and renewal.

We've seen how important technology is in our lives.

We look to the Government to lead the way.

We stand ready to help.

"There are a small but significant amount of people in our community who are unable to afford to be online. All I want is for us to emerge from this with the possibility for everybody to have the possibilities that digital offers up."

Nicola Wallace-Dean, StartingPoint, Stockport

"At the beginning of the pandemic, we supported a family who lost their father through Covid. They had no device and no access to the internet. We supported them with a device and data so they could say farewell to their father as they watched the funeral service online. That's when we started realising this is a serious problem."

Salim Shaikh, Smartlyte, Birmingham

Extending a Digital Lifeline

Good Things Foundation and partners have delivered over 21,000 devices, data and digital skills support through Everyone Connected and related projects.

One of these - Digital Lifeline - was funded by DCMS as part of the Government's response to the negative impacts of COVID-19 on people with learning disabilities in England. Good Things Foundation led a cross-sector collaboration of 150 partners, including AbilityNet and Learning Disability England, to help 5,500 people with learning disabilities in four months.

Even within a few weeks of receiving support, nine in ten people said their lives had already got better in some way.²⁵ Maisie was one of those supported. With the support from Digital Lifeline and a trusted community partner, Café Leep in Leeds, Maisie grew her skills, confidence, applied for - and got - a job. In Maisie's words: "Things are getting better and I'm excited for the future."



Endnotes

- 1 Lloyds Bank UK Essential Digital Skills 2021
- 2 Ofcom 2021 - Adults' Media Use and Attitudes
- 3 Lloyds Bank UK Essential Digital Skills 2021
- 4 Ofcom 2021 - Affordability of Communications Services
- 5 Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2021
- 6 Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2021
- 7 NHSX data: 11.6 million people in England, 28 July 2021
- 8 Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2021
- 9 Yates 2021, Ofcom Adults' Media Use 2020/21, Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2021
- 10 Ofcom Adults' Media Use 2020/21
- 11 World Skills UK (2021) - Disconnected: Exploring the digital skills gap (92%)
- 12 FutureDotNow (2021), Unlocking the essential digital skills opportunity (23%)
- 13 Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2021 (67%)
- 14 Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2021
- 15 West Midlands Combined Authority (2021)
- 16 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2021)
- 17 Good Things Foundation, Digital Inclusion: A Roadmap for Combined Authorities
- 18 Lloyds Bank UK Essential Digital Skills 2021
- 19 Good Things Foundation (2019), Future Digital Inclusion. Final programme report will be published later in 2021.
- 20 Lloyds Bank UK Essential Digital Skills 2021
- 21 Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2021 (35% in 2021)
- 22 Research by Ipsos MORI for Good Things Foundation using I:Omnibus, 28.08.20-31.08.20 (75%)
- 23 Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2021
- 24 APPG on Loneliness 2021, A connected recovery
- 25 Digital Lifeline Fund Interim Report
- 26 Research by Ipsos MORI for Good Things Foundation using I:Omnibus, 28.08.20-31.08.20
- 27 Ofcom 2021 - Affordability of communications services
- 28 Ofcom 2021 - Affordability of communications services
- 29 Ofcom 2021 - Affordability of communications services
- 30 Ofcom Children's Media Use 2020/21
- 31 For example: GMCA (2021), WMCA (2021), Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales (2021), Digital Strategy for Wales (2021), Scottish Government (2021)

About Good Things Foundation

It's never been more important to be online - but 10 million people in the UK lack the most basic digital skills.

We want to fix the digital divide - for good.

Good Things Foundation is a leading digital inclusion charity working in the UK, Australia and beyond.

We work in cities, towns and communities to help people thrive in a digital world.

For more information, contact:

Helen Milner OBE,
Group Chief Executive
helen.milner@goodthingsfoundation.org

Adam Micklethwaite,
Director of Partnerships and Fundraising
adam.mickelthwaite@goodthingsfoundation.org

Dr. Emma Stone,
Director of Evidence and Engagement
emma.stone@goodthingsfoundation.org

Follow us on Twitter:
[@goodthingsfdn](https://twitter.com/goodthingsfdn)

