

# Commission on Justice in Wales: Response to the Call for Evidence from Good Things Foundation

**Date: August 2018**

## Call for evidence

The Commission on Justice in Wales has asked for and is considering evidence across five themes. This response from Good Things Foundation focuses on the theme of Access to Justice and other overarching issues, and is particularly relevant to the second question raised by the Commission: *What are the economic, social, geographical, technological, constitutional and other barriers to improvement and how could these be overcome?*

## Response

11.3 million adults in the UK (21%) do not have basic digital skills, with 8.6 million (16%) unable to complete an online application form<sup>1</sup>. Digital exclusion and social exclusion are closely related: people without digital skills are much more likely to face single or multiple forms of exclusion (unemployment, poverty, low skills, disability). There is also a strong correlation between digital exclusion and age, with the proportion of people offline or with no or low digital skills increasing for those in the older working age population, and those in retirement: however, it is important to note that digital exclusion can be seen at any age.

Not having digital skills is a significant marker of digital exclusion (18% of people say they aren't online because they don't have the skills), but digital exclusion is a more complex issue.

Research by Good Things Foundation<sup>2</sup> shows that 7.4 million people in the UK are 'limited users' of digital technology: for example, using the internet less than once a week, or only using 1 or 2 apps. These people may have some skills but are not gaining the full benefit of being online: saving money, finding jobs and staying connected with others.

Alongside this, 39% of those offline say that motivation (lack of interest) is the main reason for not engaging with digital technology - more than for any other reason; and 78% of those offline say 'nothing' would get them online. This underlines that addressing motivational barriers to engagement is the most important factor in supporting people to use digital technology.

Socially excluded groups are the heaviest users of many Government services (for example, Universal Credit and previous benefit models) and yet are less likely to be able to use online channels. This makes it doubly important to ensure they are not excluded as services shift online.

Digital exclusion varies in different areas of the country. In general, digital exclusion is strongly correlated with deprivation (best exemplified by the Index of Multiple Deprivation). But in rural areas, digital exclusion is frequently exacerbated by a lack of infrastructure; and in deprived inner-city areas, the pattern of digital exclusion can be complex, varying both within and between communities.

As justice services become more digital, those offline or with no or low digital skills risk being excluded. Maintaining access to justice is particularly important, above and beyond the need to ensure access to all public services, as on balance those using these services are more likely to face social exclusion, and will frequently need to access services at difficult points in their lives.

Maintaining access to justice during a period of digital transformation means making available provision for digital inclusion (helping people build the confidence and skills to use digital technology independently) and assisted digital (providing assistance that helps people to use online services).

Many organisations in the UK provide access to training for digital skills, including colleges, training organisations and local authority adult education services. However, the barriers to engagement faced by those who are digitally excluded mean that community-based channels (community groups, libraries, social enterprises, social housing services) are often the most effective way to reach and support people to build their digital confidence. Put simply, digital inclusion is most often about people, not tech.

---

<sup>1</sup> Consumer Digital Index 2018, Lloyds Banking Group, 2018

<sup>2</sup> 'The Real Digital Divide?', Good Things Foundation/BT, 2017

On balance, digital inclusion support carries greater long-term benefit than assisted digital support, as helping people to become independent users of digital technology means they will be able to use (or have the confidence to learn to use) new online services in the future, as well as driving a wide range of other benefits, both social and economic. Good Things Foundation's programmes with Government have shown that people who benefit from digital inclusion feel more confident, less socially isolated, and have increased health and wellbeing<sup>3</sup>. Alongside this evidence, a report from CEBR in 2015 estimated an economic return on investing in digital inclusion of around £10:£1, covering employment, earnings, time/cost savings, and savings for the NHS<sup>4</sup>.

Assisted digital can provide an effective way of maintaining access to online public services for people facing digital exclusion, particularly those who face specific barriers that prevent them from using digital technology (such as a physical disability). However, we believe it should be seen as part of an overall strategy for supporting access to online services. Digital exclusion is fluid, not static, and every individual will need a different type of support, reflecting the access, ability and confidence they have on any given day. For example, your physical and/or mental health, finances and the social network you do or don't have around you can affect the level of assistance you need. Equally, it is important to determine each person's level of need for assisted digital and digital inclusion, so that investment can be targeted for greatest impact.

Finally, experience from community-based providers of digital inclusion shows that alongside help with digital confidence and skills, people will frequently need a range of wider support, including advice, counselling and signposting to other services, in order to achieve positive outcomes. They present as individuals with complex and inter-related needs (eg. mental health, translation) and the support provided should be similarly holistic. Many community organisations provide this 'broad spectrum' support under one roof, while others have well-developed networks with other local specialist organisations based on signposting and referral.

This 'end-to-end' aspect of community-based support should not be underestimated, either as a critical factor for maintaining access to public services, or in highlighting a limitation on the effectiveness with which public services alone can respond to the needs of those who are digitally and socially excluded.

It is also important to recognise that in the justice sector, vulnerability can be particularly situational. People who might normally be confident online may struggle with digital services when faced with crises such as divorce or debt which reduce people's confidence and capability. The unfamiliarity of the process, its importance, and the sheer amount of information that needs to be absorbed and processed can also make interactions with the legal system extremely challenging.

As a charity leading digital inclusion, we believe Government should ensure that public services - including those relating to justice - remain inclusive as they move online. This means investing in the right balance of digital inclusion, assisted digital and wider support; carrying out user research, service design and testing to ensure support meets the needs of digitally and socially excluded people whilst maximising value for public money; and finding cost effective ways to scale support in an accessible way so that as many people as possible who need it can benefit.

In 2018, we have also contributed to a comprehensive review of the interaction between digital exclusion and access to justice by JUSTICE<sup>5</sup>, which provides much further valuable information and data.

## About Good Things Foundation

[Good Things Foundation](#) is a charity and the UK's leading digital inclusion organisation. We believe in a world where everyone can benefit from digital, and our aim is to help socially excluded people lead better lives through digital. Since 2010 we have helped 2.5 million people engage with the digital world, and our target is to help 3 million people by 2020.

We work with thousands of community partners across the UK - the [Online Centres Network](#) - providing the tools and support they need to engage digitally and socially excluded people, support them to build their digital confidence and skills and help them achieve positive changes in their lives.

Good Things Foundation is currently working with HM Courts and Tribunals Service in England to design and test a face-to-face Assisted Digital service for HMCTS online transactions, as part of the Justice Reform Programme. The Foundation also works with DfE, MHCLG, NHS Digital, HMRC and the Australian Government.

---

<sup>3</sup> Evaluation of DfE Future Digital Inclusion Programme, Good Things Foundation, 2016-17; Evaluation of NHS Widening Digital Participation Programme, Good Things Foundation, 2016

<sup>4</sup> The Economic Impact of Digital Skills and Inclusion in the UK, CEBR, 2015

<sup>5</sup> Preventing Digital Exclusion from Online Justice, JUSTICE, 2018