



FutureDotNow Regional Guide

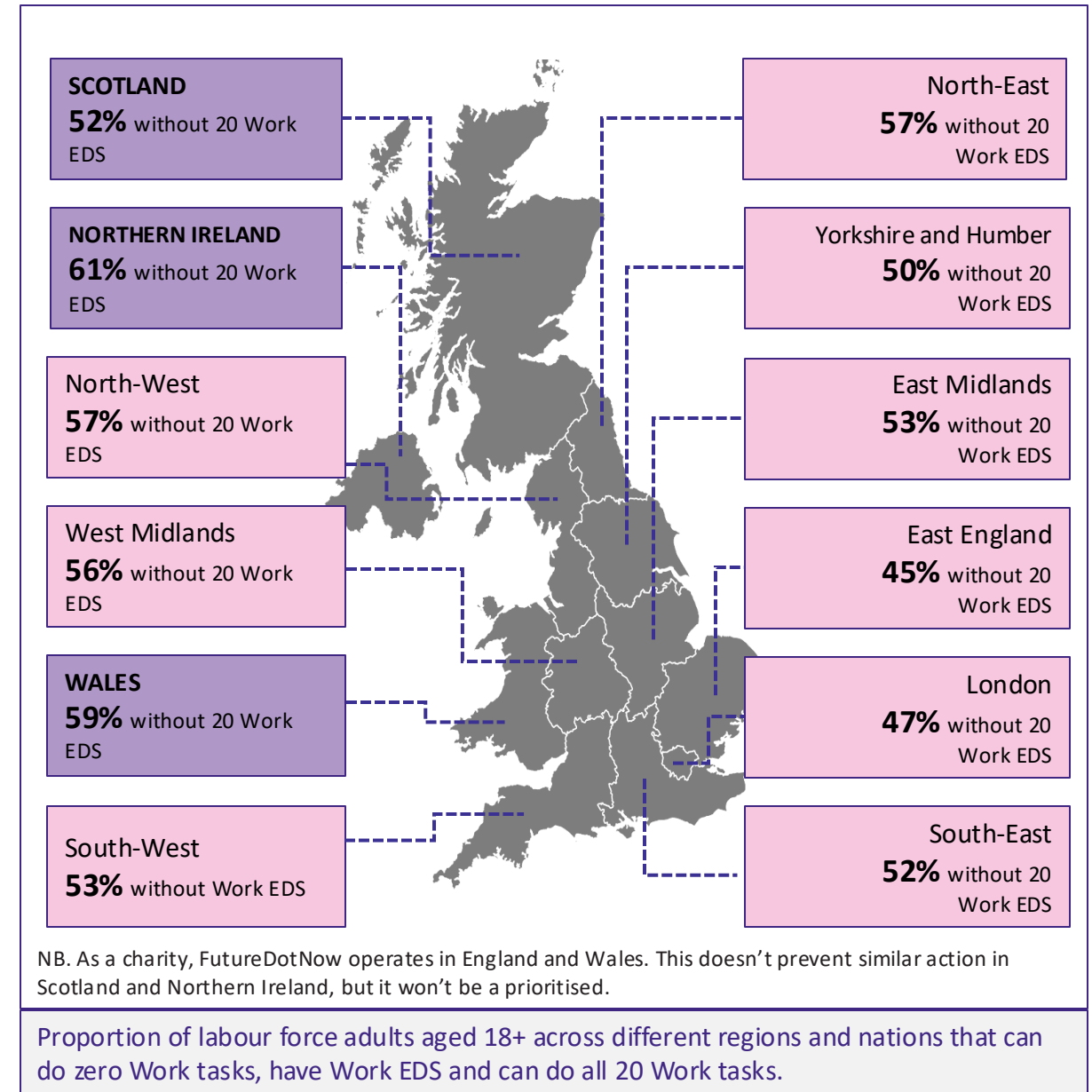
Helping Combined and Local Authorities
close the Essential Digital Skills gap

Introduction

There is a significant Essential Digital Skills gap in the UK labour force that has implications for individuals, business and the UK economy.

- Latest data shows more than 50% of working-age adults cannot complete the 20 digital tasks industry and government deem essential for the workplace.
- No almost every UK region and nation, more than 50% of working age adults don't have all 20 digital basics for work.
- London and the South-East are ahead but only by a narrow margin, at 48% and 45% respectively.
- The biggest area for opportunity is the Northern Ireland and Wales nationally, and the North-West and North-East of England and the West Midlands where those without all the digital essentials is around 60%
- **Addressing this gap offers opportunities to improve prosperity for individuals, boost productivity for business and grow the UK economy.**

(All data from the UK Essential Digital Skills report, FutureDotNow and Lloyds Bank, 2024.)



We are accelerating progress through collaboration

Starting in, FutureDotNow partnered with Greater Manchester Combined Authority, West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Dorset Council to support and learn from their current work to build digital confidence and capability in a regional setting.

We are grateful to Accenture who funded this work through a Global Grant. The scope has been both internal and external; which has meant working with HR to build skills in the Authority, working with Digital Policy teams to engage businesses in the region and with Transformation/Innovation teams to improve front-line services for the community.

The FutureDotNow Regional Guide seeks to capture the collective knowledge of these regional players for the benefit of other regions. It combines first hand experience from multiple regional teams, together with expertise from FutureDotNow. We do not yet have all the answers, but we do have a wealth of collective insight. This has been distilled into six recommended action steps, together with links to extra resources to help you take action locally.

As you learn from your own upskilling journeys, we'd love to include your reflections. Not only does this help us to shape the assets for members, it enables us to champion the needs of regional teams in our discussions with policy makers.

Please get in touch via hello@futuresdotnow.uk to share your story.

Developed in partnership with:



Overview

Who is the guide for?	Leaders and teams in Combined and Local Authorities tackling the EDS gap in their organisation and across the region. Responsibility for digital skills often sits with many different teams; you may be from HR, Digital Policy, Digital Transformation and Innovation teams, among many others.
What's the purpose?	This guide provides an overview of the essential digital skills gap in regions, what this means for you and how to take action. By sharing insight into what has worked for others, we hope to make your EDS journey easier.
Where's the insight come from?	First-hand experience of Greater Manchester Combined Authority, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Dorset Council, as well as FutureDotNow insight, built over the past three years working with our 200-strong coalition of businesses tackling this issue.
What's included?	• An overview of the issue and why it matters • Six action steps for regional teams 1. Take Stock 2. Get buy-in 3. Understand the gap in your region 4. Take action externally 5. Take action internally 6. Be a part of the movement • Appendix of additional resources and support

Why regional authorities are well placed to build digital skills

Combined and local authorities have a pivotal role in regions, and this extends to building digital confidence and capability.

There is a significant and pressing opportunity for authorities to build the Essential Digital Skills (EDS) of their own workforce as well as influencing and supporting businesses and communities in the region. Tackling the EDS gap as a region is not without its challenges but it does offer many opportunities.

There are several reasons why authorities are well placed to take action:



Training provision: You have access to training provision in its different guises, whether that is a devolved Adult Education Budget (AEB) or links with local universities and colleges. You can influence how that provision is structured, offered and promoted. If you have devolved powers, you have even more flexibility in how your AEB is allocated. This guide will help you think about how best to use that provision to make it accessible and impactful.



Regional strategy and case for change: In the past few years, businesses have been, and continue to be, under even more pressure. During the Covid-19 pandemic, some businesses thrived, some have closed, and some had to dramatically change their way of working and embrace digital adoption overnight. There will continue to be many competing priorities for you as a local or combined authority, and your businesses and communities. However, the EDS gap can't be ignored, and you have the opportunity to build the case for change strategically and embed it across your existing programmes of work. You're in a unique position to influence, or even change policy for your region.



Leverage the network: It can be challenging to allocate resource when budgets are tight, but getting senior buy-in at the start is critical. The first step is to engage a sponsor and appoint a project lead who can tap into the rich regional network of teams working in "digital". This network will likely include digital inclusion projects, HR colleagues, IT colleagues, and partner organisations with reach into businesses, especially those harder-to-reach. There will be learning and synergies that can be shared across digital programmes and at a minimum you can 'work with what you've got' and focus on tackling the EDS gap by embedding small additions into existing work and programmes.



Deep regional knowledge: You will have deep knowledge of what's happening in local communities. Use this unique perspective, together with the information in this guide to help local initiatives on this topic thrive.

Who are FutureDotNow?

FutureDotNow is uniting business to close the essential digital skills gap in the UK workforce.

Established in December 2019, FutureDotNow is a coalition of industry leaders focused on closing the digital skills gap for working-age adults. We are uniting business to tackle this gap in fundamental digital capability and confidence and build a future-fit workforce, one that can capitalise on the opportunities of emerging technology and support economic growth, breaking down barriers to opportunity for all.

Our action-centred coalition cuts across all business sectors.

FutureDotNow convenes the reach and influence of industry leaders such as Accenture, Amey, Barclays, City and Guilds, City of London, Deloitte, Marks and Spencer, NHS England, Nominet, Oliver Wyman, PwC, Salesforce and UFI VocTech Trust, alongside with many others.

Through our members' employees, customers, and supply chains, we have a reach of millions. Together we can have an exponential impact, closing the digital skills gap through collaboration and coordinated action.

We help businesses understand that a significant proportion of the labour force does not have the digital basics needed for the workplace, and we're empowering industry leaders to take action.

Our action-centred coalition of more than 200 leading organisations cuts across all business sectors.





The Essential Digital Skills gap

And why it matters

Understanding the issue

There is a pervasive but hidden Essential Digital Skills gap in the UK labour force that has implications for individuals, business and the UK economy. However, addressing it could act as a prosperity multiplier and help super-charge the UK economy.

Building a digitally confident and capable workforce is now non-negotiable. Each year, basic **essential digital skills gaps are costing the UK economy £23bn¹**, and workers without these skills are missing out on an estimated £10bn in additional wages. 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.21 million (52% of adults in the labour force) can't complete the 20 tasks²** that government and industry agree are **essential for work**. With a figure this high, it's **not just disadvantaged groups that are impacted**. And the data proves this.

The Lloyds Bank 2024 Consumer Digital Index shows us that across all age groups, more than 50% of the labour force are unable to complete those 20 essential digital tasks. The figure sits at 54% for 25-34 year-olds and goes down to 29% for those 65+ (not retired).

But age is just one lens through which we can consider the issue. In fact, the **industry** a person works in **is the greatest determiner of digital capability**. The gap between the highest performing sector (Technology at 20% without all 20 task) and the lowest (Construction, 65%) is the largest of any demographic factor.

It may be unsurprising that a traditionally manual sector like Construction is falling behind but it's worth noting **Retail, Medical, Public Service, Manufacturing and even Engineering all have an essential digital skills gap of over 50%**. And, in fact, **no sector other than Tech has a gap of less than 40%**.

The impact of these gaps isn't only economic. They also affect employers in specific and tangible ways. **The biggest skills gaps across the labour force are in *using the internet safely* and *problem solving***. In both areas, **only c.65% of working-age adults can complete the full suite of essential work tasks**.

Closing the safety gap represents a **huge opportunity for employers** to mitigate a significant business risk, especially when **almost of all businesses reported a security breach or attack in 2024³**.

Addressing skills gaps in *problem solving* (as well as others in the top 10 around *transacting* and *communicating*) would have **significant implications for productivity**, improving industry's ability to embrace **digital transformation**, respond to disruption, and accelerate **performance**.

Put simply, building a **digitally capable and confident workforce couldn't be more important – for individuals, industry and the nation**.

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.

1. [The Economic Impact of Closing the Work Essential Digital Skills Gap, FutureDotNow, 2025.](#)

2. [All further data taken from the Lloyds bank 2025 Consumer Digital Index, unless otherwise stated.](#)

3. [Cyber security breaches survey 2025, UK Government](#)

The top ten digital skills gaps

The top 10 tasks in the Essential Digital Skills Framework most lacking in the UK workforce, and the proportion of UK adults unable to complete them.

Task	Cannot complete
I can improve my own and/or the organisation's productivity using digital tools (e.g. Trello, Microsoft Projects and Planner, Slack)	29%
I can set privacy and marketing settings for websites and my accounts (e.g. managing social media privacy settings, managing cookie settings, updating contact preferences)	23%
I can set up and manage an account on a professional online network/community/job site (e.g. LinkedIn, Total Jobs, Indeed)	22%
I can access salary and tax information digitally (e.g. password protected payslips, P60, P45)	21%
I can complete digital records on behalf of, or within my organisation (e.g. absence management, holidays, timesheets, expenses, tax returns)	21%
I can update my device software/operating systems when necessary to prevent viruses and other risks (e.g. enabling automatic updates, or installing when prompted to do so)	20%
I can use workplace digital tools to create, share and collaborate with colleagues (e.g. Microsoft Teams, OneDrive, G-Suite, Office 365, WeTransfer, DropBox, WebEx, Slack)	18%
I can identify secure Wi-Fi networks to connect to (e.g. Wi-Fi networks where a unique password is required, trusted source or padlock next to Wi-Fi network)	18%
I can securely access, synchronise and share information at work across different devices (e.g. manage email, calendar or appointment system via different devices)	17%
I can identify secure websites (e.g. by looking for the padlock and 'https' in the address bar)	16%

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View by demographics

The EDS for work report breaks down the digital capability and confidence across several different demographics.

This graphic shows the groups that performs the best (the highest proportion that can complete all 20 of the essential digital tasks) and worst (the highest proportion that can complete none of these tasks).

Key findings:

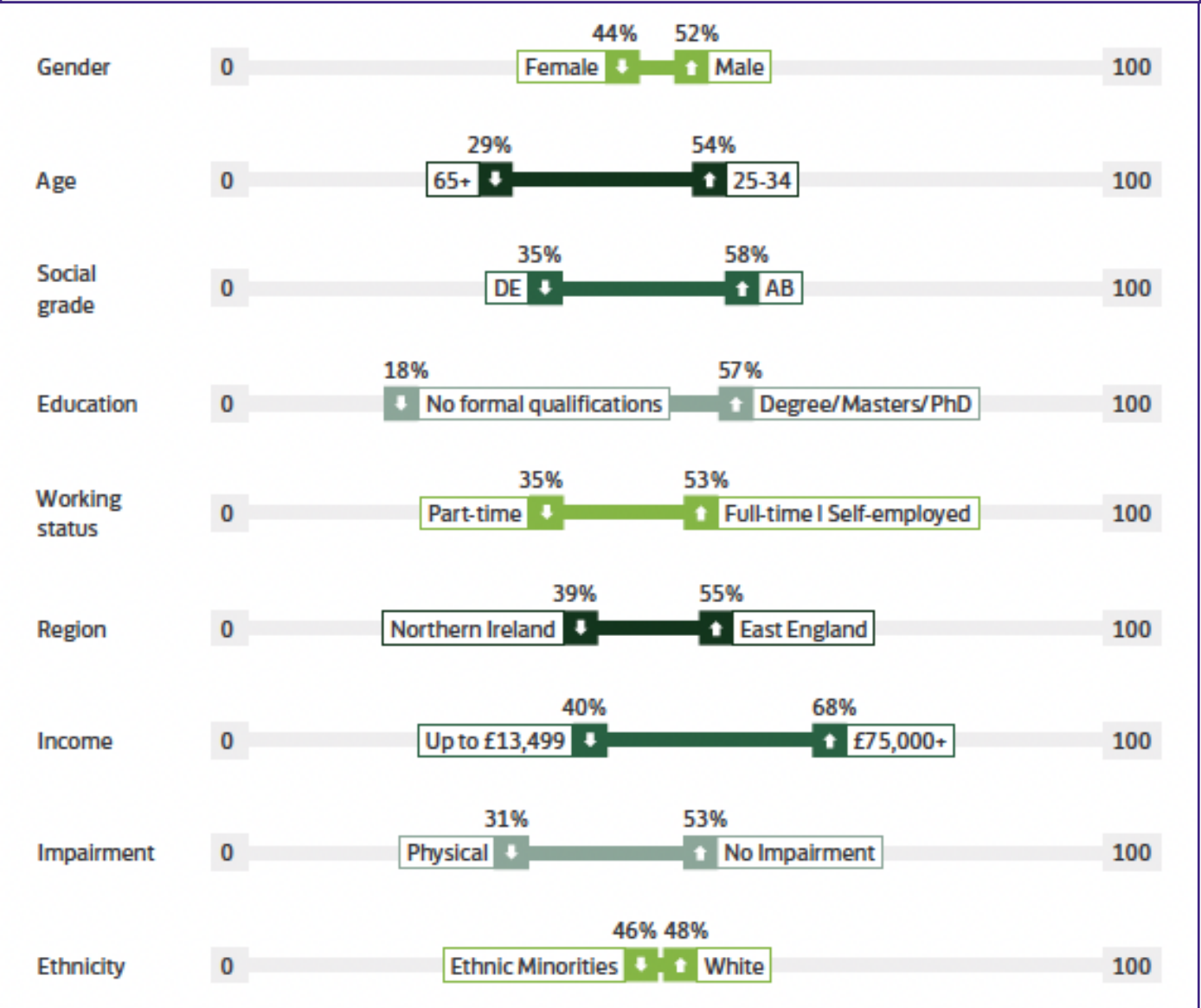
Age: The best performing group is the 25-34 year olds. That means the youngest group (18-24 year olds) is falling behind this older cohort in Essential Digital skills for Work. This challenges the idea all young people are natives and don't require any support building their digital capability.

Education: The disparity between those without formal qualifications and those with the most advanced level of education is stark and sizeable. This suggests it's likely to take significant additional effort to engage and motivate those who may have had limited – or negative – experiences of adult learning.

Income: There's an almost 30% difference between those with the lowest and highest level of incomes. When almost all jobs are advertised exclusively online and the vast majority of roles have at least some digital component, this disparity risks significantly exacerbating poverty and the resulting impacts.

There is more data on all the demographics seen here, in [the Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index](#).

Proportion of labour force adults aged 18+ across different demographics that can do all 20 Work tasks.



Guide index

This guide will take you through the six key action steps required to start closing the Essential Digital Skills gap in your region.

1	Take stock
2	Get buy in
3	Your regional gap
4	Take action externally
5	Take action internally
6	Be part of the movement



Interested in finding out more?

The full FutureDotNow Regional Guide is a resource for our paid members. However, joining is quick and simple and comes with a host of other benefits.

If you'd like to find out more about what's involved in joining our coalition and what other support we can provide, [visit our website](#) or reach out to hello@futuresdotnow.uk.