

Improving adult basic digital skills

January 2019

1. New national standards for basic digital skills

Do you agree that basic digital skills qualifications should be offered at two skills levels: 'beginner' (entry levels 1-3) and 'essential' (level 1) to comprise the minimum required for work and life?

- We are highly supportive of the overall National Standards proposal, and particularly the intention behind the basic digital skills qualifications to act as a basis for further and continued learning.
- While we are broadly supportive of a tiered learning structure, within the design of the standards there needs to be appreciation that a user's skills and knowledge may vary significantly between the different online skills statements, and rather than being a 'beginner' across all of the task requirements, the user may be highly adept at using certain aspects of the internet. For example, being highly skilled at creating digital content but have significantly less knowledge around responsible behaviours online.
- We would also like to note that the term 'beginner' may not be the most useful language in relation to skills development. What is basic for one person is not basic for another, and so groups may misunderstand or misinterpret if skills are labelled as 'beginner qualifications' and perceive that they do not apply to them. This can be particularly relevant when working with younger people on developing their digital skills, as there is an assumption that all younger people possess basic digital skills when this is not the reality. This assumption can even be held by the young people themselves, young people believe simply having access to a mobile phone means they have the skills to safely and effectively use it.
- Qualitative evidence from digital inclusion programmes we have supported highlights "For a lot of the young people, they had that presumption [being highly digitally skilled] about themselves as well. They said they felt digitally confident, but when we observed them doing it, we realised that wasn't always the case. Many felt confident doing it in a social context, using social media to chat to their friends, but when it came to approaching tasks in a more in-depth and even professional way they often didn't have the know-how at all." (Digital Ignition Project Staff).

Do you agree with the proposed five skills categories (handling information: creating and editing digital content; communicating; transacting; being safe and responsible online)?

- We are broadly supportive of the categories outlined, which cover a good range of necessary activities. However, we feel there should also be clear understanding within the standards around how the skills categories link to, and overlap with one another, so as not to silo the learning.
- Furthermore, as with the Essential Digital Skills Framework, being safe and responsible online should underpin the other four categories.
- We understand that this is an internal facing document so language may be changed during final delivery. However, 'Accessing Goods and Services' could replace Transacting. This has varied interpretation and seems predominantly monetary skills focused. 'Researching' is a common term used when referencing the uses of the internet and so we suggest this should fit within, or potentially replace, Problem Solving as the broad category definition.

Do you agree the draft standards capture the necessary basic digital skills for life, work and further study?

- We are pleased that many of the skills statements are focused on users developing skills to maximise the opportunities of the online world, and not purely centred on risk mitigation. However, we feel this could be strengthened across a number of the activities, for example "(16) Digital Wellbeing" could also present an activity to understand and recognise opportunities for positive wellbeing development online.
- We are also pleased that "(7) Communicating, collaborating and sharing" includes reference to users developing an understanding of appropriate 'conventions' as the 'social/cultural technology skills' can often be missed from frameworks and skills programmes. As such, the rest of the standards should also be evaluated to understand if there are additional social/cultural elements that have not yet been accounted for.
- The standards reference using a 'suitable' application within "(3) Creating and Editing Documents", therefore there should be a stronger focus on how to identify or select which application/tool/product/website is the most appropriate or suitable for the outcome they are trying to achieve. This will reinforce the underlying ethos of continued development, rather than focus on completion of discrete functional tasks. The intention is to support users to apply the skills in new settings or for new tasks. Furthermore, the standards reflect a general focus on "how" to do things but not "why" to do them.
- We feel a number of the activities listed within the 'essential' level standard within the context of being safe and responsible online should be shifted to the 'beginner' level standard. For example, within the skills statements "(10) buying securely online" and "(15) being responsible online". In addition to users having basic knowledge of terminology and concepts around safety, all users should have the skills to act/behave in a safe and responsible way, which is reflected in the majority of the skills statements. As well as users developing an understanding of their actions

online, there could also be further exploration of the impacts of “inaction” particularly with regards to safety behaviours.

- The standards could include a more explicit reference to developing resilience behaviours to support users to understand what to do if something does go wrong online. For example, linking with the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) work around digital resilience.
- Again, while this is an internal document, the language used within the standards should align, where possible, with language that appears on common devices or in general public usage, such as ‘Location Services’ when referencing GPS technology.
- We also support that there is only one set of standards and that the activities are not split into life, work and further study activities.
- There are a number of activities for consideration for addition within the standards:
 - Scanning or using similar tools to enable users to take the information from a piece of physical paper to online image.
 - Whilst passwords are within the ‘Functional Skills’ section, this could be expanded upon within the “beginner” level standards to include the use of strong passwords, multiple passwords or password managers.
 - Public WIFI (opportunities and risks of use).
 - Basic skills (risks and opportunities of) online banking.
 - Use of online maps.
 - Within handling information, users should be supported to recognise and understand common online iconography/graphic. For example, on a mobile device the “three horizontal line symbol” meaning menu.
 - As entertainment is a large part of how people enjoy the internet, reference to accessing entertainment services such as accessing TV on demand or games. Therefore, the skills standards should also ensure everyone is supported to access these services safely and responsibly.
 - Development of video content (rather than predominantly photo content).
 - Supporting users to develop familiarity or recognition of common computer packages and software or brand names and their key uses, to support users identify the most relevant applications to use.

- Should the standards be reviewed at least every three years?
 - Yes, if not more frequently, particularly if the intention is to take an iterative approach. As outlined in the consultation documentation, the digital skills that will be needed as 'core' (or expected by employers) will constantly and rapidly evolve. Therefore, this should be accounted for and there should be a clear refresh programme or strategy.

2. Improving basic digital skills qualifications

Do you agree that basic digital skills qualifications delivered by providers as part of the publicly funded adult education offer should:

- Have a declared purpose?

Agree in principle – though these should be regularly tested and reviewed to understand which audiences the courses are serving and which audiences they have not reached.

- Be of a minimum size?

Agree in principle – though again, this should be tested and reviewed regularly to understand if this amount of time is required to deliver the intended knowledge and skills requirement.

- Conform to a specific subject sector area (SSA) classification?

3. Introducing a national entitlement to basic digital skills training

Do you agree that:

- Learners should be fully funded to take courses up to and including 'essential' level (level 1)?

Yes

- Providers should carry out a thorough initial assessment to determine an individual's current level, based on the new national standards, to determine if the individual should be fully funded?

We agree an initial assessment is a useful starting point for both the individual and if the data is able to be aggregated will be helpful to identify broader societal gaps in knowledge. We believe this assessment should involve a variety of methods and, specifically, should not be based purely on self-report data on a perceived skill level. Qualitative evidence from programmes we have supported highlights that there can be a significant gap between self-reported skill level and demonstrable skill. For example, one programme working with young people in education, training or employment

demonstrated that more than half the group stated they were confident in using digital technology, however the project staff noted that aside from passively consuming entertainment media and engaging with social media, this appeared not to be the case. “The majority of the attendees struggled with basic use of search engines, how to find information and identify reliable information or with applications such as Microsoft Word and using email” (Digital Ignition Project Staff).

- Data collection methods could include reported skill level, tasks recently undertaken and tutor observation.

We anticipate there may also have to be careful consideration about potential weighting of skills to determine which qualification level to enter a user for, as knowledge and skill level may vary significantly between different online skills.