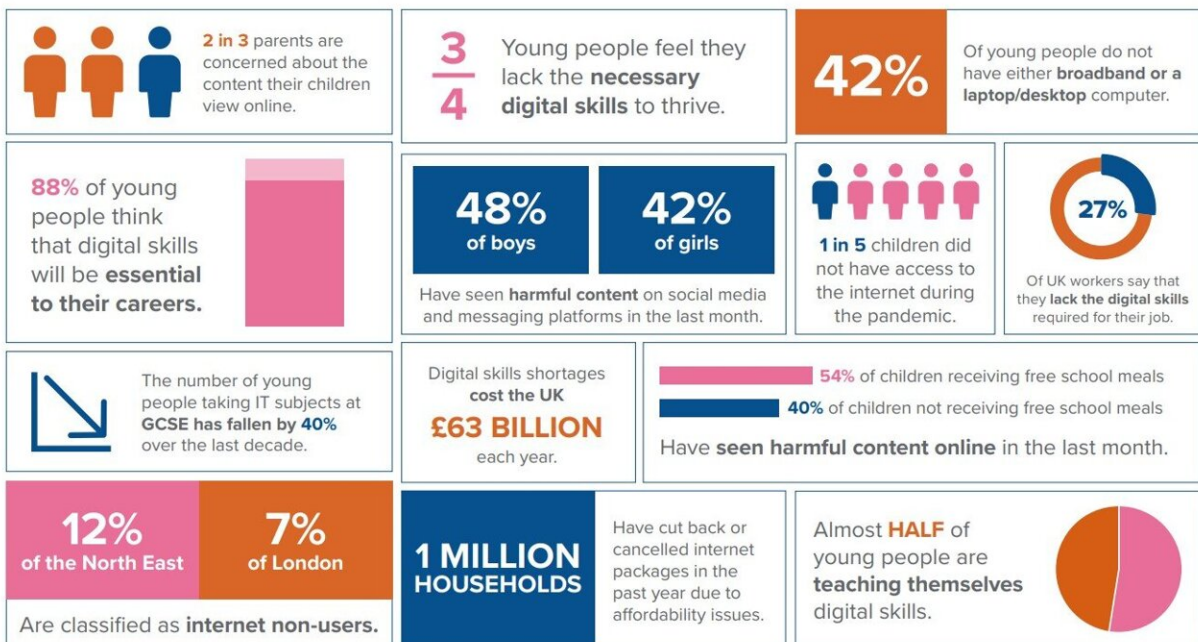


Calls for a new 'digital vaccination' for children to tackle fake news and disinformation

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Key insights



Credit: University of Sheffield

A new report published August 23, 2024 has called for a "digital vaccination" for all children, to tackle the tsunami of fake news and disinformation, and close the digital divide.

The report, from the University of Sheffield and its research collaborators in the N8 Research Partnership Child of the North and Anne Longfield's Center for Young Lives think tank, puts forward new proposals for digital upskilling, and highlights new innovations to close a digital divide which is holding back the life chances of millions of children in the UK.

An evidence-based plan for upskilling our children and young people for digital futures, calls for evidence-based approaches that can help children navigate [digital content](#) critically and responsibly and focuses on how the new Government can put the life chances of young people at the heart of policy-making and delivery.

The report sets out how the UK's digital landscape is an uneven playing field for children and young people and warns that millions of children are being left behind because they don't have regular access to the technology and skills that they need to make the best use of digital devices and spaces in a responsible and creative way.

In a world where [technological advances](#) are increasingly rapid, and where Artificial Intelligence is set to have a profound impact on employment and future economies, the report highlights the huge economic costs of failing to close the digital divide. A lack of digital skills and literacy can also leave children more open to the risks of disinformation, fake news, and other online harms.

Professor Jennifer Rowsell, from the University of Sheffield's School of Education and one of the report's executive editors, said, "The age of AI, data literacies, and the platformization of education is upon us and children and young people must be able to navigate their digital lives critically and safely.

"The report gives a detailed picture of digital inequalities in the UK and

shows how by 2030 many workers will be considered under-skilled in basic digital capabilities. It is a clear warning that not putting the lives and interests of children and young people at the center of educational policy will have very real-world implications for the UK's future economic success."

The report also calls for new Government guidance to mitigate potential harms, including fake news. It argues that current approaches to keeping children safe online often lack consistency and comprehensiveness, particularly in integrating digital literacy with traditional sex education.

Dr. Ryan Bramley, from the University of Sheffield's School of Education and one of the report's executive editors, said, "We are recommending that children need much earlier intervention and consistent educational programs throughout their young lives to be ready for, and navigate the potential negative consequences, of living in a digital society.

"This can only happen if educators are given structured support to stay updated with digital advancements, so students can be given a quality education, as well as ensuring children of all ages are given the access, resources and skills needed to take advantage of the digital infrastructure necessary for their future lives and careers."

The report urges Ministers to adopt new evidence-based policy recommendations based on extensive research undertaken across the North of England by Child of the North, including:

- Establishing a Minimum Digital Living Standards framework, including subsidized digital access to ensure that every household has the digital infrastructure necessary for effective participation.
- Enhancing digital inclusivity in schools through Continuing

Professional Development (CPD) for educators. Schools also need to be provided with the necessary resources and time allocations to support teachers and other staff to stay current with digital advancements and provide a quality digital education to students.

- Creating a national Digital Creativity Skills Commons to provide a range of evidence-informed resources, including training materials, funding guidance, and a registry of relevant agencies and charities. It would encourage partnerships between industry, educational institutions, and cultural organizations through contribution and utilization, as well as building support networks that connect learners with mentors, industry experts, and [educational institutions](#).

Anne Longfield, CBE, Executive Chair of the Center for Young Lives, said, "Children are growing up digital but we are not giving them the technology and skills they need to make the most of the opportunities it brings, or protection they need to navigate the online world safely. Technology and the internet provide access to a world of opportunity and are now a crucial part of childhood and our futures.

"We also need to equip children for the digital world they live in. Four in ten children do not have either home broadband or a laptop or desktop computer. This is not just a problem that happened during COVID. This ongoing [digital divide](#) is still leaving behind millions of children, which can have profound implications for their educational outcomes and future employment prospects.

"We can't hope to achieve the aim of becoming a world-beating economy with a well-trained and well-educated workforce for as long as a substantial number of young people are shut out of the digital world."

More information: A country that works for all children and young

people: An evidence-based plan for upskilling our children and young people for digital futures, [www.n8research.org.uk/media/Co ...
Futures Report 7.pdf](http://www.n8research.org.uk/media/Co...Futures_Report_7.pdf)

Provided by University of Sheffield

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