The Hidden Crisis Behind Digital Transformation

Through direct, daily engagement with some of the most marginalised people in the UK, Blossom Group has witnessed a profound failure in how digital systems are being implemented across public services.

What was intended to modernise services has instead created a hidden crisis: one of denial, discrimination, and the systematic degradation of rights. When public services move online without safeguards, inclusive design, or real-world support, vast numbers of people are functionally locked out of essential services.

Cannot Apply for Benefits

Digital-only forms exclude those without devices or skills

Cannot Access Healthcare

GP registration and appointments require online systems

Cannot Request Support

Social care and emergency services moved to digital portals

Cannot Access Education

Cant access courses

This is not their failure. It is the system's failure. This is digital discrimination. This is digital inequity. And it must be addressed.

About Blossom Group: Working at the Heart of Communities

Blossom Group is a grassroots organisation based in local communities across the UK. We work across faith, cultural, and community spaces to support vulnerable and disadvantaged people who fall through the cracks of mainstream systems. Our work spans benefits advice, social care navigation, health advocacy, digital inclusion, housing support, and crisis response.

Where We Work

- Mosques, churches, temples, and gurdwaras
- Community centres and foodbanks
- Local charities and ESOL hubs
- Faith-based community spaces

Who We Support

- 67% women
- Over 50% disabled people
- 51% ESOL learners
- High proportions of migrants, carers, and people living in poverty

We support people others label "hard to reach." The truth is they are deliberately excluded by design flaws in the system.

The Rapid Digital Shift: A Transformation Without Consultation

Across the last decade, public services have rapidly transitioned to a "digital first" or even "digital only" model. These changes were made with little to no consultation with affected communities, based on dangerous assumptions that simply do not reflect reality.

Benefits

Universal Credit, PIP, Housing Benefit – all require complex online portals

Healthcare

GP registration, appointment booking, prescription services moved online

Housing

Repairs, applications, rent payments now digital-only in many areas

Education

School applications, EHCPs, free school meals require digital access

Social Care

Referrals, assessments, Direct Payments managed through online systems

> Assumptions were made: that everyone has a smart device, Wi-Fi or mobile data, understands complex English, and can complete forms without assistance. Many do not even know what a login is, let alone how to submit supporting evidence via PDF.

Real-World Consequences: When Digital Exclusion Becomes Life-Threatening

Health Impacts

- Patients unable to register with GP practices
- Missed screening appointments due to lack of access to NHS apps
- Elderly people with chronic conditions unable to reorder prescriptions
- People with mental health conditions struggling to access talking therapies
- Carers unable to coordinate care or request respite support

Housing Impacts

- Tenants unable to report dangerous disrepair: mould, gas leaks, infestations
- Homeless people excluded from applying for accommodation
- Families in temporary housing unable to contact housing officers
- Evictions escalated due to missed messages sent via online portals only
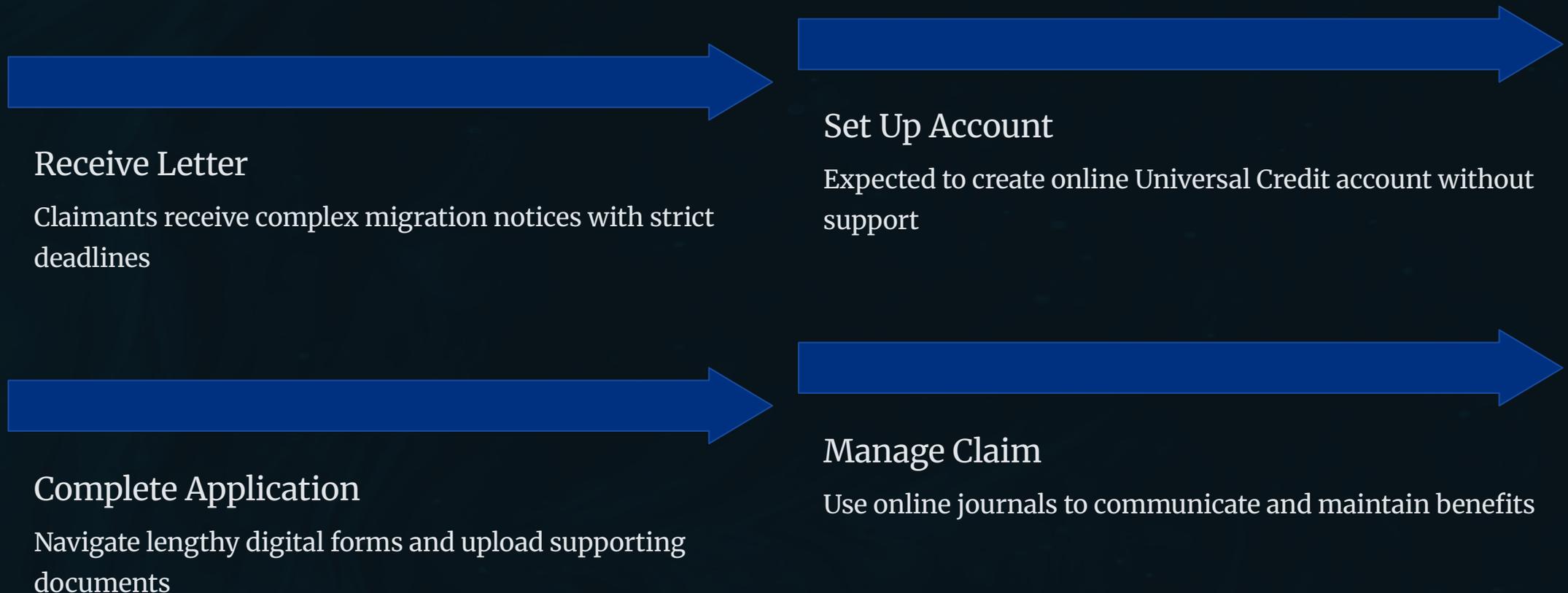
Social Care Impacts

- No clear way to refer people for assessments without digital forms
- Social workers unable to follow up with digitally unreachable clients
- Disabled people losing care packages due to missed online re-assessments
- Safeguarding concerns going unreported due to inaccessible systems

Welfare Impacts

- Missed deadlines on Universal Credit journals
- Benefit sanctions for failing to attend online appointments
- Loss of income due to inability to manage complex online portals
- DLA to PIP and ESA to UC transitions causing benefit losses, debt, and rent arrears

Managed Migration: Re-Engineering Digital Poverty

Thousands of people have recently been moved from legacy benefits like DLA and ESA onto Universal Credit and PIP. This process, known as "managed migration," has had catastrophic consequences for digitally excluded groups.

Receive Letter

Claimants receive complex migration notices with strict deadlines

Set Up Account

Expected to create online Universal Credit account without support

Complete Application

Navigate lengthy digital forms and upload supporting documents

Manage Claim

Use online journals to communicate and maintain benefits

There is no dedicated support. People fall into arrears, are sanctioned, or drop out of the system altogether. This so-called migration has re-engineered digital poverty and worsened the already severe digital divide.

What We've Witnessed

- Clients lose all income for weeks due to digital errors
- Vulnerable people left in crisis with no help and no recourse
- Households falling into rent arrears and food insecurity due to failed digital access

The Digital Divide in Diverse and ESOL Communities

The digital divide is even more damaging in communities facing multiple inequalities. Barriers include platforms only available in English, no translation or culturally appropriate guidance, low literacy and unfamiliarity with official terminology, gender norms restricting women's access to devices, and distrust of digital surveillance and state systems.

> "I've waited two years for my son to help with my benefits form."

> "I was told to upload a document. I don't even know what that means."

> "They talk to me like I should know. But no one ever taught me."

This is not a lack of motivation. It is a systemic lack of access, equity, and care.

Immediate Demands: Five Actions to Address the Crisis

Digital exclusion has been engineered through policy. The digital divide is not accidental. It has been allowed, expanded, and worsened by design. We demand urgent action to reverse this systemic failure.

01

Reinstate Paper and Telephone Support

All councils, health providers, and DWP departments must immediately reinstate paper forms and telephone support for everyone aged 50+, anyone without digital access or literacy, and all who request it.

02

Provide Ring-Fenced Funding

Government must provide dedicated funding for community-based digital support workers, assisted form-filling services in every local authority, and translation and ESOL-accessible platforms.

03

Redesign Digital Services for Inclusion

Digital services must be redesigned to be truly inclusive, not simply efficient for those already equipped. This means co-design with excluded communities, not pilot projects that end.

04

Suspend Digital-Only Delivery

Digital-only service delivery must be suspended until parity of access is proven, audited, and guaranteed through independent assessment.

05

Establish Long-Term Support Infrastructure

Replace temporary pilot schemes with permanent, embedded support systems in every community. Digital inclusion is not a short-term issue requiring short-term solutions.

A Crisis, a Choice, and a Call to Action

We are living through a national crisis of digital exclusion. But it is not an invisible crisis. It is a visible one – just not seen by those in power.

This is not about falling behind. It is about being pushed out.

The cost of inaction is paid in worsening health, deeper poverty, higher service demand, and declining trust in the public sector. Blossom Group calls for urgent and serious attention to this issue.

> Digital exclusion is not a technical issue. **It is a matter of justice.**

We do not ask for charity. We demand equality. We are ready to help fix this. But first, the government must admit it is broken.

Contact Blossom Group

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