

Annual Review 2021-22



Collective action:
Building a digitally
capable and
confident workforce



future
•now

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In the year ahead, we will continue our focus on making action on the Essential Digital Skills gap a national priority and facilitating cross-industry activity that delivers scale impact.

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This year, FutureDotNow has become an independent charity, reflecting our mission to deliver public benefit through business.

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References

From basic cyber security to data analysis, digital skills are key to supercharging the country's workforce and driving economic growth.

With FutureDotNow and the Digital Skills Council we are giving British businesses the tools to upskill workers from all backgrounds so they can thrive in a tech-powered future.

Paul Scully MP

Minister for Tech and the Digital Economy

Our goal at FutureDotNow is for all working aged adults to be equipped with the digital confidence and capability they need for a prosperous future. The key to this is more businesses training more people in the Essential Digital Skills.

Across this report, we summarise the progress that's been made in the last 12 months, FutureDotNow's key achievements and our plans for the future.

Forewords



Sir Peter Estlin
Chair, FutureDotNow

While UK businesses currently face many economic headwinds, a lack of a fully skilled workforce is contributing to these challenges, and is arguably the single long-term issue that we need to address. Several surveys are all highlighting that limited training in the workplace is preventing our adult workforce from keeping pace with the skills being demanded of them today, let alone tomorrow.

FutureDotNow has been championing this issue for 3 years, since our launch in the autumn of 2019. Then, 17.3 million UK adults did not have at least a basic level of the UK's **Essential Digital Skills**. Our latest data indicates that this skills gap has narrowed, thanks to increased awareness, a heightened necessity to operate online, particularly during Covid, and some employer programmes. Yet today, we still have 8.6 million adults who do not have basic capability of all 5 of the digital skills deemed essential by UK government. Furthermore, less than half of our employers (48%) are providing any form of skills training¹.

The Skills Act 2022 has outlined a framework within which this situation might be addressed, however, concerted action across businesses, training providers, local authorities and government needs to be taken if this skills crisis is to be abated. At FutureDotNow we are working with a coalition of 200 businesses, lead by Accenture, BT, Lloyds Banking Group, Nominet, PwC, Salesforce, and digital skills charity Good Things Foundation and in partnership with the CBI, CIPD, Digital Skills Council, Scaleup Institute, Be the Business and metro authorities to provide businesses locally with the tools and programmes to close the digital skills gap.

Our Future is Now.



Liz Williams MBE
CEO, FutureDotNow

Building a digitally capable and confident workforce couldn't be more important. We live in a digital society and yet millions aren't equipped with the skills they need. We must shift capability and confidence at pace and scale, and challenge the assumption that digital skills can be acquired without training. The data shows this simply isn't the case.

Arguably, to date there's been too much focus on higher end digital skill gaps and not enough attention on root causes. The skills system is a pyramid from basic skills at the foundation to higher order skills at the pinnacle. Whilst not everyone who gains the basics will progress into advanced tech roles, no one can progress without them. And yet, how many of us have had training to solidify our digital know-how? Why do we treat digital differently and assume people will just 'pick it up'?

My sense is that over the last year there has been a step change in the understanding of both the issue and the opportunity. There has been progress but there is much still to do. As I look to the year ahead, I'm excited to build on the momentum that's been growing. At a time of profound economic pressure and uncertainty, it's more important than ever to equip people with the digital skills they need to prosper at work and prepare for the future.

Next year, among other things, we will be drawing all we have learnt into a manifesto for action. With the help of our member companies and our key partners, we'll be documenting the UK roadmap to build a digitally capable and confident workforce. If you'd like to get involved, I'd love to hear from you.



Executive summary

Building a digitally confident and capable workforce is now non-negotiable.

Each year, basic digital skills gaps are costing the UK economy at least £12.8bn, and workers without these skills are missing out on an estimated £5.69bn in additional wages². At a time when inflation and cost-of-living are sky-high, this persistent basic digital skills gap is a real concern.

Whether collaborating with colleagues, accessing online payslips, protecting personal data, or just sending an email, very few of us can do our jobs without digital skills.

But the data shows c.8.6 million (22% of adults in the labour force) don't meet the 'minimum standard' in Essential Digital Skills for Work. And many of those who do meet this standard are still unable to complete all 20 basic digital tasks for Work. This means that nearly 57% of working adults (more than 18 million people) could benefit from improving their digital skills³.

FutureDotNow continues to champion this issue.

This year, we have elevated it to new levels of recognition, shining a light on the stark reality, alongside the compelling opportunity, which is spurring industry (and government) action. The hidden middle now features in the Government's digital strategy, and there is a dedicated workstream focused on the digital basics, led by FutureDotNow CEO Liz Williams MBE, in the Govt. Digital Skills Council. Our latest report *Unpacking the hidden middle* set out the top 10 workplace digital tasks most lacking in the workforce. It is cutting through common misconceptions and creating shared understanding that these gaps can be found at every level in every sector. We also introduced four new personas, which link skill gaps to key characteristics, which are helping businesses identify and respond to different needs in their workforce.

And we are seeing some progress. More businesses are recognising the issue and acknowledging that it takes proactive intervention to build digital confidence and capability.

The coalition continues to grow, now at nearly 200 members, with more employers looking to provide opportunities for their people to build the digital basics. But we also recognise change is not happening quickly enough; and with technology only accelerating, too many people are being left behind and business is bearing the cost.

We know it can be hard to know where to start, so this year we continued our focus on curating tools that help businesses take action.

We have worked with Barclays to develop a learning pathway aligned to the top 10 gaps, moved our directory online, and created a community space to help members connect, learn and share with others. Our monthly "Learn and Solve" sessions have brought thorny issues to light, sharing good practice and giving members an opportunity to find answers. We are also working on an impact measurement framework to make it easier for members to evidence action and impact.

Now an independent charity, we have bold ambitions for the year ahead.

We will build on our work to date to inspire more businesses to take action on the issue, capturing what we have learnt, and making clear what needs to happen next to create impact at a national scale. Working with key partners, we will create the UK roadmap for collective action that builds a digitally capable and confident workforce.

Closing this fundamental skills gap could unlock personal prosperity for millions, improve business productivity and is a key foundation to deliver the UK's ambition to be a global tech and science superpower.



Despite progress, the Essential Digital Skills gap remains a critical issue and taking action is more important than ever.

Today, millions of people are hidden in plain sight without the digital skills deemed *essential* for work.

According to the most recent data from the Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index, almost a quarter (22%) of the UK labour force lack skills many of us take for granted⁴. This includes basic activities such as collaborating with colleagues using tools like Microsoft Teams or Google Drive, or using the internet to research and problem solve.

They may use a device to keep in touch with loved ones and be comfortable browsing the internet, but when it comes to digital skills for work, they are being left behind. They sit in this hidden middle, between digital exclusion and the advanced tech workforce.

22% of the labour force (c.8.6m) don't have the Essential Digital Skills for Work.

And looking under the bonnet of the data, it's clear the digital deficit is much bigger.

Reporting someone has the Essential Digital Skills (EDS) for Work means they can complete at least one task in each of the five key skill areas (transacting, communicating, problem solving, handling information and content, and being safe and legal online), out of a total of 20 tasks.

Some people reported as having the EDS for Work will be able to complete all 20 tasks, but they could be able to do as few as five.

In fact, the data says only 43% of the those in employment report proficiency in all 20 work tasks. And 5% say they can't do any of them⁵.

Well over half of working adults in the UK could benefit from improving their digital skills.

57% of the workforce (c.18.3m) can't complete all 20 tasks that make up the Essential Digital Skills for Work⁶.

Undoubtedly this has huge implications for individuals, employers, and the wider economy.



Recent research estimates workers are missing out on £5.69bn in additional wages⁷.



Basic digital skills gaps are costing the UK economy at least £12.8bn⁸.





The good news is that closing the hidden middle presents a massive opportunity. It can boost personal and national prosperity and, crucially, address the advanced tech skills shortage faced by industry.

Of course, not everyone with the digital basics will progress into more advanced tech roles, but no one can do so without them.

We are making progress. Year on year numbers show a positive shift in digital capability levels. In 2019 when FutureDotNow was launched, **c.17.3m (53%)⁹** people were without the Essential Digital Skills for Work. Partly thanks to the positive pull to digital through the pandemic, by 2021 that figure was down to **c.11.8m (36%)¹⁰**.

New methodology in 2022 has set a fresh benchmark for assessing the levels of Essential Digital Skills, allowing us insight into the total labour force, including those of working age not in employment. The latest data from Lloyds Banking Group tells us that **almost a quarter of working-age adults (8.6m/22%)** are without EDS for Work ¹¹.

Given our increasingly digital society and the need for digitally empowered talent, these figures are simply too high. The UK workforce is some way from being truly digitally capable and confident.

There are clear pointers to how to change this.

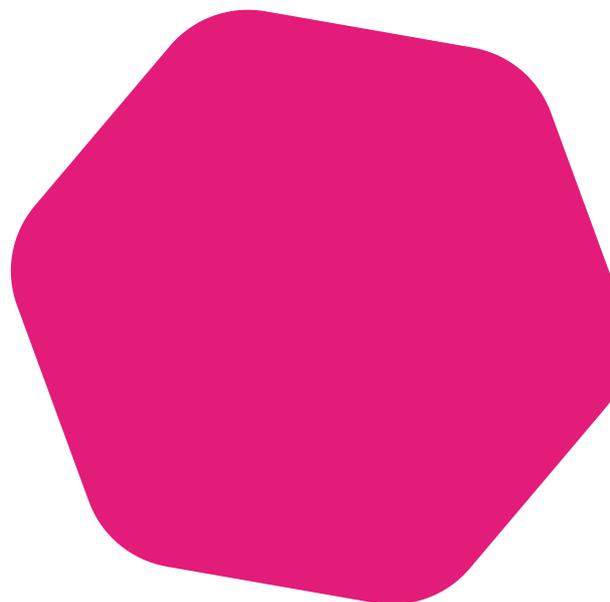
58%

Almost six in 10 workers say they haven't had any digital skills training from their employer¹², meaning there's clear opportunity for business to act.

Shining a light on this opportunity and pointing the way to scale action is at the heart of our mission – ultimately closing the digital skills gap for working age adults.

As a business led coalition, we're unapologetically focused on impact. Although this year has seen progress, we're hungry for more. That means continuing to convene industry to ensure this part of the skills gap is seen and understood. It means working to identify and scale solutions. It means more businesses taking more action, and faster, to provide people with the training opportunities they need.

Most of all, it means taking collective action to ensure all working adults have the digital capability and confidence to thrive in work and prepare for our digital future.



This year, we shone a new light on the workplace digital skills gap. *Unpacking the hidden middle* revealed shocking insights but shows where to focus action for greatest impact.

In May 2022, *Unpacking the hidden middle* provided the first analysis of the digital skills of almost the entire working population of the UK – c.30.3 million people.

Bringing together Lloyds Bank data that underpins the 2021 Essential Digital Skills Report with the additional expertise of PwC Research, revealed shocking gaps in workplace basic digital capabilities. These cut across all industry sectors and business hierarchies.

Signposting the top Essential Digital Skills missing from people in work, alongside detail of who needs support, has helped employers understand what action they can take and where to prioritise effort.

The scale and range of the gap in Essential Digital Skills for Work

- **More than two-thirds of workers** would benefit from growing their basic digital skills. People at every level, from the C-suite to the shop floor¹³.
- **More than a third of workers** are not meeting the minimum requirement when it comes to digital skills for work – they're completely missing the skills the Government has deemed essential¹⁴.
- **Almost one in ten people** currently in the workforce are missing the very basic skills like connecting to the internet and using a browser¹⁵.

The top workplace digital tasks people struggle with

Unpacking the hidden middle identified the 10 digital tasks that the largest number of workers can't do. This revealed shocking gaps that pose a reputational risk to employers and threaten to hinder business potential.

Up to a third of the workforce cannot perform essential online safety tasks¹⁶.

We discovered that three of the most common skill gaps relate to being safe online. Training people to boost their online safety competence has clear business benefit. More than a third of all businesses reported a security breach or attack in 2021, and 77% of business leaders say cyber security is a high priority¹⁷. Closing this gap represents a huge opportunity for employers to mitigate a significant business risk.

Almost 10 million workers are missing at least one (and up to five) essential digital productivity skills.

More than half of the top 10 skills deficits have direct productivity implications. Addressing them will improve industry's ability to embrace digital transformation, respond to disruption, and accelerate performance¹⁸.



Four new workplace personas

Knowing who needs what help and how to motivate them to build their skills is critical.

To help businesses target their upskilling efforts for maximum impact, *Unpacking the hidden middle* featured four new workplace personas, each representing between c.3.5m and c.17.5m people. Each persona type has different skill needs and motives to learn.

Insight is the first step to action

Unpacking the hidden middle has increased understanding of the digital capability gap in the UK workforce. However, it's crucial this understanding leads to further action.

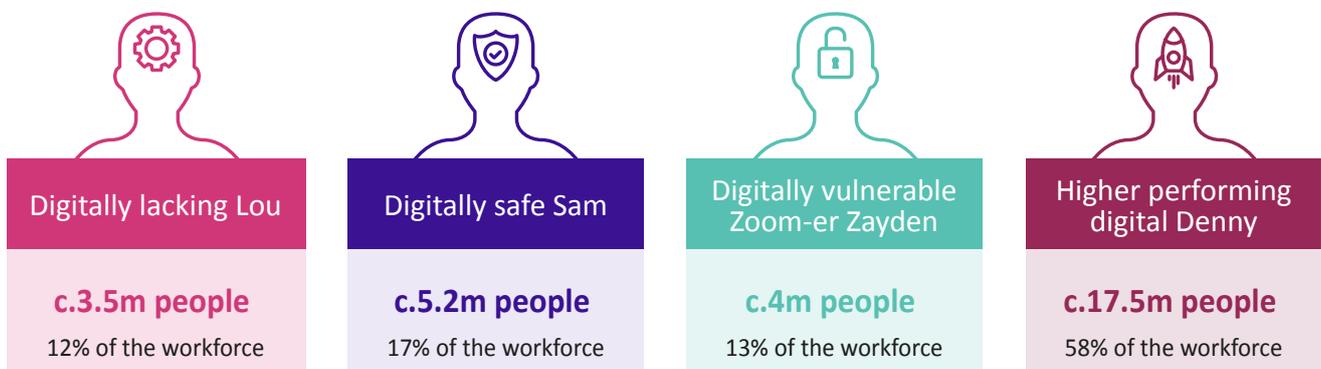
The report drew out key recommendations, on how to support each persona typology and broader 'quick wins' – where businesses could focus action to make maximum impact at pace.

In the months since publication, *Unpacking the hidden middle* has inspired our members, influenced policy and most importantly, helped drive business action to improve the digital skills of the UK workforce.

Upskilling through work has seen one of the largest increases year-on-year, and the agenda of the FutureDotNow coalition cannot be underestimated. The data shows there is still much to do and turning insight into action is essential for workplace skills to improve. Through our collaboration with FutureDotNow and PwC, the data and personas uncovered through the *Unpacking the hidden middle* report has enabled organisations of all sizes and sectors to understand and apply best practice to build workforce capability and confidence.

**Jemma Waters, Head of Digital,
Group Customer Inclusion, Lloyds Banking Group**

Four workplace personas



Population estimates based on ONS 2020 mid-year estimates for those 18+ in the UK.

What we've delivered this year.

Our goal at FutureDotNow is for all working aged adults to be equipped with the digital confidence and capability they need for a prosperous future. Key to this is more businesses training more people in the Essential Digital Skills.

Our strategy remains consistent. We 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 are digitally capable and confident.

Over the following pages, we summarise our progress and key achievements in 2021/22.



Creating the impetus for change

Building understanding of the hidden middle and why it matters to business has always been our first priority. After all, unless you understand the problem, you can't act on it. Here are some of the ways we did this in 2021/22:

We launched the *Unpacking the hidden middle* report

This major new piece of research provided the first analysis of the digital skills of almost the entire working population of the UK – c.30.3 million people. The findings were significant – and in some cases, alarming.

It revealed the top 10 workplace digital skills people are missing, who in the workforce is struggling and what employers can do to help them to build basic digital capability.

Unpacking the hidden middle might be the best report I've read in terms of the insight provided actually driving action.

Anna Collins,
Digital Eagles
Leader -
Barclays



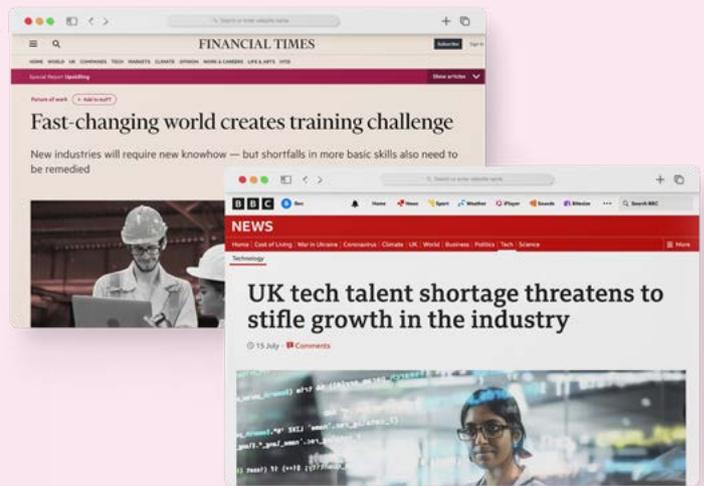
The hidden middle in the UK Digital Strategy



In June, the UK government published their Digital Strategy. This used FutureDotNow's 'hidden middle' language to describe the Essential Digital Skills gap. More important was the UK Government recognition that 'upskilling the hidden middle requires a significant commitment from employers, individuals, third sector organisations and the Government'.

Hidden middle in the media

Following the launch of *Unpacking the hidden middle*, the conversation started to take hold across national media, with mentions of the report in several major outlets.



Digital Skills Council

Our CEO Liz Williams MBE was appointed to this new cross-sector body that aims to drive industry led, Government supported, action. The Council is co-chaired by Phil Smith CBE, and the Minister for Tech and the Digital Economy at DCMS. Since then, the Council has established a workstream focused on building a solid baseline of digital capabilities, that Liz has been asked to lead.

Senior Leaders Council

The Senior Leaders Council met twice this year, convening c-suite leaders from different industries and disciplines. Their collective insight has continued to shape our strategy and spur industry action.

While some organisations are making great strides in building the digital basics of their people, this is not enough. We need more organisations taking action and we need to work together, moving beyond organisational silos towards real cross-industry collaboration that creates action at a national scale.

Simon Eaves, CEO UKI, Accenture

Our flagship events

Collective Action for a Digital World in November 2021 and **Accelerate 2022** in May were key moments that brought together members and other stakeholders to discover new data and collaborate on how to take action.



Growing partnerships to create impact

Our growing partnerships with key stakeholders and influencers created new channels and opportunities to amplify our brand and message to new and diverse audiences:

The HR community

Recognising that HR and people management colleagues have a huge role to play in driving change, we've continued our work with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) nationally to raise awareness of the basic digital skills gap with the People profession. We were delighted to welcome CIPD CEO Peter Cheese as a keynote speaker at Accelerate 2022. Linked to our ongoing work with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, we're also working with CIPD in the North of England.



Trade Unions

A close relationship with many thousands of workers, a keen understanding of their needs and motivations, and the ability to directly provide learning opportunities means trade unions can be a powerful partner.

In partnership with Community Trade Union, we've been exploring ways to bring the hidden middle imperative to the surface for the trade union movement, including engagement with Community's largest members, and more broadly through the TUC.



Working regionally

Improved digital capability has a key role to play in delivering local economic growth and prosperity strategies. In July, we co-hosted a roundtable with Greater Manchester Combined Authority that brought private and voluntary sector leaders together to share practice and seek out support for closing the Essential Digital Skills gap in the region. This has resulted in GMCA embracing the hidden middle opportunity within their strategies. They're already committed to improving the skills of their staff and modelling good practice for the wider region, alongside inspiring other businesses and community organisations to act. An example of this in practise is the work underway encouraging 'Essential Digital Skills' action from members of the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter.



The situation on digital skills is stark, and it may worsen without urgent intervention. What we need now is a shift in attitude in our culture – one that says, like literacy, digital skills are a human right... Trade unions have a key role to play. We have the ability to engage and give opportunities to thousands of workers.

Roy Rickhuss, General Secretary, Community Trade Union

Influential new audiences

Other new relationships and partnerships are allowing us to reach influential new audiences through collaboration and joint priorities. For example, the RSA, through their *Cities of Learning* project in Bradford is embedding the EDS framework into local digital skill building activity, and we are working strategically with the RSA team to bring our insights into their Design for Life strategy.



There is no greater barrier to growth in the UK, personally and nationally, than from skills deficits, of which, deficits in digital skills are among the largest. Inclusive, sustainable growth will rely on these digital deficits being closed.

Andy Haldane, Chief Executive, RSA

Digital inclusion and access to skills should be recognised as a basic human right. Our people, whatever their age, location or situation should be able to benefit from the opportunities digital brings, such as having the necessary digital skills to thrive - in life, work and business. If Greater Manchester is truly going to be a world leading digital city region, we have to make a big commitment to tackle these challenges, the consequences of not doing so are severe. It's critical that we work together and support all our residents and businesses to gain the skills they need to be part of a growing and resilient digital economy.

Andy Burnham, Mayor, Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Helping businesses to take action

We've continued to equip our members so they can help people build the digital basics at scale.

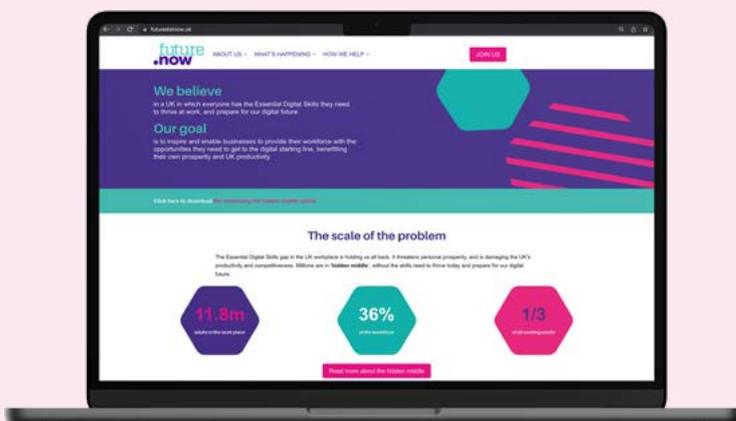
Our toolkit for business action has continued to grow and evolve

- Our **Digital Skills Directory** brings together details of digital skills initiatives and providers across the UK, making it easy to identify the right provision for each organisation, short circuiting the procurement research process. The Directory is now a dynamic, online tool. Learning is searchable and categorised by skills level and teaching method, improving user experience and accessibility.
- Our **Digital Skills Playbook** helps businesses navigate their digital upskilling journey by offering guidance on relevant tools, services and best practice, whatever stage they're at on their journey. The latest version is streamlined, easier to use and includes the latest data to help organisations build the business case for action. It's proudly built with members for members.

Improved website to power our mission

Our website is the front door for members and other interested parties, so making it even easier to use and navigate has been a priority this year. In May, we beta launched the upgraded FutureDotNow website, with improved design, navigation and accessibility.

The website has continued to develop and pro-bono user experience support from Accenture will see our web presence go from strength to strength in 2023.



New insights to drive action

The *Unpacking the hidden middle* report, provided new insight designed to help businesses take action:

- **The top 10 digital skills gap**, identifying what capabilities are most likely to be missing from the workforce.
- **Four new personas** cover the likely skills levels of almost the entire workforce.
- **Action steps for business** including quick wins for businesses wanting to make an impact on digital capability at pace, alongside pointers to prioritise the stages of their upskilling journey.

Convening industry to create impact

A key role for FutureDotNow is bringing organisations together. We encourage knowledge sharing and help avoid siloed working to accelerate action and impact. Our unique position means we can bring businesses together who wouldn't otherwise connect, crossing sector and competitive boundaries. This is at the heart of how we work, from our Senior Leaders Council to individual projects.

One project this year brought Barclays Digital Eagles together with construction retailer Travis Perkins and food service company Compass Group. Following their earlier work aligning their learning content to the Essential Digital Skills Framework, Barclays curated learning pathways aligned to top 10 skills gap across their Digital Wings platform – turning our insight into direct action. Using these pathways with employees from both Travis Perkins and Compass Group is jump-starting digital upskilling for these companies. Crucially, this partnership pilot will also go on to help others, as we cascade learning to inform the upskilling programmes of our members.



Creating a movement and strong community

Our coalition brings together organisations that want to accelerate the digital capability and confidence of their employees, customers, and wider community.

Businesses from across industry bring the skills, knowledge and experience they want to share, so others can learn from their successes and the barriers they've overcome along the way, collaborating to find scale solutions to the digital skills gap.

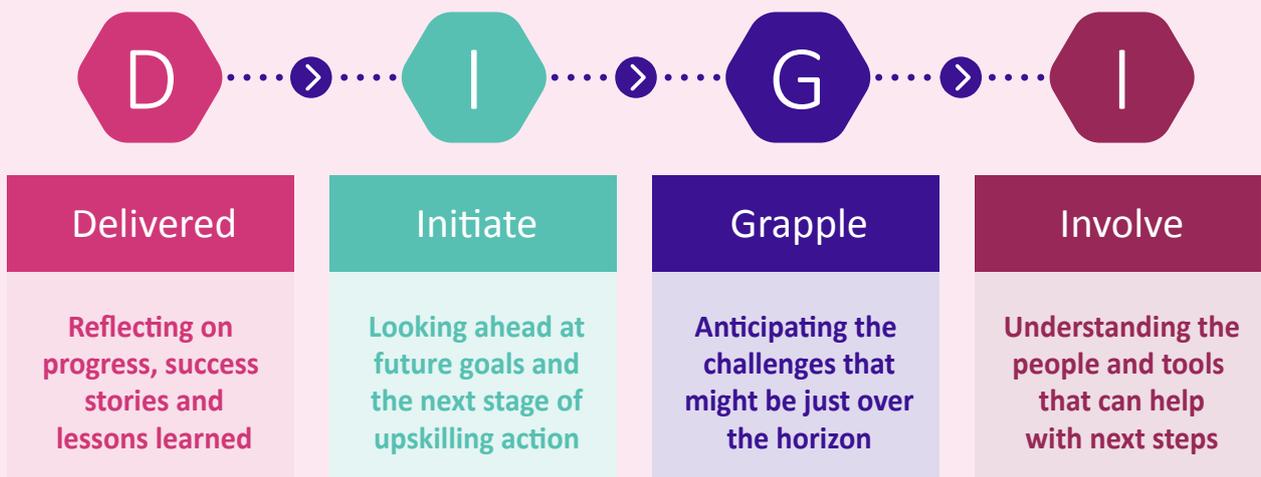
Growing membership to drive greater impact

The FutureDotNow coalition now has a reach of millions, with almost 200 member companies. During the last year, membership has grown by nearly 20%, with new joiners including DWP, CIPD, Bouygues UK, Directline Group and the Co-operative Bank.

Engaging our members in our collective mission

As the coalition has grown, we've become more sophisticated in how we build relationships with members and drive action on the FutureDotNow pledge. This year we've connected more regularly with member organisations on a one-to-one basis and we've developed the DIGI Discussion Framework to ensure both parties get the most out of our regular KIT (keep-in-touch) sessions. DIGI helps shape the conversation by focusing on progress and the barriers companies might be facing. By gaining a broader picture of coalition activity we can identify common issues and join up similar or complimentary activity, as well as taking action on emerging themes.

The DIGI Discussion Framework



Member collaboration

At the start of 2021, a survey of our members told us loud and clear they wanted more opportunities to collaborate and communicate with each other. This led to our *Building the Community* project.

Working with Service Design experts and members, we launched four community pilots testing different ways of sharing insight and encouraging conversation across the coalition:

1. Community onboarding

Joining the coalition is always an exciting time for organisations, but we know members have many competing priorities, and it can be hard to stay on top of everything we offer. Our new onboarding process prioritises energising new members around the mission. It's designed to help them navigate the resources available and encourages more participation in coalition activities.

2. Community space

Developed to make it easy for members to connect, our new Community Space helps individuals identify areas of common interest and collaborate on the solutions to the digital capability gap. Soft launched in August, it's starting to gain traction with more representatives from member organisations joining every week.

3. Learn and Solve events

These online events provide a platform for leading organisations to share the insight they've gained on a common thorny issue. When it comes to closing the digital skills gap, learning from each other what works (and what doesn't) means we can find better solutions, faster. In 2021, we've hosted Learn and Solve events with PwC, the Weir Group, Nationwide, iDEA, DWP and Barclays Digital Eagles, on topics including skills baselining, the power of collaboration and launching a digital champions programme.

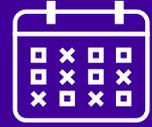
4. In-person, interactive events

Accelerate 2022 in May, our first in-person activity in almost three years, was designed using service design principles. It contextualised the *Unpacking the hidden middle* report through a dynamic and collaborative session, helping attendees recognise how the report findings were reflected in their own workplace, so they could prioritise action and identify opportunities to tackle the digital skills gap. The feedback was incredibly positive and we plan to build on the format for Accelerate 2023.





12 months of action



**OCT
21**

- Autumn Senior Leaders Council with over 20 c-suite representatives including Thames Water, Marks & Spencer, Heathrow, CIPD and more.

**NOV
21**

- Collective Action for a Digital World event.
- Launch of 2020-21 Annual Review.

**JAN
22**

- Charity Commission approves FutureDotNow as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

**APR
22**

- Learn and Solve with Nationwide and iDEA.
- Spring Senior Leaders Council.

**MAR
22**

- Learn and Solve with The Weir Group.
- Accenture Global grant award.

**FEB
22**

- Launch of KIT process for coalition members.
- Building the Community project launched.

**MAY
22**

- Flagship Spring event, Accelerate 2022 at Guildhall in the City of London.
- Launch of the *Unpacking the hidden middle* report.
- New website beta launch.
- Digital Skills Playbook 3.0 released.

**JUN
22**

- Learn and Solve with DWP.
- UK Digital Strategy. Includes reference to FutureDotNow and hidden middle.
- Liz Williams appointed to new Digital Skills Council.
- Building the Community project completes.

**SEP
22**

- Digital Skills Directory 3.0 launched.

**AUG
22**

- Travis Perkins and Compass join Barclays on our first digital skills pathway project.
- Launch of FutureDotNow members' Community Space.

**JUL
22**

- Learn and Solve with Barclays.

Transforming the digital confidence of thousands of employees.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

When the Covid-19 pandemic saw an unprecedented uptick in benefit claims, the Department for Work and Pensions was faced with a huge challenge – ensuring the digital capability and confidence of a huge and growing workforce.

Ginny (Virginia) Goodhew, the Digital Confidence and Capability Lead for DWP told us: “Circa 90,000 people work for DWP, more than almost any other government department. We found that the pandemic really accelerated our need to understand what digital skills we had in the department and where our gaps were.”

Ginny’s team launched a digital skills survey to assess employees’ ability to perform digital work tasks. They soon discovered that how the survey was presented, and the language used was crucial to the quality of data returned.

“One thing we realised was that if we started using technical language it really turned our people off straight away. Not everybody has a technical aspect to their role, so at times found it difficult to engage with the language we were using.

“As a result, we became very specific in our ask, and we made the questions relevant. We’d ask things like, ‘can you share an email or split a screen?’, and this helped us to understand where to pitch future learning.”

As well as identifying the missing skills, this baselining activity also helped the team to understand – and mitigate for – barriers to learning.

“One of the things that stops people engaging with learning is being frightened to say what they can’t do. If you ask someone, ‘Can you do X?’ and they say no, they ask themselves ‘Can I not do my job properly?’ and people can feel a fear of repercussion for that. So, it was important that we created an environment of psychological safety where it was okay to admit what you couldn’t do. The principle was: it’s okay not to know, but it’s not okay to not do something about it.”

The survey revealed varied levels of digital confidence that would later be reflected in the workplace personas identified in our *Unpacking the hidden middle* report.

Ginny continues: “We hear people say, ‘You’ve got a really big department, everybody at DWP uses technology and so surely everybody’s got a digital aspect to their role’, but unfortunately, a bit like the four personas, not everybody has or needs very technical skills. We realised very quickly that some people really struggled with some of the basic skills.”

As a result of the survey outcomes and continued collaboration with HMRC colleagues, DWP developed a bespoke Framework and range of tools that recognised different learning styles and working patterns and uses structured learning pathways to help people overcome barriers and build their skills and confidence.

Much like the survey results, the Framework anticipated the findings from *Unpacking the hidden middle*. For example, people like our **Digitally-lacking Lou** persona not only often work in public service but they also respond well to targeted bite-sized learning.

Ginny explains the parallels: “Some people in our corporate offices have more opportunity to take part in longer, more traditional learning sessions, but if you’re on the frontline and you’re working with customers in jobcentres, you don’t have that flexibility. We had to be really fair and inclusive of everybody.”



“A good example of that is our digital confidence sessions and ‘Digital Pocket Watches’ bite-sized learning. You can just jump on and off when you have a few minutes, but we do also have more in-depth learning giving everyone the opportunity to choose what is right for them at any given time.

“I’m also passionate about the consolidation of learning, because if you don’t put a skill into practice, you’ll lose it. We made sure learning can be revisited and repeated until it’s embedded.”

DWP’s digital transformation program has made a tangible impact.

“Thousands of colleagues have taken part in virtual sessions and continue to find value long after the sessions are over. 96% of colleagues said they had learned skills that make their job easier, and 87% said their digital confidence and capability had increased. That’s saved on average 15 minutes per week, per person, and for a department of our size that’s a significant and tangible efficiency boost. It’s not just beneficial for the individual but has a massive impact on business as a whole.”

With a mature digital skills programme now established, Ginny and the DWP team have been modelling key FutureDotNow behaviours in sharing what they’ve learned with other government departments, and beyond.

“Because DWP have a dedicated team to focus on digital confidence and capability, we’re a long way ahead of many other departments in digital upskilling, so it’s important that we share what we’ve learned.

“As part of FutureDotNow collaborations, I’ve spoken with the Bank of England, The Weir Group and others to share good practice and resource and my team holds a monthly digital confidence and capability forum that all government departments are invited to.

“We’re sharing the Framework and how we’ve baselined. The specifics might not be right for everybody, but it gives people an idea of the questions to ask and how to get started. It’s about working smarter together and not reinventing the wheel.”

Veena’s story

Veena Lakhani, 61, from Wellington Street Jobcentre in Leicester, is just one of those who has benefited from the sessions.

Veena says: “It’s a big generalisation, but younger people in my team tended to be better at using things like Teams. I saw them using features and thought, ‘how do they do that?’

“It’s one of the things that inspired me to go on these sessions – trying to get the most from applications and boosting my confidence. I saw from my time as a work coach just how important having digital skills is at work.”

Veena’s newfound confidence has ignited a passion for digital, which she’s keen to use to support her colleagues. “The sessions were easy to follow and really demonstrated the potential of Teams so I could get the most out of it. I left feeling excited to put what I learned into practice. I’ve used Teams ‘praise’, stickers and silent applause; features like this are a great way to celebrate our people.

“I’ve also incorporated digital confidence into our local induction process. Making sure people have the right skills and filling those gaps early can make such a difference.

“Thanks to the learning I’m doing my work more quickly and efficiently – it has really helped me.”



In the year ahead, we will continue our focus on making action on the essential digital skill gap a national priority and facilitating cross-industry activity that delivers scale impact.



Building a digitally confident and capable workforce couldn't be more important. Closing this core skills gap could unlock personal prosperity for millions, improve business productivity and is a key foundation to deliver the UK's ambition to be a global tech and science superpower.

In the year ahead, we will continue to campaign strongly, focusing attention on the hidden middle and the need to build core digital capability among working age adults.

We will influence the national agenda, through our work as part of the Digital Skills Council and with influential and diverse stakeholders. Bringing our voice to bear and increasing understanding of the issue is fundamental to our mission. We will articulate the opportunities inherent in closing the digital skills gap and promote the scale solutions that deliver impact.

We will continue to work closely with our members, inspiring and enabling them to support working age adults to build core digital capability and confidence.

Essential to realising scale action is building understanding of the barriers to upskilling that businesses face, and sharing insights to help overcome them. This will include bringing partners together to join the dots on complimentary activity and delivering projects that identify solutions.

The programme of work includes:

- Our burgeoning regional programme of activity in the North of England.
- Further development of the tools for industry.
- Continuing to work with members one-to-one to help them track their progress and unlock barriers.

The growth of our community and movement is key. We will encourage more organisations to join FutureDotNow and take action to upskill working age adults. We will continue to focus on collaboration and joint activity.

Our events and activities will enable our members to connect and learn from each other. This includes topic-specific Learn and Solve sessions and Accelerate 2023, our flagship Spring event.

Over the past three years, we've learnt the value in working together.

Sharing learning with others creates a multiplier effect – what is learnt once, can be applied many times. We will continue to drive collaboration and collective action as the most effective route to scale impact. With time and resource such a valuable commodity, learning from the progress of others enables businesses to start their journeys further along than those that came before.

By driving individual action across industry, the cumulative impact of our coalition can be significant.

And finally, we are excited to share that work will now begin on a manifesto, capturing what we have learnt and defining what needs to happen next to create impact at a national scale. Working with key partners, we will create the UK roadmap for collective action.

Scaling and measuring impact

Thanks to funding from the Accenture Foundation, we have commissioned social impact consultancy inFocus to take the learning from our first three years of action and document the theory of change for our work.

We are also developing two impact measurement frameworks; one for FutureDotNow as an organisation, and one for member companies. As part of this, we'll examine how multiple parties contribute to deliver impact, exploring how to quantify the value of collective action.

This year, FutureDotNow has become an independent charity, reflecting our mission to deliver public benefit through business.

FutureDotNow as a charity

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 our first two years of activity, we were incubated by Nominet, who provided essential professional services and support as we focused on building our coalition, profile and momentum behind our mission.

This year we have transitioned from incubator status into a CIO that is working through businesses for public benefit. Our charitable purpose is 'to advance education for the public benefit in the field of digital skills'. To do this, we work through business to deliver systemic change in the level of digital capability and confidence of working age adults.

The overall vision, mission and management of the CIO is supported by our trustees: Sir Peter Estlin, Camilla Drejer and Jemma Waters.

We'd like to thank Nominet for their vision and the support they provided as our incubator.

Led and supported by industry

As we continue to inspire, and support business to improve the basic digital capability and confidence of working age adults in the UK, we remain an employer led initiative.

Without the organisations represented on our steering board, our work wouldn't be possible.



Their financial and in-kind support allows us to operate. The individuals who sit on our board provide advice, support, and challenge that plays an essential role in our governance and the shaping of our strategy.

Our board:

Eleanor Bradley – Managing Director,
Registry and Public Benefit, Nominet

Helen Burrows – Policy Director, BT

Dave Dempsey – Senior Vice President, Salesforce

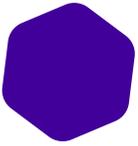
Camilla Drejer – Managing Director,
UKI Citizenship, Sustainability and
Responsible Business, Accenture

Sir Peter Estlin (Chair)

Helen Milner OBE – Chief Executive,
Good Things Foundation

Sunil Patel – Partner and Chief Data
Officer, PwC UK

Jemma Waters – Head of Digital Impact
and Inclusion, Lloyds Banking Group



Our staff team

With nearly 200 members from across industry, our coalition has a reach of millions, through their employees, customers, supply chains and the communities they operate in. We manage this through a small team that comes from across the public, private and commercial sectors.

Liz Williams MBE – Chief Executive Officer	liz.williams@futuresdotnow.uk
Holly Chate – Chief Operating Officer	holly.chate@futuresdotnow.uk
Angie Clement – Business Manager	angie.clement@futuresdotnow.uk
Jo Osborne – Learning Solutions Manager	jo.osborne@futuresdotnow.uk
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Chris Andersson – Communications and Campaigns Manager	chris.andersson@futuresdotnow.uk
Romy Poole – Communications Assistant	romy.poole@futuresdotnow.uk

FutureDotNow is a coalition of leading organisations focused on accelerating the UK's digital skills at scale. If you'd like to join our coalition, find out more about our mission or speak to a member of our team, you can visit our website, send us an email or follow us on social media.

 www.futuresdotnow.uk

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

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

 Or get in touch at hello@futuresdotnow.uk

References



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- 2 [“Get Online Week: Digitals skills shortage costs the UK economy and workers £12.8 billion as Brits grapple with higher bills during the cost-of-living crisis” \(Cebr/Virgin O2\)](#)
- 3 [Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index 2022](#)
- 4 [Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index 2022](#)
- 5 [Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index 2022](#)
- 6 [Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index 2022](#)
- 7 [“Get Online Week: Digitals skills shortage costs the UK economy and workers £12.8 billion as Brits grapple with higher bills during the cost-of-living crisis” \(Cebr/Virgin O2\)](#)
- 8 [“Get Online Week: Digitals skills shortage costs the UK economy and workers £12.8 billion as Brits grapple with higher bills during the cost-of-living crisis” \(Cebr/Virgin O2\)](#)
- 9 Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital index 2019
- 10 Lloyds Bank Essential Digital Skills Report 2021
- 11 [Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index 2022](#)
- 12 [AND Digital: The nature of the UK’s digital skills gap](#)
- 13 Only 32% of the workforce can do all 17 tasks that make up the Essential Digital Skills for Work. ([Unpacking the hidden middle](#))
- 14 c.11.8 million people (36% of the workforce) are not able to complete at least one task in each the five skill categories in EDS for Work. ([Unpacking the hidden middle](#))
- 15 8% of working adults (c.2.4m people) don’t have all the Foundation level digital skills needed to do things like turn on a device, connect to Wi-Fi or use an internet browser. ([Unpacking the hidden middle](#))
- 16 c.9.6 million workers (32%) can’t update privacy settings; c.9 million (30%) are unable to update computer security systems when necessary to prevent viruses and other risks; c.5.9 million (19%) can’t assess the risks involved in carrying out activities online and act accordingly. ([Unpacking the hidden middle](#))
- 17 [Businesses urged to act as two in five UK firms experience cyber attacks in the last year - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- 18 32% of the workforce (c9.8m people) cannot complete essential transactional tasks like accessing online payslips and expenses or booking annual leave; 23% (c.7.1m) can’t use appropriate software, including a spreadsheet, to manipulate and analyse data; 23% (c.6.9m) can’t use different digital tools to improve their own productivity i.e. saving time or working more efficiently; 22% (c.6.5m) can’t access salary and expenses information digitally, including password protected payslips; 20% (c.6m) access, synchronise and share information across different devices (e.g. manage a calendar or appointment system via phone or desktop); 18% (c.5.3m) can’t use digital collaboration tools to meet with, share and collaborate with people (e.g. Skype/Google docs/Dropbox etc). ([Unpacking the hidden middle](#))



