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# Digital Inclusion Pilots at the Open University


Sirin Tangpornpaiboon & Angela Garrod (Access, Participation, and Success team)  
Contact: [pvc-digital-inclusion@open.ac.uk](mailto:pvc-digital-inclusion@open.ac.uk)



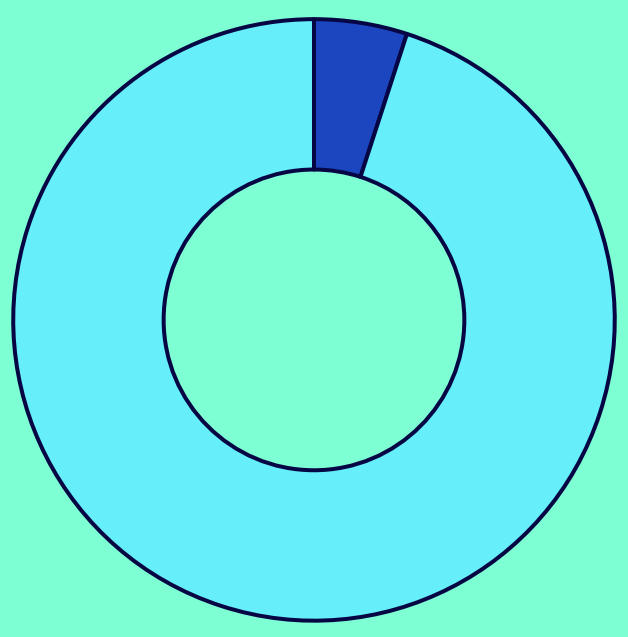
## WHAT IS DIGITAL INCLUSION?

**Tackling digital exclusion or digital poverty** which for students means lacking




 **~13-19 million** people aged 16+ in the UK are estimated to be in digital poverty.

**Source:** Digital Poverty Alliance, 2023


 **1 in 20** OU students are experiencing digital exclusion in some form and the current **cost of living crisis** is contributing to that.

**Source:** 2024 student survey


## THEORY OF CHANGE

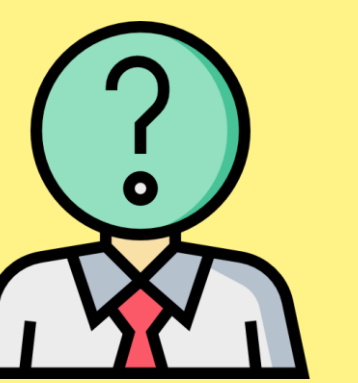
**Goal** To remove barriers to learning posed by digital exclusion 


Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
<b>IT Starter Kits:</b> Provide eligible students with laptops, bags, dongles, free data via the National Databank, and guidance*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li># devices procured &amp; distributed</li><li># students receiving support</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Students start their studies on time</li><li>Engaged in study &amp; with tutors</li><li>Increased confidence in digital &amp; study skills</li><li>Students feel valued by OU and want to continue studying</li><li>Personal benefits</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>OU study is open to prospective students without equipment or Wi-fi</li><li>Outcomes improve for students at risk of digital exclusion</li><li>Long term return on OU investment in retention and student success</li></ul>

\*IT starter kits are one of many OU initiatives to tackle digital exclusion. More details here: <https://bit.ly/3E63tdB> 

## IT STARTER KITS PILOT

 **Objective**  
To explore whether providing kits upfront is more effective than students applying for funds after enrolment

 **Who**  
Offered to 10 Access (pre-degree) students without other funding support (7 took up)

 **Focus of evaluation** – Type 2 Empirical Enquiry

- Do recipients **value** the kit? How has it benefitted them?
- Establish **process** and resources

5 semi-structured interviews were conducted

## PILOT FINDINGS

**VALUE**

The laptop is everything

I can't say enough what a difference it has made

Data is a big help


I am proud of myself

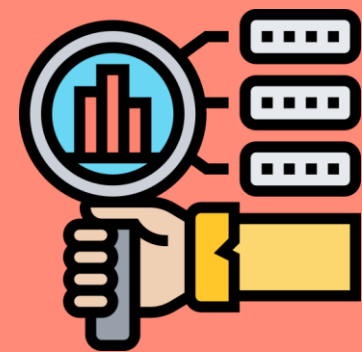
**PROCESS**


Process established as BAU

It was easy

## WHAT'S NEXT?

 **Scale up** to 50 students on an Access module in summer 2025

 **Evaluate** longer term impact on retention and student success

 **Potentially** comparing with similar students not offered kits (Type 2 or 3 – in discussion)

**Demonstrate return on investment** for the university, but also balancing with **social mission** to reduce inequity