



Collective action for a digital world

Annual Review 2020-21



Finding the answers you want in this report

Page 3-4

Hear from our Chair and CEO

Page 5-9

What is FutureDotNow and what is our mission?

What is the coalition and who sits on our board?

Page 10-12

What is the current state of the digital skills gap in the UK workforce?

Who is still without the digital skills they need and what impact is that having?

How has this been affected by the pandemic?

Page 13-18

What has FutureDotNow achieved this year?

What have been the activity milestones?

What is being done to support businesses to understand the skills gap and take action?

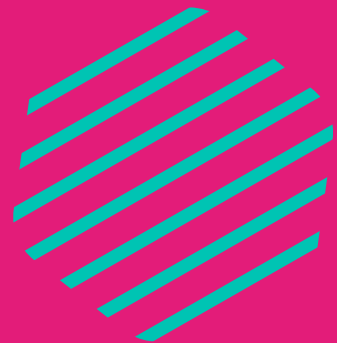
Page 19-27

What do we still not know about the digital skills gap?

What are our priorities for the next year to make sure we're having impact?

“ Despite the digital motivators provided by the pandemic, there are still 11.8 million people in the UK workforce without the Essential Digital Skills for Work. We must come together to find the solutions that will provide the business efficiencies and personal prosperity needed to make sure the UK really can level up.”

Liz Williams MBE
CEO, FutureDotNow





Liz Williams MBE

CEO, FutureDotNow

Our world is powered by digital. If that was in question before the pandemic - and I don't believe it was - it certainly isn't now. Almost every individual and most businesses have been reliant on digital to stay (safely) engaged with the world in the last 18 months, whether with loved ones or customers.

This has only made it more clear just how essential digital skills are to get along in life and work.

But unfortunately, millions of people are still being left behind.

We are living in a two-tier society, a world of digital haves and have nots. This presents a huge risk for individuals and their life chances, and for businesses and their ability to engage with customers, respond to change and prepare for the future.

That's not to say we haven't made progress. We have. In the last year millions more people have acquired the Essential Digital Skills (EDS) for Work, which is a huge cause for celebration. But the same uplift hasn't been seen in people gaining Foundation digital skills or the EDS for Life. This suggests that the people who have grown their digital skills are largely those with an existing skills baseline to build on. Those with low-level skills, or none at all are still struggling to catch up, and because the speed of digitisation is increasing, they're getting left further behind.

To help people build these essential digital life skills, we must build a more granular understanding of the factors standing in their way and what will motivate them to want to grow their skills. And we must be specific. It will be different for someone in their 20s and someone in their 50s, and for people working in different sectors, be that hospitality, retail or manufacturing.

We are living in a two-tier society, a world of digital haves and have nots. This presents a huge risk for individuals and their life chances, and for businesses and their ability to engage with customers, respond to change and prepare for the future.

Collaboration will be crucial. At FutureDotNow our focus is on working with industry to take practical steps and find solutions that work for both business and the individual. To deliver skills we must tap into motives, and help people build confidence. For it is digital confidence that will allow people to keep learning, keep growing and keep up with the ever-increasing pace of change.

Digital is a fault line, and it's only been getting deeper. If we're not careful, the fault line will become a chasm and with people on either side so far apart that the digitally empowered will not even be able to understand the experiences of those people without digital capabilities.

My thanks to everyone that has worked with us to effect change in 2020/21. We are making progress and together I believe we can turn digital skills into a bridge - a bridge that enables people to move across the fault line and thrive, and see the same benefits and experiences, the same life chances that so many of us take for granted.

Digital skills are fundamental to the future prosperity of both individuals and the UK. Building a nation of digitally empowered, capable, and confident citizens matters to us all.



We cannot leave so many people behind. We need to see a significant cultural shift in how we think about learning at all stages of our lives. It is essential that we continue to inspire and collaborate if we are to realise a delivery mechanism able to upskill over 10 million people.

Sir Peter Estlin

Chair, FutureDotNow

Since setting up FutureDotNow in 2019, we have seen and continue to see fundamental changes in our society. There's been the growing digitisation of our industries of course, but the pandemic has had a huge impact on the role played by digital. It has opened up, for many more people, the ability to engage with family, shop online, work remotely from home, amongst countless other tasks.

Of course, we couldn't have envisaged the scale of these changes back in 2019, but we were prescient in seeing that the rate of digital growth was exponential, already having a massive impact and would only continue to do so.

The rate of change has only increased. The latest [Lloyds Essential Digital Skills Report](#) shows a significant reduction in the number of people without the Essential Digital Skills (EDS) for Work. Whilst FutureDotNow can't take all the credit, there's no doubt our coalition has put a huge effort into driving that change, which is what we set out to achieve.

We've also seen growth in the coalition itself, now totalling 160 businesses, up 50% from last year. Our coalition members represent almost a million employees, a supply chain of millions more, and collectively, they reach tens of millions of consumers. I'm proud of the scale that we're achieving.

That said, we still have more to do. The Lloyds data also tells us that 11.8 million people are still without the EDS for Work. So, while we're seeing real positive momentum, there are still millions in the 'hidden middle', without the skills necessary to fully engage in life, work and everyday activities.

We cannot leave so many people behind. We need to see a significant cultural shift in how we think about learning at all stages of our lives.

150 years ago, the Education Act in the UK formalised the construct of reading, writing and arithmetic as the core pillars of education – a very simple idea that we've used for our educational framework ever since. In the 21st century, we need to re-establish what that skills hierarchy equivalent is. We need a new skills vernacular that includes digital, along with numeracy and literacy, as part of a taxonomy that becomes embedded in everyday life.

We need to think about the skills needed to enter the world of work but also those we need throughout our lives. We must build consensus around a culture of lifelong learning that encourages us to grow and learn as the world continues to evolve – a regular 'skills MOT'.

As I look ahead to our work over the next 12 months, it is essential that we continue to inspire and collaborate if we are to realise a delivery mechanism able to upskill over 10 million people.

We must leverage the power of our members; the power of huge companies and smaller organisations, coming together with the goal of making real change. FutureDotNow can be the beacon, creating inspiration, but it is up to us all, to pledge commitment, collaborate and take action. We can bring the inspiration, but from our coalition partners, we must see commitment.

Despite significant progress, there remains a digital skills crisis in the UK

It's been an exceptional period. The pandemic has provided the biggest proof of concept for what digital can deliver. It's unsurprising that the digital capability levels of our nation have changed, with the number of people deemed to have the Essential Digital Skills (EDS) for Work rising dramatically.

Today, 64% of the workforce have at least one skill in each of the five skill categories in the EDS for Work. That's a huge jump – up 5.6 million people (16%) since 2020.

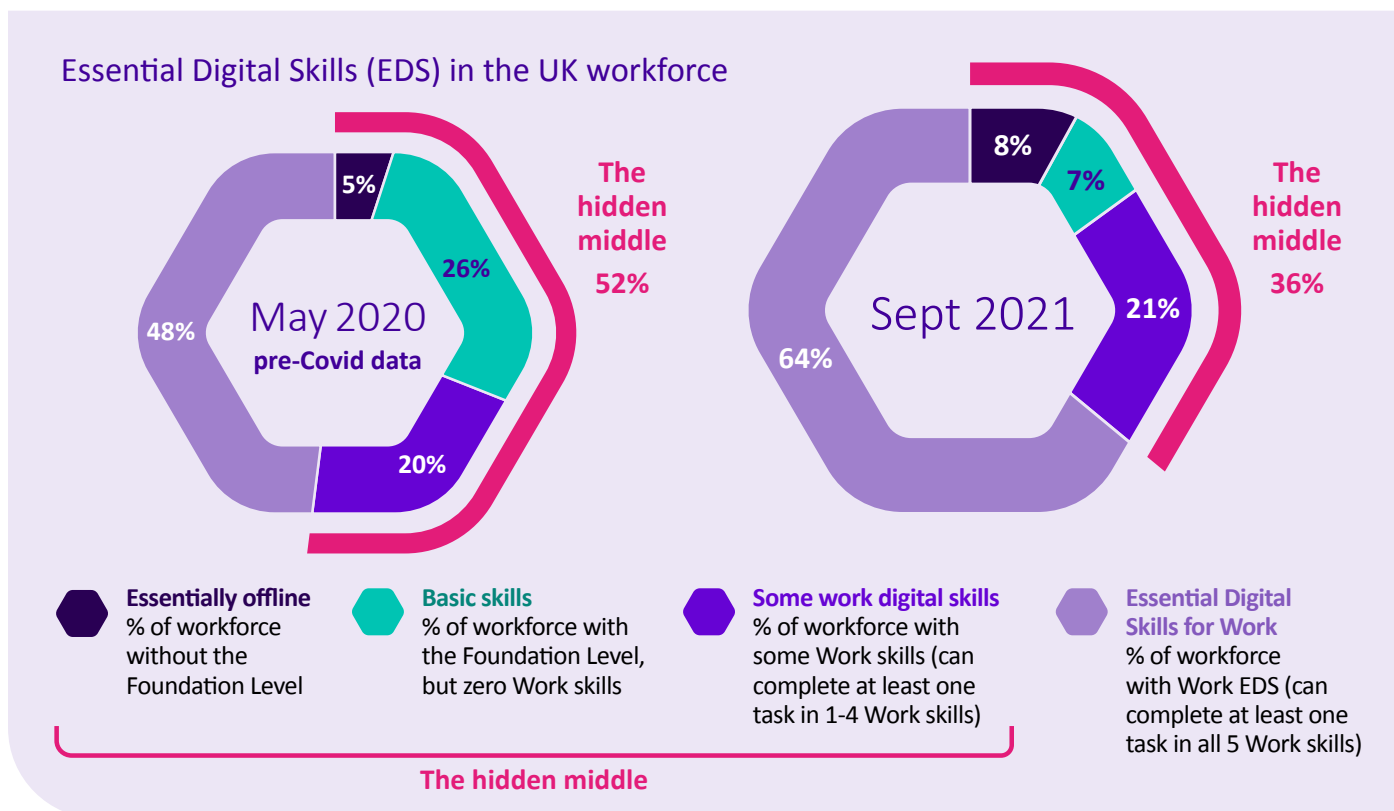
This means the number of people in work without EDS has fallen - from 16.6 million (52%) in 2020 to an estimated 11.8 million adults today. While this is

undoubtedly good news, **11.8m still represents a huge proportion of the workforce – an astonishing 36%¹.**

The change seen in the last 12 months comes after unprecedented social restrictions compelled millions of people to do more online. Our world is becoming increasingly digital, post-pandemic the rate of change is speeding up, and too many people are still being left behind.

This skills gap is holding us back. It's damaging the UK's competitiveness and productivity. A digitally confident workforce and consumer base is vital to companies being able to adopt technology and practices that drive business performance. And for individuals, Essential Digital Skills are increasingly key to modern life, without which, their opportunities will be restricted.

But something can be done.



¹ Source: Lloyds Bank Essential Digital Skills Report 2021. Covid related data collection changes in 2021 mean data is now adults 18+. The 2020 figures (17.1M) were adults 15+ and have been adjusted to 18+ to allow accurate year to year comparison. This will be the methodology going forward.

FutureDotNow was established in 2019 to improve awareness of the digital skills crisis facing UK industry and to galvanise businesses to come together and take collective action.

We quickly discovered there was an urgent need to build understanding across the business community of the:

- sheer number of people of working age without the digital capability to get on at work
- impact of this skills gap on individuals, business performance and UK future prosperity
- Essential Digital Skills Framework (see page 30) and how it measures digital capability, and
- relationship between EDS and the more advanced digital skills pipeline

Our second year of delivery has built on this knowledge.

By drawing attention to the ‘hidden middle’ – the millions of people who are online but lack the digital skills they need for the modern workplace – we’ve shone a new light on the true nature of the Essential Digital Skills gap, and who needs help to cross that divide.

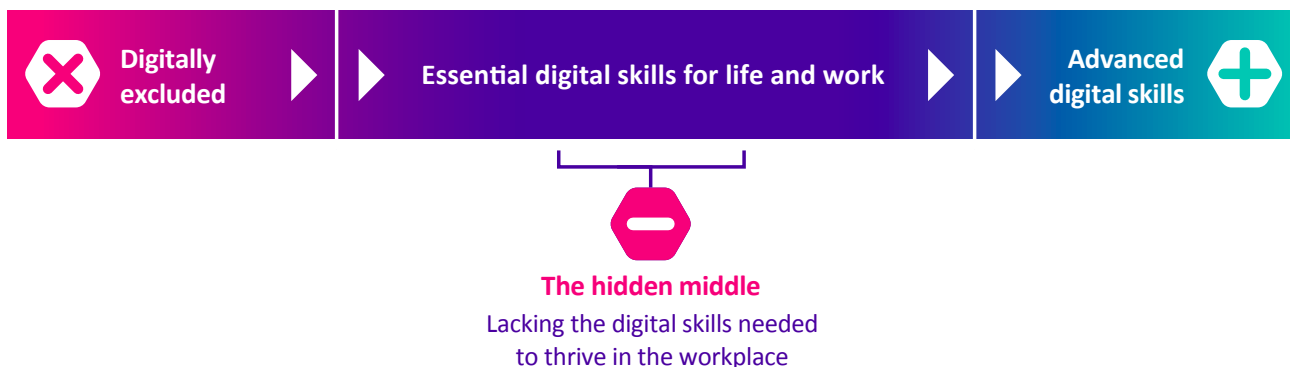
We’ve said emphatically that industry has a key role to play in equipping working age adults with the essential digital basics to: problem-solve; communicate and collaborate; transact confidently; handle data securely; and be safe online. And we’ve made it clear that basic digital skills are crucial to every individual’s life chances and future prosperity, and fundamental to productivity, recovery, business transformation and economic prosperity. FutureDotNow has been established by industry to accelerate the UK’s digital skills at scale. We’re building a community that works together to unblock the digital skills pipeline, and helps adults access the support and resources they need to be digitally confident, equipped with the skills to prosper now and in our digital future.

“ It has been so important to articulate what ‘the hidden middle’ is and how many people that really refers to.

“ It’s vital we tell that story so people really understand the implications of the crisis around Essential Digital Skills in work and how we can do something about it.”

Prof. Kerensa Jennings, Group Senior Adviser, Digital Impact, BT.

Spectrum of digital skills



An action-centred community

Our coalition is drawn from across all industry sectors. It brings together businesses who want to develop, share and implement best practice, and get all working-age adults ready to thrive in our increasingly digital world.

By engaging with FutureDotNow, coalition members are recognising that a significant proportion of the UK workforce do not have the digital basics they need for the workplace and are working together to quantify the problem and find solutions.

We're empowering businesses to take action and drive change that's fundamental to business recovery, national productivity, and personal prosperity.

Established in 2019, we're already more than 160 members strong, including Accenture, BT, Good Things Foundation, Lloyds Banking Group, Nominet, PwC and Salesforce who all sit on our Board.

Through our members' employees, customers, and supply chains, we have a reach of millions. Together we can have an exponential impact on the digital skills levels of working age adults across the UK, through common goals, complementary and coordinated action, learning and best practice.



The benefits of the coalition

Barclays commitment to the digital skills agenda and their activity in this area over a number of years is well established, as they've invested in the digital capabilities of their colleagues, customers, and the general public. During the last 2 years, the membership of Barclays' Digital Eagles programme in the FutureDotNow coalition is an example of how a collaborative approach can help close the digital skills gap.

Ross Martin, Engagement Manager for Digital Eagles tells us: "It's been fantastic to join the FutureDotNow coalition, as together, we have a common goal to empower people with the digital skills they need to thrive in a digital world. We've been proactively working together to ensure both our programme and the FutureDotNow vision complement each other. A key example of this is our involvement in helping shape the FutureDotNow Playbook by sharing our knowledge and best practice.

"The most rewarding part of being a member of the coalition has been sharing with other organisations across various industries and sectors, the journey we've been on at Barclays and how we can learn from one another. It's not about working in silos anymore; it's about working as a collective so everyone in the UK can benefit.

"Also, through our interactions it's been great to understand the purpose of 'The Essential Digital Skills Framework' as this has helped to validate and confirm that the content and resources we provide are adding value in both people's working and personal lives. This framework also ensures that there is a consistent approach to accelerating the UK's digital skills.

"We're now in the process of aligning all of our content on our free-to-use [Digital Wings](#) platform to the skills and subjects found in the Essential Digital Skills Framework. It'll be a real endorsement when we can say that if you use our platform, not only is it free, but it's aligned to the Government's central digital skills framework.

"Our next goal is to be able to build on this and provide users completing relevant modules with an accredited qualification that's directly aligned with the framework.

"I think it really highlights just how much more work we can do to raise awareness of the importance of digital skills, and of the help that's out there. It would be great to see every coalition member acting as a custodian of the framework and actively promoting it. I really look forward to our Digital Eagles programme continuing to play a key role in driving the digital skills agenda."



Guiding our strategy

Fundamentally, FutureDotNow is a coalition. It brings together purpose, knowledge and experience from across industry to create a movement to deliver an exponential shift in the digital skills of working age adults. This begins with the FutureDotNow Board.

Without the organisations represented on our Board, our work wouldn't be possible. Their financial support allows us to operate, empowering us to bring businesses together to take action on this skills gap.

The individuals who sit on our Board play an essential role in shaping our strategy, and providing advice, support and challenge as we continue on our mission.

In addition to our Board, we benefit from steer and challenge from our Senior Leaders Council. Chaired by Sir Peter Estlin, these bi-annual breakfast sessions bring together a diverse, cross industry group of c-suite leaders to help us shape and deliver our strategy. This year they have guided on the development of the Hidden Middle Report and helped surface, and start to address, a number of areas requiring collective action to drive systemic change in digital skill levels.



New expertise for the FutureDotNow Board

In November 2021, we were delighted to add the expertise and influence of Salesforce to our board, and welcome Chief Customer Officer, Vivek Ganotra as their representative.

“Both from a personal point of view and as a representative of Salesforce, I see huge value in the FutureDotNow mission, which is why I am so excited to join the Board.

“Bridging the digital skills gap in the workforce is so important to the future of UK productivity, and there is a real opportunity for Salesforce to play a meaningful role. It aligns both to our values and to the skills and experience we can bring.

“Salesforce has always believed in the importance of supporting our ecosystem to build the right skills to fully benefit from technology in the workplace and we've supported many causes focused on the wider growth of digital skills capabilities.

“Personally, I spent many years running the technology function for large organisations, and saw first-hand how having the right internal skills can really accelerate the benefit from investments in technology and digital.

“No one organisation or institution can solve the digital skills crisis alone. Hence I'm very excited to see how we can bring people together, encourage them to engage and really take the FutureDotNow mission to the next stage, realising true collective action.”

**Vivek Ganotra, Chief Customer Officer
UK & Ireland, Salesforce**

The FutureDotNow board



Sir Peter Estlin

Chair, FutureDotNow



Camilla Drejer

Managing Director, UKI Citizenship, Sustainability and Responsible Business, Accenture UK and Ireland



Professor Kerensa Jennings

Group Senior Adviser, Digital Impact, BT



Liz Williams MBE

CEO, FutureDotNow



Helen Milner OBE

CEO, Good Things Foundation



Sunil Patel

Chief Data Officer, Partner, PwC



Eleanor Bradley

Interim CEO, Nominet



Gemma Waters

Head of Responsible Transformation, Lloyds Banking Group



Vivek Ganotra

Chief Customer Officer UK & Ireland, Salesforce

“ The FutureDotNow mission is absolutely vital to ensure both businesses and individuals are equipped for a world that is becoming more digitally enabled every day. Industry must play its part if everyone is going to have the skills they need to thrive. That’s why I’m thrilled to represent Accenture on the board, demonstrating both an organisational commitment to the cause and using my own experience of corporate responsibility to provide support and advice.”

Camilla Drejer, Managing Director, UKI Citizenship, Sustainability and Responsible Business, Accenture UK and Ireland

The last 18 months has seen a seismic shift in how millions of people engage with digital technology

Whether it's people doing their supermarket shop online for the first time, video calls to maintain face-to-face contact with loved ones, or the transition to full time homeworking, the pandemic motivated people to improve their digital skills for both life and work like nothing that's come before.

The pandemic moved digitisation forward in months what otherwise would have taken years, making digital skills even more crucial to productivity. More than ever, the skills in the Essential Digital Skills Framework (see page 30) are essential 21st century life skills and building digital confidence and resilience has never been more vital for the future prosperity of both individuals and businesses.

It's crucial to continue to build understanding across industry of the nature of the Essential Digital Skills gap, and the risk it presents. Business is uniquely placed to take action to close it, as a result of their trusted status as employers and suppliers of goods and services.



² [Lloyds Bank 2021 Consumer Digital Index](#)

Conversations in business about digital skill gaps often turn quickly to advanced skills, or the social impact of digital exclusion. Between these two points, millions of people have gone unseen and unacknowledged. They are the hidden middle.

Individuals in the hidden middle might be a member of a social network or use their phone for instant messages or to read the news; but many are not confident with cloud computing and digital collaboration; they're maybe unsure about data security and online safety; or they might not comfortable using the internet to learn and independently grow their digital skills.

In producing our [Hidden Middle Report](#), published earlier this year, we set out to do three things:

- Articulate the 'hidden middle' between digital exclusion and having the Essential Digital Skills for Work, and why it exists
- Lay out the impact that addressing this skills gap could have on individuals, businesses and industry at large
- Help businesses understand how they can take action to improve the skills of their workforce

However, the hidden middle is, by definition, unseen and so misunderstood. It's vital we build a deeper understanding of those who need more help to become confident and capable digital citizens, so they can be empowered with the skills and confidence they need.

This September saw the publication of the Lloyds Bank's Essential Digital Skills Report 2021. This came at a crucial time, allowing us to understand how the pandemic had affected the digital capabilities of the nation.

The figures tell an interesting story but one that may not be as clear cut as first appears.

There's no doubt there has been a significant shift in the number of those with the Essential Digital Skills for Work. This figure is up 5.6 million people to 20.9 million, or 64% of the workforce.

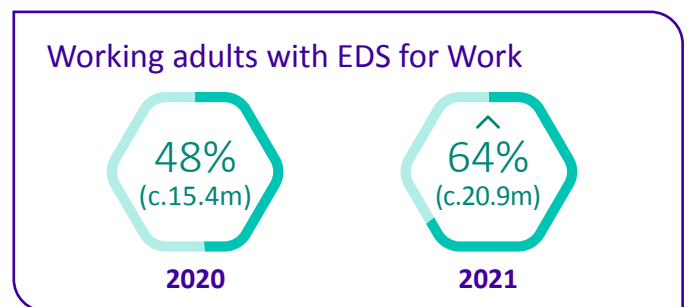
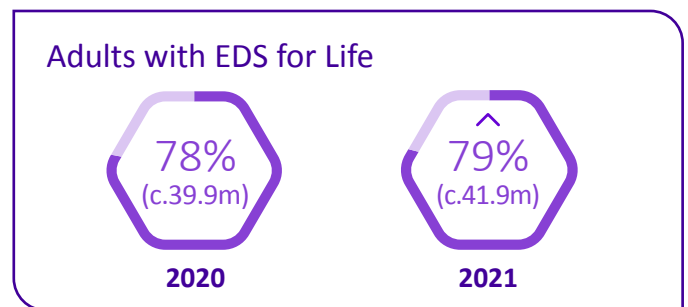
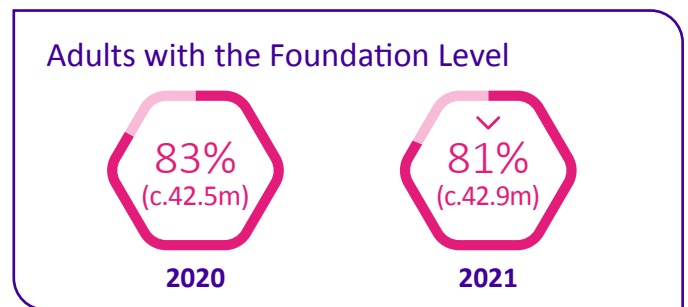
They're better prepared for future opportunities, and they're more able to support their employers through digital transformation and future disruption.

This means the hidden middle - the number of people in work without the Essential Digital Skills for Work - has fallen, from 16.6m (52%) people in 2020 to 11.8m (36%).

Interestingly, despite the added motivators provided by the pandemic, this dramatic uplift is not seen across all skills levels in the EDS framework.

The proportion of the population with Foundation Level digital skills (the very basics) actually went down, whilst those with Essential Digital Skills for Life remained relatively stable.

There remains cause for concern at all levels of the digital skills gap. There has been improvement in the Essential Digital Skills for Work, but even after the additional motivators provided by the pandemic, 11.8 million people are still without the EDS for Work (36% of the workforce).



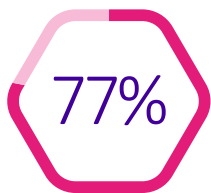
The Lloyds Bank Essential Digital Skills Report 2021 points to a need to understand more about the 11.8 million people without the EDS.

From the current data we know that:

- 21% do have some of the work skills, but only in 1-4 of the 5 Work Skill areas. This suggests there are 7m people who are tantalisingly close to having the EDS for Work.
- 7% (2.3m) only have Foundation Level skills and cannot do any of the work tasks/skills. This means they can turn on a PC, connect to Wi-Fi, open a browser, go to a website but are still without any of the digital skills they need to access payslips electronically, book annual leave online or manage digital time sheets, along with dozens of other essential workplace tasks. They're not fulfilling their potential now and they're not ready for our digital future.
- 8% of the workforce (2.4m people) do not even have these very basics – a higher proportion of the population than in 2020 when it was 5%. This is truly troubling given the rate of digital acceleration over the pandemic.

It is also important to acknowledge what it means when the data says someone has EDS for Work. It means that they are able to complete a minimum of 5 of the 17 **essential** digital tasks for work. In 2021, only 32% of the workforce has the full complement of 17 essential work tasks detailed in the framework, and this is **down** from 34% in 2020.

One thing these figures indicate is that when it comes to motivating individuals to improve their digital skills, work is key driver.



77% of adults would be encouraged to improve their digital skills if they thought it would directly help them with a day-to-day task or piece of work.³

One thing that we believe the data indicates is that the greatest progress has been seen by those who already had some baseline skills. Those with little to no skills made little progress. The divide may be growing smaller, but it's getting deeper.

What is clear is that – particularly in the light of the national dependency on tech over this period – the vast majority of the workforce could still benefit from some digital upskilling.



“Our Essential Digital Skills Report findings show just how important the aims of FutureDotNow are to the UK economy. The current state of skills in the UK is a tale of two halves. In 2021 an additional 5.6m people gained Essential Digital Skills for Work – a brilliant step forward. However, we can't lose sight of the fact that there are 11.8m people in the UK without the Essential Digital Skills for Work in the UK today.

“We need to keep up the momentum that was brought about by Covid-19, and ensure we are working together to profile the clear benefits case, and urgency of the topic. Building beyond our brands, it is important we celebrate success and learn from each other, open-sourcing our challenges, opportunities and resources for the greater good.”

Jemma Waters, Head of Responsible Transformation, Lloyds Banking Group

³ Lloyds Bank 2021 Consumer Digital Index



We're proud of the role FutureDotNow has played in the growth of EDS for Work

Clearly, we can't attribute all the improvement to the efforts of our coalition, but we know many of our 160+ members represent those businesses who best understand the value of EDS.

Our coalition is at the forefront of how industry is taking action, making sure their workforce and consumers have the digital skills needed to respond to the new challenges we're facing every day.

The societal challenges that have continued during the last 12 months, and the uptick seen in the Essential Digital Skills for Work make one thing clear – digital has been a huge component in how easily both individuals and businesses have been able to weather the storm of the pandemic.

During the last 12 months, FutureDotNow has been working hard to demonstrate the need for action and empowering a community committed to change.

The Hidden Middle Report

From our first year of work, from talking to business leaders, new and prospective coalition members and other stakeholders, it was clear that there was a job to do. We discovered a lack of awareness of the millions of people without the EDS for Work - the 'hidden middle' between digital exclusion advanced digital skills – and even less recognition and understanding of the role Essential Digital Skills for Work can play in driving productivity. This was exacerbated by the fact that, while we had extensive data on the scale of the skills gap, there was a real lack of robust research into the impact.

It was from this knowledge that the Hidden Middle Report was born.

It brought together data, where it existed, with anecdotal evidence and perspectives from business leaders and was designed to advance business understanding of the risk and opportunity presented by the hidden middle.

Sponsored by Accenture and BT, the report made an indisputable case for why Essential Digital Skills are vital for every business. It also set out a clear path for businesses that want to take action.

How Essential Digital Skills support business performance



How FutureDotNow can help you get started

Initial steps to start your journey:



Identify a senior sponsor



Join the FutureDotNow coalition

Once you are a member we can support you to:



Identify your baseline



Build your business case



Design your programme

The FutureDotNow Playbook

We launched the report during FutureDotNow Fest in May 2021 and saw its findings carried in national outlets, including The Times. The report made crystal clear, for the first time, who those without the EDS for Work are, how the gap is affecting business and what employers can do to tackle the issue.

[Read the full report](#)

“ Reading the Hidden Middle Report, I was absolutely staggered by the sheer scale of the Essential Digital Skills gap in the workplace. The report strikes home why a credible and concerted effort by industry, academia and government must be made in order to address the growing divide. Only then will we build a digital future that enables UK plc to thrive and which leaves nobody behind.”

Jacqueline de Rojas CBE, President, techUK



Whilst creating the impetus for change is key, it is only worthwhile if it leads to action. Helping industry understand how they can help people build their core digital skills is critical if we are to see a rapid step change in the numbers.

This year, we have led work with coalition members to develop a suite of resources that support business to understand their upskilling needs, help them build consensus inside their organisation on the need for action, and start to develop and scale their digital skills programmes.

Whilst every journey will be different, at the heart of our work is the recognition that no organisation needs to go it alone. In May, we formally launched the FutureDotNow Playbook including our Digital Skills Directory.



Playbook

The FutureDotNow Playbook draws on common themes identified by coalition members and captures the five steps all organisations are likely to go through when building digital skill strategies and programmes.

It explores the questions organisations will need to address during their upskilling journey, and points to data sources, tools and programmes to help them find the answers quickly. This is backed up with case studies from across the coalition, and teamed with insights (produced by FutureDotNow in association with coalition member Oliver Wyman) into how to build digital motives and confidence.

The Playbook Working Group, drawn from across the coalition, shaped and guided the development of this flagship learning resource. The FutureDotNow Playbook is a living document. Since the launch at our Fest in May, it's continued to be updated with new case studies and video content. And, we've had fantastic feedback from organisations on the value of the Playbook, particularly from those early on their journey.

Directory

Our Digital Skills Directory is an important part of the Playbook and also continues to grow. It brings together details of digital skills initiatives and providers across the UK that organisations can tap into as part of their strategies.

The FutureDotNow Digital Skills Directory includes information on dozens of learning tools and resources from almost 30 providers, including accredited courses.

We heard from so many organisations that they simply didn't know what was out there so ended up creating their own content. The Directory aims to help organisations accelerate progress, improve use of existing training content and help ensure that when new content is developed it closes resources gaps rather than duplicating.

“ The Digital Skills Playbook and the Hidden Middle Report have proved absolutely key. It was really important that we had real, up to date information on the societal levels of digital literacy in the UK. We're a global business and we need to think globally, but if we can start with robust data and insights for one of the regions we operate in, we can build learning models for the rest of the business from that.”

Kirsteen Scott, People and OD Partner, The Weir Group

The digital skills employer journey

We know every journey is not the same, but there are common themes across organisations.

Here are **five steps** our coalition members have been through when digitally upskilling their employees.



“ The FutureDotNow Digital Skills Playbook is an invaluable, free and action-focused asset for organisations looking to develop the skills and mindsets needed to empower its workforce to become both digitally competent and confident - which, with the world of work evolving at an unprecedented rate, is critical for UK businesses, to protect productivity, innovation and resilience.

“ UpSkill Digital were delighted to share our expertise on the stakeholder buy-in and needs analysis processes for the FutureDotNow Playbook. The Playbook, and the process of developing it, are evidence of the power of industry-wide collaboration when it comes to tackling the in-work digital skills gap, something which is foundational to our mission as a business.”

Ella Vize, Director of Learning Experiences, UpSkill Digital



Providing opportunities for organisations to come together to learn from each other and hear from experts has been a key part of our work this year.



ASDA

“Where FutureDotNow adds a huge amount of value is in connecting people that are wrestling with similar but unique challenges, and establishing a safe space to have conversations, learn from each other and share best practice.

“The world is shifting faster and faster and it remains critically clear that digital skills are an essential part of what we need to do as a business, so being involved in shaping something like the FutureDotNow Playbook is very helpful. I think there’s now an opportunity, to make sure it can get real cut through with the business audience, so that it’s something people pull for rather than having to push it at them.

“Part of that challenge is about educating leaders, so they see upskilling of the workforce as a shared responsibility, and something we all benefit from – we don’t need to be competitors on this. Business advantage comes from having the better consumer offer, not from us all working together to build digital skills in the community.”

**Andrew Crowe, Senior Manager
(People PMO, Insight and Technology), ASDA**

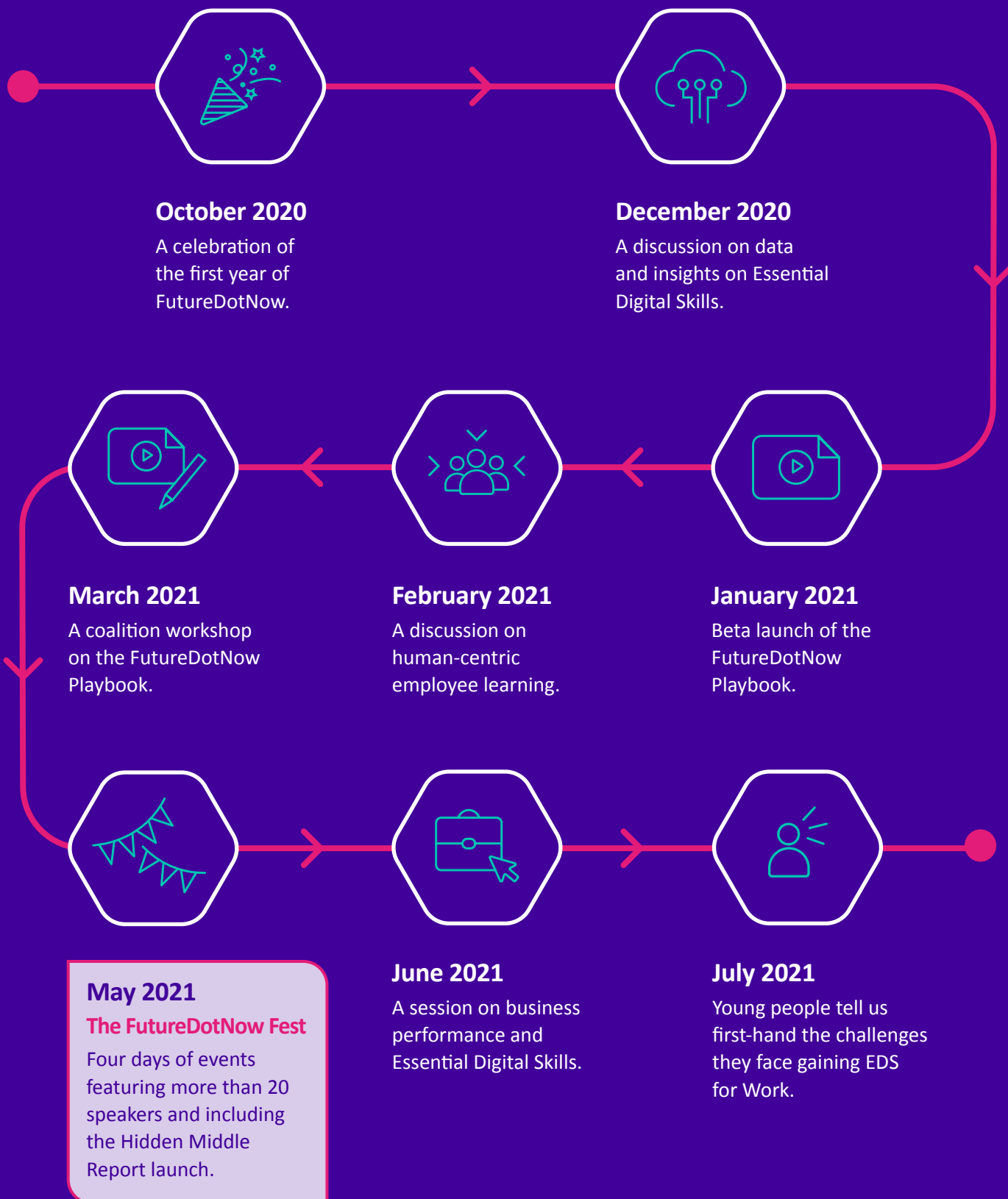
We’ve heard time and again how important it is to help people make connections with others facing similar issues, bringing new insights to power up their strategies and plans.

Of our regular events held throughout the year, our flagship was the FutureDotNow Fest: Accelerate 2021 held in May. Over four days, more than 20 speakers from across the UK shared their expertise and perspectives. As well as launching the Hidden Middle Report, we heard about the steps being taken at a national and regional level to increase capability, improve digital confidence in the workforce and drive productivity and business growth.

Through the year, we’ve adapted and refined our member engagement programme to reflect factors such as the Zoom fatigue that everyone inevitably felt as the year went on. For example, we made our regular FutureDotNow Meets shorter. And while we’ve all adapted to the virtual world, we hope that 2022 will allow us to move to a hybrid model with a mix of virtual and face to face events. Time will tell!



This year, our FutureDotNow Meets have been a regular drumbeat - a monthly 'power hour' to engage and motivate our members.



Delivering the big improvements needed in national digital capability levels will take big interventions.

We need bold steps with the potential to affect systematic change to the way individuals and businesses think about digital skills.

The uptick we saw in the amount of people with Essential Digital Skills for Work in 2021 came after the pandemic impacted the world in ways we haven't seen in a generation. Ways we don't want to anticipate seeing again.

But with 11.8m people still in the 'hidden middle' without Essential Digital Skills for Work, the pace of upskilling needs to maintain and, arguably, accelerate.


Increased recognition of the EDS as part of the suite of essential technical skills for the workplace is key. More employers need to see lifelong learning as something essential to workplace well-being, and digital skills as a central component.

But it's not all about perception, it requires action, at scale and at pace.

Our goal at FutureDotNow is to see all working aged adults equipped with the digital skills needed for a prosperous future. To achieve this goal, we must be increasingly ambitious in our action.

Our strategy remains consistent. We will:

- Continue to create the impetus for change,
- Help industry to take action on the EDS,
- Build a movement and community committed to ensuring all working age adults have Essential Digital Skills so we can achieve more, together.



“ Over the past year, I have seen how FutureDotNow has clarified and validated its strategy. This clarity of purpose is resonating with industry across multiple sectors. The strategy is bringing confidence and coherence to the plans of an increasing number of coalition members who are all looking to take action to close the essential digital skills gap in their current and future workforces.”

**Sunil Patel, Chief Data Officer,
Partner, PwC**

The FutureDotNow strategy



Looking ahead: Creating even more impetus for change

Helping industry understand the issue the Essential Digital Skill gap presents for the economy, business performance and personal prosperity is key to our mission.

Our work in 2022 will continue to build understanding of the hidden middle and includes:

- **Identifying and closing knowledge gaps.**
Our hidden middle work in 2021 surfaced that there has been limited activity to date exploring the relationship between the levels of Essential Digital Skills in the UK workforce (and population generally) and productivity. As a result, Lloyds Banking Group and PwC's Global Research Team are working together to pinpoint gaps in current data. We will share their findings early in 2022 to enable focused work to close insight gaps.

We've heard from members how important data is to help them know where to focus efforts to deliver the most impact. We are working, also with Lloyds Banking Group and PwC, to deep-dive into existing data to try to deliver a more nuanced understanding of who's improving their skills and who's still being left behind. For example, whilst there has been significant progress in EDS levels of people in the retail sector, the 2021 Essential Digital Skills Report tells us half of employees in the sector remain without the Essential Digital Skills for Work.

For retail companies to be able to target their action they need to know more. Are we able to say if these staff are evenly distributed across the sector or disproportionately in stores or in warehouses for example. Is fashion/lifestyle out-performing supermarkets? And if we can't answer these questions, what would it take to close that insight gap?

We look forward to sharing the results of this initial data work in the coming months, and would be delighted to hear from other coalition members interested in getting involved.

- **Working with individual regions, metropolitan areas and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).**
Building understanding of the hidden middle impacts and exploring the role improving EDS levels can play in delivering local economic growth and prosperity strategies.
- **Policy advocacy.**
Our work in 2021, particularly our Senior Leaders Council, has identified strategic policy areas where we are actively looking for leadership and support from others who are well placed to drive change.

These include:

- the development of a simplified skills framework, which anchors digital skills alongside broader life skills and creates a common language that reduces confusion and duplication.
- the incorporation of digital skills modules into the UK's technical education, together with a standardised accreditation, in support of the Government's policy on lifelong learning.

We are already in discussion with a number of key parties and will report back as this work progresses, including opportunities to get involved.





Essential Digital Skills and the regional approach

For the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), coalition membership brings the opportunity to cascade both the FutureDotNow messaging and model down to local businesses.

Louise Phipps, Senior Delivery Manager for Skills at WMCA told us: “In my role now, and in previous roles, I’ve witnessed the fear factor that some businesses feel when it comes to digital. I’ve had to support senior leaders to make tech decisions and I’ve seen how difficult it is for a CEO or a director to put their hand up and say, ‘Actually, I don’t know what the best decision is here’ or ‘I don’t understand this myself’. They’re frozen, afraid that taking action means they’re opening themselves up to failure, because they don’t know exactly what the problem is.

“FutureDotNow frames the conversation in a way that’s supportive, but recognises the issue, so that someone who’s struggling to find the answers they need can turn around and say, ‘You know what, that’s exactly relevant to my business, that’s the same issue that I have’.”

Next for Louise is making sure that wider industry in the West Midlands understands the hidden middle, and just how important Essential Digital Skills for Work are to their businesses.

“Within the combined authority, we do a lot of work around low-level digital inclusion and digital poverty, and we’re doing great work on higher levels skills through our relationships with the universities, but we’ve definitely identified the hidden middle as a gap. We do fund qualifications at that level, but we just don’t talk enough about the Essential Digital Skills gap.

“But after Clare Boden-Hatton, our Head of Skills Delivery spoke at the FutureDotNow Fest in May this year, we saw a real opportunity to do something similar regionally.

“In the same way that coalition members spoke at the Fest, we must leverage our regional Digital Skills Partnership Board, including the likes of Fujitsu, Microsoft and Cisco - organisations that really understand the benefits of all levels of digital skills. We can bring these large businesses together with smaller businesses, or those that aren’t as digitally savvy, to talk about the hidden middle, why it’s important to provide these skills, and how the authority can support them through the work that we fund.

“What we must see now, is a clear skills pipeline. We need to say to both businesses and skills providers that yes, basic skills are vital and yes, our universities are fantastic at higher level skills, but if we want people from our region to be able to progress from an entry level qualification to, for example, something at degree level, then people must know what that route looks like.”

Looking ahead: Helping industry take action

Once an organisation has committed to improving the digital skills of their workforce, FutureDotNow can help equip them with the tools and knowledge they need to act.

As we further this work in 2022, we will:

- **Continue to develop the FutureDotNow Playbook and Directory** to identify and map existing training assets to specific skill areas within the Essential Digital Skills Framework. Creating learning pathways aligned to the framework will enable members to readily identify what content is available for their needs. This will also help identify gaps in provision and create opportunities for members, in particular digital skills providers, to systematically close these gaps.

We've already heard appetite for tools to baseline EDS levels across organisations, and for exploring how accreditation of personal EDS capability might work in a business context.

If your company would be interested in playing an active role in advancing these activity areas - for example, by providing project management resource to stand up the workstream - please do get in touch.

“ Businesses are our partners in helping people gain greater access to digital skills education and there is a clear public benefit in ensuring that everyone has the skills they need for their lives, their job today and the jobs of the future.

“ As the pandemic has driven further digitisation of services and technology delivers ever increasing benefits to our economy, we must not leave anybody behind. We must make sure these benefits are felt by all and that prosperity is evenly spread.”

**Helen Milner OBE, Chief Executive,
Good Things Foundation**

- **Stand up our first user group 'lighthouse'.** This test and learn programme will deep dive into the needs of a particular workforce group (e.g. front line workers) without the Essential Digital Skills in one or more coalition organisations and explore what works (and what doesn't) to motivate people to want to build their skills. We're delighted that Salesforce will be acting as lead convenor on this work.
- **Formalise how we connect with members** to stimulate action and accountability. We've heard from our members how important it is to every business to be able to track their progress. Using the pledge commitments we'll be checking in regularly to ensure all members are able to gain the most value from their coalition membership.



The FutureDotNow pledge

When joining the coalition, all organisations are asked to commit to the following:

- Empowering their workforce
- Building the capability of others
- Collaborating and sharing
- Being active in the movement

You can find more information at www.futuredotnow.uk.

Looking ahead: Achieving more, together

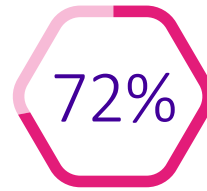
Uplifting the digital skills of over 10 million people will not be delivered by a single organisation. It requires big interventions, at scale, and at pace. Together we can achieve more and take bold steps that have the potential to affect systematic change to the way individuals and businesses think about digital skills. That's at the heart of our reason for being at FutureDotNow.

Today we're over 160 member organisations strong. And we've heard loudly from many the desire to work together to find solutions, use the experiences of others to galvanise action in their business and help bring Essential Digital Skills more to the fore in their organisation's strategy.

We shared a number of activities already planned for 2022 in this document.

Finding ways to systematically empower that collaboration sentiment and turn it from words into action is also a priority in the first half of 2022. We'll be using service design principles and co-creation with our members to build solutions that deliver more opportunities for organisations to come together and collaborate. The work already in train from Lloyds Banking Group and PwC is a great example of what this might look like. Part of this work will be further development of our website (we know it needs work!) including creating a safe space for members to connect and share.

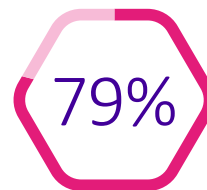
If you have experience, ideas or resources that you'd like to offer, please drop us a line at hello@futuredotnow.uk or reach out to a member of the team.



of members are delivering digital skills training



of members are delivering training that covers the Essential Digital Skills for Work



of members want to work with others on tangible work products aligned to a common problem



Collaboration on digital skills for a global business

With more than 11,000 people, working across 50 countries, and a history dating back to 1871, mining technology company the Weir Group sees digital transformation as simply the next stage of their evolution.

Keith Bryan, Head of Employee Communications, Information Systems & Technology, at Weir tells us: "Weir is a business born out of innovation, change and adapting to the changing world in which it operates. A business which, 150 years ago, revolutionised the steam ship industry with its boiler feed pumps and has evolved to support the needs of customers, communities and cultures across the world. From house building and desalination plants to specialist oil and gas equipment and now market leading equipment for the mining industry, Weir has never stood still or rested on its laurels."

The scale and spread of the business have presented some challenges when it comes to digital upskilling. Keith says: "The key to the business' success is its people and the diverse range of skills they bring to each part of what we do. From colleagues on the shop floor who manufacture our product, to the Chief Information Officer, who creates and shapes the IT strategy for the whole organisation, and everybody has a crucial role to play, but equally, this means there exists a wide range digital understanding, confidence and appetite."

Weir's digital transformation and digital capability programs are progressing well and joining the FutureDotNow coalition has been key to helping them shape their approach to this work.

Kirsteen Scott, People and OD Partner says: "The FutureDotNow Playbook and the Hidden Middle Report have proved absolutely key. It was really important that we had real, up to date information on the societal levels of digital literacy in the UK. We're a global business and we need to think globally, but if we can start with robust data and insights for one of the regions we operate in, we can build learning models for the rest of the business from that.

"I'm really excited about working with FutureDotNow and having the opportunity to connect with other global organisations across the coalition that are as curious as we are to understand what principles and approaches work well across a diverse, large business.

"The models in the Hidden Middle Report and the digital skills framework have helped solidify our thinking about what learning is required, what support our colleagues need and how the technologies can be used. It has also enabled us to be clear about what our learning outcomes could be based on the fact that we want our people to be able to engage with technology in a way that works for them, for the business and for their role."

Collaboration is already a big part of how Weir is approaching implementation of digital capabilities across the business, leveraging the influence of senior leaders and the enthusiasm of those keen to learn.

Kirsteen continues: "We've been learning from others both internally and externally, and will continue to do so. We are collaborating with a similar large organisation and building a partnership which allows us to see what has worked well for them, what approaches they've applied and understanding how they've shaped their programme has been inspiring. We've also started to think about how we build our learning journeys for the different digital personas we've identified. We've got some really exciting things in the pipeline including a Leadership Masterclass for our top 100 leaders in the business on Digital Fitness and what that means for Weir and them.

"Of course, we want to engage as many as possible in the business in this fundamental change, and we're still at the early stages in our journey. I think of it like a 'Couch to 5K' to marathon journey and we're probably just getting a lot of people off the couch. But we really want people to get excited about the potential of digitalisation and future ways of working, which is why we want to give them as much support and access to great materials as possible, so they have the confidence to put on their training shoes and get going!"

Our future

We're growing from incubator status into an independent organisation that is working through businesses for public benefit.

During our first two years of activity FutureDotNow has been incubated by Nominet. The time is now right to move out of incubator status and we are beginning our transition into an independent organisation. We look forward to confirming our new status in 2022.

FutureDotNow was established by industry in 2019 to coordinate industry action to accelerate the digital skills of working age adults across the UK, particularly the then 17.3 million people without the Essential Digital Skills for Work.

During these first two years of operation, we have been left in no doubt that there is a proven need across both industry and wider society for our mission to continue.

In fact, it has never been more important for people in the UK to be able to thrive in our increasingly digital society.

We'd like to thank Nominet for their vision and the support they have provided (and will continue to provide over the coming months as we transition). By providing the essential business support services (e.g. finance, HR, IT, legal) on a pro-bono basis, Nominet has allowed our small team to focus on delivering the mission and building sustainable funding streams, ensuring the organisation was meeting a genuine need.

“ Nominet has been proud to incubate FutureDotNow for its first two years, as it initially found its feet and then very quickly started to have real impact through the growth of the coalition and its coordination activity. From the start Nominet has been committed to the objectives of FutureDotNow. By incubating the organisation, many people in our company who might not normally be directly involved in this work have had a chance to play their part, whether preparing accounts, providing legal and HR advice or supporting on the development of the FutureDotNow website. We look forward to continuing to support FutureDotNow through its next exciting phases of development.”

Eleanor Bradley, Interim CEO, Nominet

The team

Today our coalition represents more than 160 organisations with a reach of millions of people across their workforce, consumers and supply chains, and is run by a small team, made up of staff members and secondees from the coalition.

We'd like to thank board members PwC and Accenture for the secondment of talent from their teams into key roles on the staff team. We're always happy to explore secondments and work placements for project work and longer term assignments. Please do get in touch if your organisation may be interested in supporting our work in this way.

Our thanks to our Chair, Sir Peter Estlin, and our board who have provided invaluable steer and challenge in this our second year of operation.

We'd also like to thank everyone who's worked within the executive team this year.

Liz Williams MBE – CEO
liz.williams@futuresdotnow.uk

Holly Chate – COO
holly.chate@futuresdotnow.uk

Amy Grisdale – Programme Manager
amy.grisdale@futuresdotnow.uk

Paul Fleming – Membership Manager
(on secondment from Accenture)
paul.fleming@futuresdotnow.uk

Marta Bronowicka – Membership Intern
marta.bronowicka@futuresdotnow.uk

Chris Andersson – Communications and Campaigns Manager
chris.andersson@futuresdotnow.uk

And we mustn't forget those members of the team who made a significant contribution to our work during the last 12 months and have since moved on.

Nadia Mensah – Project Delivery Manager
(seconded from PwC to July 2021)

David Pincott – Head of Communications (to May 2021)

Adam Collins – Communications Manager
(seconded from Lloyds Banking Group to April 2021)

Carole Layzell – Pipeline Development Lead
(seconded from Nationwide to March 2021)

Paulina Martinez – Membership Manager
(seconded from Accenture to October 2020)

You can keep in touch with our work throughout the year on our website, on Twitter and LinkedIn, as well as in our newsletter.




 www.futuresdotnow.uk

 [@FutureDotNowUK](https://twitter.com/FutureDotNowUK)

 [linkedin.com/company/futuresdotnowuk](https://www.linkedin.com/company/futuresdotnowuk)

 [Subscribe to our newsletter](#)

 hello@futuresdotnow.uk



“ I’m proud of so many things the coalition has achieved this year; the way we’ve brought the EDS Framework to the attention of industry; how the Hidden Middle Report reframed the digital skills gap in a way that speaks to businesses; and the number of organisations now part of our coalition and committed to taking action. And, of course, the increase in the number of people with the Essential Digital Skills for Work.

“ The year ahead is an exciting prospect. Speaking to senior leaders, there’s so much energy and enthusiasm for coming together and collaborating on solutions to deliver the big improvements needed in digital capability levels. That’s what I’m excited about; and if we can deliver step change together, that’s something we can all be proud of.”

Liz Williams MBE, CEO, FutureDotNow

The Essential Digital Skills Framework



Foundation Level Skills



- Turn on a device
- Use controls on my device
- Use accessibility tools to make it easier to use my device
- Interact with the home screen on my device
- Understand that the internet allows me to access information
- Connect my device safely to Wi-Fi
- Open a browser and use websites
- Understand that passwords need to be kept safely
- Update and change my password when prompted to do so

Skills for Life – I can...



- Set up and use email
- Communicate with others online
- Create and share an electronic document
- Post messages and photos on social media
- ...plus 3 more



- Understand that not all information online is true
- Use search engines
- Understand the cloud is a way to store content
- ...plus 5 more



- Make payments online
- Fill in forms online
- Buy goods and services online
- ...plus 3 more



- Use the internet to find helpful information
- Use chat facilities to help me solve problems
- Use online tutorials to build my skills

Skills for Work – At work I can...

- Comply with policies and security protocols
- Communicate appropriately using online tools
- Use digital collaboration tools with colleagues
- Use professional online networks
- ...plus 2 more

- Understand not all online sources are reliable
- Search for news using an internet browser
- Store photos and music in the cloud
- Access content from different devices

- Set up accounts with retailers online
- Use travel websites to make reservations
- Apply for a job online
- ...plus 5 more

- Use the internet to find specific information
- Use FAQs online to help fix something
- Use videos e.g. YouTube to learn new skills



- Understand the risks and threats online and the importance of working securely
- Understand the need for security software to protect from viruses
- Understand I must protect my own data, and not share the data of others without consent

- Use privacy settings on social media
- Recognise suspicious links and know not to click on them
- ...plus 8 more

future now

