

A woman with blonde hair, wearing large black headphones and a black tank top, is seated and looking at a laptop. A man with a grey beard, wearing a grey hoodie and a lanyard with a tag that says 'NCFE', is standing next to her, leaning over the laptop. The background shows a modern classroom or office environment with other people and furniture. The overall image has a dark, semi-transparent overlay.

No One Left Offline: a snapshot of essential digital skills in the UK

Introduction

Background

In an increasingly digital world, having essential digital skills is no longer a luxury, but a necessity. Despite this, a significant portion of the UK population is still being left behind. Recent reports show that [8.5 million people lack basic digital skills](#) and just over [half of our workforce cannot complete the 20 digital tasks that industry and government agree are essential for today's workplace.](#)

This gap in digital proficiency has far-reaching implications, affecting both economic productivity and social mobility. Without basic digital skills, individuals encounter challenges in accessing education, securing employment, and participating fully in everyday activities. Tasks such as applying for jobs, managing finances, or booking medical appointments can become difficult to navigate, creating barriers that contribute to ongoing disadvantage. The digital divide reinforces existing inequalities, increasing the risk of exclusion and isolation for those who struggle to keep up with a society that is becoming increasingly reliant on digital tools and services.

These figures and implications highlight the urgent need to address the digital divide and ensure that everyone has the skills needed to navigate modern life effectively. As such, we launched our [No One Left Offline](#) campaign in September 2024, which underscores the critical importance of digital proficiency across all aspects of our personal and professional lives. The campaign is opening up discussions with the public, gathering their thoughts, and working towards solutions that connect people to the support they need.



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Capturing digital skills levels: our methodology

As part of our No One Left Offline campaign, we opened our Essential Digital Skills Initial Assessment tool to the public to capture a snapshot of the UK's digital skills level. The assessment was freely available for anyone to complete between Monday 2 September and Friday 27 September 2024, with **438 individuals** completing the assessment. Respondents spent an average time of **24 minutes** answering a series of randomised questions, which captured their overall essential digital skills level by assessing their knowledge across five key areas:

- using devices and handling information
- creating and editing
- communicating
- being safe and responsible online
- transacting.

The assessment offered insights into the digital capabilities of various demographic groups, identifying both strengths and areas for improvement. Across all areas, users could achieve one of three grades of increasing skill level: working towards Foundation, working towards Entry Level, and working towards Level 1.

This report explores the findings from the assessment, analysing digital skill levels across different age groups, genders, and ethnicities. Our goal is to understand the UK's digital landscape better and develop strategies to enhance digital literacy, ensuring no one is left offline.

Overall digital skills level

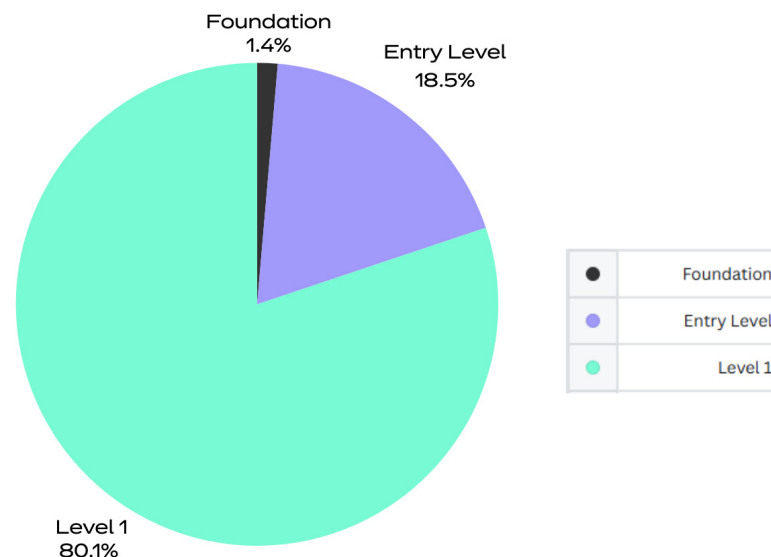
Analysis

The Essential Digital Skills Assessment revealed a mixed picture of digital proficiency across the UK. On a positive note, the data shows that the majority of participants (80%) are working at Level 1 – indicating that these 351 individuals possess a solid foundation of digital skills that enables them to navigate various digital tasks and challenges effectively.

Yet, the assessment also found that 20% of people are currently working at Entry Level or Foundation Level. Specifically, 18.5% (81 individuals) are working at Entry Level, with 1.4% (6 individuals) working at Foundation Level. This tells us that **1 in 5 respondents did not have the essential digital skills needed to fully engage with today's digital world.**

While it's encouraging that the majority of individuals possess a basic level of digital proficiency, the fact that nearly one-fifth of the respondents lacked these essential skills highlights the need for targeted interventions. Individuals working at Entry and Foundation Levels may struggle with everyday digital tasks such as online banking, accessing healthcare services, or applying for jobs – which could significantly impact their quality of life and opportunities for both personal and professional growth.

1 in 5 respondents did not have the essential digital skills needed to fully engage with today's digital world."



Overall insights by age and gender

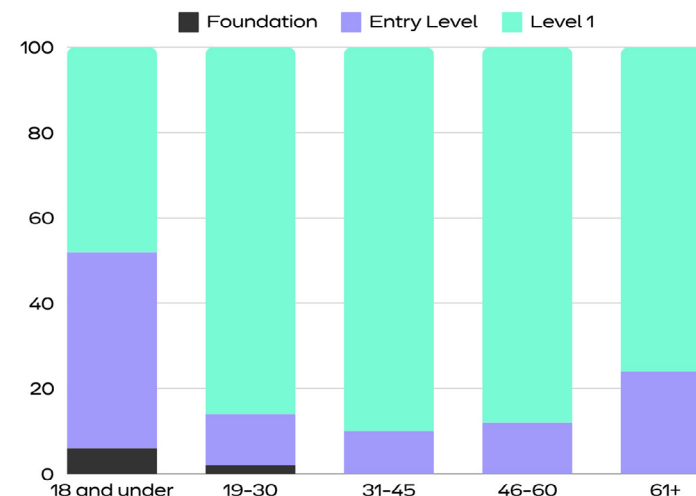
Analysis

The findings reveal a diverse landscape of digital skills, with differences noted particularly between age groups. The data found that **more than 50% of respondents aged 18 and under did not have the essential digital skills required to navigate modern life**. This age group had the highest percentage of both Foundation (6%) and Entry Level (46%) respondents, which might be somewhat surprising given the perception that young people are 'digital natives' and therefore automatically more 'digitally savvy'. Targeted support is clearly needed for this age group to elevate their digital capabilities and ensure they're well-prepared for the future.

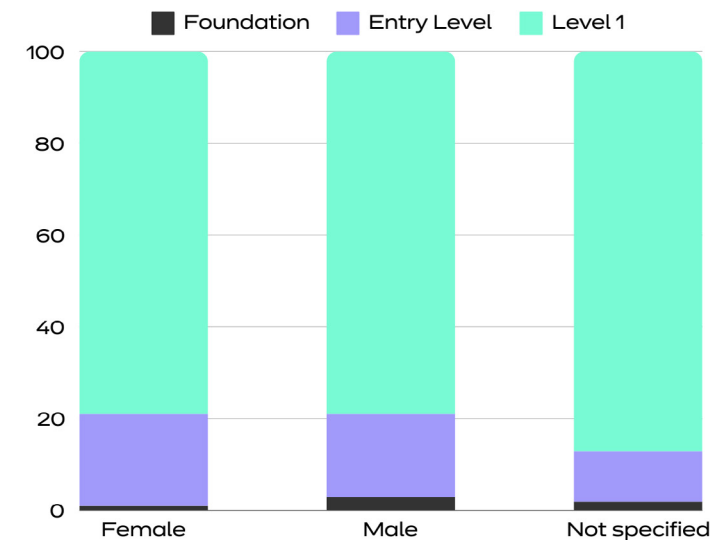
The middle-aged groups (31-45 and 46-60) exhibited the highest levels of digital skills, with a significant majority working at Level 1. This suggests that these age groups have robust digital skills, likely due to their active engagement in both professional and personal digital activities. Young adults (aged 19-30) also demonstrated strong digital proficiency, with the majority achieving Level 1 status. This indicates that this age group is well-equipped to handle digital tasks, although there remains a small percentage that could benefit from additional support to reach full proficiency.

For older adults aged 61+, while the majority are proficient at Level 1, almost **1 in 4 respondents were still working at Entry Level**. This highlights the need for continued digital skills support for older adults to ensure they can continue to adapt and navigate the digital world effectively.

Interestingly, digital skills level disparities between genders were minimal, aligning with our overall findings of 1 in 5 respondents working below Level 1.



Overall essential digital skills level by age



Overall essential digital skills level by gender

Skills levels across the five key areas

Background

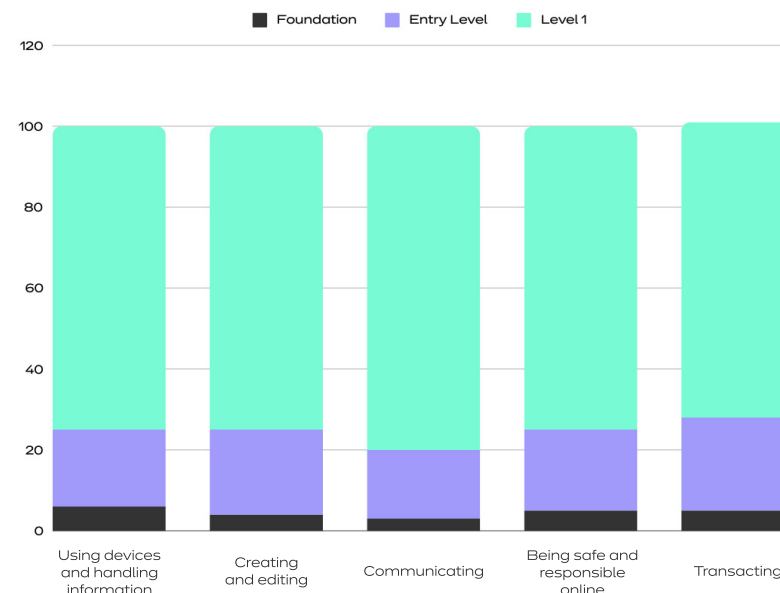
Beyond overall working level, we can dig deeper into the assessment results by looking at the findings from across the five key digital skills areas. These five key areas provide the framework for which all Essential Digital Skills Qualifications are based upon, and are as follows:

- using devices and handling information
- creating and editing
- communicating
- being safe and responsible online
- transacting.

Overall analysis

Across all genders and age ranges, results showed that respondents were strongest at **communicating**, with 4 in 5 able to digitally communicate proficiently to a Level 1 standard. This indicates that respondents were confident in setting up and using accounts and applications to communicate online, including email, social media, WhatsApp, Zoom and Microsoft Teams, alongside using these tools to send files, make and receive video calls, and create and edit documents. This proficiency has no doubt increased over the past five years in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to work remotely.

On the contrary, **1 in 4 respondents struggled with making transactions online to a proficient standard**, working to either Foundation or Entry Level in this area. This skill includes being able to set up online accounts to be able to buy goods and services, filling in forms to be able to access services, such as voting registration and booking GP appointments, and managing money and transactions online, including the transfer of funds via a banking app – activities that are all fundamental to our everyday lives in 2025.



Essential digital skills levels in the five key skills areas

Age and key skills

With regards to age, findings showed that respondents from the 18 and under group were working at a lower overall level across all five key skills areas when compared to other age groups. Across all areas, at least 2 in 5 of those aged 18 and under were working at Foundation or Entry Level in these key skills areas. This was most pronounced in the transacting skill area, where **1 in 2 respondents were working below Level 1**.

When it came to **being safe and responsible online** – which includes skills such as being able to recognise suspicious links, enable privacy settings, and identify secure websites and networks – almost half (46%) of respondents aged 18 and under, and over a quarter (27%) of those aged 61+, were working at Foundation or Entry Level. These findings suggest a stark picture of the number of both younger and older people who could be at risk when it comes to staying safe and avoiding being scammed online, suggesting that further awareness and training is needed in this area.



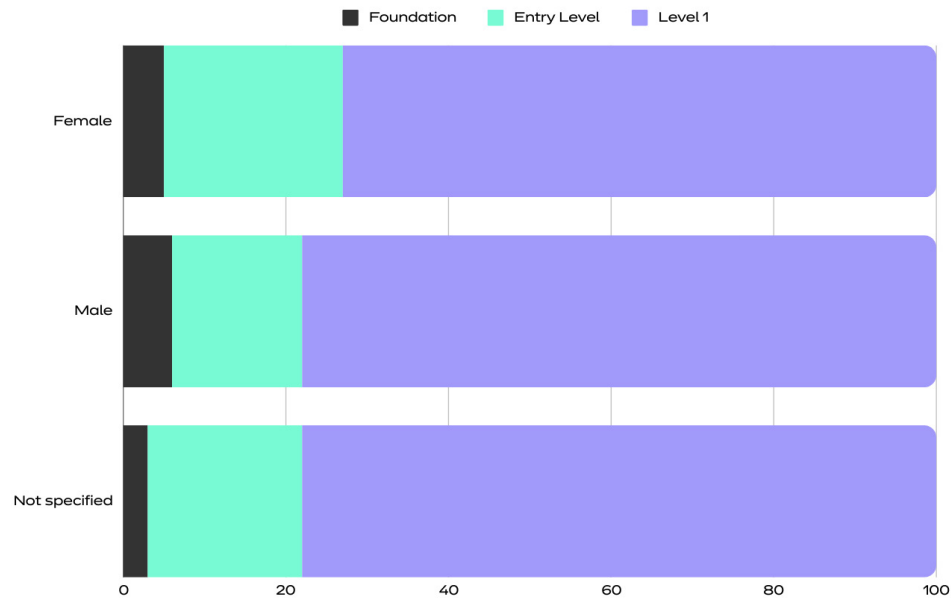
Another key finding amongst the 61+ group showed that a third of respondents struggled with **creating and editing**, with over 3 in 10 participants struggling with **using devices and handling information**. This suggests what the key areas of focus should be for this older group to ensure that they are not at any disadvantage in terms of social isolation – for example, through not being able to use devices to connect with loved ones or being unable to save or open attachments (such as photos) that family or friends may send them.



Gender and key skills

There were few notable differences between genders across the five key skills areas, although the strongest area for females was **communicating** (with 81% of women working at Level 1 compared to 76% of men), while the strongest skill for men was **being safe and responsible online** (with 78% working at Level 1 whilst 73% of women are at this level).

For respondents who did not specify their gender, **being safe and responsible online** was also their most competent area (matching the 78% of men).



Being safe and responsible online by gender



Conclusions

Findings and implications

The No One Left Offline assessment results offer a snapshot of digital skills across the UK, revealing both progress and challenges. While 80% of participants demonstrate Level 1 proficiency, 1 in 5 participants lacked the essential digital skills needed for full participation in today's digital world. Significant gaps are evident among younger people (18 and under) and older adults (61+), who face barriers in key areas like transacting online and staying safe in digital environments. These findings carry important implications.

The knowledge gaps in transacting skills, which more than 1 in 4 respondents struggled with, could limit access to vital services including healthcare, voting, and online banking, compounding social and economic inequalities. Additionally, misconceptions about young people being 'digitally savvy' obscure the fact that more than half of respondents aged 18 and under lacked sufficient essential skills, potentially affecting workplace readiness and lifelong adaptability.

Older adults face challenges with device use and online communication, increasing their risk of social isolation. Across all groups, limited proficiency in online safety heightens vulnerabilities to fraud and misinformation, underlining the need for focused interventions to improve digital resilience.



1 in 5 individuals lacked the digital skills needed for full participation in today's world."



Key takeaways

Although this report is intended as a snapshot and we would recommend more in-depth research with a larger sample size to ensure it is representative of the UK population, there are some clear themes that are emerging:

1. We must continue to advocate for digital inclusion as a national priority.

Collaboration between government, industry, employers, providers and non-profit organisations will improve our ability to address the digital divide and ensure that everyone has equal access to digital opportunities. This includes working to increase awareness and dispel misconceptions, including those about young people's digital proficiency.

2. We must ensure that younger and older individuals receive targeted support to improve their skills.

Through tailored programmes, we can address the specific needs and challenges that these groups face, using age-appropriate content and ensuring accessible delivery methods. We must also work to dispel any preconceptions and misconceptions around the perceived digital skills levels of these groups. Additionally, we should advocate for the inclusion of digital skills in the core curriculum in schools. This will support young people in transitioning to a digital world, ensuring they are well-equipped with the necessary skills from an early age.

3. We must connect individuals to existing digital skills

solutions. We need to consider how we can create a streamlined system to link individuals with currently available digital skills resources, including existing training programmes, free-to-access qualifications such as the Essential Digital Skills and Digital Functional Skills Qualifications, and assessment and diagnostic tools which can help to determine starting points and measure progress and development. For example, this could mean delivering digital skills resources through familiar touchpoints such as schools, workplaces, and community centres. By meeting individuals where they are, this approach reduces barriers and ensures accessible, proactive support for building essential digital skills.

Through partnership and collaboration, we can work together to bridge the digital divide and empower individuals of all ages with the essential digital skills they need not only to survive, but thrive, in today's increasingly digital world.



Further information

Visit [No One Left Offline](#) to:

- discover where you can access Essential Digital Skills Qualifications
- read expert opinion pieces
- hear from the public about their views on the importance of essential digital skills
- learn how NCFE is closing the digital skills gap with partners including FutureDotNow.

