



Department  
for Education

# **Narrowing the digital divide in schools and colleges**

**Government consultation**

**Launch date 21 March 2025**

**Respond by 23 May 2025**

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## **Foreword by Minister Morgan, Minister for Early Education**

At the Department for Education, we are determined to break down the barriers to opportunity to ensure every child and young person has the best start in life and the best possible education. This includes access to the right technology. Reliable and safe technology in schools and colleges is key for all children and young people to be able to achieve and thrive.

The role of technology in education is constantly evolving. When used effectively, technology can reduce workload, increase inclusivity and support students to develop digital skills needed for opportunity and growth. We know that some schools and colleges will want to go further with technology than others but there are still too many that lack the digital infrastructure to embed basic technology use. We must go further and set milestones to tackle this digital divide, so that everyone in schools has access to the benefits of technology, including new opportunities offered by AI.

We are setting out our proposals to make sure there is reliable and safe technology in every school by 2030. We have put the people who are impacted by this work at the heart of our decision-making. Our digital and technology standards for schools and colleges and accompanying support services have been co-designed in partnership with IT network managers, teachers, leaders, cyber security experts and technology suppliers, to tackle the barriers to progress together.

We will use the combined power of digital, data and technology to make a more inclusive, innovative and fit for the future education and care system. Our support services are focused more on schools, where the need is greatest. But we will also continue to work closely with Jisc and the post-16 sector, supporting their use of technology and sharing their expertise and best practice. We will also start new work with the early years sector to better understand their technology needs and design future interventions to support learners of all ages in education.

We understand that the digital divide exists beyond the gates of a school and college, so we are working with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) on their ambitious national plans for digital inclusion. We know that we need to do more to tackle the digital divide in education and help more schools to access the benefits of reliable and safe technology. For this reason, we are asking for your views and expertise on these proposals and support in gathering evidence on further measures to address the digital divide in schools.

I look forward to receiving your responses.

## Who this is for

- School and college leaders, teachers and support staff
- Academy trusts, local authorities, college governing bodies, diocese acting on behalf of governing bodies, and site trustees
- Organisations and suppliers who support schools and colleges
- Governors and trustees

## Issue date

The consultation was issued on 21 March 2025.

## Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can email:

[digitaldivide.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:digitaldivide.consultation@education.gov.uk)

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: [coordinator.consultations@education.gov.uk](mailto:coordinator.consultations@education.gov.uk), telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

## Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

## The response

The results of the consultation and the department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in Summer 2025.

## About this consultation

This consultation sets out the Department for Education's long-term vision for narrowing the digital divide in schools and colleges, focusing on proposals for the future of the [digital and technology standards](#).

The document is split into three sections, outlining proposals and gathering evidence aligned to three key aims:

- Prioritising essential technology infrastructure
- Managing the risks of technology
- Harnessing the opportunities of technology

This consultation sets a long-term ambition for all schools and colleges to meet the following core digital and technology standards by 2030:

- Broadband internet
- Wireless networks
- Network switches
- Digital leadership and governance
- Filtering and monitoring
- Cyber security

To help inform future policy development, this document also seeks to gather wider evidence, including:

- the readiness of the sector to meet these six core digital and technology standards
- any barriers schools and colleges face in meeting the standards
- the support the sector requires to meet the standards
- examples of best practice in harnessing the benefits of technology
- evidence gaps that the sector would like the Department to help with filling

Please note all proposals and policies in this consultation apply to England only.

Most of the questions in the consultation are optional so you only need to answer questions that are applicable to you and where you would like to comment.

In addition to this work with schools and colleges, the Government is committed to ensuring that everyone has access, skills, support, and confidence to engage in our modern digital society and economy, whatever their circumstances. That is why we are working closely with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), who recently published their [Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps](#). We would also invite those responding to this consultation to share their views on the [digital inclusion call for evidence](#) by 9 April.

## Questions overview

The table below shows who questions are aimed at. **All respondents are welcome to answer all questions, however they may find that some are less relevant to them.**

Question number	These questions are primarily aimed at:
	<b>About you</b>
1 - 13	Everyone
	<b>Prioritising essential technology infrastructure</b>
14	Everyone
15	Schools and colleges
16 – 18	Academy trusts, local authorities, college governing bodies, diocese acting on behalf of governing bodies, and site trustees
19 – 20	Everyone
21 - 22	Organisations and suppliers who support schools and colleges
	<b>Managing the risks of technology</b>
23	Everyone
24 – 25	Schools and colleges
26 – 27	Academy trusts, local authorities, college governing bodies, diocese acting on behalf of governing bodies, and site trustees
28 – 30	Everyone
	<b>Gathering Evidence: Harnessing the benefits of technology</b>
31 – 35	Everyone
	<b>Equality Impact Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment</b>
36 – 40	Everyone

## **Respond online**

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [DfE consultations on GOV.UK](#) to submit your response.

## **Other ways to respond**

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may request an alternative format of the form.

### **By email**

[digitaldivide.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:digitaldivide.consultation@education.gov.uk)

### **By post**

Narrowing the Digital Divide in Schools and Colleges Consultation Team,  
Department for Education,  
Sanctuary Buildings,  
Great Smith Street,  
London,  
SW1P 3BT

## **Deadline**

The consultation closes on 23 May 2025.

## About you

The following introductory questions will help us understand more about you and, where relevant, the nature of your business or organisation and the main ways in which you currently interact with schools and colleges in England. This will help us direct you to the questions that are most relevant to you and/or your organisation and analyse your responses. We know that not everyone will wish or feel able to answer all the questions in this consultation. However, you will still have the option to answer all the questions if you wish to do so.

### Confidentiality

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal data, may be subject to publication or disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. If you want all or any part of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential. If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it confidential will be considered, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not in and of itself be regarded as legally binding for the Department for Education. The privacy notice is available alongside this consultation.

#### For everyone

**Question 1:** What is your name?

**Question 2:** What is your email address?

**Question 3:** Are you happy to be contacted directly about your response? Please note: We may wish to contact you directly about your responses to help our understanding of the issues. If we do, we will use the email address you have given above.

Yes

No

**Question 4:** Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation? If you are responding as an individual, we will consider the views within your response to this consultation to be your personal views. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, we will consider the views within your response to this consultation to be those of your organisation and not necessarily your personal views.

Individual

Organisation



## Individual

**Question 5:** As the government analyses the consultation findings, we may identify direct quotes to include in the published government response – may we use your feedback in this way?

Yes, and you can name me  
Yes, but please anonymise me  
No

**Question 6:** Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?

Yes  
No

**Question 7:** Please select one description of your current role:

Designated safeguarding lead  
Governor  
Headteacher  
IT lead  
IT support  
Network Manager  
Parent/carer/guardian  
Senior Leader  
School business manager  
School support staff  
Secondary teachers of computer science and subject leads  
Special Educational Needs Coordinator  
Student  
Teacher  
Technical Advisor  
Virtual School Head  
Other – If other, please describe your role

**Question 8:** Which local authority in England are you based in? Please select which local authority in England you live or work in:

Multiple choice of Local Authorities or 'Other outside of England - please specify'

## Organisation

**Question 9:** As the government analyses the consultation findings, we may identify direct quotes to include in the published government response – may we use your feedback in this way?

Yes, and you can name my organisation

Yes, but please anonymise us

No

**Question 10:** Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?

Yes

No

**Question 11:** What is your organisation's name?

**Question 12:** Which of the following best describes who/which part of the sector your organisation represents? Please only select that you are responding on behalf of an organisation if you are submitting the cleared and approved official response from the organisation. Individual responses should be submitted in the section previous.

Academy (including free schools)

Voluntary aided schools

Voluntary controlled schools

Foundation schools and community schools

Academy trustees

Bodies representing schools or local authorities

Charity

Designated institutions and 16-19 academies

Faith bodies

Federations

Further education colleges

Governing bodies

Independent specialist colleges

Local authorities

Organisations that support schools and colleges

Organisations which represent the views of computing teachers

Sixth form colleges

Supplier of a digital service or product

Training providers

Contractors involved in building schools

Unions and representative

**Question 13:** Which local authority in England are you based in? Please select which local authority in England you live or work in.

Multiple choice of Local Authorities or 'Other outside of England - please specify'

# Prioritising essential technology infrastructure

## Background

Through our work with the sector, we have identified a good digital strategy as the first step for an effective digital transformation. Preparing for technology implementation, ahead of implementation itself is crucial for ensuring schools and colleges have the technology that meets the needs of their staff and students, can plan for its maintenance and evaluate its impact.<sup>1</sup>

The Department's [digital leadership and governance standards](#) recommend that schools and colleges should have a digital strategy that they review annually, which includes a vision for how they will use technology and a long-term maintenance plan.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of schools having a digital strategy in place. In the 2021 EdTech Survey, 38% of primary and 54% of secondary schools reported having a digital strategy.<sup>2</sup> By the 2023 Technology in Schools Survey, this had risen to 55% for primary schools and 68% for secondary schools. This survey also highlighted that leaders with a digital strategy were more likely to report that technology had already reduced staff workload and expected that it would reduce staff workload in the future.<sup>3</sup>

Working with senior leaders in schools, we have developed [plan technology for your school](#) to help schools make strategic decisions about what technology to buy and how to implement it effectively. On the service, schools can:

- assess their existing technology against some digital and technology standards, including leadership and governance, connectivity and filtering and monitoring
- get tailored recommendations on how to improve their technology, with actionable steps to meet the digital standards

## Case Study from Portsmouth City Council on The Digital City project.

The 'Portsmouth: The Digital City' project brings together all 61 schools in the city, consisting of 17 LA maintained schools and 44 academies, under a shared vision to use technology to:

- enhance the teaching and learning for our learners
- support accessibility and inclusion
- reduce workload for our school staff
- narrow the digital divide

We started by building a strong, city-wide digital strategy that gave schools a clear strategic direction, aligned with the DfE digital and technology standards.

*'We are very early on in terms of digital development. The biggest challenge is change management. With all the other demands on staff in school, it is incredibly important that digital development does not add to the already extreme pressures. This has meant that we have been very careful not to overwhelm staff with changes or demands and have 'read the room' before implementing any change. This is where the strategy is so important and equally school and city champions. The result of this has been that the changes have become truly embedded and not a 'bolt on' to practice.'* Senior Leader at a multi-academy trust

Alongside this strategic view, ensuring a baseline of technology infrastructure, like a reliable internet connection across every school site, was essential. Following Connect the Classroom funding, the project successfully integrated technology across our schools. This has allowed us to reap the benefits technology offers and respond to schools' digital needs.

To ensure sustainable digital growth and collaboration, the project has supported the development of Digital and Professional Development Leads as well as offering bespoke training for schools across the city.

*The greatest impact on the school is having a Digital and Professional Development Lead who is able to share information, work with you as a school. Having a wide understanding of the city has enabled training to happen in the right place with the right people. We have been able to save money and share ideas across the city. Without the project and working together as a local authority, many standards would not have been met. With the support of the Digital City project sustainability within our current funding model has been a priority, meaning our children are able to use technology across the curriculum.* Digital Lead at a local authority maintained school

Alongside this strategic approach, good connectivity is the technical foundation of reliable technology. We know that reliable, fast and secure Wi-Fi in the classroom is essential before schools can consider moving to the cloud or fully incorporating technology into their lessons. In the 2023 Technology in Schools Survey, 63% of schools reported having a fully functional Wi-Fi signal throughout the school, while 27% reported that it was not fully functional and 10% were unsure.<sup>3</sup> [Jisc](#) provides colleges with full fibre 1Gb/S broadband with back up connectivity, although, like schools, some colleges face challenges on Wi-Fi across the campus.

To support schools and colleges to define their expectations, the Department has published four connectivity standards to set out the expected baseline:

- [Broadband internet](#) - Broadband refers to the high-speed internet connection that can be delivered through a range of technologies.
- [Network cabling](#) - Network cabling involves the physical cables that carry data between devices within a school or college network.
- [Network switching](#) - Network switches are devices that connect multiple devices on a network, segregating and directing data to its destination.
- [Wireless network](#) - Wireless networks can connect devices without physical cables.

This has been supported by targeted investment on both broadband and wireless networks. Our broadband programme funds fibre infrastructure for schools who wouldn't otherwise be connected by commercial rollout. We are joint funding with BDUK (Building Digital UK in DSIT) fibre upgrades to 833 schools by the end of 2025. This is on top of the 683 schools delivered by BDUK programmes with DfE from 2017-2021.

Additionally, Connect the Classroom is supporting over 3,700 schools to upgrade their wireless networks and ensure a reliable Wi-Fi connection throughout the school site by March 2025. The programme has delivered over £215m of funding and improved connectivity for over 1.3 million pupils.

## **Case Study from South Wirral High School on improving connectivity**

Connect the Classroom has had a huge impact on South Wirral High School. Before the installation, our Wi-Fi was unreliable, which negatively impacted teaching and learning. Teachers were often frustrated, and it was challenging to use digital resources effectively. Our IT team was often troubleshooting, leaving little room for strategic planning.

Since the installation in January 2024, the transformation has been remarkable. We now have reliable Wi-Fi coverage throughout the school, including every classroom, staff rooms and faculty offices. As a result, staff are now able to access resources and do their lesson planning anywhere in the school and technology can be embedded into any lesson.

External access points provide connectivity in the playground and sports field. This has been brilliant for increasing the use of technology in PE lessons and has enabled us to change our morning registration process. This has been a big-time saver in the morning, supporting punctuality and allowing heads of year to give announcements to the full year group in one place.

For our pupils with SEND, the new Wi-Fi has been a game-changer. They have greater independence as they can utilise accessibility software and complete tasks digitally in all classrooms. These students can also print their work via their device, again increasing independence and allowing teaching assistants to spend more time supporting the students' learning.

To support our school budget, we rent out parts of the school site in the evenings and holidays. Since the Connect the Classroom upgrades, guest access to Wi-Fi has been greatly simplified and we can provide secure, time-limited access as part of our rental package.

Reliable wi-fi supports the smooth running of our school and improves the overall learning experience for our students as we explore new ways to use technology in our school.

## Proposal

We would like to set a long-term ambition for all schools and colleges to meet the following standards by 2030 to ensure they have a strong digital strategy, and the essential digital infrastructure required in the digital age:

- Leadership and governance
- Broadband internet
- Wireless networks
- Network switches

This ambition comes with a package of support for schools from the Department. We will invest another £25 million in upgrading wireless networks in schools through our Connect the Classroom programme next year.

On broadband, we will continue to work with DSIT and BDUK to identify schools that might be missed by the commercial rollout of fibre broadband and support those schools to receive an upgrade to gigabit-capable broadband.

We will also work with the market to explore how suppliers can help schools and colleges achieve the best value for money when meeting the connectivity standards.

We will continue to fund the provision of connectivity, appropriate cyber security, and specialist advice and guidance to FE colleges in England.

Academy trusts, local authorities, college governing bodies, diocese acting on behalf of governing bodies, and site trustees have a key role in driving the digital transformation of schools and colleges, including taking a strategic role in the long-term improvement and maintenance of essential technology infrastructure.

We will continue to develop our [plan technology for your school](#) service so it can go further to reduce the burden on schools when developing sustainable digital strategies and prioritising high impact upgrades to their technology infrastructure. This includes developing functionality to allow academy trusts to use the tool as part of their central strategic oversight of technology in their academies.

Jisc will continue to help colleges improve their digital capability by providing the leadership, guidance and infrastructure needed.

We will continue to engage with the sector to understand the barriers faced in meeting these core digital and technology standards and any further support the Department can offer.

Alongside this support, we will explore long-term options for greater accountability on these standards for 2030. As part of this, we will consider:

- what level of accountability would be fair and proportionate to the benefits technology offers

- where accountability should sit, for example with individual schools and colleges or academy trusts, local authorities, college governing bodies, diocese acting on behalf of governing bodies, and site trustees
- how to cohesively bring together the existing expectations around the standards, looking at where they are embedded in existing guidance such as Keeping children safe in education, the Academy Trust Handbook and Good estate management for schools

### **For everyone**

**Question 14:** For the following questions, will you be responding from the perspective of:

A school or college

An academy trust, local authority, college governing body, diocese acting on behalf of a governing body or site trustee

An organisation and/or supplier who supports schools and colleges

Other

### **For schools and colleges**

**Question 15:** Is it feasible for your school or college to meet these four standards (leadership and governance, broadband internet, wireless networks and network switches) by 2030?

Yes, we already meet them

Yes, we can meet them by 2030

No, we can't meet them by 2030

### **For academy trusts, local authorities, college governing bodies, diocese acting on behalf of governing bodies, and site trustees**

**Question 16:** Is it feasible for the schools and colleges in your organisation to meet these four standards (leadership and governance, broadband internet, wireless networks and network switches) by 2030?

Yes, all of the schools and colleges in my organisation already meet them

Yes, the schools and colleges in my organisation can meet them by 2030

No, the schools and colleges in my organisation can't meet them by 2030

**Question 17:** Do you have the strategic capacity and capability to ensure that schools and colleges in your organisation have essential technology infrastructure?

Yes, we already do this

Yes, we could do this in the future

No, we do not have the capacity or capability to do this



**Question 18:** What support would you need to take on a strategic leadership role for technology?

**For organisations and suppliers who support schools and colleges**

**Question 19:** How has your organisation aligned its products or services to support schools and colleges to meet the standards?

**Question 20:** What could the Department do to enable you in this shared goal?

**For everyone**

**Question 21:** Are there specific elements of these standards that you or the schools and colleges you support would struggle to meet?

**Question 22:** Please share any best practice examples regarding managing essential technology infrastructure.

# Managing the risks of technology

## Background

As we introduce more technology into schools and colleges, we need to be mindful of the risks that technology can pose, as well as the benefits. To support schools and colleges to understand the risks and proactively manage them, we have published standards on cyber security and filtering and monitoring.

### Cyber security

Cyber incidents cause significant disruption including losing access to critical systems, lost learning time, data breaches or financial losses. Meeting the [cyber security standards](#) helps schools and colleges to reduce the risk of cyber-attacks and minimise the disruption should a cyber incident occur.

The Department continues to collaborate with the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) to ensure our sectors are receiving up to date information about the latest threats and mitigations. [PDNS for Schools](#) allows all schools to sign up for the NCSC's free cyber defence service which helps block online threats such as malware, ransomware and phishing attacks.

Colleges have significant DDoS protection as well as a range of tools and support from Jisc to increase resilience against cyber-attacks, including threat intelligence and access to a cyber security incident response team.

Further support is available through the Department's [Risk Protection Arrangement \(RPA\)](#) which is an alternative to commercial insurance for schools. RPA has included cyber incident cover as standard benefit since the 2022/23 membership year. RPA members have access to a 24/7 Incident Response Service in the event of a cyber incident, with 56% of schools in England currently participating in the RPA. To receive support, members need to:

- have offline backups
- make sure all employees or Governors who have access to the school's information technology system undertake NCSC Cyber Security Training
- register with Police CyberAlarm
- have a Cyber Response Plan in place

The [Academy trust handbook](#) sets an expectation that trusts “should take appropriate action to meet DfE's cyber security standards, which were developed to help them improve their resilience against cyber-attacks”.<sup>4</sup>

## **Case Study from the Head of Information and Cyber Security at Harris Federation on their cyber strategy**

At Harris Federation, cyber security has become increasingly important due to ever-evolving threats and changing technology. From phishing emails to AI-assisted attacks, the threats are numerous. Defending against these requires dedicated cyber security skills and technology, so ongoing investment in these is important.

Since the cyber attack we experienced in 2021, Harris have invested in developing a cyber security team with the mission of increasing our cyber maturity and our resilience to cyber threats. Cyber security covers a very wide spectrum of concerns, so covering all of them can be a challenge.

To increase our cyber maturity across the board we take a risk-based approach. This way we can prioritise the areas that need the most attention and pose the greatest risk to our data and systems. This strategy ensures that we can cover all of our threats and risks in a strategic way. The maturity model is a great way of assessing our resilience, as it goes beyond the compliant/non-compliant marking scheme, and instead provides a more granular overview of our entire cyber security posture and encourages constant improvement.

Ultimately, we strive to give our pupils the best education possible, and to achieve this they require resilient systems and access to information when needed. Preventing and responding to cyber threats is an important part of this resiliency. By increasing our cyber maturity, and dealing with key risks, we can ensure the highest standard of education can be provided to our pupils.

## **Case Study from the School Business Manager at Bishop Stopford School on planning for and responding to a cyber incident**

It was a Thursday evening when the Headteacher was notified by DfE cyber response team that there was an incident, and the school's remote credentials were for sale on the dark web.

The school's cyber plan was immediately activated that evening, and all remote access was immediately switched off so if someone were to purchase the credentials, they would not have access to the network. Friday morning, the police and the RPA were informed, and a meeting was set up with all staff to inform them of what was happening and action they needed to take, including the need to reset their username and passwords – by lunchtime that day around 95% of staff had done this.

It was very fast paced for the first week, prioritising activities including contacting parents. A draft communication template to write to parents was already part of the cyber response plan, and the school had its own external Data Protection Officer (with a legal background) to help draft and clear the final content.

As a result of this incident, the school has put in place a more secure password policy, increasing the number of characters and the complexity required for all members of staff, and a similar policy for students. Following the incident, the school is looking to implement further security measures to make the network more secure.

## **Harmful content**

Schools are already under a duty to have appropriate filtering and monitoring systems in place to reduce the risk of young people being exposed to harmful content when online in school. '[Keeping children safe in education](#)' makes clear that: "governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their school or college has appropriate filtering and monitoring systems in place and regularly review their effectiveness." <sup>5</sup>

We have published [filtering and monitoring standards](#) to support schools and colleges to understand how to meet this duty by setting out the technical requirements to implement effective filtering and monitoring. We have worked closely with the filtering and monitoring providers and the wider online safety community, including funding a [webinar series](#) from UK Safer Internet Centre. It is our expectation that schools and colleges are already meeting the filtering and monitoring standards in accordance with their statutory safeguarding duties.

## Proposal

We would like to set a long-term ambition for all schools and colleges to meet the following standards by 2030 to minimise the risks posed by technology:

- Cyber security
- Filtering and monitoring (these standards should already be met as part of Keeping children safe in education)

To support schools and colleges to reach this ambition, we intend to work with the sector to understand any barriers to meeting these standards and build on our plan technology for your school service to provide extra support.

## **For everyone**

**Question 23:** For the following questions, will you be responding from the perspective of:

A school or college

An academy trust, local authority, college governing body, diocese acting on behalf of a governing body or site trustee

An organisation and/or supplier who supports schools and colleges

Other

## **For schools and colleges**

**Question 24:** Is it feasible for your school or college to meet the cyber security standards by 2030?

Yes, we fully meet them now

Yes, we can meet them by 2030

No, we can't meet them by 2030

**Question 25:** To what degree is your school or college meeting the filtering and monitoring standards?

We fully meet them

We meet them to some extent

We don't currently meet them

## **For academy trusts, local authorities, college governing bodies, diocese acting on behalf of governing bodies, and site trustees**

**Question 26:** Is it feasible for the schools and colleges in your organisation to meet the cyber security by 2030?

Yes, all of the schools and colleges in my organisation already meet them

Yes, the schools and colleges in my organisation can meet them by 2030

No, the schools and colleges in my organisation can't meet them by 2030

**Question 27:** Do you think the schools and colleges in your organisation are meeting the filtering and monitoring standards?

Yes, all of the schools in my organisation already meet them

The majority of the schools in my organisation already meet them

The majority of schools in my organisation don't currently meet them

## **For everyone**

**Question 28:** Are there are specific elements of the cyber security standards that you, or the schools and colleges you support, would struggle to meet?

**Question 29:** Are there are specific elements of the filtering and monitoring standards that you, or the schools and colleges you support, are struggling to meet?

**Question 30:** What additional support would you or the schools and colleges you support need to proactively manage the risks of technology, including meeting the cyber security and filtering and monitoring standards?

# Gathering Evidence: Harnessing the opportunities of technology

## Background

Reliable and safe technology can offer schools and colleges significant benefits, including new teaching and learning opportunities, more inclusive learning environments and operational efficiencies. However, the evidence on which technology is most effective and how it should be used to maximise those benefits is less clear.

Alongside the six core standards highlighted already in this document, we have a further five standards:

- [Cloud solution standards](#) - Cloud solutions involve using internet-based services for data storage, software, and computing power instead of relying on physical servers at your school or college.
- [Digital accessibility standards](#) - Digital accessibility ensures that all digital content and tools are usable by everyone.
- [Laptop, desktop and tablet standards](#) - Laptops, desktops, and tablets are different types of end user devices used in schools and colleges
- [Servers and storage standards](#) - Storage refers to the devices and media used to save data using hard drives. Schools and colleges need reliable, scalable server and storage solutions to meet their users' requirements and protect their data.
- [Network cabling standards](#) - Network cabling involves the physical cables that carry data between devices within a school or college network.

We have published these guidelines to help schools and colleges implement these areas of technology effectively. However, we think schools and colleges should choose when they prioritise these areas as part of their continuous improvement plans, and we are not setting any expectation for when they should be met.

We would welcome views on whether our current suite of eleven standards is sufficient, or if there are areas where further guidance would be beneficial. We want to ensure we are supporting schools and colleges, as well as the market, to define their expectations while avoiding an infinite stream of guidance.

### For everyone

**Question 31:** Is this the right set of standards to help schools and colleges maximise the potential benefits of technology?

Yes

No

**Question 32:** What is the best way the Department for Education can support schools and colleges to meet the remainder of the digital and technology standards within their existing technology budgets?



## Teaching and learning

Technology is used frequently for teaching and learning, with teachers and leaders reporting that technology contributes to improved pupil attainment.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the 'Using Digital Technology to Improve Learning' from the Education Endowment Foundation' highlighted that effective use of digital technology can lead to an additional two to five months of accelerated learning for pupils.<sup>6</sup> Technology can be used across many subjects but it is essential for teaching the digital skills give young people the power to seize opportunity.

Meeting the [laptops, desktops and tablets standards](#) supports schools and colleges to have the right devices in place, which is crucial for taking advantage of technological advances and meeting education needs.

### **Case study from Director of Digital Transformation at Hull FE college about their "AI Translate" project.**

We have had a significant increase in ESOL (English for speaking of other languages) students in recent years. This comes on top of our existing challenges - the college serves the 4th most deprived LA in England with high unemployment and 22% of children in absolute low-income families – and we decided to use AI to meet this new challenge. We developed our digital guide for teachers to help them use these tools effectively in teaching and to help students to use them in learning. The results speak for themselves. We've seen ESOL attendance improve from 65% to 91.5%. ESOL achievement rates have risen from 77% to 90%. The downstream impact has been equally high - 20% of employed ESOL learners received a pay rise, and over 55% moved into paid work.

Teaching quality improved with overall learner satisfaction increased by 12%. And the College saved over £50,000 in administrative costs, delivering a substantial return on investment. But it's all about the student. We've had comments like: "There were 10 of us, all with different backgrounds and languages, and we could all understand her"; "Translate has been amazing. I don't just use it at College; I use it everywhere now." That really brings home the value of these tools."

## Improved inclusion

Digital assistive technology (AT) includes any device, software or system used to support students with SEND; it includes specialist equipment like Braille devices, as well as free or low-cost accessibility software such as dictation tools.

The [digital accessibility standards](#) recommend the inclusion of digital accessibility in relevant strategies and ensuring that digital resources are accessible to all learners, both of which are crucial to fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Reliable, secure Wi-Fi can enable the use of portable devices in classrooms, including devices that assist students with medical needs or Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This can have a transformative effect on teaching practices and the learning experience for those students.

The Department delivered and evaluated AT training aimed at mainstream school staff. The course helped staff to maximise the benefits of free and low-cost AT and embed its effective use throughout their school. In the post-course survey, respondents said effective AT use had a positive influence on the independence (92%), confidence (89%), attainment (64%), and engagement (86%) of their students with SEND. Training participants also felt that effective AT use can positively impact the use of support staff and teacher time.<sup>7</sup> We will continue to work with partners and the sector to explore how to support schools to embed AT in their setting.

### **Case study from a SENCo at a mainstream primary who attended DfE Assistive Technology training in 2023.**

The school is currently using Immersive Reader and speech to text facilities on laptops to support five children in Year 5 and Year 6 with writing.

“[Assistive technology] helps the children to focus on the task, because the task is more accessible for them. This means there is less low-level disruption in class and makes the class a more positive environment... It changes how we deploy Teaching Assistant (TAs). The children are more independent so they don't need the constant adult support, and the TA can help with other children, so it helps the class as a whole.”  
– Teacher

“He was having angry outbursts, crying and stomping and getting down on himself. That happens a lot less now. He's proud of his work and wants to talk about it now.” – Parent

### **Case study from an all-through special school who attended DfE Assistive Technology training in 2023**

“I thought [assistive technology] was all of this amazing, fantastic technology that was far beyond what we could get, but [the DfE course] made me realise that more accessible things like visuals, basic uses of computer tech, etc is also incorporated in that... We’ve got quite a few students across the school now using Reading Pens and as they are part of our normal way of working it doesn’t affect their [public exam] access arrangements... We now have students accessing entry-level and functional skills, who couldn’t access that without assistive technology, so they are actually coming out with qualifications that they may not have been able to come out with previously.”

### **For everyone**

**Question 33:** Please share any examples of best practice which has allowed your organisation to use technology to:

- provide new teaching and learning opportunities
- improve inclusivity, including for students with SEND

### **Optimisation and efficiencies**

Effective planning and implementation of technology in schools and colleges can lead to significant cost and time savings. In the 2023 Technology in Schools Survey, over 70% of leaders felt technology saved time on administration tasks such as parent and carer communication, managing staff and delivering training.<sup>3</sup>

Reliable connectivity allows schools and colleges to adopt enterprise cloud-based solutions, which in most cases will be more secure and cheaper for schools and colleges than maintaining their own servers. Transitions to cloud-based solutions allow schools and colleges to adjust computing power, storage, and other IT resources based on need and promotes sustainability by reducing the energy consumption associated with on-site servers. Furthermore, cloud solutions provide opportunities for more flexible working arrangements, cross-site working and staff collaboration. Meeting [the cloud solutions standards](#) supports schools and colleges to enhance security, reduce costs and improve efficiencies.

On average, teachers spend around 6 hours a week on marking, representing a significant proportion of teacher workloads. High quality Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools have the potential to reduce the amount of time that teachers spend marking, whilst supporting effective feedback and tailored teaching which drive pupil progress.<sup>8</sup> In 2023, the DfE opened a conversation with the sector with the launch of a Call for Evidence on

the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in education to better understand the potential benefits for pupils and staff. Most respondents were optimistic about the potential for GenAI to free up teacher time by automating a range of tasks, with creating lesson content and report writing offering the most significant time savings.<sup>9</sup> Some teachers reported that automating tasks reduced time spent working out of hours, having a positive impact on work life balance.<sup>10</sup>

The Department has taken steps to harness the workload saving benefits of AI, through its arm's length body, Oak National Academy. In September 2024, Oak launched 'Aila', their AI lesson planning assistant. This tool enables teachers to create personalised lesson plans and resources drawn from Oak's curriculum content. An Oak National Academy survey found that almost two-thirds of teachers said that using Aila either decreased their workload or allowed them to spend more time on other important aspects of their role.<sup>11</sup>

### **Case study from LEO Academy Impact Report**

Since 2019, we, at LEO Academy Trust, have initiated a significant shift by equipping every staff member and Key Stage 2 pupil with a Chromebook, and providing on-demand access to tablets and Chromebooks for our Early Years and Key Stage 1 pupils. Our investment in this technology initially cost approximately £12 per child per month but has yielded substantial returns.

We have found that this initiative has led to significant cost savings over time. For example, across the trust, the decrease in worksheet printing and exercise books saves around £78 per child per year, in addition to saving approximately 400 trees annually. Furthermore, moving to digital tasks with a focus on pedagogy, has increased classroom efficiency by 23%, freeing up teachers' time for more focused and inclusive learning activities. This repurposed teacher capacity has equated to 11 full-time staff members across the trust.

The cost and time savings, coupled with improved attainment, higher attendance and higher staff satisfaction levels, demonstrate the significant positive impact of this change on the whole organisation.

## **For everyone**

**Question 34:** Please share any examples of best practice which has allowed your organisation to use technology to:

- improve workload efficiencies
- offer cost savings and efficiencies

**Question 35:** What are the current evidence gaps the Department for Education need to fill to support the education sector to maximise the benefits of technology?

# Equality Impact Assessment

## Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requirements are set out in s.149 of the Equality Act 2010. The PSED requires a public authority to have due regard to the need to:

1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
3. foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

These aims are also known as the three limbs of the PSED. This involves having due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics and take steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.

The equality duty covers nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (ethnicity), religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Understanding the possible impact that policy decisions could have on different groups helps us to identify, avoid and manage negative equality impacts. The equality duty is an ongoing duty, and we will continue to consider and amend this assessment.

### For everyone

**Question 36:** What comments or concerns do you have, if any, about how the proposals in this consultation document may affect you or individuals (both adults and children) with particular protected characteristics (as defined by the Equality Act 2010)?

**Question 37:** What comments or concerns do you have, if any, about how the proposals in this consultation document may affect children and young people with special educational needs?

## Gathering evidence on particular protected characteristics (Equality Act 2010) and special educational needs

This section asks for your help in identifying any potential impacts of our proposals on people with particular protected characteristics and on children and young people with special educational needs.

### Equality Assessment – The Environmental Principles Duty.

The Environmental Principles Duty requirements are set out in the Environment Act 2021. The duty requires policymakers to have due regard to for the:

1. **Integration Principle:** Ensuring that environmental protection is integrated into the development of policies and proposals from the outset.
2. **Prevention Principle:** Taking proactive measures to prevent environmental harm before it occurs.
3. **Rectification at Source Principle:** Addressing environmental damage at its source rather than dealing with its consequences later.
4. **Polluter Pays Principle:** Ensuring that those who cause environmental damage are responsible for covering the costs of managing and mitigating that damage.
5. **Precautionary Principle:** Taking precautionary measures when there is a risk of significant environmental harm, even if some cause-and-effect relationships are not fully established scientifically.

## Gathering evidence: on environmental impact

This section asks for your help in identifying any potential impacts of our proposals on environmental impact.

### For everyone

**Question 38:** Are you aware of the environmental impacts of technology?

**Question 39:** Do you consider environmental impacts when purchasing technology?

**Question 40:** Are there any specific environmental considerations that should be included in the DfE's digital and technology standards?

## References

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- <sup>10</sup> Department for Education. (2024) Page 16. [GenAI in education: Educator and expert views report.](#)
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