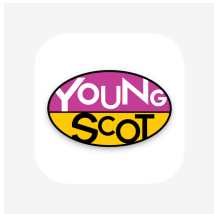# SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

Policy 5:

Every young person in Scotland should have access to fast and reliable internet and devices to access the digital world, regardless of their geographical location or financial situation.

Endorsed by:

What's this all about?

Young people said that they need high-quality, fast, and reliable internet to learn, socialise, share, and engage with their lives. Access to the internet and devices improves many young people's lives, especially those from rural areas and areas of deprivation. Young people have also told us about the challenges of digital exclusion and digital poverty. Young people also recognise that there are many negative effects of social media and emerging technology that need to be explored with young people.

"It creates a harder life in school as many young children may feel as though they can't do tasks outside of school like research."
– Young woman aged 14-17

"Lack of Internet access negatively impacts young people's education, which is unfair to those with low parental income"
– Young woman aged 18-21, Scottish Borders

What are young people in Scotland calling for?

- **Decision makers should meaningfully involve young people in assessing the impact of digital exclusion and poverty on young people's education and improve the infrastructure to provide fast, reliable internet across Scotland.**
"Why should we exclude people from having a chance to improve themselves with all the useful, free information that the internet gives? For example, Khan Academy, Open learn, etc. These free resources give people in poverty a chance to improve themselves, so that they can better take care of and help others, and open more opportunities for themselves. For example, someone really struggles with math, so they do free math courses on Open Learn, so then they are better able to help their young person or child with their homework, or someone wants to help improve their mental health or wants to help get support for someone else because they see they are struggling. Or they take a Khan Academy course on writing so that they can go from cleaner to a secretary."
– Young woman aged 18-21, Orkney

- **Young people call on decision makers to include them in conversations about safe social media use, and to support them to participate meaningfully in the digital world and with new emerging technologies.**
"Regardless of your view of whether the digital world is positive or not,the reality is large parts of life, even day-to-day activities are only accessible online. Maybe that needs to change but right now we can't withhold vital components of our modern world for moral reasons. That increases suffering and targets the wrong people. Young people need the internet."
– Young woman aged 18-21, Orkney

- **The Scottish Government must consider the impact on young people before making any decision on restricting their use of social media or digital devices.**
- **Young people call for increased media and critical literacy skills to be embedded throughout the curriculum.**
"Education on the dangers of the online world and how to use digital spaces should also be provided to young folk. The web is one of the most unregulated spaces ever still so young people should be able to go on there feeling confident in making safe and informed choices."
– Young woman aged 22-26, Aberdeenshire

Evidence and Support

- According to Audit Scotland, as of August 2024, 15% of Scotland's adult population lack foundation level digital skills, 9% of Scottish households don't have access to the internet, and 90% of people in Scotland use the internet for work or personal use.

- In [Digital Poverty and Exclusion in Scotland - Digital Lives of Care Experienced Children](#) published by the [Scottish Children's Reporter Administration](#) in 2023, children from poorer backgrounds and those in care struggle to get online to learn - they lack adequate access to devices, connections and digital skills training. Those who live in residential homes or foster care can experience access barriers due to a risk-focused narrative. Those who are elderly or unemployed often lack the skills, desire and confidence to navigate the digital world in a meaningful way. Many rural populations do not have sufficient or reliable connection, either via broadband or 4G/5G networks. It is expensive to install optical fibre in rural areas and hilly terrain and poor weather can impact connection consistency and speed. As of 2022, this rural vs urban divide is wider in Scotland; 83% of rural premises in Scotland receive superfast broadband, compared to 96% in the UK overall.

What has SYP done?

The [SYP Policy Log](#) includes policies on access to the internet for young people; access to reliable and affordable broadband for young people; restrictions on social media data collection.