



Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

Digital Inclusion Action Plan First Steps



Digital Inclusion Action Plan – First Steps

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology
by Command of His Majesty

February 2025

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Joint Ministerial Foreword

Digital technologies are already woven into the fabric of our society. The internet age has left no part of our lives untouched: from the schools where our children are taught, to the jobs we do and the ways we choose to spend our free time. As scientific progress continues apace in the decades to come, its influence will be felt ever more profoundly. Access to technology and the skills to use it effectively will, in turn, become an ever more powerful factor in shaping the life chances of our citizens.

We have already lost a decade to delay and indecision. Even as millions have seized the opportunities that the online world offers, millions more have been left behind. Some are forced to ration their data. Others can only access the internet at trusted community hubs or with the help of friends and family, because they lack trust and confidence or struggle to obtain and maintain digital skills in a rapidly changing world.

Digital exclusion can take many forms. Whether you lack access to a stable and affordable internet connection, the right sort of device, or the skills needed to complete tasks confidently and safely online, the consequences can be devastating. It is harder to search for and apply for jobs. Goods and services are more expensive if you cannot access online deals. Accessing essential services takes longer.

We want to use technology to grow the economy, reform our public services and make life better for every citizen. That means creating a future where everyone can safely access and use digital products and services that could make their lives happier, healthier and easier. A future where it is easier to connect with family and friends, engage with public services, or find employment in the industries of tomorrow, but where everyone can continue to access offline support if they need it.

There is a lot of work to do. However, we can look to achievements at the local level – in our public libraries and community centres – for inspiration. The National Data Bank has supported the distribution of 125,000 data packages to people to access free mobile data. Too often, though, projects like these have gone unrecognized or unsupported by the state. Today, that changes.

In this document, we set out Our First Actions, including our definition of digital inclusion and the principles which will guide our work to address it.

- We will partner with the Digital Poverty Alliance to pilot a groundbreaking multi-department device donation scheme to provide re-purposed government laptops to those that need them.
- We will launch a new Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund to support and expand local community initiatives to get people online.
- Our call for evidence will allow us to gather views from those who are delivering vital services and working directly with digitally excluded people.
- Finally, to monitor our progress, we are creating a Digital Inclusion Action Committee, an expert advisory group made up of industry, charities, local authorities and academics.

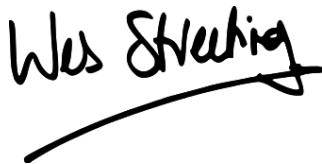
The Government Digital Service that I created to drive forward far-reaching digital reform of our public services will have a crucial role to play here.

I believe that our digital future belongs to everyone, no matter which of our nations and regions they are from, and regardless of their age, ethnicity, ability or social class. If we are to use technology to create a fairer, more prosperous country, then everyone must be able to participate in our society and economy.

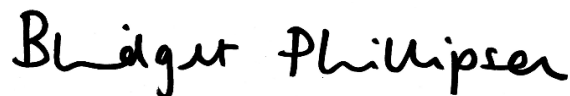
For too long, governments have seen digital inclusion as a challenge that was simply too difficult to take on. But these are precisely the problems which we believe a mission-led government can – and must – solve. This document marks the first step of a new, ambitious approach to tackling digital exclusion. By working together with the private sector and civil society, we will deliver the long term, systemic change that British people deserve.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter Kyle". The signature is stylized with a large initial 'P' and a long, sweeping underline.

The Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP, **Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wes Streeting". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent underline.

The Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP, **Secretary of State for Health and Social Care**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bridget Phillipson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent underline.

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, **Secretary of State for Education**

Handwritten signature of Liz Kendall in cursive script.

The Rt Hon Liz Kendall MP, **Secretary of State for Work and Pensions**

Handwritten signature of Angela Rayner in cursive script.

The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP, **Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government**

Executive Summary

We know that digital exclusion today in the UK is a significant challenge. Lloyds estimates that 1.6 million people in the UK currently are living offline and around a quarter of the UK population have the lowest level of digital capability, meaning they are likely to struggle to use online services.¹ Those who cannot use digital technologies are likely to have worse health outcomes, face higher costs when shopping for everyday items, and are over five times more likely to be unemployed. Digital inclusion is a priority for this government. It means ensuring everyone has the access, skills, support and confidence to engage in our modern digital society and economy, whatever their circumstances.

Our first five actions set out in this publication will kickstart our drive to improve digital inclusion. In addition, the government is taking forward leadership actions, including the establishment of a Digital Inclusion and Skills Unit within government, establishing a ministerial group and an expert action committee and leveraging an expert exchange programme to bring in external expertise. We are also collaborating with industry, with some already making specific pledges of support.

Our key principles set out how we will address digital exclusion, which is complex and cross-cutting, and needs an evidence-based and collaborative approach from government. These principles will help us identify what works and break down silos within government, deliver interventions in partnership with, and learn lessons from, local authorities and others, and understand best practice internationally. This is a shared endeavour across all parts of the UK. There is a lot we can learn from action being taken by the Devolved Governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on digital inclusion, and we are keen to ensure that our combined efforts deliver the best we can for people who are, or may become, digitally excluded, wherever they live.

The four areas of focus for our framework are to open up opportunities through skills, tackle data and device poverty, break down barriers to digital services, and build confidence. Working in partnership is essential to have the transformative impact where everyone has the access, skills, and confidence to participate in the UK's digital society. That is why we are launching a Call for Evidence, which welcomes views from stakeholders, local and combined authorities, businesses, charities, community groups, and individuals on the contents of this publication and where we should go next. This is just the start of the Government's renewed, ambitious approach to tackling digital exclusion.

¹ [Lloyds Consumer Digital Index \(2024\)](#)

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Digital technology has the potential to transform modern society, creating equal opportunities for everyone to access information, create connections, and live healthy and fulfilled lives. However, millions of people in the UK are currently held back from reaching their potential as they do not have essential access to connectivity, digital technology or the skills to use it effectively. Lloyds estimate that 1.6 million people in the UK are living offline² and around 23% of the UK population may struggle to interact with online services.³ Those who cannot use digital technologies are likely to have fewer job opportunities,⁴ pay more for certain transactions,⁵ have worse health outcomes,⁶ and find it more difficult to manage their finances.⁷

Given the rapid pace of technological change and developments in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), we need to act now to address the barriers to digital inclusion so that everyone can feel the benefits of technology in their everyday lives. These first actions are the UK government's initial steps towards achieving this.

In 2014, the previous Government published a Digital Inclusion Strategy, but progress against it was limited. Despite positive individual projects, such as the Digital Lifeline Fund,⁸ and the development of more accessible platforms for government services like GOV.UK, there has been a lack of a coordinated effort from the UK government over the past decade. This has meant that millions of people cannot safely access the digital world, and vital public and private services which exist in this space. They are now at risk of being left behind. People who are digitally excluded need locally delivered, highly tailored and targeted interventions which meet their individual needs. Government must ensure the services it delivers are personalised, easy to use and save time for all users. We cannot delay government action any longer: these are our initial steps in the government's commitment to digital inclusion.

We set out the **first five actions** that the government will take in 2025 to improve digital inclusion. We want to build on the strength of the local support that is available across the UK and put the focus back where it is needed, in our communities. We cannot

² [Lloyds Consumer Digital Index \(2024\)](#)

³ [Lloyds Consumer Digital Index \(2024\)](#)

⁴ In 2016, it was predicted that by 2036, 90% of all jobs will require some element of digital skills, [Digital Skills Policy Paper](#), 2023

⁵ Research shows that consumers could pay 25 per cent more for an illustrative series of transactions, including for insurance, phone contracts, and food, [Centre for Social Justice Left Out report](#), 2023

⁶ Digital exclusion can compound health inequalities, including by exacerbating challenges with access to healthcare, with 30% of people who are offline saying they feel the NHS is one of the most difficult organisations to interact with, [NHS England Inclusive Digital Healthcare: A framework for NHS action on digital inclusion](#), 2023

⁷ Lloyds estimates that only 6.7% of those with the lowest digital capability are likely to engage with their finances digitally, vs 100% of those with the highest capability, [Lloyds Consumer Digital Index \(2024\)](#) p.9

⁸ [Digital Lifeline Fund: Evaluation Summary, 2022](#)

deliver the change we need without partnership from industry and we have therefore secured **pledges from industry partners** also outlined in this document.

Recognising the longer-term leadership role the government has, we also set out **leadership actions** that we are committing to, which will continue to drive more ambitious work over the course of the next parliament.

The first five actions that we will deliver in 2025 will kickstart our ambition to improve digital inclusion. These are our immediate and urgent steps to boost impactful local support, provide more laptops to people that need them and support employers to upskill their workforce.

Government First Five Actions	
Over the next year, government will...	
1	Launch an ambitious Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund to support local initiatives that increase digital participation. We will launch this fund in the spring and intend to deliver in partnership with local leaders and devolved governments.
2	Enhance support for the framework that helps people and businesses get the essential skills they need to get online safely and with confidence.
3	Pilot a proof-of-concept multi-department device donation scheme with the Digital Poverty Alliance to provide re-purposed government laptops to those that need them.
4	Make government digital services easier to use with a renewed focus on digital inclusion, for example by improving the whole experience for users and increasing the number of services that use GOV.UK One Login.
5	Measure what works on digital inclusion, identify where the need is greatest, and establish the economic and social value of upskilling adults with digital skills.

The challenge of digital exclusion is not one for government alone. Everyone has a role to play in realising a shared vision for a digitally inclusive UK; from central government to local authorities, the private sector and charities, local communities and the third sector. We see partnership as an essential foundation of how we tackle this challenge. That is why we have worked with these partners in the development of this action plan, and we will keep doing so to realise the shared vision.

Key industry partners are already taking steps in parallel with, and in support of, this action plan and the shared vision. The government will keep working with the private sector and welcomes further action – new and ongoing – from partners far and wide. The commitments that have been secured in this Action Plan will support our journey towards ensuring everyone has the access, skills, and confidence to participate in the UK’s digital society.

Industry Pledges	
Google	Google will develop a new partnership with DSIT to deliver intensive digital skills training to support adults with low digital skills, helping them succeed in the modern work environment.
CityFibre	CityFibre has committed to installing 170 connections to 170 premises in Norfolk, Suffolk, Leicestershire, Kent, East and West Sussex, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire and surrounding areas by 2030. As part of this, these premises - including residential and community hubs - will be given their first 6-month broadband package for free.
Virgin Media O2	Virgin Media O2 has already connected over 350,000 digitally excluded people. It is committing to increasing this to 1 million people by the end of 2025, through expanded provision of data and devices to those that need it.
Vodafone	Vodafone will help 1 million people cross the digital divide in 2025 through donating connectivity and technology, affordable services, and upskilling communities. This includes a commitment to maintain their social tariff product offerings. To support closing the digital infrastructure divide, Vodafone will continue to invest in rolling out their network to the whole of the UK.
WightFibre	WightFibre commits to providing free or discounted broadband to community groups and charities, including community centres, digital hubs and village halls, on the Isle of Wight. These community organisations will promote that they have free Wi-Fi available on-site for public use.
Good Things Foundation, Vodafone and Deloitte	Good Things Foundation, Vodafone, and Deloitte are working together with the Government to lead the development of a charter for responsible device donation. This will establish common principles for businesses and organisations to commit to: increasing the number of devices donated to digitally excluded people; reducing electronic waste; and promoting circularity.
BT	<p>Connectivity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · BT has already connected over 300,000 digitally excluded households through its social tariffs, which also include a lower £15 tariff for 'zero income' households, and will continue to offer these tariffs to millions of people on Universal Credit who are eligible for them. <p>Community WiFi:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · BT Group has the country's largest public WiFi network, with some 5.5m EE and BT hub locations (in households and commercial premises) available for eligible customers to connect to. BT and EE have agreed to pilot two new approaches to extend the use of this network to a much larger number of digitally excluded households: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. by providing log-ins for free WiFi to eligible families through charity and public sector partnerships 2. by providing community WiFi services, free at the point of use, at a much larger number of libraries and community centres,

	<p>including working with government to identify and prioritise connections to 500 community hubs in deprived areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · To succeed, this initiative will need support from local partners, which the pilot phase of the project will seek to ensure. <p>Skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · BT commits to providing digital training to thousands of older people and children in 2025, through their partnership with AbilityNet and their Work Ready programme. · BT commits to providing 500 adults with disabilities with digital devices, data and support in 2025, through their partnership with Keyring.
Openreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Openreach is building ultrafast ultra-reliable Full Fibre broadband to 25 million premises by December 2026 and ultimately aiming to reach as many as 30 million by 2030 if the right investment conditions exist. · As we build, we'll work with the government to upgrade connectivity to at least 500 community hubs in deprived areas, helping people across the country to get online, with the majority delivered by the end of 2026. We'll also work with our communications provider customers to offer the services these sites need, as soon as our network's been built.
Sky	<p>Through Sky Up - Sky's social impact programme – Sky will commit to supporting 70 Sky Up Hubs across the UK help people bridge the digital divide by providing reliable internet connections, tech equipment and digital training in partnership with local charities in 2025.</p>
Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · To support those facing digital exclusion, Three will donate over 2 million GB of data to an estimated 80,000 people by 2026. · To help bridge the digital divide, Three's Discovery digital-skills training programme seeks to reach over 270,000 people by 2030. · Through the Reconnected scheme, Three aims to save around 30,000 unused devices to help disadvantaged people get connected.

We are a mission-driven government and digital inclusion is foundational to deliver our ambitions. We will embed digital inclusion within all five Missions, underpinned by a new ministerial group on digital inclusion. This group will have membership from across government departments, including the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Department for Education (DfE), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), His Majesty's Treasury (HMT) and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). It will meet quarterly to ensure digital inclusion is at the heart of everything government does. We will also create a Digital Inclusion Action Committee; an expert advisory group designed to scrutinise, steer and help determine the government's approach to digital inclusion.

Leadership Actions

Over the next year, government will...

1	Set up a new Digital Inclusion and Skills Unit that will drive work across Government, including through our Missions to tackle digital inclusion.
2	Establish a ministerial group on digital inclusion within three months. The group will meet on a quarterly basis, and feed into Mission Boards.
3	Establish the Digital Inclusion Action Committee. This will be an expert committee, made up of national and local experts in tackling digital exclusion. Members will be from industry, the third sector, local authorities and academics. The Digital Inclusion Action Committee's role will be to scrutinise, steer and help determine the government's approach to digital inclusion.
4	Leverage the Expert Exchange Programme to bring external expertise, for example from Local Authorities, into DSIT to help shape our approach on digital inclusion.

These actions are just the beginning. We recognise that long-term, systemic change is needed to fully address the scale of the issue. That is why we have also accompanied these first actions with a call for evidence. Chapter 5 sets out our focus areas for medium and long-term proposals to support digital inclusion and we are inviting views on what more government should do to address digital exclusion. We will work towards the ambition for everyone to have the access, skills and confidence to participate in, and benefit from, a modern digital society and economy. Our focus areas are:

1. Opening up opportunities through skills,
2. Tackling data and device poverty,
3. Breaking down barriers to digital services; and
4. Building confidence and supporting local delivery

There is no silver bullet, and government cannot achieve this alone. By taking first actions and setting out focus areas, we will work towards our vision that, everyone, regardless of age, ethnicity, ability and social class, and across all regions and nations of our economy, has the access, skills and confidence to participate in, and benefit from, a modern digital society and economy. This work will be supported by the new Government Digital Service, which has already brought together the key parts of government working on digital transformation of public services led by DSIT.

Chapter 2 - Why is Digital Inclusion important?

Modern society is increasingly technology-driven, with digital technologies progressively used to shape and enable our lives. The use of technology has huge potential to be a great equaliser in a digital society. For these benefits and opportunities to be realised, everyone must be able to navigate this digital world in a safe and secure way. In 2023, 97% of adults in the UK – around 50 million people – were online,⁹ with 88% of people reporting that they use the internet several times or once a day.¹⁰

However, not everyone has the means or motivation to access the online world, and many lack the skills and confidence to take full advantage of the opportunities it presents. Being digitally excluded can have a significantly negative impact on an individual's life. The gap between those online and offline perpetuates existing social and economic inequalities, holding back efforts to create a society where everyone can thrive and reach their full potential.

More and more essential services are offered online, like healthcare, education, banking and shopping. In 2023, the Centre for Social Justice estimated that on average, consumers that are not online could pay 25% more for things like home insurance, train travel and food than consumers who are online.¹¹ They also found that digitally excluded people of working age are significantly more likely to be unemployed (22.1% against the national average of 3.8%).¹²

Being online can be a predominantly positive experience and improve quality of life. It can provide access to entertainment, education, up to date news and the means to participate in democratic debate. Online communication has become an integral part of life for many people, and it has the potential to facilitate vital connections where loneliness might otherwise prevail, reducing levels of isolation and connecting communities.

Digital inclusion also has the potential to drive growth in our economy by enhancing job opportunities, increasing earning potential, and driving productivity and efficiency.¹³ The Good Things Foundation estimate a total benefit of almost £9.48 for every £1 invested in training persons to become more digitally able.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the Digital Poverty Alliance has estimated that we could see a £17 billion increase in yearly earnings thanks to people gaining essential digital skills.¹⁵ By ensuring everyone has

⁹ [Lloyds Digital Consumer Index](#) (2024) (Only 3% are offline)

¹⁰ [Lloyds Digital Consumer Index](#) (2023) – No updated figure in 2024 Lloyds Digital Consumer Index

¹¹ Centre for Social Justice - Left Out (2023): [How to tackle digital exclusion and reduce the poverty premium](#)

¹² Centre for Social Justice - Left Out (2023): [How to tackle digital exclusion and reduce the poverty premium](#) (p.5)

¹³ [Digital Poverty Alliance, A Socio-Economic Analysis of the Implications of Digital Poverty in the UK, 2023](#)

¹⁴ Good Things Foundation (2022) – [The Economic Impact of digital inclusion in the UK](#)

¹⁵ [Digital Poverty Alliance, A Socio-Economic Analysis of the Implications of Digital Poverty in the UK, 2023](#)

equal access to the digital world, we will drive growth in the UK economy and for the individual.

DSIT is leading efforts to transform public services as the centre for digital expertise and delivery in government. We know that to do this, we need to bring everyone on the journey with us. This includes providing rural communities with internet access¹⁶ and ensuring that technologies are safely developed and deployed across the country.

Driving digital inclusion can be beneficial not only for society, but also for the planet. Device donation schemes, like those run by the Good Things Foundation, Business2Schools and Recycle Your Electricals, keep devices out of landfill and put them in the hands of those who need them. Green Alliance has estimated that the UK is the second worst in the world for generating e-waste¹⁷ with 880 million unused items sitting in “drawers of doom” some of which (e.g. computers, laptops and mobile phones) could be donated through digital inclusion schemes.¹⁸ By amplifying and scaling-up device donation schemes we will support government’s ambitions to create a more environmentally friendly and circular economy.

Alongside the strong positives of the internet, there is a broad range of harms that can arise from being online that have real life consequences. It is critical that individuals are educated and empowered to make informed and safe decisions online. Making sure individuals can use digital technologies safely requires a broad toolkit.

The Online Safety Act was passed in October 2023 and gives social media platforms and search services new duties to protect their users from harm. This includes targeted media literacy duties on Ofcom to help the public assess the reliability, accuracy and authenticity of content found on regulated services. We are working closely with Ofcom to ensure that the Act is implemented as quickly as possible, with protections for illegal content coming into effect in spring 2025, and measures to protect children from harmful or age-inappropriate content following in summer 2025.

The government has also established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review. The review will seek to deliver an excellent foundation in the core subjects of reading, writing and maths, and a broader curriculum that readies young people for life and work, and reflects the diversities of our society. It will consider the key digital skills needed for future life and the critical thinking skills needed to ensure children are resilient to misinformation and extremist content online.

Finally, there are people who will continue to struggle to, or choose not to, be online. We must ensure that there is always a route for people to seek support using digital services and interact with government through alternative pathways where needed.

¹⁶ [Peter Kyle’s speech at the 2024 Farnborough International Air Show](#)

¹⁷ [Great Lakes Electronics Corporation ‘What is E-waste? Definition and Why It’s Important’ 2024](#) – This link provides a definition of e-waste, and a list of items that are included in e-waste statistics

¹⁸ Material Focus, [UK Electrical Waste: Challenges & Opportunities 2023](#)

Chapter 3 - Defining and Measuring Digital Inclusion

There is no universal definition for digital inclusion and no agreed way to measure it. Individual countries, businesses, charities, and local authorities use different metrics and definitions to assess the impact of their work.

The government has, through research and engagement with local authorities, devolved governments, expert academics and charities, developed a definition of digital inclusion. Having an agreed definition will provide a common language and assist in consistently measuring the success of policies and programmes.

Government's definition of digital inclusion

Digital inclusion means 'ensuring that everyone has the access, skills, support and confidence to participate in and benefit from our modern digital society, whatever their circumstances'. There are four priority focus areas that need to be addressed to achieve this:

- **Opening up opportunities through skills** which means developing the necessary digital skills, and having access to the right training and support to meet people's changing needs.
- **Tackling data and device poverty** by ensuring access to sufficient, affordable and reliable internet connectivity and devices that are suitable for people's lives.
- **Breaking down barriers to digital services** with accessible digital services that are easy to use and save people time and / or money, with appropriate and well supported alternative pathways for those that need them; and
- **Building confidence and supporting local delivery** with an understanding of how being online can benefit you; trust that necessary protections for privacy and security are in place; and the ability to find support when you need help, including at a local (offline) level.

What this means

Opening up opportunities through skills

People need to have the necessary training and support to develop the essential digital skills and media literacy skills to live, work and participate in the modern world. It means they can independently perform the tasks in the Essential Digital Skills Framework, such as communicating online and problem solving.

Tackling data and device poverty

Sufficient affordable connectivity means having access to an internet speed and data allowance sufficient for essential online activity each month. For example, applying for jobs, making appointments with your GP or maintaining contact with friends and family.

Sufficient affordable access to devices means that people have regular access to a smartphone and desktop, laptop, or tablet that allows completion of all critical online activity. For example, applying for jobs or managing household finances or essentials.

Breaking down barriers to digital services

Accessible public digital services means that individuals have access to essential digital services and can complete the necessary tasks such as managing health and National Health Service (NHS) appointments, renewing car tax or applying for a passport. This should be done in a way which meets the expectations of the user and provides instructions in Plain English. This should be inclusive of users who use assistive technologies and require access to alternative options such as over the phone or in-person support if required.

Building confidence and supporting local delivery

Having the confidence to be online means understanding what benefits can be gained from the internet and digital services and having the motivation to get online. It means that people know how and where they can find support when they need it (including offline support in their local community).

It also means individuals have trust that their safety and security is protected online, including understanding their rights and protections in relation to content they see online.

Who is digitally excluded?

We have identified five broad demographic groups who are more likely to be digitally excluded, and the biggest challenges they face. Often, people will fall into more than one of these groups and will face more than one barrier to digital inclusion.

Groups more likely to be digitally excluded	
Low Income Households	More likely to struggle to afford broadband and data. ¹⁹
Older People	Less likely to use the internet. ²⁰
Disabled People	More likely to be impacted by the digital skills gap ²¹ and struggle with accessibility. ²²
People experiencing unemployment and seeking work	More likely to be unable to afford broadband, data and devices. ²³
Young People (including those not in education, employment or training)	Most likely to perceive a lack of digital skills as a barrier to future work. ²⁴

Digital exclusion is highly intersectional, and individuals may fit into multiple groups. It is often compounded by other indicators of deprivation. Conversely, improving digital inclusion has the potential to open opportunities for, and have benefits beyond the direct scope of the digital inclusion initiative. For example, a disabled older person provided with a laptop and the skills to manage health appointments online, may also be able to keep in touch with family members more easily, helping reduce the impacts of loneliness and feelings of isolation.

Measuring digital inclusion

The evidence base on digital inclusion in the UK is significant but fragmented. While this evidence is instrumental in understanding the scale of the challenge, we face challenges:

- Digitally excluded people are hard to reach as large-scale research is often conducted via digital means (e.g. online surveys).
- There is a lack of evidence on the correlation between digital exclusion and inequalities, such as health, educational attainment and social mobility.
- Most studies do not provide long-term analysis on digital inclusion, and many studies do not provide demographic breakdowns. This means that most of the current evidence is provided at a single point in time without accounting for a rapidly changing digital landscape.

¹⁹ [Ofcom Affordability Tracker](#), October 2024 found that households in receipt of benefits are more likely to report affordability issues

²⁰ [DCMS Participation Survey 2022-2023](#)

²¹ [The Lloyds Consumer Digital Index 2024](#) reported that only 76% of people with an impairment had the foundation level for digital skills, whereas for those without an impairment, this figure was 91%.

²² [WebAim Million 2024](#) found 95.9% of global homepages do not comply with internationally recognised accessibility standards

²³ Digital Poverty Alliance estimate that 47% and 55% of unemployed and retired individuals are in digital poverty compared to 24% of the employed, [Digital Poverty Alliance, A Socio-Economic Analysis of the Implications of Digital Poverty in the UK](#), 2023

²⁴ [The King's Trust, 'Decoding the Digital Skills Gap'](#) August 2024

- Metrics from publicly available reports are produced by several different organisations and often cannot be compared, as methodologies and sampling sizes vary.

The complex nature of digital exclusion, and the different barriers that people face, means that understanding the underlying drivers of digital exclusion and designing effective interventions will be a key challenge. This is why one of our first five priority actions is to develop a robust suite of headline indicators on digital inclusion.

Case Study: The Digital Exclusion Risk Index (DERI) Tool

The award-winning DERI tool was started in Salford before being developed further by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.²⁵ The tool is a data set tool that visualises the risk or likelihood of digital exclusion in England and Wales.

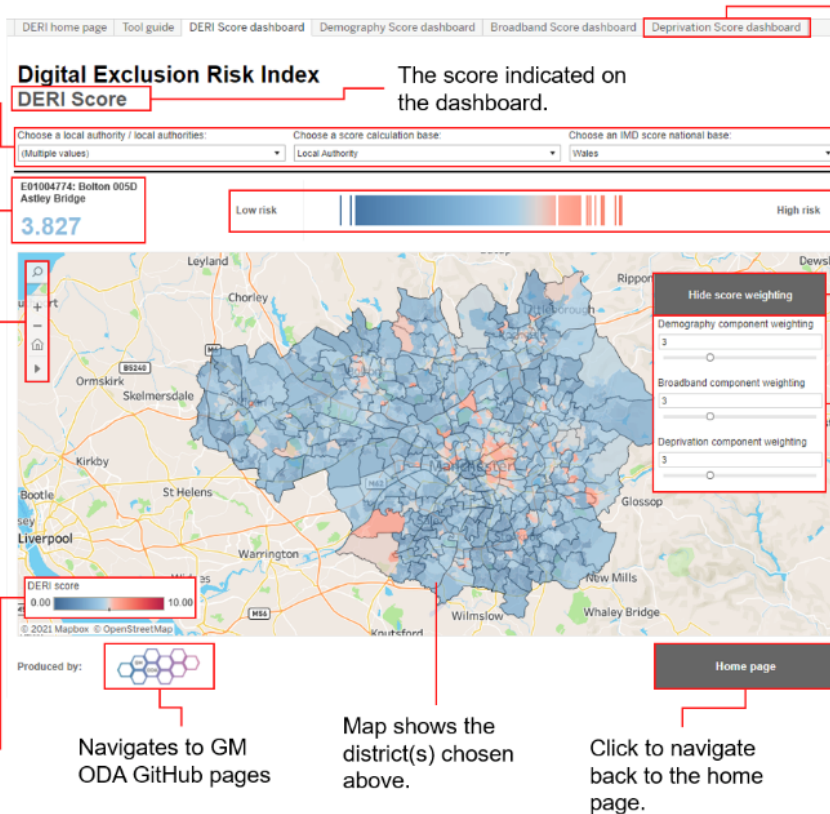
The tool is open source and brings together a broad set of indicators across three components that are weighted and calculated to give an overall ‘DERI’ score that measures the likelihood of digital exclusion risk by local council area. The three components are: demography indicators; deprivation indicators; and broadband connectivity

Choose district(s), score calculation base, and IMD methodology from drop down boxes.

Identifies the name and score of each LSOA as you hover over or click on the map or bar.

Tools to navigate the map view.

Colour scale for the score from 0 to 10.



Tabs to navigate to other pages of the dashboard.

Identifies where each LSOA in the district lies on a scale of 0 – 10. Click or hover over the bar for more details.

Click to show/hide the option to amend weightings.

Choose the weightings to apply to each component, from 0 to 10.

Navigates to GM ODA GitHub pages

Map shows the district(s) chosen above.

Click to navigate back to the home page.

The DERI tool has been further adopted and adapted by local authorities such as Essex County and Liverpool City Region, to help identify where the risk of digital exclusion is at its highest and guide decisions about where interventions should be focused, for example the development of digital inclusion support hubs or bespoke funding, should be prioritised. The Trust for London used the DERI tool to assess wider poverty and deprivation for London.²⁶

²⁵ [DERI Tool](#)

²⁶ Trust for London, [Digital Exclusion Risk Index](#)

Chapter 4 - Our Approach and Guiding Principles

The complex and intersectional nature of digital exclusion requires government to be evidence-based and collaborative, and to learn the lessons from what already works. We have therefore identified key principles which will guide our approach to addressing digital exclusion:

1. Identifying what works and designing evidence-based interventions
2. A cross-government approach: breaking down silos
3. Delivering in partnership with local authorities, national and devolved governments, and private and third sectors
4. Supporting locally designed and delivered interventions
5. Understanding international best practice and cooperating with international partners.

1. Identifying what works and designing evidence-based interventions

Evidence should inform all stages of policymaking to support digitally excluded people and promote digital inclusion. This includes:

- **Understanding the scale of the challenge and opportunities.** We will review the evidence base, identify gaps and engage with experts. We will make best use of existing evidence and look to develop new indicators and metrics where data isn't currently available.
- **Developing evidence-based policy interventions.** We will ensure policy interventions are designed based on evidence and analysis, supported by a robust theory of change. We must ensure that interventions represent the best value for money for the taxpayer.
- **Take an iterative approach through pilots and continuous monitoring and evaluation.** We will test what works and constantly seek ways to improve by delivering actions on a small scale, measuring what difference they make, and how we can make improvements before rolling them out more widely.

ACTION: Government will measure what works on digital inclusion, identify where the need is greatest, and establish the economic and social value of upskilling adults with digital skills.

2. A cross-government approach: breaking down silos

Given the complex nature of digital exclusion and our ambition to transform public services, it is vital that government departments work together to address the systemic causes and effects of digital exclusion. A new Digital Inclusion and Skills Unit in DSIT will coordinate and drive progress towards achieving our vision for digital inclusion. This unit will work closely with the new Government Digital Service to ensure that digital inclusion is at the forefront of public service transformation and that the benefits are widely shared.

Across government departments, there is a considerable amount of work underway that will directly drive-up digital inclusion, or support digitally excluded people. The new Digital Inclusion and Skills Unit is already working to bring these projects together so that any action we take is joined-up and delivered to maximum effect. We will work in partnership across DSIT and with other key departments:

- The Department for Education (DfE) is responsible for ensuring that young people and adults in England have the skills and training they need to thrive in modern society, and will be jointly responsible for the opening up opportunity through skills section of this publication.
- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) help adults who are out of work to move into and progress in work. DSIT will work closely with DWP to reach and support adults who need digital skills for work.
- The Disability Unit in the Cabinet Office's Office for Equality and Opportunity aims to break down barriers and improve the lives of deaf and disabled people in the UK. Their work will be critical in developing policy and interventions to improve digital inclusion for this key demographic.
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is responsible for civil society, tackling loneliness and superintending public libraries – a vital part of the national and local ecosystem supporting digital inclusion.
- The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) will be an important partner to support the local delivery of digital inclusion policies, meeting the people who need help where they are.
- The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) is responsible for building an NHS and a National Care Service fit for the future. DSIT will work with DHSC to ensure the benefits of digital inclusion reach patients, care recipients and frontline staff.
- HM Treasury (HMT) leads work on financial inclusion, including developing a Financial Inclusion Strategy alongside a supporting committee of industry and consumer representatives, to tackle the problem of financial exclusion. DSIT will work with HMT to ensure digital inclusion programmes across the country receive the funding needed to deliver impact and on complementary work to addressing the barriers to financial inclusion.
- HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) will publish its digital transformation roadmap in spring 2025, which will set out HMRC's vision to be a digital first organisation and include measures to ensure digital inclusion and support for customers who cannot yet interact digitally. DSIT will work closely with HMRC to ensure that this is aligned with these actions.

ACTION: Government will establish a ministerial group on digital inclusion within three months of publication. The group will meet on a quarterly basis, with published Terms of Reference and summaries of meeting minutes, which will feed into Mission Boards.

3. Delivering in partnership with local authorities, national and devolved governments, and private and third sectors

Digital inclusion is an intersectional and cross-cutting issue that cannot be solved by government alone. We know that digital inclusion interventions work best when government, the private sector, the third sector, local authorities and Devolved Governments work in partnership to deliver tailored and impactful schemes that fulfil the needs of local communities.

We intend to implement a holistic approach to digital inclusion policy, with government working in partnership with those who know what works best across the UK. Each partner has a role to play in ensuring everyone, regardless of circumstance, has the access, skills, and confidence to participate and benefit from a modern digital society.

Roles and responsibilities of actors working to address digital exclusion	
Actor	Roles and Responsibilities
UK Government	The government will provide leadership and coordination to convene, design, and implement a digital inclusion approach at the national level. The Digital Inclusion and Skills Unit in DSIT will play the central role in developing and coordinating cross-government policies to support these initiatives, track progress and measure impact.
Devolved Governments	Recognising Devolved Governments’ (DGs) existing work in tackling digital inclusion and the devolved nature of several key policy areas, they will continue to provide strategic direction for digital inclusion, share best practice, and lead on devolved policy areas such as skills. By working with DGs, we can develop a common framework from which to work and this will help provide a more strategic approach to measuring individual and shared successes.
Local Authorities	Local Authorities, including Mayoral Combined Authorities will be key to the delivery of digital inclusion interventions. By convening and conducting activities in their local areas, they can deliver tailored and targeted, community-based initiatives in collaboration with the private sector and third sector organisations.
Private Sector	The private sector overall benefits from a digitally inclusive society through a digitally skilled workforce, and firms delivering innovative digital products have the potential to reach more customers. Companies should leverage their expertise, resources, and innovation to provide affordable and accessible technology and services. Companies could implement social value programs, such as device donation schemes, and collaborate with other organisations to deliver digital skills training.

	<p>Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) with sizeable UK footprint such as large tech companies and big employers can deliver effective interventions with a focus on innovation and inclusive design that can be scaled across the UK.</p> <p>Regional Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) can engage with local communities to identify the specific needs of local communities and provide flexible, tailored solutions.</p>
Third Sector (including charities and non-profits)	The third sector, including charities and non-profit organisations, plays a vital role in supporting and amplifying the voices of underserved communities. By directly engaging with digitally excluded individuals, these organisations advocate for inclusive policies, foster collaboration with local governments, and build trust within communities.
Regulators	Regulators in the UK play a key role in protecting and informing the public. We would encourage regulators to consider how they can best contribute to addressing digital exclusion where it is relevant to their roles.

ACTION: Establish the Digital Inclusion Action Committee, chaired by Baroness Hilary Armstrong. This will be an expert committee, made up of national and local experts in tackling digital exclusion. Members will be from industry, the third sector, local authorities, and academia. The Digital Inclusion Action Committee’s role will be to scrutinise, steer and help determine the government’s approach to digital inclusion.

The Committee could be supported by several subcommittees, established by the chair to support the work of the main Committee. The subcommittees could focus on, for example, key demographic groups or the focus areas identified in this action plan.

Case study: Private Sector Best Practice working with Local Authorities

The Digital Inclusion Initiative (DII) is a private sector-led programme, committed to bridging the digital divide by improving digital skills, enhancing lives and stimulating economic growth. Lloyds Banking Group, Vodafone and Assurant have come together in partnership with Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to provide over 4500 free tablets, connectivity and skills support to digitally excluded individuals in the region. The Combined Authority has facilitated the delivery of this private sector-funded initiative and brought together a network of over 85 local organisations to collaborate, including the NHS and DWP, meaning those hardest-to-reach have been supported. This approach has led to some impressive outcomes for participants, including improved employment and health outcomes.

4. Supporting locally designed and delivered interventions

Barriers to digital inclusion vary widely, with different locations facing different challenges. Reducing digital exclusion will only be possible with the support and expertise of Devolved Governments (DGs) and Local Authorities (LAs) - who are best placed to understand the specific needs of their communities and deliver tailored services for people who live there.

Some DGs and LAs have already made impressive progress in promoting digital inclusion, including by setting up networks that support each other and share best practice, both locally and nationally. We will seek to support and amplify these strong, collaborative approaches while upholding the autonomy of devolved governments. Where appropriate, we will encourage the expansion of successful programmes across the country.

Case study: Digital Inclusion across the UK nations

Wales and Scotland: Wales and Scotland have leveraged shared best practices through the Minimum Digital Living Standards (MDLS) to enhance their digital inclusion strategies. Initiatives like Digital Communities Wales and Connecting Scotland focus on ensuring accessible internet, providing necessary devices, and promoting digital skills, all tailored to their specific regional needs and priorities. Additionally, both nations have launched their respective Digital Inclusion Alliances, bringing together organisations across the digital inclusion space to share learning and coordinate efforts. This collaborative approach aims to more effectively support digitally excluded individuals across Wales and Scotland.

Northern Ireland: [Go ON NI](#) is a digital inclusion programme aimed at helping people in Northern Ireland get online, access government services, and improve their digital skills. The programme offers free events and informal digital technology awareness sessions in libraries, community centres, and various other locations. These sessions are designed to assist individuals in getting online for the first time, enhancing their digital skills, and learning more about using smartphones and tablet devices to ensure they have the confidence to use online services and no one is left behind.

Case study: Local Authorities

Local authorities across the country have made significant stride in tackling digital exclusion. The [Digital Inclusion Toolkit](#), started by Croydon and Leeds councils, is an online resource designed to help councils create and manage digital inclusion projects by sharing successful strategies and experiences. The toolkit has helped many LAs to further their own digital inclusion work.

5. Understanding international best practice and cooperating with international partners

Lack of dedicated government action over the past ten years means we are at risk of falling behind our international counterparts. As we work towards developing our long-term approach to digital inclusion, we need to ensure we learn the valuable lessons from countries that have been testing different approaches to tackling digital exclusion.

As a world-leader in science and technology, our goal is to develop an approach to digital inclusion that matches this global position. We want to engage and cooperate internationally, bilaterally and in multilateral fora on digital inclusion, to shape global best practice.

Chapter 5 - Our Focus Areas

Our first five actions will kick-start government's efforts to ensure everyone in the UK has the access, skills and confidence to participate in, and benefit from, a modern digital society and economy. Building a long-term approach, in partnership with industry, charities, Devolved Governments and local authorities, is essential to ensure we reach everyone across the country.

We have identified four focus areas as the framework for future work. These are: open up opportunities through skills, tackle data and device poverty, break down barriers to digital services, and build confidence. Under these focus areas we outline medium and long-term proposals upon which we are seeking feedback, in particular whether these are the right focus areas for government to achieve our vision.

5a - Opening Up Opportunities Through Skills

Opening opportunities through skills means developing the necessary digital skills and having access to the right training and support to meet peoples' changing needs.

The issue

Despite an increase in essential digital skills levels in the UK over the past few years, more needs to be done to reduce the digital skills gap; 3.8 million (7%) people in the UK lack the essential digital skills for life and 7.3 million (18%) lack the minimum essential digital skills for work.²⁷ It is crucial to reduce these figures, and for people's digital skills to keep pace with rapid technological advances and the increased digitisation of society, public services, and the workplace.

The current skills gap has a detrimental impact on employment and economic growth, with nearly a third (32%) of shortage vacancies caused by a lack of digital skills, and half of these involving a lack of basic digital skills.²⁸ The essential skills needed to participate in both economy and society are also evolving and increasingly include AI, media, and data literacy. Increasing digitisation of public services without adequate skills provision risks limiting vulnerable groups' (including older adults' and deaf and disabled people's) access to the NHS, social care and social security support.

There are clear areas for government action on improving digital skills provision for young people and adults. To reduce the number of people experiencing digital exclusion in the UK, it is crucial for young people to leave formal education with the skills to benefit from and stay safe in the online world. Recent research from The King's Trust found that 37% of young people sampled in the UK did not study a digital or technology-focused subject beyond Key Stage 3.²⁹ Despite the 3.8 million people lacking the digital skills for life, the uptake of government-funded adult training is low.³⁰ In the 2023/24 academic year, only 43,240 people started an essential digital skills course or qualification funded through the Adult Education Budget³¹. It is therefore necessary to improve the quality, variety and uptake of EDS provision.

Objectives

Our overarching objective for this focus area is that people across the UK, regardless of their background or circumstances, have the skills to benefit from the online world in a safe and informed way.

²⁷ [Lloyd's Banking Group Consumer Digital Index](#), 2024

²⁸ [DfE, Employer Skills Survey](#), 2022

²⁹ [The King's Trust, Decoding the Digital Skills Gap](#), 2024

³⁰ [Lloyds Consumer Digital Index](#), 2024

³¹ [Further Education and Skills Statistical release](#), DfE, January 2025

This will involve ensuring we are providing the right digital skills through relevant training; facilitating access to skills support for everyone, regardless of circumstance; and making sure upskilling enables people to realise the wider benefits of being online.

Government action on skills

The UK government is acting now to support the skills pipeline, including developing the Industrial Strategy, setting up Skills England, launching the independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, as well as announcing a new growth and skills levy. Digital skills will be a critical part of this work.

Immediate action is required to significantly reduce the proportion of people without the Essential Digital Skills (EDS) for life and work. This means that everyone should leave school with digital skills; adult digital skills training should be easily accessible and tailored to the changing needs of people and the economy; employers should proactively support employee upskilling; and there is sufficient (local) support to ensure that hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups have access to support at their points of need and points of contact with existing public services.

ACTION: Enhance support for the framework that helps people and businesses get the essential skills they need to get online safely and with confidence.

We recognise that the essential skills which are required to interact safely, and fully benefit from being online, will continue to evolve and change at pace with technological advances and widespread digitisation of public services and the economy. Active cross-Governmental sponsorship of a common framework is crucial to ensure that available resources are spent on promoting access to the right skills for life and work. This informs national standards that provide the basis for essential digital skills provision for adults, can support provision for young people, and offers a clear framework to rally businesses to upskill their workforces.

ACTION: Measure what works on digital inclusion, identify where the need is greatest, and establish the economic and social value of upskilling adults with digital skills.

To ensure maximum impact of future digital inclusion interventions, we will develop and update the evidence base on what works and how we measure success. Government will work with FutureDotNow to build the economic and social value case to incentivise businesses to upskill employees with the essential digital skills for work. This will build a foundation for incorporating digital inclusion into employers' investment decisions, Environmental Social Governance (ESG) frameworks to hold businesses accountable, and into procurement practices through the Public Services (Social Value) Act. This will support wider work to quantify the impact of, and return on investment on, digital inclusion initiatives more broadly.

Call for Evidence: Medium- and long-term next steps

We recognise that these immediate actions are not enough to deliver our vision and achieve systemic change on digital inclusion. In addition to immediate actions, we will build on the best of existing work across government and outside, gathering evidence towards a roadmap of ambitious, targeted initiatives to improve long-term outcomes for people across the UK. In the longer term, the government will consider a range of actions based on feedback from this call for views, including:

Regular appraisal of the digital skills needed to benefit from being online: We will consider how best to work with Lloyds' Banking group and wider industry to regularly update the EDS framework as the needs of citizens and employers evolve.

We are ambitious that that all public sector workers are ready to work in a digital age: Government Skills Unit and the Government Digital Service will seek to integrate current and future EDS Frameworks into the core skills curriculum for the Civil Service. Furthermore, we will join up with the broader public sector and learn from initiatives such as the NHS Digital Academy, which seeks to upskill the 1.4 million NHS staff to have basic digital and data competence and confidence. Government intends to lead by example, ensuring its workforce is equipped with the digital skills for work and better enabling the transfer of skills between sectors.

Explore improvements to the adult Essential Digital Skills offer: This could include ensuring provisions address the needs of working age adults (whether in or out of employment), and older adults. This will involve working closely with Skills England to identify and address the digital skills gap. We will seek views on ways to improve how EDS are delivered through Further Education and training providers and work closely with Mayoral Combined Authorities responsible for EDS provision to better meet user needs. We will explore working with the private and third sectors, Skills England and others to increase employer investment in digital skills and promote the Workforce Digital Skills Charter amongst private and third sector stakeholders. In recognition of the need to mitigate the potential harms of being online, we will develop new initiatives to support people in developing key media literacy skills.

Seek to ensure that young people leave education with the necessary digital skills: Subject to the recommendations of the upcoming independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, we will seek to further embed digital skills into students' learning as part of a reformed National Curriculum. We will continue to embed EDS concepts in apprenticeships and T-levels, and explore the expansion of existing extra-curricular programmes, such as CyberFirst, across the country to inspire young people to continue their digital education. There is also a need to ensure that teachers, parents and carers have access to the support they need to ensure their students and children can stay safe and benefit from being online.

Improve signposting for hard-to-reach groups: We are conducting research to understand the barriers people face when navigating digital skills provision and how to improve signposting. Building on the commitments in the Get Britain Working White Paper, we will also explore further opportunities to work with DWP to ensure that citizens are better able to access the digital skills support they need to help them enter and progress in work. DWP Work Coaches offer tailored, flexible advice and support as part of its core offer and jobseekers can access a menu of help, including referral into skills provision and job search support. Interventions like this help people gain the skills they need to enter and progress in employment providing the means to permanently enhance earnings and career prospects.

To improve join-up of services for hard-to-reach groups, we will consider the expansion of multi-agency working to support people at their points of interaction with public services, seeking views on a ‘train the trainer’ model to enable frontline workers to better support excluded customers. We will explore a cross-government approach to EDS training and signposting to service users of the NHS, MHCLG and Home Office. We will also explore ways to strengthen the capacity of local organisations and increase uptake of existing training, such as ‘Learn My Way’, delivered through public libraries.

Through these immediate actions, related industry pledges, and proposed medium- and long-term next steps, we will achieve our objective for people across the UK, regardless of their background or circumstances, to have the skills to benefit from the online world in a safe and informed way.

We would welcome views from stakeholders on our proposed approach, and whether there are other areas of work government should consider on skills.

Case Study: Manchester Let’s Get Digital

Manchester Libraries Digital Inclusion Team lead on Manchester’s Lets Get Digital initiative, a programme run both inside libraries and in the wider community. Libraries offer free Wi-Fi, IT training sessions, and support to people with low confidence online. Staff support customers to access e-learning, such as Learn My Way, and meet their immediate needs online, such as registering to vote. Libraries and other community venues are also Digital Health Hubs providing support on the NHS App. In turn, local GP surgeries have leaflets listing where digital support is available.

5b - Tackling Data and Device Poverty

Data and device poverty is the inability of an individual or household to access or afford sufficient connectivity and/or a device suitable for their needs.

The issue

To get online, an individual needs three core things – a broadband line or mobile signal, a telecoms service, and a device. Yet not everyone lives within reach of a fast, reliable network, has sufficient income for the monthly cost of a service, or can afford a laptop, tablet or smartphone.

If government is to address digital exclusion, then it is essential that we bring networks, services and devices in reach of those who need them, and that we collaborate with telecoms providers, community groups, charities and others to ensure that people know about the help available.

Significant progress has been made to ensure that people have access to high-quality, reliable broadband and mobile signals. Yet, 58,000 premises remain unable to access 'decent' broadband,³² those living in rural areas have broadband speeds 26% slower than those in urban areas,³³ and there continue to be connectivity 'not spots' without coverage from all or any mobile networks.

Similarly, steps have been taken to ensure that telecoms services are affordable to those on very low incomes; however, in October 2024, 8% of broadband and 6% of mobile customers reported struggling to afford their connections.³⁴ A report by Frontier Economics for BT suggests that as many as one million households are likely to be unable to afford connectivity at any price,³⁵ and many more may be sacrificing other life essentials (such as clothing or food) to remain online.³⁶

Devices can represent a significant outlay for households and are at a cost which those on low or fixed incomes cannot easily afford. In 2023, a Nominet survey of young people aged 8-25 showed over half (53%) of respondents in working class households considered laptops too expensive,³⁷ and Ofcom found that 37% of households who are offline cite a lack of equipment as a barrier.³⁸ Overall, in 2024, 4% of UK households did not have a laptop, PC or tablet in the home (among other devices), and 2% did not have a mobile phone.³⁹

³² [Ofcom, 'Connected Nations' 2024](#)

³³ [Ofcom, 'UK home broadband performance' 2023](#)

³⁴ [Ofcom Affordability Tracker October 2024](#)

³⁵ [BT Group, 'Digital Inclusion: New insights and finding a sustainable way forward' 2023](#)

³⁶ [Ofcom Affordability Tracker October 2024](#)

³⁷ [Nominet, 'Digital Youth Index' 2023](#)

³⁸ [Ofcom, 'Media use and attitudes' 2023](#)

³⁹ [Ofcom, 'Technology Tracker' 2024](#)

It is important that we remember the individuals and families behind the statistics. It is not enough to simply provide connectivity and a device; real-life requires high-quality and affordable connectivity and devices that can be used for a range of purposes: for example, for children to do their homework, adults to apply for jobs and households to remain connected.

Objectives

The overarching objective for this focus area is to ensure that everybody has access to sufficient, affordable and reliable internet connectivity and devices that are suitable for people's lives.

To this end, by 2030, we want:

1. nationwide gigabit broadband and 5G Standalone (5GSA) mobile coverage in all populated areas;
2. a good range of connectivity options for those who, due to affordability issues, are either entirely offline or struggling to stay online; and
3. to have removed the affordability of devices as a barrier to getting online.

Government action on connectivity

Filling the not-spots and bringing high-quality, reliable telecoms infrastructure to every home. The government has made significant progress already to ensure households have access to the connectivity they need. Over 98% of homes can access a superfast connection,⁴⁰ 85% a gigabit-capable line,⁴¹ over 95% of UK landmass is covered by 4G mobile services, and basic 5G is available outside over 90% of UK premises. But more needs to be done to ensure that no-one is left behind.⁴²

Seizing the opportunity to promote digital participation from the upgrade of the UK's digital infrastructure. Communication providers and operators are rolling out new infrastructure and withdrawing legacy networks (such as the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), 2G and 3G). This is an opportunity to promote digital participation at the same time as protecting migrating consumers.

Specifically, the government will:

⁴⁰ Superfast broadband defined as a connection offering download speeds of 30 Megabits per second (Mbps)

⁴¹ Thinkbroadband: [Local Broadband Information](#)

⁴² [Ofcom, 'Connected Nations' 2024](#)

- Through a competition-friendly and predictable regulatory environment, continue to encourage investment in gigabit broadband and 5G standalone to ensure nationwide coverage.
- Continue work with mobile network operators (MNOs) to deliver the Shared Rural Network (SRN) to bring high-quality mobile coverage to more areas of the UK and close rural not-spots.
- Support the mobile industry to invest in upgrading networks to close coverage gaps, and upgrade networks to higher quality (standalone 5G);
- Continue its investment to bring gigabit broadband to hard-to-reach parts of the UK via Project Gigabit.
- Work with Ofcom to review the broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO) to ensure it meets the needs of consumers and is fit for a modern digital society.
- Continue with our focus on Very-Hard-to-Reach (VHTR) locations and explore options to use new, innovative technologies to bring reliable connectivity to people wherever they choose to live.
- Work with legacy telecoms providers to protect those migrating away from PSTN, 2G and 3G and examine options to encourage those – who may be getting an internet connection for the first time – to explore the digital world.

Government action on device poverty

Action: Government will pilot a proof-of-concept multi-department device donation scheme with The Digital Poverty Alliance to provide re-purposed government laptops to those that need them.

Access to devices is essential for tackling digital exclusion and supporting people to participate in an increasingly digital society. We are taking a first step as a department by wiping, refurbishing and donating ex-government devices from DSIT, Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ). Donating these devices to the Digital Poverty Alliance will allow us to repurpose end-of-service devices in a way which is highly targeted and makes use of their expertise. This pilot will run until August 2025. Our aim through this pilot is to understand how to deliver effective device donation schemes in government and set a clear precedent for other government departments to follow suit, as well as industry.

Call for Evidence: Medium- and long-term next steps

In addition, we will build on existing government work to ensure individuals or households can access or afford sufficient connectivity and/or a device suitable for their needs. We are seeking feedback on whether we have identified the right medium- to long-term next steps to achieve our objectives. These include:

Ensuring high-quality, reliable and affordable broadband and mobile services for those on very low incomes. As more and more services move online, the difference between the digital haves and the digital have-nots is increasingly stark. The price of broadband and mobile services has fallen in real terms in the past 5 years and broadband and mobile social tariffs offer a safety net for those struggling with their bills; but for too many on very low incomes the price of connectivity remains too high.

To support those unable to access connectivity at home, or with limited data allowances, the government will look to work with local authorities to consider how best to signpost existing locations where people can get online for free and explore options to expand the number of locations offering free connectivity. We will also engage with MNOs to consider how to enable easier access to government websites and online services for those in data poverty.

To get those on low incomes connected, we will explore innovative options and partnerships with housing providers, local authorities and others, to bring free or low-cost connectivity to areas of high social and economic deprivation.

Glasgow City Region – Smart and Connected Social Homes

The evolution of technologies means that what we once thought of as “mobile” networks, now have capabilities to support a whole range of different uses, including in the delivery of public services.

Glasgow City Region was awarded £3.2 million through DSIT’s 5G Innovation Regions Programme to improve social housing and health services through innovative use of digital technologies that use 5G connectivity. These trials are the first steps in the region’s plan to use connectivity and data collection to enable online healthcare and to move the balance of care towards the home.

Projects funded by the programme include:

- Using smart speakers and voice recognition assistive technology to provide a more reliable and user-friendly way for some people to access help in social care settings.
- Installing connected sensors to monitor temperature, humidity and CO2 levels in social housing to support net zero and energy efficiency outcomes

Getting devices into the hands of those that need them. Ensuring people have consistent access to reliable devices is essential. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government made 1.95 million devices available to support remote learning and online social care, but as devices age and needs evolve, it is essential that those on low incomes can access safe and secure laptops, tablets and smartphones.

On device refurbishment, the third sector has led the way. Charities such as the Good Things Foundation and Digital Poverty Alliance, as well as a plethora of community-based digital inclusion hubs, have been at the forefront of sourcing and providing devices to low-income households and keeping them online.

We want to learn lessons from the new DSIT, DBT, DESNZ pilot, with the hope to extend device donation to all government departments and public bodies. Having led by example, government is working collaboratively with the Good Things Foundation and industry to develop a voluntary device donation charter, encouraging signatories to responsibly donate their devices with compatible, up-to-date software, increasing the number of suitable devices given to those who need them and reducing electronic waste.

We recognise the device alone may not be enough. Second-hand devices need to be able to run the latest software to stay secure, and ensuring there are routes for repair when these devices breakdown is essential. Government is therefore keen to explore options to assist households to access essential programmes, applications and services, including security software, to ensure that devices are safe and meet people's needs. We will also consider how repair schemes and warranty extensions can be negotiated to allow donated devices to remain useable for longer.

The government considers that the actions and pledges set out above put us on a path to deliver our objectives, but we are aware that there will be other innovative, local approaches to data and device poverty across the UK from which we, and others could learn.

We would welcome views from stakeholders on whether government has identified the right medium-long term next steps for increasing mobile and broadband coverage and tackling data and device poverty and thoughts on other areas to be explored. We would be particularly interested to hear from local digital inclusion groups regarding challenges or barriers and Government's potential role in addressing them.

5c - Breaking Down Barriers to Digital Services

This focus area looks at how we can make digital services inclusive and accessible, including those run by the government, the wider public sector and vital private sector

The issue

Inclusion lies at the core of how the government delivers' digital services, and significant progress has been made in recent years, especially with the establishment of Government Digital Service (GDS) and later, Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO), to champion digital service design across government.

However, the experience of many users accessing digital services in the government, public and private sectors is and has been one of frustration, with services not meeting the different needs of users. 11% of people tend to favour offline approaches,⁴³ and for significant government services like Pension Credit, 36% of people are using offline routes.⁴⁴

The service standard guides the design of government services; however, it does not cover non-GOV.UK services, nor does it define how a service can be fully inclusive. Of the 7,000 plus services on GOV.UK, we currently have no way of understanding how digitally inclusive they are, let alone those run by arms-length bodies, or the rest of the public sector.

Digital services which are not inclusive result in greater use of offline routes, costing the taxpayer money through reliance on post, phone or in-person options. They also increase manual back-end processing time and result in duplication e.g. of data entry. Designing inclusive services which result in greater take-up of digital routes will also allow government to focus on providing assisted digital support, and offline routes, to those who need them.

To comply with the law, UK website owners must make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure their web content is accessible to people with protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act. However, there is little formal monitoring of this, and the current law only covers accessibility, not inclusivity more broadly – where there are no standards to follow. For private sector services which everyone must use – like paying energy bills, banking or ordering groceries – this means there is no guarantee that people can access what they need to.

Objectives

⁴³ [Link, 'New research shows almost a quarter of UK adults feel digitally excluded' 2024](#)

⁴⁴ [Good Things Foundation, 'Digital inclusion: What the main UK datasets tell us' 2024](#)

We want to ensure inclusive digital services that are easy to use and save people time and/or money; with appropriate and well-supported alternative pathways for those who need them.

Doing so will result in improved user experience, reduction in failure demand generated by services which are not inclusive, a better ability to measure how inclusive services are and cheaper delivery of services through digital adoption.

Government action on digital services

Immediate action is required to make government services easier to use for more people. Digital government should be inclusive and remove the barriers people face based on their digital confidence, access or skills. Doing this will save people time and make their lives easier.

ACTION: Make UK government digital services easier to use with a renewed focus on digital inclusion, for example by improving the whole experience for users and increasing the number of services that use GOV.UK One Login.

The new Government Digital Service is being created within the DSIT to transform public services. We will focus on the experience of people who use government services, improving the full end-to-end journey, both online and offline. As part of this action, we will continue the rollout of key cross-government programmes like GOV.UK One Login and platforms like GOV.UK Forms and GOV.UK Notify. We will also improve GOV.UK through testing an AI-enabled chatbot and the GOV.UK app. We will help government departments and organisations by creating enhanced service standards and guidance, measuring service performance, and supporting departments to reduce duplication between services to give users a better experience of government.

Best Practice Case Study: The Post Office and GOV.UK One Login

GOV.UK One Login partnered with the Post Office to run an in-person identity check in their branches. This provides those who want to use GOV.UK One Login but are unable to use the app or browser journey to prove their identity, an accessible route for doing so. It's specifically aimed at those without smartphones, or who have a low level of confidence in proving their identity online.

Over 30,000 people have successfully proven their identity using this route, giving them access to services using GOV.UK One Login including Basic DBS checks and Veterans Card.

Industry pledge

We are proposing that industry partners ensure their public-facing platforms meet minimum industry wide [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines level AA](#)

[requirements](#),⁴⁵ including products or services procured from third-parties; become disability confident employers and work towards disability confident leader level and conduct and, once the new standard on inclusive digital services is agreed, publish research on how their services are meeting it.

Call for Evidence: Medium- and long-term next steps

Our immediate focus is on exploring how to improve inclusivity in public sector services and we are considering a range of next steps, based on the feedback we receive from this call for evidence. These include:

Making digital services more inclusive by improving standards and regulations: This would require expanding existing standards into wider public sector services and defining a cross-government approach to highlight challenges of different user groups.

Establishing targeted support for people using relevant public services: We propose targeted support to relevant public services, which will be done by extending and expanding assisted digital services, including exploring different options where users can be helped with access and usability of government services within the community. We will collaborate with local authorities, Jobcentre Plus, public libraries, and others to identify better ways of working together to align support; and the role of trusted members of the community to give informal help.

We will identify key private sector services that could meet future standards on inclusion (e.g., banking, utilities, online shopping) and explore opportunities to align. We will seek views from sectors including banking, utilities and online supermarkets, and those who often advise, and those in the voluntary sector who often help people access these services. We will agree with private sector stakeholders which sectors should be prioritising inclusive digital services, given their importance to people's daily lives. As part of this work, we will consider which sectors are classified as Critical National Infrastructure (CNI).⁴⁶

Government welcomes views on whether we have identified the right medium-long term next steps for breaking down barriers to digital services.

⁴⁵ [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.2](#), 2023

⁴⁶ [NPSA, 'Critical National Infrastructure' 2023](#)

5d - Building Confidence and Supporting Local Delivery

Having the confidence to be online means that you understand what benefits you can gain from the internet and digital services and knowing how and where you can find support when you need it (including offline support in your local community). It also means you have trust that your safety and security is protected online.

The issue

A lack of confidence and motivation is a significant issue which exacerbates digital exclusion yet defining what this means and measuring its scale is a challenge.

In 2023, Ofcom found that 6% of UK households did not have internet access at home.⁴⁷ The most common reason given for not having internet access at home was not being interested or not having the need to go online (69%), and most people (82%) said nothing would prompt them to go online at home within the next 12 months.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Age UK has found that 37% of those aged over 65 who *do* want to be online more often, do not trust the internet.⁴⁹

These statistics give a headline sense of the challenge. However, given the multi-faceted and individual motivations, the lack of breadth and depth of existing research into confidence barriers means we do not have a robust picture of why people choose to be offline, and what might need to change for them to be more motivated to get online in a way that benefits themselves and their families.

Instilling and encouraging a sense of confidence, motivation and trust in the people we want to help get online is crucial if we are to be successful in our vision. If we do not, then people will avoid skills training if they worry it does not suit them; people will not make use of affordable devices or internet where they do not see the benefit of being online; and people will not use Government or other digital services where they are uncomfortable sharing their data.

Objectives

We want people across the UK, regardless of their circumstances, to understand how they can benefit from the online world and be able to make choices to get online where it works for them. We want people to trust the protections that are in place already, while feeling empowered with the knowledge that there are steps they can take to

⁴⁷ Ofcom, [Adults Media Use and Attitudes Report, 2023](#)

⁴⁸ [Ofcom, Adults Media Use and Attitudes Report \(2024\)](#) p.36

⁴⁹ AgeUK, [Media Centre Article, 2023](#)

protect themselves. We also want them to have the confidence to seek out support where they need it.

Ultimately, building confidence online will contribute to breaking down barriers to opportunity for people who are digitally excluded. It will also support economic growth through widening participation in the digital economy. We want to champion, iterate on and expand the innovative digital inclusion work taking place across the UK in local digital inclusion networks, community organisations and local authorities. This new approach and focus on local delivery puts the emphasis where it is needed, directly in communities.

Government action on building confidence and supporting local delivery

Immediate action is required to support and expand local and targeted digital inclusion initiatives across the country.

ACTION: The government is launching the **Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund** to support local initiatives that increase digital participation. We will use the fund to identify best practice with an ambition to scale-up and replicate successful digital inclusion programmes across the country. We want to ensure the innovation fund is used to meet the specific and diverse needs of local people and communities.

The Innovation Fund will be launched this Spring and support local stakeholders who are seeking funding to deliver targeted, innovative digital inclusion projects at a local level. These projects will need to demonstrate how they will improve digital inclusion outcomes in local areas, or for target demographics set out in this publication, in-line with the four action areas. These initiatives will contribute to strengthening the digital inclusion evidence base and form the foundation of medium to longer-term work.

Local Best Practice Case Study: London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

The London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea has excelled in combating digital exclusion by partnering with third sector organisations. They established the K&C Digital Inclusion Partnership during the pandemic, providing digital skills training, device access, and support through local libraries and community groups. This initiative ensures residents can confidently use the internet and access essential online services.

Call for Evidence: Medium- and long-term next steps

We recognise that these immediate actions are not enough to deliver our vision and achieve systemic change on digital inclusion. We need to urgently consider what our next steps will be.

The government wants to build confidence and address the challenges of trust and motivation. In the medium and longer term, we need to support local digital inclusion networks to be equipped to help their communities. We need to build our evidence base to better understand the reasons people choose to be offline, and how they could be best motivated to get online. We also need to raise awareness about safety online, making people more aware of the protections that already exist and building confidence in personal online safety.

In the longer term, the government will consider a range of next steps, based on feedback from this call for evidence, including:

Growing the evidence base on digitally excluded people's lack of interest in and need for being online. The lack of breadth and depth of existing research into confidence barriers means we do not have a robust picture of why people choose to be offline, and how they could be best motivated to get online. Existing surveys have a limited focus explicitly on those not online, and underlying reasons behind a stated lack of interest have not been thoroughly explored. Government will work with existing researchers and survey owners to shape existing research on confidence and motivational barriers as well as explore commissioning new research to understand confidence and motivational barriers.

Exploring how best to raise awareness, with key partners, of the rights and protections people have to keep them safe and secure online. We must reassure people who are kept offline because they are concerned about their safety online. This awareness-raising will need to go hand in hand with making sure that people remain aware of the risks online. It will include working with Ofcom to effectively implement the Online Safety Act (2023), which will introduce wide-ranging protections for adults and children online. More generally, we will explore with regulators ways in which the public can be informed more about their rights and protections, and empowered with the knowledge they can take steps protect themselves.

Major new regulations have been introduced and are being considered to address the most significant risks associated with digital technologies. This includes: a new Data (Use and Access) Bill to more effectively regulate the processing of personal information; a new Cyber Security and Resilience Bill that will improve UK cyber defences and protect our essential public services; and new rules to ensure the most powerful AI models are developed and deployed safely and securely.

The Online Safety Act (2023)

The Online Safety Act (2023) will protect children and adults online by placing a range of new duties on social media companies and search services.

The Act tackles criminal activity online, by mandating platforms to remove and limit the spread of illegal content online. It introduced new criminal offences which will protect people from a wide range of abuse and harm online, including threatening messages, false communications and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images for which individuals can be, and have been, prosecuted. The Act also includes strong safeguards for children to protect them from harmful and age-inappropriate content, such as bullying, pornography, and the promotion of self-harm and eating disorders.

The Act's duties also include tackling fraud and ensuring that tech companies have robust systems in place to detect and remove fraudulent content. Additionally, it promotes transparency and accountability by requiring the largest platforms to set clear terms of service across all aspects of their content moderation.

As these key protections are implemented, it will enable people to feel more confident that they are less likely to encounter harmful and fraudulent content online.

Working with devolved governments and local authorities to amplify local support by identifying, supporting and learning from best practice. Our vision is for everyone to have access to local support which meets individuals where they are to help get them online. It is important that we examine how best to make this vision a reality for communities nationwide. Through the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund, we will use our learnings to scale-up and replicate successful programmes across the country, while also ensuring we balance this approach with meeting the specific and diverse needs of local people and communities.

Going forward, we want to work closely with Local Authorities, Devolved Governments and the Local Government Association to identify and share best practice, exploring ways in which digital inclusion offerings can be supported and expanded at a local level. We will explore jointly with DCMS how digital inclusion can be supported further through work with civil society and public libraries.

We would welcome views from stakeholders on whether government has identified the right medium and long-term next steps for building confidence and supporting local delivery.

Chapter 6 - Next Steps

This publication has set out our approach including the first five actions for government and the four focus areas for medium and long-term work. It is the first step in the Government's renewed, ambitious approach to tackling digital exclusion.

From here, we will work in partnership with industry, the third sector, local authorities and devolved governments to build and deliver a better future for everyone, whatever your background or circumstances. We will assess progress on the first five actions, leadership actions and the four focus areas outlined in this publication, and crucially, we will urgently consider what further actions the government can and should take to drive systemic change.

Call for evidence

Working in partnership is essential to achieve transformative impact to ensure everyone has the access, skills, and confidence to participate in the UK's digital society. We welcome views from stakeholders on the contents of this publication and where we should go next.

We particularly would welcome comments from local and combined authorities, businesses, charities, community groups, and individuals. We invite you to share your views on the following questions:

1. Are you answering this survey as an individual or on behalf of an organisation or a group?

I am responding as an individual.

I am responding on behalf of an organisation/group.

2. Where are you or your organisation/group located?

North East

North West

Yorkshire and the Humber

East Midlands

West Midlands

East of England

London

South East

South West

Scotland

Wales

Northern Ireland

3. If you are an individual, please can you outline the reasons you have responded to this survey?
4. If you are an organisation, please can you specify the type (e.g. business, academia, government, charity) and sector in which you operate (e.g. service provider, academic research, not-for-profit)?
5. Government has identified five population groups that would likely benefit greatly from digital inclusion initiatives, these are:
 - Low-income households
 - Older people
 - Disabled people
 - Unemployed and those seeking work
 - Young people
 - a) Do you agree with these five population groups? *Yes/ No/ Don't know*
 - b) **If no**, what changes would you make to the population groups?
6. Are there examples of digital inclusion initiatives that could be scaled-up or replicated in other local communities? Please provide the name of the initiative (if known), the organisation (if known), a summary of what they do and contact details (if relevant).
7. Are there examples of evaluation models for measuring the impact of digital inclusions programs that you are aware of? Please provide details of these models and where they have been used (if known).
8. In what ways could the government partner with industry, charities and community organisations to promote digital inclusion?
9. How can the government ensure the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund best supports local communities across the UK?
10. The government has identified four focus areas for how it will drive up digital inclusion, these are:
 - Opening up opportunities through skills
 - Tackling data and device poverty
 - Breaking down barriers to digital services
 - Building confidence
 - a) Do you agree with these four focus areas? *Yes/ No/ Don't know*
 - b) **If no**, what changes would you make to the areas of focus?

11. For each focus area, has the government identified the right objectives?
Please refer to the objectives in the consultation document.

- a. "Opening up opportunities through skills"
 - i. Has the government identified the right objectives? *Yes/ No/ Don't know*
 - ii. **If no**, what should be the objectives of this area?
- b. "Tackling data and device poverty"
 - i. Has the government identified the right objectives? *Yes/ No/ Don't know*
 - ii. **If no**, what should be the objectives of this area?
- c. "Breaking down barriers to digital services"
 - i. Has the government identified the right objectives? *Yes/ No/ Don't know*
 - ii. **If no**, what should be the objectives of this area?
- d. "Building confidence"
 - i. Has the government identified the right objectives? *Yes/ No/ Don't know*
 - ii. **If no**, what should be the objectives of this area?

12. For each focus area, has government identified the right medium and long-term next steps? Please refer to the next steps in the Digital Inclusion Action Plan document.

- a. "Opening up opportunities through skills"
 - i. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps? *Yes/ No/ Don't know*
 - ii. **If no**, what should be the next steps in this area?
- b. "Tackling data and device poverty"
 - i. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps? *Yes/ No/ Don't know*
 - ii. **If no**, what should be the next steps in this area?
- c. "Breaking down barriers to digital services"
 - i. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps? *Yes/ No/ Don't know*
 - ii. **If no**, what should be the next steps in this area?
- d. "Building confidence"

- i. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps? *Yes/ No/ Don't know*
- ii. **If no**, what should be the next steps in this area?

13. If you have any additional ideas on what government should be doing, please tell us more.

This call for evidence will remain open until 23:55 on Wednesday 9 April. When responding, please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. Your response will be most useful if it is framed in direct response to the questions posed, though further comments and evidence are also welcome.

Submit your online responses [here](#)

To help us analyse the responses, please use the online system if you are able to and ensure you have submitted your response before exiting the questions.

If you would prefer to respond by email you can contact us at:

Digitalinclusion@dsit.gov.uk

You may also respond by post. Please address your letter to:

Digital Inclusion and Skills Unit
Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology
22-26 Whitehall
Westminster
London
SW1A 2EG

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