DIGITAL REACH:
Digital skills for the hardest-to-reach young people

A new approach to engage the UK’s most digitally disadvantaged
INTRODUCING DIGITAL REACH

Digital technology is a powerful driver for positive social change, providing solutions to complex issues previously beyond our reach. But these advances bring new challenges: how to ensure everyone, regardless of background and circumstance, has access to the fundamental digital skills needed in today’s ‘digital-by-default’ society – skills that shape the way we interact, transact, access opportunities and solve problems.

Since 2009, Nominet Trust, the UK’s leading tech-for-good funder, has invested more than £29m in projects harnessing digital technology to deliver social change. As the charitable foundation of Nominet – a public benefit company responsible for running the .UK internet infrastructure – Nominet Trust uses the funding provided to mobilise projects and initiatives that influence and accelerate the use of technology for social good.

In the UK, it is estimated that there are over 300,000 young people aged 15–24 who do not have basic digital skills, despite the array of digital skills initiatives available over the last five years.

Nominet Trust’s Digital Reach programme is a fresh approach to tackling the acute digital skills gap among some of the UK’s most disadvantaged young people. We believe that by collaborating to deepen our collective understanding of the factors limiting digital skills development, we can democratise access to digital skills and provide a brighter future for all young people.

This prospectus outlines our new model to help break the cycle of social and economic disadvantage by equipping all young people with the digital skills, as well as the confidence and resilience, to use technology and reach their full potential.

Chris Ashworth
Programme Director,
Nominet Trust

1 The Tech Partnership, Basic Digital Skills UK Report: summary of findings 2017
The Basic Digital Skills UK 2017 report suggests that, despite an overall increase in the number of UK adults who have gained basic digital skills, at least 3% (300,000) of those aged 15–24 are still left behind.

In early 2017, Nominet Trust undertook research to explore the barriers preventing disadvantaged young people from gaining digital skills. A key finding was that those least likely to have digital skills are also most likely to be facing multiple forms of disadvantage and are among the hardest-to-reach in our society.

The research identified three key barriers to developing basic digital skills:

- **PERSONAL SKILLS BARRIERS:** factors such as poor literacy and numeracy can prevent young people from using digital technology for formal communications such as job applications.

- **CIRCUMSTANTIAL BARRIERS:** household poverty and poor credit ratings can deny access to home broadband; long-term family health conditions can mean peer and formal support to use technology are not readily accessible.

- **SYSTEMIC BARRIERS:** young people living in households with intergenerational unemployment can lack motivation to develop digital skills through formal training programmes.

Nominet Trust research also found that these barriers are intensified by frequent and chronic disruption to the lives of young people. The most prevalent causes of disruption are experience of the care and criminal justice system, moving home, family breakups, and addiction or violence in the household.
Launched in June 2017, Digital Reach offers an alternative to various mainstream initiatives and approaches to teaching basic digital skills. It is based on insights generated from research by award-winning design agency Snook, and on-going advice and support from an expert network of associates, including the Children’s Commissioner for England and On Our Radar.

This evidence-based programme is being implemented by Nominet Trust and a consortium of 12 delivery partners working across six initiatives to support disadvantaged young people in developing digital skills. To deliver shareable insights about social impact, evaluation is an integral part of Digital Reach. Nominet Trust is working with Dr. Ellen Helsper, Associate Professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science and leading digital engagement expert, to develop an evaluation framework and validate key findings.

Digital Reach has three key design components:

- **Leveraging the expertise of youth organisations** who have trusted 1:1 relationships with young people, to lead on digital skills provision and to incorporate it into the delivery of their existing services. We believe that greater social impact can be achieved by engaging young people via the social interventions already supporting them.

- **Piloting a variety of models** with a consortium of expert youth organisations to understand which approaches are most effective in overcoming the factors inhibiting digital skills acquisition. We will use this shared knowledge to refine, replicate and scale future initiatives to achieve greater social impact. Initially we aim to engage 4,000 young people on the wrong side of the digital divide.

- **Exploring how digital skills can be embedded in the acquisition of other skills**, rather than being taught as a standalone subject. To have the best chance in life, it is vital that our most disadvantaged young people develop a range of personal skills and competencies including literacy, numeracy and social skills. Our research found that these personal skills should not be regarded as mutually exclusive to, or distinct from, the acquisition of digital skills.
DELIVERING IMPROVED SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC OUTCOMES

The diagram below shows how the interdependency of personal and digital skills can lead to improved social and economic outcomes.

**PERSONAL SKILLS**
E.g. literacy, numeracy, communication and social skills

**BASIC DIGITAL SKILLS**
E.g. the capability and confidence to use the internet and devices to manage and share information, communicate, transact and problem solve effectively

**INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES**
E.g. participation in employability training and digital upskilling programmes for the workplace, access to online services and products

**LONGER-TERM OUTCOMES**
E.g. social and economic inclusion, wellbeing
DIGITAL REACH PILOTS

Following a rigorous selection process, Nominet Trust has awarded over £600,000 in funding to support six pilots, involving 12 partner organisations. The portfolio of partnerships includes a diverse range of organisations, approaches, locations, reach and influence to help shift the narrative on supporting disadvantaged young people affected by digital exclusion in the UK. Crucially, the organisations will all work closely with young people to co-create the solutions that work best for them.

The organisations developing Digital Reach pilots are:

- **Action for Children**: Action for Children will digitise their current paper-based content across three employability programmes in severely deprived urban areas of Scotland. Supporting some of the hardest-to-reach young people in the area, the pilot will enable them to complete their qualifications online and ensure they develop the capability and confidence to use the internet to look for jobs and complete pre-employability training.

- **Carers Trust**: Carers Trust will work with Good Things Foundation to develop an e-learning resource for young adult carers as an extension to Learn My Way (the most widely used tool for digital skills delivered through libraries and community organisations). Eight Carers Trust Network Partners will use the resource to help young adult carers gain the basic digital skills they need to achieve their aspirations.

- **Home-Start and #techmums**: Home-Start and #techmums will collaborate to support 500 young mothers acquire basic digital skills to overcome the challenges they face in their daily lives, helping them become more confident and achieve their personal and professional goals.

- **The Children’s Society and City & Guilds Group**: The Children’s Society and City & Guilds Group will engage 550 young people across the Midlands and the North of England by supporting them to improve their digital skills through accredited course development.

- **UK Youth**: UK Youth will use the investment to create digital hubs in member organisations by training a youth worker and three young people to become digital champions. They will then work with referral and outreach partners to support the most isolated young people who engage with the digital hubs.

- **Wales Co-operative Centre, YMCA Swansea, Llamau and GISDA**: Wales Co-operative Centre will work with YMCA Swansea, Llamau and GISDA to engage 375 of the hardest-to-reach young people across Wales through a series of workshops and by incorporating digital literacy into existing life skills programmes.
• Action for Children
• Carers Trust and Good Things Foundation
• Home-Start and #techmums
• The Children’s Society and City & Guilds Group
• UK Youth
• Wales Co-operative Centre, YMCA Swansea, Llamau and GISDA

FOLLOW OUR PROGRESS

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About Nominet Trust

Nominet Trust is the UK’s leading social tech funder. It provides full grant funding, mentoring and business support to organisations using the internet and digital technology to address significant social challenges including health and wellbeing, economic empowerment and sustainability. Since 2009, Nominet Trust has invested more than £29m in projects harnessing technology to deliver real social change. Through partnerships and campaigns such as the inspirational NT100, Nominet Trust mobilises new approaches that will influence and accelerate the use of tech for social good.

www.nominettrust.org.uk

Nominet Trust was founded in 2008 by Nominet. Nominet is a public benefit company with 20 years’ experience of running the .UK internet infrastructure. Building on that expertise, Nominet is actively involved in connecting devices as well as people, helping people be safe and networks stay secure, and supporting the next generation of ideas and talent. With the proceeds of its successful registry business, Nominet set up and funds Nominet Trust, its charitable foundation.

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