



Department
for Education

Subject content for digital Functional Skills qualifications

Government consultation

Launch date 16 May 2019

Respond by 11 July 2019

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Introduction

The Department for Education is seeking views on proposed subject content for new digital Functional Skills qualifications.

Who this is for

This consultation is for anybody with an interest in the digital subject content for adults and young people pursuing digital Functional Skills qualifications. This includes:

- Education and training providers, including Further Education colleges, adult and community education providers and independent training providers
- Teachers and tutors
- Subject experts
- Learners
- Employers
- Business sector
- Awarding organisations
- Third sector and representative organisations

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 16 May 2019.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team on email via: essential.digitalskills@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: coordinator.consultations@education.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

The response

The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in autumn 2019.

About this consultation

In October 2018 the Department for Education published a consultation setting out plans to improve adult basic digital skills by:

- updating the national standards for 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.

In April 2019 we published our new national standards¹ for essential digital skills and the government consultation response, in which we set out our plans for the new offer for adults with no or low digital skills, comprising new Essential Digital Skills qualifications and new digital Functional Skills qualifications (digital FSQs).

This consultation marks the next step in the introduction of the new digital offer and is seeking views on the proposed subject content for new digital FSQs.

Digital FSQs will be available for first teaching from August 2021 and will replace legacy Information and Communication Technology (ICT) FSQs. Legacy ICT FSQs refer to the existing suite of qualifications which were introduced in 2011 and which will continue to be available until July 2021.

Legacy ICT FSQs are available at entry level 1-3, level 1 and level 2. It is proposed that the new digital FSQs will be made available at a single entry level and level 1. This is because our work with employers, providers and digital inclusion stakeholders in developing the new national standards concluded that:

- a single entry level, rather than three entry sub-levels, better reflects how digital skills are typically taught, learned and applied; and
- level 1 provides the digital skills needed for adults to operate effectively in day-to-day life.

The proposed subject content for digital FSQs has been developed in consultation with stakeholders and subject experts, and is based on the national standards for essential digital skills. Digital FSQs will provide:

- reliable evidence of a student's achievements against demanding content that is relevant to the workplace and real life;

¹ National standards for essential digital skills <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-standards-for-essential-digital-skills>

- an assessment of students' underpinning knowledge as well as their ability to apply this in different contexts; and
- a foundation for progression into employment or further education and skills for everyday life.

The expectations set out in the subject content are designed to meet the needs of employers and prepare students to apply their knowledge and skills in their working and everyday life.

Determining the subject content of the new digital FSQs is a critical part of ensuring they continue to meet the needs of students and employers.

In responding to this consultation, respondents should refer to the digital FSQs subject content. This document can be found via the link on the consultation website.

We would like to hear your views on our proposals.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

If you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a word document version of the form and email it or post it.

By email

essential.digitalskills@education.gov.uk

By post

Post-16 Basic Skills Team
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT

Deadline

The consultation closes on 11 July 2019.

Background

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 skills².

To address this, from 2020, we will introduce an entitlement to fully funded digital qualifications, alongside the existing legal entitlements to English and maths. 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 in an increasingly digital world.

The new digital offer will comprise new Essential Digital Skills qualifications and new digital FSQs:

- **Essential Digital Skills qualifications** will be available for teaching from August 2020 and will enable adults to develop the 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 skills areas from the national standards, and may cover some, or all, of the skills statements in each skill area. Essential digital skills qualifications will be at least 30 guided learning hours and no larger than 50 in size.
- **Digital FSQs** will replace legacy ICT FSQs. We plan to work with employers, Ofqual and awarding organisations to develop new digital FSQs for first teaching from 2021. They 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. Digital FSQs will be set at 55 guided learning hours.

These reforms build on the recent steps government has taken to reform FSQs in English and maths. New English and maths FSQs will be ready for teaching from September 2019.

The replacement of ICT FSQs with new digital FSQs will result in a new generation of FSQs in English, maths and digital which have recognition among learners, employers and providers and in which they can have confidence.

² Lloyds (2018) 'Consumer Digital Index' <https://www.lloydsbank.com/banking-with-us/whats-happening/consumer-digital-index.asp>

Proposals for digital subject content

The proposed subject content for digital FSQs is based on our new national standards for essential digital skills. Our national standards were developed in close consultation with a range of stakeholders, including providers, awarding organisations and digital inclusion organisations, and were consulted on extensively. The standards are informed by the Essential Digital Skills framework³ which defines the skills needed to safely benefit from, participate in, and contribute to the digital world today and in the future.

Reflecting the national standards, the digital FSQ subject content is proposed at two levels. A single entry level is proposed, rather than three entry sub-levels, to reflect how digital skills are typically taught, learned and applied. The proposed level 1 subject content includes skills classified at level 2 in the Functional Skills criteria for ICT published in 2011⁴. This is due to advances in the ease of use of digital devices and applications that have made them more natural and instinctive to navigate and use. As a result, many digital tasks now require fewer steps to complete and are less likely to require users to pre-learn procedures and have prior knowledge.

In contrast to English and maths FSQs, digital FSQs will not be available at level 2. This is because our work with employers, providers and digital inclusion stakeholders in developing the new national standards concluded that level 1 provides the digital skills needed for adults to operate effectively in the workplace and everyday life. In the longer term, as the digital skills required for work and life evolve, we will consider the case for also developing digital FSQs at level 2.

The purpose of digital FSQs at entry level is to demonstrate the ability to apply digital knowledge and skills to complete simple tasks safely in real-life contexts. Achievement of this qualification can provide a basis for further study at level 1.

The purpose of digital FSQs at level 1 is to demonstrate a sound grasp of digital knowledge and the ability to apply these skills to complete tasks safely in the workplace and in other real-life contexts.

Digital FSQs should have clear subject content at each of the two levels but remain one suite of qualifications to better facilitate an individual's progression. The qualifications should provide assurance that, at level 1, students have retained and consolidated their understanding of subject content covered at entry level.

³ Essential Digital Skills framework <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/essential-digital-skills-framework>

⁴ Functional Skills criteria for ICT, Ofqual <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/functional-skills-criteria-for-ict>

The five skills areas set out in the proposed subject content (using devices and handling information, creating and editing, communicating, transacting, and being safe and responsible online) are the same as the skills areas in the new national standards for essential digital skills. They encompass a wider range of skills in comparison to the three skills areas in legacy ICT FSQs which are predominately focused on use of office productivity software and email. This reflects the significant advances in digital technology and its application, for example:

- digital technology is increasingly present in all aspects of life and work;
- mobile and on-the-go connectivity means that we, and our data, are increasingly online; and
- everyday activities such as social participation, communication, commerce and public services are increasingly taking place online.

The proposed subject content reflects recent technological advances, for example, by requiring individuals to know the main features of different types of devices commonly used today, such as smart devices and wearable technology, and to work with cloud enabled devices and storage. The subject content also includes a level of fundamental digital knowledge to provide a grounding for development of digital skills, for example knowledge of the main functions of an operating system.

The way in which we use technology has also evolved in recent years and this is reflected in the new subject content. For example, skills statements refer to the wide variety of ways in which we now communicate online such as social media and video calling, to ensure teaching and learning is not limited to email. It also includes understanding of online activity that contributes to a digital footprint and steps that can be taken to limit it.

To better reflect the extent to which we now use the internet as a principal source of information, the subject content includes taking into account the reliability of information found online and understanding that search results may include sponsored results or advertisements, as well as the ability to recognise these.

In recognition of the increasingly online world in which we live, and the risks associated with this, the new subject content places a greater emphasis on the safety of online users. For example, individuals are required to know methods for protecting personal information and privacy. This goes beyond the password protection skills in the legacy ICT FSQ criteria. The subject content also includes a new emphasis on the legality of online activities, for example it includes knowledge that engaging in certain online activity may be against the law, and knowing what action can be taken in response to this.

To ensure that digital FSQs are relevant to the workplace and to reflect the evolving needs of employers, the new subject content includes using appropriate language and

style when communicating online. In response to requests from employers, it also includes a greater level of detail regarding processing numeric data than is present in the legacy ICT FSQ criteria, for example the ability to sort and filter data and use simple formulae.

The proposed subject content also includes skills and knowledge which aim to develop an individual's confidence when using digital devices. For example, the subject content includes being able to distinguish between system errors and user errors, and to enable an individual to more accurately troubleshoot and solve technical problems independently. The subject content also aims to build an individual's confidence when navigating the online world. For example, it includes a statement around understanding one's own key rights under data protection laws, in recognition of the prevalence of online data sharing and the associated risks.

Skills and knowledge are set out in more detail in the proposed subject content than in the legacy ICT FSQ criteria to ensure expectations are clear and to promote greater comparability across awarding organisations.

Consultation questions

This consultation asks questions about whether the proposed subject content for digital Functional Skills represents a demanding course of study, and whether it will develop the digital skills needed for work and everyday life.

1. Does the proposed subject content cover the appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding for digital Functional Skills qualifications?
2. At entry level, does the proposed subject content support individuals to progress to study of digital skills at level 1?
3. At entry level and level 1, does the proposed subject content support progression to further vocational and technical study?
4. At entry level does the proposed subject content cover the key digital skills, knowledge and understanding needed to complete tasks for everyday life?
5. At level 1, does the proposed subject content cover the key digital skills, knowledge and understanding needed to complete tasks routinely required in the workplace and everyday life?
6. Does the proposed subject content have potential to positively impact on specific groups, in particular the 'protected characteristic' groups⁵?
7. Does the proposed subject content have potential to negatively impact on specific groups, in particular the 'protected characteristic' groups? If so, how could this be reduced?

⁵ The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.



Department
for Education

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