The Institution of Engineering and Technology

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**PAPER CLASSIFICATION: OPEN**

**Council**

**DIGITAL POVERTY ALLIANCE**

(Paper by David Lakin. If you have any questions on this paper before the meeting please contact David Lakin on 01438 767340 or by email DavidLakin@theiet.org)

**1. Issue**

The IET taking a leading role in the formation of the Digital Poverty Alliance (DPA).

**2. Timing**

Council meeting, 25 March 2021.

**3. Reason for Paper Classification**

The formation of the Digital Poverty Alliance and its operating model has been approved

**4. For Note**

To note the Digital Poverty Alliance and proposed operating model

**5. Background**

5.1 Digital poverty is not a new term, nor is it a new issue of how the lack of digital provision in the UK is negatively affecting the attainment of young people in education, particularly in technical and practical subjects. This has been widely publicised recently due to the coronavirus pandemic, which has highlighted the growing problem of digital poverty in the UK and its effects on young people. It is estimated that over 1.9 million households do not have access to the internet, and COVID-19 has identified key gaps the ability of many children to learn from home during periods of lockdown.

5.2 The IET and the Learning Foundation, the parent of Digital Access for All (DAFA)*, has been particularly concerned about the effects of the ongoing pandemic and have already collaborated on an initial virtual round table in October 2020. This round table involved more than 20 organisations, including the Department for Education (DfE), the Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS), Intel, TechUK, TeachFirst, BBC News and LEGO, to discuss the issue of digital divide and align ambitions end digital poverty for all.

*DAFA is an initiative created in February 2019 by the Learning Foundation, an independent registered charity established in January 2001 - https://learningfoundation.org.uk/

## 6. Opportunity

The challenge of tackling the digital divide is too large for one organisation to take on alone, which is why the IET with our partner, the Learning Foundation are working to establish an alliance with organisations, who working together, can tackle this challenge. The IET and DAFA are bringing together organisations such as NGOs, Government departments and business to form the Digital Poverty Alliance (DPA) aimed at tackling the issue of digital poverty and ending digital poverty for all, particularly for disadvantaged children over the next 5-10 years.

## 7. Benefits

7.1 The IET's charitable objects, as set out in the Royal Charter, is to "to promote the general advancement of science, engineering and technology and to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas on these subjects amongst the members of the IET and otherwise".

7.2 As is well established within the IET, fundamental to promoting the general advancement of science, engineering and technology is engagement with children in order to develop the engineers and technologists of tomorrow. By capturing the minds of children through our STEM education programmes, we aim to inspire them into the exciting world of engineering and technology, and communicate the opportunities it may offer, both to them personally and the wider society. However, with many children not having the digital means to access our STEM initiatives, there is a demographic with whom we are unable to engage and this is a challenge to be tackled.

7.3 The IET's involvement in the DPA will:

7.3.1 Enhance and expand the IET's engagement with disadvantaged schools, students and communities, provide the opportunity to promote our STEM offering to them, and inspire them to study STEM subjects and consider a career in engineering.

7.3.2 Raise the profile of the IET and its work (both in STEM and generally) amongst the alliance members.

7.3.3 Directly contribute to the IET's strategic KPI for education by increasing the opportunity for young people to engage with the IET's online education materials and activities.

7.3.4 Further enhance the IET's public affairs and reputation amongst government and opinion formers, members and general public.

7.3.5 Directly contribute to the IET's 2030 strategy for education and digital futures to increase public trust in digital.

## 8. Role of the DPA

8.1 The role of the DPA will not be a legal entity but a group of organisations that, by the mechanism of an alliance Memorandum of Understanding, agree to work collaboratively to address digital poverty challenge by bringing together organisations who either have expertise in digital poverty or want to contribute to tackling the issue, but it is not about duplicating work already being done.

8.2 The DPA will invite organisations to become signatories of the DPA, agreeing to a number of pledges to work together and use the DPA as a hub for co-ordination to provide expertise and thought leadership on the issue and liaise with government on policy and approach, whilst acting as an umbrella and infrastructure organisation – the

DPA plans to “own little and inspire much”. The DPA will be small and flexible to respond quickly to changing demands to provide expertise, advice and practical support rather than delivery which will be done by other DPA signatories.

## 9. Objectives

9.1 The short and long term objectives of the DPA are:

9.1.1 Establish the Digital Poverty Alliance with key stakeholders and signatories.

9.1.2 Conduct primary research to baseline the challenge and prioritise areas of focus.

9.1.3 Capture and share best practice to support young people accessing STEM resources through technology.

9.1.4 Identify barriers and blockers to scale and provide workable solutions to mitigate.

9.1.5 Over 5-10 years to effectively end the digital divide in the UK for everyone – with initial but not exclusive prioritisation on school aged children.

9.1.6 Create a sustainable environment so the digital divide doesn’t reoccur.

9.1.7 Create a new business model that enables ongoing investment and established realistic and realisable ROI.

## 10. Governance

10.1 The DPA will be governed and directed by an advisory board consisting of representatives from stakeholders, including the IET, the Learning Foundation (parent charity of DAFA) and Dixons Carphone, plus supported by the DPA signatories consisting of key organisations with expertise in this field. The below diagram shows the proposed governance structure of the DPA.

10.2 The DPA governance structure:

10.3 The IET's responsibilities and involvement in the DPA will be to:

10.3.1 To provide partner management with a direct point of contact through the IET Education department. This will be the Head of Education and the Education Manager for partnerships.

10.3.2 Actively participate in DPA advisory board meetings attending quarterly meetings.

10.3.3 Respond in a timely manner to DPA requests such as press release approval or call to actions.

10.3.4 Consider funding requests that support key deliverables agreed by the DPA advisory board.

10.3.5 Provide IET support for DPA communications, such as press releases, distribution channels and social media activity.

10.3.6 Use the IET's network for raising awareness of the DPA work and where possible encourage other organisations to become a DPA signatory.

## 11. DPA Funding

11.1 The DPA will require two types of funding. There will need to be some provision for core activities and people costs as well as the provision of core supporting infrastructure. These costs will need to be largely met through donations from the DPA signatories, including the recent investment from Dixons Carphone. This funding will cover activities such as stakeholder engagement, governance and reporting, fundraising and hosting of events such as roundtables and planning sessions.

11.2 The second form of funding will cover delivery activities such as research, pilots, marketing campaigns, case studies and programme delivery agreed by the advisory board. Much of this will be match funding that is raised by supporters to deliver specific outcomes. An example would be the Dixons Carphone contribution which will be used to deliver work such as specific teacher focused activity. This funding will be discussed at board level and the prioritisation, delivery and outcomes will be agreed and signed off.

11.3 All donations made to the DPA will be transacted through the Learning Foundation, with spending agreed and authorised by the DPA advisory board.

11.4 At this stage, it is not envisaged that the IET will be required to make a cash injection to the DPA, however seed funding or ongoing financial support may be discussed and agreed at DPA Board level.

## 12. Resources

12.1 The formation of the DPA will involve some IET resource such as legal for creating the alliance agreement in the first instance, then education for the point of contact and communications. The DPA will also involve other external bodies such as the Learning Foundation and Dixons Carphone. The DPA operations will be overseen and managed by the Learning Foundation, who will be responsible for the resource of 5-6 full and part time roles such as a Project Manager, Programme Manager, Relationship Manager, Marketing and Project Assistant to manage the day-to-day administration and operations.

12.2 This resource will either be funded through contributions made to the DPA or by people secondments from other organisations. For example, Unilever has offered project management support to the DPA. The Project Managers will take guidance from the DPA advisory board and will be supported by the stakeholder organisations including the IET, Learning Foundation and Dixons Carphone.

## 13. Timescales

As the digital divide issue is so large and there are no quick wins, the DPA is anticipated to be a long-term 5-10 year project with regular reviews expected to take place every 2-3 years to assess the digital divide situation and scale. With digital poverty featuring heavily in the media at the moment due to the pandemic, it is critical we act swiftly to establish the DPA and launch while other organisations are keen to be involved. Although some companies will come and go over the 5-10 years as their priorities change, the IET and the Learning Foundation intend to be the stable foundation to last the course of the project with reviews every 2-3 years to ensure the DPA still aligns with our charitable objects.

## 14. Risk

14.1 The IET will have oversight but not responsibility of the DPA. The risk to the IET is significantly reduced by the formation of the DPA alongside other stakeholders. The governance and decision making of the DPA will be controlled by the collective DPA Board consisting of the stakeholders, including the IET, which provides the IET with a level is influence. The DPA alliance agreement, Terms of Reference and signatory Memoranda of Understanding will clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of the relevant parties involved.

14.2 The Learning Foundation is a registered member of the Charity Commission with no known issues for concern. The Learning Foundation has also passed all credit checks carried out by the finance department and are an IET approved supplier on of payment system.

## 15. Appendix

Please watch this short video (please click here) which describes the issue of digital exclusion from the perspective of a school child. This 3-minute video was originally filmed for the Learning Foundation over 8 years ago and you'll note that the core details remain largely unchanged.