



WHY DIGITAL SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT



From web developers to call handlers, forklift drivers to financial consultants, companies are demanding workers that are equipped with digital skills. Regardless of the level or sector, around 80% of job listings in the UK, for example, are for digitally aware roles. This urgent need for a digitally skilled workforce is reflected right across Europe, yet the European Commission says 35% of workers lack what it considers the most basic digital skills¹, creating a substantial skills gap that means as many as half a million vacancies for skilled ICT jobs are going unfilled. We want to help close that gap.

As technology continues to rapidly advance and influence our lives in more complex ways, there's a major challenge for parents and teachers: how can they prepare young people for what to expect from the ever-evolving job market? As a technology, media and telecoms company, we have a role to play in helping them find the answer



Young people don't inherently possess digital skills

According to the International Telecommunication Union, 70% of the world's 15 to 24-year-olds are now online, and the British communications regulator, Ofcom², says owners are obsessed by their smartphones, checking them every 12 minutes, on average. Worldwide, users of the internet find themselves online for six hours and 42 minutes³ each day – that's more than 100 full days in every 365 spent actively connected. The internet is clearly a non-negotiable part of people's lives. Despite that deep, almost constant attachment, it's naive to conflate access and usage with skill, particularly when it comes to the skills necessary for the digital workplace.

While they make use of technology to shop, bank, stay connected with friends and communities, be entertained, stay informed, find destinations and much more, there is a great deal of research showing that many European young people lack basic ICT skills, such as the ability to make use of spreadsheets, databases and search engines. We need to ensure they have access to digital education so that we empower them to use technology for positive change and become the skilled learners and leaders of tomorrow's world.

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/scaling-digital-skills-and-jobs-coalition-new-support-team-starts-work>

² <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2018/decade-of-digital-dependency>

³ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-global-digital-overview>

WHAT WE DO

We aim to both develop our own initiatives and support those led by others that fuel people's imagination and empower them to bring positives change in their communities, whilst developing digital skills.

European Commission initiatives

The European Commission has created several initiatives to enhance the digital skills and careers of young people including, most notably, the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs and the Digital Single Market strategy.

Key priorities of the Coalition, to which we have pledged our support, include raising awareness of the fulfilling ICT careers available to young men and women and promoting the importance of teaching coding for the development of careers and society.

The Commission's Digital Single Market initiative recognises how vital the digital economy is to innovation, growth and jobs. It highlights that, without swift action, there could soon be half a million unfilled positions in the ICT industry and that jobseekers in every sector need better digital skills if they want to become more employable. Education and training must adapt too, and we need to look beyond traditional providers to give young people the skills they now require.

The new, €700 million, Digital Europe Programme for advanced digital skills aims to set these changes in motion. Among its goals are the creation of 160 new Master's programmes to develop experts in AI and highly technical computing, short-term courses to teach jobseekers and SME workers the competencies needed to roll out digital technologies throughout the economy, and specialist job placements to help people learn advanced digital skills in workplaces where they are already in use. Ultimately, this programme intends to increase the digital talent pool in Europe by more than a quarter of a million people, allowing businesses to deploy the technology they need to thrive.

Liberty Global initiatives

While the internet and technology are incredible tools, it's what you do with them that counts. We created our Future Makers programme to share skills young people need to thrive in the digital economy and help them generate a positive social impact. In partnership with CoderDojo, we reinforced those aims by launching the Future Makers Awards.



Bento Box

In 2018, alongside our partners the CoderDojo Foundation, we developed the Social Enterprise Bento Box to help volunteers guide young people through their social innovation journey. The Bento Box has been well received by the public with many positive reviews and more than 60,000 people engaging with the Bento Box portal.

Infinity Gauntlet

At the STEAM Cup Challenge in Amsterdam, our Future Maker Awards challenged teams of young students to design technology to make cities more sustainable. The winners, from Christian Lyceum Nassau-Veluwe, were inspired by Marvel's Avengers: Infinity War film to create the Infinity Gauntlet, a special glove with buttons that enables elderly people or those with mobility issues to turn on the TV or open the front door, for example, thus reducing the risk of falls.

The Awards, first unveiled at CoderDojo's Coolest Projects event in 2016, celebrate the digital solutions young people design for social good. Since that event, over 2,200 young people throughout Europe have participated in our programme, with 230 of them submitting tech-based projects that tackle issues like health, the environment and online safety.

Recently, we've seen just how engaged by societal problems young people can be. Sparked by the climate change activism of Greta Thunberg, the Youth for Climate Change movement mobilised 1.4 million students across 112 countries in high-profile strike action. It's a potent reminder of what young people are capable of achieving.

If we can encourage young minds to combine that ability to question and innovate with the power of digital and coding skills, we believe we can help even more young people become driving forces for positive change in their communities.

FUTURE MAKERS HIGHLIGHTS



Belgium

Telenet and CoderDojo organized the national Coolest Projects event with over 90 inventors. Our Future Makers Award winner designed a smart cane to help visually impaired people.



Germany

Unitymedia and CODE sparked young peoples' civic responsibility through a workshop at the Cologne Code Camp.



Ireland

Virgin Media sponsored the international Coolest Projects event. Over 1,000 young people and 750 projects came down to one Future Makers Award winner – software that uses face recognition to help find missing people.



Poland

UPC partnered with Glamour for a second edition of Future Makers Girls. Twenty young women learned about web design, the importance of online security and data privacy and the powerful potential of technology for social good.



Hungary

UPC launched their first Future Maker Awards, with over 40 young people entering.



Romania

UPC sponsored the Technovation Challenge, empowering young women to solve social challenges.



Netherlands

Liberty Global sponsored the STEAM Cup Challenge, engaging teachers and young people to create projects with a positive impact on society.



Welcome Here

The 2017 winner of the Future Makers Awards was Jeroen, from Belgium, who developed the 'Welcome Here' app to facilitate refugee integration within communities. The app provides a step-by-step checklist with key information to help refugees get started in a new country.

WHAT'S NEXT?

From self-driven cars to 3D printing and artificial intelligence, technology is transforming our world in ways that a few short years ago we couldn't have imagined. We need young people to grasp the latest digital skills for their own benefit and for the positive impact they can impart on society.

We will continue to support initiatives that promote the sharing of digital skills and come up with new ideas to drive positive change, while also encouraging our own employees to inspire young people to use technology for good. We remain committed to, and will continue to invest expertise, time and funds into our Future Makers programme, empowering young talents to make a significant difference to communities around the world.