Supporting people with data connectivity

(Broadband and mobile data)

Contents

This guide is for charities, community groups and organisations that reach and support people struggling to afford internet because of poverty and the cost of living, especially those that are not specialist providers of debt or money advice.

Use this guide however works best. We've designed sections to be easy to print and share as helpsheets.

Why this guide

Internet access is now essential in everyday life - so not being able to afford it is a big problem for individuals, families and communities. Around 2 million people may struggle to pay for broadband and mobile data bills (Ofcom 2022). This is likely to increase as the cost of living crisis deepens.

Not being able to afford data (we call this data poverty) is one reason why some people don't use the internet at all, or only for a few things.

Data poverty is only one part of digital exclusion. Data poverty exists when people cannot afford enough mobile or broadband data to meet their essential needs.

The good news is that there is support to address data poverty. The bad news is that many people don't know about this support.

Finding the best broadband or mobile deal isn't easy...especially if you have limited digital skills or limited budgets or insecure work.

And it isn't easy for community organisations and charities to know how to help. Even people who are experts in teaching digital skills can feel uncertain about how to help people with their data connectivity.

That's why Good Things Foundation and People Know How have produced this short guide through the Data Poverty Lab with support from Nominet.

If you have feedback, tips or good practice to share, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact: research@goodthingsfoundation.org
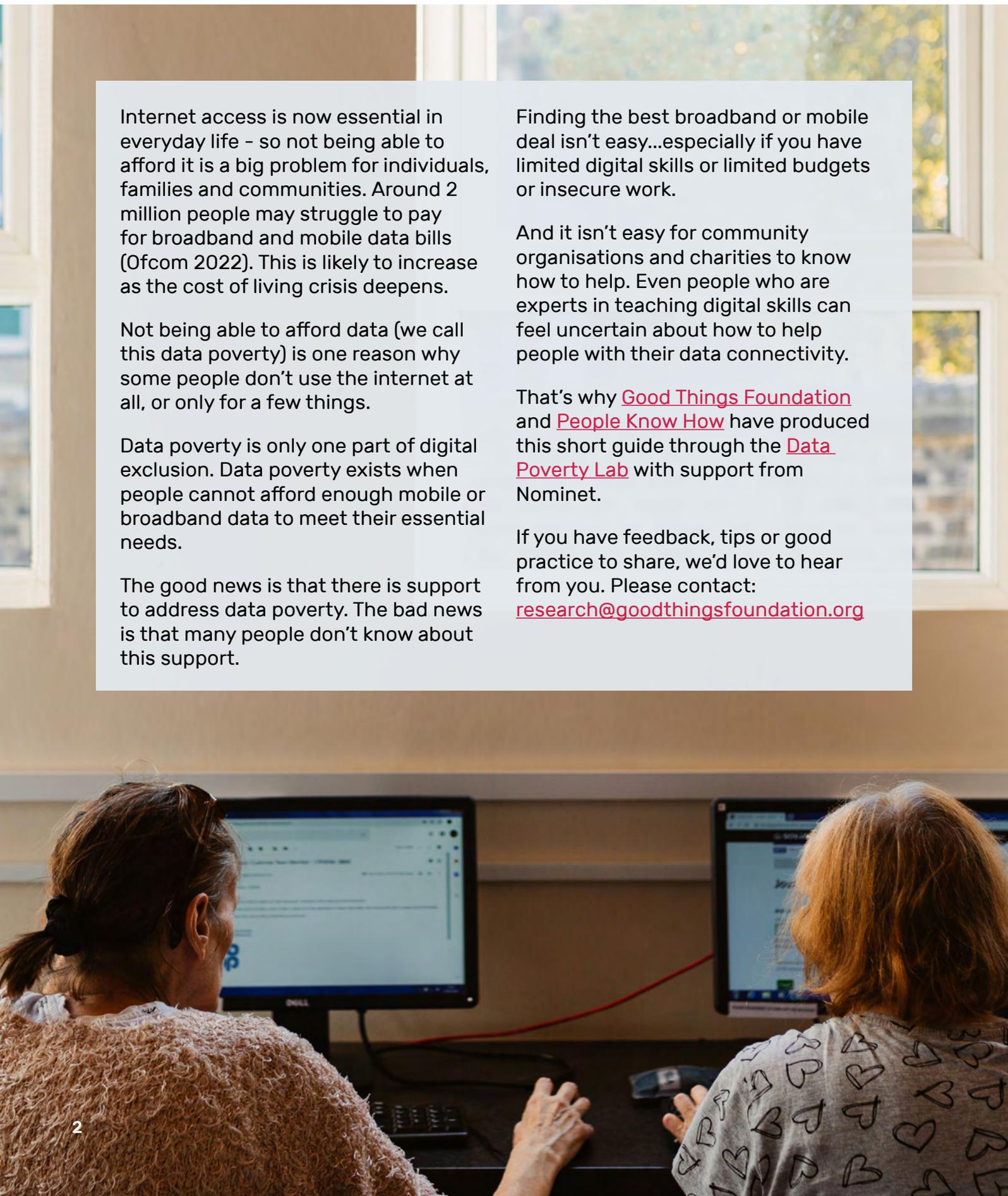
Creating a supportive environment

As living costs rise, it is important to help people to stay connected in ways they can afford. And to help people check that they're getting all the support they're entitled to.

How your organisation can support people to stay connected

You can:

- Open up the conversation with people to see if they need support

- Help people work out what a good solution looks like for them

- Raise awareness about available support, such as social tariffs

- Join the National Databank and provide free mobile data to people who need it

- Signpost people to trusted information - where they live and online

- Help people understand more about their data usage and speeds

- Share information about what different providers offer, without recommending one

- Raise awareness and campaign to end data poverty.

Opening up the conversation in your organisation

You can help people to work out what a good solution looks like for them.

To get started, you can open up conversations about data poverty - with staff, volunteers, peer workers, people you support. The 'CHESS' framework can help you do this. It was developed by Good Things Foundation with APLE Collective (Addressing Poverty through Lived Experience) and Families, Friends and Travellers.

As a rule, avoid promoting one provider as better than others (unless there is only one in the area); and avoid giving advice on contracts which involve buying a smartphone or device.

The CHESS framework:
What does a 'good solution' to data poverty look like?

Cheap: can I afford it?

What is affordable for one person is different for another. A 'social tariff' may cost too much for some people. Cost is also about contracts. Some deals are cheap at the start and then go up. Some contracts carry penalties for leaving.

Handy: is it easy to find and apply for?

There is a lot of jargon. A lot of different providers and deals. It can be hard to know what's best. Help is out there for people who can't afford internet access … but many people don't know about it.

Enough: is it enough for what I need to do?

Some internet activities, like video calling, use a lot of data. Also, many people may be paying for more data, or faster speeds, than they need.

Safe: does it protect my privacy?

Free public WiFi can be a lifeline for internet access. But it isn't as safe and secure. Staying safe online is important, whatever you use to connect.

Suitable: is it right for me?

Life happens. Needs change. No-one should ever feel bad for getting help. Many people are entitled to support. For some people, flexibility (e.g. pay as you go) matters more than cost alone.

Opening up the conversation with people you support

Community organisations can make it easier for people to seek and receive help with data poverty - without feeling any loss of pride or stigma.

Start by finding the right 'hook'. Tap into what matters - their needs, interests and worries.

- **Social** - For people who are less confident about using the internet - the social side can matter most. Staying connected with friends and family online; staying in touch with what's going on - whether that's using social media, video calling or writing emails to friends. When supporting people with the social aspect of connectivity, open conversations around staying safe and protecting their privacy online.

- **Financial** - If you're already supporting people who are struggling with rising costs, start to include mobile data and broadband costs. Encourage people to check what benefits and support they're entitled to, and help them find ways to reduce their household bills or get specialist support from others. Gaining access to the web also provides opportunities to improve financial health - from learning to research the best deals to online banking, from benefits checks to finding and applying for jobs.

Understanding data usage

Every online activity uses data. But not all activities use the same amount. Data is information that is moved or processed by computer networks. Understanding how data is used and the impact of different speeds, is important in finding the best solution.

Most broadband packages offer unlimited data. They vary in speed, contract length, set up charges, exit penalties and what else is included in the package (e.g. calls). To keep costs down, don't pay for more data, faster speeds or more extras ('bundles') than necessary.

Assessing data usage

Get a sense of how people use (or plan to use) the internet. A first step is to check if you are in or out of contract. If households already have a package, it may be worth revisiting it. It could be better to switch to a lower-speed, lower-cost deal. Does the deal provide more optional extras than are being used?

Warning: Beware of exit fees, as most providers operate on a contractual basis.

Things to consider:

- How many family members are using one connection at the same time?

- How many devices are in your household? Don't forget to take smart televisions, smartphones, tablets and gaming consoles into account as well as computers

- What is the internet used for?
    - Browsing the web or social media
    - Browsing or applying for jobs
    - Paying bills or council tax
    - Online shopping
    - Online banking
    - Video calling with friends, family, support groups or work
    - Video streaming or online gaming

Understanding data usage

Provide a simple breakdown of which activities use more data, and the differences between browsing, streaming and downloading. For mobile data, it is helpful to know how to check data usage (usually through 'Settings' on a smartphone).

Streaming video through Netflix or on-demand television consumes perhaps the most data in an average user's internet package. Broadband Choices gives a handy breakdown:

- Document download: **2MB**

- Music track download: **4MB**

- Web browsing (1 hour): **10–25MB**

- Browsing Facebook (1 hour): **20MB**

- Music streaming (1 hour): **150MB**

- YouTube streaming (30 min): **175MB**

- Video call (1 hour): **500 MB–1 GB**

- HD video streaming (1 hour): **2GB**

- HD film download: **4GB**

Understanding broadband or internet speeds

An understanding of speeds can help to understand how long things will take and avoid frustration down the line.

Warning: High speed and fibre options most marketed to consumers may be well above what is needed.

Speeds can impact:

- How many devices can be connected to the internet at one time

- Quality and speed of video streaming and how to avoid buffering

- Download speeds

- Quality of video calls

- Connection quality when gaming

To keep costs down, don't go for a faster speed than necessary.

- 10-15 Mbps should be fine for basic internet tasks such as emails and internet browsing in a single person or small household

- 30-40 Mbps should be fine for everyday internet use in most households

- 50-100 Mbps may be needed in a larger household using the internet for a lot of data-heavy activities (such as streaming, gaming or video calling) at the same time.

Tips to make data last longer

- Remember that some devices (smartphones, smart speakers, etc) and apps keep using data even when you are not using them directly.

- Video often consumes the most data. If you want to, you can lower the quality of your video stream, or turn off video for conference calls.

- If using WiFi, speak to your provider to understand your data usage. Some providers offer online portals which help you see how much data you spend each month.

- If using a mobile network linked to your phone, you can do a few things to minimise data spend. Try turning off automatic app updates, frequent calendar or email syncs, or background data. Most providers have an app to help you keep an eye on this.

Tips to boost your speed

- Take note of how many devices are connected to the internet, and whether they need to be connected at the same time.

- If using a WiFi router, make sure it can reach to where you most use your devices. Try not to place the router in a covered environment. If you can't move the router, try exploring WiFi boosters.

- If using a MiFi or mobile hotspot, put it somewhere that gets a good mobile signal. Try somewhere near a window or higher up.

- For mobile data, the signal and speed you get will depend on your tech and operator. For example, opening a webpage takes 3 minutes on 2G, only 4 seconds on 3G, and 0.5 seconds on 4G. Check before signing up to a new operator that you'll get a mobile signal in your area with the mobile download speed you need.

- Not all mobile and broadband providers have good coverage in all parts of the country. Ofcom has a broadband and mobile coverage checker. Some providers have their own coverage checker too.

Identifying connectivity solutions

There are a range of factors to consider when choosing a router and an internet package. These can be different for everyone, based on a range of factors.

Some people's options will be restricted because of where they live. Not all mobile and broadband providers have good coverage in all parts of the country. Ofcom has a broadband and mobile coverage checker.

Some people's options will be restricted by their housing situation. For example, mobile data connectivity is likely to be essential (even the only option) for some people in shared housing, temporary accommodation, seeking asylum, or experiencing homelessness.

WiFi routers versus MiFi or mobile network connections

Many people are not aware that these options are available, so it may be helpful to lay out the pros and cons of each option.

- **WiFi**: WiFi routers plug into the wall so you can avoid worrying about battery drain. However, this needs a fixed location to connect to. It requires a broadband package, which includes a monthly recurring cost. Routers use a small amount of electricity - we estimate £2 per month for a 10 watt router switched on 24 hours a day.

- **Mobile network or MiFi**: You can convert most mobile phones that have network connections into a mobile hotspot. Alternatively, you can put a SIM card into a MiFi which will function as a mini portable router, without the need for a phone. However, these must be kept charged and may not work while charging.

## Help people identify their needs and entitlements

It can be difficult to work out what you need, and to check what support you could be entitled to.

- Understanding how data is used and the impact of different speeds can be helpful when comparing packages using price comparison tools. Many people are paying for more data or faster speeds than they need.

- Many people who receive state benefits (such as Universal Credit) don't know they could be eligible for cheaper 'social tariffs'.

- People may be able to use other support to stay connected - such as free mobile data connectivity from the National Databank, or schemes run by organisations in their local area.

- Help people check what else they may be entitled to. Use a benefits calculator or other online resources. (There's a list at the end of this guide.)

Compare deals

From WiFi to mobile data packages, it isn't easy to find the best deal.

- **Broadband vs. mobile data**: WiFi packages can offer higher internet speeds and unlimited data - but they generally come at a higher cost and require a contract commitment. No-contract mobile data is more common, but usually provides less data and slower internet speeds.

- **Social tariffs**: Consider and check eligibility for social tariffs. These can be a safety net for eligible households (who receive certain state benefits) who might be struggling to afford broadband or phone services. Ofcom has a list of providers. Keep an eye out for improvements to social tariffs. Also for low-cost essential broadband packages which anyone can buy (check contracts and fees).

- **In or out of contract**: Check if you are in or out of contract. Providers often offer a discounted rate at the start of a contract period, so you may be tied in for 12, 18 or 24 months. Ofcom has advice on negotiating contracts with providers.

- **Existing customers**: Encourage people to contact their existing provider if they are struggling to pay bills. See what options are available. This might include a 'social tariff' or moving to a cheaper package. Providers have said they will treat people struggling with bills with compassion and understanding.

- **Compare prices**: Price comparison websites can be helpful to work out which providers cover your area. Also to work out what broadband speed you need. And to compare extras, set-up costs, contract lengths and exit penalties.

- **Warning**: discounted 'social tariffs' are generally not included on price comparison sites. Martin Lewis's website is working on this (for now, it lists them separately).
  - Choose
 - Money Supermarket
  - Money Saving Expert
  - USwitch
  - Which?
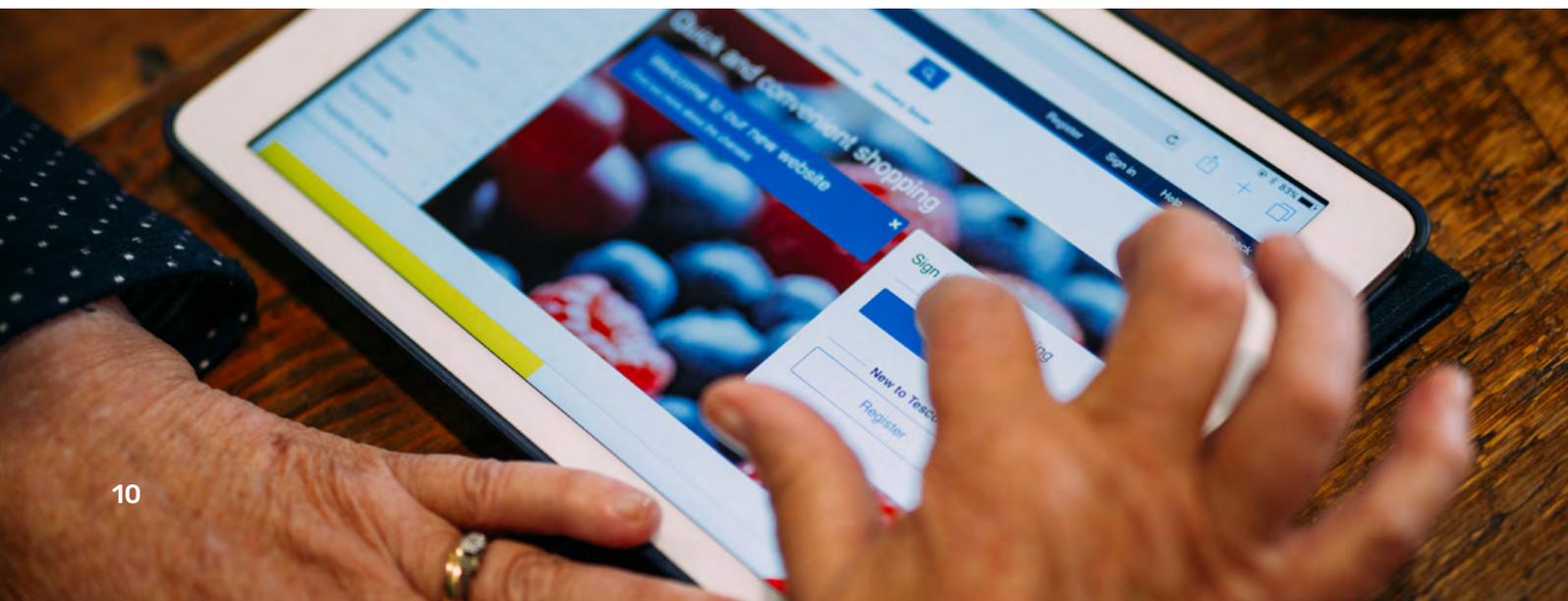
Promoting social tariffs for fixed broadband

'Social tariffs' (or targeted tariffs) are low-cost broadband packages for people who receive certain state benefits, such as Universal Credit. Awareness about them is low, but starting to grow. More people are starting to use them. The link to benefits may put some people off but social tariffs can be a safety net for internet access.

What's the deal?

- Not all providers offer a social tariff. Ofcom encourages all providers to offer one.

- Each social tariff is different but generally they should be:

  - Cheaper than standard tariffs (usually £15 to £20 per month)

  - Low entry costs and no price rises in the contract period

  - No penalty if you move to a social tariff from your existing provider

  - Sufficient speeds for everyday internet use

- A range of tariffs is available. Most are 30-40 Mbps.

  - Most providers don't charge exit fees if you cancel early

  - Some providers offer rolling monthly contracts

  - Some providers offer two social tariffs (one with faster speeds)

  - Social tariffs are mainly for home broadband. There is currently one for mobile data.

- Generally 10-15 Mbps is enough for small households for everyday basic internet use. Around 30-40 Mbps is enough for average household internet use. Around 50-67 Mbps works best for households (three to five people) using multiple smart devices at the same time for downloading, video calling and streaming.
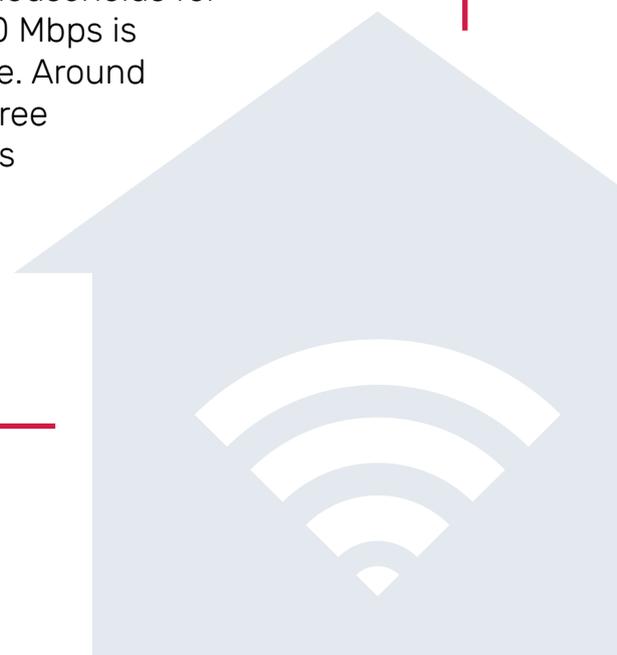
How to get this support?

- Check if you are eligible. Eligibility is limited to people getting certain state benefits.
  - Universal Credit – you are very likely to be eligible
  - Pension Credit – you are likely to be eligible, especially if you get the Guarantee Credit element
  - Other state benefits (like Attendance Allowance) or 'legacy' benefits (such as Employment and Support Allowance) – you may be eligible. It varies.
- Check if your provider offers a social tariff. Some providers offer social tariffs for both new and existing customers. Others offer social tariffs for existing customers only.
- Social tariffs are not easy to find. They don't come up on most price comparison sites. They have different names – such as BT Home Essentials, Hyperoptic Fair Fibre, Sky Broadband Basics, Virgin Media Essential Broadband and VOXI for now.
  - Ofcom has a useful table of social tariffs with links to provider websites:
    Cheaper broadband and phone packages - Ofcom
  - Jobcentre Plus staff are starting to provide information on social tariffs.
  - LOTI has a Social Tariffs Toolkit to support frontline practitioners raise the awareness of broadband social tariffs.
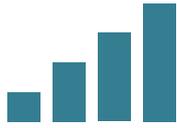
The National Databank

Like a foodbank for mobile data, the National Databank has enough to help up to 500,000 people struggling to afford internet access to get free mobile data connectivity. Good Things Foundation set it up with support from Virgin Media O2, and donated SIMs and vouchers from O2, Vodafone and Three. It is hoped more will join and donate free mobile data.

What's the deal?

- Through partner organisations, people who are eligible can get a package of free mobile data, plus free calls and texts, for six months (and a maximum of 12 months).

- People are eligible if they are 18+ years old, from a low income household, and

    - have no or insufficient access to the internet at home; and/or

    - have no or insufficient access to the internet when away from home; and/or

    - cannot afford their existing monthly contract or top up.

- Vouchers or SIMs are donated by O2, Vodafone and Three.

How to get this support?

- The National Databank is available across the UK through registered partner organisations. Partner organisations are trusted to know their communities best. They decide who needs support without having to ask people to prove they live on a low income or receive benefits.

How organisations register to use the National Databank

- **Step 1:** Join Good Things Foundation's digital inclusion network (online centres). There are no fees; all resources are provided free of charge.

- **Step 2**: Apply to become a registered databank partner if:

    - You reach and directly support people experiencing data poverty

    - You have capacity to support people to activate and start using their data

    - You can provide your registered company or charity number for standard due diligence checks.

# Free broadband for jobseekers through Jobcentre Plus

People who are seeking work may be able to get six months' worth of broadband through their local Jobcentre Plus. This is for people who are out of work and seeking work (or looking for better work) and face digital barriers. This is available across the UK. The broadband is provided at no cost to the individual.

What's the deal?

- TalkTalk's standard fibre broadband package, free for six months
- No optional extras are included, such as calls or TV
- Average download speed of 38 Mbps - fast enough for job searching and more
- No contract - penalty-free cancellation at any point during the six months
- No contract and no obligation to continue after the six months ends
- Continue to use the broadband even if you find a job within the six month period
- After the six months, the broadband is automatically ended penalty-free. (You may need to return the router, which you can do free of charge). Or you have the option to continue with a paid-for product.
- You don't sign a contract with TalkTalk so this won't impact a credit score.

How to get this support?

- Available across the UK through local Jobcentre Plus work coaches
- Aimed at people facing a digital barrier to apply for jobs or gain new skills online
- Jobcentre Plus staff decide if this is the most suitable solution for the person
- If eligible, Jobcentre Plus provide a voucher referral code to give to TalkTalk, and a TalkTalk phone number to call to redeem this code.
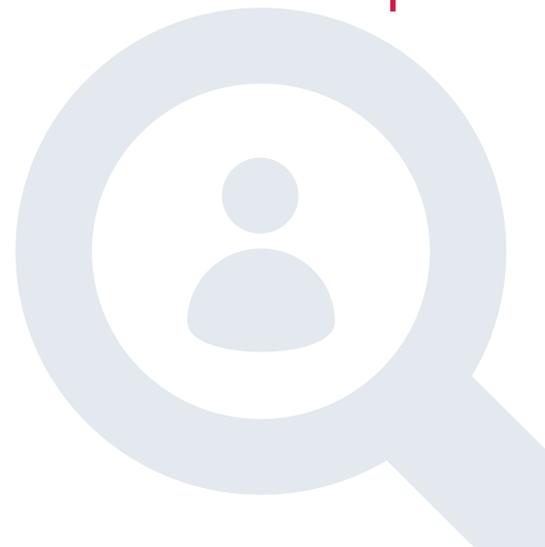
Using public WiFi safely

Free public WiFi has a valuable role in enabling people to access the internet. However, public WiFi, and using the internet in public spaces, can be - and feel - unsuitable for some things. Where possible, it is always best to use a private and secure network like one in your home or your own personal mobile hotspot. This is because you likely don't know who has set the network up or who else might be connected to it.

Tips for safe use of public WiFi

If using public WiFi is necessary - here are some tips for safer use:

- **Connect to a network you trust.** There are many open networks available in public spaces; not all are safe. It is usually best to connect to a network you know.

- **Don't access financial information on a public network.** It is best to assume that a network is not secure. Avoid accessing financial or sensitive information on a public network.

- **Look out for secure websites.** Look for the padlock symbol in the browser bar. Many websites use 'https' which means you have a secure connection to the website and your session is encrypted. However, this does not mean the website cannot be a scam. (Hackers can use https to encrypt their websites as well).

- **Pay attention to alerts and warnings.** Many browsers come with default safety settings that will warn you if a website is not safe. Be particularly careful about downloading suspicious files.

- **Disable file sharing.** Make sure your device is not configured to share access to files or be seen on public networks.

Tips for general online safety

Here are a few additional tips for safer internet use.

- **Check your privacy settings.** Keep your information safe online. Social media sites will allow you to control your privacy and what can be seen by the public.

- **Use secure passwords and keep them safe.** Many websites and apps require a password to allow to you create your own account with them. It is best to choose a strong password - such as three random words plus a number and/or symbol.

- **Know how to avoid common scams and phishing attempts.** Check the content of the email – is this something you were expecting? Check the sender – do you recognise this person? Make sure not to open any attachments or click on any links if you suspect an email may be fake.

- **Learn My Way.** Check out topics on 'online safety' on Learn My Way (a free online resource for community organisations when helping people learn basic digital skills).

- **Know where to get help.** National Cyber Security Centre has online information for individuals and families, including what to do if you think you have been scammed.

Where to get more information

Look up data connectivity programmes in your area

Some charities, housing associations and other organisations run schemes to support people which include data connectivity. For example, Get Connected Community Broadband is a community-led initiative in Hartlepool providing a free router and low-cost unlimited broadband on 'easy in/easy out' terms. In Scotland, the Connecting Scotland programme has closed in current form, but planning for future development is underway. A number of housing associations - from Monmouthshire to Greater Manchester - are also investing in ways to support cheaper internet access to tenants and local communities.

Information and support

Good Things Foundation, the UK's leading digital inclusion charity, provides free support and resources to charities, libraries and organisations so they can respond to local need.

- National Databank - free mobile data connectivity to partner organisations, so they can give this support to people they know will benefit. Any organisation can apply to join the National Databank.

- National Digital Inclusion Network - a free membership network for charities, local organisations and others providing digital inclusion support to people they reach.

- Learn My Way - a free online learning resource to build basic digital skills.

- Data Poverty Lab - an initiative with Nominet to explore longer-term solutions for a fairer, better system to end data poverty.

- 'CHESS' - co-defining what counts as a 'good' solution to data poverty.
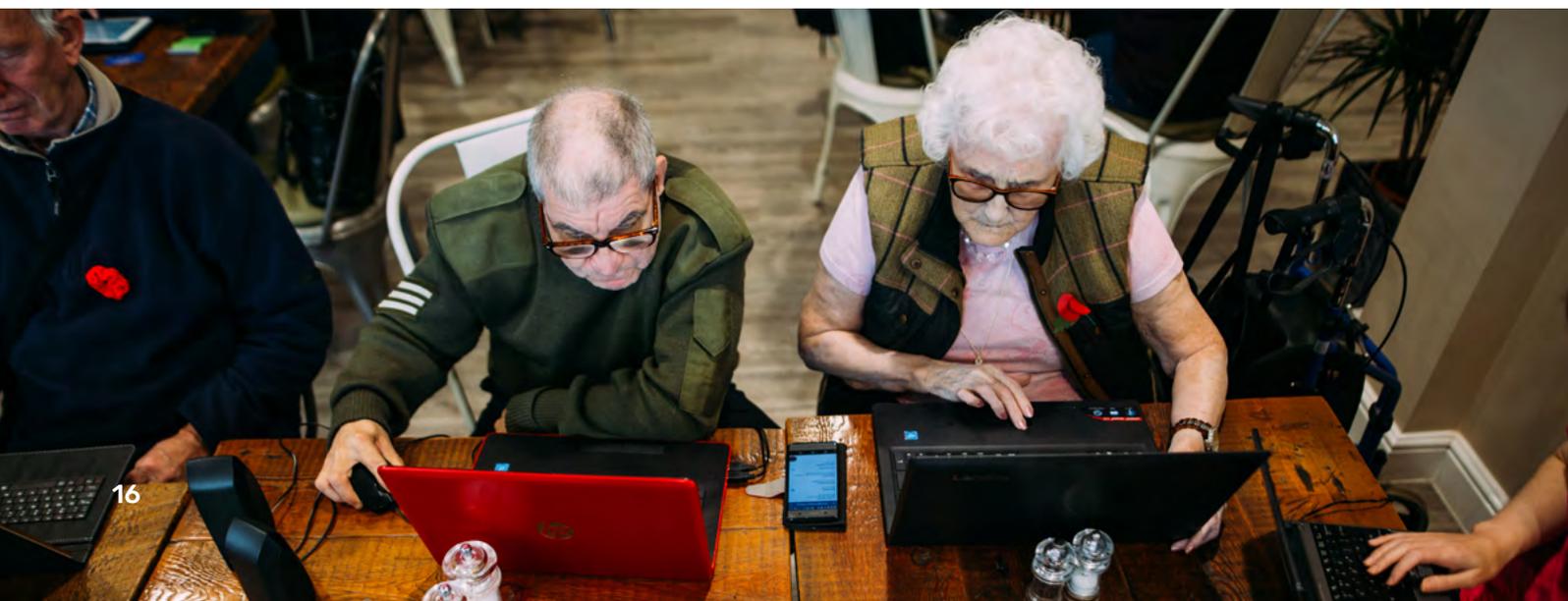
People Know How, a Scottish social innovation charity, that uses research and cross-sectoral collaboration to provide community support, resources and run campaigns to affect wider policy change towards digital inclusion for all.

- Reconnect - free one-to-one and group support for people to improve wellbeing through increasing digital and social inclusion. Open to individuals in Edinburgh and East Lothian.

- Connectivity Now - a Scotland-wide campaign to end data poverty. Pledge to the campaign on the website to back the campaign and join a community of organisations passionate about digital inclusion.

- Connect Four - a platform that promotes collaboration across the third, business, academic and public sectors to drive social innovation. Join the network, use the social innovation toolkit, and get involved in upcoming events to solve social issues.

Ofcom is the regulator for communications services including broadband, home phone and mobile services. Ofcom provides a list of social (or targeted) tariffs, as well as guidance and research.

- Cheaper broadband and phone packages - list of 'social tariffs'

- Broadband and mobile coverage checker - a tool to check coverage in the area

- Are you in or out of contract - steps to a better deal with a provider

- Affordability of Communications Services - research reports

LOTI, the London Office of Technology and Innovation, has developed online resources for council practitioners in London which are also relevant elsewhere:

- Social tariffs and mobile packages - a detailed table of social tariffs and mobile packages, updated regularly

- Social Tariffs Toolkit - a toolkit to support frontline practitioners raise the awareness of broadband social tariffs

Citizens Advice - England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and local offices - can give specialist help with money, benefits and debt advice, including internet access.

- Citizens Advice website (click for England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland)

- Citizens Advice Scotland and #MoneyMap tool for help on living costs

- Advicelink Cymru - Welsh government funded helpline run by Citizens Advice

- Switch broadband, phone or TV provider - A Citizens Advice UK guide

Internet data usage guides

- Broadband Choices - a short online guide about how internet data is used by Moneysupermarket.com

- A Guide to Mobile Download Speeds: 2G, 3G, 4G and 5G by Tigermobiles

Wider support around money - information and guidance from trusted sources

- [Gov.UK Cost of living support](#) - Help with the cost of living brought together in one place

- [Gov.UK Benefits Calculators](#) - links to three independent calculators

- [Ask Bill](#) - free and impartial advice on money and bills

- [Entitledto](#) - independent benefits calculator

- [Mental Health & Money Advice](#) - online tips and tools

- [Money Saving Expert](#) - consumer website, MoneySupermarket group

- [Policy in Practice](#) - independent benefits calculator

- [Quids in!](#) - a magazine helping low income households become better off

- [Step Change](#) - specialist debt charity

- [Turn2us](#) - benefits checker and calculator

- [Which? Magazine](#) - independent consumer champion

Jargon buster

App: An application, program or piece of software on a device designed for a specific purpose, for example, social media or online banking.

App Store / Play Store: An online shop for apps, where you can search, download or buy apps you want.

Attachment: A file that is added to an email message for other people to read, edit and download.

Byte (KB, MB, GB, TB): A unit of digital information used in measuring computer storage. Bytes are measured in multiples, commonly in kilobytes (KB), megabytes (MB), gigabytes (GB), terabytes (TB), etc. going from smaller to larger respectively.

Cookies: A piece of data stored in your web browser that a website can retrieve later on.

Data: Data is information that is moved or processed by computer networks.

Data poverty: When individuals, households or communities cannot afford sufficient mobile or broadband data to meet their essential needs.

Device: A machine, for example, a phone, tablet or computer, that can be used to connect to complete digital tasks and connect to the internet.

Direct messaging (DM): A private message sent on social media that only the recipient can see.

Email: An electronic message sent over the internet, usually through a wider email system like Google Mail, Hotmail or Yahoo.

Internet: The global network of connected devices around the world that allows people to share information and communicate with each other.

Mbps or Mbit/s: Megabit per second is a measure of internet speed.

MiFi: A mobile network router, providing internet connection through mobile data.

Mobile network: What smartphones use to get online when they aren't connected to WiFi, usually obtained through a SIM card.

Phishing: An attempt to steal sensitive information using social engineering to impersonate a legitimate organisation or individual.

Poverty premium: The poverty premium is described by Citizens Advice Scotland as "a term used to describe how those on low incomes often pay more for essential goods and services".

Scam: An attempt to steal money, or personal data that can be used to steal money.

Web browser: What you use to access and browse the internet and websites - e.g., Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Edge.

WiFi: A wireless internet connection usually routed through a WiFi router in someone's home or office.

Please get in touch if you have any feedback:
research@goodthingsfoundation.org

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