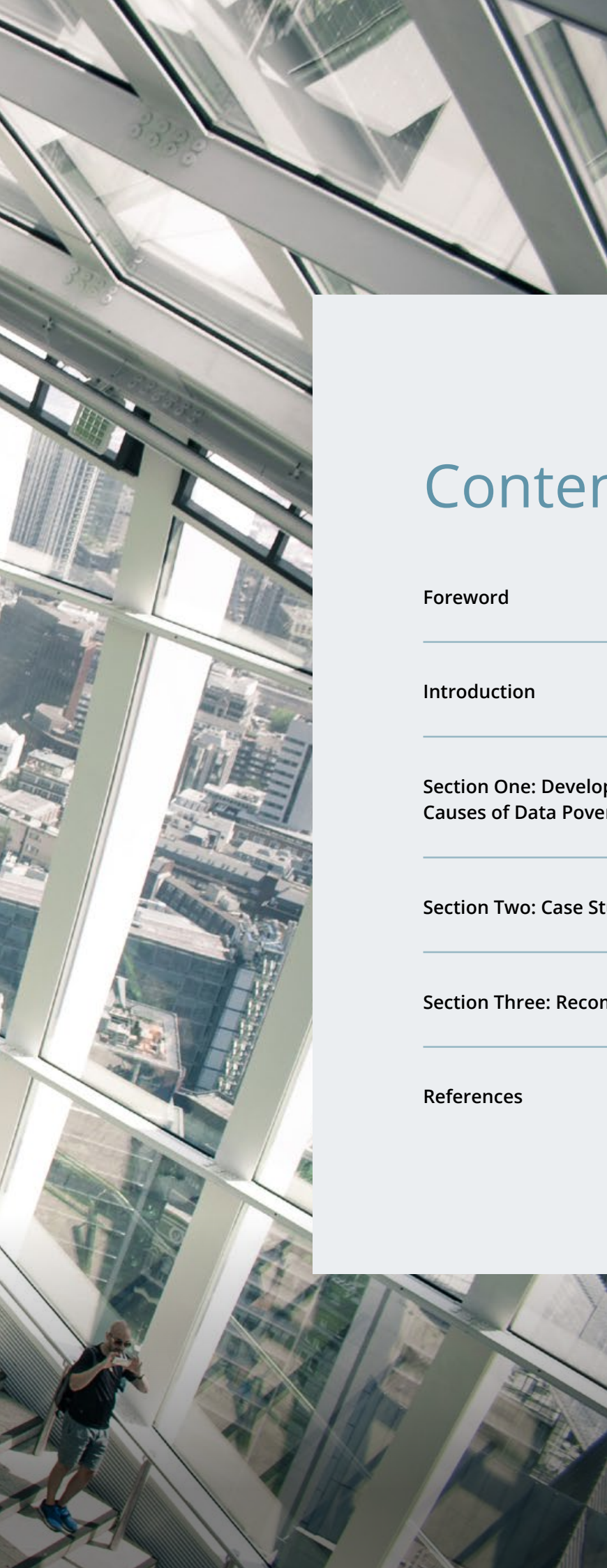


Data Poverty APPG

State of the Nation Report 2:

August 2023





Contents

Foreword	4
<hr/>	
Introduction	6
<hr/>	
Section One: Developments in the Causes of Data Poverty	10
<hr/>	
Section Two: Case Studies	19
<hr/>	
Section Three: Recommendations	42
<hr/>	
References	45

Foreword from Data Poverty APPG Co-Chairs, Darren Jones MP and Matt Warman MP



The publication of the 2023 Data Poverty APPG State of the Nation report marks the culmination of a second full year of this group's activity.

Online access has become critical for enabling people to actively participate in our society and economy. However, more people will have been pushed into data poverty due to the ongoing cost of living crisis and the variety of inflation-linked price rises seen across internet service providers. As a result, we have more of a duty than ever to find a set of workable policies to eradicate data poverty in the UK.

Every community has been impacted by the cost-of-living crisis, which has proven more persistent and pervasive than many of us feared. It's squeezed people's incomes across the UK and driven up to one million households to the point where they've had to cancel or downgrade their internet packages in order to afford basic utilities.¹

Meanwhile, the online world has continued to boom – from headline-grabbing developments such as the explosion in generative AI, to slower, less noticeable, but equally significant processes such as the steady digitisation of public services and private enterprise.

This presents the central dilemma: that the digital and data divide in our country is widening, when the UK's success – and the prosperity of all its citizens – demands that it closes.

Alongside this is an opportunity which the UK cannot afford to miss. According to research from digital inclusion charity Good Things Foundation, fixing the digital divide will bring a returned net present value to our economy of £12.2 billion.²

This is why we've been continuing to work hard to raise awareness and hear solutions in Westminster on the issue of data poverty. We've been pleased to welcome several new officers to the APPG, including Matt Warman MP who has brought his considerable expertise and energy to bear as our new Co-Chair.

In July, the House of Lords Digital and Communications Committee published a commendable report on digital exclusion, of which data poverty forms a significant component. We were happy to submit last year's State of the Nation Report as evidence to the Committee and were encouraged by their findings and their clear call to Ministers across Departments to show new leadership in this area. We now look forward to the Government's response to the Committee, expected on 20 September 2023.³

We've also been hugely heartened to hear during the Group's sessions over the past year how organisations across industry and the third sector have been ramping up their efforts to alleviate data poverty both nationally and locally, with expanded social tariffs, increased donations to databanks, increased provision of internet to students, and targeted outreach to some of the most excluded in society. These are just a snapshot of some of the brilliant initiatives taking place.

What's also become clear is how this work urgently needs support from government, whether that be through new funding models or legislative change. As parliamentarians, we have an important opportunity to learn from these initiatives with a view to building a national strategy to tackle data poverty, while remaining alert and responsive to the differences that exist between regions and localities in its execution.

That's why in this year's report, we've updated our recommendations to the following:

1. **Make addressing data and digital poverty a core task of the new Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.**
2. **Create a Digital and Social inclusion Fund.**
3. **Develop a national digital inclusion forum with Ofcom.**
4. **Create a 'one-stop shop' digital inclusion support service for consumers, charities, and government agencies.**
5. **Easier access to social tariffs and data voucher schemes for those on eligible benefits.**
6. **Increased provision of internet connectivity in public spaces.**
7. **A digital 'right-of-way' to public services and other essential services provided through the private sector.**
8. **Expand the number of zero-rated websites**

If we can be successful in achieving these, we can ensure that the enormous social and economic value of mending disparities in data access across the UK can start to be felt. The internet is a wonderful thing when used for public good: it's past time that everyone is able to benefit.



Introduction



£12.2 billion

Fixing the digital divide will bring a returned net present value to the UK economy of £12.2 billion. This will only be possible if we address the fundamental issue of data access.



81 areas

Based on research conducted by Good Things Foundation Data Poverty Lab Fellow Kat Dixon, there are now at least 81 identifiable areas in which internet access has become integral to our daily lives.⁴



70%

Recent polling shows 70% of people would support the Government providing a device to access the internet in every household; and 80% of people would support the Government prioritising internet access in all homes.⁵



2 million

2 million households in the UK are struggling to pay for broadband.⁶ This is a rise of nearly 1 million since the last Data Poverty APPG State of the Nation Report.⁷



In the past few years, the term 'data poverty' has gone from a little-known concept to an issue that is increasingly recognised as both a critical and expanding obstacle to enabling equality of opportunity across the UK.

Last year's Data Poverty APPG State of the Nation Report focused on defining and quantifying the issue, which was agreed as:

Anyone who is unable to get online, or unable to be online long enough to meet their needs, is in data poverty.⁸

The report also made nine recommendations to serve as a starting point to tackling data poverty in the UK:

1. Developing an agreed definition of data poverty

2. Creating an assumed right to data

3. Agreeing a digital 'right-of-way' to public services

4. Promoting social tariff and data voucher auto-enrolment

5. Outlining clear social tariff order journeys

6. Making early termination free and simple

7. Expanding the number of zero-rated websites

8. Establishing collaborative ways of working

9. Creating a social inclusion fund



It has been encouraging to see progress made in many of these areas. Data poverty as a term has continued to proliferate across media, industry and parliamentary discourse, expanding awareness of the topic and the urgent need for it to be addressed. Public service providers are increasingly recognising that equitable online access must go alongside increased digitisation.⁹ Internet service providers are continuing to expand their social tariff offers, supported by the Department for Work and Pensions allowing internet service providers to verify – with customers' permission – whether they are in receipt of the necessary benefits and therefore eligible for additional financial support.^{10 11} The APPG has also witnessed first-hand the transformative effects of increased collaboration between industry and third-sector organisations, with the expansion of flagship initiatives such as Good Things Foundation's National Databank supported by ISPs including Virgin Media O2 and Vodafone.¹²

At the same time, progress in other areas has been slower than an effective response to the issue of data poverty demands.

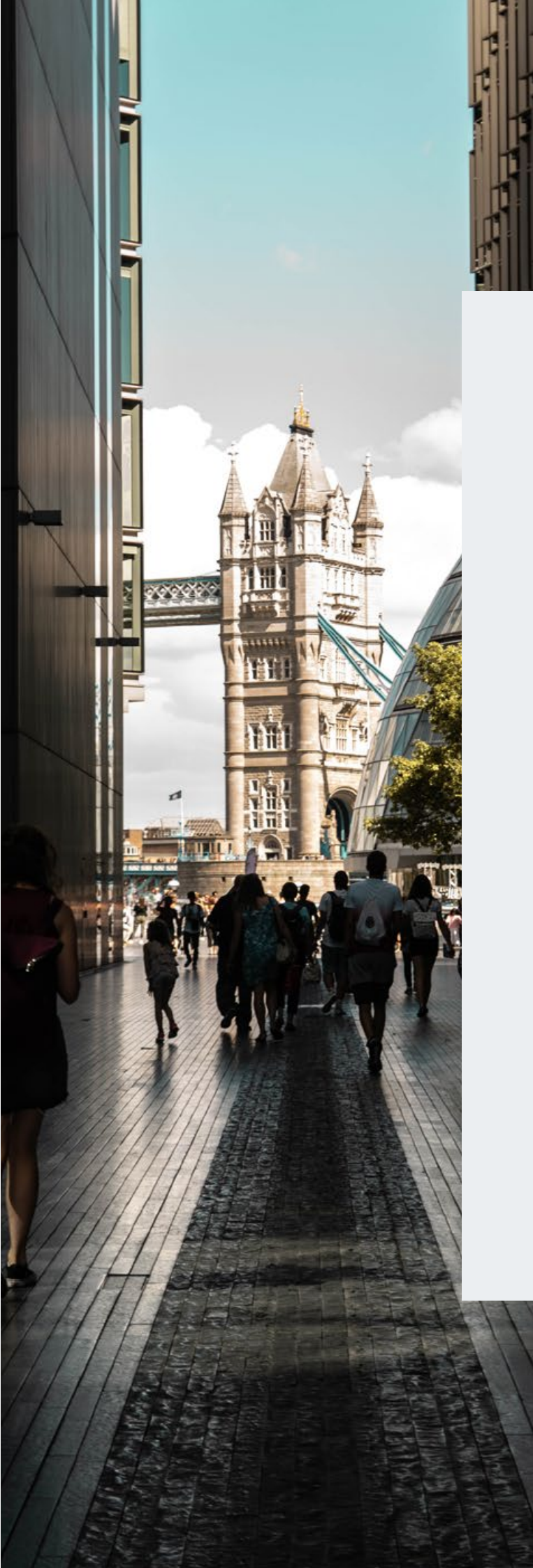
A consistent message from industry and third sector stakeholders when engaging with the APPG has been a frustration at a lack of sustained engagement from government. It is widely acknowledged that the legislative and funding systems in place around data poverty are insufficient and remain fundamentally unchanged from at least before the publication of last year's State of the Nation Report.¹³

In Parliament, the call for increased centralised activity in response to data and digital poverty was taken up by the

House of Lords Digital and Communications Committee, which in June 2023 published its report on Digital Exclusion and the Cost of Living.¹⁴

The Committee's report echoes many of those from the Data Poverty APPG's State of the Nation report 2022, with alignment on calls to action including:

- A cross-government approach towards tackling digital & and data poverty
- An updated National Digital Inclusion Strategy
- Easier order journeys for those eligible for social tariffs, inc. free early termination
- Improving & expanding data voucher schemes
- Improving digital access to public services



The Data Poverty APPG endorses the Committee's findings, and in this report will seek to reinforce its call to action by highlighting how and where data poverty obstructs successful policy outcomes.

The findings mentioned in the sections below are based on the Group's sessions over the past 12 months, which have focussed on the impacts of data poverty in sectors including:

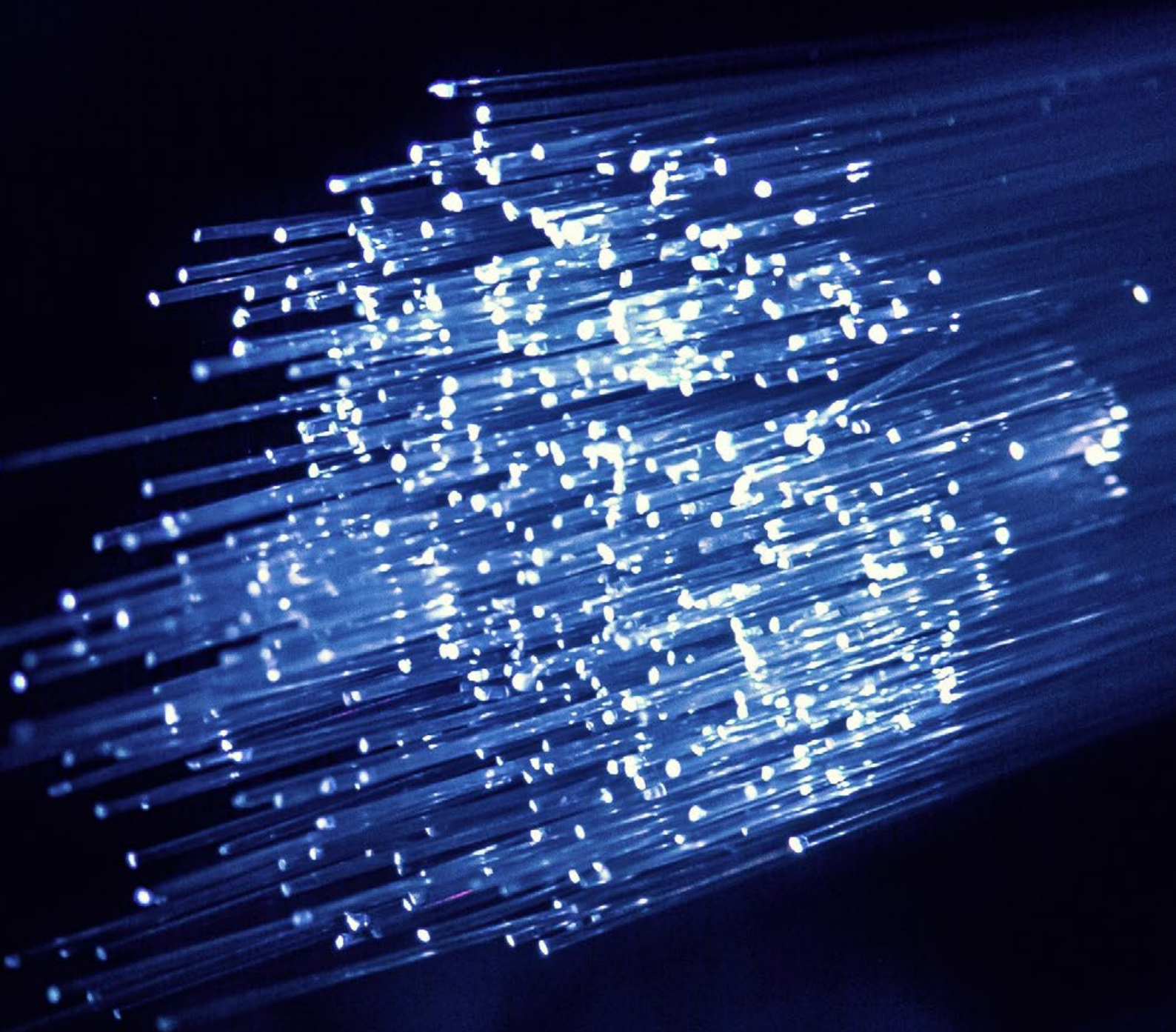
- Healthcare
- Education
- Financial services
- The labour market


It is the view of the APPG that these sectors are some of the most significantly and urgently affected by data poverty. The Group also held a roundtable in winter 2022 on the effects of the cost-of-living crisis, in a bid to better understand the immediate steps that might be taken to mitigate the impacts of inflation on data access.

To this end, the following sections of this report are informed by evidence and testimonies gathered by the APPG on these sectors and the wider contexts surrounding data poverty. These have been provided from experts across our partner organisations and more widely from the fields of politics, industry, academia and the third sector. The Data Poverty APPG would like to extend our thanks to all of those who have contributed to this research, as well as the Group's work over the last two years.

Section One:

Developments in the Causes of Data Poverty





The most significant constituent cause of data poverty identified in last year's State of the Nation Report was affordability, and this remains the case today.¹⁵ It was noted too that affordability issues manifest themselves particularly strongly in times of hardship, and this is something that has been particularly evident throughout the cost-of-living crisis over the past year.

The worsening cost-of-living crisis has significantly exacerbated data poverty in the UK. According to the Citizens Advice Bureau, one million households have cancelled or downgraded their internet packages over the last year, driven by inflation which reached a peak of 11.1% in October and remains persistently higher than the Bank of England's 2% target.^{16 17} To take a microcosm of the issue for one of the most persistently badly affected groups, a recent student survey found students lost £90 a month in November compared with the previous year.¹⁸

At the same time, the causes of data poverty referenced in last year's report have not gone away. In particular, access issues continue to spring from low digital literacy, a lack of access to devices, and through disparities in digital infrastructure and coverage.¹⁹ BT estimated last year that 2.6 million households in the UK do not have the necessary skills to access the internet, including 50% of the population aged 75 or older.²⁰ This year, Good Things Foundation reports that 10.9 million people lack the basic skills needed to participate in the digital world and that 6.9 million people will continue to be digitally excluded if they cannot access support.^{21 22 23}



Impacts

Last year's State of the Nation report revealed that 2.7 million people were behind on their broadband bills in January 2022,²⁴ and highlighted Ofcom figures that revealed that 1.5 million UK households had no internet access at all in 2021.²⁵ Last year, 1 in 6 broadband customers struggled to pay their bills between March 2020 and January 2021 (Citizens Advice 2021), while 2 million households struggled to afford internet access in the UK.²⁶

Added to this is research presented to the APPG showing nearly 6 million young people across the UK do not have proper internet access,²⁷ with one in four young people lacking home internet access.²⁸ It is estimated that currently, one in five households is unable to afford broadband,²⁹ something which is reiterated by Citizens Advice's report that one million people in the UK cancelled their broadband in the last year as the cost-of-living crisis left them unable to afford internet access.³⁰ Finally, Ofcom found that this year, 4% of the population reported having no devices enabling internet access at home.³¹

This year's figures are similarly sobering. According to research by the CSJ, Ofcom's figure of 1.5 million UK households lacking internet access last year has risen to as high as 3 million as of August 2023.

The long term societal impact of data poverty

Data poverty seriously affects the ability of less affluent young people to gain access to health and financial services, as well as education and employment mobility.³² Moreover, the 2025 online learning entitlement will further disadvantage those unable to access the internet. The growing presence of AI in education and the labour market means all students and workers will need access to a data bank and data source in order to benefit from it.³³

According to the Lloyds Bank Digital Consumer Index, of two people in the same job, one with digital skills will on average make £450 more a year than someone with no digital skills. People who are online can save £600 a year through savings and online tools compared to someone who is offline.³⁴

The APLE Collective points out that both lack of opportunity and fear, for example, of AI, are obstacles to digital access which compromise individual independence and can lead to isolation and mental health problems. Indeed, NHS England cites the World Health Organisation's designation of health literacy as a key outcome measure for early child development, school curricula and lifelong learning for health and wellbeing.³⁵ The United Nations emphasises that "poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities", hampering effective participation in society.^{36 37}

Alarmingly, only 43% of adults in England are able to understand health information when presented in text format, making it doubly important to ensure that online health information is reliable and usable, safeguarding against misinformation.³⁸ As the NHS becomes increasingly digitised, it is important to allay the risk of misdiagnoses online, especially for pensioners and people with learning disabilities,³⁹ while ensuring that there are better privacy regulations for care home residents.⁴⁰

"supporting digital access should be viewed in the same way as giving an asthmatic an inhaler."⁴¹

People in data poverty are particularly disadvantaged when they develop health problems that make them even less able to gain digital access, especially when there is a need for their condition to be constantly monitored. Research from the US Government shows people without high-speed internet access suffer worse health outcomes.⁴²



Data poverty: an obstacle to learning and prosperity

Education is an important means by which people can potentially find a path to prosperity and health. However, many of the poorest students are locked out of higher education by the fact that data access is needed to apply to courses in the first place.⁴³

In last year's report, 39,000 HE and almost 24,000 FE students were reported to have encountered obstacles to learning online: 16% of FE and 24% of HE respondents cited mobile data costs as a concern.⁴⁴ In this year's report, student broadband provider Jisc tells us that 51% of students say that wifi/broadband connectivity has an impact on their ability to learn online.

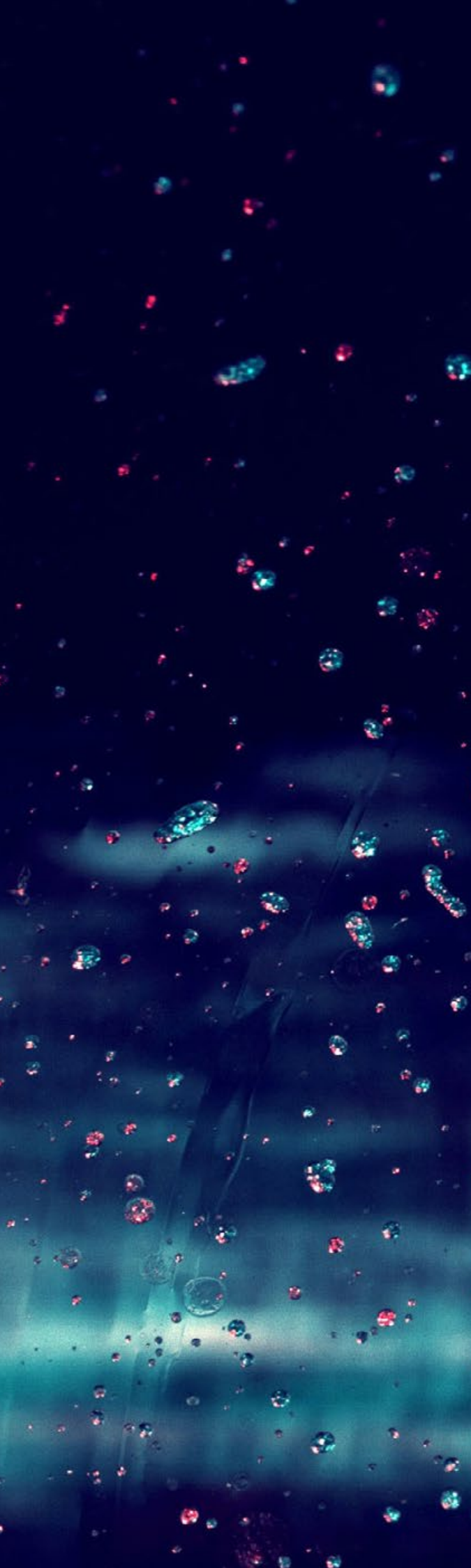
Again last year, Jisc argued that disadvantaged HE students should be added to the 'Get help with technology' scheme. An open letter was sent to the then Secretary of State for Education from Jisc and partners at Guild HE and Universities UK, but as yet there has been no rethink.⁴⁵

The statistic of 25% of young people who don't have home broadband access rises to 48% with care leavers – meaning they're further disadvantaged from entering the workforce.⁴⁶

With many applications and assessments moving online, the one in four young people who lack home internet access face considerable challenges. That statistic of 25% rises to 48% with care leavers, making it even more difficult for them to get a job.⁴⁷ Apprentices, often from less affluent backgrounds, are also disproportionately affected by data poverty.⁴⁸

Digital skills are now fundamental to almost every job role, which will be a further disadvantage to the nearly 6 million young people across the UK who do not have proper internet access. People in data poverty often find themselves in a vicious circle; without data, they are unable to get a job and then cannot afford data as a result.⁴⁹ Currently, 75% of the workforce need digital skills to get into work. In regions like the North of England, there are many poorly connected places, which poses a problem for economic growth because businesses and workers alike will choose to locate themselves in areas with superior digital infrastructure. Meanwhile, 70% of the financial services workforce operate from home, as well as 70% of the IT services workforce – both sectors where connectivity is crucial.⁵⁰

Technology has the opportunity to be the 'ultimate leveller': disabled people can work at home, young people have vast educational resources available to them, and those who are less inclined towards school can take advantage of the web to do things such as set up an online business.⁵¹ However, this requires basic digital infrastructure, which currently is not being provided.⁵²



Cut off from money-saving tools and services

Data poverty deepens the worst effects of the cost of living crisis by restricting access to online money-saving tools and services. With banks closing their high street branches, it has become clear over the past 10 years that broadband is a utility rather than a luxury.⁵³

In its work with CEBR⁵⁴, Good Things Foundation calculated that every £1 invested in basic digital skills could generate an overall return of £9.48. The estimated cost of equipping 508,000 people per year with basic digital skills over that period was circa £1.4 billion. Without further action to improve people's digital skills, 5.8 million people will still be digitally excluded by 2032. Failing to invest means the UK will lose out on £12.2 billion of economic value.

3.7m people in the UK would benefit from better digital connectivity, and... disadvantaged children are a third more likely to be in data poverty than their peers.

Nominet's Digital Youth Index



Solutions

There is a large patchwork of solutions, current and planned, happening across the country and in different sectors; the Government now needs to provide a centralised convening force to coordinate and scale these into a national solution.

Given increasing financial pressures on students,⁵⁵ clearer signposting to a social tariff or databank before cutting students off from an ISP provider could be an important way forward. Jisc wants to put its eduroam service in all government buildings and build on breakthroughs in Manchester and Salford universities and Kent and Medway councils.⁵⁶ So far, however, only 7 councils have taken the offer up, despite promotion from Michelle Donelan MP when she was DCMS Secretary.⁵⁷

The complex debate on online access to patient data and the possibility of sharing between Trusts poses a potential solution to slow or inadequate access to healthcare.⁵⁸

Currently, patients and doctors remain unable to see prescriptions online and allowing data sharing could help those who struggle most with healthcare access.⁵⁹

⁶⁰ However, public concerns over GDPR form a barrier to change in this area.⁶¹

The idea of classing data as a utility continues to be discussed; the APPG can consider what steps need to be taken to ensure it is a workable solution,⁶² but such a move might require changing the whole model of its provision.⁶³

Progress updates on 2022 solutions

Amidst the difficulties, there are some significant achievements. In last year's report, the Nominet Digital Youth Index highlighted that 2.9 million young people (21%) did not have access to either a laptop or desktop and almost a third (32%) of young people did not have access to home broadband, leaving 6 million (42%) young people without home broadband or a laptop/desktop. Since April 2022, 16,203 devices have been donated to Good Things Foundation for refurbishment. 4,429 of these devices have been given to 267 Digital Inclusion Hubs to distribute to people in their community, with more on the way. This means that, since April 2022, 3,054,424.5 CO2 e-emissions were avoided and 29,830.9 kgs of e-waste prevented.

Last year, BT supported new research by the Fabian Society which concluded that all operators should offer social tariffs to an agreed industry standard on speed, price and terms, making it easier for customers to understand. Despite Ofcom's figure of only 1.2% eligible customers taking up a social tariff, there are signs that awareness is starting to build.

Some experts suggested the VAT charged on broadband should be used as a funding pot to support social tariffs and broadband access. It was also suggested that social tariffs could be accompanied by contracts with no mid-contract price rises and exit fees, particularly in light of the fact that one million people had their broadband cut off last year. Clearly, there is still work to be done and these arguments continue to be made.





Since April 2022, Good Things Foundation has distributed 181,798 free SIM cards from O2, Vodafone (whose business.connected programme is set to upskill the online capabilities of 800,000 SMEs by 2025) and Three and marked its 1,000th National Databank earlier this year. Since the Databank launched, it has distributed over 50,000 SIMs/vouchers through over 400 partner organisations, with more joining each month with the support of Virgin Media O2, and donations of SIMs and vouchers from O2, Vodafone and Three.

Virgin Media O2's collaboration with Virgin Money as part of their poverty taskforce is another example of how digital and financial exclusion can be tackled. Virgin Media O2's work with Good Things Foundation's databank has enabled the donation of enough connectivity to connect half a million people in the UK. Their databank pilot has been expanded to 33 Virgin Money stores in a bid to tackle data poverty on the high streets.⁶⁴

The main solution to data poverty would be a proactive approach from government, but so far the response is lacking. Currently, responsibility falls in a policy blackspot,⁶⁵ with the recent House of Lords Digital and Communications Committee report into digital exclusion noting that, since 'digital exclusion is inherently cross-cutting', responses to it must be 'similarly joined up'. It points out that the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) 'holds the main policy lead', but that 'many delivery mechanisms sit elsewhere, including in at least six Government departments'.⁶⁶ The report adds that the Cabinet Office 'holds many of the core policy leads, while the departments for Education, Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Work and Pensions and Health and Social Care, as well as HM Treasury, 'also oversee key policies and services'.⁶⁷ Baroness Stowell, House of Lords Digital and Communications Committee chair, said they had found 'a distinct lack of leadership in Government to tackle this issue'.

Section Two:

Case Studies



The clear benefits of tackling digital exclusion

Access to and the ability to use connectivity, especially broadband, is a prerequisite to other public policy goals, such as delivering healthcare and other public services digitally, enabling individuals to better manage finances, helping people back into work and retraining or building new skills to access improved careers. We recommend that the Government prioritise and resource effective policy interventions that reduce digital exclusion.

Digital inclusion: the first step on the path out of the poverty trap

Potential policy interventions:

1. Joined up and funded policy interventions to address the digital skills gap

The primary barrier to being online is low digital skills, which breed a lack of confidence and motivation, most often found in older people.^{69 70} Yet, enabling this group to engage digitally can improve outcomes for patients, the NHS and society as a whole.

Patients able to engage digitally – for example, contacting the GP online or having a condition managed via a virtual ward – get better healthcare outcomes, such as spending less time seeking care⁷¹ or recovering more quickly.⁷² This can enable significant savings for the NHS: one study showed a cost saving per patient of over £700.⁷³

Data from the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) shows that the cost of caring for older people – taking into account hospital and community health services, family health services and pharmaceutical services – increases with age⁷⁴. At the same time, our population is ageing: over the next 25 years the number of over 85s in the UK will double to 2.6 million⁷⁵.

Ability Net outlines how personal and regular support from a trained expert, often delivered at home, can significantly improve quality of life and public service delivery.⁷⁶ The current patchwork of charity and voluntary organisations offering this type of help should be scaled up to a high-quality, clear, consistent, nationwide programme.



2. Fully fund connectivity for the very lowest income households

New research from Frontier Economics suggests that one million working-age individuals eligible for social tariffs live in households that cannot afford any connectivity at all, even lower priced social tariffs.

Lloyds Digital Index research shows that, in similar low-income households, those that are both connected and have the necessary digital skills to use that connectivity have higher incomes, are better able to manage their money, have better job opportunities, and have better access to healthcare⁷⁷.

The Government, in some ways, seems to recognise this: for example, it requires universal credit claimants to apply online,⁷⁸ with much support from Job Centres now offered online.⁷⁹ Yet the very low income group identified by Frontier – 85% of whom do not work – cannot afford to pay for the connectivity that would enable them to search for a job, manage their money, or reach their GP online.

The digital exclusion of this group, initially due to their limited incomes, then compounded with low skill and confidence challenges, is absolute. There is a strong case for policy intervention to resolve this, either by funding connectivity, providing it directly, or increasing incomes to ensure it is affordable.

A joined-up policy response

Tackling data poverty is also a pre-cursor to the success of public policy programmes such as digitising public services, from benefits claims to the NHS, to supporting people into work and improving UK productivity. If this Government, or the next, were considering improved policies to address digital exclusion, it should start with better supporting these two groups – those that can't use or cannot afford the internet – in a joined-up way.



Good Things Foundation

Fixing the Digital Divide - For Good

The Government must act

The House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee's report reiterates our call for urgent action, describing the digital divide's profound effects on individual health and wellbeing, and on the multi-billion pound implications for the country's economic growth, education, employment, and Net Zero targets. We endorse the report's conclusion that the scale of this problem is a direct consequence of political lethargy and concur that an ongoing, practical, joined-up digital inclusion strategy can help us fix the digital divide – for good.

Impact since our strategy launch in 2022

At Good Things Foundation, we support digitally excluded adults through a network of hyperlocal Digital Inclusion Hubs across the country. Through our National Digital Inclusion Network, Good Things Foundation has delivered our flagship online learning platform, Learn My Way, to 1,839 Digital Inclusion Hubs. The platform has over 100 free online topics for learning digital skills and staying safe and connected online. More than 9 in 10 participants in the UKCRF-funded Digital Skills Pathway pilot reported improved digital skills and greater internet confidence.⁸⁰ Since April 2022, we have seen 79,217 registrations to the platform.

We endorse the House of Lords report's recommendation for the establishment of a cross-government digital exclusion unit, having calculated that to halve the digital divide by 2030 the Government must co-invest £30 million per year in digital inclusion and skills, and work across departments – including Number 10 – to break down barriers to opportunity and set the UK on the path to the highest sustained growth in the G7.



Eradicating data poverty

Good Things Foundation's National Databank provides free mobile connectivity data for people who cannot access it. Since April 2022, we have distributed 181,798 free SIM cards from O2, Vodafone and Three. We marked our 1,000th National Databank earlier this year and support 1,221 Hubs to distribute SIMs to those in need. However, free connectivity is a sticking plaster on a wider structural issue: data poverty. To meaningfully eradicate data poverty, the internet must be accessible and affordable for everybody. The House of Lords recommends that the Government reduce VAT on broadband social tariffs from 20% to 0%, and pass on the financial savings to end consumers. Several internet providers have committed to this approach. By eliminating VAT on these tariffs, costs can be reduced and internet access made more widely available.

“Asking family and others to borrow their data felt burdensome. [Now] I’m able to do it all online – check my balance, check my gas and electricity bills. The cost-of-living crisis is hard but access to the internet makes life so much easier.”

Refurbishing devices

The Covid-19 pandemic made evident the indisputable importance of devices to people's health and wellbeing, education and employment. Yet, earlier this year, 4% of the population reported having no devices enabling internet access at home.⁸¹ In addition, the UK has the world's second-highest level of landfill e-waste per head of population as devices are replaced and disposed of inadequately. Several initiatives have been established to ensure provision of devices in the UK and the addressing of e-waste. The House of Lords reference Good Things Foundation's National Device Bank as tackling digital exclusion and accelerating our country towards its Net Zero targets, by safely refurbishing old and disused devices at scale and distributing them to digitally excluded adults across the UK.

The House of Lords is calling on the Government to ask public sector organisations to donate their old devices to the National Device Bank and encourage businesses to do likewise. Similarly, we are asking the Government to reuse all of its technology, as donating to the National Device Bank is good for people and the planet.

Fixing the Digital Divide - For Good

Our recent polling shows that 75% of people believe the Government should do more to fix the digital divide. A new Digital Inclusion Strategy should act on data, devices, and skills, and acknowledge how digital disparity undermines efforts to foster economic prosperity and social wellbeing for individuals, households and communities.



Nominet⁸²

The urgent need for leadership

Last year's Data Poverty APPG State of the Nation report highlighted the ever-growing dependence on data and digital access across the UK. Since then, many families have continued to live more of their lives online, with continued hybrid working, NHS e-consultations and a myriad of digital tools for children's education and parent contact.

Had the recommendations of last year's State of the Nation report been implemented, we would have seen more zero-rated social services websites, better developed and highly accessible social tariffs for broadband, the commitment and delivery of a social inclusion fund and a digital right of way for every adult in the UK.

Instead, we've seen a year of deepening digital poverty, millions more customers unable to pay utility bills, having to choose between connecting online for essential services or putting food on the table. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that one million people in the UK cancelled their broadband in the last year as the cost-of-living crisis left them unable to afford internet access⁸³. We've also had more government services going online, substantial above-inflation increases in broadband bills and more column inches devoted to 'AI' than to essential digital skills.

As the recent House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee report points out, we need a Government-led strategy to tackle digital exclusion if we are to show true global digital leadership and become a science and tech superpower. That strategy should build on the insights we have on digital poverty and work with academia, industry and civil society.

Digital inclusion partnership

As we continue to build our understanding of data poverty, initiatives like the Nominet and Good Things Foundation Data Poverty Lab fellowship have helped us better understand data poverty for young people in the care system and how to scale solutions. We've also reaffirmed our commitment to our largest and most ambitious long-term partnership to date with Good Things Foundation, building on their work to create a 5,000 strong grassroots Digital Inclusion Network across the UK, the establishment of the National Device Bank and the further development of the National Data Bank to help a million families.

We'll work tirelessly with our partners, grassroots organisations, industry peers and passionate advocates to respond to needs in key areas and support at a local level. But, crucially, we must look to Government and make the case more strongly and urgently for change in how data poverty is understood and addressed. Society and social services are digital by default in so many aspects of daily life; they now underpin the social, educational, health and community infrastructure that everyone depends on. Abandoning outcomes to chance, or to industry alone, in the digital age guarantees one thing; it leaves those most vulnerable and excluded behind.

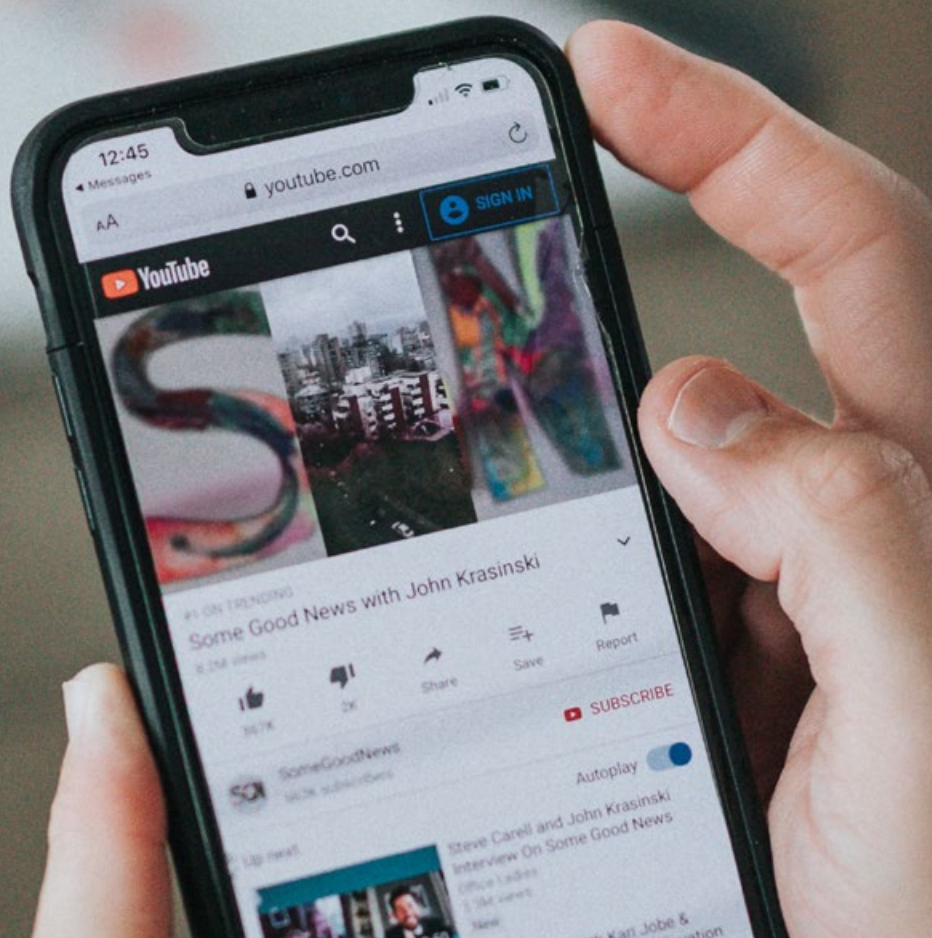


Artificial intelligence could widen the digital divide

Since the artificial intelligence tool ChatGPT was released in late 2022, there has been a worldwide focus on the implications of AI, and on education in particular. But one issue that has not been properly addressed is how access to AI tools could exacerbate digital inequality. Jisc's annual Digital Experiences Survey currently shows around a third of HE students and a quarter of FE students see issues with data and digital as barriers to their learning.

At Jisc we believe the likes of ChatGPT hold great promise for students to use them in positive ways to improve teaching and learning. For example, ChatGPT can cut the time spent on routine tasks like writing reports, it can produce succinct summaries of arguments, has the ability to provide an essay outline or be prompted to respond as a character within a novel to support a deeper understanding of the character's motives or actions. Plugins excel at maths and STEM subjects.

Current AI tools have their limitations, producing inaccurate or hallucinated responses, but these will improve with time and new use cases are emerging all the time. AI use is already being embedded in the way students study and is well on its way to becoming a basic requirements of learning, much like access to the internet is now seen as an essential utility.



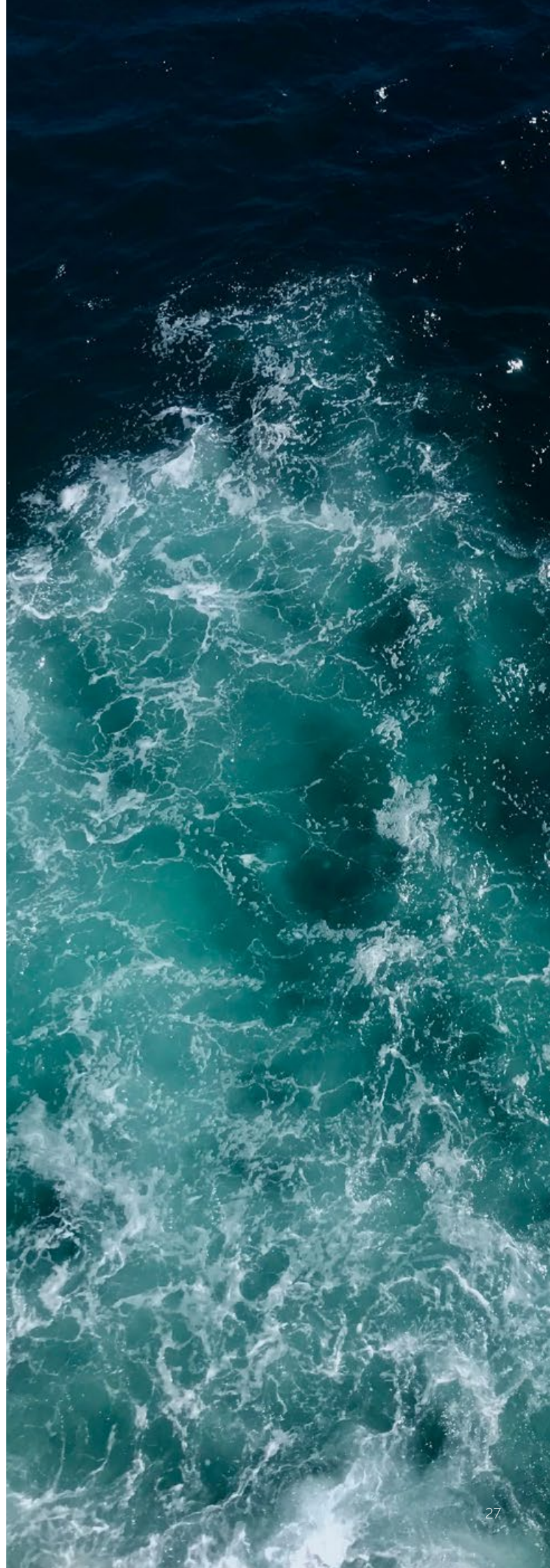
The likes of Microsoft and Google are already incorporating AI tools in their main platforms and we should be integrating AIs into the pallet of tools that we can all call upon to make us more effective both at work and in the classroom.

All of this comes at a cost, for both students and education providers, and there is a risk that students who can afford all the packages available will have an unfair advantage over those who cannot, or those whose college or university cannot afford to provide the tools, or are unwilling to. Those already in data poverty won't be able to take advantage of AI tools and risk dropping further behind their peers who can access these for educational purposes.

Jisc recently held discussion forums with tertiary students about their use of AI and among their main concerns was equity, that there was fair access and usage, particularly after charges started to be added to tools such as ChatGPT4.

Initial estimates by Jisc's experts found that if a student were to subscribe to a full suite of popular generative AI tools and education plug-ins, it could cost them around £1,000 a year. More assessment of this issue needs to be done before AI becomes part of the everyday digital tools being used in education, but at the very least we need to ensure all learners have access to suitable tools so they are not significantly disadvantaged in their studies.

Jisc continues to work with education providers to widen access to the internet and we are currently running trials with colleges of affordable AI tools for educators to create a variety of essential and engaging materials for their students.



Virgin Media O2

Addressing Digital Poverty: partnership for progress

At Virgin Media O2, we have set out the goals of connecting one million digitally excluded people across the UK through free and affordable connectivity and services, and improving the digital skills and confidence of six million people by the end of 2025. We are proud of our efforts to address data poverty, but partnerships between charities, Government and industry players are essential if we are to make meaningful progress. While the telecoms industry has already done a lot – a package of cost-of-living measures worth £290m since late 2021, according to Assembly Research – there is a limit to the impact we can have.

Affordable connectivity

Connectivity prices in the UK are among the lowest in the world and telecoms accounts only for about 4% of household expenditure. At Virgin Media O2, our Essential Broadband package supports people facing financial difficulty and receiving support payments to get online. Our Essential Broadband plan offers speeds of 15 Mbps and costs £12.50 per month, while Essential Broadband Plus provides 54 Mbps broadband for just £20 per month. Both plans are available for people who receive Universal Credit, income-based Employment Support Allowance, income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support, and Pension Credit – making almost 10m people in the UK eligible for these reduced cost services.

In our partnership with the UK's leading digital inclusion charity, Good Things Foundation, we are providing data, devices and digital skills to people most in need. We founded the National Databank with Good Things Foundation, committing more than 61 million GB of free O2 data to the initiative by the end of 2025, with more than 1,000 National Databank Hubs now operating across the UK. From the beginning, we felt it was important that the Databank was convened as a multi-operator initiative, and so when it launched, we called on the rest of the industry to join us in tackling data poverty together and are delighted that a number of operators have since done so.



Internet Service Providers

Vodafone - connectivity and support for all

Under the umbrella of the everyone.connected campaign, Vodafone has been providing free and affordable connectivity, donating technology and delivering skills programmes to those who need it most.

The support provided to individuals and business includes:

- SIMs and devices donated through charities.connected and the Great British Tech Appeal
- savings to customers achieved through VOXI For Now mobile and Essentials broadband social tariffs
- support provided to small businesses through Vodafone's business.connected programme.

Since 2020, this campaign has delivered the equivalent of £108 million in social value across the UK. After achieving our goal of connecting one million people by the end of 2022, we have extended our ambition to help a total of four million people cross the digital divide by 2025.

Access to online services

Vodafone Essentials Broadband provides affordable broadband for, among others, those in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit, to ensure that nobody is unable to access the labour market as a result of digital exclusion.

However, even with access to connectivity, people need the skills and confidence to stay connected and not fall on the wrong side of the digital divide, especially now that services and communities are increasingly moving online. Research commissioned by Vodafone at the end of the pandemic found that 36% of people felt they would benefit from digital skills training, with this almost twice as high (63%) for those seeking employment.

Alongside the social impact organisation, We Are Digital, we have created a free helpline with specially trained advisors to help callers gain skills such as setting up a phone or tablet, connecting to the internet, using online banking and money-saving tools, and email and messaging services. We've also designed a free step-by-step course on key digital themes called "Hi Digital", designed particularly for those who have rarely been online.

Supporting health and wellbeing

We've also partnered with Sported, a UK-wide grassroots sport and physical activity charity and are offering free connectivity, digital skills training and a grant-giving scheme to support young people's engagement in sport.

Digital access for businesses

Many SMEs feel they need to improve their digital skills and capabilities, as demonstrated by the 230,000 SMEs we've already assisted. Through our business connected programme we have pledged to upskill the online capabilities of 800,000 SMEs by 2025. This initiative provides a wide variety of free online training courses, mentoring and workshops to help SMEs maximise business opportunities online, adopt new technology, mitigate cyber-attacks and meet with other like-minded individuals.

The road ahead – a united approach

Closing the digital divide needs to be a key focus for the whole industry, not just network providers, Government and the third sector. We need to ensure that those households and individuals that need help with connectivity, devices and skills receive it.

The pandemic taught us the importance of collecting the data to identify what measures are required to target the most vulnerable in society and equip them with the tools they need. We would welcome intervention from Government to support us to get this data.

Finally, we need the whole digital ecosystem to play its part. To be able to continue offering affordable, financially viable social tariffs to digitally excluded people – as we, Government and Ofcom want – we need Openreach and others to offer an equivalent wholesale social tariff at a substantially reduced rate.



We Are Digital

No wrong door, no data poverty

A new era in how we should provide and fund support to those most in need.

Data poverty, the lack of access to digital tools and connectivity, remains a critical issue in our technologically advanced society. Our unique approach aims to run effective welfare programmes at scale, serving local and national governments, corporates, and the third sector. We offer digital and financial assistance, guidance, and skills, alongside providing hardware and connectivity. Additionally, we run Department of Education Skills Bootcamps across the UK to empower individuals with essential work and gain skills for life

At the core of our philosophy lies the belief in "No Wrong Door", by which everyone should receive the help they need, where and when they need it. To achieve this, we collaborate with a network of community partners to offer face-to-face and remote support across the UK.

1. The way the digital inclusion system works for people

The Challenges of Data Poverty

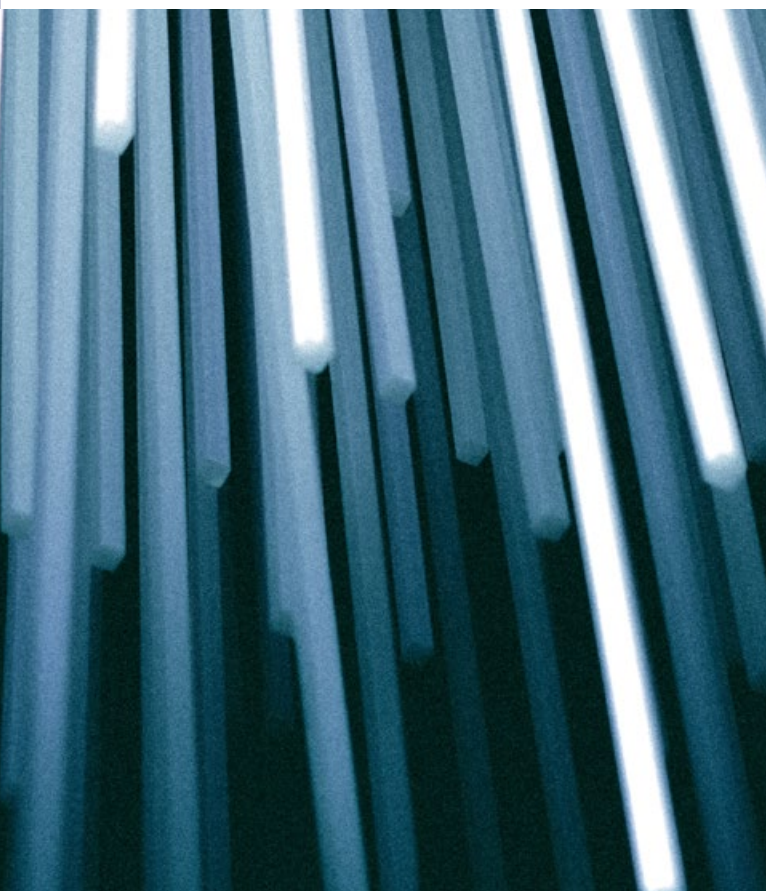
Despite significant investments in fintech and technology, community digital inclusion programmes for vulnerable individuals have remained stagnant for decades. Millions of pounds in government investments have failed to move the needle. Over the past two years, We Are Digital has engaged in conversations with funders, delivery partners, and service users across the UK, uncovering startling similarities in their feedback:

Fragmentation: The digital inclusion landscape suffers from fragmentation, leading to duplication, confusing user journeys and a disconnected approach to tackling data poverty.

Mismatched Support: Support often depends on the availability of supply, rather than being driven by customer demand or how people live their lives. For instance, the recent Enders report for connectivity tariffs highlighted that many in data poverty are employed and may not be able to attend community venue sessions, rendering such support ineffective for them.

Inappropriate Solutions: The abundance of support, without proper triage, results in mismatched solutions to the way people live their lives. For example, providing mobile data to someone via a community centre to which they can't travel is an inappropriate solution.

Challenges for Local Partners: Local partners, despite their intimate knowledge of communities, face administrative hurdles and limited funding, hampering their ability to provide effective support.



Reimagining the WAY Community Programmes are Run

We Are Digital aims to address these issues by constructing an end-to-end platform for managing community programmes efficiently, so they can scale and be based on user needs. Ours is not a standalone tech platform seeking user licenses, but a comprehensive service to enable the ecosystem. It encompasses a team of brilliant individuals, including triage agents, bookers, project managers, data analysts, and impact consultants, in addition to an extensive network of delivery organisations across the UK.

We manage community programmes from start to finish, ensuring a seamless experience for beneficiaries, where users can dial one number and, behind the scenes, a complex web of systems, technology, people, and providers work cohesively to offer help at the point of need. Examples of initiatives that have already been launched include partnerships with Lloyds Banking Group for their Digital Skills helpline and Vodafone services, where people can access free connectivity as well as skills.

Benefits of the New Approach

The implementation of this model offers numerous benefits to all parties:

Funders: More efficient, cost-effective programmes that reach the target population suited to the way they want to learn, delivering connectivity help at scale.

Delivery Organisations: Reduced administrative burdens, enabling them to focus on their core mission of helping people.

Users: A more impactful experience with prompt assistance tailored to their specific needs, eliminating the need to navigate multiple support channels.

2. The ownership of digital inclusion issues, including data poverty.

Ownership and Sustainable Funding

The narrative surrounding data poverty has traditionally placed the responsibility on the Government or internet service providers (ISPs). However, we believe in an “all-in-it-together” approach, where various content providers and sectors contribute to the cost of inclusion.

As with the digital switchover, which considered behaviour change alongside policy change and cross-sector initiatives, we need to approach digital poverty with a sustainable mindset, not as a one-off intervention.



APPLE Collective

Overcoming digital exclusion barriers

We are a national collective of individuals and groups with experience of poverty. The cost of living crisis⁸⁴ has exacerbated the digital inequality already highlighted by the Covid pandemic. In order to solve this problem, we listen to those affected to understand why they remain unconnected.

Digital exclusion is a class issue, also affecting rural and urban areas differently, presenting barriers to job applications and social security access. It hits schoolchildren who increasingly need access to technology for their homework, and other citizens, including the elderly who may struggle to access online GP and banking services or travel and transport information. Such barriers undermine personal independence, compromise data confidentiality and security, and can increase vulnerability to debt. These factors can lead to isolation, suicidal ideation and mental health issues and, overall, a less productive society.

Internet access – a human right

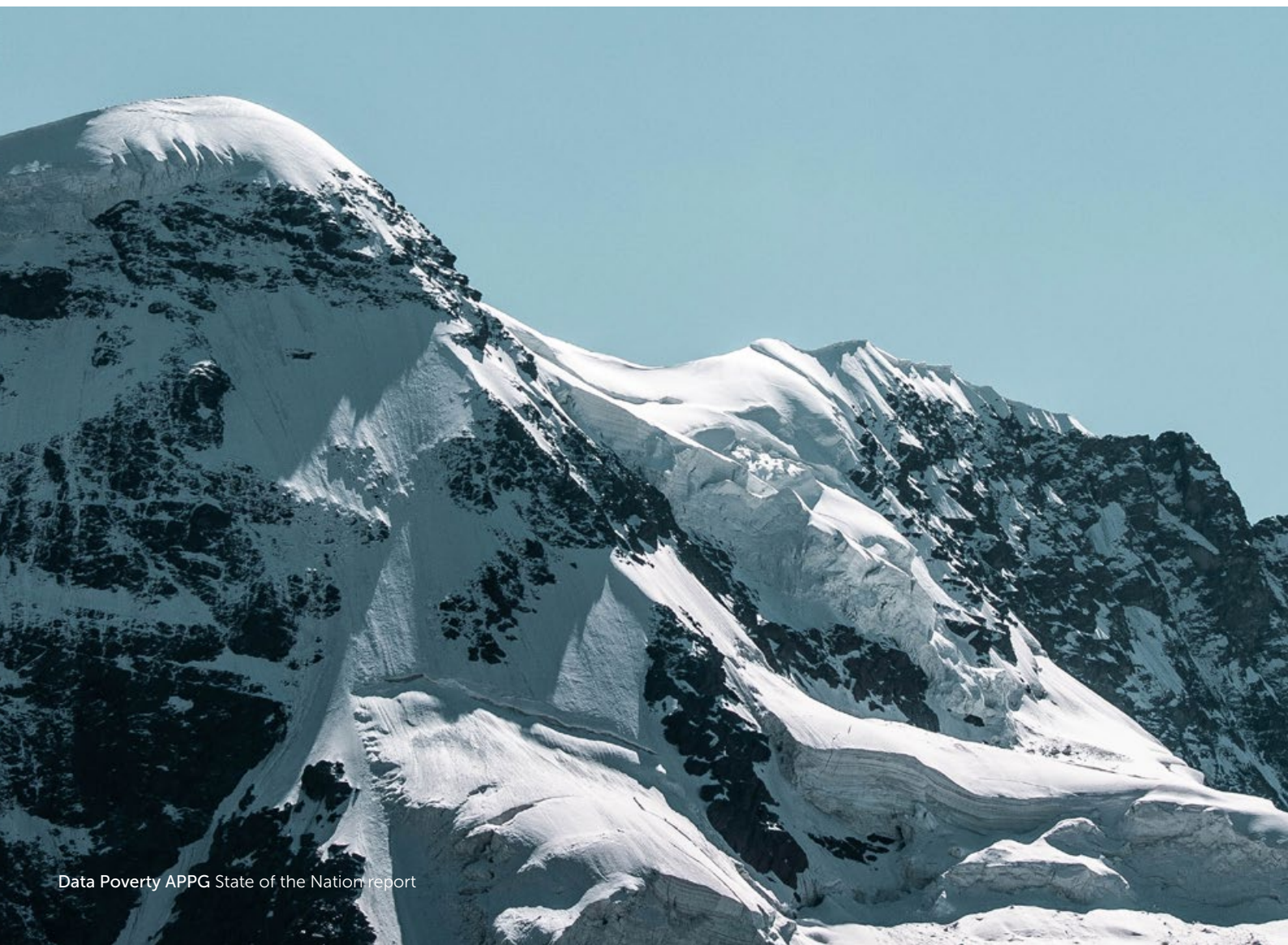
According to the most recent data from the Office for National Statistics, 'in 2018 there were still 5.3 million adults in the UK, or 10% of the adult UK population' who, as non-internet users without any access to the internet, are becoming increasingly isolated and cut-off from mainstream society.⁸⁵



Recommendations

Access to the internet should be understood as a human right.⁸⁶ At our participatory world café style conversation, the following policy levers and recommendations were proposed:

- ✓ Digital Training to support digital inclusion.
- ✓ Funding allocated to public libraries to allow people to access digital devices and get online in free public settings.
- ✓ Fewer barriers to public Wi-Fi.
- ✓ DWP funding to offer Data and Digital Devices (e.g. laptops) to support low income job seekers.
- ✓ Free Wi-Fi / data in public spaces such as social housing, older people's homes and hospitals.
- ✓ A charter signed by businesses to agree to invest in digital inclusion good practice. This could be linked to tax relief to big companies who provide free data.
- ✓ There should be lived-experience voices on the policy-making bodies within central and local government that design and deliver data and digital inclusion policies.



MDLS – a North Star for Digital Inclusion⁸⁷

Minimum Digital Living Standard (MDLS) has worked with members of the public to define what a minimum but acceptable level of 'digital inclusion' looks like.

A 'basket' of necessary skills

A minimum digital standard of living includes – but is more than – accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need. It is about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence.

Starting with households with children as the proof-of-concept, it is the combination of digital goods, services and skills that enables families to feel they meet a minimum level.

The Welsh Government has already commissioned the MDLS team to develop a Welsh Minimum Digital Living Standard as a key plank in the Digital Strategy for Wales. The appetite to understand and use the MDLS is increasing in Scotland and several English regions, as well as across different stakeholder groups.

What does the MDLS research tell us about data poverty?

Members of the public – both parents and young people – identified the need for a minimum combination of both mobile data and home broadband to ensure a minimum level of cultural and social engagement, such as:

- basic TV and gaming subscriptions.
- access to services, including health, banking, which are now increasingly online.
- access to school communications, now far more digitised.

The list of contents, therefore, includes the following services for connectivity:

- Broadband: home broadband with sufficient speed to support all family members to access the internet at the same time
- Mobile data: 5GB data per month for each parent and for each secondary school age child, with an extra 3GB of data per month if they have a child of pre-school or primary school age

Both home broadband and mobile data connectivity were felt to be necessary to reach the MDLS; and if a household was unable to have home broadband, for whatever reason, then the level of mobile data required would need to increase accordingly.

You could have whatever laptop you want but making sure the internet quality is good...has got to be key...to be able to hold conversations on the internet is key."

(Parents Task Group, Bristol)

Practical and functional skills for digital tasks

Within the skills identified by members of the public are those of managing and maintaining digital devices and data usage.

If affordability is a barrier, more skills are often required. You may need to know:

- What services or tasks consume most data or requires faster speeds
- What level of data consumption your family needs
- How to find and select the best deal to meet your needs - depending also on where you live, choice of providers, nature of contracts
- How to boost signals to deliver to every part of the house
- How to make mobile data last as long as possible
- How to use public Wi-fi as safely as possible (if you have limited data).

How can MDLS inform action to address data poverty?

For families on low incomes, being worried about not having sufficient fast, reliable broadband for family needs is one factor behind low uptake of social tariffs, alongside low awareness, cost, and stigma. In the MDLS research, parents talked about the horrible feeling of being worried they or their children will run out of data.

To end data poverty, we need to design internet connectivity services which lighten the load - both cognitive and financial - on families already struggling, including for families living with disability or caring responsibilities, in rural or remote areas, or in temporary accommodation.

Removing VAT from retail social tariffs and the wholesale broadband used to provide them, ensuring savings are passed to low income households, and developing alternative voucher and discount schemes are all recommendations proposed by the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee.

Now that the trigger for the Secretary of State to review the Universal Service Obligation (Broadband) appears to have been reached, this is surely the moment to set the MDLS devised by members of the public as a north star for digital inclusion as part of the credible strategy we urgently need.



NHS England⁸⁸

Low health literacy: a determinant of poor health

In our digital age, the NHS England App is the digital ‘front door’ to patient care. However, 1 in 20 households in the UK do not have access to the internet⁸⁹ and a third of people who are offline struggle to interact with healthcare services.⁹⁰ For patients, digital inclusion means “having easy and affordable access to a suitable device with sufficient data and internet connectivity, and the digital skills and health literacy to find and understand information about a health condition and treatment options”

Counting the cost of low health literacy - poorer health outcomes, higher costs

Around 10 million adults in the UK lack health literacy; this takes a heavy toll on patient outcomes and use of healthcare services, creating a fertile environment for misinformation. Health illiteracy has a stronger correlation to poor health than education level, deprivation, age or ethnicity.⁹¹ It is associated with unhealthy lifestyles, lower take up of preventive services, including immunisation and screening, low compliance with medical advice and greater reliance on emergency services, thus incurring higher healthcare costs. In 2014–15, US research estimated the economic cost of poor health literacy to the NHS in England as between £2.95 bn and £4.92 bn per year.⁹²



Health and digital literacy

Schools, healthcare systems, communities, families and employers – with sickness rates at their highest in 20 years – each have a role to play in working together to provide multiple learning opportunities at community level.

Health and social care staff use simple techniques like 'chunk and check' to communicate effectively and NHS England provides relevant e-learning.⁹³ There is some evidence of positive effects of using video animations as patient information tools.⁹⁴

NHS England advises General Practice and Integrated Care Boards always to provide choice and co-design support with patients. 6 Intermediaries play a crucial role, offering digital assistance as part of broader services from health services, banks, community groups and libraries.⁹⁵

The NHS England Knowledge and Library Services team is building a Health and Digital Literacy Partnership with libraries across England – exemplified in Norfolk,⁹⁶ Taunton and Yeovil⁹⁷ and Oldham⁹⁸ – working with CILIP, Arts Council England and Libraries Connected.⁹⁹ The NHS team is testing a number of interventions to discover which are most effective, with the aim of empowering communities to establish sustainable approaches.

The geodata tool commissioned by NHS England provides an estimate of the percentage of each local authority population with low health literacy or numeracy.¹⁰⁰ Nationally, there is a gap in longitudinal data on health literacy to complement sources on connectivity and digital skills. Its current delivery aim is for health services to be a multi-channel offer, meeting individual needs and helping to free up resources for those who need face-to-face care.



Recommendations

- ✓ Digital capabilities in the workplace: Employers, including NHS bodies, as part of their organisational strategy, should outline specific actions that they will take to increase the digital knowledge, skills and literacy of the workforce.
- ✓ Digital literacy in schools: Schools should integrate the use of the NHS App, online health services and online health information within digital skills training as examples of essential life skills to help to address health inequalities.
- ✓ Digital inclusion: Public services including the NHS, local authorities and other employers should work in partnership with communities – optimising the use of libraries and community centres – to improve digital literacy and connectivity.
- ✓ Alternative service options: Digital-First services should ensure provision of support and non-digital access for people who cannot use digital tools (including the NHS app) effectively. This calls for joined up approaches involving digital ambassadors and community groups.
- ✓ Information accessibility: Through funding and support, encourage the exploration and use of technology to tackle inequality and empower people to make informed health choices and overcome barriers posed by low levels of literacy.
- ✓ Robust data: A cross-government initiative should be established to gather data, and produce geodata, to inform public service planning and monitor improvement in people's ability to use health information effectively for self-care, and to include mapping of digital poverty plus longitudinal survey data on health and data literacy.



The Digital Poverty Alliance

Education, technology, and data poverty

A lack of data access has a pervasive effect on everyday life, becoming more pronounced in the context of the cost-of-living crisis. Data from Ofcom shows that 8 million households, 29%, are struggling to afford communications services since April 2023. Dispiritingly, this rate has almost doubled compared with the same period two years ago.

Data poverty and education – bridging the digital gap

Edtech has proliferated across all stages of education in the last twenty years, resulting in a diffusion of hardware and software to enhance the learning experience, both inside and outside the classroom. Across schools, further education colleges and universities, learning management systems, educational apps and online resources have become a mainstay of practically all educational programmes.

For most students, these technologies confer clear benefits, providing straightforward ways to complete assignments and review material at their own pace. They enable the self-direction and customisation of learning to a degree that would have been scarcely imaginable before the tectonic shifts brought about by the personal computing revolution.

Yet, for those who do not have access, whether they are limited by data, devices or skills, technology alone does not represent a tide capable of lifting all boats. A range of factors such as geography, household income and parental digital literacy will influence the degree to which a student can use technology to create tangible benefits.

This matters because technology has the potential to level the playing field and reduce the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Yet this will only be possible when the provision of devices, connectivity and skills are accessible to all students on an equal basis, both inside and outside the classroom. The 2023 Pearson school report, for example, finds only half of schools report reliable Wi-Fi across the entire campus and only 44% of schools have access to a portable device per student.

These trends also occur in a context in which the aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic are still reverberating across the education system. Since the pandemic, there has been a significant rise in school absences and many young people are struggling to catch up on lost learning. Technology can help to bridge this gap, particularly to help students access support including through initiatives such as the national tutoring programme.

Addressing the challenge

One useful way of building on work currently underway is to scale up the availability of secure and safe open wireless networks, such as eduroam, to allow students to connect to the internet from a range of public places. To support open networks, businesses could be encouraged to donate unused bandwidth. Alongside this, individuals and companies can donate their data to initiatives like the Good Things Foundation national data bank to ensure data is distributed to people facing digital exclusion.

Secondly, although data forms an important part of the puzzle, it stands alongside access to devices and digital skills support as an essential prerequisite for digital

inclusion. As such, promoting full digital access will require that every pupil has access to a 1:1 device, an objective that the Learning Foundation is actively working towards through its donation management service programme. Research demonstrates that the 'digital native' stereotype does not accurately reflect the true extent of young people's digital capability and so we must ensure that digital skills and literacies are integrated across the curriculum at all stages of education.

Finally, addressing data poverty in education will require a whole systems approach, which is why the Digital Poverty Alliance and our partners are working to take forward the actions set out in the National Delivery Plan.



“Recently, we heard from a school within the Learning Foundation Network where a concerned teacher asked a student why they were uploading their homework in the early hours of the morning...within a household in which few devices were shared among multiple family members and connection speeds crawled at a snail's pace, the early hours of the morning provided a rare opportunity for the student to complete and upload the assignment.”

Section Three:

Recommendations



As the House of Lords Digital and Communications Committee pointed out in June of this year, the Government's approach to digital exclusion currently lacks an up-to-date strategy and largely relies on shifting the problem on to the industry's shoulders. However, like other forms of disadvantage, digital poverty is an entrenched and complex societal and public policy challenge that needs leadership from Government. Enhancing and developing The Government's last Digital Inclusion Strategy was published nine years ago in 2014, and a new, updated strategy needs to be produced with a funded delivery plan.

From its work engaging with industry, academia, the third sector and political stakeholders from a national to local level over the past year, and in light of the shifting economic and social situation nationally, the Data Poverty APPG has updated its recommendations from 2022 to the following:

1. A core task of the new Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Data Poverty is an issue that affects all walks of life but has in the past been relegated in importance as a policy issue warranting ministerial attention. Eradicating data poverty should be a core task for the new Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, with a minister from that department appointed to chair a cross-departmental task force. The Government's Digital Inclusion Strategy should be updated bi-annually, with feed-in from all Departments.

2. Create a Digital and Social inclusion Fund

VAT on broadband is charged at 20%, whereas for other goods and services deemed 'essential' it is charged at 5%. The Treasury should conduct a review into the costs and benefits of making broadband products 'essential', with the 15% 'extra' charged on all broadband products (£2.1 bn a year) ring-fenced to help fund the Digital Inclusion Strategy.



3. Develop a national digital inclusion forum with Ofcom

This forum would assist relevant bodies to develop and share best practice locally and nationally on data poverty and digital inclusion solutions. It would provide a platform for collaboration between different levels of government and across geographies and jurisdictions, while providing an evidence-base for scalable solutions for the Government to implement nationally.

4. Create a 'one-stop shop' digital inclusion support service for consumers, charities, and government agencies.

This would be accessible online at home for those with pre-existing internet access, and should be zero-rated to ensure it is available for those who have little or no data. The platform would bring together pre-existing and future solutions to digital and data poverty in a single online space, able to clearly direct those in need to the support available to them. It should also be made available to access in community spaces such as charities, foodbanks, libraries and job centres. Funding for this service could come from our proposed Digital and Social Inclusion Fund.

5. Easier access to social tariffs and data voucher schemes for those on eligible benefits.

Ofcom should work with the Department for Work and Pensions to signpost Universal Credit claimants or those on similar benefits towards social tariffs and other affordable broadband offers as part of a cost-of-living pack, and the 'one-stop-shop' for digital inclusion support should this be implemented. Ofcom and the Government should also work to mandate the removal of switching costs and simplified order journeys for those eligible for social tariffs across all internet service providers. As part of this, Ofcom should require ISPs to proactively ask customers in their telephone or online order journey if they're in receipt of a universal credit, and to sign post them to a social tariff if they are.

6. Increased provision of internet connectivity in public spaces.

Publicly owned buildings and spaces should have free Wi-Fi provision for those who require it. Where not already implemented, this should include spaces such as government buildings, educational spaces, libraries, GP surgeries and hospitals, care homes, and other community spaces.

7. A digital 'right-of-way' to public services and other essential services provided through the private sector.

The Government should put in place a statutory duty on all public bodies (such as NHS providers and schools), and private sector organisations, such as banks, utilities, supermarkets and housing providers, to ensure a digital 'right-of-way' solution so that users experiencing data poverty can still access digital-only services.

8. Expand the number of zero-rated websites

Websites for essential services, including accessing government, NHS, certified educational services, debt advice and the proposed digital inclusion 'one-stop-shop' should be zero-rated.



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