AELP Submission: #57

AELP response to DfE consultation on Adult Basic Digital Skills

AELP response to DfE consultation on Digital Skills

Recommendations:

1. We support the suggestion of various skills levels and whilst terminology is favoured over 'entry level' and 'level 1', the use of terms should be made clearer.
2. We believe there is a strong need to align the five skills categories against knowledge, skills and behaviours in alignment with language used in apprenticeships and T Levels.
3. Basic digital skills should also be a part of the apprenticeship offer, with appropriate digital embedded in every standard
4. We urge the Department for Education to ensure 16-18 year-olds are not excluded from basic digital skills entitlement who participate in apprenticeships.
5. There should be a thorough initial assessment as a prerequisite to determining eligibility to access fully funded basic digital skills courses.

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

We support the suggestion of various skills levels, however, we are concerned that merging two levels into one programme, dropping level 2 skills into level one will make the programme too challenging for some learners. In addition, whilst terminology is favoured over 'entry level' and 'level 1', the use of terms should be made clearer and easier to understand as this is not currently the case.

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

We believe the five categories listed are sufficient as part of the basic digital skills content. They provide a robust overview that will provide learners with an adequate understanding of basic digital skills.

However, language is key and for continuity, consistency and recognition for both learners and employers. We strongly believe the five skills categories would be better aligned against "knowledge, skills and behaviours" – language used in apprenticeship standards and in the new T-Levels, rather than the current categories that have been proposed.

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?

The emergence of the need for good digital skills is vital to ensure the workforce remains aligned with the growing dependence on technology and also how to use it effectively to improve both lives and increase productivity in the UK economy. An estimated 35% of all jobs are likely to become automated in the next 20 years, with 90% of jobs requiring some level of digital skills.

Consequently, we believe that basic digital skills should also be a part of the apprenticeship offer, with appropriate digital embedded in every standard. We believe in the need for a contextualised digital skills offer within apprenticeships that would give learners a strong understanding of applying digital skills within their role not only for current job requirements but also likely requirements over the next several years and job roles evolve and become more digitised.

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

We support the notion of formally reviewing the standards at least every three years. This would be in line with the review of apprenticeship standards, therefore, both elements would be updated regularly thereby remaining up-to-date and relevant. However, caution must be exercised with regards to a consistently evolving curriculum as well as teachers and assessors having to learn new materials on a frequent basis.

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

We are cautious of the notion of guided hours as to how useful a measurement this is, preferring an approach where the learner achieves the intended outcome of the programme or does not.

Furthermore, we believe basic digital skills should be a requirement within apprenticeships for all ages, therefore consideration should be given to not exclude 16-18 year-olds from basic digital skills entitlement who participate in apprenticeships.

Finally, consideration needs to be given with regards to capital funding for IT equipment to ensure learners access up-to-date and relevant software and hardware.

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

We strongly agree that publicly funded courses should be offered up to and including 'essential' level as part of the legal entitlement up to level 2. A national digital entitlement needs to be supported by investment by government to support the four million adults

identified as lacking digital skills. Furthermore, we welcome the recognition that digital skills will evolve and encourage extending the entitlement to fully fund adults undertaking digital skills courses at level 2.

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?

We agree there should be a thorough initial assessment as a prerequisite to determining eligibility to access fully funded basic digital skills courses. This is important as the initial assessment helps plan for individual learner needs. Furthermore, there should be a tool that runs assessments which changes as abilities are assessed against skills levels. We believe the need for an assessment tool should be put out to tender through open competition.

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

We do not believe the proposals have the potential to have a disproportionately positive impact on groups with protected characteristics and young people with SEND.

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

The mechanics of IT must cater for those with SEND which can be expensive but must be considered. Thought must be given to those with mental health challenges and the dynamics of being safe online. There should not be an assumption that young people leave school with digital skills. Using social media is only a small aspect of digital skills.

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