

FutureDotNow policy briefing: DSIT's review of the Essential Digital Skills for Work

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) has taken stewardship of the **Essential Digital Skills Framework** and the annual survey to measure the nation's levels of core digital capability. The department has committed to updating the framework so it reflects the reality of today's digital world including AI, and engaging the public, industry and experts in this work which includes roundtables taking place in June/July.

This document sets out FutureDotNow's perspective and recommendations on the Essential Digital Skills Framework overall and the Essential Digital Skills for Work specifically. We hope it is useful to inform any contribution you may make to the consultation.

Three headline messages on the overall framework

1. **The core construct of the Essential Digital Skills Framework does not require review**
The Essential Digital Skills Framework is fit for purpose. It is specific and actionable and brings specificity to an often-ambiguous topic. Subject to the establishment of agile processes, it has inherent flexibility for update to reflect changing technology, such as AI and emerging tech.
2. **The Essential Digital Skills for Work are a business-critical topic, not digital inclusion**
The framework spans citizen level needs and those needed by the labour force. These are very different audiences and require input from different stakeholders and review processes. The citizen part of the framework (foundation skills and skills for life) is a core part of UK digital inclusion activity. The Essential Digital Skills for Work provide the national baseline for digital capability for all workers across the UK. This is a business issue, requiring strong business voices in any review processes and for those review processes to have a level of agility commensurate to the pace of technological change.
3. **Reporting metrics need urgent attention to stop misrepresenting digital competence**
The definition of 'having the essential digital skills' in reporting must change to reflect true levels of capability against all essential digital tasks in the framework. Current reporting metrics severely misrepresent the actual state of the nation. A person is currently deemed to 'have the essential digital skills' if able to do one task in each skill area rather than their ability to do all specified tasks.

Routinely used as the headline figure, this 'one task' view masks the true level of digital competence in UK citizens and workers:

- 92% of UK adults have Essential Digital Skills for Life (able to do one task in each skill area); only 53% can complete all 26 Life tasks.
- 82% of UK labour force have the Essential Digital Skills for Work (able to do one task in each skill area); less than half of workers (45%) can do all digital tasks deemed essential for work.

Four recommendations for the review of the work skills

The following are FutureDotNow's headline recommendations from the perspective of the Essential Digital Skills for Work. They draw on the work of our Future-fit framework workstream team and wider engagement with our community.

1. The Essential Digital Skills for Work must be urgently updated to embrace AI skills.

This is the most important outcome required from DSIT's current review. FutureDotNow was commissioned by DSIT to recommend updates to reflect AI enabled workplaces. These recommendations have been published by FutureDotNow as [the AI-embedded framework](#) and are already being used by businesses and in some policy areas. The recommendations need to be formally adopted. The underlying framework construct is effective and fit for purpose.

2. Processes need to be established to keep the Essential Digital Skills for Work updated in line with the pace of tech change. These need an appropriate level of agility and ensure industry and other organisations representing workers have a clear voice.

3. Raise the profile of the Essential Digital Skills for Work framework

The framework is a national asset. It's simplicity, comprising 5 skill areas and 25 tasks for work (when including AI), allows individuals, employers and educators to talk confidently about the skills needed without the risk of jargon or technical terms alienating segments of the workforce or complicating training delivery. It has been repeatedly validated by employers and government and emulated internationally, yet in the UK it has suffered from a lack of promotion both to policy makers and business.

Under their stewardship, DSIT can change this and fully establish the AI-embedded Essential Digital Skills Framework as the minimum digital baseline for workers. This includes aligning policy makers around it and encouraging even greater adoption among employers. Digital skills can be ambiguous but coalescing around the Essential Digital Skills for Work could deliver a critical shift in workforce capability at a time when AI is creating widespread disruption and make best use of an already fit-for-purpose national asset.

4. Develop a national measure on workforce basic AI capability using the AI-embedded Essential Digital Skills Framework

There is currently no national measure on workforce basic AI capability. DSIT can close this gap by reporting how many working-age adults can do all tasks in the AI-embedded Essential Digital Skills Framework. This would provide government and employers with a critical reality check on the breadth and depth of basic AI skills in the workforce and provide a baseline from which to measure and drive impact. AI is not a specialist or technical skill but an extension of essential digital capability, and AI adoption depends on the UK having a digitally confident labour force. A clear baseline measure and the ability to track progress is critical to the nation's productivity goals.

ABOUT FUTUREDOTNOW

FutureDotNow is a UK charity leading a coordinated, evidence-based mission to close the workforce essential digital skills gap, bringing together businesses, government and industry to drive systemic change and build a digitally confident workforce. Find out more at www.futuredotnow.uk.

Essential Digital Skills Framework - the 20 tasks for work

Set out in the Essential Digital Skills Framework, there are 20 digital tasks that government and industry agree are essential for work. These are broken down across five skill areas:



Communicating	Handling information and content	Transacting	Problem solving	Being safe and legal online
1. You can communicate in the workplace digitally using messaging applications (e.g. Email, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Slack, internal Intranet, WhatsApp) 2. You can use workplace digital tools to create, share and collaborate with colleagues (e.g. Microsoft Teams, OneDrive, G-Suite, Office 365, WeTransfer, DropBox, WebEx, Slack) 3. You can set up and manage an account on a professional online network/ community/ job site (e.g. LinkedIn, Total Jobs, Indeed)	4. You can follow your organisation's IT policies when sharing information internally and externally (e.g. classifying emails/documents, encrypting sensitive information, sharing appropriate information on social media) 5. You can securely access, synchronise and share information at work across different devices (e.g. manage email, calendar or appointment system via different devices)	6. You can complete digital records on behalf of, or within your organisation (e.g. absence management, holidays, timesheets, expenses, tax returns) 7. You can access salary and tax information digitally (e.g. password protected payslips, P60, P45)	8. You can find information online that helps you solve work related problems (e.g. search engines, IT helpdesk, software providers, peer networks) 9. You can use appropriate software that is required of your day-to-day job (e.g. spreadsheets, online booking systems, HR management, workflow or sales management) 10. You can improve your skills and ability to do new things at work using online tutorials, learning platforms and how-to guides (e.g. LinkedIn Learning, YouTube, iDEA, Skillssoft, internal learning platforms) 11. You can improve your own and/or the organisation's productivity using digital tools (e.g. Trello, Microsoft Projects and Planner, Slack)	12. You can act with caution online and understand that there are risks and threats involved in carrying out activities online (e.g. use anti-virus software, classify and share information securely or avoid certain types of websites such as piracy websites) 13. You can set privacy and marketing settings for websites and your accounts (e.g. managing social media privacy settings, managing cookie settings, updating contact preferences) 14. You can follow data protection guidelines online (e.g. follow data storage and retention guidelines, not sharing or using other people's data or media such as movies or music without their consent) 15. You can respond to requests for authentication for online accounts (e.g. resetting forgotten passwords, two factor authentication, using a remote access key or authenticator app) 16. You can identify secure websites (e.g. by looking for the padlock and 'https' in the address bar) 17. You can recognise suspicious links and know that clicking on these links or downloading unfamiliar attachments is a risk (e.g. Spam/ phishing emails, texts, pop ups) 18. You can update your device software/ operating systems when necessary to prevent viruses and other risks (e.g. enabling automatic updates, or installing when prompted to do so) 19. You can identify secure Wi-Fi networks to connect to (e.g. Wi-Fi networks where a unique password is required, trusted source or padlock next to Wi-Fi network) 20. You can be careful with what you share online as you know that online activity produces a permanent record that can be accessed by others (e.g. publicly shared photos, forums, personal information or opinions)

Find out more about the
Essential Digital Skills Framework at
www.futuredotnow.uk/framework

The AI-embedded Essential Digital Skills Framework

The AI-embedded Essential Digital Skills Framework sets out the digital skills and tasks all workers need to be able to carry out in an AI-driven world of work.

The wider Essential Digital Skills Framework also includes Skills for Life and the Foundation Skills that enable an individual to access technology at the most basic level (e.g., turning on a device, using a mouse).

FutureDotNow, in partnership with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, conducted a review of the Work element of the Essential Digital Skills Framework and made specific recommendations to ensure it reflects how AI, automation, and emerging technologies are reshaping the world of work. These recommendations are reflected in the AI-embedded Essential Digital Skills Framework.

For more information about the Framework and our work to ensure it keeps pace with evolving technology, visit www.futuredotnow.uk/framework.

25 tasks for work

Handling information and content

1. **You can follow your organisation's IT policies when sharing information internally and externally** (e.g. classifying emails/documents, encrypting sensitive information, sharing appropriate information on social media, avoiding sharing sensitive data with unauthorised generative AI tools).
2. **You can securely access, synchronise and share information at work across different devices** (e.g. manage email, calendar or appointment system via different devices).

Communicating

3. **You can communicate in the workplace digitally using messaging applications** (e.g. Email, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Slack, internal Intranet, WhatsApp).
4. **You can use workplace digital tools to appropriately create, share and collaborate with colleagues** (e.g. Microsoft Teams, OneDrive, G-Suite including Gemini, Office 365 including Copilot, WeTransfer, DropBox, WebEx, Slack, ChatGPT).
5. **You can set up and manage an account on a professional online network/community/job site** (e.g. LinkedIn, Total Jobs, Indeed).

Transacting

6. **You can complete digital records on behalf of, or within my organisation** (e.g. absence management, holidays, timesheets, expenses, tax returns)
7. **You can access salary and tax information digitally** (e.g. password protected payslips, P60, P45)
8. **You can complete online financial transactions while understanding how AI systems support these processes, and can identify potential risks** such as AI-generated scams or deceptive interfaces designed to manipulate your purchasing decisions.

Problem solving

9. **You can find information online and use appropriate digital tools that help you solve work-related problems** (e.g. search engines, IT helpdesk, AI assistants, software providers, peer networks, authorised generative AI).
10. **You can improve your skills and ability to do new things at work using online tutorials, learning platforms, AI-assisted tools and how-to guides** (e.g. LinkedIn Learning, YouTube, AI learning assistants, internal learning platforms).

Problem solving (cont.)

11. **You can use appropriate software that is required of your day-to-day job** (e.g. spreadsheets, online booking systems, HR management, workflow or sales management, AI-powered analytics, automated scheduling, intelligent document processing).
12. **You can improve your own and/or the organisation's productivity using digital tools and appropriate AI solutions** (e.g. *project management tools, collaboration platforms, AI-assisted task automation, meeting transcription tools*).
13. **You can develop effective prompts for AI systems to solve specific workplace problems while understanding AI's role as a complementary resource rather than a replacement for human judgement.**

Staying safe, legal and responsible online

14. **You can act with caution online and understand that there are risks and threats involved in carrying out activities online, including when using AI tools** (e.g. use anti-virus software, classify and share information securely, follow data handling policies for AI systems, or avoid certain types of websites such as piracy websites, unauthorised AI services, deepfakes and AI powered scams).
15. **You can follow data protection guidelines online** (e.g. following data storage and retention guidelines, not sharing or using other people's data or media such as movies or music without their consent, understanding consent for AI training data, avoiding sharing copyrighted content with AI systems).
16. **You can recognise suspicious links and content, whether human or AI-generated, and know that clicking on these links or downloading unfamiliar attachments is a risk** (e.g. spam/phishing emails, AI-enhanced scams, deceptive texts, pop ups).
17. **You can be careful with what you share online as you know that online activity produces a permanent record that can be accessed by others, and may be used to train AI systems or influence algorithmic decisions about you** (e.g. publicly shared photos, forums, personal information or opinions, understanding how shared content may be used by AI systems).

Staying safe, legal and responsible online (cont.)

18. **You can respond to requests for authentication for online accounts (e.g. resetting your password when you've forgotten it, two factor authentication, using a remote access key or an authenticator app).**
19. **You can identify secure websites (e.g. by looking for the padlock and 'https' in the address bar).**
20. **You can identify secure Wi-Fi networks to connect to** (e.g. Wi-Fi networks where a unique password is required, trusted source or padlock next to Wi-Fi network).
21. **You can update your device software/operating systems when necessary to prevent viruses and other risks (e.g. enabling automatic updates, or installing when prompted to do so).**
22. **You can set privacy and marketing settings for websites and your accounts** (e.g. managing social media privacy settings, managing cookie settings, updating contact preferences, opting out of AI-powered personalisation where appropriate)
23. **You can understand the basic principles of AI, including how it works, its limitations, and when it is appropriate to use** (e.g. understanding AI training, data requirements, and evaluating when AI tools are suitable for specific tasks).
24. **You can recognise the ethical implications of AI use and its societal impact** (e.g. understanding AI biases, human oversight requirements, environmental impact and potential effects on privacy, fairness, and human rights).
25. **You can understand and manage AI risks in your job** (e.g. keeping up with new AI technology, understanding how it affects data privacy, and following AI guidelines for your industry).

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Sector heatmap

The Sector heatmap shows the digital skills position for each UK industry sector.

Each is experiencing the essential digital skills gap. In most sectors, fewer than half of workers have the full suite of digital essentials for work.

How to read the heatmap

The heatmap shows:

- Percentage of workers in each sector that can do all 20 Work tasks¹
- The comparative data point from 2024²
- Whether the trend is improving or worsening

The heatmap also indicates if a sector has mobilised action i.e. they have a sector leadership team in place. We ended 2025 with four sectors mobilised, with ambition to scale in 2026.

It also shows the number of Workforce Digital Skills Charter signatories for each sector³. This will continue to be a key measure of business engagement levels (these figures are accurate as of 16 March 2026).

Our work to mobilise UK industry sectors is sponsored by

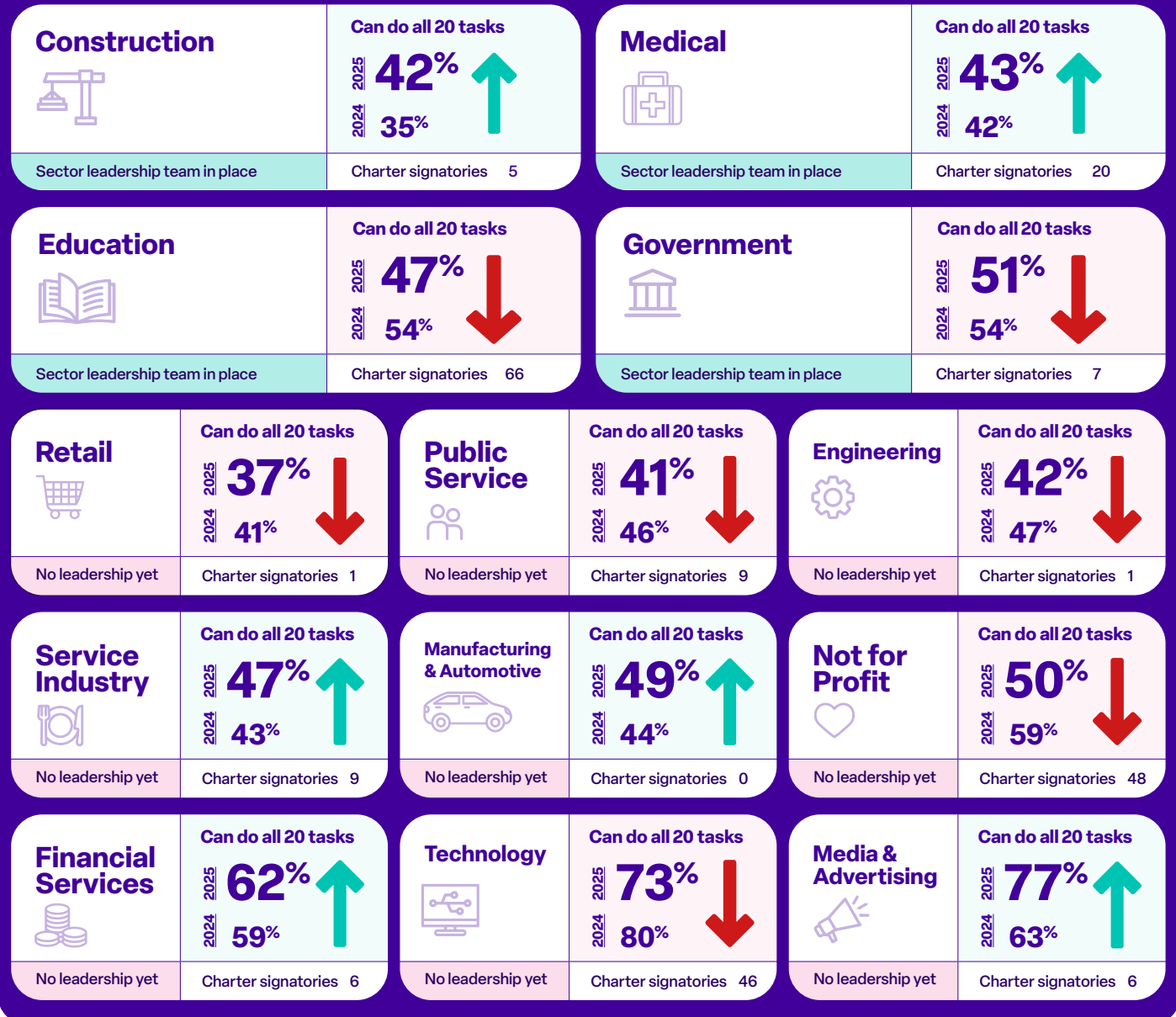
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1. Lloyds Banking Group Essential Digital Skills Report 2025.

2. Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index 2024.

3. A small number of Charter signatories did not align themselves with one of the sectors used in the Lloyds Banking Group data so are not reflected on the heatmap.

Essential Digital Skills for Work: Sector heatmap



Place heatmap

The Place heatmap shows the digital skills position by region and nation. Every part of the UK is experiencing the essential digital skills gap – no region has more than half its working population with the full suite of essential digital skills for work.

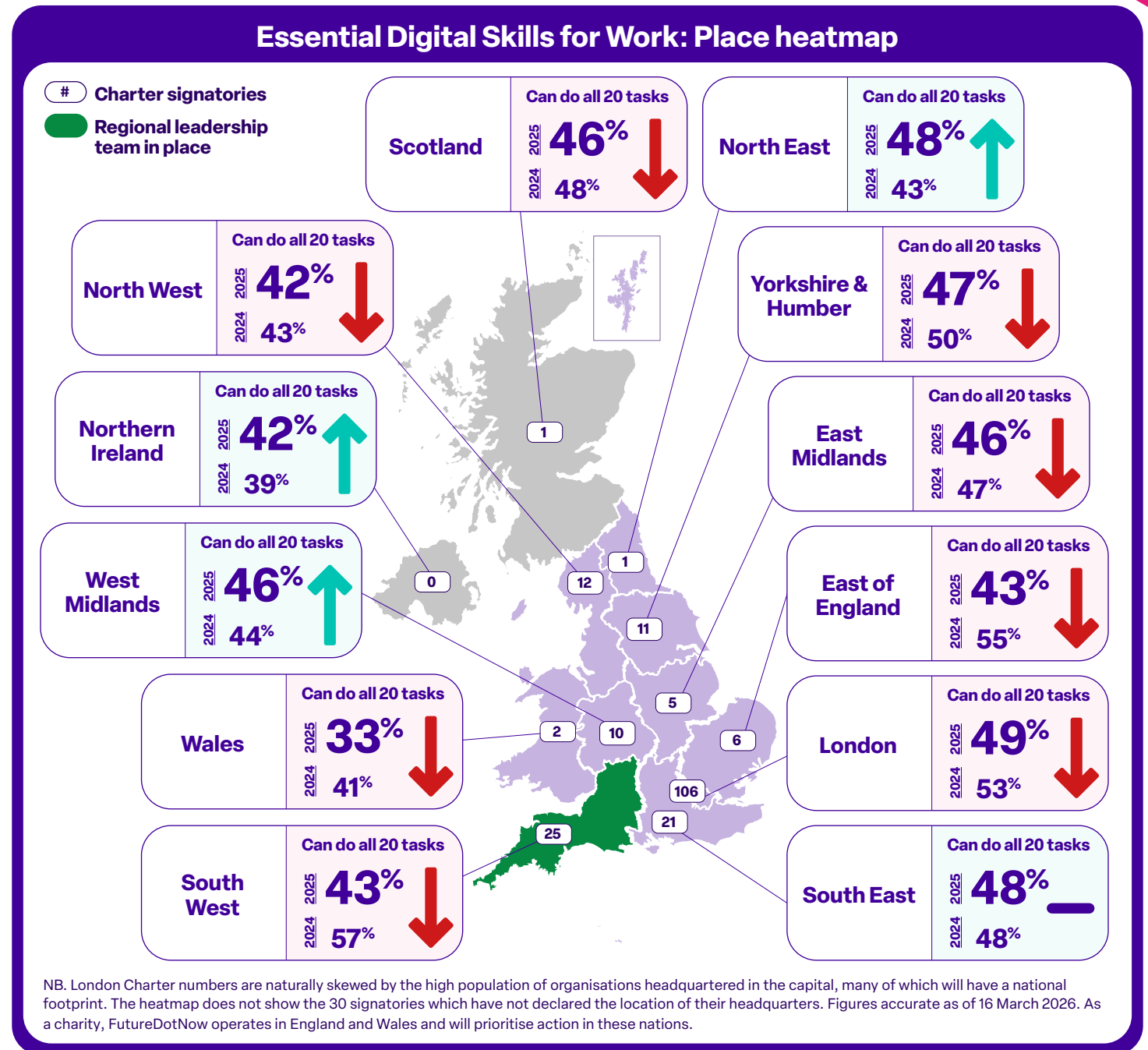
How to read the heatmap

The heatmap shows:

- The percentage of workers in each region or nation that can do all 20 Work tasks¹
- The comparative data point from 2024²
- Whether the trend is improving or worsening

The heatmap also indicates if a location has mobilised action i.e. they have a leadership team in place, as well as the number of Charter signatories in each region.

Digital skills agency, Cosmic UK, has led activity in the South-West, working alongside local government. As of the end of 2025, no other part of the UK has this type of active community focused on the essential digital skills of the workforce.



1. Lloyds Banking Group 2025 Essential Digital Skills Report.

2. Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index 2024.