



Department
for Education

Improving adult basic digital skills

Government consultation response

April 2019

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Introduction

Last October the Department for Education (DfE) published a consultation setting out plans to improve adult basic digital skills by:

- Updating the national standards for the basic digital skills needed for life and work;
- Improving basic digital skills qualifications; and
- Introducing a national entitlement to basic digital skills, mirroring the existing legal entitlements for English and maths.

The consultation ran for 12 weeks. It received 170 responses. Of these, 158 were received via the online questionnaire and 12 were received by email. Responses came from providers, industry, digital inclusion organisations, awarding organisations, local authorities, representative bodies and others. Of the responses we received:

- 49 were submitted by individuals
- 42 were submitted by providers
- 33 were submitted by local authorities
- 10 were submitted by awarding organisations
- 10 were submitted by employers
- 17 were submitted by provider representative organisations or other organisations
- 6 were submitted by other government departments, such as HM Revenue & Customs and HM Prison Service
- 3 were submitted by academics or universities

The online questionnaire required all respondents to answer all consultation questions. The number of responses received from each category of stakeholder varied considerably and the amount of detail in response to each of the consultation questions also varied between respondents. Responses have not been weighted.

In a small number of cases, more than one response was received from the same organisation. These responses were counted separately where individual respondents did not provide the same responses. In some cases, where respondents stated they agreed with our proposals through 'yes/no' questioning, this appeared to be an agreement or disagreement in principle, caveated by additional consideration and factors they felt we should take into account.

The Office of Qualification and Examination Regulation (Ofqual) consulted separately on the regulation of basic digital skills qualifications, including the specific rules on their design, delivery, awarding and standard setting, and on the detailed work that will be required in order to maintain standards on an ongoing basis.

Overview of reform

Digital skills are as important to employability and participation in society as English and maths, yet an estimated one in five adults lack basic digital skills¹.

To address this, from 2020, alongside the existing legal entitlements to English and maths, we will introduce an entitlement to fully funded digital qualifications. Adults with no or low digital skills will have the opportunity to undertake improved digital qualifications based on new national standards setting out the digital skills people need to get on in life and work.

The entitlement will help providers support adults at risk of being left behind by an increasingly digital world. This is alongside our wider action on digital skills, where we continue to support the Good Things Foundation to deliver the 'Future Digital Inclusion' programme in their Online Centres Network. To date, the programme has helped over 1 million adults to improve their basic digital skills. The new digital offer will comprise of new essential digital skills qualifications and new digital Functional Skills qualifications (FSQs):

- **Essential digital skills qualifications** will enable adults to develop the digital skills they need for life, work or further study, as set out in the essential digital skills national standards. To support a range of purposes, these qualifications must cover all five of the skill areas from the national standards, and may cover some, or all, of the skills statements in each skill area.
- **Digital FSQs** will provide reliable evidence of a student's achievements against demanding content that is relevant to the workplace and real life, and provide assessment of students' underpinning knowledge as well as their ability to apply this in different contexts. Digital FSQs will provide a foundation for progression into employment or further education and develop skills for everyday life. The subject content for digital FSQs will reflect the full essential digital skills national standards.

DfE will shortly consult on draft subject content for new digital FSQs, which will replace legacy ICT FSQs. We plan to work with employers, Ofqual and awarding organisations to develop the new digital FSQs for first teaching from 2021.

¹ [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2018](#)

The offer of full funding for adults to take digital training to a specific skills level has been set out in primary legislation for England (Digital Economy Act 2017²), mirroring that of the English and maths legal entitlements.

The new entitlement will be funded through the adult education budget. In devolved areas, the specified mayoral combined authorities and the Mayor of London will need to make provision for the funding of the digital entitlement as part of their devolution deal alongside the English and maths, level 2 and level 3 statutory entitlements. For non-devolved areas, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) will provide the adult education budget funding.

² [Digital Economy Act, 2017](#)

Summary of responses received and the government's response

The sections below set out the views of those responding to the consultation, and decisions made by the government.

The written responses and views from respondents during the consultation period, and throughout the development process, have been important in shaping and strengthening the final national standards published alongside this response, and informing decisions on the new essential digital skills entitlement. The Department has also worked closely with Ofqual to ensure that the qualifications developed against the new national standards can be regulated effectively.

The plans to improve adult basic digital skills have been well received, with all proposals being supported by at least 60% of respondents. Some proposals, for example the proposal to offer qualifications at two levels, and the proposed skills areas for the national standards, achieved over 80% approval.

We received a number of specific suggested amendments and clarifications to the proposed national standards. Most comments were received on the 'handling information' and 'being safe and responsible online' skills areas. Issues that received the most comments included the proposal for a single entry level and how frequently the national standards should be reviewed. These concerns have been addressed in detail within this response.

This analysis does not include issues mentioned by respondents that were outside the scope of the consultation – for example, issues raised regarding teaching styles, the teaching workforce or development of specialist and advanced digital skills.

Some responses were relevant to Ofqual's consultation on regulating basic digital skills qualifications that ran from 5 November 2018 to 13 January 2019. These issues will be addressed by Ofqual in its consultation response and are therefore not reported here.

In accordance with our duties under the Equality Act 2010, we have considered the impact of the proposals on individuals sharing protected characteristics in order to give due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. Taking into account the responses received to the consultation and wider evidence, we have prepared an equality impact assessment which is published alongside this response.

A full list of changes to the national standards and decisions on implementing the new entitlement are summarised in Annex B and Annex C.

Question analysis

1. New national standards for basic digital skills

Question 1: Do you agree that basic digital skills qualifications should be offered at two skills levels: ‘beginner’ (entry level) and ‘essential’ (level 1)?

	Percent
Yes	82%
No	14%
Don't know	4%

The significant majority of respondents supported the proposal to offer basic digital skills at two skills levels (entry and level 1) and agreed that skills at level 2 and above went beyond the digital skills currently needed for life and work.

Providers, teachers and individuals agreed that entry level courses should be focussed on those with limited or no experience of digital devices, and level 1 courses should be focused on those who have used digital devices but do not have secure digital skills. For example, one respondent commented ‘there is a huge difference in skill level between learners who use their smartphones or the internet a bit at home, but need to develop their digital skills and understanding of internet safety, and the ones who have never used a computer and have little or no experience of using one.’

The majority of respondents supported the proposal for a single entry level, agreeing it was not possible to define coherent standards at each of the three entry sub-levels. A minority of respondents expressed concern that a single entry level would disadvantage individuals with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) and those taking courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), as they may find assessment at entry level 3 too demanding and because the three entry levels can be helpful in recognising progress.

Several awarding organisations advised that the assessment of the entry qualification should be at entry level 3, arguing that entry level 3 would support digital literacy to a level that will enable the individual to carry out the basic functions to support daily living in a digital society, while level 1 would certify digital skills needed in the work place.

The proposal to refer to entry level courses as ‘beginner’ and level 1 courses as ‘essential’ attracted a wide range of comments and views. Some respondents argued that the proposed terms had the potential to improve clarity, while others queried the difference between the terms and felt they would be confusing to individuals and providers.

Those in favour of the term 'beginner' felt it might be more appealing to older adults than courses advertised as 'basic'. Those against argued that it would be demotivating for individuals successfully completing entry level courses to be certificated as 'beginners'.

There was broader support for the term 'essential'. This reflected the findings of the consultation undertaken by the Tech Partnership last year, which found significant support for the proposal to rename the 'Basic digital skills framework' the 'Essential digital skills framework'. However, some respondents argued that the term 'essential' implied that all the skills statements at level 1 in the national standards are needed by every adult, and questioned how realistic this was.

A significant number of respondents flagged the need for pre-entry courses for those with no experience of using digital devices, in particular adults over 50. They proposed pre-entry courses should also be funded under the new entitlement as they would provide a pathway to the new entry level and level 1 qualifications.

Government response

Given the significant support for the proposals, we will proceed with our plan to introduce a new entitlement to digital skills qualifications at entry level and level 1, alongside the existing English and maths legal entitlements.

We have carefully considered the feedback concerning the proposal for a single entry level and have run workshops with awarding organisations and providers to test this proposal in detail. The significant majority of attendees agreed that the skills statements at entry levels 1, 2 and 3 provided insufficient progression, and broke up knowledge and skills in an artificial and fragmented manner. Attendees proposed that a single entry level would better support skills development.

We have also carefully considered the impact of a single entry level on individuals with LDD, including 19-24 year olds with special educational needs (SEN) and have concluded entry level 1 and entry level 2 qualifications are not playing a significant role in supporting those recorded as having LDD. Greater detail on this is provided in the equality impact assessment published alongside this government response.

For individuals, including those with LDD, assessed as not ready to study the new entry level qualifications, we will continue to ensure ESFA funded provision is available. The specified mayoral combined authorities and the Mayor of London will determine what provision they fund outside of the legal entitlements.

To reflect stakeholder preference for the term 'essential', the new qualifications will be collectively known as 'essential digital skills qualifications' and the national standards referred to as 'national standards for essential digital skills'.

We have decided not proceed with the proposal to introduce 'beginner' or 'essential' level descriptors due to the concerns raised by the consultation. Instead, the standard Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF) descriptors of 'entry' and 'level 1' have been used to describe the two levels in the new national standards.

Question 2: Do you agree with the five skills areas (handling information; creating and editing digital content; communicating; transacting; being safe and responsible online)?

	Percent
Yes	87%
No	10%
Don't know	3%

Nearly 90% of respondents agreed the proposed skills areas captured the skills and knowledge needed to safely benefit from, participate in, and contribute to the digital world of today. There was also general agreement that the five skills areas would remain relevant for the foreseeable future.

A number of respondents - mainly providers - suggested that a topic should be added focused on understanding and using digital devices. Some providers also suggested reference to using the internet to further develop digital skills.

Some employers and professional bodies proposed more significant changes to focus on adults being active, rather than passive participants of digital technology. They suggested new topics on the principles of computing and networks, data analytics, coding and content management and maintenance of digital devices and peripherals.

Two respondents proposed a distinct skills area on digital entertainment or leisure, arguing that skills in 'consuming media from streaming films and media, to eBooks and magazines' are important enough to feature as a distinct skills area, and that it would potentially attract adults to enrol on courses teaching these skills.

A number of respondents - mainly individuals or providers - suggested that some of the skills area titles could be simplified or shortened to make them more accessible. For example, some adults may not understand what is meant by 'transacting' and that 'buying, paying and selling' would be easier to understand, and 'being safe and responsible online' could be shorted to 'being safe'.

Several respondents observed the proposed skills areas did not match those set out in the Essential Digital Skills (EDS) Framework³ and expressed concern this may hinder progression from informal digital skills support, based on the EDS Framework, to qualifications available through the new entitlement.

Government response

Given the significant support for the five proposed skills areas, we have decided to make no significant changes to them. However, amendments have been made to the first skills area - handling information - to incorporate new skills statements concerning the use of digital devices and developing digital skills.

We have decided not to match the structure of the EDS Framework for two reasons:

- we have decided not to include problem solving as a skills area as there is scope for coverage of problem solving in all five skills areas; and
- we have made editing and creating a skills area following a review of international literature and in response to feedback from stakeholders who argued that it is important to maintain a strong focus on creating and editing documents, handling digital media and processing numerical data.

We have decided not to add skills areas relating to principles of computing and networks, data analytics, coding and content management or the maintenance of digital devices and peripherals, as these topics go beyond the essential digital skills needed for life and work.

We concluded that there is insufficient distinctive skills needed to access and participate in digital entertainment and leisure to merit it being a skills area in its own right, however we have incorporated references to entertainment and leisure in the transactions skills area.

In response to calls to simplify language where possible, the title of the 'creating and editing digital content' skills area has been shortened to 'creating and editing'.

³ [Essential digital skills framework](#)

Question 3: Do the draft standards capture the basic digital skills needed to fully participate in life, to undertake the significant majority of jobs and encourage further study?

	Percent
Yes	67%
No	19%
Don't know	14%

Two thirds of respondents agreed the draft standards captured the essential digital skills needed for life, work and further study, while one in five did not. Most written comments proposed further skills to the standards or suggested further examples of how skills might be used in life and work. Suggestions were also made on skills that should be removed from the standards. Three respondents expressed concern that some skills statements were too demanding.

Government response

The following changes have been made to the standards in response to feedback received:

i) Using devices and handling information

A significant number of respondents were of the view that the draft standards did not sufficiently ensure understanding of hardware, software, operating systems and applications, and that such knowledge was helpful in using and maintaining devices and solving technical problems.

To address these points, new skills statements on 'using devices' at entry and level 1 have been incorporated. These new skills statements also refer to using system settings to adjust devices to individual needs, including accessibility.

A number of respondents proposed that there should be explicit reference to maintaining and improving digital skills. A new skills statement at level 1 has been added to address this.

In the 'finding and evaluating information' statement, searching on attributes has been removed from entry level and added to the amplification at level 1 in response to feedback that it was too advanced for entry level.

A number of respondents also raised the need for adults to understand the comparative size of files so they can make informed decisions on managing and storing information and act on instructions requiring files to fall within a specific size parameter. Therefore,

knowledge of data sizes, for example megabyte, gigabyte, has been added at level 1. Data speeds have also been added to ensure an understanding of broadband speeds and data transfer.

ii) Creating and editing

Relatively few comments were received concerning this skills area. A few respondents suggested there should be greater emphasis on creation and editing of digital media, proposing additional skills statements on video editing and creating and publishing web pages. These have not been included in the final standards as they go beyond the essential digital skills needed for life and work.

Some respondents felt the standards were overly focused on Microsoft Word and Excel, but not on other applications for creating and editing documents and numerical processing. However, no changes have been made, as the standards do not refer to specific applications.

The requirement that numerical data at level 1 needs to be at least 25 rows of data and 4-6 columns has been removed. This is because we have decided this level of detail is more appropriate for inclusion in the subject content for new digital FSQs.

iii) Communicating

Relatively few comments were received concerning this skills area. A number of respondents expressed strong support for the level 1 skills statement concerning use of appropriate modes of online communication for a range of contexts and audiences. A suggestion was made on the importance of appropriate online names and email addresses, which has been added to the amplification.

Some respondents expressed concern that the standards are overly focused on email rather than other forms of online communication. However, no changes have been made to the standards as the skills statements refer to online communication, and the amplification references email, instant message, text message, social media, blogs and collaboration tools and services.

A number of respondents argued for additional emphasis on collaboration, arguing individuals would benefit from understanding the basic concepts of collaboration tools and their increasing role in creating and editing documents. We have decided not to add specific skills statements on collaboration as the underpinning skills needed are already in the standards. However, as collaborative working on digital platforms becomes more prevalent in the future, we may need to update the standards to reflect this.

iv) Transacting

Most of the comments received for this skills area concerned incorporating examples of transactions in everyday life, such as online job applications, booking an appointment or buying a product online. To reflect this feedback, the amplification accompanying the

skills statements have been expanded to include a greater range of examples, including purchasing and streaming of entertainment media.

Changes have also been made to the amplification for the 'undertaking transactions online' skills statement at level 1 to include the uploading and downloading of documents and images, as this is often required when registering or undertaking a transaction.

v) **Being safe and responsible online**

This skills area attracted the most comments. There was concern expressed that the draft standards did not make it explicit that inappropriate language and behaviour online, for example trolling or online harassment, threatening, abusive or grossly offensive online communications, could constitute a criminal offence. This has been clarified in the final standards.

At entry level, amplification has been added concerning the risks associated with clicking on links found in emails or other digital messages. At level 1, amplification has been added on use of password manager applications, the risks posed by caching on public computers and networks, understanding that devices transmit location data via GPS and the importance of using location settings to protect privacy.

Question 4: Do you agree the standards should be reviewed at least every three years?

	Percent
Yes	88%
No	9%
Don't know	3%

Nearly 90% of respondents agreed that the standards should be reviewed at least every three years, observing it struck the right balance between keeping the standards up to date while not overly impacting on providers, individuals and awarding organisations. Respondents also commented that the proposed frequency would allow for evolutionary changes to the standards rather than major changes over time.

Most of the respondents that answered 'no' to this question expressed a view that the standards should be reviewed more frequently, citing the rapid pace of technological change. The 'internet of things' and artificial intelligence were quoted as examples of technological change with the potential to impact profoundly on the digital skills needed for life and work in the coming years.

Most providers agreed that a review every three years was appropriate, with some respondents noting that more frequent changes might result in providers struggling to meet costs associated with curriculum change, such as needing new equipment or training for staff.

Awarding organisations responding to the consultation generally either supported reviews on a three or five year basis. Awarding organisations arguing for a review every five years observed that more frequent changes would have significant resource implications, risk teachers not becoming familiar with qualification specifications, and may deter awarding organisations from developing and offering qualifications.

There were differing views on the extent to which technological change would require changes to the standards. A significant number of respondents commended the drafting of the national standards, noting the focus on the underpinning skills and knowledge to use digital devices and the internet, which will increase the chances of the standards remaining relevant as digital technology advances and use evolves.

Such respondents argued that new technologies coming on stream are likely to require changes to the amplification rather than the skills statements themselves. Examples of technological changes that might be accommodated in this way included online security, changes to platforms, new ways of accessing digital content and changes to user interfaces.

A number of awarding organisations also argued that reviews should focus on confirming that the standards remain fit for purpose, and would not necessarily mean that qualifications need to be updated every three years.

Government response

Given the significant support for the original proposal to review standards at least every three years, we will proceed on this basis. This will ensure that the standards continue to reflect the full range of essential digital skills needed to participate actively in life, work and society.

Wherever possible, updates will focus on changes to the amplification that provides detail on how individual skills statements should be interpreted rather than to the skills statements themselves.

To ensure the full engagement of digital skills and inclusion partners, DfE will involve the Digital Skills Partnership in future reviews of the standards and the underpinning Essential Digital Skills framework.

2. Improving basic digital skills qualifications

Question 5: Do you agree with the proposed three qualification eligibility principles (declared purpose, size and sector subject area classification)?

	Percent
Yes	60%
No	11%
Don't know	29%

Providers, awarding organisations and local authority responses accounted for most of the written responses to this question.

i) Declared Purpose

Relatively few respondents provided comments in response to this question. Of the comments received, all were supportive and recognised the value of declared purpose statements in confirming the intent of qualifications and helping adults make informed decisions on which qualification to take.

ii) Size

The consultation document proposed qualifications must be at least 45 guided learning hours (GLH). While there was broad agreement that there should be a minimum size to ensure that the standards at both skills levels are adequately covered, there was a wide range of views on what the minimum size should be.

Awarding organisations expressed differing views on the extent to which 45 hours would be sufficient time to cover the skills set out in the draft national standards. For example, one awarding organisation described 45 hours as 'quite generous', while another awarding organisation concluded 45 hours was insufficient to provide meaningful learning across all five skills categories. Other respondents argued that 45 hours is excessive for a qualification aimed at those with low or no basic digital skills, and those individuals with learning difficulties or complex needs may struggle to engage with a qualification of 45 hours or more.

A small number of respondents argued for a higher minimum size in line with the proposed 55 guided learning hours for reformed functional skills qualifications in English and maths. Several awarding organisations argued for a higher minimum size on the basis that qualifications should be unitised and that at least 15 hours would be needed to cover each of the five skills categories. Some also argued for an upper size limit to ensure a degree of standardisation across qualifications.

iii) **Sector Subject Area classification**

The proposal that all publicly funded essential digital skills qualifications should be recorded under Sector Subject Area (SSA) 6.2- ICT for users was broadly supported, with respondents recognising that it would help avoid confusion, affirm purpose and make it easier to monitor enrolments and achievements. One provider argued against the proposal, arguing that essential digital skills qualifications should be considered 'life skills' and therefore should be classified under SSA 14.1- Foundations for learning and life, alongside FSQs.

Government response

Given the broad support for the proposed qualification eligibility principles, we will only fund qualifications under the entitlement that meet these principles. These principles will work in tandem with regulatory oversight from Ofqual to encourage the development of a high quality and relevant essential digital skills offer for adults, which represents value for money.

Essential digital skills qualifications will enable adults to develop the digital skills they need for life, work or further study, as set out in the essential digital skills national standards. To support a range of purposes, these qualifications must cover all five of the skill areas from the national standards, and may cover some, or all, of the skills statements in each skill area.

Each qualification will be required to have an accompanying 'declared purpose' statement that clearly describes who the qualification is for, what digital skills the qualification covers, and to what further study or employment the qualification is designed to lead. This will help adults make informed decisions about which qualification to take.

In consideration of the responses received, we have decided that essential digital skills qualifications should be at least 30 GLH and no larger than 50 GLH in size. This will give awarding organisations the flexibility to design essential digital skills qualifications that meet the diverse needs of adults with no or low digital skills.

Essential digital skills qualifications should be recorded under SSA 6.2- ICT for users. Reformed digital FSQs will continue to be recorded under SSA 14.1- Foundations for learning and life.

In due course, ESFA will confirm the principles and process through which qualifications will be approved for full funding through the entitlement for adults aged 19 and above.

3. Introducing a national entitlement

Question 6: Do you agree that publicly funded qualifications should be offered up to and including level 1 as part of the legal entitlement?

	Percent
Yes	86%
No	9%
Don't know	5%

The consultation set out the case for level 1 providing the skills needed for adults to operate effectively in day-to-day life. The consultation also cited mapping that found that many skills classified at level 2 in the 2006 standards should be reclassified at level 1 or below.

Nearly 90% of respondents agreed with the proposal to fund qualifications up to and including level 1. Many respondents also provided written comments supporting the proposal to extend free provision to include level 2 courses as need advances.

Many respondents, including employers, welcomed the government's ambition to support adults to develop the core digital skills they need to participate fully in society, and welcomed placing digital skills on an equal footing to English and maths as a national entitlement through the Digital Economy Act 2017.

Those that disagreed with the proposal to fund qualifications up to and including level 1 made the case to also include level 2 qualifications in the entitlement. Some respondents expressed concerns that attainment at level 1 would not close the digital divide, that employers typically demand level 2 certification and that parity with English and maths was important. Three respondents argued that digital courses should also be fully funded at level 3.

Government response

The significant majority of respondents supported the proposal that publicly funded digital skills courses should be offered up to and including level 1. Therefore, we will proceed with our plan to introduce the new entitlement to fully fund eligible adults with no or low digital skills to enrol on specified essential digital qualifications at entry level and level 1 from 2020.

The new digital offer will comprise of new essential digital skills qualifications and new digital FSQs:

- **Essential digital skills qualifications** will enable adults to develop the digital skills they need for life, work or further study, as set out in the essential digital skills national standards. To support a range of purposes, these qualifications must cover all five of the skill areas from the national standards, and may cover some, or all, of the skills statements in each skill area.
- **Digital FSQs** will provide reliable evidence of a student's achievements against demanding content that is relevant to the workplace and real life, and provide assessment of students' underpinning knowledge as well as their ability to apply this in different contexts. Digital FSQs will provide a foundation for progression into employment or further education and develop skills for everyday life. The subject content for digital FSQs will reflect the full essential digital skills national standards.

DfE will shortly consult on draft subject content for new digital FSQs, which will replace legacy ICT FSQs. We plan to work with employers, Ofqual and awarding organisations to develop the new digital FSQs for first teaching from 2021.

Reformed digital FSQs will not be ready for teaching in the first year of the entitlement, so in 2020/21 we will fully fund eligible adults to enrol on FSQs in ICT at entry levels 1-3 and level 1. To encourage providers to teach new digital FSQ qualifications from August 2021, the last date for new starts on legacy FSQs at entry levels 1-3 and level 1 will be 31 July 2021.

Level 2 digital skills qualifications will remain eligible for funding by:

- ESFA, mayoral combined authorities and the Mayor of London where they meet criteria for inclusion in the first full level 2 entitlement offer for adults aged 19-23.
- ESFA where they are in the broader ESFA funded adult education budget 'local flexibility' offer. Mayoral combined authorities and the Mayor of London will determine which qualifications they will fund outside of the legal entitlements.

We will encourage awarding organisations who offer level 2 digital qualifications focused on the acquisition of basic digital skills to map these qualifications against the new level 1 standards and consider whether they should continue to be offered and awarded.

In the longer term, as the digital skills required for work evolve, and subject to affordability, we will consider extending the entitlement to fully fund adults to undertake digital skills qualifications at level 2.

We are carrying out a review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below⁴. Due to the reforms set out in this response, digital FSQs and new essential digital skills qualifications at entry level and level 1 will not be subject to the review. All other digital qualifications available to students aged 16 and over will be subject to review.

Question 7: Do you agree that providers should carry out a thorough initial assessment to determine whether an individual should be fully funded to undertake a basic digital skills qualification?

	Percent
Yes	70%
No	21%
Don't know	9%

The significant majority of respondents agreed that providers should carry out thorough initial assessments to determine an individual's current skills level.

Respondents also supported the proposal that providers should be required to enrol the individual on a level above that at which they were assessed and be able to provide evidence of this. Many individuals, providers and awarding organisations commented on the need for initial assessments to identify differing levels of knowledge, skills and understanding across the five basic digital skills areas and produce a spiky profile.

Some respondents expressed concern that initial assessments could become a barrier to learning, particularly with regard to adults with low confidence or previous negative experiences of education. Suggestions on how to minimise this risk included ensuring that initial assessments are not onerous and that they should be incorporated as part of a holistic package of support to avoid them being perceived as a high stakes test.

Six respondents proposed that the government should commission or provide a single assessment tool used by all publicly funded providers to ensure consistency and provide intelligence on results and use.

Several respondents also emphasised the importance of referrals from organisations whose clients are likely to have no or low basic digital skills, such as Jobcentre Plus, Citizens Advice and community groups.

⁴ [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England](#)

Government response

As is already the case for the English and maths entitlements, we will require providers to undertake a thorough initial assessment of an individual's digital skills.

This will ensure that only adults who do not have essential digital skills (i.e. below level 1) will have their learning fully funded under the new digital entitlement, and will ensure individuals are enrolled on courses at the appropriate level.

Providers will be required to carry out a thorough initial assessment to determine an individual's current skills level using an assessment tool based on the new national essential digital skills standards, and to enrol the individual on a level above that at which they were assessed and be able to provide evidence of this.

To ensure awareness of the new entitlement, we will ensure that a wide range of organisations who have contact with adults with low or no digital skills are aware of the entitlement and signpost adults to providers offering the new qualifications.

Question 8: Do you have any examples of best practice for initial assessments for basic digital skills?

	Percent
Yes	38%
No	62%
Not answered	0%

Just over a third of respondents provided a wide range of examples of initial assessment practice, including paper based self-assessment forms, observations of individuals attempting to undertake digital exercises and online initial assessments.

Government response

We are grateful for respondents taking the time to share best practice in undertaking initial assessments for essential digital skills.

A review of the examples provided confirms that few initial assessments in use would meet the proposed adult education budget funding rules.

Therefore, we plan to convene a meeting of initial assessment providers, awarding organisations and providers to encourage the development of assessments ahead of the entitlement starting in 2020.

Next steps

We are grateful to all those who responded to the consultation and worked with the Department to finalise the new national standards and arrangements for the entitlement.

We believe that the changes made in response to the consultation appropriately address the issues raised, and that the national standards published alongside this response will provide a strong basis for awarding organisations to develop new essential digital skills qualifications.

Alongside the publication of this response and the national standards, Ofqual has published their conditions, requirements and guidance for new essential digital skills qualifications.

We will continue to work with the sector to prepare for the introduction of the improved qualifications to the timescales set out below:

Date	Milestone
April 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DfE publishes new national standards• DfE publishes government response setting out decisions on the operation of the new digital entitlement• Ofqual publishes conditions, requirements and guidance for new essential digital skills qualifications.
May 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DfE publishes draft content for new digital FSQs.• Ofqual publishes policy consultation concerning new digital FSQs.
Summer 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DfE holds meetings to encourage the development of initial assessments for digital.• ESFA confirms the eligibility principles and process through which qualifications will be approved for full funding through the entitlement for adults aged 19 and above.
By winter 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Awarding organisations submit Essential Digital Skills qualifications to Ofqual and ESFA.
Early 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Publication of English, maths and digital legal entitlements for funding year 20/21.
Aug 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First teaching of Essential Digital Skills qualifications.
Aug 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First teaching of Digital FSQs.

Annex A: List of organisations that responded to the consultation

The Adult College - Barking and Dagenham
Adult Education in Gloucestershire
AELP
Association of Colleges
Barnsley Adult and Community Learning
BCS
Birmingham Adult Education Service
Bolton College
British Dyslexia Association
BT
burged
Carnegie UK Trust
Compaid Trust
CompTIA
Croydon Council-Adult Learning and Training
Cumbria County Council
Derby College
Digital Operations Group - <https://www.collegewebsites.ac.uk/>
EEF
Facebook
Fareham College
Federation of Awarding Bodies
The Futures Group
Gateway Qualifications
GCC Adult Education
Good Things Foundation
Google
Greater London Authority
Harlow College
Hampshire County Council
Holex: Professional Body for Adult Community Education Providers
Hope Nottingham CIO
Horbury Academy
Institutes for Adult Learning
Jisc
Kaspersky Lab
Key Training Ltd
Lancashire Adult Learning
Learning & Skills Darlington Council

Liverpool City Council
Luton Adult Learning (Luton Council)
Manchester Adult Education (Manchester Combined Councils)
Microlink PC UK Ltd
National Education Union
National Numeracy
National Skills Academy for Rail
NCFE
Newcastle City Learning
NOCN
North West London Collaboration of CCGs NHS
OCN London
OCR Examinations
OKCC/C3O
One Digital Partnership
Open Awards
The Open University
Pearson UK
Portsmouth City Council
Prodigy Learning
Qdos Training Limited
Rowan Learning Trust
Royal Geographical Society
Sheffield City Region
Southampton City Council
Tees Valley Combined Authority
TLM
TUC
UK Computing Research Committee
UKHospitality
Unison
Westminster Adult Education Service
Working Men's College

Annex B: Summary of changes to the standards

Skill area	Change
Handling information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Title of skills area has changed to 'Using devices and handling information'. ii. New skills statements relating to use of devices have been added to ensure understanding of hardware, software and operating systems, and to locate and install applications. iii. Greater emphasis on using system settings to tailor devices to individual needs, including accessibility. iv. Searching on attributes has been removed at entry level. v. Data sizes e.g. megabyte, gigabyte and data speed e.g. megabits per second have been added at level 1. vi. Maintaining and improving digital skills has been added at level 1.
Creating and editing digital content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vii. Title of skills area has been shortened to 'Creating and editing'. viii. Removed requirement that numerical data at level 1 needs to be at least 25 rows of data and 4-6 columns.
Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ix. Added reference to using appropriate online names and email addresses at level 1.
Transacting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> x. Added a greater range of examples of online transactions, including government services, applying for jobs, organising finances and downloading or streaming entertainment media. xi. Uploading / downloading documents and images when undertaking transactions has been added to level 1.
Being safe and responsible online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> xii. Added reference to the need to be mindful of risks associated with clicking on links found in emails or other digital messages. xiii. Clarified that inappropriate language and behaviour online e.g. trolling or online harassment, threatening, abusive or grossly offensive online communications could constitute a criminal offence. xiv. Added references to using password manager applications, browsers caching login details, dangers of using public computers and GPS location information at level 1.

Annex C: Summary of decisions

Theme	Summary of decision
The national standards	The national standards will feature skills statements at entry level and level 1.
	The five skills areas making up the national standards will remain unchanged from those issued for consultation.
	A range of changes have been made to the skills statements in each skills area. These are set out in Annex B.
Improving basic digital skills qualifications	<p>To be eligible for public funding, essential digital skills qualifications must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feature a purpose statement • Be recorded under SSA 6.2 ICT for users • Be 30 to 50 guided learning hours in size
Introducing a national entitlement to basic digital skills	Only new entry level and level 1 qualifications based on the new national standards that meet our qualification eligibility principles will be eligible for adult education budget funding from September 2020.
	In 20/21 academic year we will fully fund eligible adults to enrol on legacy FSQs in ICT at all skills levels (entry levels 1-3, level 1).
	In 21/22 academic year, we will only fully fund enrolments on new digital FSQs at entry level and level 1.
	We will require providers to undertake a thorough initial assessment for digital skills.



Department
for Education

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