

Department for Education Consultation on the Basic Digital Skills Entitlement

Response from the Greater London Authority (GLA)

Executive Summary

- The Mayor welcomes the Government's proposals to update the basic digital skills qualifications and undertake a consultation on the best approach to doing so. The below outlines the views of the Greater London Authority and draws on desk research, external stakeholder consultation and internal engagement.
- Overall, the updated standards represent a fair snapshot of digital skills at the moment and the GLA agrees that the standards will need to be reviewed every three years to ensure that they are kept up to date.
- However, the GLA believes the proposed changes in level descriptions should be tested with users (learners, businesses and providers) to remedy any potential confusion.
- Through the devolution of the Adult Education Budget, the GLA will be responsible for delivering the new entitlement. We will be delivering provision up to Level 2 ('beginner') through the entitlement under the eligibility criteria outlined in our [Skills for Londoners framework](#).

Introduction

- The Mayor's [Skills for Londoners Strategy](#) sets out an ambitious vision for the skills and adult education system in London. This vision of a city for all Londoners aims to make London's skills and education system the most successful and inclusive in the world, based on excellent teaching and learning.
- As set out in the Strategy, there are many challenges to achieving this vision. Some of the challenges relate to long-standing systemic issues, such as a misalignment between supply and demand for skills in London. Others have emerged more recently, including the impact of rapid technological change on skills requirements, and the threat to the availability of skills and talent following Brexit.
- From the academic year 2019-20, an indicative £311m of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) will be devolved to London. The devolved AEB is not the only funding stream which will be used to achieve the Mayor's vision for skills, around £295 million from the European Social Fund (ESF) has also been committed towards skills, employment and youth programmes in London. This funding is targeted at the most disadvantaged groups.
- City Hall will seek to use the devolved AEB, committed European Social Fund, and several other levers to address the issues of digital inclusion and the basic digital skills gap in the capital.

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

- While the GLA agrees that there should be two levels covering the minimum required for work and life, we disagree that they should be classified as 'essential' and 'beginner', moving away from the previous language of Level 1 and Level 2.
- The descriptors of the levels are accurate, however shifting away from the previously-agreed terminology of Level 1 and Level 2 may confuse some learners and providers. Our conversations with businesses have shown that there is already a lot of confusion in the landscape of adult skills provision, and further complications should be avoided.
- Stakeholders have also suggested that the terminology does not communicate an adequate level of progression, which we know to be an important aspect of the learner journey. It is also felt that the term 'essential' is too much of a catchall, which is unlikely to cover all employer needs for digital skills, possibly causing further confusion.
- The GLA therefore believes that Level 1 and Level 2 remain the most appropriate descriptions of the two qualification levels.

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

- The GLA agrees that these five categories are most appropriate. In particular, we support the idea of 'being safe and responsible online' underpinning each category, as this is particularly important when learning digital skills.

iii. Do you agree that 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?

- The GLA agrees that overall, the draft standards capture the basic digital skills necessary for the categories outlined above. The skills statements accurately reflect the actions and tasks necessary to fully participate in an increasingly digitising society.
- However, some categories could benefit from greater clarifications. In particular:
 - Creating and editing documents – learners could benefit from understanding the basic concepts of collaboration tools and their increasing role in creating and editing documents.
 - Communicating, collaborating and sharing – when identifying appropriate models of online communications, online safety should be explicitly referenced, specifically around identifying false news sources and understanding where information on the internet originates from. This is particularly important for vulnerable learners.

- Creating and editing digital media / digital wellbeing – these two categories should be linked so learners can understand the basics of photo and video manipulation, which has an important link to mental health in some contexts.

iv. Do you agree that the standards should be reviewed at least every three years?

- The GLA and all consulted stakeholders believe that the standards should be reviewed at least every three years. This is particularly important as the digital landscape changes rapidly, and skills evolve accordingly.

v. Do you agree with the three proposed qualification eligibility principles (declared purpose, size, and sector subject area classification)? If not, please explain why.

- The GLA agrees with the three proposed qualification eligibility principles. The only element that may require clarification is whether the proposed 45 guided learning hours can be undertaken as blended learning using online tools or will be a prescriptive 45 hours of classroom learning.

vi. Do you agree that publicly funded courses should be offered up to and including essential level (level 1) as part of the legal entitlement?

- The GLA agrees that the legal entitlement should cover up to traditional Level 2 ('beginner' level), and the Mayor has committed to this in the Skills for Londoners Strategy and accompanying Framework.
- We encourage the Government to adopt this approach, as Level 1 ('essential') only scratches the surface of basic digital skills, and only by progressing through both Level 1 and Level 2 would a learner be equipped with the skills necessary for work, jobs and life in a digital economy.

vii. 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 course?

- Yes, the GLA agrees that providers should carry out a robust, uniform assessment to determine an individual's eligibility for a digital skills course.
- The stakeholders consulted also stressed that this should be managed using a centralised approach, and that a single assessment mechanism should be adopted to ensure assessments are widely accepted.
- Current assessments for digital (ICT) are not fit for purpose, so this area will require reform through innovative means. While there are some existing tools (outlined below), it is our belief that a new assessment mechanism will need to be established.

viii. Do you have examples of best practice for initial assessments for basic digital skills?

- The Tech Partnership's 'Get Digital' [basic skills assessment questions](#) have proven to be effective for the previous iteration of the basic digital skills framework.

- Digital skills training organisations, such as [General Assembly](#), also have diagnostics tools that are accessed online. While they are used to determine higher level digital skills, the mechanisms and underlying principles could be adopted for a basic digital skills tool.
- There are several other excellent assessment tools, but they are disparately used by training providers and businesses. As such, a new mechanism tool designed to match the new standards will be essential for the success of the basic digital skills entitlement. This must be in line with the recently-established Basic Digital Skills framework, and with recent moves to create a uniform language around digital skills.

ix. Do any of the proposals have the potential to have a disproportionately positive or negative impact on specific learner groups, in particular the 'protected characteristic' groups and young people with Special Educational Needs?

- As with other training and qualifications, there are groups that will be negatively affected, and this must be mitigated with adequate support. For instance, individuals with dyslexia will require specialist fonts when reading and editing documents. Similarly, individuals with vision impairment will require particular tools.
- In light of this, consideration must be given to the capital investment necessary to deliver basic digital skills to specialist groups.
- Additionally, the Department for Education should consider developing or disseminating a toolkit to providers to assist with digital accessibility. This could be done in collaboration with organisations that are already excelling in this area, such as Ability Net.