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Sally

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As part of plans to develop a world-leading digital economy that works for everyone, I recently committed to introduce fully funded basic digital skills courses for adults from 2020. They will be funded from the Adult Education Budget for eligible learners on a similar basis to the English and maths legal entitlement.

In the autumn I will be launching a formal consultation on updating the national standards for basic digital skills, which date back to 2005. The consultation will also seek views on the skill level we should provide fully funded courses up to and the use of initial assessment arrangements to ensure providers enrol learners on appropriate courses.

Some existing digital qualifications are based on outdated standards, therefore updating the national standards will require these qualifications to be reformed and allow us to give adults the opportunity to study improved courses that reflect the full range of digital knowledge, skills and application needed to get ahead in life and work.

This letter sets out my policy priorities for the reform of these qualifications. My priorities apply to all basic digital skills qualifications, with the exception of Functional Skills. Like Functional Skills in English and maths, ICT Functional Skills are important qualifications that are also in need of reform. I will write to you separately concerning the reform of Functional Skills ICT.

I want the reformed qualifications to support adults in gaining the essential digital skills and underpinning knowledge needed in life, work and further study. They should provide reliable evidence of learners' achievements against the new national standards once they are developed.

I expect the reformed qualifications will be primarily studied by adults aged 19 and over. The Basic Digital Skills entitlement will fully fund these post 19 learners and I expect it to drive the majority of take-up for these new qualifications. In some circumstances the qualifications may also meet the needs of 16 to 18 year olds undertaking training at level 2 or below, such as a preparatory programme ahead of a T level programme or an apprenticeship. However, it is important that the design of the qualifications prioritises the needs of those post 19 learners.

Adults without secure basic digital skills range from those with no basic digital skills to those with some but not all of the five categories of Essential Digital Skills for life and work - communicating, handling information and content, transacting, problem solving and being safe and legal online. Most current basic ICT qualifications are made up of units to allow learners to undertake learning on topics they need to develop knowledge and skills in, without the need to undertake a whole qualification and so repeat learning. I would be pleased to see this continue.

To improve recognition, consistency and transferability, new qualifications should follow a standard titling convention to ensure learners, education and training providers and employers can easily identify and understand the learning outcomes of a qualification. I would appreciate your thoughts on how regulation might assist in achieving this, balancing this with the diverse range of digital skills adults need and the ambition to have qualifications made up of units.

As awarding organisations reform their qualifications and when deciding your regulatory approach, you will want to take into account the diverse needs and learning preferences of learners with low or no basic digital skills, many of whom are from vulnerable groups such as older people, people with disabilities and those with low incomes. I accept that this makes it likely that qualifications will take different approaches to assessment.

I will be interested to understand how you intend to strike a balance between the need to encourage awarding organisations to consider innovation and flexibility in the design of their qualifications, while making sure employers and learners have confidence in the qualifications and their assessment standards. You should also note that the qualifications will not play a part in the Government's accountability system, with the exception of qualification achievement rates.

I would like to thank Ofqual for working closely with my officials to progress these reforms. I look forward to working with you further on introducing these improved qualifications.

Best
Anne

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