Unleashing Our Digital Potential

CompTIA recommendations for the next Government

About CompTIA

CompTIA is the leading and trusted voice of the world's IT industry. We are a non-profit, international trade association and education organisation representing more than 2,000 members, 3,000 academic and training partners and tens of thousands of registered users spanning the entire information communications and technology industry.

We offer certifications for IT professionals, from entry level to expert, with over two million individuals certified globally.

We promote best practices as the world's leading provider of vendor-neutral certifications to industry, education providers and awarding organisations.

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Summary

The digital sector is a critical part of the UK economy, worth over £130 billion and accounts for 7.1% of UK GVA.[1] In 2018, over 2.1 million people worked in the digital tech industry, and the sector is now a bigger employer than hospitality (1.3m), construction (1.9m) and financial services (1.2m).[2] This demand for digital skills is continuing to grow and positions in the sector now represent a fifth of all vacancies. [3]

As identified in the CompTIA Tech Towns report, the UK is a dynamic and exciting place to work, both for today's IT professionals and for those entering the workforce, with opportunities for work across the country. [4] Yet three in five senior business leaders report that the skill shortage has worsened over 2018, despite the demand for IT workers increasing every year. [5]

According to the most recent research by CompTIA, more than 165,000 job openings for core information technology positions were advertised by employers across the United Kingdom in the third quarter of 2019. This represents a 19-percentage point increase in the number of IT job postings over the previous quarter. [6]

In order for the economy to continue to benefit from the growing digital sector, the next government needs to equip the workforce with the skills businesses require. Unleashing the UK's potential through IT certification will unlock growth across all parts of the United Kingdom, improve productivity and provide rewarding careers for people of all backgrounds.

To inform the policy debate in the 2019 General Election, CompTIA has released its manifesto with 3 key recommendations for the next government. These recommendations are:

1. Ensure the UK remains competitive in a global jobs market with vendor-neutral certifications at the core of the UK digital skills strategy.
2. Preserve and increase the use of industry certifications in apprenticeships to encourage lifelong learning and ensure standards are suitable for all businesses.
3. Build on the new Local Digital Skills Partnerships to improve opportunities for people from all communities to enter the tech professions.

[1] DCMS Sector Economic Estimates
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/759707/DCMS_Sectors_Economic_Estimates_2017__provisional__GVA.pdf
[2] Office for National Statistics, EMP13: Employment by industry, August 2019 -
https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/employmentbyindustryemp13
[3] City A.M, Digital tech sector now accounts for a fifth of all UK job vacancies, June 2019 - https://www.cityam.com/digital-tech-sector-now-accounts-for-a-fifth-of-all-uk-job-vacancies/
[4] CompTIA Tech Towns Report, 2019 - https://www.comptia.org/blog/tech-towns-uk
[5] The Open University Business Barometer, 2018 - http://www.open.ac.uk/business/apprenticeships/blog/business-barometer
[6] CompTIA UK IT Employment Snapshot, Q3 2019 - https://www.comptia.org/content/comptia-uk-it-employment-snapshot-2019-q3

Ensure the UK remains competitive in a global jobs market with vendor-neutral certifications at the core of the UK digital skills strategy.

Digital skills are in demand - the size of the IT workforce in the UK continues to grow year-on-year, projected to increase by more than 11,500 from 1.30m in 2019 to 1.31m in 2020. Furthermore, 3% job growth is estimated for the five-year period 2019-2024 (37,700+ new jobs). [7]

Certifications are benchmarked, industry-wide recognised standards, and one of the keys to unlocking the UK's competitiveness and the opportunities of the 4th Industrial Revolution. IDC Research shows employees that have gained certifications are more knowledgeable, reach job proficiency more quickly and perform at a higher level compared to their non-certified colleagues. [8]

With the demand for IT professionals increasing, hiring managers need to know that individuals truly have the skills to do the job. It is here that training and certifications can be increasingly valuable tools in building a productive workforce.

The benefits of IT certification are immediate and tangible. For example, certifications can play a role in building a productive team. When multiple employees are all operating from the same knowledge base, they will be more effective in completing projects and creating innovations that are built on that knowledge.

In particular, vendor-neutral certifications offer learners industry-relevant knowledge and skills across a broad spectrum of technologies and beyond any one particular IT provider. This ensures skills are relevant across different digital technology packages.

We call on the next Government to ensure certifications are put centre stage when developing the digital skills strategy to close the digital skills gap.

[7] CompTIA UK IT Employment Snapshot, Q3 2019 - https://www.comptia.org/content/comptia-uk-it-employment-snapshot-2019-q3
[8] IDC White Paper, Impact of Certifications and Training on Career Milestones, June 2019 - https://comptiacdn.azureedge.net/webcontent/docs/default-source/MemberResources/comptia-idc-impact-of-certifications-and-training-white-paper.pdf?sfvrsn=e9d2e41a_0

Preserve and increase the use of industry certifications in apprenticeships to encourage lifelong learning and ensure standards are suitable for all businesses.

Apprenticeships are an integral part of tackling the digital skills gap and maximising the talent of the future IT industry workforce. They enable more people to enter the industry and are a credible alternative to university, providing opportunities to earn and learn, developing necessary skills that can immediately be used in the workplace. A combination of industry experiece and education create practical skills that can be quickly developed into a career, whilst enabling apprentices to earn industry-recognised qualifications along the way.

CompTIA has long been a supporter of apprenticeships and all of our certifications are already mapped to the Skills Framework for the Information Age, aligning to apprenticeship standards. [9]

Certifications ensure apprentices are already familiar with established, recognised international standards. This improves the employability and geographical opportunities for apprentices. It also supports inclusiveness and diversity by offering a route which individuals, particularly those from underrepresented groups, find attractive. These IT certifications open up a world of opportunity, allowing individuals to easily transfer to new projects and different locations across the UK and the wider global market, providing assured, flexible careers which the modern workforce desires. [10]

Crucially, vendor-neutral certifications provide apprenticeships with industry-benchmarked standards suitable for all businesses, rather than a narrow range of companies. This is particularly helpful for small and medium enterprises, providing the flexibility and common standards they can access.

The next Government needs to embrace the use of certifications in apprenticeships and endorse their use across a range of courses. This allows participants to be trained to industry standards and enables workforce mobility as industry changes; providing an increased return on investment for both future IT workers and their employers.

[9] Skills Framework for the Information Age - https://www.sfia-online.org/en/framework/sfia-6/reference-guide/SFIA6-reference
[10] CompTIA A+: Laying the Foundation for a Successful IT Career - https://www.comptia.org/blog/comptia-a-laying-the-foundation-for-a-successful-it-career

Build on the new Local Digital Skills Partnerships to improve opportunities for people from all communities to enter the tech professions.

More opportunities are being presented across the UK to ensure anyone can pursue a career in technology without geographical or economical restrictions. Having strong technology clusters spread throughout the UK creates a greater number of career opportunities, supports local businesses and boosts local economies.

The Local Digital Skills Partnerships (Local DSPs) are a successful way of bringing together employers, training providers, charities and Government to address digital skills needs according to local demand and economic profile. The initial six Local DSP "Trailblazers" have been the first to benefit from the scheme and operate in partnership with Local Enterprise Partnerships.

CompTIA has been an active partner and supporter of Local DSPs, offering content and courses in two of the local pilot areas. In Lancashire, we piloted our IT-Ready programme, which is designed to serve unemployed and underemployed adults with limited or no post-secondary education, and to support their quick return to work in a field with high growth and wage potential. In the Heart of the South West LEP we provided free Cyber Secure guidance, for all organisations within the Local Digital Skills Partnership, to help businesses protect against cybersecurity breaches.

Through these CompTIA programmes, many people have gained valuable skills and were able to enter digital professions. For example, just four months after graduating our IT-Ready programme, 85% of the students are now working in a paid IT role in local companies. CompTIA's Cyber Ready programme; a managed flipped-classroom learning programme designed as a conversion course for individuals who have some IT job role experience, was co-funded by the Cyber Security Immediate Impact Fund (CSIIF) and also yielded positive results with 75% of participants having secured Cyber Security related roles.

The next Government needs to build outreach programmes that make it easier for people to enter or transition into digital roles. This includes stimulating regional job growth by expanding Local DSPs to more locations to ensure local skill needs are met.