

REPORT

WHAT STEPS CAN GOVERNMENT AND EMPLOYERS TAKE TO MITIGATE DIGITAL POVERTY IN THE UK?

DECEMBER 2020



**Apprenticeship Diversity
& Social Mobility Forum**

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About Us

This report is brought to you by the BAME Apprenticeship Alliance, a community of organisations that aims to promote apprenticeship diversity through policy, advocacy and conversations.

The Alliance is backed by: Coca-Cola European Partners, Severn Trent, Lifetime Training, National Grid, Black Country and Marches IoT, United Utilities, The Open University, Health Education England, JTL, Pathway Group, Rural Payments Agency, NCFE, NOCN Group, Dudley College and WorldSkills UK.

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Introduction

The essence of social mobility is to ensure those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds have the best chances and opportunities to become more socially mobile individuals through the skills they acquire, the money they earn, the jobs they do.

At the start of the year before the pandemic, The Social Mobility Commission shared damning news that social mobility had regressed in Britain with a calling and a warning for this to be address.

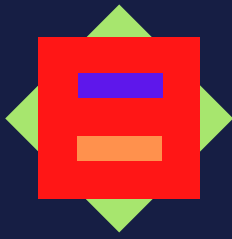
When COVID-19 hit, health, social, education and economic inequalities were exposed. The scale of impact reached severely high levels, however the complete picture has yet to be determined.

What we do know is that the unemployment rates is much higher than the last recession and young people will be entering the most disrupted labour market. Those from disadvantaged communities and particularly minority communities will feel the full brunt of this pandemic.

Launching The Apprenticeship Diversity and Social Mobility Forum in July, we felt that it was an opportunity to bring together key stakeholders and decision makers within Government and industry to gather as much insight into why diversity and social mobility has regressed and what people are doing about it.

What we hope to achieve with the forum, like with the research paper within this report, is to highlight some of the key areas which we have found that, when properly addressed, can be a driver for achieving social mobility and real, tangible change.

For any comments, thoughts, and feedback, please contact us by visiting the BAME Apprenticeship Alliance website or emailing admin@bameaa.co.uk



Apprenticeship Diversity & Social Mobility Forum

BACK IN SPRING 2021



What steps can Government and employers take to mitigate digital poverty in the UK?

The pre-existing digital divide has been highlighted by the covid-19 pandemic and further consequences must be mitigated to ensure that minorities, young people and those that are furthest away from the labour market have equal opportunities.

The BAME Apprenticeship Alliance makes the following recommendations:

- 1. Map out the scale of digital poverty on a local level.**
- 2. Continue and encourage impact lead investment in local and grassroots organisations.**
- 3. Encourage big tech companies to create community investment programmes for minorities, young people, and those furthest away from the labour market.**

There is a link between digital and social exclusion that has been recognised by Government. In fact, digital exclusion is three times more likely to be a reality for those that already face social or financial disadvantage¹. Digital exclusion is brought about both through a lack of digital skills and a lack of access to digital devices and the internet – there has recently been a lot of focus on improving digital skills, but attention also needs to be given to a lack of access to digital devices and the internet, in other words, digital poverty.

Digital poverty was an issue long before the covid-19 pandemic however the pandemic has compounded the consequences for vulnerable people. The extent of this problem can be highlighted by the response by the Department of Education providing digital devices to school children so that they can continue to access learning. This is a step in the right direction as there is evidence that the digital divide has impacts on GCSE and A-level grades².

Young people are likely to be impacted more than we may think – ‘it is estimated that by 2025, there will still be 10 percent of all 15-24 year olds not using the internet³’ which is especially concerning in terms of the labour market outcomes for those who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

There are earnings and employability benefits foregone for those experiencing digital poverty as ‘academic research shows that people in work who acquire digital skills achieve a rise in earnings of between 3% and 10%’⁴ and there is also evidence that improvements in digital skills improves employability prospects. Digital poverty makes acquiring digital skills difficult and many that are left behind are those that already bear the brunt of structural socio-economic inequalities. Special attention also needs to be turned to those belonging to ethnic minority backgrounds as ‘black and ethnic minority people in Britain face extensive and persistent economic inequality’

¹ Litrg.org.uk. 2020. [online] Available at: <https://www.litrg.org.uk/sites/default/files/digital_exclusion_-_litrg_report.pdf> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

² Webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk. 2020. [online] Available at: <<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919213425/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1001077.pdf>> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

³ Webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk. 2020. [online] Available at: <<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919213425/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1001077.pdf>> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

⁴ 2015. *The Economic Impact Of Basic Digital Skills And Inclusion In The UK*. [online] Centre for Economics and Business Research. Available at: <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/sites/default/files/research-publications/the_economic_impact_of_digital_skills_and_inclusion_in_the_uk_final_v2.pdf> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

according to a report by Runnymede Trust, 'The colour of money'⁵, and a part of that inequality can be explained by an overlap between belonging to a black and ethnic minority background and other demographic factors. Although the ethnicity gap in internet usage has narrowed⁶ and labour market outcomes along with educational outcomes have improved for ethnic minorities⁷, there still remains structural factors that means that social mobility and positive labour market outcomes are more difficult to achieve.

The BAME Apprenticeship Alliance calls for Government and employers to take action to lift those furthest away from the labour market and those facing socio-economic challenges by actively providing them with opportunities that will enable them to reach their potential.

Recommendations

1. Map out the scale of digital poverty on a local level

In order to truly tackle the digital divide, we need to know its true scale. Different localities have different characteristics and therefore different challenges. Only after understanding these unique challenges can impact lead solutions be designed and implemented.

Efforts should include a collaboration between local organisations for example Chambers of Commerce, Local Enterprise Partnerships and other local organisations for example The Careers and Enterprise Company.

This is key to measuring impact and opens up opportunities to explore policies such as subsidising or providing free access to devices and to the internet for households who cannot afford it⁸. The government is already implementing such efforts to counter digital poverty to mitigate the digital divide that has been made worse by the covid-19 pandemic. It is doing this by providing laptops and tablets to schools to assist children and families with remote learning as well as assisting with internet connection for disadvantaged children⁹.

2. Continue and encourage impact lead investment in local and grassroots organisations

There are already organisations and programmes that are actively investing in efforts to tackle digital poverty and therefore there are already processes and capabilities in place. Investment would allow them to benefit from scaling up their activities or at least being able to sustain them. A good example is Devices Dot Now, which has provided 'over 11,000 people with devices, connectivity and support'¹⁰ with partners that includes over 500 community based online centres.

⁵ Khan, O., 2020. *The Colour Of Money*. [online] Available at:

<<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/2020%20reports/The%20Colour%20of%20Money%20Report.pdf>> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

⁶ 2019. *Exploring The UK'S Digital Divide*. [online] Office for National Statistics. Available at:

<<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringthekdigitaldivide/2019-03-04#how-does-internet-usage-vary-for-different-ethnic-groups>> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

⁷ 2018. *Opportunities Knocked? Exploring Pay Penalties Among The UK'S Ethnic Minorities*. [online] Resolution Foundation. Available at:

<<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/opportunities-knocked-exploring-pay-penalties-among-the-uks-ethnic-minorities/>> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

⁸ Burgess, G., n.d. Tackle the digital divide. [Blog] *Beyond the pandemic*, Available at:

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/BeyondThePandemic_digitaldivide> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

⁹ GOV.UK. 2020. *Get Laptops And Tablets For Children Who Cannot Attend School Due To Coronavirus (COVID-19)*. [online] Available at:

<<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-laptops-and-tablets-for-children-who-cannot-attend-school-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19>> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

¹⁰ Future Now. 2020. *CV-19 Response: Devicesdotnow - Future Now*. [online] Available at: <<https://futuredotnow.uk/devicesdotnow/>> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

For those experiencing digital poverty in terms of a lack of devices as well as a lack of access to the internet, raising digital awareness to explain its benefits and to encourage its use means that ‘We need to remember the role that libraries, community centres, education settings, volunteers and local digital champions can play in providing digital access, and ensure this support is protected and funded¹¹

The BAME Apprenticeship Alliance recognises that the challenges for those that are the furthest away from the labour market are intertwined¹² namely ‘digital exclusion, money management and moving into employment’¹³ and therefore calls for Government to encourage investments that would enable efforts to focus on place-based initiatives that address those deep-rooted challenges.

3. Encourage big tech companies to create community investment programmes for minorities, young people and those furthest away from the labour market

It is in the interest of big tech companies and other employers to invest in the future pipeline of the workforce through community investment programmes to bridge the imminent skills gap¹⁴. For big tech companies to be socially responsible and to go beyond tick box exercises, a commitment would be required that would involve collaborating with the community to identify and bridge gaps in terms of access to digital devices and skills.

An example of this effort is Nominet, a world-leading domain name registry, that takes the digital divide seriously by ‘putting aside profits for a purpose¹⁵’, and through recognising the resource limits that schools face, understands that the private tech sector has a responsibility to identify opportunities to provide support to those they would want to hire in the future.

¹¹ Burgess, G., n.d. Tackle the digital divide. [Blog] *Beyond the pandemic*, Available at:

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/BeyondThePandemic_digitaldivide> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

¹² Walsh, L., n.d. Living on the edge. [Blog] Available at: <<https://www.cam.ac.uk/newhorizons>> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

¹³ Burgess, G., n.d. Tackle the digital divide. [Blog] *Beyond the pandemic*, Available at:

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/BeyondThePandemic_digitaldivide> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

¹⁴ 2018. Outdated education and workplace training put at risk £141.5 billion in UK growth promised by intelligent technologies, finds Accenture. [Blog] Available at: <<https://www.accenture.com/gb-en/company-news-release-g20-report-uk>> [Accessed 27 November 2020].

¹⁵ Bradley, E., n.d. Closing the digital skills gap for the future workforce. [Blog] Available at:

<<https://uktechnews.co.uk/2020/06/22/closing-the-digital-skills-gap-for-the-future-workforce/>> [Accessed 27 November 2020].



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