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Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

Call for evidence outcome

Digital Inclusion Action Plan: summary of responses (published 17 July 2025)

Updated 17 July 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the call for evidence

Digital inclusion is a priority for this government. It means ensuring everyone has the access, skills, support and confidence to engage in our modern digital society and economy, whatever their circumstances. The government published the [Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps](#) in February 2025, which set out the first

actions we are taking towards our ambition of delivering digital inclusion for everyone across the UK.

Between 26 February and 9 April 2025, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) held a call for evidence to accompany the [Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps](#). The call for evidence welcomed views from stakeholders, local and combined authorities, businesses, charities, community groups, and individuals on the contents of the Action Plan and on the government's intended medium- and long-term next steps. The full list of questions asked in the call for evidence is provided in the Annex.

1.2 Scale of response

The call for evidence received 800 responses; 756 via the online form hosted on GOV.UK and 44 via the email address provided. While most responses submitted via the online form were from organisations (61%), a significant minority were submitted by individual members of the public (24%). The largest share of responses was from organisations and individuals based in London (27%), followed by the South East (10%), Yorkshire and the Humber (10%) and the North West (10%). The devolved nations account for a combined 9% of responses (Scotland 6%; Wales 2%; Northern Ireland 1%). A full breakdown of regions is presented in the following table.

A full breakdown of regions

Nation / Region	Responses (%)
England	91
North East	6
North West	10
Yorkshire and the Humber	10
East Midlands	8
West Midlands	6
East of England	7
London	27
South East	10
South West	7
Northern Ireland	1

Scotland	6
Wales	2

1.3 Analysis methods

This report provides a summary of responses to both the closed-ended questions and open-ended questions asked via the online call for evidence form and the written responses submitted to DSIT via email.

Descriptive analysis was conducted on the responses to the 10 closed-ended questions. The main body of this report provides a breakdown of responses to each question. A thematic analysis of responses to the 17 open-ended questions was conducted. All responses were read in full, and AI-powered tools ([Consult](#)) and ([Redbox](#)), in combination with extensive manual review, were used to identify and summarise the key themes.

1.4 Structure of this report

The main body of this report broadly follows the structure of the call for evidence questionnaire. It commences with a summary of respondent feedback on each of the focus population groups identified by government, followed by a summary of recommendations for the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund. Responses relating to the objectives and medium- and long-term plans for each of the areas of focus are then discussed in turn.

Where responses to a question are not explicitly discussed (for example, responses regarding government partnerships), this is because the themes from the responses to these questions were cross-cutting and have therefore been incorporated as relevant throughout the report to avoid duplication. 2 questions asked for respondents to provide specific examples of relevant digital inclusion initiatives and evaluation approaches. The examples received have not been listed within this analysis but will be considered as part of the development of policy and evaluation approaches.

2. Analysis

2.1 Identification of priority population groups

The [Digital Inclusion Action Plan](#) aims to tackle digital inclusion with a particular focus on 5 broad demographic groups: low-income households, older individuals, disabled people, people experiencing unemployment and seeking work, and young people (including those not in education, employment or training). Feedback from respondents indicates substantial agreement with these groups, with 60% agreeing that they are appropriate.

While 36% of respondents expressed disagreement, these participants primarily suggested specific other groups which experience significant and unique barriers to digital inclusion, rather than disagree with the selected groups. Frequently mentioned groups include:

- **individuals with low levels of English literacy**, including non-native speakers, those from communities where English is not the primary language, and individuals who struggle with reading and comprehension;
- **refugees and asylum seekers** who experience barriers including low levels of English literacy, limited awareness of available resources, and inadequate skills and support;
- **homeless individuals and those facing insecure housing conditions**, who often lack stable access to devices and reliable internet connectivity;
- **individuals who have been displaced due to domestic violence, human trafficking, or modern slavery**; and,
- **people living in rural communities**, with concerns referencing the compounding impact of geographic isolation and inadequate digital infrastructure.

Responses also suggested refinements to the definitions of the 5 groups identified in the Action Plan. Specifically, responses called for the focus on those with disabilities to be expanded to include those with long-term physical or mental health conditions and those with cognitive impairments, particularly given the increasing digitisation of healthcare services. Conversely, responses called for a more targeted approach to young people, focusing on specific subgroups including low-income youth, young people with disabilities, care leavers, as well as those not in education, employment or training.

As acknowledged in the Action Plan, a key concern for respondents was the impact of intersectionality on digital exclusion. Participants noted that multiple socio-economic factors—such as income level, education, health status, and geographic location—interact to create complex barriers to meaningful digital participation, and that people may experience changing barriers over time. Some suggested that the Action Plan should incorporate greater consideration of how this intersectionality will be effectively addressed.

2.2. Recommendations for the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund

The Action Plan detailed government's commitment to launch a Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund, to support local initiatives that increase digital participation. In response to this commitment, respondents provided suggestions for how government can ensure the Fund best supports local communities across the UK.

Respondents frequently emphasised the importance of meaningful engagement with local communities as fundamental to the Fund's success. They advocated for collaboration with local stakeholders to better understand specific barriers and needs of those experiencing digital exclusion. Suggestions for facilitating this engagement included workshops, regional advisory boards, and the co-design of funding criteria. Some respondents proposed devolving funding to local governments or regional digital inclusion partnerships, arguing that local authorities possess the skills and relationships needed to engage effectively with various organisations and address regional challenges.

Respondents emphasised the importance of making the application process for the Fund straightforward to ensure it remains accessible to smaller organisations. Several respondents recommended that taking an evidence-based approach to allocation of funding would be important to maximising the Fund's impact. Calls were also made to ensure funding is sustainable, to support longer-term impact.

Finally, awareness-raising efforts also emerged as a crucial theme. Some respondents suggested a national communications campaign to increase public awareness of the Fund, while others advocated for broad public awareness campaigns addressing digital exclusion issues to educate communities on available support.

2.3 The 4 focus areas

The approach to digital inclusion set out in the Action Plan proposes 4 focus areas:

- opening up opportunities through skills
- tackling data and device poverty
- breaking down barriers to digital services
- building confidence

Overall, 78% of respondents agreed with the 4 focus areas, with 22% disagreeing.

Where respondents provided constructive feedback on the focus areas, they generally highlighted perceived gaps in coverage rather than disagreeing with the proposed focus areas. Notably, gaps concerning online safety emerged, emphasising the need for education to protect digitally excluded individuals from online harms, such as fraud and misinformation. Respondents highlighted the importance of sustained digital skills training and lifelong learning, particularly for

older generations and those in lower-skilled jobs. The interplay between digital and financial exclusion was noted, advocating for holistic support for low-income households to access affordable technology and broadband.

Furthermore, the need for offline alternatives to digital services was emphasised, with calls for clear strategies to ensure equitable access for non-digital users. User-friendly digital services designed for individuals with varying needs were also highlighted, placing responsibility on organisations to enhance accessibility. Additionally, the importance of motivating digital engagement through demonstrated benefits and fostering confidence among users was stressed, with locally led initiatives identified as key to success. Overall, respondents advocated for a coordinated approach to digital inclusion, emphasising collaboration across sectors to integrate these goals into broader policy issues, thereby maximising resources and effectiveness.

The call for evidence asked respondents to comment on the proposed objectives and medium to long-term work relating to each of the 4 focus areas in turn.

2.3.1 Opening up opportunities through skills

Two in three (66%) of respondents agreed with the objectives relating to opening up opportunities through skills and 78% agreed with the proposed medium and long-term next steps.

Reflecting this, the responses demonstrated high levels of agreement on the necessity of equipping individuals with essential digital skills. In addition, however, many responses emphasise the importance of upskilling individuals in critical competencies related to online safety and media literacy. With the increasing prevalence of digital fraud and misinformation, many respondents underscored the urgent requirement for educational initiatives that prepare users to navigate the online environment safely. Responses argued that while the Essential Digital Skills framework provides a useful benchmark, it requires modernisation and in-built flexibility to allow it to adapt as the digital landscape evolves. Key concerns centred on the notion that digital literacy training must extend beyond technical know-how; individuals also need to acquire the skills required to critically evaluate information sources.

Furthermore, the importance of ongoing support mechanisms to continually reinforce digital skills was underscored. Many respondents articulated that training should not merely be approached as a one-time event, but rather as an ongoing process necessitating regular reinforcement and further development. To facilitate its accessibility and reach, many suggested that digital skills support should be embedded into existing community services; for example, by locating it within libraries and health services.

Tailoring skills training to suit the specific needs of different demographic groups was another significant point made in the responses. For instance, specific training modules designed for older adults might need to differ markedly from those intended for young people. Likewise, people currently seeking work will have different motivations, and may benefit from developing different skills, to

those in work. This variance arises from the distinct levels of pre-existing knowledge and comfort with technology observed across demographics, as well as differences in motivations for being online. Respondents suggested that ensuring that approaches are adaptable and sensitive to these differences is key to improving engagement and effectiveness.

2.3.2 Tackling data and device poverty

A high proportion of respondents (70%) agreed with the objectives relating to tackling data and device poverty and a similar proportion (73%) agreed with the proposed medium and long-term next steps.

In the written answers, respondents generally expressed strong support for the government's objectives to enhance affordable and high-quality digital connectivity across populated areas, endorsing initiatives such as gigabit broadband investment through Project Gigabit and 4G mobile coverage deployment through the Shared Rural Network. Many emphasised the potential significance of achieving nationwide coverage of gigabit broadband and 5G standalone mobile coverage (5GSA) as a factor that could drive economic growth and ensure digital inclusion.

While there was notable praise for Project Gigabit's focus on hard-to-reach areas, some respondents advocated for community-led solutions that could be tailored to local contexts, rather than suggesting a one-size-fits-all approach.

The upcoming review of the Broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO) was also viewed positively, with multiple stakeholders suggesting that diverse consumer needs—particularly those of low-income households and individuals with disabilities—merit careful consideration alongside calls for more ambitious minimum broadband speed targets. There were calls for the government to provide more details on both how and when it plans to work with Ofcom on the review.

Additionally, the transition from legacy telecoms, such as Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), 2G/3G, was recognised as an important step to modernising telecoms networks. Stakeholders stressed the need for clear communication and targeted support for vulnerable individuals during this transition, cautioning that it could create new barriers for those lacking digital skills or access to modern devices.

Respondents often reiterated that while there has been a decline in real-term prices for connectivity, affordability remains a significant barrier. Therefore, many respondents agreed with the government proposal to ensure a good range of connectivity options for those struggling with affordability. Suggestions included enhanced social tariffs and expanded subsidies or more inclusive tariff structures. However, they emphasised that merely providing options is insufficient. Enhanced promotion and awareness of existing initiatives, such as social tariffs, were deemed crucial to reaching those most in need. It was also suggested that more innovative solutions should be explored, including the creation of local community hubs offering free access to devices, device charging, and internet connectivity.

These hubs – which could be based in existing infrastructure (e.g. local libraries, FE colleges) - could serve as vital resources, particularly for individuals with volatile incomes who may struggle to commit to long-term social tariffs.

Respondents showed strong support for the government's aim to improve device access for those in need. The proposal to extend device donation initiatives across government and establish a [IT Reuse industry charter](#) garnered general approval, and there was emphasis on responsible donation practices to ensure compatibility and functionality of devices. The consensus was that focus should extend beyond hardware provision to include ongoing training, security, and maintenance. However, some respondents suggested that a centralised model for device donation would not be effective, and that creating resources in every community, via local connectivity hubs, is more likely to result in a system that can respond quickly and efficiently to local needs.

2.3.3 Breaking down barriers to digital services

Three in four respondents (75%) agreed with the objectives relating to breaking down barriers to digital services and a similar proportion (74%) agreed with the proposed medium and long-term next steps.

The importance of maintaining offline alternatives for essential services was a prominent theme in the feedback received. As a growing number of services transition to online platforms, many respondents highlighted that not every individual is comfortable or able to engage solely through digital means. It was articulated that maintaining accessible offline pathways is crucial to ensuring overall inclusivity, particularly for populations such as the elderly and individuals with disabilities who may be disproportionately impacted by the shift to digital-first services.

Calls for stronger accessibility standards were prevalent, with many participants calling for a proactive approach by organisations to ensure that digital platforms are designed to accommodate individuals across a spectrum of abilities. Some went further, advocating for comprehensive legislation to bolster accessibility across both public and private sectors. Specific suggestions included the application of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to mobile applications and extending these guidelines to all UK entities, including private companies. Furthermore, organisations were urged to interact directly with end-users during the development and testing phases of digital services to ensure designs reflect the actual needs and experiences of users with a range of accessibility needs.

Community initiatives were also highlighted as an effective means to assist individuals in navigating digital services. Conceptual ideas included establishing local digital champion roles and accessible community digital hubs that could serve as vital resources for digital skills development.

2.3.4 Building confidence

Around 2 in 3 respondents (65%) agreed with the objectives relating to building confidence while 3 in 4 (74%) agreed with the proposed medium and long-term

next steps.

Written responses relating to this focus area highlight the need to build individuals' knowledge and skills regarding online safety and data security. Calls were also made for commitment from the government and private sector, particularly in telecommunications, to ensure that safety is a shared responsibility and not solely the user's burden. However, respondents also emphasised the importance of building individuals' ability to recognise misinformation and fraud as part of initiatives to encourage more people to engage with online services, noting that negative experiences can undermine confidence and deter continued use. The need for a synergistic approach between confidence building and skills development was also stressed. Some respondents proposed that improving digital skills would foster confidence.

Many participants acknowledged the need to communicate the benefits of digital services, which they viewed as comprising a broad range of advantages including managing finances, accessing discounts, and connecting with communities. Local organisations with established trust in their communities were seen as key players in conveying these benefits to digitally excluded individuals, especially those who are unmotivated to go online.

Respondents expressed a desire for increased focus on building relationships between digitally excluded people and those providing support to enhance digital confidence. This includes prioritising face-to-face interactions and establishing trust through models such as peer mentoring and community connectors. Trusted local intermediaries were identified as particularly beneficial for older individuals, people with disabilities, or those with low literacy levels. The overarching sentiment was that strategies should be person-centred and leverage existing community infrastructure.

The need for a synergistic approach between confidence building and skills development was also stressed. Some respondents proposed that improving digital skills would foster confidence, while others asserted that establishing this confidence is key to enhancing literacy.

3. Next steps

The government remains committed to delivering digital inclusion for everyone across the UK, regardless of their circumstances and recognises that collaborative efforts between government, industry, and local communities are essential to achieve this. The government would like to thank respondents who shared their views and will consider this evidence and use it to inform future policy development.

Alternative format versions of this report are available on request via the Digital Inclusion Mailbox at digitalinclusion@dsit.gov.uk.

Annex: Call for evidence questionnaire

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

I am responding as an individual I am responding on behalf of an organisation/group

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

North West North East Yorkshire and the Humber East Midlands West Midlands East of England London South East South West Scotland Wales Northern Ireland

3. If you are an individual, please can you outline the reasons you have responded to this survey?

Free-text

4. If you are an organisation, please can you specify the type (e.g. business, academic, government, charity) and sector in which you operate (e.g. service provider, academic research, not-for profit)?

Free-text

5. Do you agree with these 5 population groups?

Yes No

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

Free-text

7. 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).

Free-text

8. Are there examples of evaluation models for measuring the impact of digital inclusion programs that you are aware of? Please provide details of these models and where they have been used (if known).

Free-text

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

Free-text

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

Free-text

11. The government has identified 4 focus areas for how it will drive up digital inclusion. Do you agree with these 4 focus areas?

Yes No Don't know

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

Free-text

13. Has the government identified the right objectives for “Opening up opportunities through skills”?

Yes No Don't know

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

Free-text

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

Yes No Don't know

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

Free-text

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

Yes No Don't know

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

Free-text

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

Yes No Don't know

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

Free-text

21. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next

steps for “Opening up opportunities through skills?”

Yes No Don't know

22. If no, what should be the next steps in this area?

Free-text

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

Yes No Don't know

24. If no, what should be the next steps in this area?

Free-text

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

Yes No Don't know

26. If no, what should be the next steps in this area?

Free-text

27. Has the government identified the right medium and long-term next steps for “Building confidence”?

Yes No Don't know

28. If no, what should be the next steps in this area?

Free-text

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

Free-text

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