



Topic: Digital skills

What can Government do to increase the public's basic digital skills?

We present a timely and future-proof solution for improving the UK's digital skills. Our solution addresses a national challenge by bringing together government, the private sector and local community organisations to create lasting change for the digitally isolated. Our partners in the private, public and third sectors are engaged, and we are ready to launch our idea.

Background

11.3 million people in the UK lack one of the five basic digital skills and 8.4% of adults have never used the internet. Millions of people are missing out on the opportunities the digital world has to offer, from accessing essential services and information to connecting with family and friends.

Digital skills also impact the delivery of public services, both in terms of user convenience and delivery cost. Serving a customer face-to-face is up to 50 times more expensive than doing so online. The benefit to the government of a digitally aware public is clear and digital by default is here.

Our solution uses a proven approach to increasing digital skills, does so in a way that maximises value for money from public spend, and goes a considerable way to address a cross-government policy issue.

Why is an innovative solution needed?

The evidence suggests that digital isolation is a social problem. Data shows that the disabled, elderly, economically inactive and low-income households have fewer digital skills and use the internet less regularly than other groups. 60% of those without internet access say they don't need it, and our research shows this can encapsulate fears such as security.

Previous interventions have reached many of the easier to target groups, but the digitally isolated are hard to reach. There is significant regional variation in digital skills, further illustrating the complexity of the issue and the need for a localised personal approach.

The government is not well placed to deliver this kind of intervention directly. It is also resource intensive and expensive. Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations excel at the type of engagement needed but lack resource.

An innovative approach is required to deliver meaningful change in a cost-effective way. Our solution integrates existing tools and networks to provide resources to community-based digital programmes. We will enable these groups through the provision of hardware, space and professional expertise to support the delivery of personalised interventions.

Concept outline

Our solution will support the VCSE organisations that are best placed to reach the digitally isolated groups we've highlighted. It will do so by maximising the value of government procurement spend as opposed to providing dedicated funding.

We propose using the *Social Value Act (SVA), 2012*, to leverage the power of central government spending to enable resource provision to VCSEs. The Act requires departments to consider the social benefit of public services contracts. The timing is right – changes expected in 2020 mean there will be far more focus on the explicit evaluation of social value and the delivery of specific outcomes linked to procurement.

We will use the SVA to create a mutually beneficial relationship between government, suppliers and VCSE organisations. This will be achieved by matching resource needs of VCSEs with government and supplier needs to explicitly demonstrate the social value element of a procurement.

We propose utilising an existing platform, called the Social Value Exchange, which will facilitate the allocation of resources. This platform will:

- **Guide** government procurement with measures of social value.
- **Highlight** tangible social benefits for suppliers to support their social value evaluation criteria of a bid.
- **Generate** data about the digitally isolated groups, supporting effective design and delivery of future interventions.
- **Connect** community-based digital training programs to share best practice.
- **Enable** community organisations to deliver personalised interventions to improve digital skills.

Currently the Social Value Exchange works at a local level, and without a digital skills focus. This product could be used to address our challenge at a national level.

Why we believe our solution will work

All parties involved can benefit from our solution:

- The Government wants measurable social value from procurement spend and has considerable expenditure on technology procurement.
- The private sector wants to be successful in bids for government contracts. The platform can be used to provide evidence of the specific and measurable social benefits it will support towards the social value evaluation criteria of a bid.
- The VCSE organisations are exemplar at the engagement and delivery of services needed to boost digital skills but are constrained by being under-resourced.
- Individuals benefit from receiving local, personalised interventions that increase digital skills from the organisations most effective at doing so.

Our solution will help increase basic digital skills and provide an innovative answer to this challenge.

Testing

We have engaged with all parties that will be involved in our solution.

Beneficiaries

We've worked extensively with The Good Things Foundation, a leading digital inclusion charity. They are experts in the field, leading a movement of 5,000 VCSE partners. Their success underlines the importance of local community relationships and person-centred support. We've also held workshops with VCSE organisations to understand the challenges they face and the type of resources they need.

Government

We've engaged with the policy team in DCMS to understand existing government initiatives and what has/hasn't worked previously, and to test our concept. Several government departments confirmed challenges around measuring and evaluating social value and the inconsistent approach and preparation for the changes expected next year.

Suppliers

We've engaged with suppliers such as KPMG, Fujitsu and PA Consulting. Feedback has been positive regarding missed opportunities for corporate social responsibility impact and objective evaluation of social value.

Platform

We've worked with the Social Value Exchange to explore their product in-depth, confirming the quality, flexibility and suitability for our solution.

Overcoming obstacles

Our concept is a living solution, future-proof and flexible to adapt to what is needed at any given time. It is also open ended rather than being bound to a specific investment programme. Our approach certainly isn't 'one size fits all' and recognises the individual needs of those without digital skills and what they can benefit from gaining them, with each intervention evaluating its own success.

Another strength of our approach is maximising the value of public money. Part of our challenge relates to the cost of delivering public services, and this solution will generate benefits without the need for a significant outlay upfront.

Our main challenge is generating initial buy-in and active participation. There is general awareness of the SVA across government but little consistent application of it, or preparation for the changes expected this year.

A successful proof of concept pilot would be an effective way to win support, whilst requiring a small amount of funding, expected to be in the region of £50k.

Cost-effectiveness and scalability

We estimate central government spend on technology procurement to be £2bn annually. This represents a huge opportunity to leverage the power of the SVA. Improving digital skills saves public money, but the benefits to the individual are more than monetary.

Our solution uses a proven approach to increase digital skills in a way that doesn't require significant public spend. Our solution supports this challenge, and has the potential for much wider application across government.

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