



**The refreshed Essential Skills Core Curriculum and Standards for ICT in
Northern Ireland**

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Introduction

This document sets out the refreshed NI standards and curriculum for ES in ICT. It replaces the original curriculum and standards introduced in 2009. Its purpose is to provide a reference point for tutors, lecturers, Awarding Organisations, and others involved in the teaching and assessment of ICT from January 2024.

Background

The Department for the Economy currently funds the delivery and assessment of a suite of Essential Skills in response to the 2002 Essential Skills for Living Strategy. The suite of qualifications consists of Essential Skills Communication, Application of Number and ICT. Essential Skills Communication and Application of Number were refreshed, and their assessment updated in 2016. Essential Skills ICT has not been updated or refreshed since its introduction in 2009.

Guidance on using the refreshed curriculum

The core curriculum for ICT has been replaced with this refreshed document which will meet the needs of the learners. The sample activities within the previous core curriculum may still be used if appropriate and relevant. However, the standards themselves have been updated in line with modern technology practices. These are the new refreshed standards and curriculum published by CCEA Regulation. The standards are intended for use by Awarding Organisations in developing the new Essential Skills qualifications for teaching from January 2024.

Essential Skills: Digital ICT should fulfil the following purposes:

- Provide learners an opportunity to create evidence relevant to real life and the workplace
- Provide an opportunity for the assessment of learning to include skills, knowledge, and application to various contexts
- Provide an opportunity for progression to further education, learning and development of skills or for progression to employment.

Learners at Entry level 3, level 1 and level 2 are expected to demonstrate knowledge, skills and application to real life contexts through the completion of tasks as set out in the subject content. Tasks should be relevant to everyday life and to the workplace.

The Digital ICT qualification must cover all the five skills areas set out in these standards to include the use of devices and handling information, creating and editing, communicating, transactions and being safe and responsible online.

Some learners may need guidance and support when using digital devices for the first time. These skills are an important prerequisite for some individuals. These skills should be included in specifications for the qualification but should not be subject to assessment. These skills are pre-entry level and include

- Turning on a device and entering account information such as a password safely and securely
- Using controls on a device to include a mouse and keyboard
- Connecting to the internet safely and securely and opening a browser
- Interacting on the home screen
- Opening and accessing an application.

The standards set out the digital skills required by learners for everyday life and for work across 3 skill levels.

1. Entry Level 3 - designed for learners with no or little prior experience of using digital devices, services, or the internet.
2. Level 1 – designed for learners with some experience of using digital devices, services and the internet but need to develop knowledge and skills further to be able to apply to everyday life and the workplace.
3. Level 2 – designed for learners with competence in using digital devices, services and the internet who wish to advance their skills for further progression to employment or further education.

ENTRY LEVEL 3 SKILLS STANDARDS

At this level learners should

- be able to identify the main features of different devices
- know what an application is and the main types of application software
- be able to work independently to solve a simple technical problem
- be able to work safely and securely online and be able to set up security features.

Entry level
1. Using devices and handling information
1.1. Know the main features and uses of different types of devices (including desktop, laptop, mobile devices, smart devices).
1.2. Know what an application is and the main types of application software (including email clients, web browsers, mobile device applications, security applications, word processors, presentation software).
1.3. Apply system settings (including display, sound, Wi-Fi, time, language, accessibility).
1.4. Navigate online content to locate required information.
1.5. Carry out searches on the internet (including information, images, videos).
1.6. Use files to read and store information (including creating a file, opening a file, reading information from a file, editing a file, saving a file).
1.7. Use files and folders to organise and retrieve information (including local and remote storage).
1.8. Know when there is a problem with a device or software and know the difference between system errors (including device crashing or freezing, slow response) and user errors (including using incorrect credentials, incorrectly connecting hardware).
1.9. ¹ Know how to apply a solution to solve a simple technical problem (including restarting a device to address a system error, correcting a user error).
2. Creating and editing
2.1. Use a suitable application to enter, edit and format text (including bold, underline, italics, font sizes and colours, text alignment, bulleted lists, numbered lists).
2.2. Use a suitable application to enter, edit and format graphics (including position, size).
2.3. Combine different types of information (including text, graphics, images) for a given purpose.
2.4. Capture digital media (including image, video) and view in a suitable application.
3. Communicating
3.1. Create and edit details in a contacts list.
3.2. Compose and reply to online communications comprising text and other digital content to individual and multiple recipients.
3.3. Initiate and participate in a video call.
3.4. Know what is meant by a digital footprint, understand the implications of a digital footprint, and know the range of digital activities (including social media activity, web searches, emails), that leave a digital footprint.
4. Transacting
4.1. Complete and submit an online form (including personal details) and comply with data validation.
4.2. Comply with verification checks to complete an online transaction.

¹ 'know how to' to be manageable for centres

Entry level
5. Being safe and responsible online
<p>5.1. Understand the need to stay safe and respect others when using the internet and communicating online.</p> <p>5.2. Know simple methods to protect personal information and privacy online (including not sharing personal information, looking for HTTPS when logging in).</p> <p>5.3. ²Know how to set up and use security features (including authentication methods) to access devices and online services.</p> <p>5.4. Understand the benefits of using security software (including anti-virus, firewall) to protect against online risks.</p> <p>5.5. Know of and know how to minimise the effects of physical stresses (including pain from poorly positioned equipment and/or bad posture, repetitive strain injury, eye strain) that may result from using devices.</p>

LEVEL 1 SKILLS STANDARDS

At this level learners should

- be confident in applying digital skills independently to meet their needs, to exchange information and to solve problems in a range of familiar situations
- be able to carry out searches for files, save information using cloud storage
- be able to work with a level of autonomy and have the skills to decide which tools to use.

Level 1
1. Using devices and handling information
<p>1.1. Carry out searches on the internet (including use of keywords, exact phrases, search filters).</p> <p>1.2. Take account of currency, reliability and copyright when selecting information from the internet.</p> <p>1.3. Understand that search results may include sponsored results or advertisements and be able to recognise these.</p> <p>1.4. Carry out searches for files (including on file names, partial file names, file content).</p> <p>1.5. Create and use a hierarchical folder structure to organise files and use an appropriate file naming convention.</p> <p>1.6. Save a file on cloud storage using one device and open it on another device.</p> <p>1.7. Know and be able to appropriately use terminology (including bytes, kilobytes, megabytes, gigabytes, terabytes) describing data storage requirements.</p> <p>1.8. Know and understand limitations on file sizes when using some online services, and the benefits of using file compression to make effective use of storage capacity and to reduce data transfer times.</p> <p>1.9. Use online resources to identify solutions to common technical problems (including when to reinstall an application, change Wi-Fi settings, change a system or software setting) and ³know how to apply the solution.</p>

² 'know how to' to be manageable for centres

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Level 1
2. Creating and editing
<p>2.1. Use suitable applications (including word-processing, spreadsheet⁴ or presentation software), to enter, edit, format, layout and save information (including text, tables, graphics, charts) for a range of purposes and audiences.</p> <p>2.2. Use appropriate layout conventions for information (including formal and informal communication, presentation, advertisement) and audiences (including familiar, unfamiliar audience).</p> <p>2.3 Edit (including caption, crop, resize, change contrast, change colour balance) an image using an appropriate tool.</p> <p>2.4. Process numeric data using simple formulae (including sum, subtraction, multiplication, division, maximum, minimum, average) using relative cell references</p> <p>2.5. Process (including sort, filter) numeric data by values in a column.</p> <p>2.6. Format numeric data (including font sizes, font styles, alignment, cell formatting, merging cells, splitting cells, row height, column width).</p> <p>2.7. Chart a single series of numeric data using an appropriate type of chart and apply suitable titles and labels (including chart title, axis titles, data legends and data labels).</p>
3. Communicating
<p>3.1. Use email for a range of contexts and audiences.</p> <p>3.2. Use online messages (including instant message, text message, social media) for a range of contexts and audiences.</p> <p>3.3. Know what steps can be taken to limit a digital footprint (including use of privacy tools to manage cookies and website tracking, private browsing, restricting GPS information).</p>
4. Transacting
<p>4.1. Manage account settings for an online service (including personal details, login credentials, marketing and communication preferences).</p> <p>4.2. Complete online forms and upload documents or images.</p> <p>4.3. Carry out checks to reduce the risks involved in transactions online (including checking for the padlock next to the URL in the browser, checking if the website appears professional with a legitimate domain name, checking reviews).</p>
5. Being safe and responsible online
<p>5.1. Understand key rights under data protection laws (including right to see what personal data organisations hold about you, right to withdraw consent) and the circumstances where you can request that personal data be rectified or deleted.</p> <p>5.2. Understand the importance of protecting personal information and privacy online and know methods to do so (including private browsing, social media settings, settings on a mobile device to restrict or grant GPS location information, using a secondary email address).</p> <p>5.3. Know how to backup files to the cloud.</p> <p>5.4. Know how to avoid exposure to malware (including worms, trojans and ransomware).</p> <p>5.5. Know of and know how to minimise the effects of health risks (including weight gain, decline in physical fitness, poor sleep patterns) that may result from using devices and the internet.</p>

⁴ Spreadsheet added to list of applications for clarity

LEVEL 2 SKILLS STANDARDS

Content relating to Skills Standards 1, 3, 4 and 5 need to be included in Level 2. These will be assessed through Core Module A: Underpinning skills.

Learners must also complete Core Module B: Advanced Communicating.

An assessment model at Level 2 should be devised in modular/component format to allow a candidate who has achieved Level 1 to be given credit for these Skill Standards without retaking Core Module A.

To achieve a Level 2 qualification, a learner will have to achieve the **core modules**, plus a further **two** modules from **four** available modules.

Optional units need to be developed by Awarding Bodies to be comparable in demand.

At this level learners should

- be able to build on competence required at level 1
- be confident in applying digital skills independently to develop solutions
- be able to use advanced digital skills efficiently to meet needs, exchange information and solve problems.

Level 2
Core module A: Underpinning skills
This is made up Level 1 Skills Standards 1, 3, 4 and 5 If a learner has achieved Level 1, they will be exempt from this module.
Core module B: Advanced Communicating
B.1 Use email for a range of contexts and audiences including email signature, out of office reply, flag an email, reminder, read/delivery receipt, archive an email, delay delivery, email rules, email folders, spellcheck, grammar check. B.2 Know how to block a sender, manage spam and junk emails, send large attachments
1. Advanced document creating and editing
1.1 Advanced word-processing software skills, including such as table of contents, references and bibliography, mail-merge, document watermarks, cover page 1.2 Advanced presentation software skills, including slide layout, slide master, editing master slide, slide design, format slides, transitions, animations, timings, embedded video, insert charts, insert tables, diagrams, hyperlinks, action buttons, re-order slides, hide slides, spellcheck 1.3 Use appropriate layout conventions for information including formal communication and audiences (including familiar, unfamiliar audience).

Level 2
2. Advanced number handling
<p>2.1 Advanced spreadsheet skills, including linking multiple worksheets, switchboard/menu, data bars /sparklines (data trends), conditional formatting, pivot tables, lookup functions, sub-totals, data validation, hide rows and columns, hide worksheets, link data from another file, import and export data, forecasting tools, freeze panes, adjust row height, horizontal and vertical alignment</p> <p>2.2 Know how to solve errors in a spreadsheet, including formula errors and circular referencing</p> <p>2.1 Advanced charting skills, including automatic updating of charts when values change</p>
3. Understanding digital marketing and social media
<p>3.1 Understand digital marketing as a business tool e.g. establishment, growth, continuity</p> <p>3.2 Know tools for digital marketing e.g. search engine optimisation (SEO), blogs and wikis, paid search results and know channels for digital marketing e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat</p> <p>3.3 Understand data and analyse data relating so digital marketing and social media e.g. sources of data, collection of data</p> <p>3.4 Understand legislation relating to digital marketing and social media e.g copyright, data protection</p>
4. Advanced graphics
<p>4.1 Advanced graphics, including combining images, layers, fill, canvas size, combine elements, align, rotate, flip, group, order, filters, test wrap, use bleeds, export to other file formats</p> <p>4.2 Know when to use different file formats e.g. jpg, png, svg, bitmap, raw</p> <p>4.3 Know methods of compression (lossy, non-lossy)</p>