

Digital Inclusion Action Plan – techUK

Draft Consultation Response

Please find below a draft of techUK's response to the Government's Consultation on the Digital Inclusion Action Plan.

Introduction

techUK supports the Government's release of the Digital Inclusion Action Plan, which shows the Government is committed to assuming strategic leadership in this important field. We also support the majority of provisions in the Plan, which include several policy recommendations from techUK such as:

- The establishment of a dedicated unit within DSIT for promoting digital inclusion, the Digital Inclusion and Skills Unit.
- The adoption of the [Essential Digital Skills Framework](#) by the Government, which will be integrated into public sector skills provisions and used as a base for future skills initiatives.
- Ministers to take responsibility for promoting digital inclusion.

However, we feel the burden for tackling digital exclusion is at risk of falling too greatly on a small number of tech businesses, and that the Government could go further in ensuring digital inclusion is recognised as a problem that affects everyone by ensuring public services promote digital inclusion through inclusive practices and design, and by looking to bridge gaps between the very poorest and services they need.

We also think more could be done to promote digital skills for those in work, to recognise that people can be digitally excluded for more than one reason throughout their lives. This requires taking a long-term, strategic view to understanding how digital inclusion can be promoted for years to come. This view should look at how different projects and work can be best brought together, directed and honed over the very long term.

We also are concerned about the unfunded nature of the current Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund. Digital Inclusion efforts, particularly those seeking to tackle digital poverty, require public money to bridge the gap between what businesses can reasonably afford to provide and those that need support. The Fund also needs to support existing practice and underperforming areas, as well as supporting best practice being replicated across the UK.

Despite these areas of concern, we are supportive of the Plan and look forward to working with the UK Government and our partners to implement the Plan.

1. 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

Do you agree with these five population groups?

No

2. If you answered no to the previous question, what changes would you make to population groups?

techUK welcomes the focus on these particular groups and also welcomes the recognition by the Government that they may well intersect. [Research supported by BT](#) found that in 2024, 90% of those contacting AbilityNet for help were over the age of 55 (other research shows the older you are the less likely you are to be online) and 81% said they had a disability or impairment, showing the potential crossover of factors such as disability and age.

Research on reasons for wider exclusion

Nominet and Catch22 collaborated on [research in 2022](#) focused on barriers to digital skills and who is left behind. The research highlighted that broad demographic groups interrelate with a wide range of socio-economic issues and are often compounded by an individual's personal circumstances. In seeking to understand better who is being most left behind, the research found that economic challenges, systemic social issues, and personal circumstances are more influential than broad demographic groups represented in much of the data published on digital skills. It is this intersectionality through which we can better understand the digital reality or lived experience of digital disadvantage. Findings of the research were as follows:

- Poverty and digital opportunity are inextricably linked.
- Lack of physical space is a crucial barrier to digital access. This may be having the physical space to work or needing to share devices or broadband.
- Care experienced young people are a group at significant risk of being left behind. The research suggests that they often don't have the appropriate devices, Wi-Fi access or support to develop digital skills. While many of the young people interviewed have access to hardware, the restrictions placed on the devices meant they had very limited functionality and access to essential software
- For young people in contact with the justice system, meaningful access is a major challenge. In some cases, these challenges related to the young person being in a custodial setting with limited access to appropriate devices. However, the interviews showed that, even after release, digital access beyond a phone was a serious barrier. Workers supporting young people coming out of the justice system also expressed that the young people they work with haven't experienced digital positive role models. As a result, pursuing opportunities for digital skills may be less appealing.

Essentially, those who are more likely to be digitally excluded exist in a variety of unfixed categories, which may or may not be demographic. Considering non-demographic categories, those which people may more easily leave and re-enter (e.g. unemployment), and the potential for people to be excluded multiple times throughout their lives is essential.

Other groups in need of assistance

In light of the above, we would remind the Government that there are several other groups in need of assistance and, as made clear in the response to the last question of this response,

people may find themselves part of more than one of these groups throughout their lifetimes due to a range of personal circumstances.

We would urge the Government to explicitly consider impacts on groups outside of these categories. For example, the Digital Inclusion APPG's [recent report](#) found that women are 14-22% more likely to be in digital poverty than men. Furthermore, [The 2021 census](#) showed that 23% of households with an annual income under £10,400 do not have internet at home, compared to 1% of households earning over £26,000, showing older, disabled and young people who are digitally excluded are more likely to be excluded if they are in poverty or are working class than their middle-class peers.

The Government should also look to consider those who do not have the required digital skills for work, including adults in work who do not have the digital skills needed to advance or change career. As cited below, [data from Lloyd's](#) suggests 52% of the UK workforce cannot do all twenty of the UK's Essential Digital Skills for Work (rising to 60% for the unemployed) and [it is estimated](#) that the digital skills gap will be the largest skills gap by 2030. Therefore, it is essential that the Digital Inclusion Strategy take account of those who need to acquire basic digital skills while working.

There is also a need to include those who live in the UK who do not speak English fluently, who may find themselves more generally isolated if they cannot easily access digital help they can understand. techUK members are already doing work with asylum-seekers who need connectivity to engage with the Government services that impact their continued right and ability to remain in the United Kingdom, such as [Vodafone's support](#) for Ealing and Acton Support Enterprise to provide drop-in help sessions for refugees and asylum seekers.

Balancing support

Government should outline how it will ensure a holistic and balanced approach to each of the groups, including identifying areas of greatest need and consequently its proposals for allocating time and resources between the groups. However, we do understand the need to prioritise groups that would benefit from digital inclusion activities and would support the five population groups outlined.

3. Are there examples of digital inclusion initiatives that could be scaled-up or replicated in other local communities? If known, please provide the name of the initiative, the organisation, a summary of what they do and contact details (if relevant).

techUK members have been widely cited in the Digital Inclusion Action Plan, showing the extensive work the tech sector is already doing to fight digital exclusion. We have also seen work from our partners, including the National Data Bank and National Device Bank, cited as examples of best practice, and we urge the Government to continue their support for our members and these schemes to continue delivering for communities around the UK. Ensuring that there is support for the extension of programmes such as these into areas that are not seeing as much success in tackling exclusion should be a priority of the Innovation Fund (more below)

We would like to highlight several member programmes in this area in addition to the ones in the plan:

FutureDotNow

Our partners FutureDotNow, who we would urge the Government to continue their work with, frequently use a 'sprint' model to break out of silos and to convene employers to find ways to improve employee digital skills across the UK economy, which we support as being effective at promoting digital inclusion efforts. These are similar to the 'task and finish' groups techUK has advocated be set up in other areas of the public sector, such as for implementing the Industrial Strategy, in order to identify and address specific issues through a concentrated and limited programme of activity. These activities require a permanent infrastructure to manage them, and for digital inclusion may see programmes continued after the initial group that established a project has disbanded, but nevertheless this targeted and intensive approach can yield positive results for addressing digital inclusion issues.

Digital Help Finder

Essex County Council has developed the [Digital Help Finder Tool](#), which techUK sees as an example of good practice for helping people access the support services they need. The Finder allows users to assess their current level of digital skills with a few simple questions and guides them to support to progress their digital skills. The Tool is designed so people can come back and update their progress, with each update guiding them to new, more appropriate support services. The Help Finder Tool eases people's transitions between support schemes most appropriate for their developing level of digital skills, recognising people's improving digital skills constitute a journey, and that the best support may not fully include people in one go, but rather progress them along that journey.

Digital Inclusion Initiative/Connecting Scotland

The [Digital Inclusion Initiative](#) created by Liverpool City Region Combined Authority was cited in the Digital Inclusion Action Plan, and this is because it has been highly effective at bringing together the relevant experts to provide connectivity, devices and skills in Liverpool. The scheme provides people a tablet, in-person digital training and six months of free mobile connectivity, ensuring they have the means, skills and confidence to be online. Similarly, the [Connecting Scotland](#) scheme, funded by the Scottish Government, should be examined by UK Government to assess its suitability for England or the English regions, ensuring best practice cross national and regional barriers.

Jisc

Jisc have engaged in this area through their Building Digital Capabilities service in further and higher education. offering regular webinars, podcasts, and events to boost digital confidence and capability. Collaborative approaches such as Jisc's can support the scaling needed to meet the goals of the Digital Inclusion Plan, particularly when engaging with other digital inclusion partners to ensure the digitally excluded are getting the skills they need where they can best help.

Good Things Foundation and Nominet

Good Things Foundation and Nominet have collaborated on the [Data Poverty Lab](#), which has set out to evaluate the landscape of solutions to Data Poverty. The four years since the Lab was established have been a period of astonishing innovation to develop new ways to support people experiencing data poverty. Initiatives such as the National Data Bank and Jangala Get Boxes have demonstrated how radical cross-sector collaboration, from commercial SIM donation to third sector delivery, can provide urgent support to some of the most vulnerable groups in society. Novel Wi-Fi expansion or connection mechanisms such as Open Roaming, Mesh networks and Eduroam have developed more accessible and safer public Wi-Fi options to provide free internet access across places and communities. This first wave of radical thinking and action also helps highlight areas where progress is still

needed. Ongoing challenges that have limited the impact of these innovations and that we can now come together to address include:

- Continued confusion over what is available and barriers to access when solutions are known, with the burden of finding and accessing solutions falling to individuals themselves or over-stretched voluntary services.
- Existing reactive funding models that were rapidly organised in the pandemic, almost exclusively reliant on commercial donations and investment.
- Evaluation of innovations in practice needs to advance, making better use of existing delivery examples as test and learn opportunities to widely share what works and for whom. The Digital Inclusion Action Committee could help facilitate discussions on this.

The Data Poverty Lab has also highlighted that there is a place for social tech innovation. Zero-rating of the NHS website and COVID 19 app during the pandemic were an example of how government, regulators, the technical community, product innovation teams and civil society came together to work on technical innovation in the public benefit

4. 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).

Vodafone's [everyone.connected](#) programme has used a mix of statistical and anecdotal evidence to measure success, as no two digital inclusion scenarios are ever exactly alike.

Statistics used to assess levels of digital inclusion throughout this response should be used as part of an assessment toolkit when looking at digital inclusion across the UK. There should be a series of ambitious, though achievable goals which the Government can work towards, identifying quantitative and qualitative evidence to understand how well any programme is succeeding. Similarly, task and finish groups and sprints work well when focused on specific goals.

The [Minimum Digital Living Standard \(MDLS\)](#) is a collaborative research project led by the University of Liverpool, and funded by Nuffield Health and Nominet, which offers a national benchmark for being digitally included as defined by Members of the public. Starting with a proof of concept for families with children, the minimum digital living standard includes, but is more than, having accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need. It offers a benchmark for what is "enough" digital inclusion to be able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence. This benchmark could be a useful starting point for the Government when it comes to designing the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund, and in evaluating progress towards digital inclusion over time.

Whole systems thinking to evaluate outcomes and success

Whilst not strictly limited to evaluation, Government Office for Science's '[Introductory systems thinking toolkit for civil servants](#)' from 2023 is a helpful point of reference. This aims to support the development of policy interventions that require cross-government initiatives to address complex interdependent challenges and could be applied to digital inclusion. It advocates for systems thinking, which aims to ensure interacting components deliver desired outcomes, offering helpful recommendations on policy design, including how to build in monitoring and evaluation. It also recognises that complex systems often evolve in unpredictable and unexpected ways while encouraging further thinking about direct and indirect impacts.

It may also be useful for DSIT to engage with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on any learnings from its [Changing Futures Programme](#), which is a 5-year, £98.1 million programme aiming to improve outcomes for adults experiencing multiple disadvantage including combinations of homelessness, substance misuse, mental health issues, domestic abuse and contact with the criminal justice system. Although slightly different in terms of its aims, this programme may yield useful learnings when it comes to whole-person support. It operates at the individual level (stabilising and then improving the life situation of adults facing multiple disadvantage), local service level (transforming these to provide a person-centred approach) and at the system level (testing a different approach to funding, accountability and engagement between local commissioners and services, and between central government and local areas). Learnings could be relevant to Government's future digital inclusion work, particularly in terms of the interaction between central government, local authorities and local programmes, in the context of the funding model for the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund.

5. In what ways could the government partner with industry, charities and community organisations to promote digital inclusion?

The Government should look to provide a central co-ordination role across the excellent local efforts taking place across the UK, and we are glad the Plan does this. We also support the Plan in offering unified frameworks for volunteers, civil society and the private sector to adhere to when tackling digital exclusion. We are glad the Government has committed to playing a convening role in designing a digital inclusion strategy and that this commitment extends to implementation and assessment.

Inclusion through the public sector

We also think the Government needs to be more active in how it can promote inclusion throughout the public sector, including amongst those providing services to vulnerable people more likely to be digitally excluded. As part of this, the Government should look first to its own policymaking and systems design to build inclusivity into Government policy making. As referenced throughout this response, digital exclusion will be an ongoing problem. Therefore, there will be an ongoing need for the Government to bring inclusivity into their policy choices and into the design of their systems, as not doing so can lead to unnecessary digital exclusion and the negative effects that come with it.

We believe that digitisation can bring huge positive effects across the Government, and we are glad this is something the Secretary of State addressed at [our Policy Conference](#) in March 2025, when he pointed out that a more digitised state that is more active will ultimately benefit the most vulnerable who rely on that state. However, due attention needs to be paid to people's ability to engage with that more digital state, and the state needs to remember when reforming itself that it needs to ensure people are not left excluded because of non-inclusive design or policy choices.

For example, there is an opportunity to work with DWP and Job Centres to advertise digital inclusion opportunities and to ensure people can access the services they are entitled to use, from accessible website and service design to provision of devices if the claimant has none.

The Government should also look to be creative across the public sector at where help and advice can be dispensed. The [Good Things Foundation](#) has also highlighted how inclusion services provided through NHS services can be effective at including new parents and other users of the NHS, if digital inclusion is built into the way services are delivered and staff

operate. A school [featured by the BBC](#) in January that has made providing extra wellbeing support for pupils and parents part of its core operations has found they can host support somewhere trusted by pupils and parents while improving academic standards. Providing digital inclusion for parents through schools, as well as pupils, may therefore be another way of being more digitally inclusive through existing public sector service providers.

Maintaining digital inclusion infrastructure

Government must also consider the maintenance of essential infrastructure for providing digital inclusion support over the longer term. Digital exclusion will never be eliminated as an issue, especially as there are causes of digital exclusion (advances in technology, personal injury or disability, personal poverty) that may be beyond the personal responsibility of any single individual. It will be more expensive to provide digital inclusion services, wind them down as statistics improve, and then reinstate them as statistics worsen, than simply to keep them running at a constant level. Instead, the Government must commit to viewing digital inclusion support as an ongoing and open-ended investment into the social and economic wellbeing of people throughout the United Kingdom, rather than delivering time-limited, ad-hoc partnerships.

Digital inclusion through the wider economy

Similarly, we would wish to remind the Government that digital skills gaps for work are not just limited to the tech sector, and there need to be partnerships and incentives to sectors across the economy to tackle the digital skills gap. Partnerships with the private sector need to extend outside of the tech space and ensure that digital skills gaps across the economy, from construction to social care and agriculture, are all addressed. [Lloyds has data](#) about sectors with a large digital skills gap. Government should work companies operating in those areas who would benefit from digitally included employees, as there is a limit to what telco and other tech-focused companies can do for workers in those industries, especially when it is firms in these sector that know best what their employees need. Similarly, the Government should clarify how they will embed EDS in apprenticeships and T-levels and ensure all apprenticeships provide digital skills training.

6. How can the government ensure the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund best supports local communities across the UK?

While there is pressure on the public finances, and the Spending Review is currently being conducted, we would appreciate the earliest possible confirmation of the funding available as part of the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund, as this will allow those working in digital inclusion to best tailor their expectations of the fund's potential.

The Government should not look to allocate all the money in the same way. For example, money should go to Local Authorities to spend on inclusion in whichever way they think best appropriate, including through procuring connectivity, with central government assessing progress based on both quantitative and qualitative methods. This funding should also be used for maintaining longer-term digital inclusion infrastructure to prevent the aforementioned issues with the winding up and winding down of projects.

However, some funding should be used for funding discrete projects, including those run by civil society organisations and the private sector. These projects should look to provide a focused attempt to address an issue, and the project should be subject to an outcomes assessment to replicate any best practice where relevant.

It is important that this Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund be deployed intelligently. The Fund as presently constituted looks 'to identify best practice with an ambition to scale-up and replicate successful digital inclusion programmes across the country.' We welcome this,

however there is a risk that if it replaces existing schemes, it could marketise the provision of digital inclusion support in a way that conflicts with providing capacious support to all. Some programmes may not reach many people by design, but as a result are more successful with the people they do reach. This further shows the importance of looking at quantitative and qualitative outcomes of any project.

The Government can ensure this does not happen by committing to use the fund in several ways. Firstly, the Fund should augment current funding for digital inclusion, rather than replace any existing allocation. Secondly, the Government should assess best practice and the success of any scheme funded by assessing a range of outcomes from any particular project, instead of just a few key indicators.

Thirdly, and very importantly, the Government must commit to spending in areas with the least success in fostering digital inclusion, as these are the areas that need the most support to reach the digitally excluded. Unlike a business, which will fund those areas doing well, the Government must instead fund those areas doing badly to ensure they are not left further behind by the rest of the country.

We would also urge the Government to look at novel providers of digital inclusion support, including the public service providers listed earlier in this response of healthcare, education and jobseeker support.

7. 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

Do you agree with these four focus areas?

Yes

8. If no, what changes would you make to the areas of focus?

This is a restatement of the access, skills, motivation and trust framework techUK has previously subscribed to.

When discussing breaking down barriers to digital services, we welcome the Plan's support for assistance and offline options for those that need them, effectively outlining that they will be paid for by increasing numbers of people using digital routes for engagement with the state. We would remind the Government that people may well be fully digitally included and yet prefer to use offline methods when negotiating with the state, and that there should be consideration for these people.

Similarly, the phone-in option is often a great way to support those without confidence to complete processes online. Government may look to creating a pooled support system which works across the Government, and which is designed to guide people through any digital interaction with the Government when necessary. This will reinforce trust and break down barriers to accessing essential services.

Statistical alignment

We would also draw attention to a statistical anomaly raised by our partners at FutureDotNow. [Data from Lloyds](#), used by those working in the digital inclusion space, has found c.21 million working-age adults (52%) cannot complete all 20 work tasks in the Essential Digital Skills framework. The Government though have cited a different part of the Lloyds data, which records those who can complete one task in each of the five skill areas of the Framework, to claim only 7.3 million (18%) working-age adults are lacking the Essential Digital Skills for Work. We would urge the Government to look again at the data to avoid confusion to and to ensure the most accurate picture of the digital inclusion landscape is presented.

Building confidence

We would add that on 7d) 'building confidence' is as much about building confidence in one's ability to be safe online as it is about data, devices and access, and we need to meet people at points of digital inclusion to build their confidence in online safety.

9. Has the government identified the right objectives for "Opening up opportunities through skills"?

The UK government is acting now to support the skills pipeline in the UK, 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.*
- *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.*

Yes

10. If no, what should be the objectives of this area?

Wider reform of Government skills provision

We are glad to see the Government embrace the need for the UK's workers to constantly reskill throughout their lives as technology advances, and to include this thinking in their strategy for digital inclusion. [Data from Lloyds](#) suggests 52% of the UK workforce cannot do all twenty of the UK's Essential Digital Skills for Work and [it is estimated](#) that the digital skills gap will be the largest skills gap by 2030.

We are also glad to see that this Digital Inclusion Action Plan fits into a broader skills reform programme from the Government. The lack of appropriate digital skills from UK workers is

symptomatic of the need for reform in wider Government skills provision, as well as a cause of exclusion. It also shows that digital skills are needed not just to engage with services, but also to produce economic growth. Skills England's [report](#) shows around one third of average annual UK productivity growth between 2001 and 2019 is attributable to an expansion of skills available in the workforce. However, investment in skills development, both from employers, but also from the Government, has declined over the past 10 years. The Department for Education funded [Employer Skills Survey 2022](#) found that the total investment in skills was £53.6 billion (including trainee labour costs) which was a real terms decrease of 7.7% from the figure in 2017 of £58.1 billion (adjusted for inflation). The adult skills budget in England has also been cut by [£1 billion \(20%\) since 2010](#) – equal to a 32% cut in per head investment, and the average number of days of workplace training received each year falling by 19% per employee in England since 2011. The tech sector, however, has been actively addressing the need for a skilled workforce through initiatives and will continue to do so. What is needed is government support for SMEs in particular to train their staff.

We would like the Government to clarify that skills provisions will involve using the latest AI tools and will look to integrate AI skills into digital skills, especially given their importance in the medium and long term. The widespread adoption of AI this would enable raising productivity by half a percentage point by 2028/29, giving the Exchequer an extra £39.9 billion in revenues while reducing costs by £6.2 billion. [Other estimates suggest](#) that AI could boost UK GDP by £550 billion by 2035, an equivalent to raising annual growth rates by 2% a year. These gains could, in turn, pay for greater digital inclusion support and wider public services.

We would also wish that the Government clarify the expected relationships between the public bodies they have mentioned in tackling digital exclusion, for example outlining how the Industrial Strategy will include provisions for inclusion and work to ensure they are implemented. Ensuring that inclusivity is part of the Government's policy work and public service delivery will help to prevent some cases of digital exclusion before they occur. Our response goes into this in further detail above.

The UK needs a comprehensive National Skills Strategy that is linked to the Industrial Strategy. The government's forthcoming post-16 education strategy is a welcome step, but one of the most significant barriers to skills investment is the fragmented nature of the UK's skills system, which varies across its four nations and can be difficult for employers to navigate. The lack of a national strategy along with economic uncertainty has caused employers to make short term decisions and prioritise spending in areas other than skills. Strategies to increase employer investment in training needs to take into account the more challenging financial environment that employers are facing following increases to the national minimum wage and employer national insurance contributions.

Any national strategy needs to address the structural challenges within the skills system but also foster collaboration with employers, unions, and training providers, and meet employer needs.

11. Has the government identified the right objectives for “Tackling data and device poverty”?

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:

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

No

12. If no, what should be the objectives of this area?

We support the first two objectives outlined here and agree that access to good quality connectivity as well as range of connectivity options is an important component in tackling data and device poverty. Investment from telecoms companies in connectivity, as well as public-private initiatives like Project Gigabit and the Shared Rural Network, are bringing people access to high quality connectivity/coverage, whilst closing the gaps on not spots and hard to reach areas. This is certainly helping those who wish to access the benefits of the digital economy but are constrained by geography. Continued support through similar schemes, combined with i) a regulatory regime that encourages stability and investment and ii) a government and regulator keen to tackle key delivery challenges (e.g. planning for telecoms infrastructure) will continue to help in this area.

Device and data affordability

While we support the first two objectives, with Government support, we do have some concerns around the third objective of device affordability, and the related subject of data affordability. These are areas where businesses are already playing a significant role and where the Government now needs to step in to reach the very poorest.

Currently, one million people cannot afford a social tariff according to research [supported by BT](#). Furthermore, [The Good Things Foundation](#) found in 2024 that around 1.5 million people do not have a smartphone, tablet, or laptop. This is despite the schemes already in place to support access to both data and devices.

The Government is aware that the private sector has already committed to a significant amount of work to improve access to digital devices, with many of our members involved in the pledges announced within the Action Plan. While there are people who cannot afford even the most basic digital devices and data, there are schemes to help them already.

However, it is worth restating that the main cause of digital poverty is poverty itself. Whilst the tech sector is committed to supporting digital inclusion, it cannot be its responsibility to tackle this much broader societal challenge, as if businesses have to cut the prices of basic devices and data even further to improve affordability, that cost will have to be recouped elsewhere.

Similarly to this, the UK generally has some of the lowest data and broadband prices when compared to international competitors, which have continued to fall even as networks have been upgraded. Commercial efforts have even seen the prices of some broadband tariffs fall below social tariff prices [according to research from Farrpoint](#), showing the strong commercial impetus to keep prices low in the UK.

These lower-than-average prices, combined with schemes to increase access to data, broadband and devices, show there is already a significant commercial effort towards minimising data and device poverty, and that there exists already a good range of

connectivity options for those who, due to affordability issues, are either entirely offline or struggling to stay online

Instead, the Government should be looking at how it can work to bridge the remaining gaps itself as the Government, given its greater resources and greater responsibility derived from its social contract with the public, is in a much stronger and more legitimate position to bridge this gap.

Therefore, we would prefer the goals to be focused on action the Government can take and lead. For example, 'ensure that the Government is recycling as many devices as possible to support those who cannot access a device' or 'ensure record numbers of digital devices are recycled and donated' for devices. We believe the Government pilot to develop a proof-of-concept around a multi-department device donation scheme would link well with this revised objective and could be built further within the public and private sectors. For data, we would suggest 'provide additional support for accessing mobile and/or broadband connectivity to individuals based on their specific needs and requirements'. This could come with Government paying for certain people's data or better utilising public service providers, such as schools, hospitals and Job Centres to advertise support with data access or even work with businesses to directly distribute data to users in need from these areas.

While the Government does go into detail about actions it will take to ensure people have access to devices, we would urge the Government to commit fully against asking companies to further reduce the general prices of basic data, broadband and device services.

Tracking affordability

As part of measuring affordable connectivity issues, the Government should use a wider set of measures to track affordability, including not only tracking awareness and uptake of social tariffs, but also how many households pay £20 or less per month for their broadband (whether through a social tariff or a commercial product). This would show those who may struggle to afford broadband but consciously choose a slightly more expensive option as part of a wider bundle. For example, on data, [research supported by BT](#) suggests that two million eligible for the social tariff have consciously chosen broadband as part of a wider bundle due to valuing other services.

Inclusive network evolution

Similarly, the Government must ensure that there are opportunities provided for supporting inclusive digitisation while making gains in the efficiency and resilience of networks that come from sunseting legacy technologies such as 3G, the PSTN and DTT are fully realised. Ensuring these necessary sunsets occur in an inclusive way should be a priority over the next few years.

13. Have government identified the right objectives for “Breaking down barriers to digital services”?

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.

Yes

14. If no, what should be the objectives of this area?

We support this objective and the desire to ensure Government services are accessible, including with alternative pathways for those that need them. These pathways though should be available to those who would prefer non-digital options. More details can be found earlier in our response of how this can be done, such as in our response to Question 8.

15. Have government identified the right objectives for “Building confidence”?

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 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.

Yes

16. If no, what should be the objectives of this area?

Digital by Default

The Government should bear in mind that somebody may have full confidence in their online skills and using online systems, yet may well prefer to use non-digital options for any number of rational or irrational reasons. [Ofcom has found](#) that 65% of those who said they would not get an internet connection within 12 months would not do so because they didn't want to. The Government must therefore be prepared for people who are fully confident and able to use digital tools may not be motivated to use them, and outline how they plan to respond through either removing barriers to motivation or providing alternatives. This motivation issue is related to, but separate from, confidence and largely relies on assuaging individual concerns and barriers.

As outlined earlier in the response, there is a need to ensure that Government service delivery is designed to be inclusive, as this will be far better at building confidence than by making systems complicated and putting support in place post facto. The 'digital by default' policy of previous governments are an example of how non-inclusive policy can lead to those in need being able to access essential services, with numerous reports of the difficulties of engaging with public services emerging both [before](#) and [after](#) the policy was introduced.

The vulnerable excluded by 'digital by default' were excluded because they were digitally excluded, and anecdotal evidence suggests this policy change further demoralised and disempowered those in need of support, instead of boosting their confidence, ability or genuine willingness to use digital technologies. The Government must learn from this and ensure future digital systems support the confidence of the most vulnerable, which requires patience and investment from the Government and staff charged with delivering vital public services.

Building confidence

On “Building confidence”, while we agree with DSIT’s vision of having trust that your safety and security is protected online, we think confidence can only be built if education of users on how they can keep themselves safe takes place in parallel with access to devices, data and digital skills. We need to meet people at points of digital inclusion to build their confidence in online safety, including media and financial literacy. It would make sense for DSIT and Ofcom to join up work on digital inclusion with work on media literacy, and to consider learnings from projects funded by DSIT’s Media Literacy Taskforce Fund which may have read across to digital skills.

A few examples of programmes which operate at the intersection of digital inclusion and online safety which we’d like to call out are:

- ParentZone’s [Everyday Digital](#) initiative, which is designed to improve families’ critical media literacy skills, including through self-guided learning, plug and play sessions and free training for professionals to become Local Champions.
- The Scouts’ [self-guided learning tool](#) on digital skills for adult volunteers, which was funded by Nominet. This includes a quiz to identify learning needs, and resources to improve the confidence and abilities of adult volunteers in using digital technologies for administrative tasks, communication and delivering their programs online.
- Good Things Foundation’s [Learn My Way free](#), online learning platform, which offers a range of courses designed to help beginners develop essential digital skills and build confidence in using the internet and technology, including learning on how to stay safe online.

17. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps for “Opening up opportunities through skills”?

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](#) (GDS) 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Yes

18. If no, what should be the objectives of this area?

We support these measures to everyone will be given a fair chance to learn digital skills in education, or to use digital means to engage with the state. We'd agree this is a way to open opportunities.

techUK's has several recommendations as to how to improve the UK's tech skills base:

- Deliver a reformed 'Growth and Skills Levy' that prioritises flexibility, enabling employees to fund training through routes alongside apprenticeships. The Apprenticeship Levy currently raises around £3.5 billion a year from large employers in the UK. But our members tell us the Levy is currently not working. The IFS, found that, despite large subsidies, around £550 million of the levy pot is not used to subsidise apprenticeships. The reformed Levy could include high-quality short courses focused on functional and digital skills, enabling existing employees to upskill and retrain. Ensuring that SMEs, scale-ups, and some of the UK's fastest growing companies can benefit from the reformed levy will be key to its success, particularly in tech. Due to the ownership structure of many start-up and scale-up companies they were unable to use the former Apprenticeships Levy and we encourage the Government to consider potentially providing the levy through a voucher system which all companies can utilise. techUK believes that employers need to be able to address their workforce skill needs by allowing them to choose the eligible provision most appropriate to them. [Public First has suggested](#) that if employers spent 30% of the estimated Levy funding available for non-apprenticeship training on Higher Technical Qualifications, it could lead to 58,000 more of these courses being taken across the Parliament, with a lifetime economic gain for individuals of £7.8 billion. techUK recommends Skills England to start with a relatively modest amount of flexibility in the Growth and Skills levy and evaluate the impact, making decisions that build on what has gone before and allowing sufficient time to embed before changing the policy.
- Provide a fully-integrated platform for apprenticeships which would support student access and parity of esteem but also enable careers advisers and teachers to better understand the range of opportunities available to students. This should include pre-apprenticeships to encourage a range of learners to understand routes that are right for them.
- To improve the digital skills of apprentices, techUK believes government should review the Functional Skills Qualification in apprenticeships for relevance to employers, and whether there is a role for digital literacy to become embedded across outcomes.

- Government should reconsider its decision to defund Level 7 apprenticeships, especially in key areas like data, AI, and digital technology. TechSkills and techUK believe by raising the budget for the Growth and Skills Levy in line with the increase in the amount of money raised by the apprenticeship levy, would minimise any restrictions on Level 7 apprenticeships. Before making final decisions, techUK urges the government to undertake consultation with businesses, public services, and educational institutions to understand the full impact of removing Level 7 apprenticeship funding from the Growth and Skills Levy.
- Build on previous success of the Skills Toolkit launched in Spring 2020, to build a 'Digital Skills Toolkit 2.0'. This tool would enable people across all areas of society to understand the digital job opportunities available to them and access training. In turn, making digital opportunities and pathways more transparent and accessible to more people. The Government can get started on this from day one by opening a tender for the construction of the digital skills toolkit platform.
- Skills England should move quickly updating occupational standards to respond to the evolving needs of employers. The current pace of change, where updates to standards can take up to two years, is too slow and risks leaving critical areas like AI out of date.
- Reconsider the policy design of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement to ensure that it is a success, including whether it can be used by employers to support the cost of employee study on a modular basis. Learners can currently only access the Lifelong Learning Entitlement if they are studying at levels 4 to 6. This approach has severe limitations, risks excluding older people and low/middle income groups and having a negative impact on economic growth and productivity. The Lifelong Loan Entitlement should be a system that meets the funding needs of all students.
- A [survey conducted by techUK](#) of parents and guardians working in tech revealed a lack of confidence in the current digital education and curriculum. Only 51% are somewhat confident and 27% are very unconfident that the education system is preparing children for future job markets. A massive 70% of respondents to techUK's survey believe schools are not focusing enough on core competencies like critical thinking and problem-solving—skills that will define success in a world dominated by AI, automation, and data. While technical skills are crucial, 68% of respondents see a mix of soft and technical skills as the ultimate career preparation—an area where education is falling short. Despite this, 59% of children are not pursuing computing qualifications, and just 34% of parents feel schools adequately encourage tech education for all genders. Schools aren't just neglecting future-focused subjects; they're failing to encourage tech education for all genders. Only 34% of respondents are confident that schools promote tech inclusivity, with 25% unconfident in schools' ability to encourage tech education for all genders. techUK recommends that government needs to commit to offering world-leading computing education by continuing to fund the National Centre for Computing Education (NCCE). Continued funding would ensure that the UK offers world leading computing education for every young person, aligning with the Government's ambition of breaking down barriers to opportunity. The offer would allow schools in England to continue to support our teachers in preparing the future workforce for technological realities, with the potential of being expanded to support the growing need for digital skills and AI.
- Engage in a review into the current cyber security skills gap with a specific focus on the challenges and opportunities to encourage diversity. Necessary cyber security skills are essential for the protection and growth of the UK's digital economy, with the global economy needing 3.4 million cybersecurity experts to support today's economy. But the

current gap in cyber security professionals poses a threat to the UK's increasing reliance on digital infrastructure, and the UK's economic stability, security and growth. Plugging this skills gap can be supported by more effective dissemination of the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) Cyber toolkit and inclusion of cyber security and risks in higher education/MBA courses. These should be based on international standards and ensure the UK is able to take advantage of an internationally-skilled cyber security base.

We would also urge the Government to ensure the Essential Digital Skills Framework keeps up with advances in technology to remain relevant for those using it. They should do this by constantly engaging with trade associations, such as techUK, third sector organisations which focus on digital skills, including FutureDotNow, and academia to ensure that the Framework is reviewed yearly to include new, necessary skills.

19. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps for “Tackling data and device poverty”?

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.*

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.*

Yes

20. If no, what should be the objectives of this area?

Collaboration

Beyond the continued focus to drive connectivity and coverage across the hard-to-reach areas, we agree with the proposals outlined. Collaboration between the Government, local authorities, charities and industry to signpost the broadband and mobile social tariffs available will be hugely important initiative to maintain and continue. Clear campaign messaging needs to be aligned here.

Equally, exploring partnerships with housing providers and local authorities is a good idea. We strongly believe connectivity needs to form a core component of the Government's ambitious housebuilding plans and this should consider potential agreements for social housing as well as all developments that must include an affordable home quota (whether that be actual free or low-cost connectivity agreements or signposting people to the potential options).

We welcome the fact that none of the medium or long-term measures proposed by the Government involve intervention in the prices of digital devices, reinforcing our views on the wider goals in this area not being suitable or practicably achievable. However, as outlined in our response to Question 12, this is an area the Government will need to lead on. Similarly, we welcome the Government's efforts to better signpost support schemes, and the Government should be the leader in bridging the gap between those that cannot afford data and devices and the schemes currently on offer to help them.

Connected Hubs

We have previously called for Connected Hubs to be set up across the UK in our [Growth Plan](#), modelled on the Irish scheme. These Hubs would provide areas where people can work without using their personal data or internet allowance and could host classes teaching essential digital skills. Ireland currently has 363 co-working hubs, 5292 desks available and 561 workspaces and has seen over 10,000 people across rural communities register for hot desks in remote working hubs. They would likely require £50 million in investment, based on the €5 million Irish investment taking population and currency differences into account, if the Government chose to finance their creation. There may be other ways to implement the scheme.

Connected Hubs will help provide support in rural areas and could even help people in rural areas access job opportunities outside their communities, essential given that 25% of people in rural areas [are already home workers](#).

21. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps for "Breaking down barriers to digital services"?

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)

No

22. If no, what should be the objectives of this area?

techUK supports all services, especially public services, being made more accessible for people. We would support the first two objectives as part of this but would wish for clarity that the third would not mandate a particular form of accessible interface for users. techUK members already look to make their services accessible, and mandating particular kinds of accessibility may discourage innovation in making systems more accessible. So long as a particular form of accessibility is not mandated though, we support this objective.

23. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps for "Building confidence"?

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 service
- 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 LAs, DGs and the Local Government Association (LGA) 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 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) how digital inclusion can be supported further through work with civil society and public libraries.

No

24. If no, what should be the objectives of this area?

As with other areas, while techUK has said 'no', we do support the majority of the proposed steps. [Research suggests that](#) for most digitally excluded people a combination of low confidence, low skills and low motivation play an important role, and this is true for those with and without affordability issues.

Indeed, this separation of motivation and confidence is an important distinction that should be taken forward.

As referred to earlier, we would advise caution with how the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund is administered to ensure it carefully considers what projects to take forward, and augments rather than replaces existing digital skills provision. An area should not be forced to give up a scheme that works for those they help because the Government believe a scheme in another area is more effective. We absolutely support schemes learning from each other and best practice being shared, but the best digital inclusion work happens at a local level and it is this level that knows best as to what people in their immediate area need.

We would also advise Government that digital inclusion is about empowering people to make decisions for themselves, and that there is a pool of people who may just never want to be online, in spite of what may be seen as compelling rational evidence that using the digital world is likely to improve their quality of life. [Ofcom has found](#) that 65% of those who said they would not get an internet connection within 12 months would not do so because they did not want to, which even considering some could be persuaded to use the internet, suggests there are still many who do not want to use the internet. The confidence is there, the motivation simply is not, and so an offline option should exist for them to empower them so they can make decisions about being online for themselves.

At the same time though, actions on Digital Inclusion should look beyond boosting confidence to removing motivational barriers to digital inclusion. As alluded to above, motivational barriers are often personal, and so there needs to be a general attempt to mobilise and motivate people through the Government's communications on and implementation of policies relating to the digital sphere.

Likewise, increasing both motivation and confidence is an important positive externality of policies designed to be digitally inclusive, as this may address people's individual concerns in unique ways.

Below, please find our views on the Data Bill and Online Safety Act as ways to support confidence in using digital exclusion, as well as removing motivational barriers for those confident in their digital skills but unmotivated to use digital technology.

Data Bill

We agree with the Government that the Data Bill presents a significant opportunity to increase the confidence people have when online that they will be safe and secure. Building confidence is already a significant opportunity for growth, with a 5% increase in digital trust potentially [raising](#) GDP per capita by over \$3,000, according to the World Economic Forum.

We think the Bill can principally do this through increasing and underpinning trust in Digital IDs. In 2023, the UK Government [estimated](#) that widespread adoption could add £800 million annually to the UK economy through improved financial inclusion, reduced levels of fraud, and streamlined access to services like banking, public services, and retail experiences.

We support these provisions and would further support action from the DIAP to ensure people are comfortable, confident and motivated to use Digital IDs to maximise their effectiveness. The Digital Inclusion Action Committee should advise on ways to increase Digital ID adoption as part of digital inclusion, including ways to avoid the 'mandatory ID card' [stories in the press](#) that have accompanied Digital ID announcements in the past.

On a separate note, we wish the Bill to go further, ideally by establishing an independent regulator as we continue to believe this is needed for a trustworthy digital ID market. However, working within the constraints of the Bill, we think the Bill should at least be amended to create a structure that better reflects good governance practices. We also believe that the Government should prioritise making One Login interoperable with the trust

framework, and with international standards, as this will further increase confidence in the systems and make them easier to use for people.

We also support the data provisions of the Data Bill as balancing innovation and trust in the UK's data framework.

Online Safety Act

We would encourage the Government to work with Ofcom to ensure the Online Safety Act contributes to the goals of building trust and confidence in UK systems.

We have worked extensively on combatting online fraud and other consumer dangers that the Online Safety Act is designed to combat and prevent, including through our work on designing the Fraud Charter under the previous government. The Fraud Charter was representative of an approach we fundamentally agree with in which collaboration, sharing information and coordinating across sectors is necessary to disrupt fraudulent actors effectively. It's important that the channels of communication between Government, the regulator and industry are working effectively here. There are many well intended initiatives taking place that can often be siloed and therefore hinder a truly joined up approach.

The Digital Inclusion Advisory Committee should look at how the gains from work to tackle fraud, including new measures and laws, are best communicated to the digitally excluded and those unmotivated to use digital technology to maximise the confidence in digital technologies and remove further barriers to motivation.

We would ask that Government work with Ofcom to provide further clarity and study into age assurance systems and age verification as two technologies fundamental for increasing confidence in digital technology and motivation to use digital systems.

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

Life-cycle digital exclusion

techUK believe the Government should look to establish a concept of 'life-cycle exclusion' to understand how the digital exclusion problem, like poverty and unemployment, fits into the human life cycle and therefore can be approached as providing continual support over a lifetime, rather than targeting those currently digitally excluded. Alongside this, we need dynamic analysis which recognises that people can move between digitally included and excluded day-to-day, hour-to-hour and week-to-week, and that there is a strong correlation with affordability, attested to by the "End of the Month" phenomenon seen at National Data Banks, when people have run out of data due to affordability constraints.

techUK believes the Government is right to say that '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.'

The Government has recognised that certain groups are at risk of digital exclusion, including young people, older people, people living in poverty generally and disabled people. However,

the Government should explicitly recognise a person may fit under each of these categories at various points in their life.

Everyone is born digitally-excluded, and must be included by the time they need to use computers for school. These same people may become digitally excluded as adults because of changing technology, or unemployment preventing the upkeep of digital devices, or because of a disability. Even if they are digitally re-included, they may well become excluded once more afterwards.

The Government should therefore consider digital exclusion along a person's life cycle, as this will give greater appreciation of the need for ongoing support and, frankly, the impossibility of ever eliminating digital exclusion. At best, digital exclusion can be minimised and its negative effects reduced as far as possible. It will also give a far greater appreciation of the reality that digital exclusion is often a symptom of other societal ills and in turn compounds these wider ills, meaning tackling digital exclusion must be seen as part of holistic measures to tackle those problems.