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Digital Exclusion:

I share constituents concerns that digital exclusion is a reality for many people. Less than half of those aged 75 and over, use the internet regularly, and out of the four million people who have never used the internet in the UK, 3.7 million of those are over the age of 55. I therefore agree we need to take the necessary action to ensure that everyone is empowered to access the digital space.

The Government does not have a current strategy for digital inclusion, and I am concerned that its last strategy was published a decade ago. Technology is fast-evolving and in less than half of that time, we have been through a pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis, and countless technological developments that all completely reshaped our relationship with the internet.

The range of challenges demands a range of solutions that are centred around skills, affordability and accessibility. For example, having community banking hubs where high street banking is no longer available and ensuring access to public libraries, who do essential work by providing computers and a helping hand to their communities. However, community services such as public libraries cannot function without funding and support to meet demand.

It is vital that digital exclusion is given as much importance as we gave to literacy in schools over a century ago. I believe education should be available to everyone through their lives. In place of the current system, which I am concerned takes a piecemeal approach to education and skills, I believe we should create a new skills system, providing pathways for people at every stage of their lives to learn, retrain or refresh their skills.

Full participation in modern life often requires a fast internet connection, a reliable device and an evolving skillset. I am concerned that if we do not take action on this issue, digitally excluded people may not enjoy the same opportunities as those who have the skills, confidence and income to regularly get online.

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