Blueprint for a 100% Digitally Included UK

For a post-COVID-19 economy

September 2020

Good Things
Foundation

#FixtheDigitalDivide

The UK is leading the world as a digital nation. Let's continue to lead. A Great Digital Catch Up - an investment of **£130m** during this Parliament, alongside support from businesses - will level up opportunity, fire up the economy, and help **4.5 million** more people to cross the digital divide.

Our Prime Minister has pledged a world class gigabit-capable broadband for every home and business across the UK by 2025. Yet **9 million** people who struggle to use the internet independently are being left out.[1] COVID-19 changed the dial on digital. At least **82%** of jobs require digital skills.[2] In England, the digital divide is also a north/south divide; **49%** of people in the South East using the internet fully compared to 18% in the North East, and **31%** in the North West.[3]

Together, we can fix the digital divide for our economy: There's almost **£15** of growth for every **£1** invested in digital skills and inclusion.[4] We can fire up the economy if we boost the skills of the **13.6 million** workers who have digital skills for life but not yet for work.[5] Manual workers with high digital skills earn around **£2,160** more a year than those in the same jobs with low digital skills.[6] **65%** of adults think that keeping their digital skills up to date is important for their future.[7]

Together, we can fix the digital divide for our society: Our communities have harnessed digital to help each other and support their families through the pandemic. Yet some of our most vulnerable citizens are locked out. **23%** of children in the poorest families don't have home access to broadband and a laptop, desktop or tablet.[8] The least digitally engaged spend an average of **£348** more per year on utility bills.[9]

Investing in superfast broadband without investing in digital inclusion will deepen the divide.

£130m is equivalent to **2%** of superfast broadband infrastructure investment.

75% of people think that every community in the UK needs a place where people can get help with their internet skills[10]

Three steps to fix the digital divide

Good Things Foundation

1.

Our Great Digital Catch Up: £130m over 4 years, alongside support from businesses, so that every village, town and city has a trusted place to get support with digital inclusion. Let's help **4.5 million** more people across the digital divide, fire up the post-COVID economy and level up opportunity.

75% of adults agreed that every community in the UK needs a place where people can visit to get help with Internet skills, such as how to do online banking, how to access online education.[11]

2.

A Data Poverty Lab: Recognise internet access as an essential utility, like electricity. Commission people with lived experience, design thinkers, digital inclusion and industry innovators to co-design solutions - exploring ideas from social prescribing to data donating. Let's pilot a **Gigabit-Giveabit** scheme to channel public generosity through donating unused data.

61% said internet access should be recognised as an essential utility, like electricity; and **47%** of adults said they would donate unused data to low income families, according to data from a new public poll.[12]

3.

A Digital Strategy for everyone so we continue to lead the world, leaving nobody behind. Let's make digital inclusion a social priority. Embed digital inclusion into financial, health and government public services. Improve metrics and establish a better baseline - informed by the people - of what we need to live in a digital society.

80% felt digital technology was a vital support to them in lockdown; and **78%** said the pandemic had escalated the importance of digital skills.[13]

Digital inclusion is about levelling up. It means having access to the internet, and having the skills and confidence to use the internet safely. Investing in digital skills will help us to face the future.

Our **Great Digital Catch Up** would help **4.5 million** more people to cross the digital divide by 2024 through providing basic digital skills and confidence, through trusted local organisations, with world-class online learning products.

Around **9 million** people struggle to use the internet independently.[14] Being unemployed, retired, disabled, living on a low income, no or few qualifications: these are the biggest predictors of being on the wrong side of the digital divide.[15] People in the poorest households are at least four times more likely to be digitally excluded: **13%** of working-age adults in DE households compared to **3%** in ABC1/C2 households; **27%** of all adults in DE households compared to **4%** in AB households.[16]

Every community needs a trusted place to get support with digital inclusion - to help people across the digital divide. Especially those who need this most.

4.5 million more people cross the digital divide by 2024

Digital skills deliver a fairer economy

COVID-19 changed the dial on digital: how we trade, sell and consume. Basic digital skills are as important as English and maths. Digital skills are now essential for work and business.

- At least **82%** of jobs need digital skills.[17]
- **13.6 million** workers have digital skills for life, but not for work.[18]
- **4 in 10** people claiming benefits lack all the essential digital life skills.[19]

Around **7.6m** workers face redundancy or reduced hours and pay due to COVID-19; almost half earn less than £10 per hour.[20] Women and workers in BAME communities are over-represented in many sectors hit hardest by the pandemic.[21] The Social Metrics Commission has identified the youngest and oldest workers as among those most impacted by the economic fall-out of COVID-19;[22] those who also have low qualifications are far more likely to be 'limited internet users' (e.g. use social media but can't use digital for work).[23] Many on furlough, newly redundant or at risk will be among the **13.6 million** workers with digital life skills, but not digital work skills.

In England, there is a north/south divide. Looking at the workforce: **57%** in London, East England and the South East have the essential digital work skills, compared to only **42%** in the North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber; and **44%** in the East Midlands and West Midlands.[24]

This is a huge opportunity to fire up the economy, and move people more quickly into work or business.

- Workers in manual jobs with high digital engagement earn on average **£180 (8%)** more a month **(£2,160 pa)** than those in the same jobs but with low digital engagement.[25]
- **62%** of furloughed workers identified digital skills as important for their future career.[26]
- **73%** of sole traders and small business owners agreed that online/IT skills are essential for their business to thrive. Almost a third **(32%)** said they would not know where to get help.[27]

The Government's Skills Toolkit, launched in lockdown to boost digital skills and numeracy, is excellent and merits sustained promotion.[28] In England, the Essential Digital Skills entitlement is extremely important; using an existing Department for Education budget, free courses will be offered to adults with no or low digital skills (skills like using email and adding attachments).[29]

The real economic boost will only happen if we unlock the door to online learning. Yet the people who most need digital skills support often face barriers to formal further education - a double disadvantage. Our solution: community-based, informal learning - blended with world-class free online resources, like Learn My Way.[30] Community providers are a vital bridge across the divide.

- **10%** of UK total economic output is linked to the effects of online learning for work.[31]
- Research by Cebr shows we can grow the economy by almost **£15** for every **£1** invested in digital skills.[32]

Digital skills deliver a stronger society

Through lockdown, communities have responded to COVID-19 with innovation, dedication and a can-do spirit.[33] From faith groups to food banks, exercise to English language classes, mutual aid to mental health - we have used digital skills to help each other through. Kindness, community action and technology have come together to provide emergency support through challenging times. Digital has strengthened community resilience.

Until now, one of the biggest barriers to digital inclusion has been lack of interest and motivation. COVID-19 has created a window for change.

Older people, like Mable from Stockport who had never used the internet before, have gone online to stay safe, informed and connected with family and friends while shielding. For Mable, getting online means she feels less lonely, and is less reliant on her GP.

> *I do get a little bit down sometimes because of my illness. But just being able to talk to my family has helped a great deal.*[34]

For Kathalingham in West London, all internet access was lost when his community centre had to shut its doors.

> *I regularly used the computer when I came to class, but now the centre is closed I have nowhere to go. I am classed as an NHS vulnerable category A. I felt very scared and confused and needed help to get food and prescriptions. I am now feeling confident that I can connect with my community. I used the NHS website to request a food parcel.*[35]

When asked in May 2020, many people with a close relative over seventy felt their family member would say going online is too complicated; four in ten said their family members would be more open to improving their digital skills due to recent events, but don't know where to start.[36]

How can we reach those who remain digitally excluded – whether they need digital skills to get a job, access support, order groceries, or simply to stay in touch and feel less lonely? The answer is in our communities.

The community sector has a vital role in bridging the digital divide. Especially where people think digital is not for them, or worry about using the internet for making payments, applying for jobs, or finding health information they can trust. COVID-19 has shown how it is possible – although difficult – to give remote support to people with no, low or limited digital skills or internet access.

76%
of people supported said their job prospects improved as a result of building their digital skills.

- **75%** of people think that every community needs a place where people can go to get help with their internet skills.[37]
- **We have this in place:** Good Things Foundation delivers digital inclusion in partnership with thousands of community organisations across the country.

In our work with community partners, we've seen that such support is best provided by trusted faces in local places.[38] A welcoming, friendly environment, rooted in the community, connected as part of a local ecosystem of support. This might be a family or community centre, carers' café or job club, library, food bank or homeless hostel. Places where people can explore how the internet can help them, and how to use it safely. Where support comes from 'people like me' and 'in my language'. Where the goal is to build motivation, skills and confidence to take first and further steps online. Where the conversation starts with what matters to each individual.

Digital inclusion in communities is the heart of Good Things Foundation's work with our UK-wide network of community partners.

- **76%** of people supported by Good Things Foundation and our partners in 2019/20 said they have improved their jobs and prospects as a result of building their digital skills.[39]

- **71%** across older people and disabled people supported to use Learn My Way in 2019/20 felt more independent because of the internet skills they learned.[40]
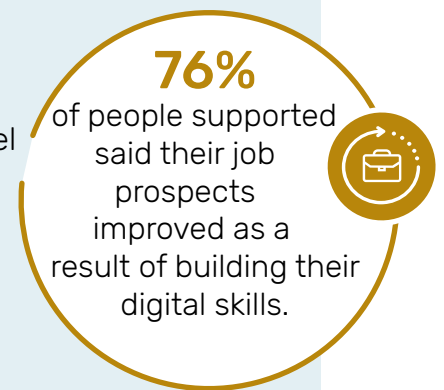
Now's the time to fire up the economy and level up opportunity.

That's why we're inviting the Government to work with us:

- Invest in the **Great Digital Catch Up**: **£130 million** over **4 years** - equivalent to **2%** of superfast broadband infrastructure investment - alongside support from businesses, will allow **4.5 million** more people to cross the digital divide, fire up the post-COVID economy, and level up opportunity. Every village, town and city needs a trusted place to get support with digital inclusion. This will reach those who are seeking work, newly redundant or at risk; it will reach older people, families, disabled people and others who face digital and social barriers. **75%** of adults agree that every community needs a place where people can visit to get help with Internet skills, such as how to do online banking, how to access online education.[41]

And we're also calling on:

- **Employers** across the UK to play their part by joining the FutureDotNow[42] industry-led coalition, pledging and taking action to boost their employees' essential digital skills.

- **Local Digital Skills Partnerships**[43] in England to drive take-up of the Essential Digital Skills entitlement, to unlock the economic benefits of online learning.

Good Things Foundation

"Digital exclusion effectively means exclusion from modern life. Fundamentally, if you can't get access to current public health information you can't follow government guidance. If you can't get online you can't access social security support, request a vulnerable persons food parcel scheme or support your children to home-school, or contact your children easily if you live apart from them or they are in care." (APLE Collective)[44]

COVID-19 has exposed the UK's digital divide, and exacerbated digital exclusion. Recent data releases on the digital divide before the coronavirus outbreak tell us:

* **11%** (**7 million**) did not have home internet access in 2019.[45]
* **23%** of 5-15 year olds in the poorest households (D&E) do not have access to both an educationally ideal device (laptop, desktop or tablet) and broadband.[46]
* At least **1 in 5** adults who are offline said cost was a barrier for them.[47]

When lockdown started, anyone who couldn't afford a home broadband or mobile contract, and relied on free internet access in schools, libraries, community centres, shops and food outlets, was suddenly locked out. COVID-19 made data poverty visible.[48] Good Things Foundation received hundreds of requests through community partners. Requests like this about a young family:

"The breadwinner is in and out of zero-hour, short-term employment ... There is depression and anxiety in the family from dealing with poverty ... They have no spare finances or internet access, and rely on community internet access, but this has been stopped due to COVID-19"[49]

Recent research into school responses to COVID-19 found **28%** of pupils had little to no IT access in the home, rising to **43%** in schools with the highest levels of deprivation.[50]

Since April 2020, Good Things Foundation has worked with community partners to deliver devices, data and digital skills support to vulnerable individuals and families without internet access, through DevicesDotNow.

* **29%** of people supported had never used the internet before Covid-19.[51]
* **80%** felt more confident with their digital skills as a result.[52]

7 million
people did not have home internet access in 2019

COVID-19 exposes absolute digital exclusion: people unable to afford a device or data, who have been socially disconnected, struggling to access economic assistance. It also reveals relative digital exclusion: people with some - but limited - internet access and low digital skills.

Let's work together to make sure that cost is not a barrier to crossing the digital divide.

Now's the time to level up so everyone can benefit from broadband.

That's why we want to work with the Government, industry and civil society to:

- Set up a **UK Data Poverty Lab**

  - Recognise **internet access as an essential utility.** For example, clearer rules to protect people from disconnection; digital exclusion as a form of consumer vulnerability. *61% of adults agree that Internet access by fixed line or mobile should be recognised as an essential utility, like electricity.*[53]

  - Commission people with lived experience, design thinkers, digital inclusion and industry innovators to **co-design solutions to data poverty**. For example: data donating and gifting, WiFi sharing, social prescribing, social tariffs, subsidised broadband, extending public internet WiFi in towns and cities, and more.

  - Pilot a **Gigabit-Giveabit** scheme to channel public generosity through donating their unused data - inspired by Optus and The Smith Family charity in Australia. *47% of adults said they would donate some or all of their unused data to low income families, if there were an easy and safe way to do so.*[54]

47%
of adults said they would donate some or all of their unused data to low income families

Digital inclusion matters for our family finances, health and wellbeing more than ever before.

- **80%** felt digital technology was a vital support to them in lockdown.[55]

- **78%** said the pandemic had escalated the importance of digital skills.[56]

Digital skills deliver better lives

Lockdown has changed the way we pay, shop, sell and manage our money. Already in 2019, card payments accounted for just over half of all payments in the UK for the first time, with **72%** using online banking and **50%** using mobile banking.[57] Following COVID-19, Nationwide reported that **27%** of people used mobile payments for the first time in the early months;[58] and Mastercard found **76%** planned to continue using Contactless payments after the pandemic ends.[59]

Access to the internet opens up a wealth of opportunities, including making and receiving payments, online banking, money saving deals, and money and debt advice. Being offline or having low digital skills now means you are financially as well as digitally excluded.[60] For those with high digital engagement, the benefits are clear: savings of around **£348** a year on utility bills alone[61] and the benefits are greatest in households with lower incomes.

- Among those earning less than **£20,000** per year, those with very low digital engagement spend **42%** more (**£720 annually**) on utility bills than those with high digital engagement.[62]

80%
of families felt digital technology was a vital support to them in lockdown

Health is another part of our lives where the pandemic has moved the goalposts. Digital is now one of the wider determinants of health: it affects our access to health care, as well as things like employment which shape our chances of a healthy life.[63]

Before COVID-19, **66%** had never used the internet to manage their health, rising to **79%** of those with low digital engagement.[64] In March 2020, this changed overnight. Online consultations doubled from around **900,000** to over **1.8 million** in March alone.[65] Online health services bring time and cost savings to patients and the public purse; alongside concerns about widening health inequalities.[66]

- **71%** of people with a degree compared to only **38%** of people without formal qualifications would download a COVID-19 contact tracing app.[67]

Millions of people have also gone online to access Government advice on COVID-19 and to apply for Government loans, Universal Credit, other benefits or NHS food parcels. Being able to access government digital services - and receive help to do this - is now essential; yet **4 in 10** benefit claimants do not have all the essential digital skills for life.[68]

Everyone should be able to benefit from the internet, personally or with support they can trust.

This is about citizen and consumer choice. It is also about facing the future. How do we ensure everyone can benefit from digital, so they can be happier, healthier and better off?

Now's the time to put digital inclusion into financial, health and all public services; bringing digital into social inclusion.

That's why we're calling on Government for:

- A **Digital Strategy** for everyone. Investing in broadband infrastructure and high-end ICT and AI skills is vital, but not at the expense of levelling up so everyone can have better lives, and every part of the country benefits from the digital dividend. Let's make digital inclusion a social priority. Government digital services should continue to lead the way: services designed with and for people with low or limited skills, and assisted digital support in communities.

We're also calling on organisations across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to continue to play their part:

- **A coalition led by financial services** to bring digital inclusion and financial inclusion together. Everyone should be able to access and use the online financial services and products they need. As well as access to cash for vulnerable consumers, we need to continue to invest in online and local support to build digital financial literacy.

- **Leadership from the NHS in England, Wales, Scotland, and Health and Social Care Northern Ireland** and the wider health sector to prevent digital exclusion from widening health inequalities, improve digital health literacy, and design inclusive digital health services. Digital health hubs in communities are a tested and scalable solution.

- **Commitment to address digital inclusion** from government bodies, local authorities, housing associations, and third sector providers - wherever digital channels are used - starting with designing digital services to be accessible for people with low or limited digital skills or access, and providing assisted digital support.

- **Improved metrics** to track progress and monitor the links between digital inclusion and key areas of national social and economic wellbeing - such as health, education, poverty, and financial inclusion. We need a clear baseline - a Minimum Digital Living Standard informed by the public - of what we need to live in a digital society.
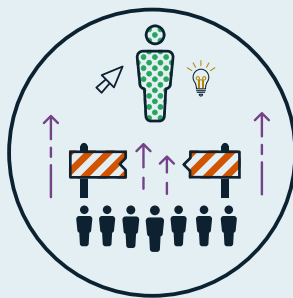
Let's level up and fix the digital divide.

Let's lead the world in digital inclusion.

Together.

Endnotes

1. [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#)
2. [Dept. for Culture, Media and Sport (2019), No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills](#)
3. [Ofcom Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2020](#) / Analysis by Prof. S. Yates for Good Things Foundation
4. [Cebr (2018) The Economic Impact of Digital Inclusion in the UK](#)
5. [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#)
6. [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#)
7. Research by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Good Things Foundation. A nationally representative quota sample of 2,219 UK adults aged 16-75 using its online I:Omnibus between 28.08.20-31.08.20
8. [Ofcom Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report 2019](#) (published February 2020) / Analysis by Prof. S. Yates for Good Things Foundation
9. [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#)
10. Research by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Good Things Foundation. A nationally representative quota sample of 2,219 UK adults aged 16-75 using its online I:Omnibus between 28.08.20-31.08.20
11. Research by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Good Things Foundation. A nationally representative quota sample of 2,219 UK adults aged 16-75 using its online I:Omnibus between 28.08.20-31.08.20
12. Research by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Good Things Foundation. A nationally representative quota sample of 2,219 UK adults aged 16-75 using its online I:Omnibus between 28.08.20-31.08.20
13. [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#) (Attitudes towards digital engagement during COVID-19)
14. [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#)
15. [Ofcom Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2020](#)
16. [Ofcom Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2020](#)
17. [Dept. for Culture, Media and Sport (2019), No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills](#)
18. [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#)
19. [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#)
20. [McKinsey & Company (2020), COVID-19 in the United Kingdom: Assessing jobs at risk and the impact on people and places](#)
21. [Money and Pensions Service (2020), Impacts of Covid-19 on Financial Wellbeing](#)
22. [Social Metrics Commission (2020), Poverty and Covid-19](#)
23. [Ofcom Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2020](#) / Analysis by Prof. S. Yates for Good Things Foundation
24. [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#)
25. [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#)
26. [Make it Click (June 2020) Research on furloughed workers, drawn from a sample of 2,003 UK adult workers. Conducted by Censuswide between 01.06.2020 – 03.06.2020](#)
27. [Make it Click (August 2020) Research on 503 UK small business owners and sole traders. Conducted by Censuswide between 01.06.2020-03.06.2020](#)
28. [HM Government, The Skills Toolkit](#)
29. [Department for Education (2019), Plans launched to boost digital skills for adults](#)
30. [www.learnmyway.com](#)
31. [Demos (2020), The Learning Curve](#)
32. [Cebr (2018) The economic impact of Digital Inclusion in the UK](#)
33. [Good Things Foundation (June 2020), COVID-19 Response Report](#)
34. [Good Things Foundation (May 2020), DevicesDotNow: Mable](#)
35. [Good Things Foundation (May 2020), New device gives a welcome health boost](#)
36. [BT Skills for Tomorrow (2020), Fears for over 70s struggling with digital isolation during lockdown](#)
37. Research by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Good Things Foundation. A nationally representative quota sample of 2,219 UK adults aged 16-75 using its online I:Omnibus between 28.08.20-31.08.20
38. [Good Things Foundation (June 2020), COVID-19 Response Report](#)
39. Good Things Foundation (2019/20) Learner Progression Survey findings (n=325)
40. Good Things Foundation (2019/20) Learner Progression Survey findings (n=325)

41. Research by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Good Things Foundation. A nationally representative quota sample of 2,219 UK adults aged 16-75 using its online I:Omnibus between 28.08.20-31.08.20
42. www.FutureDotNow.uk
43. HM Government, Digital Skills Partnership
44. APLE Collective (2020), Coronavirus response must include digital access to connect us all. JRF
45. Ofcom Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2020 and Technology Tracker
46. Ofcom Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2020 / Analysis by Prof. S. Yates for Good Things Foundation
47. Ofcom Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2020; Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020
48. APLE Collective (2020), Coronavirus response must include digital access to connect us all. JRF; Good Things Foundation (June 2020), COVID-19 Response Report
49. Good Things Foundation (June 2020), COVID-19 Response Report
50. Sharp, C et al (2020), The Challenges facing Schools and Pupils in September 2020. National Foundation for Educational Research
51. Good Things Foundation (August 2020), DevicesDotNow Impact Report #3
52. Good Things Foundation (August 2020), DevicesDotNow Impact Report #3
53. Research by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Good Things Foundation. A nationally representative quota sample of 2,219 UK adults aged 16-75 using its online I:Omnibus between 28.08.20-31.08.20
54. Research by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Good Things Foundation. A nationally representative quota sample of 2,219 UK adults aged 16-75 using its online I:Omnibus between 28.08.20-31.08.20
55. Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020 (Attitudes towards digital engagement during COVID-19)
56. Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020 (Attitudes towards digital engagement during COVID-19)
57. UK Finance (2020) Summary of UK Payments Market Report
58. Nationwide (2020) Average Brit goes 44 days without using cash. Research by Censuswide between 22.05.20-26.05.20
with a nationally representative poll of 2,042
59. Mastercard (2020), Contactless payments have become the 'new normal' across the UK Research with 1,000 respondents in the UK conducted between 10.04-20-12.04.20
60. Stone, E (2020), Money, Debt, Digital: 5 new ways to lose out
61. Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020
62. Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020
63. Good Things Foundation, Digital inclusion in Health and Care: Lessons learned from the NHS Widening Digital Participation Programme (2017-2020)
64. Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020
65. Bibby, J & Leavey, C (2020), Learning from lockdown. The Health Foundation
66. NHS England (2020), Implementing Phase 3 of the NHS Response to the COVID-19 pandemic
67. The Health Foundation (2020) COVID-19 Survey
68. Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020

About Good Things Foundation

Good Things Foundation is the UK's leading digital and social inclusion charity. We believe in a world where everyone benefits from digital; and no-one is left behind or locked out.

We help people to develop digital skills to use the internet safely and confidently, so they can be happier, healthier and better off.

We do this by working with an amazing, diverse network of community partners (online centres) across the UK, making available free online learning resources (Learn My Way, Make it Click), and partnering with corporates, charitable trusts, government departments and others. Together we have helped over three million people take their first and further steps online since 2010.

Find out more about us, our partners and our resources:

www.goodthingsfoundation.org
www.onlinecentresnetwork.org
www.learnmyway.org
www.makeitclick.org
www.digital-health-lab.org

CEO: Helen Milner, OBE
Chair: Liz Williams, MBE

Call: 0114 349 1666
Email: hello@goodthingsfoundation.org

Press: press@goodthingsfoundation.org / 07808 041 267

Good Things Foundation