

Written evidence submitted by the Good Things Foundation

About Good Things Foundation

Good Things Foundation is the UK's leading digital and social inclusion charity. We bring together a UK-wide network of community partners - the Online Centres Network, working together to reach those who need support. Through this network and our online learning platform, Learn My Way, we've supported more than three million people to gain digital skills since 2010.

Our network partners are all independent of Good Things Foundation - they are small community centres, local charities supporting people with disabilities or unemployment, homeless shelters, job clubs, libraries, Age UK centres, et al. We call it a 'big club with a shared vision' - a vision of a world where everyone can benefit from digital.

Good Things Foundation works alongside funding partners including Accenture, Mastercard, BT, Google.org, and Lloyds Banking Group. Our projects have been supported by the National Lottery Community Fund, Children In Need, the NHS and several Government departments.

Overview

With approximately half of the UK workforce lacking the Essential Digital Skill for work (as set out in the UK Government's framework and tracked by the Lloyds Consumer Digital Index),¹ there is a clear need to invest in building the *essential and everyday* digital skills to support the creation of new jobs, retention of current jobs, and economic recovery more broadly. The Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index (2021)² shows a seven-fold increase in the number of people who want digital skills support in their local area.

We urge the Treasury to put essential digital skills at the heart of levelling up and our national recovery.

Through the UK Community Renewal Fund (UKCRF), the Treasury can opt to boost regional, collaborative and innovative responses to driving up digital skills for our economic recovery.

The forthcoming Levelling Up White Paper is a timely opportunity to introduce a digital skills roadmap, working across all departments and levels of government. As part of this, the Government should commit to reinstating a national programme of informal, basic digital skills support to help people get back into work and prepare for the jobs of the future.

Our response

- The Government's landmark report, 'Build Back Better' notes that over 60% of businesses have adopted new digital technologies.³ There is a clear need to ensure all businesses have the skills and confidence to benefit from digital by investing in people's basic digital skills. In particular, the Government can strengthen our recovery if it invests in digital skills for unemployed people – both recent and long-term – helping to open up new job opportunities across the country.

- In making decisions about the UK Community Renewal Fund (UKCRF), the Treasury should prioritise attention to supporting community collaboration around digital skills. The latest Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index shows a seven-fold increase in the number of people who would like to see digital skills support in their local area. The UKCRF offers a significant opportunity to boost regional, collaborative responses to driving up digital skills for our economic recovery.
- The winding down of the Future Digital Inclusion (FDI) programme will leave a gap in the national digital skills support offer in communities, putting adults who face barriers to learning in formal environments at a particular disadvantage. The programme, which supported more than one million people since its inception in 2014, bridged the gap between community provision and formal training in Essential Digital Skills, and in FE and Adult Education funded through the AEB entitlement. Almost a third of FDI learners were motivated to learn digital skills for finding work, rising to more than half of working-age learners with no qualifications. Digital Bootcamps are welcome but risk not engaging those with low digital skills and confidence. What's needed is a coordinated plan which works in partnership with those who know their communities best, such as the network of hyperlocal community organisations which Good Things Foundation supports.
- The forthcoming Levelling Up White Paper is an opportunity for the Government to place digital inclusion at the heart of levelling up for economic and social recovery. As recommended in *Rebooting Britain (2021)*⁵ by former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, Baroness Martha Lane-Fox, and Sir Tim Berners Lee, the UK needs a "robust national digital plan to deliver digital access and inclusion to all our citizens". National coordination and leadership is needed to tackle the digital divide - working to a digital skills roadmap, working across all departments and levels of government to deliver for the whole nation.
- Insights from our work on community-based digital inclusion - including our partnership programme with Nesta and Accenture - *Future Proof: Skills for Work*⁶ - highlighted:
 - Unmet demand for employability support that embeds non-accredited digital skills training, including for workers with higher education, and those already in employment.
 - 'Whole person' support which builds confidence, resilience, and motivation as well as skills and an understanding of the changing world of work.
 - Benefits of embedding digital skills building into programmes, rather than as a 'bolt on'.
- Increasing the level of digital skills and confidence among the population as a whole will also help drive jobs and productivity in new and emerging industries, where the UK economy aspires to be world-class. The recent Kalifa review has highlighted the need for digital skills and training to ensure the UK fintech sector can grow and so that consumers can fully utilise this new industry. This is in line with broader warnings in the AI Barometer Report about the risks posed by digital exclusion levels in the population to realize the economic and social benefits of growth in sectors such as financial services and health ([CDEI 2020](#))⁷.

References

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3. Riom and Valero (2020), cited in [Treasury \(2021\)](#).
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5. Alliance for Full Employment. (2021). Available at: <https://affe.co.uk/affe-reboot-britain-press-release-report/>
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7. CDEI (2020a), [AI Barometer Report June 2020](#). Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation.

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