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Data Poverty APPG
State of the
Nation report

Foreword
by Darren Jones MP, Chair of the Data Poverty APPG

The last two years have pulled into sharp relief - for every one of us - our growing dependence on data to live our lives. The pandemic accelerated existing trends in how we live, work and access public services. Many of us continue to enjoy the benefits of hybrid working, the NHS continues to promote e-consultations and schools continue to use digital tools to enrich children's' learning. But for millions of people in the UK, accessing online services isn't convenient or efficient. Instead, people in data poverty who struggle to get online, are excluded and increasingly unable to access the most basic services.

In January 2021, I launched the Social Tariff Campaign in the House of Commons, calling for UK internet service providers to introduce a low cost 'social tariff' for broadband for families with children on free school meals. The following month, I set up the Data Poverty All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) as a forum for bringing parliamentarians together with regulators and internet providers to build support for social tariff broadband products, and to explore long-term solutions to the growing issue of data poverty in the UK.

Since then, we've been pleased that social tariffs have been improved or offered by numerous providers. BT has upgraded its social tariff from a slower copper product to a faster fibre broadband product. TalkTalk piloted a successful free broadband scheme in Manchester for people receiving Universal Credit in order to help them find employment. The communications regulator, Ofcom, called for more social tariffs and are campaigning to increase awareness of them, while the Department for Work and Pensions has also sent a message to recipients of Universal Credit to encourage the take up of broadband social tariffs.

We are also delighted to have seen the emergence of a number of initiatives aimed at tackling the issue, including the Good Things Foundation and Nominet's Data Poverty Lab which is developing our understanding and practical steps to address data poverty, as well as the National Databank and National Devices Bank – supporting people in getting online by providing access to free data and devices to people who can't afford to access them.

Work has also been ongoing to develop solutions which move beyond the debate on social tariffs to focus increasingly on building data accessibility into our core infrastructure. Organisations such as Jisc and Glide – both operating in the higher education space – have developed new initiatives and workstreams to strengthen connectivity across university and college campuses, as well as student accommodation to ensure students remain connected.

Over the last eighteen months since our founding, the APPG has engaged widely with industry, the third sector and with government to understand the problem of data poverty and to support initiatives that can help us tackle this issue. I'm grateful to all of them for taking part and to my colleagues in parliament for their support of this important work.

In this report, our first annual State of the Nation report on data poverty in the UK, we have summarised what we have learned about the nature of data poverty and the interventions that can help. We have also set out what more needs to be done and call on those with the power to act to do so. Our core recommendations include:

- Developing an agreed definition of data poverty
- Creating an assumed right to data
- Agreeing a digital 'right-of-way' to public services
- Promoting social tariff and data voucher auto-enrolment
- Outlining clear social tariff order journeys
- Making early termination free and simple
- Expanding the number of zero-rated websites
- Establishing collaborative ways of working
- Creating a social inclusion fund

The Government must lead on eliminating data poverty in our country, but it cannot and need not do this on its own. As the Data Poverty APPG has demonstrated - in our work and in this report - there is a broad coalition across politics, industry and the third sector that stands ready and enthusiastic to help. I know that, together, we can eliminate data poverty in the UK and ensure that everyone has the opportunity of accessing the benefits the internet can offer us all.

Darren Jones MP,
Chair of the Data Poverty APPG and Member of Parliament, Bristol North West

2m

Based on the latest data from Ofcom, around 2 million households in the UK are currently experiencing data poverty

2.7m

Citizen's Advice has released data showing that three million people were behind on their mobile phone bills and 2.7 million people behind on their broadband bills in January of 2022

1.5m

1.5 million UK households had no internet access in 2021

1.1m

1.1 million households are struggling to afford their fixed broadband service

Introduction

Digital inclusion matters more today than could have been imagined even just five or ten years ago.

Our access to data affects every aspect of our lives – our ability to learn and to work, to connect with online public services, to access necessary services from banking to healthcare, and to socialise and connect with the people we know and love.

It follows, therefore, that 'data poverty' matters. Those of us who are unable to afford the data that drives so much of our new, hybrid lives are left profoundly disadvantaged – economically and socially. And that disadvantage is compounded over time because the disconnection that even a brief period of data poverty can bring also makes it harder for someone to access support. Someone in data poverty because of unexpected unemployment, for example, may find it harder to find new work because of data poverty. As with other forms of poverty, data poverty can all too easily become a complex and vicious cycle; the disadvantage entrenches further disadvantage.

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Data Poverty was set up in early 2021 to identify the causes of data poverty and to advocate for interventions to prevent and to mitigate it. As COVID-19 continued to spread - and with most of the country restricted to working from home and prevented from socialising in-person – the effects of data poverty were stark and obvious. Many organisations stepped up to ensure that children were not prevented from accessing home-schooling by the lack of equipment or data and a great deal of political attention was focussed on what could be done to prevent the disconnection of people at a time of national crisis. It is our mission now to ensure that we do not lose that sense of urgency on this important issue as we emerge into a 'new normal' of hybrid living. The pandemic highlighted the importance of data poverty for many, but data poverty has not been resolved nor become unimportant simply because public health restrictions have been lifted.
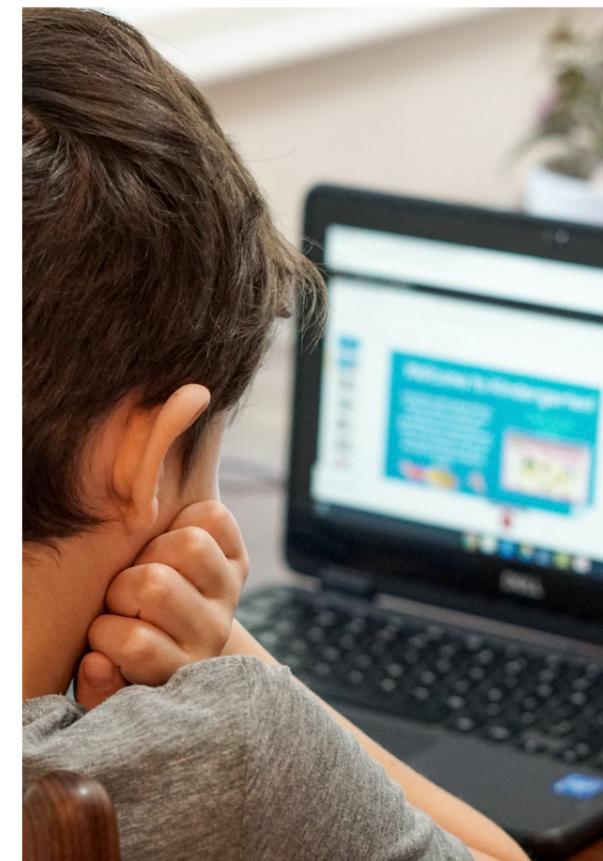
The pandemic accelerated the trends in online living and working that were already in train; we must accelerate, therefore, efforts to define and alleviate data poverty so that the 'new normal' does not leave anyone behind. If we fail to do so, then we will have failed to create a socially equitable and just settlement, and we will also have failed to capitalise and benefit from the wealth of untapped human talent that we must harness if we are to grow and prosper as a country.

In this report, the APPG has gathered evidence from its own members, other politicians, industry stakeholders, trade bodies, regulators and third sector organisations to gain an incisive, in-depth understanding of the issue of data poverty. This report aims to give the first state of the nation perspective on data poverty and what needs to be done to eradicate it in the UK.

In particular, we explore:

· What data poverty means and looks like in the UK today;

· What measures are in place to tackle data poverty; and

· What needs to happen next to eradicate data poverty.

The APPG on Data Poverty thanks everyone who has supported our work – in Parliament, government, industry and the third sector. We aspire, through our work, to bring all stakeholders in this area together to eradicate data poverty in the UK, declare our work done and disband.

Section One:
What data poverty looks like in the UK today

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

In common with most forms of poverty, tackling data poverty depends on a clear-sighted ability to define and measure it in the first place. The APPG on Data Poverty has set for itself the goal of driving consensus - in politics, industry and the third sector - of what data poverty is. We believe that this is necessary to identify and implement positive, practical and sustainable solutions.

In this report, we have sought to bring together the evidence from academia, industry bodies and campaigners in order to lay out clearly what we know about the causes and impact of data poverty and to outline the most effective means of measuring the problem.

Causes

Data poverty is a complex, multi-faceted issue, stemming from a range of causes which often intersect and compound each other.[1] The causes of data poverty must therefore be understood through a variety of lenses, including digital poverty, traditional poverty, and social exclusion.[2] However, put simply, data poverty is most often associated with traditional, financial poverty. It is also often linked to an individual's ability to access the internet, be that due to a lack of access to internet enabled devices or a lack of digital skills.

Importantly, data poverty is closely linked to digital poverty,[3] which is defined by the Digital Poverty Alliance as: "the inability to interact with the online world fully, when, where and how an individual needs to."[4]

The APLE Collective meanwhile split the digital divide into three constituent elements:

(1) physical access;
(2) skills and digital capacity; and
(3) inequality of access, of which data poverty falls into the latter.[5]

Data poverty is also a key determinant of traditional financial poverty,[6,7] as well as a contributor in that often the best financial offers and access for both public and private sector goods and services are found online. Finally, it is both caused by and exacerbates social exclusion.[8]

Alongside these wider contexts, data poverty can also be understood by examining its constituent causes. Most pressing of these is affordability, with access also highlighted. Data poverty caused by a lack of affordability of online services manifests itself particularly strongly in times of hardship, including as a result of the current cost of living crisis.[9]

Citizen's Advice has released data showing that three million people were behind on their mobile phone bills and 2.7 million people behind on their broadband bills in January of 2022.[10] While broadband prices are yet to rise as steeply as food or energy, they still form part of the

cost dilemma for those on low incomes. Many are concerned about broadband price rises that are linked to inflation, given the significant inflation the UK is experiencing this year.[11]

Access issues can also be attributed to gaps in digital literacy, with BT estimating that 2.6 million households in the UK do not have the necessary skills to access the internet, including 50% of the population aged 75 or older.[12] These issues are compounded by access to and use of devices with reduced or free fixed broadband connections clearly not benefitting households without the devices needed to access the internet.[13,14]

Access concerns also arise through infrastructure and coverage issues, which in turn feed into regional disparities in data availability.[15]

1. https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/events/dpis21-day-2-data-poverty/
2. https://www.datapovertyappg.co.uk/news/minutes-from-the-first-meeting-of-the-data-poverty-appg
3. Dr Katy Goldstraw, the APLE Collective – The lived experience of data poverty and the digital divide (2022)
4. https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/#:~:text=How%20we%20define%20digital%20poverty,and%20levelling%20up%20the%20UK
5. Dr Katy Goldstraw, the APLE Collective – The lived experience of data poverty and the digital divide (2022)
6. https://www.datapovertyappg.co.uk/news/minutes-from-the-first-meeting-of-the-data-poverty-appg
7. https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/towards-solving-data-poverty/
8. Ibid
9. https://www.datapovertyappg.co.uk/news/event-report-practical-steps-to-closing-the-data-poverty-gap
10. Ibid
11. https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/strategy/
12. https://www.datapovertyappg.co.uk/news/7fhhshv8y62i6nhmcepyhb34ytfgnr
13. https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/what-we-do/news/national-device-bank-built-news/
14. https://www.datapovertyappg.co.uk/news/minutes-from-the-first-meeting-of-the-data-poverty-appg
15. https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/events/dpis21-day-2-data-poverty/

Impact

Perhaps the most critical impact of data poverty is the inability to access vital online services, particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift towards digital public services.[16,17]

As APLE reported in a submission to the Data Poverty APPG:

"Public Health Information has been largely communicated online during the COVID-19 pandemic and many GP, hospital and other appointments are now booked and conducted online. For people living in poverty this adds additional barriers to accessing both public health information and healthcare services".[18]

And one APLE member reported:

"My negative experience of the digital divide was when I phoned my doctor during Covid about a growth I had on my stomach. I was told to send him a photo of it. I do not have a camera on my phone and had no computer, I had to wait for my daughter to come and do it for me the next day… the doctor booked me into hospital to have it removed in case it was cancerous. Without my daughter to do it I would have just left it and the results would have been life-threatening".[19]

Jisc revealed how during the pandemic 25% of students in higher education and 16% in further education struggled to pay data charges. This was particularly relevant when all schooling was online. This remains a concern with large amounts of learning remaining internet-based.[20]

As one grandmother told the APLE collective:

"My grandchildren had limited access to the Internet and no access to a laptop, which now is essential for schoolwork. They have applied, through the discover digital pop-up shop, for a laptop and data dongle which will be a great improvement on how they access not only their schoolwork but will also help them to connect with their friends outside of school".[21]

Data poverty also makes it harder to escape the wider poverty trap,[22] removing the economic benefits internet access brings, such as saving money, improved job prospects and the ability to work flexibly.[23] The APLE Collective also point to the 'Digital by Default' benefits system described by Amos Toh in his Human Rights Watch report.[24] Finally, in part due to a combination of all these factors, data poverty has also been identified by Nominet's Digital Youth Index as increasing social isolation.[25]

The range of effects resulting from data poverty - reaching as they now do into every aspect of a person's life - reinforce the importance of an overarching strategy to tackle and eliminate the problem. For government, data poverty makes it harder to deliver public services to those who need it the most, limits the potential of each person to make their full contribution to society and our economy, and slows the delivery of better performing and cheaper digital first public services.

16. https://digitalyouthindex.uk/digital-access-and-inclusion-the-orphan-issue/
17. https://www.datapovertyappg.co.uk/news/event-report-practical-steps-to-closing-the-data-poverty-gap
18. Dr Katy Goldstraw, the APLE Collective – The lived experience of data poverty and the digital divide (2022) https://usercontent.one/wp/www.aplecollective.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/APLE-Digital-Divide-Briefing-Paper-May-2022-Final.pdf?media=1646145254
19. Dr Katy Goldstraw, the APLE Collective – The lived experience of data poverty and the digital divide (2022)

20. https://www.datapovertyappg.co.uk/news/event-report-practical-steps-to-closing-the-data-poverty-gap
21. Dr Katy Goldstraw, the APLE Collective – The lived experience of data poverty and the digital divide (2022)
22. https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/towards-solving-data-poverty/

23. https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/strategy/
24. Dr Katy Goldstraw, the APLE Collective – The lived experience of data poverty and the digital divide (2022)
25. https://digitalyouthindex.uk/digital-access-and-inclusion-the-orphan-issue/

Measuring Data Poverty

It is probable that those receiving Universal Credit or similar benefits will either be living in data poverty or be at risk of falling into data poverty - for example, such households often report sacrificing other essentials to gain proper internet access, due to wider costs of living.[26] Meanwhile, organisations such as Jisc, Glide, and Citizens Advice are all able to provide information on individual causes and impacts of data poverty.[27] It is acknowledged however, that these overviews are useful only to a point – for instance, while a household may have internet access, it may not be suitable for all its inhabitants' needs (for example, a parent with a single mobile phone connection would struggle to provide meaningful access for themselves and their children).[28]

BT has identified 'skills and will' and 'affordability' as important means of understanding the extent to which an individual, family or household is in data poverty.[29] Elsewhere, the Good Things Foundation has also developed the CHESS (Cheap, Handy, Enough, Safe, Suitable) acronym to measure the provision of internet services to an individual or household against.[30] More detailed metrics were also put forward in Nominet's Digital Youth Index.

This creates a complex picture when looking to measure data poverty. It is essential, however, to develop a working definition, such as the one outlined above – that anyone who is unable to get online, or unable to be online long enough to meet their needs, is in data poverty – which progress can be tracked against.[31]

The State of the Nation

Based on the latest data from Ofcom[32], over 2 million people in the UK are currently experiencing some form of data poverty - driven by a complex and interlocking set of causes but manifesting itself as an inability to access everyday services such as online banking, NHS booking systems, online news and social networks. This number is likely an underestimate, given further statistics from Ofcom revealing that 1.5 million UK households had no internet access in 2021.[33] This provides an overall snapshot of the scale of the problem. Their research also shows that 5% of UK households – around 1.1 million households – are struggling to afford their fixed broadband service.[34]

Data poverty has a severe impact on the households concerned and an impact on wider British society - reducing productivity and slowing progress on digital transformation. There are significant and valuable attempts to measure data poverty and to develop interventions and tools, but there is not currently sufficient momentum inside government to fully eradicate the problem.

Section Two:
Tackling data poverty

26. https://www.datapovertyappg.co.uk/news/darren-jones-mp-the-first-meeting-of-the-data-poverty-appg
27. https://www.datapovertyappg.co.uk/news/minutes-from-the-first-meeting-of-the-data-poverty-appg
28. https://digitalyouthindex.uk/data-snapshots/internet-connection-quality/
29. https://datapovertyappg.co.uk/news/7fhhshv8y62i6nhmcepyhb34ytfgnr
30. https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/chess-co-defining-what-counts-as-a-good-solution-to-data-poverty/
31. https://digitalyouthindex.uk/
32. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-internet/information-for-industry/policy/affordability-of-communications-services#:~:text=Making%20sure%20people%20can%20access,of%20consumers%20of%20communications%20services
33. https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/56912074#:~:text=About%201.5%20million%20homes%20in,learning%20while%20schools%20were%20closed
34. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-internet/information-for-industry/policy/affordability-of-communications-services#:~:text=Making%20sure%20people%20can%20access,of%20consumers%20of%20communications%20services

There are a number of current initiatives designed to tackle data poverty. In this section we map this existing provision and discuss their benefits and disadvantages. All interventions to alleviate data poverty are to be welcomed but the two most prevalent measures both suffer from considerable drawbacks.

Social tariffs - which offer a long-term solution for low-income households by providing data at a below-market rate - suffer from low take-up and awareness and depend on the individual who is benefiting having a fixed home address.

Data voucher schemes - which are available to recipients of Universal Credit for a fixed period - are a useful short-term intervention but are not sufficient to tackle long-term data poverty because of both the short-term nature of the offer and the reliance on the recipient having the appropriate devices to access the data.

Social Tariffs

Benefits	Drawbacks
Cheaper broadband for those on universal credit	Recipients need a house
	Still hard to afford
	Low take up and awareness
	How to ensure speeds are sufficient?
	Assumes the correct skills and devices (wider drawback)

How are they in place?[35]

Package	Price (per month)	Average Speed	You could qualify if you receive
BT Home Essentials	£15	c.36 Mbit/s	Various Benefits (in and out of work)
BT Home Essentials 2	£20	c.67 Mbit/s	Various Benefits (in and out of work)
Country Connect Social Tariff	£15	50 Mbit/s	Various Benefits (in and out of work)
G.Network Essential Fibre Broadband	£15	50 Mbit/s	Various Benefits (in and out of work)
Hyperoptic Fair Fibre 50	£15	50 Mbit/s	Various Benefits (in and out of work)
Hyperoptic Fair Fibre 150	£25	150 Mbit/s	Various Benefits (in and out of work)
KCOM Full Fibre Flex	£14.99	30 Mbit/s	Various Benefits (in and out of work)
NOW Broadband Basics	£20	36 Mbit/s	Universal Credit or Pension Credit
Sky Broadband Basics	£20	36 Mbit/s	Universal Credit or Pension Credit
Virgin Media Essential Broadband	£15	15 Mbit/s	Universal Credit
VOXI For Now	£10	5G where available	Various Benefits (in and out of work)

35. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-internet/advice-for-consumers/costs-and-billing/social-tariffs

Data voucher schemes

Benefits	Drawbacks
Don't need a home	Only available for so long
Free	Low take up and awareness
	Assumes the correct skills and devices (wider drawback)

How are they in place?

Package	Price (per month)	Average Speed	You could qualify if you receive
TalkTalk Broadband for Jobseekers	Free for 6 months	Maximum speed of 40 Mbit/s.	Referral codes are sent to the DWP, who then distribute the vouchers to eligible customers.
Good Things Foundation's National Databank	Free for 12 months	Dependent on telco providing the data.	Applicants must be: 18+ years old From a low income household And have: No access or insufficient internet access And/or no or insufficient internet access when away from home And/or cannot afford their existing monthly top up

APLE Collective

The APLE Collective addresses poverty with lived experience. Our aim is to create a sustainable, grassroots network across the UK to raise awareness of poverty, reduce stigma and work together with others to eradicate it.

- *Definition – no set definition, but at its core involves working collaboratively working with, not alongside or on behalf of those in data poverty*

- *Gives those in DP 'respect, dignity and 'voice-space'*
    - *This in turn is more likely to improve outcomes*

The Data Poverty APPG commends those providers which have positively engaged in either social tariffs or data vouchers, or both. But these efforts must now be supported by a concerted effort by government to effectively eradicate data poverty. The interventions that are currently most prevalent for tackling data poverty help many people and households. But they are also patchy, suffer from drawbacks that exclude significant portions of the at-risk population and are not sufficient on their own as an answer to data poverty.

36. https://www.aplecollective.com/socially-distanced-activism/

Good Things Foundation: Let's Fix the Digital Divide - For Good

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed the way we all live and work. There are 2 million households that struggle to afford internet access in the UK today, and 10 million adults lack the most basic digital skills.[37]

In the last two years, the way we understand digital exclusion has shifted also. And that's why we - Good Things Foundation, the UK's leading digital inclusion charity - have changed how we work. Our new strategy 2022-25, Fix the Digital Divide - for Good, sets out why and how.[38]

Tackling data poverty is now core to our mission - through the National Databank, National Device Bank, and continuing to develop national social infrastructure through our National Digital Inclusion Network. We're building on a decade of experience in digital inclusion. And, on data poverty specifically, we're delivering practical solutions to alleviate data poverty now, alongside advocating for a better, fairer system to end data poverty.

Delivering practical, immediate solutions

Earlier this year, we launched the National Databank, inspired by campaigners and advocates, and made real by industry partners. The National Databank provides free mobile data connectivity to community and partner organisations, so they can give this to people who cannot afford to get online. People in their communities, people using their services, people who already experience barriers in their lives - and for whom staying connected is an essential, not a nice-to-have.

Paul is one of the many people that we've supported. Paul is in his late forties and experiences many mental and physical health challenges. He relies on constant support from his partner and carer and is unable to live independently. Paul is not well enough to leave his home, which means he spends almost every day stuck indoors, disconnected from the outside world.

We've provided Paul with data vouchers through the National Databank and our local community partner, Smartlyte. The vouchers have eased Paul's loneliness,

making him feel more connected to his children. His mental health has improved and he feels less stressed every day. The vouchers provide an invaluable connection to them, helping him to feel less isolated and more independent.

Since the Databank launched, we've distributed over 50,000 SIMs/vouchers through over 400 partner organisations, with more joining each month. None of this would have happened without the support of Virgin Media O2, and donations of SIMs and vouchers from O2, Vodafone and Three. We've now got enough data connectivity to support half a million people to get online or stay connected. What we need now is support to promote this service to organisations across the UK - so people facing data poverty now can benefit from this support.

But our work on the National Databank so far has also highlighted low levels of awareness - among public, voluntary and community sector organisations - as well as members of the public - about support and solutions already available. Ofcom's recent report on the low take-up of social tariffs for broadband is a clear example of this - with an estimated 1.2% of eligible customers taking up a social tariff. There are signs that awareness is starting to build - and we want to play our part to ensure that happens faster.

That's why we've partnered with one of our network members, People Know How, to develop a short guide for community organisations, charities and others about data connectivity. The guide is designed to cut through some of the jargon and complexity around data connectivity, providing information and tips to address data poverty with those they support. This includes information about accessing existing solutions, such as social tariffs and discretionary support from TalkTalk and JobCentre Plus, as well as the National Databank.

Seeking longer-term sustainable solutions

Our practical solutions are providing help right now. But we know that we need a fairer model for internet access; one that understands the integral role this plays in our lives, communities, local economies and society.

37. Ofcom (2022). Affordability of Communications Services; Lloyds Bank (2021). UK Consumer Digital Index.
38. Good Things Foundation (2022). Good Things Foundation strategy: 2022-2025

Case Studies

Jisc: The problem of data poverty for students

That's why, together with Nominet, we set up the Data Poverty Lab. We're working together to build a fairer future that develops longer term, sustainable solutions to data poverty - seeking ideas to change systems in ways which improve lives for everyone.[39]

From the start, we've worked closely with APLE Collective - Addressing Poverty through Lived Experience - to benefit from the expertise of people experiencing data poverty. Together, we created 'CHESS' - a framework for defining a 'good' solution to data poverty: cheap, handy, enough, safe, and suitable.[40] This provides a basis for evaluating policy proposals and practical solutions.

Our three Data Poverty Lab Fellowships are up and running.[41] Between them, they are exploring community and place-based solutions; how we talk about data and data poverty; and whether the internet should be viewed as an essential utility, a human right, or something else. We expect their work (to be published in the autumn) to open up new avenues for policy, advocacy and action. And we plan to engage and consult over the summer to shape our next Data Poverty Lab challenge in the autumn.

Finally, we're partners in the pioneering research to involve members of the public in setting a benchmark - a 'Minimum Digital Living Standard'. Led by the University of Liverpool, with a consortium of academic, voluntary sector and funding partners, this takes as a starting point the following definition, which emerged through the first phase of engaging with members of the public:

'A minimum digital standard of living includes, but is more than, having accessible internet, adequate equipment, and appropriate training and support. It is about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence.'

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Data Poverty meets at a critical time for internet access and for addressing poverty. The cost-of-living crisis poses huge challenges for our country and communities. If we keep working together, raising awareness of existing solutions and designing new ones, then we can alleviate data poverty now and help to find fairer solutions for the future. We can fix the digital divide – for good.

Conducted between October 2020 and April 2021, surveys of 39,000 HE and almost 24,000 FE students found significant numbers encountered several problems that impacted their ability to learn online: 16% of FE and 24% of HE respondents cited mobile data costs as a concern.[42,43]

Poor Wi-Fi connection was more of an issue, with 49% of FE learners and 63% of university students citing this as a barrier, while some didn't have access to a suitable device (14% of FE and 15% of HE). Teachers suffered too: 14% in FE and 12% working in HE struggled to afford the data that enabled them to work from home and half of all teachers reported poor Wi-Fi connections.[44,45]

How we are fighting data poverty

The Government tackled digital poverty by providing devices for school pupils via the temporary 'Get help with technology' scheme and Jisc added its voice to others that successfully argued that further education (FE) college learners should also be eligible. Disadvantaged higher education (HE) students, however, were excluded from the scheme. Through an open letter to the then secretary of state for education, Jisc and partners at GuildHE and Universities UK tried – and failed – to instigate a rethink.[46]

On behalf of these disadvantaged staff and students at our member organisations (colleges and universities) we have engaged with telecoms companies, local authorities and the Government.

In April 2020, Jisc and other sector organisations wrote to the then culture secretary and Ofcom urging them to work with telecoms providers to make all relevant online education sites free to access for UK FE and HE students.[47]

In May 2021, Jisc wrote to the Local Government Association, urging English authorities to provide free internet access to students in public spaces via our eduroam connectivity service, which we will enable for free.[48,49]

The offer applies to councils that are already using Jisc's govroam public sector roaming service. As the name suggests, eduroam was developed for the education sector and now connects millions of students and staff when on campus at universities and colleges nationwide.[50]

If eduroam were available in thousands of libraries, community centres and public buildings, it would massively extend access to 'zero touch' internet connectivity for students and education sector staff who, for whatever reason, aren't on campus.

This could benefit many people who don't have an internet connection at home, whose broadband connection is poor, and those who can't afford data costs required to work or study effectively at home. It also gives greater choice in terms of when and where to study or work. It's a no-brainer.

So far, seven out of a possible 71 councils have taken up the offer; it's a step in the right direction and we'll keep pushing at this door.

Fortunately, we have another weapon in the arsenal: or to be more precise, a little box of tricks that's in development. Edubox is a portable technology that allows access to eduroam in areas where there is only cellular connectivity.

One edubox placed in a building and connected to the existing local network can deliver eduroam to up to 100 users. The box can also be reprofiled to work with the govroam network in a similar fashion. We are now testing to see whether the Jisc-run national research and education network, Janet, can be brought into buildings via the edubox technology.[51]

39. Good Things Foundation (2022). The Data Poverty Lab.
40. Good Things Foundation (2022). CHESS: Co-defining what counts as a 'good' solution to data poverty

41. Good Things Foundation (2022). Data Poverty Lab Fellowship.

42. Jisc.ac.uk, September 2021: Student digital experience insights survey 2020/21
43. Jisc.ac.uk, September 2021: Learner digital experience insights survey2020/21
44. Jisc.ac.uk, November 2021: Teaching (FE) staff digital experience insights survey 2020/21
45. Jisc.ac.uk, November 2021: Teaching (FE) staff digital experience insights survey 2020/21
46. Jisc.ac.uk, January 2021: Government action called for to lift HE students out of digital poverty
47. Jisc.ac.uk, April 2020: Sector leaders call on government to make education websites free for UK students
48. Jisc.ac.uk, May 2021: Call for local authorities to support students with free wifi in public spaces
49. Note: eduroam is a Jisc service which provides secure and seamless internet access across locations and devices. Eduroam is provided to the UK via the Janet Network.
50. Note: govroam is a Jisc service which provides seamless roaming connectivity across thousands of public sector locations
51. Note: The Jisc owned and run Janet Network is the UK's national research and education network

Nominet: Understanding and Tackling Data Poverty

Before the pandemic, data poverty was a peripheral and poorly understood issue that found itself entangled within the broad arena of digital exclusion. But as the lockdowns exposed new fault lines in disadvantage and social exclusion, the lived experience of millions of households in the UK brought much needed attention to data poverty as a chronic and distinct challenge whose impact is felt on a daily basis.

This problem affects millions of people. Nesta's 2020 report on data poverty in Scotland and Wales reported that data poverty affects 1 in 7 adults. 1 in 10 are connected but compromised.[52]

The Nominet Digital Youth Index highlighted that 2.9 million young people (21%) do not have access to either a laptop or desktop and almost a third (32%) of young people do not have access to home broadband. Combined, this leaves 6 million (42%) young people without home broadband or a laptop/desktop.

How we're tackling data poverty

Thankfully, the interest in data poverty as a systemic issue is rising. At Nominet, we are determined to tackle data poverty using research, innovation, policy change, and collective action as the tools to bring about positive change. In recent years we have undertaken several actions to effectively tackle the issue:

- We helped raise awareness of the impact that data poverty has had on society since the start of the pandemic and led the zero-rating response in March 2020, thereby helping create a platform for collective action.

- We have carried out open research through the Digital Youth Index so that every organisation, civil society actor, funder, and local authority can understand the issue relevant to their mission and objectives.

- We've worked closely in partnership with the Good Things Foundation to create the Data Poverty Lab and we're supporting new interventions and place-based approaches such as Getting Oxfordshire Online – supplying hundreds of devices to enable access to those who would otherwise not have it.

- We have funded and supported projects across the UK where young people with physical disabilities are able to thrive in full time careers in the digital economy, where girls living in areas of multiple deprivation have created online communities taking commissions globally, where enrolling in advanced computer science degrees delivered from London but completed in rural Wales is entirely possible. All from eradicating data poverty, sometimes the only blocker to achieving their full potential.

BT: Addressing data poverty through industry efforts, public funding and the chance to end it in the next decade

The challenge of data poverty, and the wider issue of digital exclusion were rightly pushed to the top of the agenda by the pandemic. The reality – that some households that cannot afford enough connectivity to carry out what for many of us are day to day activities, and that millions more lack the skills to do so - suddenly became an urgent issue.

Ofcom data shows that around 6% of households still do not have home internet access, and some 14% do not have broadband. The largest group not online is overwhelmingly older (50% of those aged 75 or older are not online), and for this group the key driver is lack of skills and will. A smaller group of households have broadband, but report affordability concerns to Ofcom; and a still smaller number of low income households do not have broadband as they cannot afford it, but mostly can access the internet via a smart phone and mobile data.

What BT is doing

In 2021 BT supported new research by the Fabian Society into these digital divides both of skills and will, and of affordability.[53] Their findings highlight the importance of plenty of connectivity. Over half (55%) of respondents from low income homes say connectivity is more important than ever post pandemic, to manage finances (79%), learn new skills online (69%) and access online health services (50%). The majority (56%) of respondents feel more vulnerable compared to the start of the pandemic, with nearly one in three (30%) needing additional financial support.

Mobile data can offer flexible ways to be connected and can work for low income households as pay as you go (PAYG) options do not need a contract or commitment to pay. However, as the Fabian's report sets out, mobile data is the most expensive way to buy connectivity, and can lead to low income households going without the 'always available' connectivity that is normal for most of us. In contrast per gigabyte used, broadband usually offers the best value for households to meet all their data connectivity needs.

Sadly, as the cost of living crisis looms, the number of households that cannot afford all the data or connectivity they need looks set to grow. To address this, we welcome the recent commitments (many of which BT already offer) that the telecommunications industry has agreed with government to help those struggling with their bills, although some operators have more to do on early termination charges, so that customers can move to more affordable packages if they need to.[54]

52. https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/data-poverty-scotland-and-wales/

53. https://fabians.org.uk/publication/bridging-the-divide/

54. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/telecoms-industry-agrees-to-new-cost-of-living-plan-following-government-summit-led-by-digital-secretary-nadine-dorries

What further steps are required

We believe four further steps are necessary:

First, all operators should offer social tariffs to an agreed industry standard on speed, price and terms. This will make it much easier for customers to understand and take advantage of social tariffs in greater numbers. Without this, the considerable burden of supporting them falls unfairly across a small number of operators, is not sustainable and will not achieve the reach needed.

Second, an industry fund, and / or public funding for social tariffs should be introduced alongside standardisation. The Government says over 4 million households are eligible for social tariffs. While these households clearly need support. Some experts have suggested the VAT charged on broadband should be used as a funding pot to support social tariffs and broadband access.[55]

As the chart shows, telecoms is the only sector to offer social tariffs without at least one of these enabling measures.

Industry	Standardised terms	Public Funding	Industry levy funding	Wide or narrow eligibility
Energy	N/A	Yes	No	Wide (all UC plus others)
Water	N/A	No	Yes	Narrow (zero income UC only)
Banking	Yes	No	No	Wide (bad credit history or no account)
Telco	No	No	No	Wide, but varies by operator

Third, BT believe the Government should bring in full funding for broadband connectivity for households on the very lowest incomes. DWP figures show that there are at least 1.5m households that cannot cope with their food, energy and water bills on their current income. Greater choice or marketing of social tariffs cannot help this group. Yet industry cannot drive the retail price any lower. A full subsidy would cost around £240 per household per year, for comparison, winter fuel subsidies in a normal year are typically around £300 per household per year.

BT is trialling a way to execute this: following a pilot in partnership with the Department for Education, BT is working with charities including Home Start, Buttle UK a nd Barnardo's to trial a 'Connected Families' scheme to give some of the families most in need access to fully funded broadband.

This scheme is based on our social tariff, BT Home Essentials. This was launched last year and provides fibre broadband and calls for £15 per month. Currently it is the best social tariff on the market in terms of reach, speed, price, eligibility and end term. Take up in recent months has been nearly 10% of our new broadband customers and has doubled quarter on quarter. BT are proud to have been offering a social tariff, first for phone lines and then for internet connectivity, for over 10 years. In total, we support nearly 1 million customers on social or subsidised tariffs.

Fourth, as more and more public services go digital - from getting in touch with your GP to TV channels leaving broadcast and satellite to be delivered via the internet - it is time for more joined up thinking on sustainable longer term solutions.

For example, the BBC recently announced plans to withdraw CBBC from broadcast, leaving children in the lowest income households unable to view it without broadband. The coming end of broadcast and satellite TV technology will throw up more and more tricky challenges like this.

But it could be a golden opportunity to bring online those currently excluded from the internet via a joined up 'switchover' plan and renew the purpose of our public sector broadcasters.

If the whole telecommunications industry and government work in partnership, we can better address data poverty today, and a create a sustainable way to end it UK in the next decade.

People Know How: Tackling Data Poverty in Scotland

Why is data connectivity so important?

Digital boasts the ability to connect people across all types of boundaries, but without internet, the result can be the opposite.

UK data from 2021 shows that:

- 1.5 million UK households (6%) don't have home internet access, rising to 11% of poorer households (Ofcom 2021)
- 2 million UK households struggle to afford broadband (Ofcom 2021)
- 10 million adults don't have the most basic digital skills (Ofcom 2021)
- 40% of those offline earn less than £15,000 and 55% below £20,000 (Ofcom 2021)
- 1 in 6 broadband customers struggled to pay their bill between March 2020 and January 2021 (Citizens Advice 2021).

How are community organisations supporting people with data connectivity?

As part of our social innovation model, People Know How conducts research and consultations to ensure our services continue to address current need. We recently gathered views from seven people we support who are experiencing data poverty, and ten organisations

supporting people with digital inclusion. We hoped this would generate top tips and guidance for others, but in fact, the research underlined the relative lack of knowledge and awareness about data connectivity and available support – such as the lack of advertisement around 'social tariffs' for broadband.

This resonates with a recent audience poll at a Policy in Practice webinar, where 58% of money guidance practitioners who responded said they were 'not very confident' or 'not at all confident' about providing support to people around broadband or mobile data costs. This was similar in our own research – with over half saying they lacked confidence.[56]

When we asked people who have received connectivity support about what they looked for in a broadband package, almost everyone placed price as their number one consideration, with just over half also prioritising speed, and half choosing data amount. By contrast, when we asked service providers, the highest-ranked priority was data amount. Lack of understanding about amounts and speed of data may contribute to poor uptake of potential solutions to data poverty, such as social tariffs.

A few organisations mentioned supporting people to use price comparison websites when choosing internet packages. These can be useful, but require a level of internet access, digital skills and confidence to use them.

We were also interested in knowledge about data needs and consumption. When we asked people who have received support to rank internet activities in order of data consumption, some were unaware of how little data is used by activities like online banking, or how much is used by video conferencing or streaming. Half put social media browsing at the top; with the other half placing video chatting first instead. Importantly, none of the organisations reported offering advice on 'making your data go further,' and almost all said the reason for this is that they don't know enough about it to feel confident advising others.

55. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/medialse/2022/04/12/reassessing-vat-on-broadband-could-generate-a-digital-inclusion-fund/

56. https://policyinpractice.co.uk/webinar-how-low-income-families-can-benefit-from-social-tariffs/

Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales: Tackling Data Poverty in Wales

Learning from Connecting Scotland

As well as providing our own digital support, People Know How has also been heavily involved with the Scottish Government programme Connecting Scotland, both distributing devices provided by the scheme and operating their national helpline. The programme was set up over COVID-19, with the aim of supporting everyone in Scotland to get online. It works with organisations to distribute devices and connectivity in the form of MiFi's pre-loaded with SIM cards.[57]

When the programme began, the MiFi's only provided 20GB of data per month. During this time the helpline would frequently receive calls from users who were unaware of why their data had suddenly stopped working. Upon investigation, many said they had recently discovered on-demand television streaming services. Some callers would phone in the middle of the month and would have to wait until the following month for their 20GB to be renewed.

An understanding of data usage would have been beneficial to these recipients. Now Connecting Scotland offers unlimited data for 2 years. Outside of Connecting Scotland, however, packages with fixed data provisions are a real option for people with a smaller budget. An understanding of data usage can help people make informed choices about packages on offer, and how much data they need to complete essential activities online.

Connectivity Now: Campaigning to end data poverty

Derived from our work, our Connectivity Now campaign outlines three main actions to end data poverty in Scotland. The first calls to regulate connectivity, offering better packages to people on low incomes and viewing internet as a basic utility.[58] The second calls to link connectivity to shared spaces. Done securely, sharing and subsidising data through community hubs and social housing can substantially widen access to data. Finally, the third action calls to zero-rate essential service websites, allowing everyone to access essential services online for free, or in other words, without spending any data.

Since launch, we've been campaigning for pledges of support from organisations and community groups whose backing will support us as we lobby the Government to implement policy change that can make the campaign a reality.

Data poverty is just one aspect of poverty, but it is one that impacts many other aspects, reducing access to education and employment, heightening the cost of living, and negatively impacting wellbeing. We are calling on policymakers to recognise the impact that data poverty has on people across Scotland and to implement lasting change.

In March 2021, DIAW published 'From Inclusion to Resilience: An agenda for digital inclusion'.[59] One of the five priority areas is 'Addressing data poverty as a key issue'. We recognised that data poverty had become even more visible through the COVID-19 pandemic. In Wales, as elsewhere, the pandemic surfaced stories of families having to choose between data or dinner.[60]

How the DIAW is tackling data poverty

We are undertaking research to develop a Minimum Digital Living Standard for Wales, which extends the UK study on a Minimum Digital Living Standard.[61,62] This reflects a commitment to building a shared, evidence-based understanding to support a joined-up approach. In parallel, the Centre for Digital Public Services in Wales is undertaking an all-Wales exercise to map digital inclusion support, and Audit Wales is starting a project to understand the current extent of digital inclusion in Wales.[63,64]

In May 2022, Alliance members came together to discuss the challenges and opportunities for addressing data poverty - as an Alliance, and along with Welsh Government Ministers Lee Waters and Jane Hutt.

Alliance members heard about the damaging impacts on people's lives when they cannot afford to stay connected. We heard from organisations like Displaced

People in Action, Swansea MAD, Big Issue Cymru and Monmouthshire Housing Association about how data poverty deepens social isolation for people already experiencing exclusion, and how it compounds existing barriers for older people and others who are worried about using the internet. We heard from many Alliance members about how rising living costs are putting essentials, including internet access, even further out of reach - with Citizens Advice Cymru sharing that the number of people undertaking a debt assessment who are in a negative budget (unable to meet even the most fundamental essentials of food and heating, let alone internet access) climbed to its highest level in the first quarter of 2022.

Alongside, we heard about the positive, life-changing impacts for people experiencing homelessness who have received support from Big Issue Cymru with both digital and financial inclusion; and how Big Issue and others, like Swansea MAD, have been able to provide free mobile data connectivity using Good Things Foundation's National Databank to people they support.[65]

Awareness of existing data connectivity solutions - such as social tariffs for broadband and the National Databank - was low - even among Alliance members. This emerged as a clear and immediate area for joint work between DIAW and the Welsh Government - to ensure that people, communities and organisations supporting them are aware of what is already available to help people stay connected in Wales.

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57. https://connecting.scot/
58. https://peopleknowhow.org/connectivity-now

59. https://www.digitalcommunities.gov.wales/from-inclusion-to-resilience-an-agenda-for-digital-inclusion/
60. https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/What_is_Data_Poverty.pdf
61. https://news.liverpool.ac.uk/2022/02/18/developing-a-minimum-digital-living-standard-for-wales/

62. https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/research/research-themes/digital/minimum-digital-living-standard/
63. https://digitalpublicservices.gov.wales/
64. https://www.audit.wales/
65. https://www.bigissue.com/news/no-spare-change-two-thirds-of-big-issue-sellers-now-accept-contactless-payments/

Seeking Welsh solutions

From a policy perspective, boundaries between reserved and devolved powers add to complexity. They also present opportunities to explore Welsh solutions to data poverty. In 'From Inclusion to Resilience', we identified four outcomes for Wales:

- Internet access is recognised as an essential utility in Wales.
- There is free public provision of WiFi and community-based support for digital inclusion across all areas of Wales.
- Cross-sector collaboration takes place to research and design sustainable solutions to data poverty.
- The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation is explored to see how it might be possible to include data poverty and digital support in a measurable way.

Looking ahead

Action will be needed at all levels and across all sectors. The Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales is committed to taking coordinated action and championing change to address data poverty in Wales. We believe the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Data Poverty provides an opportunity for Welsh MPs and parliamentarians across all parties and nations to come together with industry and civil society leaders to pursue an agenda for digital inclusion. We look forward to continuing to work together.

Section Three:
What needs to happen next to eradicate data poverty

The scale of the problem is clear - whatever measure or combination of measures one chooses to use, there are millions of people living in data poverty in the UK today. Take up of social tariffs and digital vouchers is inadequate and, in any case, these measures alone cannot tackle the issue at the scale required.

The impact of data poverty on the wellbeing and social and economic inclusion is severe and is growing. The blunt truth is that data poverty is preventing millions of people from living a full, active and productive life. That is clearly bad for them, but it is also bad for the country.

Through our work, the Data Poverty APPG has identified a range of interventions that - taken together - have the potential to eradicate data poverty in a positive, practical and sustainable way. These recommendations are rooted in the evidence and submissions provided to us from industry and from civil society, which in turn have grown out of engagement with people living with data poverty. They have the potential to win widespread support across the political spectrum and from industry and campaigners. As outlined in the introduction to this paper, data poverty is a severe and growing problem, but it is a fixable problem too.

Towards a national framework for data access

Crucially, government has a role to play in developing a coherent and cohesive national strategy to eradicate data poverty. This strategy should bring together the multiple government departments and public bodies that have a role to play and send a clear message to, whilst also partnering with, industry on government's expectations of them.

As outlined above, the solutions that we currently rest on to tackle data poverty are necessary but insufficient and many people fall between the cracks in what is, at best, a patchwork of provision. A national strategy would knit together that patchwork, identify and resolve gaps and ensure that a full suite of interventions is available to meet the complexity and compounding nature of the problem. The APPG's proposal for a national strategy should form the basis of wider engagement and discussion with individuals and organisations across the UK who want to or already working to tackle data poverty, and joining their work up with Government policy.

Sitting beneath this national strategy, the Data Poverty APPG has a number of recommendations:

1   **An agreed definition of data poverty –** government should convene stakeholders to agree a working definition of data poverty and the Office for National Statistics should be mandated to start collecting relevant data for publication.

2   **An assumed right to data -** the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Department should put in place a legal assumption of the right to access data. This would drive support mechanisms from relevant departments, encourage internet service providers to do more and stimulate the rollout of community owned access points across the country (for example, in libraries or community centres).

3   **A digital 'right-of-way' to public services -** the Government should put in place a statutory duty on all public bodies (such as NHS providers and schools) to ensure a digital 'right-of-way' solution so that users experiencing data poverty can still access digital only services. For example, some GP surgeries will have iPads installed in their surgeries to provide a digital access point for their patients.

4   **Social tariff and data voucher auto-enrolment -** the Department for Work and Pensions should work with internet service providers to create an auto-enrolment scheme that includes one or both products as part of its Universal Credit package.

5   **Social tariff order journeys –** internet service providers should have specific order journeys for customers seeking to sign up to a social tariff, with call centre staff given appropriate training to correctly authenticate the customers' universal credit status.

6   **Making early termination free and simple –** internet service providers should waive early termination charges for customers moving onto universal credit and for customers already on universal credit but who could benefit from moving onto a social tariff with their current provider. Where ISPs already provide this service, they should make the necessary processes as simple and transparent as possible, and allow for switching to another provider's social tariff.

7   **Expand the number of zero-rated websites –** websites for essential services, including accessing government, NHS and educational services, should be zero-rated. This builds on previous policy proposals made by Jisc for local authorities to provide free internet access to students in public spaces via their eduroam service.

8   **Establish collaborative ways of working –** different regions should begin routinely sharing lessons from their research and experience to replicate in other places where appropriate. To support a joined-up approach, each local authority should assign a digital/data poverty lead.

9   **Creating a social inclusion fund –** VAT on broadband is charged at 20%, whereas for other goods and services deemed 'essential' it is charged at 5%. Broadband products should be deemed 'essential', with the 15% 'extra' charged on all broadband products (£2.1bn a year) ringfenced to make broadband affordable for all universal credit and pension credit (guaranteed credit) claimants.