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The Treasury
Measuring What Matters Consultation
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Digital Skills Organisation and Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance Submission to the Measuring What Matters Consultation - Second Phase

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. The Digital Skills Organisation (DSO) and the Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA) welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the emerging policy themes developed from phase one consultation. In particular, *Emerging Policy Theme 1 - Prosperous: A growing, productive and resilient economy.*

The DSO and the ADIA are undertaking collaborative work with a range of stakeholders, including Jobs and Skills Australia, to gain consensus on what are the Essential Digital Skills for access to work, learning and life. This submission provides detail on this work. We believe this project is a strong fit with Measuring What Matters, Theme 1.

We would be pleased to discuss this with you further.

Your sincerely

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Essential Digital Skills for access to work, learning and life

1. Context

The need for digital skills is nearly ubiquitous across the economy. This is especially the case since cloud technology has become pervasive across all industries and across society, driven by the uptake of software as a service and the internet of things.¹ Australia has one economy, already digitalised, with most workers needing at least one digital skill in some form, and therefore every employer is an employer of digital skills.

As an example, Exhibit 1 below sets out a sample of industries where, in the last five years, digital skills for that industry have intensified.

To be meaningfully employed in the Australian economy, there is a need for digital literacy across the workforce and for those seeking to gain a foothold in the labour market. Nearly all jobs across all industry sectors now require some level of digital literacy. The increasing application of digital tools and technologies has led to greater expectations that workers will be digitally literate in order to complete their job.

This trend of growing intensity of digital skills (compared to all skills for an occupation) is only going to increase, especially as new forms of artificial general intelligence become ubiquitous across the economy, as has occurred with cloud technology.

Digital literacy needs to be sufficient to enable people to have the potential to build, as needed, the digital technical skills required in the workplace.

2. Being Digitally Literate

The question is, what are the essential skills to be digitally literate. In essence, it is either being:

- digitally literate with support (guidance); or
- independently (autonomously) digitally literate.

As noted, if digital literacy needs to be sufficient for people to have the potential to build digital technical skills required in the workplace, then this indicates there is a need to be independently digitally literate.

Beyond the workplace, in the learning setting, digital literacy must be enough to enable an individual to advance their education; and in the citizenship context, digital literacy must be sufficient to enable adaptation to changing online services, as well as the ability to navigate problems and appropriately seek help.

Overall, we consider it necessary for individuals to be digitally resilient and able to self-propel their learning as part of having the essential skills to be digitally literate. As such, our view is a person needs to be independently (autonomously) digitally literate.

¹ <https://technologyonecorp.com/resources/articles/how-saas-is-profoundly-changing-the-relationship-between-staff-and-tech?ref>

3. Essential Skills to be Independently Digitally Literate

We commend the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) for seeking to determine a shared understanding and definition of digital literacy. A lack of a single, shared definition is just one of the challenges in this area. Currently, 'digital literacy', 'digital fluency', 'digital capability', 'digital skills' and 'digital ability' mean different things to different people. In regards to being digitally literate in Australia, there is no central reference point around which to align.

Our approach to the essential skills to be independently digitally literate utilises the Australian Digital Capability Framework (ADCF)². The ADCF has five focus areas:

- Information and Data Literacy
- Communication and Collaboration
- Digital Content Creation
- Protection and Safety
- Technical Proficiency and Problem Solving

As the JSA has acknowledged, digital literacy skills exist on a continuum. There are varying degrees of proficiency required depending on the context (application). To be independently (autonomously) digitally literate, the levels of proficiency, if relying on the ADCF as we suggest, is set out in Figure 1 below³. That is, there is a matrix of focus areas and proficiency for those five areas from Foundation through to Specialised.

Figure 1: Structure of the ADCF Proficiency Levels

Four Level		Eight Level		
Level of Proficiency			Complexity	Autonomy
A Foundation	1	Perform at a basic level with guidance	Simple tasks	With guidance
	2	Perform at a basic level with autonomy and some guidance	Simple tasks	Autonomously With some guidance
B Intermediate	3	Autonomously solve simple problems	Routine tasks Simple problems	Autonomously
	4	Autonomously solve intermediate problems	Routine tasks Intermediate problems	Autonomously
C Advanced	5	Autonomously solve advanced problems and guide others	Advanced tasks	Autonomously May guide others
	6	Autonomously solve complex problems and guide others	Advanced tasks Advanced problems	Autonomously May guide others
D Specialised	7	Autonomously solve highly complex problems and guide others	Complex tasks Complex problems	Contribute knowledge
	8	Perform highly specialised activity and guide others	Highly specialised tasks Highly complex problems	Contribute knowledge

² <https://www.dewr.gov.au/aisc/resources/australian-digital-capability-framework>

³ <https://www.dewr.gov.au/aisc/resources/australian-digital-capability-framework> page 9

4. DSO-ADIA Working Group

The DSO and the ADIA, jointly, are undertaking collaborative work through a Working Group with a range of stakeholders in seeking to gain consensus on what are the essential skills for digital literacy and where the level of proficiency may lie for these skills across work, learning, and active citizenship in Australia. The JSA is part of this Working Group.

Learning from what has worked in the United Kingdom, by providing definitional context through application scenarios for the essential digital skills for access to work, learning, and life, we aim to provide further clarity to a wider range of stakeholders.

Our starting point in seeking to identify a minimum level, which enables independence rather than seeking the need for support, is a standard that will, in general, be suitable for work, learning, and active citizenship. The standard may have differing levels of proficiency depending on the ADCF focus area. The application to workplaces, learning, and citizenship and the use cases for cohorts will enable the application and interpretation of digital literacy for a broader audience.

A degree of common sense will need to be applied to what are essential skills (and proficiency) to be digitally literate for work, learning, and active citizenship so the more general contexts are covered, while less common contexts have a foundation on which to build further digital skills, especially skills more technical in nature.

We recognise the proficiency of the skills needed by employers is not homogenous. We need to recognise there will always be outliers in proficiency needed, and the need for contextualisation in the application of skills. This also likely applies to digital literacy, so the approach to what constitutes digital literacy needs to be pragmatic.

The initial tasks of the Working Group will be in three phases:

- Phase 1, form a Working Group comprised of key stakeholders to oversee project planning and execution, inform the scope, and propose a single articulation of the essential digital skills for work, learning and life. *Actioned*.
- Phase 2, collaborate with key stakeholders to gain agreement on a single articulation of the essential skills to be digitally literate (i.e., the essential digital skills for work, learning, and life). *Underway*.
- Phase 3, provide recommendations to governments on next steps.

Subject to the Government's response to the recommendations submitted, it is proposed the overall approach involves three stages:

- Agreement on a single articulation of digital literacy as set out in the three phases above
- Identification of a menu of appropriate tools to screen and measure digital literacy across the nation, tailored for cohorts
- Commitment from stakeholders on a nation-wide action plan to close the digital literacy gap.

As the JSA moves towards its survey in mid-2024, we are engaging with the JSA on Working Group outcomes, especially recommendations that may be endorsed by governments, industry, unions, the education and the training sectors, and by citizenship representatives.