

A VISION FOR A DIGITALLY INCLUDED BRITAIN

The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the extent of the digital divide in Britain. 1.5 million households are without access to the internet¹ and 22% of the UK population lack basic digital skills². The children in these households, many in rural and hard to reach areas, are at risk of falling – and being left – further behind in their education. The adults seeking work are missing opportunities to seek and apply for jobs. And the much-needed contact with friends and family is even further away at a time when connection is needed more than ever. With businesses forced to shift their operations online and new commitments to more flexible ways of working, it is likely that this divide will continue to grow.

- 1.5 million households have no internet data³
- Only 51% of households earning between £6000-10,000 have home internet access compared with 99% of households with an income of over £40,001⁴
- 23% of children in the poorest families don't have home access to broadband and a laptop, desktop, or tablet⁵
- 13 million people lack the digital skills they need for work⁶
- 11.9 million (22%) of people do not have the skills for everyday life – the ability to manage money online, engage in government services and find a job online⁷

Digital inclusion is a key part of levelling-up, and is essential for improving peoples' lives. If we are to become a truly digitally-enabled nation, with everyone – whatever their background or location – having access to appropriate devices, data and the skills they need, there must be a national commitment to tackling the problem. This includes attention being given to many of the groups most disadvantaged by digital inequity, including, but not limited to: children and young people in - and leaving - care, those living in areas of high deprivation or harder to reach communities, children and young people in alternative provision education and receiving pupil premium, and those with experience of the criminal justice system.

To deliver real change, this drive and commitment must be led by the Government, but also come from across society - from tech companies, data and device providers, and third

¹ [Ofcom, Media Release, 2021](#)

² [Lloyds Bank, UK Consumer Digital Index, 2019](#)

³ [ONS, Internet access – households and individuals, 2019](#)

⁴ [ONS, Exploring the digital divide, 2019](#)

⁵ [Ofcom, Media use and attitudes report, 2019](#)

⁶ [Lloyds Bank, Consumer Digital Index, 2021](#)

⁷ [Lloyds Bank, UK Consumer Digital Index, 2019](#)

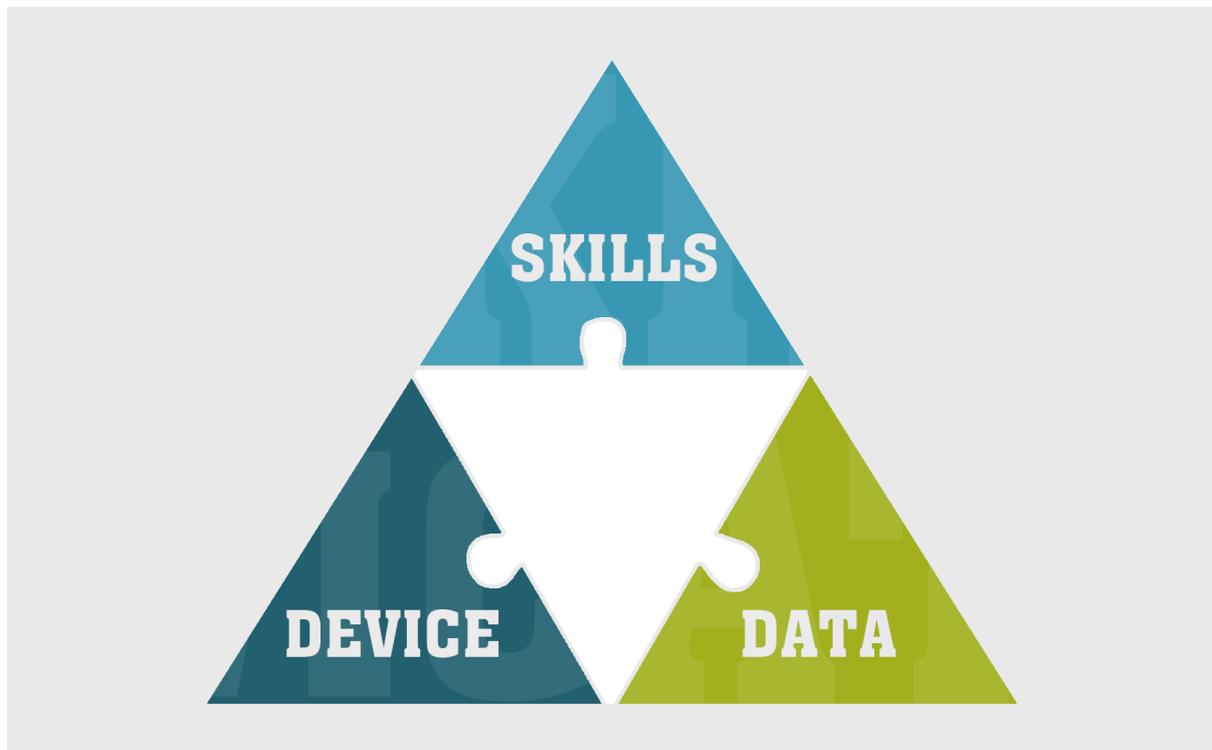
sector organisations. There needs to be consensus on the scale of the need, what needs to be done, and who will do it – as part of a sustainable, long-term plan.

THE AMBITION

To end digital poverty and achieve 100% digital inclusion by 2030, by ensuring:

- everyone is able to access appropriate devices that allow them to connect to the internet,
- everyone has easy access to high speed, quality, broadband,
- every school-aged child is given, or has access to a personal, age-appropriate device, data and skills package upon starting school,
- basic digital skills training is available to everyone, regardless of age, through local community hubs, and
- everyone has access to the information they need to stay safe online.

THE STRATEGY



1. DEVICES

- Government should work with local civil society organisations to accurately assess the need for devices amongst services users - as part of a long-term, sustainable model.
- Government should work with tech companies and hardware providers to provide high quality refurbished devices to meet needs, building on some of the good work started during the pandemic. This could work through:
 - Incentives for local and regional businesses to donate devices
 - Government subsidies for tech companies to refurbish devices with up-to-date software and distribute via local civil society organisations.
- Students using devices donated by tech companies to schools and colleges should be allowed to purchase the device (or an upgraded version) through a loan scheme.

2. DATA

- Key health, wellbeing and education sites should be zero-rated, to ensure those currently in digital poverty are not further disadvantaged.
- Social tariffs should be introduced by mobile phone and broadband providers, with data prices tiered depending on household income.
- Data donation schemes should be explored so that individuals with excess monthly data can donate it, via local third sector organisations, to those unable to afford it.
- Other cost saving measures such as VAT removal for those on the lowest incomes should be explored.
- Broadband should be of sufficient quality (at least 40mb) to enable learning and job searching to take place (i.e. simultaneous video streams or online calls).

3. SKILLS

Within the digital inclusion strategy there should be a specific Digital Skills strategy which should look to; understand issues of motivation for getting online, address the increasing role of digital skills in work and life even within generic careers and employability skills training, include information and training to keep everyone safe online, and build on existing schemes such as The Government Skills Toolkit⁸ to include:

⁸ [.Gov.UK, National Careers Skills Toolkit, 2020](#)

- A fund for specific digital skills training targeted at socially excluded groups, such as those in prison and leaving prison, those in care and leaving care, harder to reach community groups including non-English speakers and older generations.
- Digital skills training to be included as part of the national curriculum.
- Mandatory digital skills training for all employees in organisations of more than 50 employees to futureproof the UKs workforce and support society.
- Small businesses (<50 people) to have access to free online digital skills training, provided by tech companies.

All digital skills training should include sign-posting or information on how to stay safe online - from a cyber security, fraud, physical harm and exploitation perspective.
