

# Response from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

**Royal Geographical Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography and geographical learning

## ● Improving Adult Basic Digital Skills - Department for Education

January 2019

The Department for Education sought views from those with an interest in improving adult basic digital skills, requesting feedback on:

- The draft national standards
- Improving basic digital skills qualifications
- Introducing a national entitlement to basic digital skills

The Society's response, to a limited number of questions in the consultation, focused on the further development of spatial literacy and digital navigation skills within the draft national standard.

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

**Response:** No

#### **Additional comment:**

Ofcom's Communications Market Report 2015

([https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0022/20668/cmr\\_uk\\_2015.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/20668/cmr_uk_2015.pdf)) stated that maps are the third most popular app download to smartphones (after social networking and weather) and that 66% of smartphone users with 4G connectivity use online maps, the third most popular online activity behind general web browsing (81%), downloading apps (70%), and ahead of online banking (55%), making purchases (55%) and uploading photos/video content (51%). Ofcom also report that two-thirds of UK adults now have a smartphone. This level of engagement with location data, digital maps and navigation represents a significant and essential element of baseline digital skills not addressed in the draft national standard. This should be rectified.

The core knowledge in each of the skills categories, as currently defined, does not mention any aspect of digital spatial literacy or engagement with online maps and navigation. We suggest that engagement with online maps and digital navigation requires basic spatial literacy. We would express this as the competent and confident use of maps, with the ability to visualise and interpret location, distance, direction and movement over space.

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**6. 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?**

**Response:** No

**Additional comment:**

Given the prevalence of smartphone usage and the high engagement with maps and navigation applications noted in our response to Question 5, we consider it essential that basic digital skills statements include:

- Using a device's location to discover their position on a map
- Using online maps to search for and locate landmarks, places of interest or services
- Using online maps to guide them to a physical location
- Using online maps to provide additional information about a location, place of interest or service
- Knowing that turning on device location might make them personally identifiable
- Knowing that location data can be turned off for some applications.

In addition to this, we urge further attention to location data and privacy. Advances in how data are used, and the technologies that lie behind such data, are transforming the world as we know it. Understanding, anticipating and responding to emerging ethical issues raised by rapidly-developing technologies such as AI and the ever increasing availability of data are critical. In improving adult baseline digital skills, we urge the Department to direct specific attention to spatial or location digital information, and spatial or location literacy as a key baseline digital skill.

In statistics, spatial disaggregation, which is now easily done, can lead to identification of individuals through location/location identifiers. In drafting the standards it is essential that individuals understand that location data shared through a digital device, especially when combined with other online communications or transactions, may reveal aspects of their identity, character or behaviour that they may wish to keep private.

**15. Do you have any other comments**

We think that spatial literacy and the use of digital location tools such as online maps is an essential baseline skill area to develop, and we urge the Department to discuss these skills with us, as well as organisations such as Ordnance Survey and the Geospatial Commission. We welcome opportunities to contribute.