



Routes to 20 million

FutureDotNow's five-year strategy to
close the workforce digital skills gap

2026 Plan



**More than half of the
UK labour force are
unable to do all 20
work tasks found in
the Essential Digital
Skills Framework**

Closing that gap

- Boosts the UK economy by £23 billion a year**
- Improves lives and creates social impact**

The digital capability of our workforce is fundamental to UK growth and prosperity. As AI reshapes every sector, every worker must have the chance to build essential digital skills. In 2026, FutureDotNow will continue to scale what works and mobilise more organisations to close this skills gap so people, industry and the economy can thrive.

Liz Williams MBE
Chief Executive
FutureDotNow

future
now

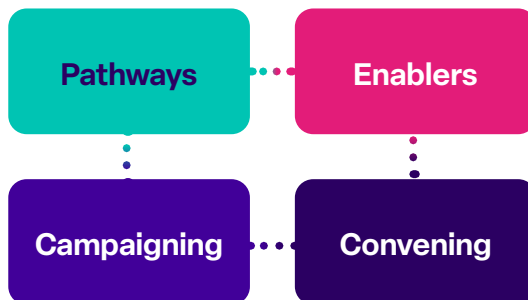


The routes to 20 million strategy is working

Our strategy remains unchanged. We'll continue to campaign and convene but our primary focus is shifting to actions that scale impact, with two priority themes for 2026.

Developing routes to 20m

Four strategic priorities



2026 themes

Scale impact on 20m



- ✓ Engage more business
- ✓ Provide tools & solutions to help businesses take action

Pathways to scale: engage more businesses

Sector has proven to be the most effective pathway to reach people at scale via their employers. Our aspiration is for every sector to have action plans to raise business awareness of the need to build the essential digital skills in their workforce.

Place continues to provide an important perspective, and there are three other audiences that we will not lose sight of.

- ✓ People who are not in work
- ✓ SMEs
- ✓ Young people

Enablers to action: tools and solutions to help business

In 2025, our enabler workstreams identified and addressed many of the systemic barriers holding back progress.

Having developed a significant amount of content on topics such as economic impact and social value, there is now a job to do to 'slice and dice' these insights for key audiences, making it even easier for others to engage and see the relevance.

In 2026, we will continue to identify and address the most pressing systemic issues, alongside a new focus on curating existing tools and resources.

Our ambition is to see many, many more organisations taking action to close the skills gap – to do this, they need practical and accessible tools and solutions aligned to where they are in their journey. The FutureDotNow community will be a key route to accelerate progress.

FutureDotNow is proving that collective, employer-led action can shift the dial on workforce digital skills. As a founding partner, Accenture is proud to play a role in this progress. It's clear what comes next: scale business action so every worker has the essential digital foundations to succeed in a fast-changing economy.

Matt Prebble
CEO
Accenture UK&I

accenture



A joint mission and shared plan

FutureDotNow is leading the mission to close the hidden middle - the essential digital skills gap in the UK workforce. All our work is geared to deliver the outcomes set out in our Theory of Change.

Launched in 2025, Routes to 20 million is our five-year strategy to help the UK build a digitally capable, future-fit workforce.

We campaign to ensure the digital upskilling needs of working-age adults are recognised and prioritised.

We are a convening force, working across business and policy makers, articulating the issues, setting tangible goals and creating a shared plan for action.

We provide the infrastructure for collective action. We coordinate three 10-week sprints of targeted activity each year focused on closing systemic barriers and making scale impact. We run the annual Workforce Digital Skills Summit.

We are custodians of the Workforce Digital Skills Charter. Endorsed by the Government, the Charter unites organisations in a shared mission to take action that ensures their workforce is future-fit and digitally confident.

We help organisations fast-track the digital upskilling of their workforce, by providing authoritative insight, solutions and resources.



At Marsh, we support organisations across multiple sectors to tackle complex challenges, and digital capability is a consistent critical enabler. When employers invest in their people, they create the biggest opportunity to drive transformation, build resilience and lift productivity.

That's why Marsh is proud to work with FutureDotNow to mobilise greater sector activity to build digital skills.

Richard Cross
Regional People Leader UK
Marsh

MARSH

Significant job remains to build awareness

Every sector, region and demographic group in the UK has an essential digital skills gap, with gaps in many unexpected places. Growth in tech is outpacing workforce upskilling and a shift in awareness and action is essential if the UK is to keep up.

The essential digital skills gap is getting worse

Despite pockets of progress, the number of working-age adults who can do all essential digital work tasks has dropped in the last year, from 48% to 45%. Less than half of people of working age have all the basic digital skills government and industry agree are essential. Preliminary analysis suggests AI is impacting worker confidence in their own capability.

Despite growing need for a tech literate workforce, our work in 2025 showed that most organisations are yet to fully understand digital competence levels in their organisation or take action to help people build the digital essentials.

Skill gaps persist in unexpected groups

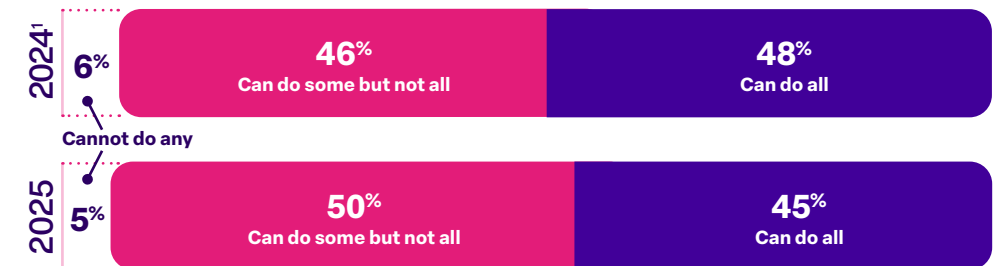
Myths prevail about the skills gap, with many thinking only more disadvantaged groups are affected, but the data shows that's not the case. Examples of groups lacking at least some of the skills include:

- **Tech Sector:** 1 in 4 tech sector workers lack some essential skills
- **High earners:** 1 in 3 workers earning over £75k a year lack some essential skills
- **Young people:** 1 in 2 young people aged 18-24 lack some essential skills

Working-age adults represent the UK's greatest digital upskilling opportunity

Working-age adults represent almost two thirds of the population. As well as being workers, they are teachers, carers, parents, employers and as [The Ripple Effect](#), our social value report shows upskilling this community would have a positive and disproportionate impact on other groups in society.

Essential Digital Skills for Work



1. Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index, 2024

Communities in which the gap is more pronounced

Adults aged between 55 and 64 years

67%

The Retail Sector

63%

Part-time workers

65%

People not in work, and not-retired

67%

Adults living in Wales

67%

People with an impairment

63%

Proportion of people who cannot complete all 20 tasks in the Essential Digital Skills Framework.

Pathways

2026 Delivery Plan

More organisations taking action on workforce digital skills requires a significant uplift in awareness of the skills gap and how it may show up undetected in their business. Sector leadership will continue to provide an effective route to scale reach.

Building the awareness pipeline

Our aspiration is for every sector to have plans in place to raise awareness of the workforce essential digital skills gap. We are working with sector sponsor Marsh to identify the next wave of priority sectors and industry leaders, using our sector heatmap (see page 11). The number of Workforce Digital Skills Charter signatories will be a key measure of business engagement levels.

We need many more industry leaders to take leadership roles for their sectors, working as co-leads to develop and deliver awareness action plans.

Our aspiration is for every sector to have an action plan. Today, just four out of 13 have an action plan in place.

Four sectors leading the way

In 2025, four sectors mobilised with co-leads developing and driving their action plans to raise awareness among peers, and importantly, developing understanding of what it really takes to 'mobilise' a sector.

- **Construction and Infrastructure.** Co-leadership from Amey and Bouygues UK.
- **Health and Care** (Medical). This has been split by the expert co-leads to recognise the breadth of sector and size of workforce.
 - The NHS, led by The NHS Digital Academy
 - Adult social care, led by Skills for Care
 - Independent healthcare, led by Ramsay Health
 - Future health and care workforce, led by the Royal College of Surgeons
- **Education.** Co-leadership from Gateway Qualifications and AELP
- **Government.** Mobilising with co-leadership from DSIT and the Home Office.

Sector leads will continue to build and deploy their plans, encouraging organisations to sign the [Workforce Digital Skills Charter](#) and use the [Essential Digital Skills Framework](#) and other FutureDotNow resources to close the skills gap in their organisations.

Capturing business attention

Each sector will have different hooks to capture business attention and our work in 2025 has identified at least two that are holistic across all sectors - AI and online safety. The essential digital skills are highly relevant, creating the critical foundations for individuals to harness the opportunities of new technology while staying safe online. The tech sector could potentially play a leadership role here.

At Amey we are investing in our people, delivering digital skills training and building a digitally confident frontline workforce – both internally and by sharing our expertise with supply chain partners. Working with FutureDotNow, we can increase our reach to ensure digital upskilling is a priority across the sector and an enabler for safer more efficient working.

Naomi O'Neill
Head of Digital Skills
and IT Governance
Amey

Amey

Breaking the cycle for young people

Whilst FutureDotNow's focus remains on the needs of the current working population, without action to break the cycle, young people will continue to enter the labour force without the essential digital skills.

Co-led by BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT and iDEA - both influential organisations working in digital skills education - this workstream is working to raise awareness among stakeholders who share the objective of ensuring young people are work-ready.

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.

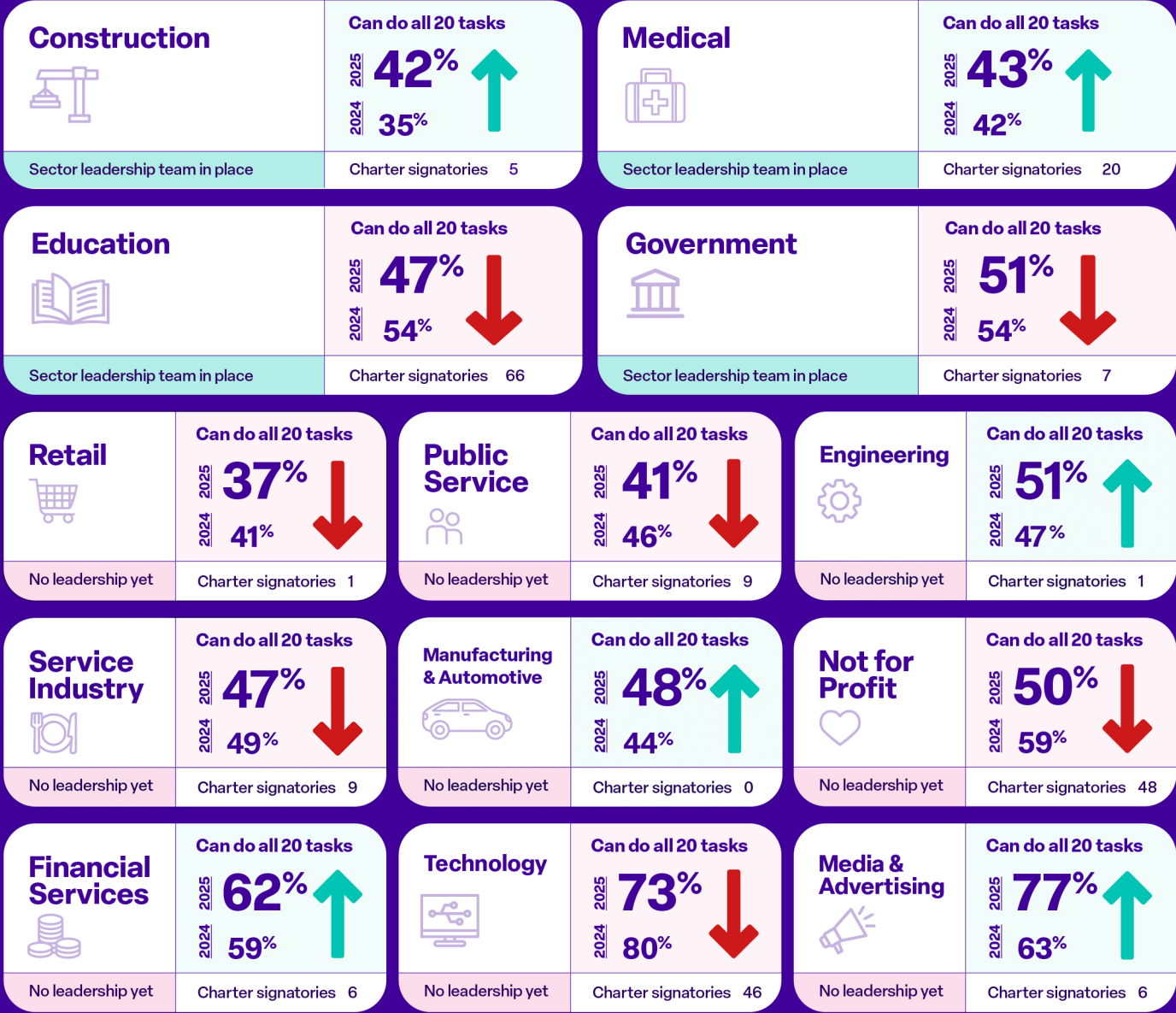
It also shows the number of Workforce Digital Skills Charter signatories for each sector³. This will continue to be a key measure of business engagement levels (these figures are accurate as of 16 March 2026).

Our work to mobilise UK industry sectors is sponsored by

MARSH

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



Pathways

2026 Delivery Plan

Place is another route to scale

Our place based strategy is to work with existing regional teams to raise awareness of the essential digital skills gap and to drive collective action to close it.

As regional teams develop their Local Skills Improvement Plans, this is a prime opportunity to anchor essential digital skills into regional strategies. Place may also prove an important route to reach the not in work community and SMEs.

Currently only the South-West has an active place-based delivery community, which is being led by Cosmic.

FutureDotNow has helped to turbocharge Cosmic's impact in our digital skills employability work. Now we need to turbocharge regional action right across the country. In no UK region do 50% of workers have all the digital essentials for work.

In the South-West, we're bringing partners together to embed essential digital skills into local plans for growth and prosperity, creating a model we can scale across the UK.

Julie Hawker MBE
Chief Executive
Cosmic



Small and medium-sized businesses employ two-thirds of the workforce, generate half of private-sector income, and sit at the heart of our communities. Helping them boost productivity through the smarter use of technology is essential to driving growth and delivery benefits across the country.

Anthony Impey MBE
Chief Executive
Be the Business



Equipping those not in work with essential digital skills

As part of the Government funded Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund, regional work in the South-West has been brought together with our Not in Work workstream to create a proof-of-concept project to help NEETs (not currently in employment, education or training) gain employment, and digital and AI skills. The Essential Digital Skills & AI Employability Project is live and will run throughout sprint 1 and into sprint 2. For more information, see page 17.

Small businesses employ more UK workers than any other individual sector

As the largest single group of employers, SMEs are a critical community and understanding their needs will continue to feature strongly in our work. Social enterprise Digital Boost is leading this work and Be the Business is a key FutureDotNow partner.

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:

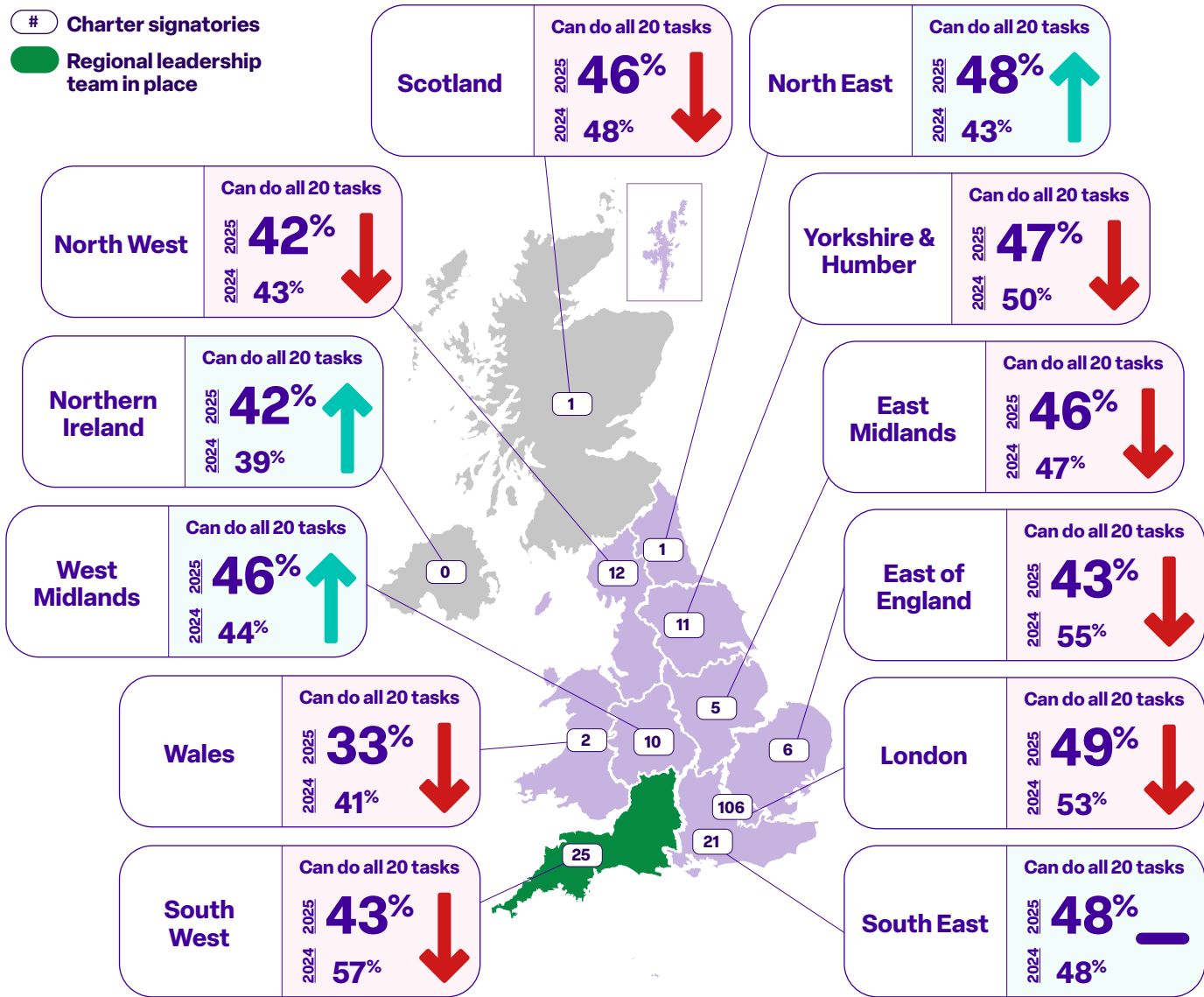
- The percentage of workers in each region or nation that can do all 20 Work tasks¹
- The comparative data point from 2024²
- Whether the trend is improving or worsening

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.

Essential Digital Skills for Work: Place heatmap



NB. London Charter numbers are naturally skewed by the high population of organisations headquartered in the capital, many of which will have a national footprint. The heatmap does not show the 30 signatories which have not declared the location of their headquarters. Figures accurate as of 16 March 2026. As a charity, FutureDotNow operates in England and Wales and will prioritise action in these nations.

Enablers

2026 Delivery Plan

Our priority is to make it easier for organisations to take action to help working-age adults build the essential digital skills for work. This means identifying and addressing the most pressing systemic barriers and curating tools and resources so organisations can access them quickly and easily.

Making action easy

Thanks to significant progress in 2025, we now have a large bank of content to support organisations in helping people build the essential digital skills, as well as tools to benchmark progress against peers. The priority is to curate these resources and make them even easier to access.

Our Training Content workstream led by Cisco and Salesforce will help steer work to map resources and tools across the different stages organisations typically work through.



Enabling organisations to understand their journey

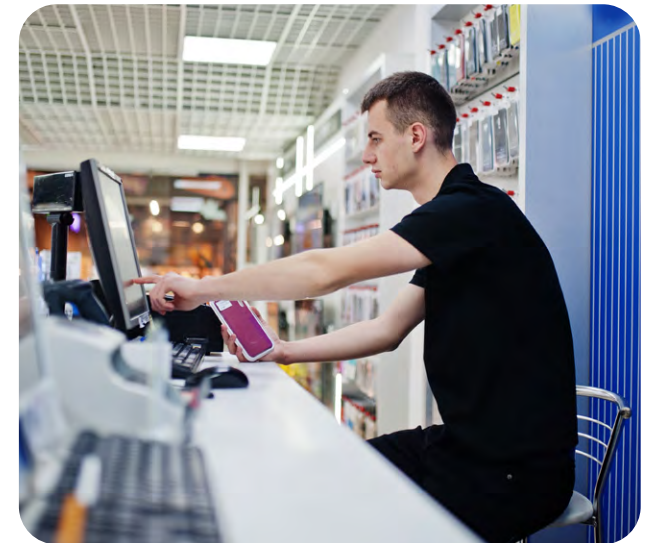
Our research shows that most organisations once aware of the essential digital skills gap need help to measure the skills levels within their workforce and create their business case for action. We have built a unique perspective on the stages organisations typically work through. This is captured in the Essential Digital Skills Organisational Maturity Framework (see page 18). This will underpin our work, as we encourage organisations to use it to benchmark their position.

Continued focus on systemic issues

Our work to ensure the Essential Digital Skills Framework is future-fit and championed by the UK Government will continue. This workstream is co-led by the Alan Turing Institute and Lancashire Skills and Employment Hub.

The workstream on accreditation and digital badging is being led by our partners at City and Guilds. The immediate focus is on prototype testing as part of the Essential Digital Skills & AI Employability Project, and exploring linkages to the Digital Badging Commission led by FutureDotNow Strategic Partner Ufi VocTech Trust.

We will continue to work with the FutureDotNow community throughout the year to identify other priority areas for action, for example the need to benchmark the workforce's basic AI skills and confidence.



Essential Digital Skills & AI Employability Project

The Essential Digital Skills & AI Employability Project brings together our South-West regional work with the Not In Work workstream. It is co-led by FutureDotNow, Cosmic and Accenture, and funded by the Government's Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund.

In 2026, we're running a proof-of-concept to test the impact of equipping unemployed adults with the refreshed, AI-embedded Essential Digital Skills Framework. We'll also develop a toolkit to help regional partners work together more effectively to improve employability and scale essential digital skills across the UK.

Enablers

2026 Delivery Plan

In 2026, we will use the Essential Digital Skills Organisational Maturity Framework to help employers understand and move through the maturity stages. We will curate practical resources (e.g. bitesize 'what works' guides mapped to each stage), so businesses can find relevant content quickly and efficiently to accelerate progress and measure impact.

Ufi VocTech Trust and FutureDotNow share a commitment to helping organisations understand where they are now and what good looks like next, using insight, evidence and technology. We're proud to be a FutureDotNow Strategic Partner as we work together to unlock better skills outcomes for people, employers and the economy.

Rebecca Garrod-Waters
Chief Executive
Ufi VocTech Trust



The Essential Digital Skills Organisational Maturity Framework

Stage 1
Identify the starting point and digital skill levels within your organisation



Stage 2
Build your business case and develop senior support



Stage 3
Design your programme



Stage 4
Implement your programme



Stage 5
Test, improve and scale your programme

Preparation

Active commitment

Realisation & embedding

FutureDotNow's work is both essential and impactful. Thanks to their Economic Impact, Learning that Clicks and Ripple Effect reports, the NHS has been able to make a strong, evidence-based case that includes essential digital skills as a key pillar for the first time.

This will enable the UK's largest employer to bring much needed attention and action to address this critical skills gap in our current and future workforce and for the people we serve.

James Freed
Deputy Director
The NHS Digital Academy



Campaigning

2026 Delivery Plan

As the leading authority on workforce digital skills, campaigning remains core to our strategy. Working with industry and policy makers, we will continue to use powerful data and storytelling to frame the issue and make the case to close the digital skills gap.

Our message on the need to help working-age adults build the digital basics is cutting through. The digital upskilling needs of this audience are now reflected in the Government's Digital inclusion Action Plan. The Workforce Digital Skills Charter has gained momentum with over 200 signatories and a reach of over 2 million workers. But we need many more.

Building on the progress, in 2026 we are working with key influencers and stakeholders, using this evidence to make a powerful, evidence-based case for greater action to close the workforce digital skills gap.

We are campaigning for the new AI-embedded Essential Digital Skills Framework to be built into the government's 'AI Skills Boost' programme to upskill 10 million workers and for research to understand the basic AI confidence of working age adults.

Building on feedback in 2025, we'll change the emphasis of our messaging to focus on the percentage of workers able to do all tasks in the Essential Digital Skills Framework and our mission to boost this figure. Previous reporting has focused on the percentage unable to do all tasks. This can be seen reflected in the latest Sector and Place heatmaps (pages 11-12).



Improving the digital capability of our workforce couldn't be more important, and a clear, shared message for policy makers is crucial to making this happen.

We're proud to work with FutureDotNow to amplify a shared voice on an issue that's critical to the nation. Three central pillars of workforce development lead to improvements in productivity and prosperity for all: technical skills, management skills and digital skills. That is why we back FutureDotNow. Put simply, skills change lives and life chances.

Paddy Craven
Executive Director Policy &
Stakeholder Partnerships
City and Guilds





Our convening power brings our community together with clear direction and shared measures for coordinated action. We will continue to provide the infrastructure for collaboration that allows organisations to drive progress on closing the workforce digital skills gap.

Delivering large scale change requires a clear vision and plan. It also requires coordination. In 2026, we are convening our delivery plan community in three 10-week sprints of focused effort, a model which has proven highly effective in recent years. The first sprint will focus on planning and prioritisation, to deliver scale impact against the new 2026 themes.

We will continue to create an inclusive and energising space for our delivery community, so they can work together, drive action and feel good about their impact.

We're delighted that FutureDotNow delivery plan activity has now been certified as Continued Professional Development (CPD), recognising that it provides structured learning opportunities that keep skills current. Accreditation is free for member companies. A small charge will apply for non-members.

Workforce Digital Skills Summit 2026

On Wednesday 22 April, we will unite practitioners, stakeholders and decision makers at the third annual Workforce Digital Skills Summit. As well as helping delegates to understand and act on the digital skills gap, it provides a key opportunity for peers to connect and collaborate. This will take place at the Guildhall thanks to the generous support of our partners at the City of London Corporation.



Senior Leaders Council

In October, FutureDotNow will convene its annual Senior Leaders Council. Chaired by Sir Peter Estlin, the council brings together a diverse group of C-suite leaders to help us shape and deliver our strategy. They have helped surface and address some of some of the key barriers to closing the essential digital skills gap.

Setting up for success in 2026

Sprint teams underway

The first sprint of the year has kicked off and is largely about ambition-setting and mobilising teams around the different priorities. The community comprises a diverse mix of people, all at different stages of their careers, from many organisations. We welcome new participants all the time and would love to hear from you if you're keen to get involved. We will be providing regular updates on progress over the year. For the latest information please visit futuresdotnow.uk.

Sprint 1

**Sprint 1
kick off**
13 Jan
Remote



**Mid-point
connect**
10 Feb
Remote



**End of sprint
workshop**
17 March
In-person

Sprint Focus

- Strategy setting
- Review goals and targets for 2026
- Refresh teams

Sprint 2

**Sprint 2
kick off**
26 May
Remote



**Mid-point
connect**
23 Jun
Remote



**End of sprint
workshop**
28 Jul
In-person

Sprint Focus

- Delivery

Sprint 3

**Sprint 3
kick off**
22 Sept
Remote



**Mid-point
connect**
20 Oct
Remote



**End of sprint
workshop**
24 Nov
In-person

Sprint Focus

- Delivery
- 2027 planning

Key events

22 April: Workforce Digital Skills Summit **15 October:** Senior Leaders Council

What gets measured gets done

Having specific metrics and goals against which we can monitor progress allows us to understand where interventions are working and where we could place greater attention. The list below is an emerging view on metrics and will be developed during the year.

Workstream	Goals/Measures
Sector mobilisation	• More sectors with leadership teams in place
Sector awareness raising	• Number of Charter signatories by sector • Number of FutureDotNow members by sector • Action plan in place to build sector awareness
SME	• Number of Charter signatories from SME community • Number of FutureDotNow SME members
Place	• Number of Charter signatories by region. • Number of regional teams in place, mobilising place-based activity
Breaking the cycle for young people	• Action plan in place to build awareness
Making action easy	• Map employer resources and tools against the stages of the Organisational Maturity Framework
Future-fit framework	• Essential Digital Skills Framework ownership resolved • Appropriate review process proposed that ensures the framework keeps pace with tech developments (e.g. AI) • Framework recognised and adopted by industry and government as the digital skills baseline for workers
Essential Digital Skills & AI Employability Project	• Increased digital confidence and job readiness for the cohort, with a target of at least 20% of participants moving into employment • Toolkit developed
Accreditation and Digital	• Badging proof of concept designed and delivered for Essential Digital Skills & AI Employability Project

How to make progress and make an impact

Sign the Workforce Digital Skills Charter

Join the 200+ leading organisations already committed to:

- Raising awareness of the workforce essential digital skills gap
- Our national change programme to supercharge action
- Empowering people of working age to build solid digital foundations

In addition to other assets, Charter signatories receive the FutureDotNow Colleague Self-Assessment Guide, designed to help employers baseline organisational digital confidence.

Sign the Charter 

Become a FutureDotNow Member

FutureDotNow Members benefit from exclusive tools and resources to tackle the workforce digital skills gap.

Our co-designed resources and practical solutions help organisations understand their digital skills challenges and provide guidance on how to build essential digital and AI capability.

As a FutureDotNow Member, you'll gain exclusive access to tools that will help you understand, measure and close your organisation's essential digital skills gap.

Members also receive priority access to our events, while directly contributing towards our sustainability as a charity.

Annual membership costs between £250 and £5,000, based on business size.

Find out more and join 

Play a leadership role in our delivery plan

Be part of a powerful community of influencers and changemakers from a variety of sectors and organisations, including large multi-nationals to SMEs.

By leading or being part of a workstream team you can help drive action, overcoming systemic barriers to progress and developing new tools to support employer action.

By collaborating with cross-industry peers, this team is driving sector and regional action.

Our Delivery Community is always growing. If you'd like to know more, reach out below, and we'll get in touch to discuss how you can play a role in closing the workforce digital skills gap.

Get involved 

Thank you

We'd like to thank everyone who has supported the work to deliver our joint mission to close the workforce digital skills gap.

Special thanks go to our trustees, our Strategic Partners and every member of our Delivery Plan community.

accenture

Amey

BARCLAYS

City
Guilds



MARSH

NHS
England

salesforce

ufi VocTech
Trust

aelp

The
Alan Turing
Institute

bcs
The Chartered
Institute
for IT

THE
BEHAVIOURAL
INSIGHTS
TEAM

bouygues

BUSINESS
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Cebr

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COMMUNITY
COWORKING

CORNWALL
COUNCIL
one and all - ever together

cosmic

Deloitte

Department for
Science, Innovation,
& Technology

Department
for Education

Department
for Work &
Pensions

digital
boost

DU
Digital Unite

Dorset
Council

FINYX

gateway
QUALIFICATIONS

GMCA GREATER
MANCHESTER
COMBINED
AUTHORITY

Good Things
Foundation

HM Revenue
& Customs

Home Office

IDEA

ISS

LANCASHIRE SKILLS
& EMPLOYMENT HUB

nationwide

NCFE

OliverWyman

pwc

Ramsay
Health Care

RCOA
Royal College of Anaesthetists

Royal College
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