

## #Joiningthedots to End Digital Poverty

Blog by Freddie Quek, Chair of BCS Digital Divide Specialist Group, National Delivery Plan Committee Member of Digital Poverty Alliance, Founder of #Joiningthedots community of 13 tech communities.

12<sup>th</sup> September 2023 marks End Digital Poverty Day, a nationwide initiative dedicated to raising awareness about the pressing issue of digital poverty and divide in the UK. This blog is a contribution by the UK's technology leaders and professionals communities in support.

The issue of digital poverty has been around for a while. Covid has caused this gap to be exacerbated and grow even wider. Nearly 20% of children do not have adequate access to get an online for learning or doing their schoolwork. 1.7m households do not have internet access, and 1.4m households only rely on mobile data to get online. At the other end of the spectrum, 30% of adults over 65 years old do not use the internet, or have digital devices and skills to access basic needs that many of us have taken for granted.

This is a multi-dimensional and complex issue that is intertwined with many other personal and social issues such as financial poverty, deprivation and social inequalities. We should not view or treat it as a separate thing, nor think that the government or a rich organisation/individual can solve this.

### Joined Up Thinking and Action

#Joiningthedots is a rallying cry to get everyone to be joined up with our thinking and actions so that the initiatives that are already happening or about to happen can be more sustainable, scalable, systemic, strategic, further reaching and faster. Together, we can address this in a much more comprehensive way than otherwise possible.

There is still a lack of understanding and joined-up approach. Enabling someone to get digital and participate sufficiently in a digital world is more than just about having a device or connectivity. It requires joining many dots: device + connectivity + tech support + motivation & confidence + skills, opportunities, safety, inclusive design etc.



The establishment of the Digital Poverty Alliance is enabling everyone – from political parties, government departments, corporates, professional bodies, charities to grassroots communities and individuals - to all get involve in a more joined up way to address this issue.

### #Joiningthedots Community of Technology Leaders Communities

In April 2021, 13 technology leaders communities representing 135,000 technology leaders and professionals started [#joiningthedots](#) - a connected federation of communities and organisations who share the same vision and passion to address #digitalinclusion for ALL in the UK.



The #Joiningthedots community became a Community Board Member of the Digital Poverty Alliance (DPA), and with the launch of the DPA’s National Delivery Plan, has become a Committee Member. This is an example of #joiningthedots at a profession level so that there is a way to socialise in order to mobilise those who are willing and able to contribute in a more joined up manner. Each technology leader and professional is a qualified and skilled digital user who can help others whether at work, home or in their local community.

### **BCS Digital Divide Specialist Group**

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, has over 70,000 members in 150 countries committed to “Making IT good for society”. The Digital Divide Specialist Group established in February 2022, is an active group of informed and skilled leaders who inspire, advise and direct BCS efforts to advance one of its key policy priorities - closing the Digital Divide by championing digital inclusion for all - through access to skills and technology, and by working with other stakeholders to ensure that BCS plays a major role for its members and the wider community it serves. Its purpose is to “Leave no one digitally behind”.

BCS believes that along with partners like the Digital Poverty Alliance to support governments, industry and civil society, the UK can eliminate the digital divide by 2030.

## #JoiningtheDots at local, regional, national and international levels



BCS	BCS Digital Divide SG	Digital Poverty Alliance
<p><b>Purpose</b> Making IT good for society.</p> <p><b>Vision</b> A competent and ethical profession that is diverse, inclusive and plentiful in talent at all levels and for a society that is resilient and thriving in the digital world with access to the technology, knowledge and skills required.</p> <p><b>Mission</b> To ensure the digital journey is safe and positive for everyone, by raising standards of competence and conduct across the IT industry and tackling the ethical challenges we face along the way.</p> <p><a href="#">BCS website</a></p>	<p><b>Purpose</b> Leave no one digitally behind.</p> <p><b>Vision</b> An active group of informed and skilled leaders who inspire, advise and direct BCS efforts through fulfilling its goal of fixing the Digital Divide.</p> <p><b>Mission</b> To provide leadership and technical expertise enabling BCS involvement in effecting real, lasting and permanent change that closes the Digital Divide.</p> <p><a href="#">BCS Digital Divide SG</a></p>	<p><b>Purpose</b> Convene, collaborate and increase sustainable capacity within the digital ecosystem.</p> <p><b>Vision</b> To live in a world which enables everyone to access the life-changing benefits that digital brings.</p> <p><b>Mission</b> To end digital poverty once and for all by 2030.</p> <p><a href="#">Digital Poverty Alliance website</a></p>

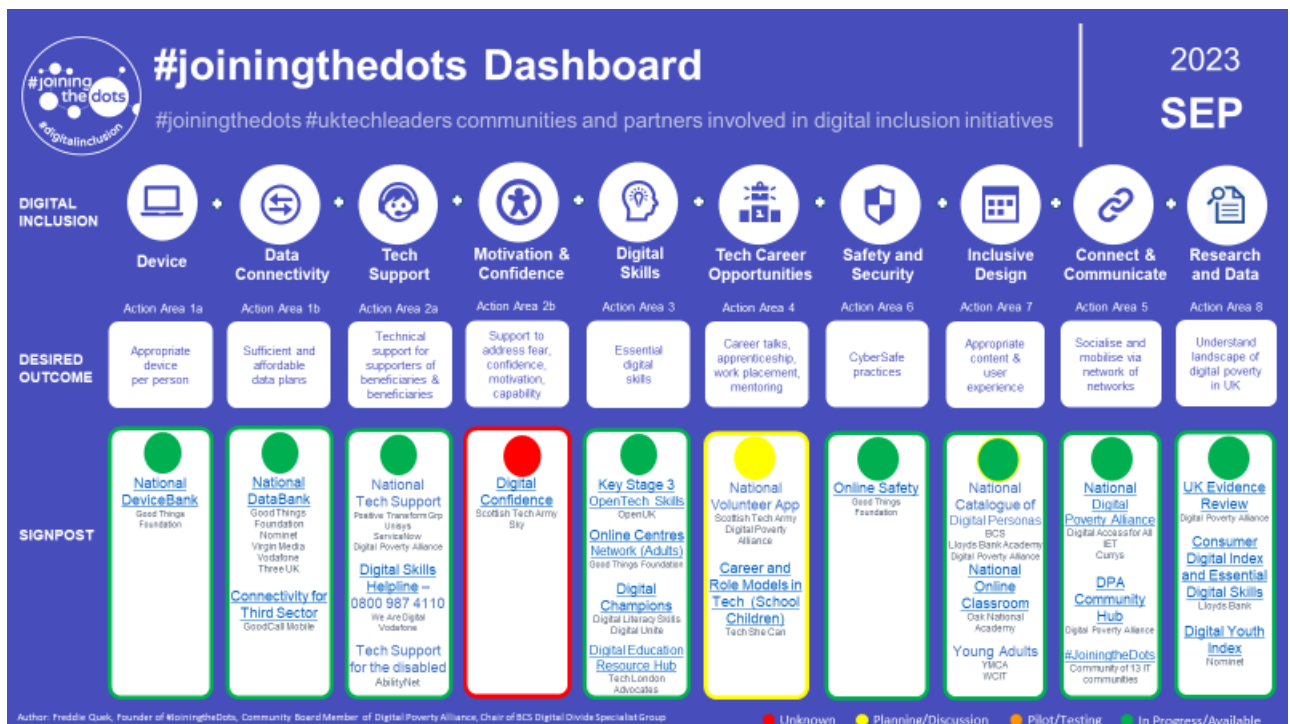
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### Key Highlights to date

Here is a selection of key highlights of #joiningthedots:

#### #Joiningthedots Dashboard

The #Joiningthedots dashboard was first created in October 2021 and presented at the annual Charity IT Leaders conference. It is a way to signpost and enable everyone to understand what is already happening out there, so that those who are interested can get involved in a more joined up and specific way. For example, if you are interested in donating devices, don't start yet another donation campaign. There are already many out there, and if you want your contribution to be more strategic than tactical, then consider donating to the National Device Bank set up by the Good Things Foundation.



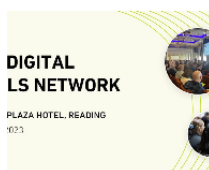
## Monthly BCS Digital Divide Webinars to socialise in order to mobilise

Since its launch in February 2022, the [Digital Divide Specialist Group](#) has been socialising this issue through a series of monthly webinars and events, covering a range of dimensions of inclusion that technology can play an important role – autism, dementia, loneliness, older people, visually impaired. This is part of its strategy to drive more joined up thinking and action. See [past](#) and

[forthcoming events](#) here.



[Webinar: Using technology to address the digital divide for the visually impaired](#)  
17 August, 5:00pm



[Digital Skills Network Event - Reading](#)  
21 June, 10:00am



[Webinar: Closing the Digital Divide: Everything, everywhere by everyone](#)  
23 May, 6:00pm



[Webinar: 7th Biennial International Conference on Access, Participation and Success](#)  
26 April, 9:00am



[Digital Universities Week](#)  
17 April, 6:00pm



[Webinar: Closing the digital divide: Fighting loneliness and digital equity](#)  
13 April, 5:00pm



[Webinar: A framework for digital participation for all - Digital Divide SG](#)  
16 March, 5:00pm



[Webinar: Closing the Digital Divide - Digital Divide SG one year on AGM](#)  
23 February, 5:00pm



[Webinar: How we can fight the cost of living crisis using technology](#)  
20 January, 12:00pm



[Webinar: Technology and Homelessness - Digital Divide SG](#)  
15 December, 5:00pm



[Webinar: Digital Divide - growing or shrinking?](#)  
8 November, 6:30pm



[Hybrid event: Closing the digital divide in Stoke-on-Trent: The Discover Digital Project](#)  
1 November, 6:00pm



[Webinar: Digital participation for all. What we can do to support older people](#)  
13 October, 5:00pm



[Webinar: Closing the Digital Divide. Help someone by becoming a Dementia Friend](#)  
28 July, 6:00pm



[Webinar: Digital Inclusion - Why you should employ and retain people with Autism](#)  
30 June, 5:00pm



[Webinar: Digital Poverty in the UK: What the evidence shows](#)  
28 June, 1:00pm

## Joined Submission to UK Parliament's call for evidence to address digital exclusion

On 7 March 2023, the DPA and BCS jointly submitted a [response](#) to the UK Parliament's Communications and Digital Committee's call for evidence on digital poverty. It was supported by Currys, In Kind Direct, Tech UK, the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists, and #joiningthedots community of 13 UK tech leaders communities: UK IT Leaders, Horizon CIO Network, S.E.E.D., CIO WaterCooler, Hottopics.ht, Computing, TechMonitor, Charity IT Leaders, BCS, CIO, IDC, Tech London Advocates and Digital Leaders. See this [write-up and quotes](#) from the tech leaders communities.

This response not only highlighted the serious issue of digital exclusion in the UK, but also how the UK tech sector has come together to speak with one strong voice on this issue, partnering with the DPA and many others. The final report can be found [here](#).

## Pledges to the DPA National Delivery Plan and in support of End Digital Poverty Day

The tech sector is contributing its efforts in a more joined up way on the following initiatives:

### **Pledge 1 Tech Support Pilot**

There is a dearth of support for those outside work contrasts sharply with the help and training in the use of digital technologies in most work organisations. The concept of an IT Helpdesk has no such equivalent outside work for people who are least digitally competent and needing support the most. Also, for this population, it is about experiential learning to do something useful and relevant, such as managing their personal life and health.

The tech sector is launching a tech support pilot in late 2023 to bring its expertise and skills to learn about how to support older people, starting with Age Concern Southend. This initiative is led by BCS/DPA/PTG/Joiningthedots, supported by two major global technology companies Unisys and ServiceNow. It aims to learn from the pilot to see how this can scale across the UK and globally.

### **Pledge 2 National Catalogue of Digital Personas**

Many digital solutions today use the approach of digital personas. A typical digital persona is somewhat two-dimensional, focuses on addressing the needs of the majority, and assumes an abled body person with some digital skills.

Previous attempts at addressing the digital divide have focused on the dimension of the “haves and have nots” – whether one has accessed to the digital tools and infrastructure. At least two other dimensions needs to be understood and addressed:

“Cans and Can Nots” – not everyone can use digital technologies or participate digitally. For example, people with disabilities may not be able to do so, require support or the provision of a less than adequate digital solution mean people cannot fully switch over.

“Wills and Will Nots” – there will be a segment of the population that do not understand or accept the benefits of going digital and make either a conscious (knowing but choose not to) or unconscious choice (not knowing).

The tech sector is launching the creation of a National Digital Personas Catalogue so that anyone who is in the business of creating digital solutions can contribute or consult this catalogue as a way to understand and broaden the digital solution provided to be more inclusive in design and reach. The research done to date has identified at least 13 dimensions to be taken into consideration such as: age, skills level, motivation, access to devices, type of devices. It is planned to share a draft of a more inclusive digital persona template with everyone to gather feedback before the end of 2023.

### **Pledge 3 Higher Education Sector-wide Digital Inclusion Strategy**

At Digital Universities Week 2023 organised by [Times Higher Education](#) (THE) in Leeds, a number of universities including University of Leeds, University of Liverpool, University of Staffordshire and University of Bristol, together with the Digital Poverty Alliance and BCS and championed by THE, started a call to action to create a sector-wide digital inclusion strategy to address digital poverty. Since then, THE has created a [register of interest](#) to be part of the Digital Inclusion Network.

The UK HE Digital Inclusion Strategy focuses on UK higher education institutions (HEIs), and includes academic staff, professional services staff, students, and also the wider community they interact with, especially those who are civic universities. It is not a standalone strategy and should be seen as



part of every HEI's Digital Strategy. A small working group is being kicked-off on 14 September 2023 to start this journey.

### **BCS-DPA MOU**

On **14 September 2023**, the BCS and DPA is signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by which both parties can work together to advocate for action by government, industry and the third sector around ending digital poverty. This provides a strong and single voice by the technology sector in support and collaboration.

### **BCS Digital Divide Webinar on supporting the visually impaired**

On **20 September 2023**, the BCS Digital Divide Specialist Group together with the Scottish Tech Army is hosting a webinar titled “#Joiningthedots to close the digital divide for the visually impaired”. This special webinar continues from the August webinar where there was a great interest in the presentation by Kris Gibson from [Southampton Sight](#) in how technology can assist those with partial and full sight loss. Only 30% of blind and vision impaired people of working age are in employment and much of the technology can be prohibitively expensive. It is a fantastic example of [#joiningthedots](#) with the [Scottish Tech Army](#) in demonstrating the difference technology can make for the visually impaired, and what the tech communities are doing to make these technologies and solutions more affordable, accessible and inclusive.

### **CIO Summit UK**

On **21 September 2023**, the [CIO Summit UK](#) has a session called “#JoiningtheDots to address the Digital Divide”.

### **UK IT Leaders Community Day**

On **29 September 2023**, the [UK IT Leaders Community Day](#) kicks off with a keynote on addressing Digital Poverty.

### **Contact**

If you are a technology leader or professional who are passionate about doing your bit, or an individual or organisation who is interested or already doing something that can benefit from [#joiningthedots](#), please [get in touch](#).