Uniting business to tackle the essential digital skills gap in the UK workforce

Colleague Self-Assessment Guide

(Now reflecting the AI-embedded Essential Digital Skills Framework)

Building a process for colleagues to assess their own levels of essential digital confidence

Acknowledgement

This guide utilises the AI-embedded Essential Digital Skills Framework, developed by FutureDotNow in partnership with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. It builds on the initial guide first published in 2024 and is designed to help FutureDotNow members understand the digital skills of their workforce.

Our thanks to the organisations that shared knowledge and experience to develop this guide, including Amey, CAST, Cornwall Council, Cosmic, Deloitte, Department for Transport, Finyx, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Lancashire Digital Skills Partnership, Leeds City Council, Marks & Spencer, Nationwide, NCFE, NHS Scotland, and Salesforce.

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Introduction

This best-practice guide and question set will help you assess your workforce's digital confidence, identifying opportunity areas so you can take steps to ensure your colleagues have the essential digital skills needed in today's workplace.

This document includes:

- Recommended question set (using the AI-embedded Essential Digital Skills Framework)
- Rating scale
- Additional contextual questions
- Tips on how to effectively implement your assessment in your business

What to consider when choosing to use this updated guide

This updated guide is based on the latest research and the updated, AI-embedded framework from the FutureDotNow report, 'Embedding AI into the Essential Digital Skills Framework'. It reflects the expanded set of 25 digital tasks now recognised as vital for today's AI-enabled workplace. By using this guide, you will gain a clear understanding of your workforce's digital confidence across this updated task set – ensuring your assessment is aligned with what FutureDotNow and our community recommend for all employees.

As an early adopter of this new framework, you won't yet have external benchmarks to compare your results, as current national data is still based on the previous 20-task version. However, using the updated framework now will help you establish your own organisational baseline and prepare for future benchmarking as the framework becomes more widely adopted.

Why ask colleagues to self-assess digital confidence?

This assessment tool will help you to:

- Accurately gauge your workforce's digital confidence levels, providing a clear snapshot of employee perception of their own capabilities.
- Uncover specific skill gaps that may be hindering business outcomes.
- Allocate resources effectively by making data driven decisions about targeted training initiatives.
- Ensure your approach to digital skills assessment is in sync with FutureDotNow-recommended best practice.
- For FutureDotNow members - Compare your workforce with competitors using other external benchmarking insight (see the Workplace Assessment Guide for other recommended data sources).

Getting started: setting up your assessment

1. **Choose your survey platform:** Select a user-friendly survey tool that your organisation is familiar with. Popular options include Microsoft Forms, Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, and Typeform. The key is to choose a platform that's accessible and easy for your employees to navigate, and that's easy for you to both set up and use to review insight.

2. **Customise with real-world examples:** While the language of the 25 core questions should remain unchanged (albeit you could decide not to assess all 25), we suggest you tailor the examples within each question to mirror your organisation's unique context. Look for the text in [square brackets] and replace it with specific tools or processes used in your workplace. This personalisation will make the assessment more relevant and engaging for your employees.

Understanding the assessment structure

We know from member feedback that a consistent approach to baselining essential digital skills is crucial. The methodology we recommend here enables us to effectively compare trends in digital skills across organisations and sectors. By structuring questions around the 25 essential digital skills tasks and using a shared rating system, we ensure data consistency which allows us to aggregate and analyse the data accurately and provide valuable insights.

Rating scale

We suggest using a simple 4-point rating scale to measure confidence:

Not confident	Slightly confident	Confident	Very confident
"I am unable to do this task without help."	"I'll give it a go, but I sometimes need support."	"I know what I need to do and can tackle the task without help."	"I am very comfortable doing this task and would be able to support others."

Demographic information

You may choose to assess organisation-wide or start with a specific team. Depending on the make-up of your organisation we recommend you consider useful demographic questions to include within your survey. In doing this you will gain an extra level of insight from your data, such as:

Current team/department (e.g. *single-choice drop-down*)

Age range (e.g. *single choice drop-down;* under 25, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 +)

Length of service (e.g. *single choice drop-down;* Less than 1 year, 1-3 years, 3-5 years, 5-10

years, 10+ years)

Location (*e.g. single choice drop-down;* North West, South East, etc.) or city if that's relevant to the analysis.

Be clear why you are including these questions and how you will use and protect this data. If you are adopting an anonymous survey, these can come in handy. If not, consider if these are needed at all (for example, you could link your results to your HR data after the fact for this information).

Question set

The question set (Appendix 1) covers the 25 essential digital tasks, spanning five key skill areas:

- **Communicating:** How effectively do your employees use digital tools for workplace communication?
- **Handling Information and Content:** Can they securely access, share, and manage information?
- **Transacting:** Are they comfortable with digital transactions and record-keeping?
- **Problem Solving:** Can they leverage digital tools to find solutions and enhance productivity?
- **Staying Safe, Legal and Responsible Online:** Do they understand online risks and follow best practices for security and data protection?

Impact measurement questions

To help us understand the impact of our tools and actions in closing the digital skills gap, we encourage organisations using this assessment to include the following **three questions** alongside the colleague self-assessment.

As the framework is adopted more widely, FutureDotNow intends to explore opportunities to gather and share anonymous, aggregated insights from participating organisations. This will help us better understand the impact of workforce digital skills initiatives and identify common trends across sectors.

1. I believe that improving essential digital skills will help me in work (agree/disagree)
2. Taking this assessment has helped me to reflect on my level of digital confidence and capability (agree/disagree)
3. Following this assessment, I am more motivated to take part in learning to increase my digital capability and confidence (agree/disagree)

Should organisations choose to share anonymised findings in the future, these collective insights could help demonstrate outcomes such as:

- *X% of the workforce believe better Essential Digital Skills will help in their day-to-day work*
- *As a result of collective effort X% more people are reflecting on their Essential Digital Skills*
- *X% more people area motivated to go and improve their Essential Digital Skills*

Additional context

We also recommend including a selection of additional context questions at the end of the survey to gain valuable insight from your colleagues. Some examples include:

- How motivated are you to develop your digital skills in the next year? (Use our recommended rating scale, replacing 'Confident' with 'Motivated' in the headline options)
- What are the barriers in your role to developing your digital confidence? *(Open text)*
- For the tasks you aren't as confident in, what type(s) of support would help you become more confident? *(Open text)*
- For the tasks you are most confident in, what could we replicate for other colleagues to become as confident? *(Open text)*
- Which one task, in which you aren't as confident, do you view as the most important to develop this year? *(list of all 25 tasks or the ones you surveyed on)*

Conducting the Assessment: A Step-by-Step Guide

1. **Prepare:** Set up the survey in your chosen tool, incorporating all 25 core questions and any additional context questions that you've selected.
2. **Communicate:** Inform your employees of the upcoming assessment. Explain its purpose, emphasise its importance for professional development and businesses goals, and assure them that their responses will be used constructively.
3. **Launch:** Distribute the survey, ensuring all employees have easy access and understand how to complete it. Set a target response rate based on group size.
4. **Monitor:** Keep track of response rates and send gentle reminders to those who haven't yet participated.
5. **Analyse:** Once the survey is complete, dive into the results. Look for trends, identify strengths, and pinpoint areas where improvement is needed. Most survey tools have reasonable analysis capability, you might want to go one step further and use Excel (or similar) to carry out a more comprehensive analysis.

Considerations for a successful assessment

- **Anonymity:** Consider the culture of your organisation and what is often done with successful surveys. Should it be anonymous to encourage honest and candid feedback, or is that not necessary?
- **Timing:** Choose a time when employees are less likely to be overwhelmed with other work commitments. Also, is there current survey fatigue? You might want to wait and select a more optimal time to carry it out.
- **Support and access:** Help anyone who might need support accessing or completing the survey. How will colleague without regular access to a computer complete your survey? It's certainly possible to offer a range of formats such as adapting it for mobile devices.
- **Follow-up:** Share a summary of the results with the team, highlighting key findings and outlining the next steps for skill development. It might help to run a small focus group if responders are open to this. In doing this it will add to your understanding on what learning can be offered.

Making the most of your results

- **Targeted training:** Identify skills with lower confidence scores and develop tailored training programmes to address those specific areas. The additional qualitative data and any further input from focus groups will help here.
- **Mentorship opportunities:** Recognise areas of high confidence where employees can share their expertise and mentor their colleagues.
- **Learning resources:** Leverage the Digital Skills Directory to find reputable learning providers who can help your team upskill in areas where improvement is needed.

Important Note: This assessment measures confidence, not competence. While confidence is a great indicator, you may want to consider competency assessments in critical areas (e.g., validation tests on key skills) ahead of any learning interventions you implement.

Conclusion

By regularly assessing digital confidence, you're proactively investing in your workforce's future. A digitally confident workforce is more adaptable, productive and better equipped to embrace new technologies. If you have any questions about implementing this assessment or interpreting the results, don't hesitate to reach out to the FutureDotNow team. We're here to support your organisation's digital skills journey.

Appendix

Colleague self-assessment question set

Skill	No.	Task (question asked)
Communicating	1	**How confident are you:** Communicating in the workplace digitally using messaging applications [e.g. Email, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Slack, internal Intranet, WhatsApp]
	2	**How confident are you:** Using workplace digital tools to appropriately create, share and collaborate with colleagues [e.g. Microsoft Teams, OneDrive, G-Suite Including Gemini, Office 365 Including Copilot, WeTransfer, DropBox, WebEx, Slack, ChatGPT]
	3	**How confident are you:** Setting up and managing an account on a professional online network/ community/job site [e.g. LinkedIn, Total Jobs, Indeed]
Handling information and content	4	**How confident are you:** Following your organisation's IT policies when sharing information internally and externally [e.g. classifying emails/documents, encrypting sensitive information, sharing appropriate information on social media, avoiding sharing sensitive data with unauthorised generative AI tools]
	5	**How confident are you:** Securely accessing, synchronising and sharing information at work across different devices [e.g. manage email, calendar or appointment system via different devices]
Transacting	6	**How confident are you:** Completing digital records on behalf of, or within your organisation [e.g. absence management, holidays, timesheets, expenses, tax returns]
	7	**How confident are you:** Accessing salary and tax information digitally [e.g. password protected payslips, P60, P45]
	8	**How confident are you:**

Skill	No.	Task (question asked)
		Completing online financial transactions while understanding how AI systems support these processes, and can identify potential risks [e.g. AI generated scams or deceptive interfaces designed to manipulate your purchasing decisions]
Problem solving	9	**How confident are you:** Finding information online and using appropriate digital tools that help you solve work related problems [e.g. Search Engines, IT helpdesk, AI assistants, software providers, peer networks, authorised generative AI]
	10	**How confident are you:** Using appropriate software that is required of your day-to-day job [e.g. spreadsheets, online booking systems, HR management, workflow or sales management, AI-powered analytics, automated scheduling, intelligent document processing]
	11	**How confident are you:** Improving your skills and ability to do new things at work using online tutorials, learning platforms, AI-assisted tools and how-to guides [e.g. LinkedIn Learning, YouTube, AI learning assistants, iDEA, Skillsoft, internal learning platforms]
	12	**How confident are you:** Improving your own and/or the organisation's productivity using digital tools and appropriate AI solutions [e.g. project management tools, collaboration platforms, AI assisted task automation, meeting transcription tools]
	13	**How confidence are you:** Developing effective prompts for AI systems to solve specific workplace problems while understanding AI's role as a complementary resource rather than a replacement for human judgement
Staying safe, legal and responsible online	14	**How confident are you:** Acting with caution online and understanding that there are risks and threats involved in carrying out activities online, Including when using AI tools [e.g. use anti-virus software, classify and share information securely, follow data handling policies for AI systems, or avoid certain types of websites such as piracy websites, unauthorised AI services, deepfakes and AI powered scams]

Skill	No.	Task (question asked)
	15	**How confident are you:** Setting privacy and marketing settings for websites and your accounts [e.g. managing social media privacy settings, managing cookie settings, updating contact preferences]
	16	**How confident are you:** Following data protection guidelines online [e.g. following data storage and retention guidelines, not sharing or using other people's data or media such as movies or music without their consent, understanding consent for AI training data, avoiding sharing copyrighted content with AI systems]
	17	**How confident are you:** Responding to requests for authentication for online accounts [e.g. resetting your password when you've forgotten it, two factor authentication, using a remote access key or an authenticator app]
	18	**How confident are you:** Identifying secure websites [e.g. by looking for the padlock and 'https' in the address bar]
	19	**How confident are you:** Recognising suspicious links and content, whether human or AI generated, and knowing whether clicking on these links or downloading unfamiliar attachments is a risk [e.g. Spam/phishing emails, AI-enhanced scams, deceptive texts, pop ups]
	20	**How confident are you:** Updating your device software/ operating systems when necessary to prevent viruses and other risks [e.g. enabling automatic updates, or installing when prompted to do so]
	21	**How confident are you:** Identifying 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]
	22	**How confident are you:** With knowing what you can share online, knowing that online activity produces a permanent record that can be accessed by others, and may be

Skill	No.	Task (question asked)
		used to train AI systems or influence algorithmic decisions about you. [e.g. publicly shared photos, forums, personal information or opinions, understanding how shared content may be used by AI systems]
	23	**How confident are you:** In understanding the basic principles of AI including how it works, its limitations, and when it is appropriate to use. [e.g. understanding AI training, data requirements, and evaluating when AI tools are suitable for specific needs]
	24	**How confident are you:** Recognising the ethical implications of AI use and its societal impact. [e.g. understanding AI biases, human oversight requirements, environmental impact and potential impact on privacy, fairness, and human rights]
	25	**How confident are you:** Understanding and managing AI risks in your job. [e.g. keeping up with new AI technology, understanding how it affects data privacy, and following AI guidelines for your Industry]

Impact measurement questions

Please include the following three questions in your assessment with colleagues so we can collectively understand the Impact we are making as a coalition:

Question 1. I believe that improving essential digital skills will help me in work (agree/disagree)

Question 2. Taking this assessment has helped me to reflect on my level of digital confidence and capability (agree/disagree)

Question 3. Following this assessment, I am more motivated to take part in learning to increase my digital capability and confidence (agree/disagree)