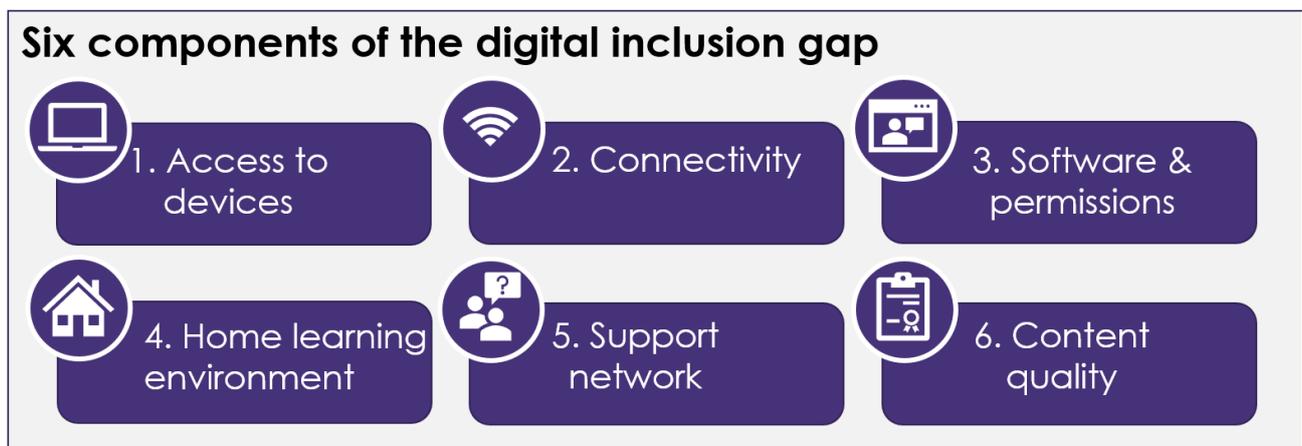# Rapid Review – Digital inclusion

Practical suggestions for minimising the digital inclusion gap during the 2020 school shutdown

Dr Katie Jones, The Brilliant Club, 30th April 2020

The internet has become an educational lifeline for children across the UK while schools are closed and other in-person educational programmes are put on hold. Unfortunately, not all children have the same access to online education.

The Sutton Trust anticipates that the existing attainment gap between the most and least advantaged children in the UK is only going to increase as a result of unequal access to education during the current school shutdown.

This rapid review outlines **six key challenges** to overcome in order to reduce the digital inclusion gap and offers **practical suggestions** for how schools and other education providers can support pupils to access and gain the most out of online learning.

Six components of the digital inclusion gap

1. Access to devices

2. Connectivity

3. Software & permissions

4. Home learning environment

5. Support network

6. Content quality

1. Access to devices

The challenge:

Recent research by the Sutton Trust and Teacher Tapp found that 7% of UK state school teachers report that more than a third of their pupils do not have adequate access to technology for participating in online learning. This percentage rose to 15% of teachers working in the most deprived state schools, compared to only 2% in the most affluent state schools. While some state schools are able to provide laptops and tablets for their pupils, those in the most disadvantaged areas may be facing a situation where many of their pupils

have profound challenges, including access to food, so the provision of more basic needs is taking precedence.

Practical suggestions:

- For some pupils, the primary online device they have access to will be a smart phone. Where possible, make sure that content is accessible on a smart phone and is suitable to be viewed on smaller screens.
- Pupils may be able to plug a USB stick into a TV screen in order to view resources.
- Consider that some pupils will not have a full keyboard to type on. A workaround could be to suggest that pupils write their work by hand, take a photo, and upload it via their phone or tablet.
- Many pupils will be sharing devices with other family members. Therefore, there are likely to be restrictions on when they have access to an online device. Try to provide information in advance about how long an activity should take and be flexible about when it can be done.

2. Connectivity

The challenge:

Limited or slow internet is a serious barrier to online learning. An increasing number of families will be struggling to pay for internet and lower income families are more likely to opt to pay a premium for shorter term contracts with lower internet speeds, rather than being tied in to longer term contracts. Connection speed also slows down as more devices are connected to the same Wi-Fi source. The Department for Education is working to supply some students and care experienced young people with free internet access, however it is not yet clear who will be eligible and when the routers will be available.

Practical suggestions:

- Consider the file size of any downloadable online content. Can a stripped back version of the content be provided?
- Package downloadable content into compressed files.
- Be sensitive to the fact that not everyone will be able to live stream content and, if they can, the quality may be poor.
- Record online lessons and make content available for download after the scheduled session.

3. Software and permissions

The challenge: Getting pupils set up to use online platforms can be challenging. Schools and other educational programmes are currently attempting to provide remote learning for pupils at a scale and speed beyond what they are used to. To compound the issue, the laptops and tablets being provided to school pupils are not always set up with the appropriate software and permissions to facilitate the many different forms of virtual learning.

Practical suggestions:

- Make sure guidance for pupils, parents and teachers using online platforms is as accessible and comprehensive as possible.
- Teachers and IT professionals need to openly communicate about the benefits, technical requirements and safeguarding concerns relating to different virtual learning platforms.
- Where possible, conduct trial-runs to make sure online content is accessible to pupils using different devices
- Think of possible workarounds for accessing and submitting work if a child cannot use a particular online platform.

4. Home learning environment

The challenge: Even when pupils have access to a suitable online device, there are a number of reasons why the home may not be an optimal learning environment. It can be challenging to find an appropriate space and time to conduct online learning when multiple members of a household are being required to share the same space.

Practical suggestions:

- Be particularly mindful that video or audio conferencing can expose aspects of a child's home life that they may not want to share.
- Provide headphones for pupils who need them.
- Try to allow flexibility in terms of when and where a pupil should attempt remote learning.
- Be clear ahead of time about what activities will require in terms of time and resources.

5. Support network

The challenge: With the majority of pupils now doing their school work remotely, support from family has become more important than ever. However, where a child is at risk of being digitally excluded, it is likely that their parents or caregivers are too. The Good Things Foundation reports that 1.9 million people in the UK lack essential digital skills that they need to access vital services and support.

Practical suggestions:

- Consider different ways to communicate with parents (email, text, phone calls).
- It is more important than ever to communicate with parents about what is (realistically) expected of their child, what resources they will require and any scheduling requirements – with as much advance notice as possible.
- The Education Endowment Foundation has provided useful resources to support schools in their communication with parents about remote learning.
- The organisation Learning With Parents provides support and resources for parents to make sure that home learning works for everyone.

6. Quality of content

The challenge: Pupils are only going to benefit from online resources if the content is engaging. Large scale studies have been conducted to investigate how to maximise engagement with online learning (e.g., Hew, 2016 and Guo, Kim, and Rubin (2014)).

Practical suggestions:

- Attention to video content starts to drop after 6 minutes. Try to chunk longer sessions in to shorter 6-15 minute sections.
- Videos that show slides interspersed with the presenter's face are more engaging than slides alone.
- Instructors are most engaging when they speak fairly fast and with enthusiasm.
- Engagement is promoted when learning is problem-centric (i.e., the purpose is to solve a real problem).
- Encourage active learning (e.g., set quizzes or tasks that test understanding).
- Encourage knowledge sharing and peer interaction.

Useful links and resources

- [The Brilliant Club](#) is regularly releasing free online resources for school pupils; including videos on university knowledge, university skills, and a range of academic masterclasses created by PhD researchers.

- [The British Educational Research Association](#) have released a virtual special issue on how to get the best from online education that is free-to-view until **31 May 2020**.

- [The Chartered College of teaching](#) have created a range of resources to support teachers with remote teaching.

- [The Education Endowment Foundation](#) are offering resources to help schools and parents make the most of home learning.

- [Future.now](#) is a coalition of leading companies and civil society groups working in collaboration with government to boost the UK's digital skills.

- [Good Things Foundation](#) is a social change charity that supports socially excluded people to improve their lives through digital.

- [Learning with Parents](#) is an organisation that works with primary schools to help parents and children to love learning together.

- [The Sutton Trust](#) have produce a report on how the school shutdown is impacting social mobility.

- [Teacher Tapp](#) is an app that asks teachers across England about their thoughts and opinions. [Read what England's teachers think about the shutdown](#).

Who to follow on twitter

The Brilliant Club has created [a list of accounts](#) to follow on twitter if you want to stay up to date with the latest on digital inclusion.

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