# Digital Business Services

*Essential Skills Guide*

This guide has been produced by Skills Builder Partnership to support teachers with identifying and utilising opportunities within the T Level curriculum to develop and progress their students' essential skills. It can be used in a variety of ways including in curriculum planning, schemes of learning and/or lesson plans.

**What are essential skills?**

At Skills Builder, we define a skill as a repeatable action whereby the more you do it, the better you become. It's something that can be taught.

Essential skills are those highly transferable skills that everyone needs to do almost any job, which make specific knowledge and technical skills fully productive. They are therefore distinct from basic skills (literacy, numeracy and digital skills) and technical skills (specific to a particular sector or role, sometimes drawing off a particular body of knowledge).

Essential skills can unlock learning in the classroom, boosting academic outcomes, perseverance and self belief. They halve the likelihood of being out of work, and increase earnings across a lifetime. They even boost wellbeing and life satisfaction. You can read more on the research around essential skills on the Skills Builder website.

# The Universal Framework

**The Universal Framework**: The Skills Builder Universal Framework is a tool for measuring and building essential skills. It breaks the 8 essential skills down into a sequence of steps, starting from absolute beginner through to mastery. It is supported by research and was developed with leading businesses, academics and educators. It consolidates an array of different skills frameworks into something comprehensive and practical.

| LISTENING | SPEAKING | PROBLEM SOLVING | CREATIVITY | STAYING POSITIVE | AIMING HIGH | LEADERSHIP | TEAMWORK |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Listening to others | Speaking clearly | Completing tasks | Generating ideas | Keeping trying | Working effectively | Understanding emotions | Working well with others |
| Demonstrating listening | Speaking engagingly | Exploring problems | Developing ideas | Finding opportunities | Setting goals | Managing tasks | Contributing to the group |
| Recognising influence | Speaking adaptively | Analysing problems | Innovating effectively | Managing risks and rewards | Creating plans | Supporting others | Improving a team |
| Listening critically | Speaking influentially | Implementing strategic plans | Supporting others to innovate | Supporting others to stay positive | Developing strategies | Adaptive leadership | Influencing a team |

*The Universal Framework was Developed by the Essential Skills Taskforce: for more information see Towards a Universal Framework for Essential Skills*

## Building your students' essential skills:

Students can complete an online self-assessment using the Skills Builder Benchmark tool to discover their initial skill score. Alternatively, you can use the Universal Framework as a useful tool to explore what progress in a particular skill might look like for your students.

- You may find that your students have different starting points and will develop their essential skills at different rates and through different experiences, such as industry placements and classroom activities. Students' progress through the skill steps may not be linear.

- You may wish to use some of the suggested activities in this guide to support your students in their learning journey and to build their essential skills as they progress through the T Level course.

- The activities suggested in this guide are not an exhaustive list and there will be other ways to develop these core skills.

In the T Level specification for **Digital Business Services**, there are six core skills identified, with the main essential skills supporting development of these core skills below:

**Core Skill 1:**
Working with stakeholders to clarify and consider options to meet requirements

SPEAKING   LISTENING   TEAMWORK

**Core Skill 2:**
Research and investigate relevant sources and data to meet requirements

PROBLEM SOLVING   STAYING POSITIVE

**Core Skill 3:**
Apply a valid approach to solving data problems, identifying and resolving issues whilst recording progress and solutions to meet requirements

CREATIVITY   PROBLEM SOLVING

**Core Skill 4:**
Ensure that actions identify and mitigate risk to security

PROBLEM SOLVING   STAYING POSITIVE

**Core Skill 5:**
Communicate information clearly to technical and non-technical stakeholders

SPEAKING   CREATIVITY

**Core Skill 6:**
Reflect and evaluate their own performance and understand the need for continuous learning and development

STAYING POSITIVE   AIMING HIGH

**Why developing the skills to working with stakeholders is important for students to progress in their future career:**

- **Working with different departments:** Digital projects often involve many different departments and multiple stakeholders. Successfully implementing digital initiatives requires good communication and teamwork and effective stakeholder management.

- **Strong relationships:** Building strong relationships with diverse stakeholders enables digital professionals to gather key insights, align priorities, and gain support for digital projects and strategies.

- **New technologies:** As technology becomes more important in all areas of business and new technologies continue to emerge, being able to explain digital concepts to people with different backgrounds will be a valuable skill in many careers.

# Core Skill 1: Working with stakeholders to clarify and consider options to meet requirements

*To develop this core skill, building essential skills in speaking, listening and teamwork are important.*

**Examples this may be evidenced through:**
- discussions with stakeholders to agree parameters based on analysis of options;
- identifying scope of processes and expected outcomes;
- systematically organising and accurately recording decisions and changes discussed with stakeholders.

## Build students' Speaking skills

**Can students speak effectively by making points in a logical order?**

**STEP 3**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **create** a stakeholder roadmap for a non-technical audience for a project.
- Students **focus** on the sequence in which they present information and how this might impact their audience's understanding.

**Can students speak engagingly by using facts, visual aids and examples to support their points?**

**STEP 7**

**STEP 8**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students prepare a presentation on the consequences of ineffective project planning.
- Students suggest improvements that could be made in the setting using visuals aids and facts to support their suggestions.

## Build students' Listening skills

**Can students listen to others and record important information?**

**STEP 5**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **listen** to a project brief and **record** the key pieces of information.
- Students **compare** the information they recorded and the methods they used.

**Can students use open questions to deepen their understanding of what they heard?**

**STEP 7**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students categorise questions as open or closed.
- Students listen to part of a project brief and create a list of open questions they could ask to improve their understanding.

## Build students' Teamwork skills

**Can students work well with others by taking responsibility for their tasks?**

**STEP 3**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students are each given different aspects of a project to **plan**.
- As a group they must **combine** all the different aspects to produce an overall plan.

**Can students contribute to group decision making?**

**STEP 6**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **research** the importance of maintaining confidential company, customer and colleague information.
- Students **share**, in groups, what they have learnt.
- Groups must **reach a unanimous consensus** on what is the main reason is for maintaining confidential information for each (company, customer and colleague).

For more ideas and resources to build your students' essential skills, check out the Universal Framework and the Speaking, Listening and Teamwork workshops.

**Why developing research and investigating skills is important for students to progress in their future career:**

- **Staying current in a fast-paced industry:** The digital sector is fast-paced and constantly evolving, making the ability to quickly find and analyse new information crucial.

- **Informed Decision-Making and Problem-Solving:** Digital projects often require gathering specific data to inform decisions or solve problems. Strong research skills are needed to locate relevant information, interpret complex data, and apply findings to meet project requirements effectively.

- **Critical evaluation of information:** In the digital world, there's an abundance of information available. The skill to discern between credible and unreliable sources is needed. Being able to critically evaluate information sources will allow professionals to make more informed decisions and provide more reliable solutions in their work.

## Core Skill 2: Research and investigate relevant sources and data to meet requirements

*To develop this core skill, building essential skills in problem solving and staying positive are important.*

**Examples this may be evidenced through:**
- reviewing and analysing requirements;
- developing search criteria to synthesise queries to support research and investigation;
- analysing and interrogating data to draw conclusions from the investigation;
- identifying and applying appropriate testing methods to verify and validate conclusions.

### Build students' Problem Solving skills

**Can students complete tasks by following instructions?**

**STEP 0**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **create** a set of instructions for a method of data collection.
- Students **compare** their instructions with peers and give feedback.

**Can students explore problems by creating different possible solutions?**

**STEP 4**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **produce** multiple ways to collect a data set.
- Students **reflect** on why it is important to consider different solutions to a problem before acting on one.

**Can students explore complex problems by building their understanding through research?**

**STEP 7**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **evaluate** the suitability of a computing system they are not familiar with by finding at least 3 different sources of information.
- Students **compare** the sources and **discuss** the reliability of the different sources identified.

### Build students' Staying Positive skills

**Can students keep trying when something goes wrong and think about what happened?**

**STEP 4**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **reflect** on an experience when something went wrong (or could share an example one).
- Students **analyse** what happened, **consider** if anything could have prevented it and **consolidate** what learnings they can take from it for the future.

**Can students look for opportunities in difficult situations?**

**STEP 7**

Example activities to develop this:
- Present **students** with a scenario, e.g., there is an unexpected error in a database.
- Students **identify** opportunities that could be explored when dealing with the situation.
- Students **create** their own scenarios and **exchange** in pairs to suggest potential opportunities.

**Why developing a valid approach to solving data problems is important for students to progress in their future career:**

- **Systematic problem-solving:** Applying a valid approach to solving data problems allows complex issues to be approached methodically. Structured thinking is essential in the digital sector, where data-driven decision-making is required. Breaking down large problems into manageable steps can increase efficiency and effectiveness.

- **Adaptive troubleshooting:** The ability to identify and resolve issues as they arise is a useful skill in the fast-paced digital world. Being able to overcome obstacles and keep projects on track, even when faced with unexpected challenges is required.

- **Documentation and information management**: Recording progress and solutions is important for continuity, transparency, and knowledge sharing in digital projects. It also aids in meeting project requirements by ensuring all steps and outcomes are properly documented.

**Core Skill 3: Apply a valid approach to solving data problems, identifying and resolving issues whilst recording progress and solutions to meet requirements**

*To develop this core skill, building essential skills in problem solving and creativity are important.*

**Examples this may be evidenced through:**
- identify and investigate the scope of the problem;
- decompose the problem into components parts;
- identify possible solutions and fixes;
- accurately record progress and outcomes.

## Build students' Problem Solving skills

**Can students explore complex problems by identifying when there are no simple technical solutions?**

**STEP 6**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **evaluate** a list of problems a digital business may have if they have a poor company culture and **classify** them as simple or complex problems.
- Students **discuss** how their approach to problem solving might differ depending on if the problem is simple or complex.
- Students **create** a series of questions to help determine if a problem is simple or complex.

**Can students explore complex problems by analysing cause and effects?**

**STEP 8**

Example activities to develop this:
- **Describe** two different solutions to a data collection, storage and / or analysis problem.
- Students **identify** the different possible effects each solution may cause and **justify** which solution is the most appropriate.

## Build students' Creativity skills

**Can students generate ideas when they have been given a clear brief?**

**STEP 3**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **review** a data collection / analysis brief.
- Students **produce** success criteria based on the brief.
- Students **design** a possible solution that fits the criteria.

**Can students generate ideas to improve something?**
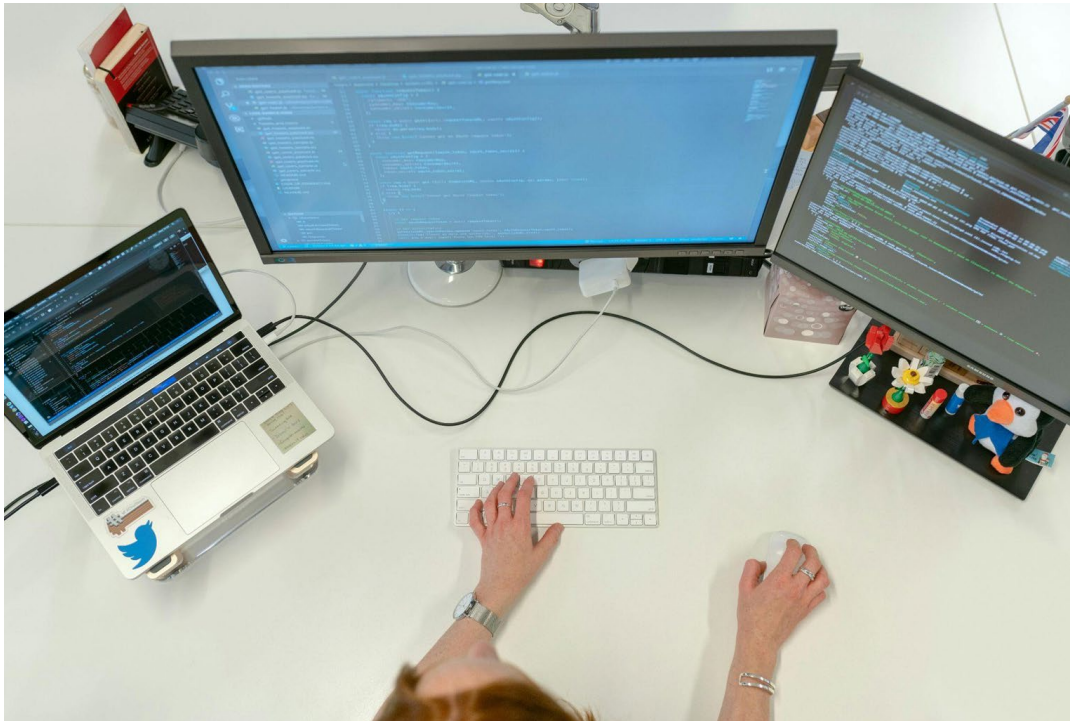
**STEP 4**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **review** the system in place for a particular database or computing environment.
- Students **suggest** ways the system or process could be improved.

**Can students develop ideas by asking themselves questions?**

**STEP 9**

Example activities to develop this:
- Present **students** with a computing system challenge.
- Students **produce** a range of initial ideas to tackle the challenge.
- Students **review** their ideas (or their peers) and come up with 5-10 questions to challenge their work.
- Students use the questions to **redraft and improve** their ideas.

For more ideas and resources to build your students' essential skills, check out the Universal Framework and the Problem Solving and Creativity workshops.

## Why developing risk mitigations skills is important for students to progress in their future career:

- **Risk management:** The ability to identify and mitigate security risks is crucial to protect data assets from cyber threats, data breaches, and other vulnerabilities. This skill helps safeguard a company's reputation, financial stability, and customer trust.

- **Regulatory compliance:** Many industries have strict regulations regarding data protection and privacy. Professionals who can ensure actions comply with these regulations help their organizations avoid legal issues and hefty fines. This skill is increasingly important as data protection laws become more stringent worldwide.

- **Business continuity:** Security breaches can cause significant disruptions to business operations. By identifying and mitigating risks proactively, professionals help ensure business continuity. This ability is needed to maintain smooth operations, prevent downtime, and protect the company's bottom line.

## Core Skill 4: Ensure that actions identify and mitigate risk to security

*To develop this core skill, building essential skills in problem solving and staying positive are important.*

**Examples this may be evidenced through:**
- identify and record potential risks;
- assess probability and impact of risk;
- calculate the severity and interpret the priority of risk based on the probability and impact;
- identify and apply appropriate risk mitigation controls and components.

### Build students' Problem Solving skills

**Can students create solutions for complex problems by generating a range of options?**

**STEP 9**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **identify** a problem they may be faced with on their industry placement.
- Students **produce** at least 3 different possible solutions for the problem.
- Students **discuss** the potential outcomes the different solutions could produce and choose their preferred option.

**Can students create solutions for complex problems by evaluating the positive and negative effects of a range of solutions?**

**STEP 10**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **identify** a complex problem they have worked on.
- Students **reflect** on the approach they used to address the problem.
- Students **consider** the implications of their approach and **suggest** alternative approaches they could have taken that may have addressed them.

### Build students' Staying Positive skills

**Can students identify risks and gains in opportunities?**

**STEP 11**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **discuss** the definition of a risk in the context of digital business services.
- Students **review** scenarios where something has gone wrong and identify what the risks were.
- Students **discuss** how to weigh up the pros and cons of a potential risk factor.

**Can students identify risks and gains in opportunities and make plans to manage them?**

**STEP 12**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **identify** potential risks in restructuring a digital business.
- Students **contribute** ideas for mitigating actions that could be taken for different risks.
- Students **complete** a risk register for the digital business and **record** a key risks, what the impacts would be, likelihood of the risks, and ways to mitigate these.

For more ideas and resources to build your students' essential skills, check out the Universal Framework and the Problem Solving and Staying Positive workshops.

**Why developing communication skills is important for students to progress in their future career:**

- **Working with diverse teams**: In digital businesses, projects often involve diverse teams with varying levels of technical expertise. The ability to communicate effectively across these groups ensures that all stakeholders understand project goals, progress, and challenges.

- **Explaining technical concept:** Digital professionals frequently need to explain complex technical concepts to non-technical stakeholders, including executives, clients, and end-users. This is useful for gaining buy-in, managing expectations, and ensuring that all parties can make informed decisions.

- **Stakeholder engagement:** Clear communication is key to engaging stakeholders at all levels of the organization. Adapting communication styles to suit different audiences can be more effective when gathering requirements, reporting progress, and addressing concerns.

## Core Skill 5: Communicate information clearly to technical and non-technical stakeholders

***To develop this core skill, building essential skills in speaking and creativity are important.***

**Examples this may be evidenced through:**
- identify stakeholder requirements;
- identify scope of communication to meet stakeholder requirements;
- select and apply appropriate tools to communicate with stakeholders;
- record and document appropriate communications information.

### Build students' Speaking skills

**STEP 5**

**Can students speak effectively by using appropriate language?**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **identify** the purpose of testing digital components.
- Students **present** the purpose of testing digital components to their peers considering the language they are using to include both technical and non-technical language.

**STEP 10**

**Can students speak adaptively by changing their language, tone and expression depending on the response of listeners?**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **deliver** a presentation on a new computing system being used in the workplace.
- Students in the audience, **take on** the roles of different stakeholders.
- **Set** questions for the 'audience' to ask that will **challenge** the students to adapt their answers based on who is asking.

### Build students' Creativity skills

**STEP 5**

**Can students generate ideas by combining different concepts?**
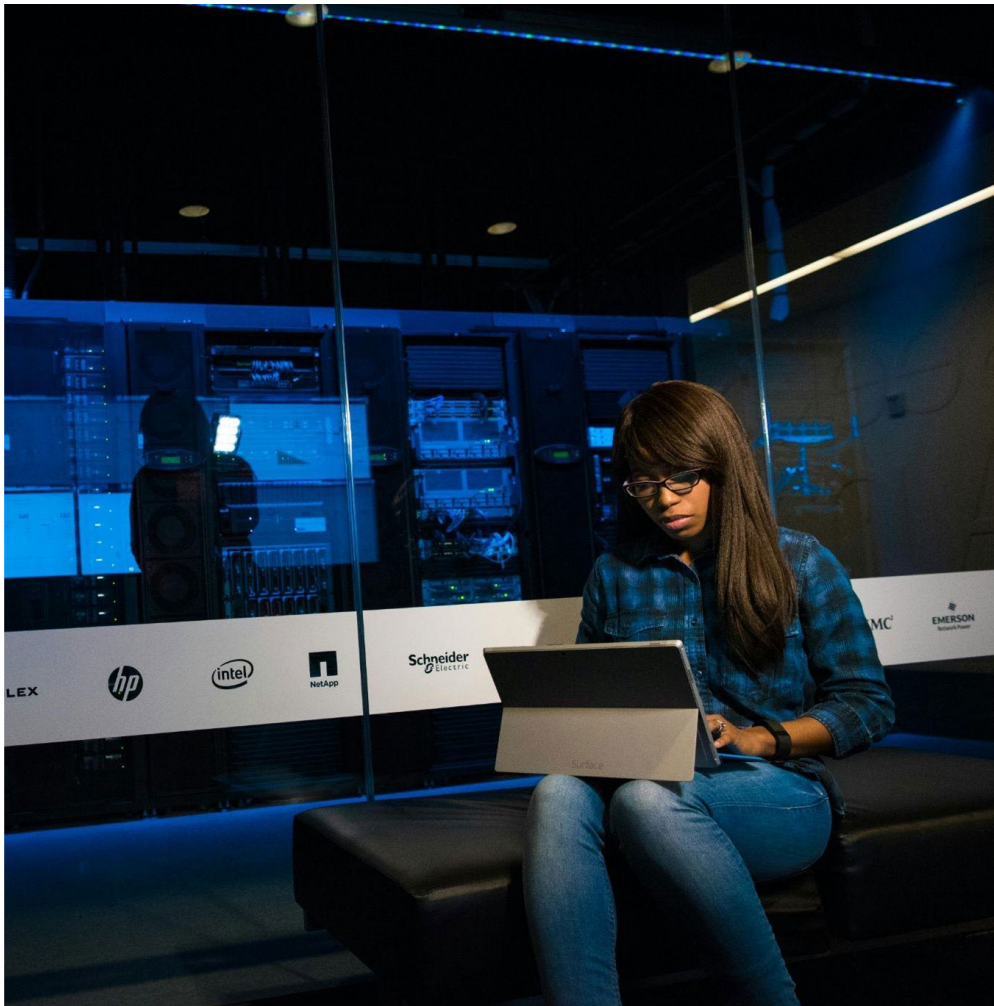
Example activities to develop this:
- Students **produce** ideas for the use of different digital tools in a business context.
- In pairs, students **combine** their different ideas to **determine** a new idea that contains aspects of original ideas generated.

**STEP 10**

**Can students develop ideas by considering different perspectives?**

Example activities to develop this:
- **Share** a scenario of how a digital business uses digital tools to improve productivity. Students must **consider** what the priorities would be for different stakeholders and **discuss** how these priorities might affect which digital tools are used.
- Students **create** a presentation for their idea of which digital tool to use and **justify** how it meets the requirements of different stakeholders.

For more ideas and resources to build your students' essential skills, check out the Universal Framework and the Speaking and Creativity workshops.

**Why developing reflection and evaluation skills is important for students to progress in their future career:**

- **Professional growth:** The digital sector evolves rapidly, making continuous learning and development crucial. Accurately assessing one's own performance can identify areas for improvement and help to stay relevant in a fast-changing industry. This self-awareness drives personal growth and career advancement.

- **Skill development:** Reflecting on one's performance helps identify skill gaps and emerging industry trends. Understanding the need for ongoing learning and proactively acquiring new skills and knowledge increases adaptability to new technologies and methodologies.

- **Performance optimization:** Self-evaluation is key to improving efficiency and effectiveness in digital roles. Learning from both successes and failures, and continuously enhancing performance can lead to better outcomes for projects and organizations.

**Core Skill 6: Reflect and evaluate their own performance and understand the need for continuous learning and development**

*To develop this core skill, building essential skills in staying positive and aiming high are important.*

**Examples this may be evidenced through:**
- apply reflective evaluation techniques based on a review of key factors and data;
- draw and summarise conclusions clearly and concisely, to support further analysis;
- analyse conclusions to identify areas for continuous learning and improvement.

## Build students' Staying Positive skills

**STEP 8**

**Can students look for opportunities in difficult situations and share these with others?**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **create** a set of recommendations based on a scenario where a system or process has failed.
- Student **consider** the different ways they could communicate their recommendations to different stakeholders.

**STEP 9**

**Can students look for opportunities in difficult situations and adapt plans to use these opportunities?**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students are introduced to the idea of carrying out a SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities and threats) analysis.
- Students complete a SWOT analysis for a given scenario and use the analysis to suggest potential changes to a plan with a justification.

## Build students' Aiming High skills

**STEP 4**

**Can students work with a positive approach to new challenges?**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **reflect** on a time they have succeeded at something new.
- Students **discuss** what factors may have contributed to their success or what they learnt.
- Students **create** a toolbox of strategies they can use when facing new challenges.

**STEP 11**

**Can students create plans that include clear targets to make progress tangible?**

Example activities to develop this:
- Students **create** SMART targets for an aspect of their practice and **discuss** what success will look like for them.

**STEP 12**

**Can students create plans that are informed by external views, including constructive criticism?**

Example activities to develop this:
- Employers **review** the different ways data can be stored for their organisations for different purposes including the limitations of each.
- Students **reflect** the different ways data can be stored for different organisations and **provide** a plan for each purpose.

For more ideas and resources to build your students' essential skills, check out the Universal Framework and the Staying Positive and Aiming High workshops.

For more information on building your student essential skills please visit the Skills Builder website at
https://www.skillsbuilder.org/

For more resources and support for this T Level please visit
https://www.technicaleducationnetworks.org.uk/digital/