



BT and Digital Inclusion

BT is committed to delivering on its corporate social responsibilities to bridge any barriers to an inclusive society. For example:-

- over 99% broadband coverage in the UK means everybody can benefit from the opportunities of fast communication;
- we communicate with customers in ways that suit them, with available alternative formats including Audio CD, Data CD, Braille, E-Information and Large Print;
- our inclusive design toolkit encourages product designers to develop products that are accessible to as many people as possible;
- the BT Internet Rangers website provides tools for young people to teach older relatives how to use the internet;
- we have supported the development of Age Concern's Digital Inclusion Network which has improved the lives of thousands of older people by helping them to use computers and access the internet for the first time;
- we are similarly active outside the UK, working with Unicef in South Africa, Brazil and China, for example.

Working with others - from the outset of BT's Digital Inclusion programme, we have recognised the importance of working with other organisations to achieve maximum impact. We have worked closely with Government, Local Authorities, Third sector and other businesses to help tackle digital exclusion. BT has a number of arrangements to work with others to deliver services to the socially disadvantaged. For example, BT has 80% ownership of Liverpool Direct Ltd, the largest public/private partnership of its kind in the UK, providing services to and with Liverpool City Council. Public and private resources must be harnessed as a means of driving up skills and improving access to and efficiency of public services.

UK Digital Inclusion Plan

We look forward to working with the Champion for Digital Inclusion and the Task Force appointed to work with her. We will also be active in the new Consortium of Stakeholders, led by Ofcom, in its drive for Digital Participation. The fact that all this work is taking place as part of the outcome of the wider Digital Britain Report work is a welcome development.

The Government's digital inclusion action plan is focused on improving social outcomes. Whilst we agree the importance of this, there are other positive impacts that should be considered too, such as the potential reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from the use of digital technologies.

Our research chimes with that of others in suggesting there are many reasons why people are not using the internet, such as a lack of interest, not having the equipment, lacking the skills or confidence, concerns about running costs and having insufficient time. Government also needs to consider other factors in relation to digital inclusion, such as disability, gender and geography.

Government engagement programmes must focus on the individual needs of people, and specific applications and their benefits, rather than the ICT itself, with a focus on specific targeted benefits. Government should also consider not only the number of excluded people, but also the depth of their exclusion – in other words, as the range of services and benefits available online grows, there may be a growing gap between those who do and those who do not access services online