Essential Digital Skills 2023: Technical Notes

Essential Digital Skills Methodology

Sample
Ipsos interviewed 4,172 participants aged 18+ years in the UK (Great Britain and Northern Ireland) via their telephone Omnibus. Data are weighted to represent the UK population in terms of age, social grade, region and working status within the gender variable and additional profiles on tenure and ethnicity using PAMCo data. Data are further weighted on device ownership using data derived from a robust national survey.

Fieldwork dates
8th March – 4th April 2023

Fieldwork methodology
The Ipsos telephone Omnibus (also known as CATIBUS), was used for a second year as the methodology for the Essential Digital Skills (EDS) study. CATIBUS interviews a nationally representative sample of those aged 18+ in Great Britain. An additional sample of interviews in Northern Ireland (n=150) was then conducted to ensure UK representivity. CATIBUS uses telephone interviewing to ensure no online bias, with responses entered directly into an electronic questionnaire by the interviewer conducting the interview.

The sample design incorporates a range of variables to ensure a robust, representative and consistent sample is achieved each week of fieldwork. CATIBUS uses a rigorous sampling method – robust samples of telephone leads are purchased from specialist sample providers as well as Random Digit Dialling, and consumer sample lists of over 10 million people in the UK which can be targeted locally and nationally. Approximately 60% of interviews are conducted on a mobile and 40% via landline.

Only a limited amount of corrective weighting is needed to adjust the results on the Omnibus survey so that they are in line with the national demographic profile.

Between 2019-2020, Ipsos conducted the EDS survey through the face-to-face Omnibus (CAPIBUS) which was able to reach those aged 15+ in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic compromising the safety of participants and interviewers and prompting local lockdowns throughout the UK, the survey was carried out by telephone for the first time in 2021, rather than face-to-face interviewing. Questions were asked in the same way. CATIBUS is now the chosen methodology for the EDS survey for the foreseeable future.

EDS framework
The Essential Digital Skills report is based on data collected to help understand if people would be able to do a range of tasks without assistance in either a work setting or in their personal lives. This is grouped in three levels of EDS: the Foundation Level, Life EDS and Work EDS.

In 2022, the Essential Digital Skills calculation and list of tasks within the framework were updated to reflect more accurately the current technological landscape and opportunity for digital activities. This is the second year utilising this current framework, and as such trended data can be seen in the 2023 Essential Digital Skills Report. To achieve the Foundation Level, you must be able to complete all of the eight tasks included in this question.

Across EDS, there are 26 Life tasks, across five Skills. These Skills are Communicating, Handling Information & Content, Transacting, Problem Solving and Being Safe & Legal Online. If you are able to do at least one task in a Skill, you are considered as having that Skill. If you have all five Life Skills, you are classed as having ‘Life EDS’.

Achievement of Work EDS is similar to Life EDS. There are 20 Work tasks across the same five Skills, though each task is focused on the workplace setting. Achieving one task in a Skill results in an individual having that Skill. If you have all five Work Skills, you are classed as having ‘Work EDS’. However, Work EDS can only be achieved by those amongst the UK Labour Force. This sample is defined by working status and not age. This sample consists of participants who:

- Have paid job - Full time (30+ hours per week)
- Have paid job - Part time (8-29 hours per week)
• Have paid job - Part time (Under 8 hours per week)
• Not working
• Self-employed (full time)
• Self-employed (part time)
• Full time student
• Still at school
• Unemployed and seeking work
• Not in paid work for other reason
• Not in paid work because of long term illness or disability

Thus, participants are classified as doing the task if they can do it, regardless of if they do it at work or not. This provides an opportunity to capture a group of the population who are not employed but can still do a Worktask, allowing Work skills to be measured for UK adults who are out of work and potentially job seeking. On the scale used to measure ability to do a task, participants are classified as being able to do a task if they code 2, 3 or 4.

1. Yes – you can do this task in your personal life
2. [IF EMPLOYED] Yes – you can do this task in your working life / [IF NOT EMPLOYED BUT NOT RETIRED] Yes – you would be able to do this task if you were in work [EXCLUSIVE]
3. [IF EMPLOYED] Yes – you can do this task in both your personal and working life / [IF NOT EMPLOYED BUT NOT RETIRED] Yes – you can do this task in your personal life and would be able to do this task if you were in work [EXCLUSIVE]
4. Yes – you can do this task in your working life but you don’t need to use it
5. No – you can’t do this task [EXCLUSIVE]
6. [IF NOT EMPLOYED BUT NOT RETIRED] Unable to consider a working life [DO NOT READ OUT —DO NOT CODE WITH 2.5]

As the framework for Essential Digital Skills was updated in 2022, any 2023 data collected cannot be compared to EDS results reported in the years 2019-2021.
UK Representivity and Population Estimates

This report includes the numbers of adults 18+ that have been inferred to be in a particular group by extrapolating from our research data (for example, the number of those 18+ in the UK in 2023 with all 8 Foundation tasks is 84% which has been extrapolated to represent an estimated 44.8m people). Total population figures are taken from the most recently published estimates provided by the Office for National Statistics (2021 midyear stats for the UK). For the Essential Digital Skills data, percentages are applied to a population base aged 18+ (53,188,264). Total working population figures are taken from the most recently published estimates provided by the Office for National Statistics (2021 midyear stats for the UK), weighted to the Labour Force Survey stats (Labour Force Study Nov-Jan 2023). For the Essential Digital Skills data, percentages are applied to a UK labour force population base aged 18+ (40,674,000). Sources can be found below:

https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland
https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/summaryoffactshomepage

Whilst every care has been taken to ensure the robustness of our data, our data accuracy is limited by its sample size, and therefore there is a margin of error that exists around any figures reported. All significance testing is calculated at the 95% confidence level, with the 95% confidence level to be used for all population extrapolations. This means that the population size of any group lies in a range which has been calculated and included in this set of appendices. For example, it is reported that 84% of UK adults (estimated 44.8 million people) have all 8 Foundation tasks; however, the true population value will be ±1.1 with a 95% confidence interval. Thus, there is 95% confidence that the correct figure is between 44.1 million and 45.3 million.

Gender classification

The following question was asked to the participants in the survey to establish a participant’s gender:

Which of the following best describes how you think of yourself?
1. Male
2. Female
3. In another way

In the report, only male and female participants are referred to as the incidence for those who select “In another way” is too low to report.

Impairment classification

The following question was asked to the participants in the survey to establish whether a participant claims to have any impairment:

'Do any of these condition(s) or illness(es) affect your ability to carry out day-to-day activities? Select all that apply'
1. Addiction, e.g. drugs, alcohol, gambling
2. Vision, e.g. blindness or partial sight
3. Hearing, e.g. deafness or partial hearing
4. Mobility, e.g. walking short distances or climbing stairs
5. Dexterity, e.g. lifting and carrying objects, or using a keyboard
6. Learning, understanding or concentrating
7. Memory, e.g. forgetting conversations or appointments
8. Mental health e.g. depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)
9. Stamina, breathing or fatigue
10. Socially or behaviourally (associated with a mental health condition, or with a developmental disorder like autism or ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder))
11. None of these conditions severely affect my ability to carry out day-to-day activities
99. Don’t know
97. Prefer not to say

In the report, nets were created such that “Has any impairment” is a combination of any impairments (codes 1-10); “Sensory (sight or sound)” is a combination of vision and hearing (codes 2 or 3), “Physical” is a combination of mobility, dexterity and stamina, breathing or fatigue (codes 4, 5 or 9) and “Learning or memory” is a combination of learning and memory (codes 6 or 7).
Ethnicity classification

The following question was asked to the participants in the survey to establish a participant’s ethnicity group:

Which group do you consider yourself to belong to?

1. White - English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
2. White - Irish
3. White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller
4. White - Any other White background
5. Mixed - White and Black Caribbean
6. Mixed - White and Black African
7. Mixed - White and Asian
8. Mixed - Any other Mixed / multiple ethnic background
9. Asian/Asian British - Indian
10. Asian/Asian British - Pakistani
11. Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi
12. Asian/Asian British - Chinese
13. Asian/Asian British - Any other Asian background
14. Black/Black British – African
15. Black/Black British - Caribbean
16. Black/Black British - Any other Black / African / Caribbean background
17. Arab
18. Any other ethnic group
Don’t know
Refused

In the report, nets were created such that “White” is a combination of White ethnic groups (codes 1 – 4) and “Ethnic minorities” refers to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups (codes 5 – 18). Note that the ethnic minorities group does not include White minorities such as Irish Travellers.

Employment classification

The following question was asked to the working participants in the survey to understand their workplace:

Which of the following best describes the industry your company operates in?

1. Telecommunications
2. Technology
3. CPG / FMCG
4. Retail
5. Financial Services
6. Not for Profit
7. Manufacturing & Automotive
8. Travel
9. Media & Advertising
10. Government
11. Education
12. Medical
13. Public service
14. Engineering
15. Service industry
16. Something else (specify) [FIXED]

Internet access question

The following question was asked to the participants in the survey to understand how they access the internet:

Which of these best describes your use of the internet? Please include all use of the internet, including sending and receiving emails

1. Several times a day
2. Around once a day
3. 4 or 5 times a week
Impact of higher cost of living question

A question was asked to participants in the 2022 survey to understand how they perceive the ongoing cost of living crisis will have on their use of internet and other online activities. In 2023, a similar question asked about what changes were made due to the cost of living crisis in the UK and how it has impacted their use of the internet and other online activities:

Given the increasing cost of living in the UK driven by higher prices on goods and services such as food, energy and fuel, which of the following apply to you?
1. I have given up internet or mobile data to be able to afford my other bills
2. I have looked for cheaper internet or mobile data plans to be able to avoid my other bills
3. I have taken steps to reduce costs associated with internet or mobile data usage to allow me to continue to afford my other bills
4. I have made more use of public Wi-Fi hotspots to save my mobile data
5. I need to rely more heavily on libraries or community centres for device usage or free Wi-Fi
6. I have not been able to afford to start using an internet or mobile data plan of my own
7. The rising cost of living has had no impact on my ability to go online

In the report, “NET: The rising cost-of-living will impact my ability to go online” is a combination of codes 1-6.

Future digital upskilling

A new question was asked to participants in the 2023 survey to understand what digital skills the UK labour force is considering for work within the next 12 months:

Which of the following, if any, are digital skills that you are considering learning for work in the next 12 months?
1. Productivity software skills (e.g. Microsoft Office, SAP, Oracle)
2. Programming and software development skills (e.g. coding, cloud data engineering, web or mobile application development)
3. Data analysis (e.g. data science, data visualisation, statistical software, machine learning, artificial intelligence)
4. Digital marketing (e.g. Google Analytics, producing web content, using social media for business)
5. Client and finance management systems (e.g. Quickbooks, Salesforce, SAP, software for Making Tax Digital)
6. Machining and manufacturing technology (e.g. computer-aided design software, engineering, programming, computer numerically controlled (CNC) systems)
7. Digital design (e.g. Adobe Photoshop, InDesign, computer-aided design software)
8. Data regulation (e.g. digital storage, data management, GDPR)
9. Cyber security (e.g. risk management and governance, security operations, web and mobile security)
10. I am not considering learning any of these skills

In the report, “NET: I am considering learning any of these skills” is a combination of codes 1-9.
Essential Digital Skills Survey Unweighted Sample Size

**Impairments**
- Sensory (vision or hearing) n=541
- Physical n=876
- Learning or memory n=643
- Mental health n=555
- Has one impairment n=679
- Has multiple impairments n=835
- Impairment (net) n=1,514
- No impairment n=2,616

**Foundation Level**
- Digitally Disengaged (0 tasks for Foundation) n=114
- On the cusp (6-7 Foundation Level tasks) n=360

**Life EDS**
- On the cusp of EDS for Life (22-25 tasks) n=1,225
- Can do 1-15 Life tasks n=299
- Cannot do any 26 Life tasks n=130
- Can do all 26 Life tasks n=2,143

**UK Labour Force**
- Those not in employment, but not retired n=609
- UK Labour Force group n=3,055

**EDS Levels**
- Foundation Level total n=4,172
- Life EDS total: n=4,172
- Work EDS total: n=3,055

**The Foundation Level and Life EDS by region:**
- East Midlands n=264
- East England n=380
- London n=565
- North East: n=137
- North West: n=427
- South East: n=512
- South West: n=317
- West Midlands: n=318
- Yorkshire and the Humber: n=334
- Scotland: n=493
- Wales: n=255
- England: n=3,254
- Northern Ireland: n=170

**Work EDS by region:**
- East Midlands n=194
- East England n=277
- London: n=474
- North East: n=94
- North West: n=316
- South East: n=362
- South West: n=226
- West Midlands: n=225
- Yorkshire and the Humber: n=259
- Scotland: n=346
- Wales: n=143
- England: n=2,427
- Northern Ireland: n=139