

## DIGITAL SKILLS PROJECT - GATSBY REPORT

Developing the essential and employability skills  
for a successful T-Level Industry Placement and future career

May 2023



### Project Background & Purpose:

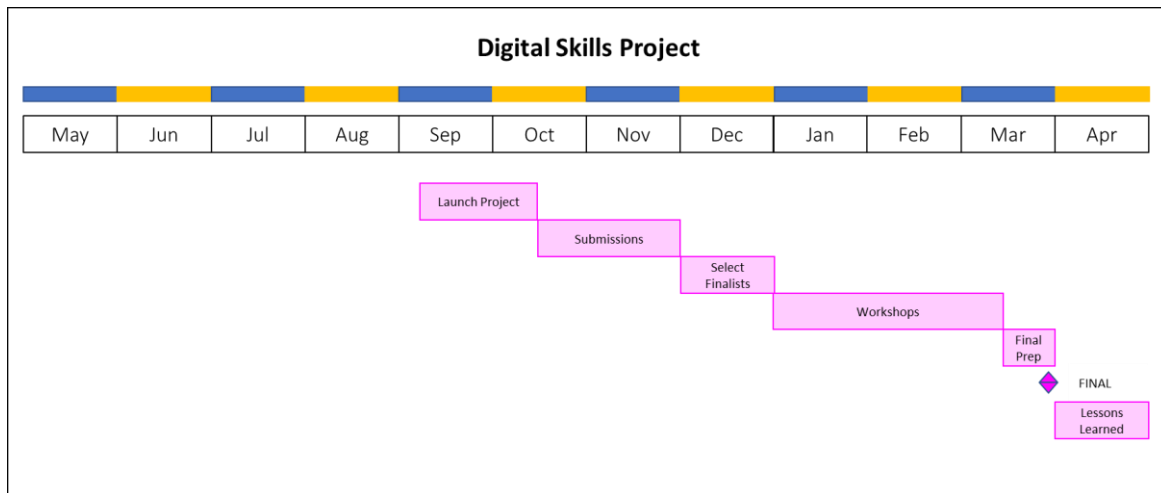
The *Digital Skills Consulting [dsc] Digital Skills Project* has been delivered for over seven years to more than 10,000 students, across a selection of FE Colleges and Institutes of Technology, in areas ranging from London (Barking & Dagenham and central) to Birmingham; and Liverpool to Newport in Wales. It was developed and is delivered by Julia von Klonowski of Digital Skills Consulting.

Julia sat on the Employer Panel for the *Digital Production, Design and Development T-Level* and is a T-Level Ambassador. For the past three years [dsc] has been working with T-Level students at FE colleges and has adapted the Digital Skills Project to meet the requirements of:

- The Work Taster (35 hours)
- Remote Learning (9 days)
- Essential Skills
- Preparation for the Employer Led Project
- Preparation for the remaining Industry Placement at an employer

Colleges build the Project into their Curriculum timetable so that students don't see it as an add-on and additional work, but part-and-parcel of their course. Each College appoints both a key point of contact from the Leadership Team, and from the teaching staff. The staff member/s is allocated at least 0.5 day of their working week to help support the Project and structure the time required. The students work on the Project as part of their course.

Colleges also reward students in *Award Ceremonies* at the end of the Academic Year. After the Final colleges will organise for students to do their presentations to the Senior Leadership Team and local employers, as well as to their peers. This provides an opportunity for the project students to shine, as well as for the Level-2 students, who are in the process of selecting their next options, to be inspired to participate. It also displays to employers the quality of students who they may wish to offer Industry Placements to.



After the Final, and before the end of academic year, [dsc] meets with all appropriate staff (including the SLT) to plan the Project timetable (workshops and visits) into their next academic year plan. This ensures that all involved understand the scope and format of the project, as well as the outcomes. It is vitally important to secure support from the College Leadership, in addition to the teachers.

The *Digital Skills Project* introduces young people to careers, as well as the world of business, and assists them to develop the skills required to succeed in their chosen pathway. Students are tasked with developing a 'Technology solution' which addresses a *challenge* - and helps them to highlight how these issues affect them, as individuals, as communities, and society as a whole, and how to use technology in a safe and positive manner.

Employers from a range of sectors are involved in the Project including Charities to assist in building empathy for society issue. This enables students to develop skills, learn how to solve problems using technology and importantly resilience, which benefits them in their future careers.

The **Aims** of the *Digital Skills Project* includes all the *Essential Skills* as detailed by [Skillsbuilder.org](https://www.skillsbuilder.org) Universal Framework (\* shown below in **bold**):

- To develop business, and digital skills, including budgeting, project planning, project management and personal skills such as:
  - **Listening**
  - Goal setting
  - **Problem Solving**
  - **Creativity**
  - **Leadership**
  - **Staying Positive**/resilience
  - Aspiration/**Aiming High**
  - Critical Thinking
  - **Teamwork**/building & support
  - Communication- written/**speaking**/Presentation skills
  - Timekeeping/management
  - Project Management
  - Personal branding
  - Financial management
  - Community work
  - Safety online
  - Security - cyber and personal
  - Kindness & respect

- To introduce careers in the many areas available such as Digital Tech, Creative Tech, Sports Tech, Health Tech and Cybersecurity
- To help them navigate through the recruitment process including networking (i.e. LinkedIn), interviews (face-to-face, online and video preparation), CVs etc.
- To attract more females into digital careers
- To encourage young people to understand the issues that affect the society that they live in and to learn how to be a good citizen, specifically
  - how the Challenge subject affects society and its/our behaviour
  - how the challenge subject affects the students' communities
  - how the challenge affects the student personally, at college, and/or at home
- To help young people to understand how to deal with the negative and positive effects of technology
- To transfer skills to young people to help them to deal with peer pressure and any other pressures that encourage them to worry about their self-image, as well as other pressures that encourage young people to participate in crime, or become susceptible to grooming
- To find different ways to help young people build their confidence
- To support students in their studies, developing digital skills that will benefit them in the careers and provide further positive encouragement
- To improve mental and physical well-being:
  - Sports, creative endeavours and pastimes
  - Bringing positivity to their lives
  - Identifying ways to reduce social isolation

**Subjects** covered previously and selected by the students have included:

- Homelessness
- Family breakup
- Debt
- Mental health (including male suicide)
- Knife crime
- Effects of COVID on students & their families
- Effects of social media on students and their families, with particular emphasis on body image and cyber bullying; and
- *The changing world and how young people can manage the effects on their futures* - particularly in relation to the cost of living crisis, climate change & sustainability, technology and its effect on 16-19 year-olds (Video - [2022/23 project final](#))

The **Objectives** of the Project are for students to:

- Use and effectively apply their digital knowledge to tackle a real-life working brief
- Learn how to use digital solutions and insights to engage with new audiences
- Experience creative collaboration in a group - to tackle a new challenge and pitch solutions
- Experience working on a digital Project and how to use their knowledge
- Learn how to use creative and critical thinking to explore issues and identify how to empower and improve lives
- Gain an understanding of the types of challenges young people face in the world they live in, particularly with regard to how this affects their self-confidence
- *[dsc]* also looks at how technology can:
  - contribute to these challenges, and
  - be used to assist in dealing with these challenges
- Acquire transferable/soft skills that help empower and inspire students for future employment
- Be aware of available career opportunities

It is important that the Challenge/Brief relates to a subject that is relevant to their age group so that they learn how to develop solutions and work together to solve real life issues. This also helps to engage them in the process. They are constantly challenged to make sure they answer the Brief and learn that it is important to stay focused.

### Summary of Delivery - Project Phases :

The Project is delivered at either an employers' premises and/or in the provider's business space. The sessions are run as business meetings and differentiated from College sessions by various external business experts managed by a manager who is always present (i.e. a member of *[dsc]*).

#### Phase 1

- September/October - Induction to digital/business skills
- October - *[dsc]* Digital Skills Project Challenge launched to all digital & creative students
- Students work in teams - and each team develops a one-page document describing their proposal
- Teams are made up of tech and creative students (and student mentors) and are placed with others with whom they would not normally choose to work
  - It is stressed that, in a normal workplace, they will not be able to select their fellow team members - and they need to learn how to work & deal with those with different skills and personalities
- Each Team appoints a Project Manager
- The proposals should:
  - Detail (briefly) the students' solution
  - Explain how the teams will market their solution digitally
  - Reflect on the subject in terms of how it affects them personally, their peers and family
- Students submit proposals by a set date (to teach time keeping)
- Students are taught how to correctly communicate in a businesslike way, particularly via email, specifically:
  - How to use the subject line
  - How to write a business email - with greeting, content and sign-off
  - How to address a person
  - Grammar and spelling
  - Correct use of a company's name (spelling, capitals)

#### Phase 2

- Students are placed into three teams selected by college staff, key partners and *[dsc]* - to develop each of the three winning proposals per college, from Phase 1
- Students attend a networking/LinkedIn session so that they know how to link with the employers at the 'Careers Day'
- November - Careers Day and Briefing session is held at a suitable business/technology venue (e.g. a Tech company HQ in London), covering careers in Technology (e.g. cloud, cybersecurity, UX/UI, gaming, etc.) and different industries (e.g. health, sport, e-Sports, public sector, charities/not-for-profit and media) as well as emerging technologies
- December-to-March - students spend approximately twelve weeks preparing their solutions and presentations using the knowledge they gain from the various workshops

- Teachers use the Project to build the skills into the curriculum and staff are upskilled in Project Based Learning and employer requirements
- Each team has to produce a presentation (including their solution and their reflections), including the budget and Project Plan/s for their solution
- Teams hold regular meetings and produce meeting minutes, which are sent to [dsc] (the Programme Manager)
- Meetings are held face-to-face and online, so that students learn the various tools available and how to use them
- [dsc] holds regular Project Management meetings with the teams
- The Teams develop their solutions - including testing, security and, for example, any legal ramifications
- [dsc] coordinates the delivery of specialist workshops, which are run in a business environment - and it is made clear to the students that they have to act in a businesslike manner (workshops are run by employers, specialists and members of [dsc] - these include:
  - Specialised workshop relating to the challenge, to introduce solutions to the issues
  - Product design - UX/UI
  - Digital marketing
  - Finance - personal and commercial
  - Options for the next stage of their career (Apprenticeships, Degrees, work, HNQs, etc.)
  - How to apply and find opportunities for the next stage (Higher and Degree Apprenticeships - level 4,5&6 (e.g. Level 4 Software Development, Cyber Security Technologist, Application Support Lead, Dev. Ops.)
  - Navigating the recruitment process
  - Goal setting workshop - how the brain works and how important sleep is!
  - How to use digital tools such as AI (e.g. Chat-GPT)
  - Social media/networking (including LinkedIn and online safety/ethics)
  - Using online tools for meetings - Zoom, Teams, Google Meet, etc.
  - How to present and prepare presentations (including practice sessions)
  - Preparing for interviews - video, phone, face-to-face
  - Project management (budgets, project plans, role assignment, leading a team, etc.)
  - How to behave in a business - communication, face-to-face meetings, online calls, preparation

### Phase 3

- End of March - presentation of solutions at a suitable business/technology venue
- Present to an audience including a range of judges/employers (see 'Stakeholders')
- The audience includes, amongst others, their peers, sponsors, partners & stakeholders and [dsc] Digital Skills Project students alumni - approximately 130 people
- All students must present jointly (15 minutes on their solution and five minutes on their reflection)
- Teams are judged in the following categories and marked by the judges; team marks are calculated and Certificates & Prizes awarded on the day:
  - *Presentation*
  - *Business Skills*
  - *Digital solution* (accuracy in response to the Brief)
  - *Best-run Project*
  - *Personal Reflection* (their personal development of Essential Skills and on the Challenge)
  - *Best Overall Team*
- A 'Student of the Year' is identified for each college (acquisition of Essential Skills)
- Every student is awarded a certificate for taking part in the Project, with additional certificates for those teams & individuals who win the various categories

- Within a month of the Final, the students participate in a *'Lessons Learned'* session to assess:
  - What skills they have learned from participating in the Project
  - What they feel they could have improved-on, and why (e.g. communication skills, or time management)
  - Suggestions for new/additional workshops, which students feel would have benefitted them
  - Suggestions for the following year's Challenge (for example, ideas in 2023 include *'Addiction'*, *'Violence against women and girls'*, *'the impact of AI'*, and *'desensitisation caused by social media'*)

### Stakeholder Views:

**Sponsors** and corporate supporters have included: Amazon Web Services (AWS), Hays Recruitment, TCS (Tata Consulting Services), HSBC, BBC, ITV, Mastercard, Ernst & Young (EY) and EY-Seren, QA, Deloitte, design specialists *Experience Haus*, digital marketer and Prince's Trust Ambassador *Find Your Feet Digital*, and digital strategists *We Explain Stuff*.

Among the **Charities** who have supported, and continue to support the project are: The Prince's Trust, Samaritans, Comic Relief, the Diana Award, the Trussell Trust, Barnardo's, the CyberHub Trust, Mind and the Digital Poverty Alliance.

The project receives support and engagement from Government and law enforcement, including: The Department for Education (DfE), the Home Office, Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), City of London Police, Regional Cyber Crime Units (RCCUs) and the Department of Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS).

### **Government**

- **Anis Islam** - Senior Policy Advisor, Cyber Security Skills & Digital Identity, DSIT  
*"The Digital Skills Project' is an amazing initiative set up by Julia Von Klonowski and Michael Klonowski (Digital Skills Consulting) working with T-Level students nationwide to utilise their digital skills knowledge to create projects around the theme of 'positive change'..."*

### **Students**

Some of these students have experienced obstacles such as bullying, studying whilst caring, and failure at school. Their resilience in participating despite these issues has been demonstrated throughout the projects and in their subsequent success. [dsc] remains in contact with many of the [Alumni](#) - continuing to support them in their careers.

#### **T-LEVEL:**

- **Sean Remorin - Hugh Baird College**  
*"With this project I learned how to work in a team effectively, and to put my public speaking skills into practice. I also learned how to work to a strict timeframe, and deal with major changes and how they affected my emotions.*  
*"Putting what I had learned in my T-Level Programme into a real-life project meant that I really understood what we had been taught and how a business would expect us to use our skills. I am so grateful for the opportunity and for meeting with so many different businesses - so I could see my options for the future."*

- **Charlie Murphy - Hugh Baird College**

*"My team went to the Amazon Headquarters for the Final of the `Digital Skills Project` 2023. We were all nervous to display the work we had done over the past few months for this Project, but it went extremely well, and we felt we had been well prepared.*

*"I won the `Hugh Baird Student of the year Award` which was a huge boost to my confidence and I can't thank Julia Von Klonowski enough for choosing me for that award - as well as giving our team the opportunity to attend this event.*

*"I was the Project Manager for my team and learned so much about being a leader and how to listen to other opinions. I put so much work into making sure that our project ran as smoothly as possible, while updating Julia (Programme Manager) with Minutes, Project Plan and Budget.*

*"We also won the `Best Solution Award`, which honestly had us all extremely happy with how our digital solution to the `Cost of Living Crisis` managed to showcase our digital skills, presenting and problem solving. I could not have done this by myself, so I thank my team for the hard work and dedication that they showed throughout the Project. We have all developed our team working skills.*

*"Also, everyone who attended and presented their ideas was incredible - with amazing ideas. I'm sure seeing the other students' work has made everyone want to work harder to improve as much as possible, because we all got to see the opportunities available and what possibilities we all have in our futures."*

- **Jagruiti Akkisetty - Barking & Dagenham College**

*"The project really helped me improve my confidence. I was really anxious about speaking in front of lots of people, as I've been quite isolated ever since the COVID lockdown. The topic motivated me to take part in the competition and to present confidently in front of others - an issue I've personally seen people go through.*

*"I learned how important it is to understand a problem before trying to solve it. It also helped me to communicate with different people, particularly as the only girl in a group of boys. The help I received from the people who ran the workshops - and particularly Julia - genuinely motivated me to continue when I felt overwhelmed. The Project taught me resilience and how to stay positive.*

*"I've always been a bit nervous being the only girl in class. I used to go to an all-girl secondary school, so taking part in the project gave me the chance to familiarise myself with the people around me and to find my own voice.*

*"I will definitely be taking part in more workshops and activities, as they helped me with the practical digital and project management skills, which are a part of my course (T-level Digital Production Design and Development)."*

**BTEC:**

- **Mohammed Ahmed (see [here](#))**

*"Whilst at College I took part in the Digital Skills Project and was honoured to become a finalist. Over 1,200 digital students took part in the competition around the country, and I was chosen, along with my team. Over the next 12 weeks we learned about business & digital skills and took part in various workshops on different aspects of technology.*

*"We won the Best Solution Award, judged by companies such as AWS, The Princes Trust, BBC and HSBC. I developed my teamworking skills and learned how to work with people with different skills and personalities.*

*"It was also amazing to meet other technology students from around the country - who I have stayed in contact with. For the final we presented to an audience of more than 150, which helped me develop confidence, community skills and team working skills.*

*"In my spare time I work on my programming skills and create websites, games, and AI ChatBots. I want to work in Cyber Security having now completed the Level-3 Diploma in Creative Computing and Cyber at Matthew Boulton College."*

#### Alumni:

- **Genna Crabtree** (see [here](#)) - Undergraduate Ravensbourne University, AWS Future Engineer Bursary (on track to graduate with a 1<sup>st</sup>)
- **Edward Flack** (see [here](#)) - Degree Apprentice Ford (received 1<sup>st</sup> in his BsC Hons)
- **Luke Mitchell** - went straight into work and is an example of using education to grow his career. Currently doing a Computing Apprenticeship at FlyForm, previously a Technical Consultant.

*"I'd love to be a part of the Digital Skills Project again, whether that be judging the projects, as it helped me in my Interview before I got my role - and I brought a lot from the Project into where I work now.*

*"I feel like I could bring a good previous case-study showing where I started (being a student in Coleg Gwent) and where I am now - including how skills developed by the project can be used in real-life situations."*

#### Employers

- **John Pittaway - AWS** (comments [here](#))  
*"It's another one of these events that I have been lucky enough to be a part of where you can just feel the positivity .... everybody is really tuned-in, everybody is passionate about making a difference and helping young people - giving them a bit of a kick-start in life. This experience of watching young people demonstrate their skills encourages employers like us to offer work placements."*
- **Lauren Best - Mastercard** (comments [here](#))  
*"I think it is wonderful to see this demographic from across the UK ... a lot of young girls think that there are issues with careers in technology ... a lot of the mentors and judges here are women, hopefully the young girls see a picture where there are lots of roles and jobs within the tech industry for them."*
- **Laura Tobin - ITV** (comments [here](#))  
*"It was really interesting to see, generationally, the different things young people are thinking about - I had no idea that they have such a good understanding of things like, for example, the Ukraine, people's safety, poverty, the cost-of-living crisis, etc."*
- **Amit Patel - Experience Haus** (comments [here](#))  
*"One thing that just jumped out of me was the energy amongst everyone, not just the students, but everyone else that was involved, including the supporting team that makes everything happen..."*



## Colleges/Providers

- **Rachael Hennigan** - Principal, Hugh Baird College, Liverpool

*"I have heard so much about the experiences that the learners and the team gained at the event. I am so proud of what the students achieved and the awards they won.*

*"I would personally like to thank Julia and Michael for supporting the Hugh Baird team and creating the opportunities for our learners. I truly believe that they have a lasting impact on our students.*

*"We have some amazing students - but without colleagues like Digital Skills Consulting, we may never have found-out about such opportunities."*

- **Sonia Stirling** - Deputy Principal, Hugh Baird College Liverpool

*"Students at Hugh Baird College studying a range of digital based qualifications, including the T-Level in Digital Production, Development & Design - have had the opportunity to participate in the Digital Skills Project facilitated by Digital Skills Consulting.*

*"They adopt a project-based approach to learning within a real-life working timeframe and require students to apply professional practice within their working groups, embed solution-driven processes and present finished ideas to a professional audience.*

*"More generally, the project allows students to develop a wide range of industry-relevant softer skills, including project management, teamwork, action planning and presentation & communication skills, which are embedded alongside the implementation of product development skills. This way of working hones the skills & attributes that you would expect to experience in a modern digital working team environment, thus providing students with a clear understanding of expectations within the industry.*

*"In many ways, projects such as this replicate the type of experiences students would expect to receive whilst doing a substantive work placement in a digital organisation or team. Equally, they are an excellent way of preparing students for their placement with a particular emphasis on team working behaviours."*

- **Stephanie Butler** - Curriculum Manager, Digital, Media & Creative Arts, Hugh Baird College Liverpool

*"As a college taking part in this project for the first time, we have been really impressed by the level of support offered to our learners from both T-Level and Creative Digital programmes. Learners were given the opportunity to develop a wide range of employability & professional working skills required to support not only their own personal growth & development, but also their transition into the working sector.*

*"The opportunities to engage in masterclasses and explore real-world concepts that impacted both themselves and their peers - brought a level of reasoning to the academic content being taught. Learners were challenged to perform all tasks in a professional working manner whilst being supported to reflect at each stage - to further enhance personal development and professional presentation skills.*

*"The greatest growth and inspiration were generated through the additional opportunities made available as part of this project, from visiting a local Trussell Trust distribution centre, to exploring the digital systems that allowed the centre to function, and the breadth of the community that it serviced. This was a sobering, yet inspirational opportunity for learners to interact in a positive manner with their local community and draw the correlations between the digital skills they are learning and the positive impact they can have on their doorstep.*

*"The greatest challenge for all involved was the final presentation at the AWS office in London. The experience was empowering from beginning to end, the professional skills taught, alongside softer skills (like empathy and compassion) were displayed by all individuals involved from. Learners were supportive, not only of their own peer groups, but each team that presented to the observers and judges. The*

*students networked and actively experienced all that a global company can offer, from enhanced security to professional working environments and industry and sector professionals.*

*“The achievements of all the students who took part were significant, not only in terms of the journey they travelled and the skills that they applied, but also how this can now be applied to their continuing studies.*

*“In the case of T-Level ESP examinations, this has now provided learners with an accurate working knowledge of large organisations, their functionality, the significance of wider roles and the way effective interactions, planning and effective communication supports productive outcomes. Most importantly it has given confidence to those students who were involved - and aspirations beyond their current course of study.”*

○ **Jan Myatt** - Vice Principal, Birmingham Metropolitan College

*“At BMET, we strive to ensure that our learners leave college equipped with the skills that will allow them to be successful within employment or further study. In order to make sure we are proficient at this; we must engage with employers and create a culture of co-design and collaboration through projects like this.*

*“Our work through this partnership is developing essential Business and digital skills to support our learners in all aspects of work and life, regardless of what vocational pathway they are on.”*

○ **Oliver Stokes** - Director Creative, Digital, Business, Accounts & Law

*“The Digital Skills Project is an essential part of the further education curriculum. It allows us, as a college, to engage and build strong collaborative relationships with employers and work proactively in building and developing innovative practice.*

*“The project not only builds and develops essential business and digital skills, it allows our learners to practice and apply them in real and flexible working environments that are safe and focus specifically on the development of sector skills and employment ready behaviours.*

*“The project itself also uses key pedagogical strategies that addresses the link between business and digital skills to real life as the pace of technological change and the ubiquity of digital technologies in all aspects of work and life places new demands on everyone.*

*“We have built this project into our courses, especially the T-Level curriculum, to ensure that we build the correct skills for students preparing for their second-year work placement.”*

○ **Jason Turton** - Vice Principal, Barking & Dagenham College (BDC)

*“We are so proud of our learners and what they have achieved, which will, we are sure, land them a great career in the near future. The Project prepares our T-Level students excellently for their work placements and for the Employer Led Project.*

*“We particularly notice how their behaviour improves as the Digital Skills Project progresses - and have received a number of comments from employers about how well they are prepared.*

*“My sincere thanks to Digital Skills Consulting, the sponsors & stakeholders, as well as the businesses and charities who support the project, and all those who participated in making this happen.”*

## Key Learnings across T-Level Routes:

- **Highlights**
  - Watching the development of students' skills and how they mature in 12 weeks
  - The positive comments employers make about the young people and their solutions
  - The demonstration of students' skills and their readiness for employment
  - The appreciation of the students when they have completed the Project - and they recognise the benefits to them
  - The ongoing communication with previous students who have taken part (many examples on LinkedIn)
  - The alumni's willingness and offer to act as Mentors and Judges in subsequent years' projects
  - Experiencing both teachers' and Leadership teams' appreciation of the success of the Project and the performance of their students
  - Observing the increase in, and diversity of, knowledge - of the teachers
  - Observing teachers include Digital Skills into their curriculum - and changing the way they engage with their students
  
- **Challenges**
  - Demonstrating to students the advantages of taking part in the Project - at the start of the project
  - Behaviours at the start of the Project- some students have no prior training of how to behave in a business environment and many can be disruptive
  - The effects of COVID, gaming and social media, particularly on attention span and sleep patterns
  - Staff engagement (in some colleges)
  - Lack of organisation prior to events (in some colleges)
  - Addressing students who are not yet ready for T-Levels
  - Lack of support, or understanding of the potential benefits, from parents/guardians
  - Current funding - limits the number of colleges we can assist
  
- **Opportunities**
  - With increased funding [*dsc*] can grow the number of students/colleges we support
  - Students engaging with employers and understanding the benefits of their course/s
  - Students recognising the many career opportunities available to them
  - Students understanding 'the art of the possible'
  - Removal of the 'fear factor' from students - to approach employers - and an increase in confidence to apply for jobs and experiences/opportunities
  - Students understanding that they are 'not stupid', or lacking in capabilities - as some have been led to believe prior to taking on their T-Level course
  - Learning *resilience* to keep going even if not successful in first applications (e.g. Degree Apprenticeships, employment)
  - The many options for continuing their education - e.g. HNCs/HNDs, Apprenticeships
  - Learning about the diversity of opportunities that are open to them (e.g. digital roles are not simply coding from behind a computer ... can be creative jobs, leadership roles, etc.)
  - Learning to adapt to change

## Key Learnings specific to Digital T-Level Learning:

- **Delivery**
  - Developing *Essential Skills* including the *SkillsBuilder Universal Framework* such as project management, listening, creativity, staying positive, communication (speaking, written and presenting), teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking and presenting, which are all key to any placement
  - Developing responsibility and accountability
  - Students prepared/made ready - for Industry placement and Employer Led project
  - Keeping students up-to-date with technology, including how to use tools, the skills that may be needed and how to recognise the negative & positive effects of technology (for example AI - Chat-GPT, etc.)
  - Developing students' aspirations, teaching them to 'aim high'
  
- **Placements**
  - Employers are able to engage with students 'pre-placement', so more are willing to offer students placements
  - Increasing employers' awareness of the number of 'quality' students from different (and diverse) backgrounds who are available for placement
  - Soft approach to & from employers - the initial ask is minimal, e.g. running a workshop and helping to judge the final, hence they discover the benefits and are willing to be more engaged
  - Finding different ways of engaging employers
  - This often leads to 'Bootcamp' placements with externals - who run workshops and then companies offer placements
  
- **Employment**
  - Our Alumni engage in their education and learn to take personal responsibility & accountability
  - They discover the various opportunities open to them - and many succeed in their applications because they have 'something' that makes them stand-out, able to demonstrate their readiness for employment
  - The students understand the behaviours required in business
  
- **Progression**
  - Students recognise the benefits of further qualifications (lifelong learning) and the advantages of different routes to employment - Apprenticeships, Degrees, HNC/HND, or straight into work with the option for further accreditations
  - We work with the students so that they learn how to adapt to change - and continually upskill
  - We introduce the students to Bootcamps, as well as other, ongoing opportunities

- **Recommendations & Next Steps:**
  - It is clear that the Digital Skills Project works
  - Students benefit from the attention and the development of their skills
  - Employers see the readiness of the students and are more comfortable offering work placements
    - It can/should be extended to more colleges
    - Funding is required to expand/scale
  - In terms of scalability and changing the model for the future, we have various plans for growing both the number of students and the colleges who participate in the Project:
    - We already use external resources for various elements of the Project, including delivery of workshops (paid & volunteer resources - from Charities & businesses), Video/Photography, Communications and Marketing (including web design and other collateral), back-office functions (such as accounting), etc.
    - We have found that a 'constant presence' is key for the students to build a trusted relationship, particularly as many of the students from disadvantaged backgrounds have never had a role model or constant support in their education - sometimes even in their lives
    - Funding will enable us to grow appropriate (trained & experienced) personnel to scale-up the project to additional colleges, as well as to include *[dsc]* Alumni, who are ideally suited to provide support for students - based on their own experience
    - Funding will also enable *[dsc]* to employ administrative support to manage the planning & administration for the various events, travel arrangements, venues, communication with colleges & students, as well as businesses and other stakeholders, freeing-up resources who currently work on the Project
    - Furthermore, plans are in development to expand the project - to include semi-finals per region, followed by a Grand Final with regional winning teams

## Conclusion:

The proof that the *Digital Skills Project* is successful has to be that we have more young people, from diverse backgrounds, employed - and the employers who are/have been involved feel that young people exiting from T-Levels are ready for work and easy to employ.

**This builds Trust, which is crucial to the success of the project, and that of the students, as well as an invaluable contribution to the economy.**

Digital Skills Consulting [*dsc*] has engaged with over 10,000 young people in the past seven years, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, and many with tough challenges to overcome. These challenges include being young carers (while simultaneously trying to study), living alone, experiencing mental or physical health issues (previous and/or current), physical, sexual or verbal abuse (either from bullying at school, at home, or elsewhere), economic deprivation, etc. - and yet they still continue with the Project and many succeed in their studies despite these (sometimes unimaginable) challenges.

We believe that the resilience of these young people is often undervalued and is the result of them not being helped or encouraged to engage in their education. Many have also been judged as 'stupid' or 'not capable' for different reasons - which has reduced their confidence. [*dsc*] believes that allowing young people to demonstrate their skills (relevant to subjects that are personal to them) is invaluable, as does working closely with them to show that *they matter*. It helps students to build empathy, which is key to forming & maintaining good relationships, both in business and in their personal lives.

We teach these young people that they need to understand a problem before they can solve it - and how to research, listen, develop, and then test solutions.

Colleges continue to take part year-after-year because they recognise the value of the project. They see an improvement in the young people who participate. They participate in 'the journey' and watch their students grow in confidence, ability, and resilience. And they observe the passion and the joy expressed by students who reach the finals and celebrate with the winners.

The students who participate almost always want to participate in the Project again. This surely indicates that it is an enjoyable and worthwhile experience. The students are often experiencing praise and validation for the first time in their lives! And they see the benefits of participating, not just personal development, but real career opportunities.

The students almost always continue to stay in touch with one another (within their college group, but also with students from other colleges), they request & provide references & advice from one another, sometimes for years after they have left college. They also frequently ask to be involved in the project (as mentors and judges) after they leave college.

**Most importantly, employers and charities also ask to be involved year after year.** There is a real energy and 'buzz' around the project every year and the adults from business and the third sector can't help but get caught-up in this. They also see opportunities to develop resources with groups of young people that they would normally not have access to.

Almost every business in the UK (and beyond) is seeking to find and employ people from diverse backgrounds, not just young people, but across sexual, racial, and cultural divides, something that is frequently very difficult. And these are the people who will be developing the technologies of the future!

**This project addresses that directly - it operates across colleges from around the country, reaching the very individuals that businesses are struggling to find and addressing them at their most impressionable stage of life.**