

Bridging the Digital Skills Gap with a Focused Student Initiative

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Abstract

The rapid evolution of technology has created a significant gap between the skills taught in higher education and those required by employers. Digital Skills Week at Salford Business School (SBS) aimed to bridge this gap by equipping students with essential digital competencies, focusing on technologies such as AI and Microsoft Office. The initiative was developed in response to the increasing demand for digitally skilled graduates and the growing challenges employers face in recruiting for digital roles. During a dedicated week, students engaged with platforms like LinkedIn Learning, completed Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) exams, and participated in sessions designed to enhance digital capabilities, their adaptability, employability, and creativity. This article explores the development and delivery of Digital Skills Week, its rationale based on employer expectations and technological advancements, and the impact of the initiative on student engagement and skill development. Evidence from student participation, feedback, and future recommendations demonstrates the transformative potential of integrating digital skills into the academic curriculum and the potential long-term impact on employability and curriculum development.

Keywords: Digital Skills, Higher Education, Employability, Student Engagement, LinkedIn Learning, Microsoft Office, AI, Digital Competencies, *Workplace readiness*, *Technology in Higher Education*.

Introduction

The advancement of technology is reshaping the workforce, with digital competencies becoming crucial for employability across almost all sectors. Willige and Markovitz (2023) suggest that 44% of workforce skills are expected to change in the next five years. From data analysis to artificial intelligence (AI) and automation, digital skills are now foundational in nearly every industry. Yet it is not to suggest that digital skills are more significant, instead as Willige and Markovitz (2023) argue, it is a combination of academic skills, creative skills, and the ability to use technology (digital skills) that employers seek. Despite the growing reliance on these technologies, a significant gap exists between the digital skills employers require and those that graduates currently possess. Rikala et al. (2024) evidence that a skill gap exists in industry and explore the growing concerns about a widening skill gap raised worldwide. They describe this as a mismatch between the skills required by employers and those possessed by employees, citing this is often called a skill gap. For this article, the skill is one of a digital nature and the term 'digital skills' is used throughout. As the digital skill gap is a pressing issue globally, it is well established that there is a significant need for digital skills, with the National Skills Coalition (NSC), in collaboration with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, publishing a report titled 'Closing the Digital Skill Divide'. This report provides an overview of the need for digital skills in the United States of America (USA) job market, revealing that 92% of the jobs reviewed, require digital skills (National Skills Coalition, 2023).

In response to these challenges, higher education institutions must take an active role in preparing graduates not only for their chosen academic disciplines but also for the digital demands of the contemporary workplace. Universities must ensure that developing digital capabilities is an integral part of the student learning experience, embedded across both academic and extracurricular activities. This idea is not modern, with Duggan reporting universities should adopt a focus on digital skill development over ten years ago (Duggan, 2013). As such, building digital competencies is now a fundamental outcome for many degree pathways. It is no longer sufficient for graduates to be knowledgeable in traditional subject areas alone; they must also demonstrate the ability to adapt to new technologies, use digital tools effectively, and engage with complex, data-driven environments. Higher education has a responsibility to integrate these skills into curricula and provide students with

opportunities to continuously develop their digital skill. By doing so, universities will not only enhance student employability but also foster a generation of graduates capable of contributing meaningfully to increasingly digital and dynamic industries. Further, students have an expectation of digital skill development during their degree as Newman et al. (2018) evidence.

Recognising this need, at the University of Salford, the Salford Business School introduced Digital Skills Week as a proactive solution to bridge the gap between academic learning and the digital demands of modern industries. This article examines the development and execution of Digital Skills Week, a structured, weeklong programme aimed at enhancing student digital skills.

Rationale

The growing digital skills gap in the UK workforce has been well-documented, with the 2021 report commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport revealing the extent to which employers are struggling to find candidates equipped with appropriate digital competencies. This shortage is particularly prevalent in areas such as data analysis, artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, and software development—skills that are increasingly essential as industries move toward automation and digital transformation. The initiative of Digital Skills Week at Salford Business School reflects the increasing emphasis employers place on digital skills in the UK, as highlighted in key reports such as the Lloyds (2023) UK Consumer Digital Index and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's (2021) Quantifying the UK Data Skills Gap. According to this report and the research conducted by Opinium, 48% of businesses have faced significant recruitment difficulties for digital roles over the past two years, underlining the severity of this skills shortage (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2021).

The demand for digitally skilled workers is expected to continue growing, with the Lloyds UK Consumer Digital Index (2023) showing that digital proficiency is not just a requirement for technology-specific roles, but for positions across all sectors, including healthcare, education, finance, and retail. This rising demand places an urgent emphasis on the role of higher education institutions in addressing the digital

skills gap. Universities are uniquely positioned to equip students with the necessary digital literacy and competencies required in the modern workplace. Microsoft recently engaged with ten Vice Chancellors, Principals, and senior leaders from UK universities, colleges, and Institutes of Technology to better understand the country's digital capabilities challenge.

By embedding digital skills development into degree programmes and offering targeted initiatives like Digital Skills Week, universities can ensure that graduates are not only prepared for the evolving demands of the workforce but are also more competitive in the job market. Such initiatives directly respond to industry needs by enhancing student employability and helping to close the digital skills gap. The increasing expectations from employers, highlighted in the reports cited, further reinforce the necessity of integrating digital literacy into academic curricula. Salford Business School's Digital Skills Week is one such example of how institutions can bridge the gap between the skills students learn in university and those required in the modern workforce.

Aims and Objectives

The core aim of Digital Skills Week at Salford Business School was to address the widening digital skills gap by raising awareness and offering opportunities to students to enhance their digital competencies, thereby increasing their employability. In response to the growing demand for digitally skilled graduates, Digital Skills Week was designed to help students develop skills needed to thrive in an increasingly technology driven workforce. To achieve this, the initiative focused on four key objectives, each of which was carefully aligned with both industry expectations and the long-term academic development of students:

Skill Development: Aligning with Industry Demands

The first objective was to ensure that students gained practical, job-relevant digital skills that aligned with the expectations of employers. Sessions were designed around industry demands, focusing on tools and technologies that are crucial in the modern workplace, such as AI, data analysis, and Microsoft Office (GOV.UK, 2019). Students were given access to a curated list of selected LinkedIn Learning courses

that addressed these skill gaps, allowing them to learn at their own pace. By providing hands-on experiences and targeted digital learning resources, the initiative sought to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical, employable skills. By integrating in demand tools such as Excel, PowerPoint, and data visualisation platforms into the week's programme, Digital Skills Week actively aimed to equip students with the skills needed and be workplace ready (Wyatt, 2022). In collaboration with LinkedIn Learning, the 'Degree + Digital' report (Wyatt, 2022) aims to identify both short-term and long-term solutions to address the issue. The discussions revealed that academic leaders are aware of the need for change. They recognise the importance of teaching students to use essential digital tools like Teams, Word, and Excel, as well as helping develop digital solutions that enhance productivity through data manipulation and Cloud computing. Additionally, there is a focus on AI and providing personalised career coaching to help students navigate the rapidly evolving job market. The research highlights a strong commitment to equipping students with the digital skills and knowledge needed for future success and as a direct response, Salford Business School launched Digital Skills Week.

Empowerment: Fostering Ownership of Learning

The second key aim was to encourage students to take ownership of their digital skill development. As a pedagogical approach, ownership of learning is well established in areas of flexible learning (Hack, nd) and technology enhanced learning (Advance-he.ac.uk, 2019). Essentially, by offering environments where students take responsibility for understanding their learning, assessing reflectively where they are with their development, and determining how to improve, a true sense of ownership of learning is created (Chan et al., 2014). This focus on student ownership leads to deeper, more meaningful engagement and better academic outcomes. Yet it is recognised that these attempts to boost participation and engagement do not always result in improved learning outcomes and true engagement occurs when students take ownership of their learning, going beyond surface-level involvement. Stiggins (2002) calls for a shift towards assessment for learning, where students are active participants in tracking and evaluating their progress. This approach was adopted in the delivery and design of Digital Skills Week, which introduced students to self-directed learning platforms and audit tools, empowering them to identify their own digital skill gaps and address them independently. This empowerment aligns with the

need for lifelong learning (Win Phyu Thwe and Anikó Kálmán, 2023), which is essential as the digital landscape continues to evolve. Industries no longer seek candidates who merely possess a static set of skills; instead, they prioritise individuals who can adapt to new technologies and continually develop their capabilities. By fostering this mindset, Digital Skills Week aimed to instil a sense of agency and responsibility in students for their own professional development, ensuring they leave university as adaptable and forward-thinking graduates.

Sustainability: Establishing Long-Term Learning Habits

While the weeklong programme provided a boost to digital skill development, the initiative also had a long-term objective to promote sustainable learning habits that would extend beyond Digital Skills Week itself. The aim was to create a culture of continuous learning where students regularly engage with digital tools and platforms throughout their university experience and into their professional lives (Dziubaniuk, Ivanova-Gongne and Nyholm, 2023). This objective stems from the recognition that digital skills are not static. As noted by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2021), technologies evolve rapidly, and the digital competencies required today may not be sufficient in just a few years. As such, students were encouraged to see Digital Skills Week as a starting point for their ongoing digital skill journey, rather than a one-time event. By developing learning habits such as engaging with LinkedIn Learning and pursuing certifications in industry-recognised skills, students can continue to stay ahead of digital trends.

Certification

Lastly, Digital Skills Week provided students with the opportunity to earn certifications in key digital areas, further enhancing their employability. One of the most significant outcomes of the week was the offer to sit Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) exams, an internationally recognised qualification that directly translates to improved job prospects (Wyatt, 2022). This certification not only validates students' proficiency in widely used software but also gives them tangible evidence that they can add to their CVs. Offering such qualifications is a crucial step in addressing the digital skills gap, especially where many job applicants lack formal recognition of their digital abilities, even when they have the necessary knowledge. By providing

opportunities for students to gain certifications in platforms that are widely used in professional environments, Digital Skills Week aimed to increase student employability and competitiveness in the job market.

Methodology

Digital Skills Week at Salford Business School took place from Monday 26th February to Friday 1st March 2024, coinciding with the timetabled Reading Week (known as Week 7). Reading Weeks provide students with a break from scheduled teaching to engage in independent study or to work on assessments. By scheduling Digital Skills Week during this period, the programme capitalised on a time when students could prioritise development of their digital competencies without the constraints of regular timetabled lectures etc. Although some universities have opted to remove Reading Weeks from their academic calendars, Salford Business School used this opportunity to dedicate an entire week to enhancing the digital skills of its students.

To support the programme, a dedicated website was launched on SharePoint, providing students with access to curated resources, recommended content, and a detailed schedule of live sessions that took place throughout the week. This online platform remained active beyond the designated week, allowing students and staff to revisit and engage with the resources at their convenience. The website acted as a hub for both self-directed learning and structured sessions, ensuring that students had ongoing access to the tools needed for developing their digital skills.

The data for this article was collected passively through analytics from various digital platforms used during Digital Skills Week at Salford Business School (SBS). This data was primarily sourced from SharePoint analytics, LinkedIn Learning usage reports, and Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) exam participation records. These sources provide anonymised metrics on student engagement, usage patterns, and completion rates, which offer an overview of how students interacted with the initiative.

The data collection process focused on quantitative metrics that reflect the effectiveness of the initiative. Three key data sources are identified. The first offers the unique site visitors and site revisit frequency from the dedicated Digital Skills Week website, which hosted key learning materials and information about events on SharePoint. The second source is the course participation data from LinkedIn Learning, provided insights into how many students accessed digital courses during the week. Although LinkedIn Learning is a central platform available across the university, data specific to SBS students was extracted for this analysis. However, due to the extensive and granular nature of the LinkedIn Learning dataset (tracking individual video views and completions), only aggregate data (total number of students accessing the platform) was utilised. The third data source is the Microsoft Office Specialist exam participation and success rates, including the number of students who booked and completed the exam.

While some will be familiar with web analytics as a data collection method, Beasley (2013) defined this as the measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of website data to understand the website usage. The data collected was entirely anonymised and aggregated, with no identifiable personal information being recorded. As such, no active participant consent was required, given the passive nature of the data collection and the lack of identifiable information. The data adheres to ethical guidelines regarding the use of anonymised data, collected from technology platforms that inherently aggregate user data, without identifying individual users. This ensured that no personal information was included in the analysis, and all insights were derived at the group level, focusing on broader engagement trends rather than individual behaviours. In line with university guidelines and GDPR compliance, the data includes no sensitive or personal information, and the data collected served the purpose of evaluating platform engagement and effectiveness of the Digital Skills Week initiative.

This data-driven approach enabled an objective evaluation of Digital Skills Week's impact, helping to inform future iterations of the programme and its potential for broader application across the university. The data collected was analysed to offer a narrative on the engagement, effectiveness, and impact. In doing so, DSW can be evaluated to assess the overall success in meeting the objectives of raising digital

awareness and enhancing digital competencies. The data analysis is therefore a narrative one that also allows for recommendations and insights from the author to be included that offer context to the data as it stands.

There are some limitations to this methodology. Due to the anonymised nature of the data, it was not possible to track individual progress or the specific motivations behind students' use of the digital platforms. Additionally, the aggregate data from LinkedIn Learning, while helpful in identifying broad trends, did not allow for a detailed analysis of individual course completion or learning outcomes. Furthermore, the engagement data, such as average time spent on the website, may not fully reflect the depth of learning or the quality of interaction students had with the materials.

Engagement and Usage Data

Data from the SharePoint platform revealed substantial engagement during the week, showcasing the initiative's success in attracting and retaining student interest:

- 294 unique site viewers, demonstrating significant reach.
- 1,081 site visits, indicating that many participants returned to the platform multiple times throughout the week.
- Average time per user was recorded at 4 minutes and 29 seconds, reflecting exploration of the available resources and the site's offerings. However, this metric does not fully capture the time spent on learning activities, as the courses and materials were hosted externally on platforms like LinkedIn Learning or delivered in person.

In addition to the website, LinkedIn Learning was a key component of Digital Skills Week, offering students access to a wide range of digital skills courses. While LinkedIn Learning data was difficult to obtain in its entirety due to the platform's university-wide access, reports from the University of Salford Library team indicated that 189 students from Salford Business School accessed the platform during Digital Skills Week. These courses covered various aspects of digital literacy, including data

analysis, Microsoft Office tools, and AI, ensuring that students had the opportunity to tailor their learning to their personal and professional interests.

An article was published on LinkedIn under the Salford Business School profile to further raise awareness of the initiative. The LinkedIn post, featuring quotes from a student and the programme organiser, achieved the following metrics:

- 13 total views on the article.
- 753 impressions with an engagement rate of 3.19%.
- 24 engagements, 14 reactions, and 1 repost

Digital Skills Week at Salford Business School (SBS) had the potential to engage approximately 1,000 students across various disciplines. This figure provides critical context for assessing the initiative's reach and impact, as engagement metrics such as 294 unique site viewers and 189 students accessing LinkedIn Learning during the week represent a significant, but not comprehensive, portion of the eligible student population. While these numbers reflect a positive initial response, they also highlight opportunities for increasing awareness and participation in future iterations to ensure the benefits of the initiative are accessible to a larger proportion of the student body.

Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) Exams

A highlight of the week was the opportunity for students to participate in the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) exams, a globally recognised certification that demonstrates proficiency in Microsoft Office tools. The MOS exams were facilitated with support from the University of Salford library team.

The data from MOS exam participation during Digital Skills Week showed:

- 15 bookings from SBS students.
- 10 students sat the exams.
- The exams had a 60% pass rate, which, while a positive outcome, suggests there is room for improvement in supporting students in preparing for certification.

The Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification was a key feature of Digital Skills Week, offering students the opportunity to obtain a globally recognised credential in digital literacy. During the week, 15 students from Salford Business School (SBS) booked MOS exams, and of those that sat the exam, 10 successfully completed them, which held a pass rate of 60%. This figure is slightly below the national average of 63% for first-attempt MOS certifications (Bakir et al., 2019). While the pass rate demonstrates alignment with broader performance trends, it highlights a modest gap that could be addressed through enhanced preparatory support. For instance, institutions that have achieved higher success rates often integrate additional resources such as targeted practice modules, instructor-led workshops, and extended preparation time into their programmes (Certiport, 2015). These strategies could be considered in future iterations of Digital Skills Week to further support students in attaining certification, thereby enhancing the employability benefits associated with MOS qualifications.

This opportunity provided a tangible and valuable outcome for students, allowing them to gain a recognised certification that would enhance their employability in a competitive job market. The success of this component of Digital Skills Week reinforces the importance of providing students with both learning resources and formal qualifications that can directly translate into career success. Yet it provides the insight that appetite to complete an MOS certification, through the formal examination, was not high. Though this was not a direct objective of the DSW initiative, it does leave room for more engagement and conversion to certification.

Live Sessions and Student Feedback

In addition to the self-directed learning and MOS certification opportunities, Digital Skills Week featured a series of live sessions and workshops designed to complement the online resources. These sessions were tailored to address key digital skills that employers seek, including the use of AI tools, data visualisation techniques and technologies, and advanced features in Microsoft Office without the need for the full MOS certification. Students were encouraged to attend these live events either in person or online, depending on their availability, providing flexibility in how they engaged with the programme.

Student feedback from the week indicated a high level of satisfaction with the breadth and quality of the content. Many students reported that the week provided them with insights into digital tools and platforms they had not previously encountered, which enhanced their confidence in navigating these technologies. The combination of hands-on experience, self-paced learning, and live interaction allowed students to engage with the material in a way that suited their individual learning styles.

Speaking ahead of Digital Skills Week, a Law student is quoted as saying:

"The new digital skills site has an easy to access user interface and looks sleek and well branded, I'm very much looking forward to using this in my reading week. It looks great!"

(LinkedIn, 2024)

The positive feedback from the Law student regarding the Digital Skills Week platform offers important insights into the initial student reception of the initiative. The student's comments, particularly on the "easy to access user interface" and the platform's "sleek and well-branded" design, underscore the significance of user experience (UX) in educational technology platforms. A well-designed, intuitive interface is crucial in fostering engagement, especially when introducing new digital learning environments to students. If the platform is perceived as accessible and visually appealing, students are more likely to engage with its content, which can enhance their overall learning experience. The student's excitement about using the platform during Reading Week (Week 7) reflects the role that branding, and first impressions play in shaping user expectations. By creating a well-branded and professional-looking site, Digital Skills Week positioned itself as a high-quality initiative, signalling to students that the content would be both valuable and relevant to their academic and professional growth. This positive impression may also contribute to increased participation and repeated visits to the site, as the data later indicated. For initiatives like Digital Skills Week, ensuring that students feel confident in navigating the platform is critical for sustained interaction. The positive student response suggests that the platform was successful in creating a user-friendly

environment that encouraged exploration, which aligns with the initiative's objectives of increasing digital literacy and fostering self-directed learning.

Reflection and Recommendations

The success of Digital Skills Week at Salford Business School demonstrates that a focused, time-bound initiative can have a profound and lasting impact on developing students' digital skills. As the first initiative of its kind at the University of Salford, Digital Skills Week provided a valuable opportunity for both students and staff to engage with essential digital tools and competencies that are increasingly required in today's workforce. The initiative effectively raised awareness of the importance of digital literacy, and student feedback indicated that the resources provided were beneficial in enhancing their confidence and employability.

Upon reflection, while Digital Skills Week was highly successful in its core aim of raising awareness and facilitating digital skill acquisition, there are several areas for potential improvement and future development. One of the key components of the initiative, the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) exams, had a relatively low number of participants and a 60% pass rate. Given the importance of MOS certification as a globally recognised qualification, it is recommended that more effort be made to increase student engagement with this aspect of the programme. This could involve:

Pre-exam preparation sessions to help students build the skills and confidence needed to succeed in the MOS exams. Targeted marketing to raise awareness about the benefits of MOS certification, not only for law students (where it is embedded in the curriculum) but also for students across other disciplines. Post-exam support to address areas where students may need additional help, thereby improving the overall pass rate. Another reflection from the initiative is that expanding the scope of digital tools and technologies offered during Digital Skills Week would further enhance its effectiveness. The rapid pace of technological change means that students need to be familiar with a broad array of digital tools, beyond those currently offered. In future iterations, Digital Skills Week could incorporate emerging technologies such as AI tools for legal research, data analysis software, or project management platforms like Trello or Monday.com. This would ensure that students

are gaining skills that reflect current digital trends and are relevant across various industries.

Additionally, while the initiative effectively used platforms like LinkedIn Learning to provide self-directed learning opportunities, there is potential to further integrate gamification and interactive elements into the programme. Research shows that gamification can significantly boost student engagement and motivation. Offering digital badges or certificates for completing key modules, or incorporating challenges and competitions, could help sustain student interest and deepen their learning experience. Moreover, this approach would align with trends in digital pedagogy that favour more interactive, student-centred learning environments.

Sustainability is another key consideration for future Digital Skills Week programmes. Although the dedicated website remained accessible beyond the week, ensuring that students continue to engage with digital skills development throughout their academic journey is essential. One recommendation would be to integrate Digital Skills Week as part of a larger, ongoing digital literacy strategy at Salford Business School. This could involve regular check-ins with students on their progress, offering advanced sessions later in their degree programmes, or partnering with industry professionals to keep the curriculum aligned with real-world digital practices.

The impact of Digital Skills Week on students' long-term career prospects is perhaps one of its most significant outcomes. In today's rapidly evolving job market, where technological innovation is transforming nearly every sector, possessing strong digital skills is no longer a supplementary advantage—it is a core requirement for most professions. By participating in Digital Skills Week, students at Salford Business School gained exposure to critical tools and platforms such as Microsoft Office, LinkedIn Learning, and emerging technologies like AI and automation, which are shaping the future of work.

One of the most immediate and tangible impacts of Digital Skills Week on students' career prospects is the acquisition of industry-recognised certifications, such as the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) credential. Certification in essential software like Excel, Word, and PowerPoint directly enhances employability, providing students with a verified competency that is highly valued by employers across industries. This

kind of certification can make a significant difference during the job application process, allowing graduates to stand out from other candidates by demonstrating proficiency in tools that are critical to day-to-day business operations.

Moreover, the integration of self-directed learning through platforms like LinkedIn Learning allowed students to develop a more personalised skillset, tailored to their individual career goals. This flexibility is crucial in preparing students for long-term success, as it encourages them to take control of their own professional development—an essential trait in a dynamic and ever-changing job market. By learning to navigate digital platforms independently, students can continue to expand their skillsets even after they leave university, ensuring that they remain competitive as new technologies emerge.

Another key impact of Digital Skills Week is the focus on fostering adaptability and lifelong learning—both of which are crucial for long-term career success. In industries where technology evolves quickly, the ability to learn and adapt to new tools and processes is a highly sought-after skill. By introducing students to a variety of digital tools and encouraging them to continuously update their skills through resources like LinkedIn Learning, Digital Skills Week helped instil a mindset of continuous professional development. This approach not only prepares students for their first job after graduation but also equips them with the resilience and flexibility needed to navigate multiple career shifts over time.

Additionally, the exposure to emerging technologies like AI and automation gave students a competitive edge by preparing them for the kinds of roles that are expected to grow in demand in the coming years. Many industries are undergoing digital transformation, and employers increasingly seek candidates who are comfortable using data-driven tools and technologies to solve complex problems. By engaging with these technologies during Digital Skills Week, students are better prepared to enter industries that are at the forefront of innovation, such as tech, finance, healthcare, and law.

Lastly, based on the engagement data collected during the initiative, it is evident that students benefited from the flexibility of accessing digital resources at their own

pace. However, the average time spent on the website suggests that while students were exploring the materials, their engagement with specific courses, such as those offered on LinkedIn Learning, might not have been as deep as expected. Future programmes could incorporate more structured guidance, such as a recommended learning path, to help students navigate the wealth of resources and encourage more sustained interaction with the digital learning platforms.

Forging partnerships with industry professionals and employers could significantly enhance the relevance and appeal of Digital Skills Week. These partnerships would provide students with insights into how digital skills are applied in real-world scenarios, bridging the gap between academic learning and industry practice. Bringing in industry leaders from sectors such as tech, finance, marketing, and law to deliver talks on the importance of digital skills in their fields. These professionals could share insights on current digital trends, offer career advice, and discuss the skills they look for in graduates. Inviting employers or tech companies to lead workshops where students can learn directly from practitioners. For example, partnering with companies like Microsoft, Google, or Amazon to deliver specialised training on their platforms could enhance the practical relevance of the week. Incorporating live case studies where students are presented with a real-world problem and tasked with using digital tools to find a solution. These case studies could be designed in collaboration with industry partners, giving students the chance to work on authentic challenges while applying the skills learned during the week. Offering students opportunities to network with industry professionals at virtual or in-person events. Creating a digital networking platform as part of Digital Skills Week could allow students to connect with potential employers, learn about internships or job opportunities, and receive mentoring from professionals in their fields.

Digital Skills Week successfully laid the groundwork for ongoing digital skills development at Salford Business School. Its success suggests that similar programmes could be implemented more broadly across the university, with a focus on enhancing student engagement with certification opportunities, broadening the range of digital tools offered, and embedding long-term digital literacy development into the academic experience. By making these adjustments, future iterations of

Digital Skills Week can ensure even greater impact on student employability and readiness for the digital workforce.

Conclusion

Digital Skills Week at Salford Business School was a timely and proactive response to the evolving demands of the digital economy. In an era where technological proficiency is a critical determinant of employability, the initiative addressed the growing digital skills gap by providing students with hands-on experience and opportunities to develop essential digital competencies. The weeklong programme empowered students to engage with tools such as LinkedIn Learning, earn industry-recognised certifications like the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS), and participate in sessions that promoted not only digital literacy but also adaptability and creativity—skills that are highly valued in the modern workplace.

One of the key successes of Digital Skills Week was its ability to raise awareness about the importance of digital skills while offering students practical ways to enhance these competencies. The high level of engagement with the dedicated website and the positive participation in digital learning platforms reflected a strong student appetite for these kinds of opportunities. By facilitating access to both structured live sessions and self-paced learning resources, the initiative helped bridge the gap between academic learning and the technical proficiencies required by employers across various sectors.

However, as industries continue to rapidly evolve, so too must the approach to digital education. The reflection on the MOS exam participation, as well as engagement metrics from the SharePoint platform, point to areas where future iterations of Digital Skills Week can be further enhanced. Expanding the scope of the programme to include a broader array of digital tools, such as AI technologies, project management software, or data analytics platforms, will ensure that students are not only meeting current industry expectations but are also prepared for the emerging trends that will define the future of work. Additionally, embedding interactive learning experiences through gamification or challenge-based learning could deepen student engagement and help foster a more dynamic, student-centred learning environment.

Furthermore, Digital Skills Week laid the groundwork for sustainable digital skills development at Salford Business School, encouraging students to take ownership of their learning beyond the designated week. The inclusion of ongoing access to resources and platforms like LinkedIn Learning fosters a culture of lifelong learning, which is essential in a digital landscape where skills quickly become outdated. As the reflection highlighted, future iterations should build on this foundation by embedding digital literacy into the curriculum more holistically, ensuring that students have continuous opportunities to refine and expand their digital skills throughout their academic careers.

In conclusion, Digital Skills Week was a significant step towards bridging the digital skills gap and equipping students with the competencies needed to succeed in a technology-driven world. The initiative's success demonstrates that universities play a crucial role in preparing students for the workforce of the future. By continuing to evolve the programme and responding to both student feedback and industry trends, Salford Business School can ensure that its graduates remain competitive and ready to meet the demands of an increasingly digital and dynamic economy.

Disclosure Statement

The content of this article represents the author's own work. Any cited or paraphrased material is included in the reference list. The work has not been previously published nor is it under consideration for publication elsewhere. The author declares no conflicts of interest that may have influenced the reporting of these findings and research ethics was obtained successfully from the University of Salford.

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