

Local Authorities

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Harnessing Technology funding 2010–2011

Guidance for local authorities

Contents

1. Introduction to the Harnessing Technology grant	01
2. The role of local authorities	03
3. Key investment priorities	04
4. Obtaining best value in purchasing technology	05
5. Sources of funding for technology	06
6. Harnessing Technology grant allocation and distribution	07
7. Eligibility of schools	08
8. Distributing the grant to schools	09
9. Retaining a proportion of the grant at local authority level	10
10. Revenue implications of the Harnessing Technology grant	10
11. What the Harnessing Technology grant can be used for	11
12. Can the Harnessing Technology grant be spent on a learning platform	11
13. Related programmes	12
Annex: Further information and publications	14

Guidance for local authorities

The Children's Plan (DCSF 2007) made a commitment to create a more joined up and consistent approach to delivering capital programmes. As a result, the DCSF has asked Partnerships for Schools (PfS) to assume responsibility for the management and delivery of all schools capital programmes from 1 October 2009.

This change represents a broader move across government that will see departments assume a more strategic function and devolve more delivery issues to agency bodies, helping achieve greater efficiency in the delivery of public sector programmes.

Becta is the government agency, which leads the national drive to ensure the effective and innovative use of technology throughout learning. To enable Becta to deliver its remit, it will continue to engage directly with local authorities and schools as well as working with PfS on any ICT issues relating to Primary Capital Programme, the Academies programme and Building Schools for the Future.

As part of this change, from 1 October 2009:

- PfS assumed responsibility for making payments for the Harnessing Technology grant to local authorities. Becta continue to have responsibility for determining funding allocations and producing associated guidance to ensure consistency with ICT policy
- The Capital Funding for City Learning Centres (CLCs) will be allocated through PfS. Becta continue to have oversight of all CLCs including responsibility for defining the National Priorities and signing off the Annual Performance Agreements.

1. Introduction to the Harnessing Technology grant

The use of computers and the internet is now an everyday feature of most young people's lives and those of citizens generally. In this context, there are exciting opportunities to harness technology to improve and develop services in response to the needs of children, young people and parents. This is what Harnessing Technology funding is intended to support.

Technology-based strategies play a central role in school improvement and development. Schools, teachers and local authorities are increasingly recognising benefits in terms of:

- greater flexibility and choice among learning options – using technology to offer differentiated curricula and learning experiences which help meet children and young people's needs and preferences
- tailored and responsive assessment – both formative (for example, more immediate feedback on learning, better information about progress) and summative (for example, flexible end-of-stage assessment)
- engaging learning experiences – for learners of all abilities, in all contexts, including children and young people who are hard to reach
- strengthened relationships between families, schools and learners – with an emphasis on integrated information systems and use of online tools to provide information and improve parental engagement.

Harnessing Technology is supported by the Harnessing Technology grant – investment for schools totalling £639.5 million over three years, 2008 to 2011.

The Harnessing Technology grant is a capital grant. It can be used to purchase computer software and digital learning resources provided that the resource being paid for can be treated as capital in accordance with normal accounting rules. This can apply to both one-off purchases of software resources and some licenses, depending on the terms of the contract.

Subscriptions to services that provide digital curriculum resources on an ongoing basis would normally be treated as revenue, unless the service includes the creation of a capital asset owned by the purchaser.

Allocations by local authority can be found on the TeacherNet website www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/resourcesfinanceandbuilding/capitalinvestment/allocations/statement

This capital grant represents just one source of funding for tec
Other sources of technology funding, particularly for recurring outlined later in this document.

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2. The role of local authorities

Where technology is used well, evidence demonstrates significant benefits for children and young people and for school improvement.¹ However, delivering better outcomes by using technology to improve services requires determined and co-ordinated approaches at school, local and national levels.

Local authorities have a key role to play in supporting change for the benefit of citizens and young people. Becta is committed to working closely with local authorities to help develop effective responses and deliver the benefits we know can be achieved. Becta is also supporting local authorities to use technology effectively in the delivery of diplomas and supporting the 20 most rural local authorities that are allocated Targeted Capital Funding for 14–19.

Local authorities are responsible for distributing the Harnessing Technology grant to eligible institutions and can help guide and shape this and other investment in technology to ensure that key priorities are addressed and value for money is achieved.

Local authorities can help ensure investment priorities are linked to a clear vision for technology and support getting best value from any investments in technology. Such investments will include both capital and revenue costs and local authorities and

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3. Key investment priorities

Becta has worked with local authorities and schools to identify a set of priorities for local investment which, guided by school and local authority self-assessment, represent guidance for schools when considering how to invest the Harnessing Technology grant. Local authorities are advised that as the Harnessing Technology grant is a capital grant, it should be used to *invest in development* of these areas:

- Learning services: learning platform services, email services, personal storage areas for learners and staff and the infrastructure to access these services. Services need to conform to Becta's functional and technical specifications, be available for all users inside and outside educational institutions, including users' homes and must be available outside core school hours.
- High-quality digital learning resources in line with Becta's quality principles, taking advantage of national and local collaboration opportunities.
- Integration of learning and management systems at institution, local authority and – where appropriate – regional level so that data is available securely when and where it is required.
- Parental reporting: online access to reporting systems and information. Schools should provide timely, meaningful and manageable information to parents through appropriate and secure use of management information systems, learning platforms, managed learning environments, messaging services and other suitable online reporting systems.
- Broadband infrastructure to provide services, appropriate to need and safety, with sustainable plans for further development of local and regional networks to ensure that the necessary capacity and services are available.
- Simplified sign-on for users: establishing authentication and authorisation infrastructure capable of granting individual learners with secure anywhere/anytime access to educational resources – must be implemented in conjunction with the UK Access Management Federation using Shibboleth, with the local authority or Regional Broadband Consortium acting as identity and service provider.



Guidance has been issued by the DCSF recommending that local authorities and schools make plans in case of emergency school closure to ensure effective communication and to support continuity of learning during closure. Used effectively, technology makes a vital contribution to learning, teaching and management. It also supports effective communication across and beyond the school. Once established it becomes a valuable tool to maintain communication and continuity of learning in the event of an emergency school closure.

www.teachernet.gov.uk/emergencies/planning/flu/pandemic/index.html

4. Obtaining best value in purchasing technology

To help schools achieve best value in their technology investment, local authorities should:

- encourage schools to use buying arrangements that meet Becta's service requirements
- develop and promote collaborative purchasing arrangements, to deliver better value and to help focus valuable school resources on teaching and learning rather than managing and supporting ICT. Best practice advice for procurement can be found at: www.becta.org.uk/schools/procurement

This link is a gateway to a range of purchasing frameworks which local authorities and schools can use for **infrastructure**, **consultancy**, **learning platforms**, **software licences**, **internet services** and **managed services**.

Last year over £60 million of cost savings were achieved through collaborative buying activity.

A useful Becta guide to saving money 'Getting best value from your investment – a guide for school leaders' can be found at: www.becta.org.uk/publications/bestvalueschools

- Consider whether a 'managed service' (incorporating implementation, support, maintenance etc.) rather than a simple equipment purchase might be the right option for your schools. Becta's technical and functional specifications and framework agreements have been developed to support this approach and the suppliers have been rigorously evaluated.

In line with Cabinet Office policy, procurement decisions should be made on the basis of the best value for money solution to the business requirement. This should take account of total lifetime cost of ownership of the solution, including exit and transition costs, after ensuring that solutions fulfil minimum and essential capability, security, scalability, transferability, support and manageability requirements:

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/government_it/open_source.aspx

Procurement should be based on specifications that use open standards and require solutions to comply with open standards. Local authorities and schools should refer to Becta's functional and technical ICT standards and specifications which cover connectivity, data services, infrastructure services and learning services:

www.becta.org.uk/industry/techstandards

Becta continues to support the use of open source software in schools and has commissioned the Open Source Schools community to raise awareness across schools and local authorities about the alternative choices to proprietary software:

<http://opensourcechools.org.uk>

5. Sources of funding for technology

The Harnessing Technology grant is just one source of funding for technology. Maintaining and developing technology involves both capital costs (for example, for investment in new hardware, software and systems) and revenue costs (for example, for technical support and other ongoing services).

The Harnessing Technology grant can be used for capital spending on technology-related priorities. Schools and local authorities are advised to make use of other revenue funding to cover recurring costs, and other capital funding sources on technology – for instance, Devolved Formula Capital – for further capital investment.

The Building Schools for the Future Programme, Primary Capital Programme and Home Access are also key sources of funding for technology investment.

Allocation and use of the Harnessing Technology grant should be considered in the context of how these other sources of funding are drawn on and used.

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6. Harnessing Technology grant allocation and distribution

Allocations by local authority can be found on the TeacherNet website.²

Allocations are made using a combination of factors: pupil numbers, deprivation and population sparsity. To manage potential losses to some local authorities due to changes in technology funding from 2008, the balance between pupil numbers, sparsity and deprivation has been phased in over the three years of the settlement: local authorities will see a reduction in funding of more than 10 per cent in 2008–09, 15 per cent in 2009–10 and 20 per cent in 2010–11.

The funding is distributed to local authorities through the DCSF Standards Fund. Payments are made to local authorities quarterly, according to the following timetable:

2009 2010	May 2009	Sep 2009	Dec 2009	Mar 2010
2010 2011	May 2010	Sep 2010	Dec 2010	Mar 2011

Harnessing Technology grant funding allocated in 2010–11 must be spent by 31 August 2011.

² TeacherNet Harnessing Technology grant www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/resourcesfinanceandbuilding/capitalinvestment/guidanceindex/harnessingtechnology

7. Eligibility of schools

The following types of schools are eligible for Harnessing Technology grant funding:

- voluntary-aided and voluntary-controlled schools, community and foundation primary schools, middle schools and secondary and upper schools
- academies, city technology colleges, pupil referral units, maintained boarding and hospital schools
- maintained special schools
- non-maintained special schools
- maintained nursery schools.

Schools that receive other funding directly from the DCSF are eligible to receive the Harnessing Technology grant from the local authority.

Academies are eligible for Harnessing Technology grant funding, but allocations should be determined on the basis of local priorities (rather than academies being automatically entitled to an allocation). It is likely that many academies will require some investment from this grant, as it is now standard practice for them to open in predecessor school buildings before they are rebuilt or refurbished.

City technology colleges (CTCs) can also receive the grant, even though they are not usually within the scope of Standards Fund grants (and are paid Devolved Formula Capital under separate arrangements). The January 2007 pupil numbers used to calculate local authority allocations for the grant included CTCs, so they are potentially entitled to allocations, using the same criteria as other schools.

Non-maintained special schools are also eligible, even though their other funding is paid directly to them by the DCSF.

8. Distributing the grant to schools

It is up to local authorities to determine the basis by which the Harnessing Technology grant is allocated to individual schools. This arrangement is intended to give local authorities flexibility to use funding to target local priorities. At its most straightforward, distribution can occur on a per pupil basis. However, there may be benefits to adopting a more strategic approach in which a local authority targets schools facing particular challenges or circumstances to receive a greater proportion of funding.

Schools should be consulted over the allocation method (via the Schools Forum) and details of the approach being taken should be communicated to all eligible schools.

It is also recommended that individual schools' Harnessing Technology grant allocations are made transparent to schools and that schools should be made aware of guidance on Harnessing Technology priorities.

The process of calculating how much Harnessing Technology grant funding to allocate to individual local authorities took account of the proportion of pupils attending voluntary-aided schools in the authority. Appropriate weightings were then applied to account for the fact that these schools receive 90 per cent of the per pupil amount received by non-voluntary-aided schools (with governors being responsible for the remaining 10 per cent); and also to compensate voluntary-aided schools for their requirement to pay VAT. Therefore, if the local authority chooses to distribute the Harnessing Technology grant to its schools on a per pupil basis, it would be consistent with the local authority allocation formula to pay a voluntary-aided school 90 per cent of what an equivalent sized non-voluntary-aided school would receive, but with an additional payment to cover the cost of VAT.

9. Retaining a proportion of the grant at local authority level

Local authorities are able to retain 25 per cent of their allocation centrally for centrally procured services or aggregated purchasing on behalf of all schools where improved value for money can be achieved. This includes investment in infrastructure through regional broadband consortia or their approved suppliers.

With the agreement of schools in their area, local authorities can retain a further proportion of the funding where there is evidence that this will achieve greater value for money, such as might be the case with regional or local authority-wide learning platforms and other services. Local authorities should be transparent about how they are using the funding being retained centrally for the benefit of all schools.

10. Revenue implications of the Harnessing Technology grant

Local authorities and schools investing in ICT infrastructure should be aware of any ongoing revenue costs for services provided through capital investment and plan the use of both their capital and revenue resources accordingly.

Local authorities have previously provided revenue funding to match spending on digital infrastructure (for example, to cover the costs of broadband connectivity).

It is recommended that they contribute revenue funding in line with previous years or consult with their schools about the use of school revenue budgets for connectivity.

11. What the Harnessing Technology grant can be used for

The Harnessing Technology grant is a capital grant and can be used to support purchases of ICT infrastructure and equipment or upgrades. Software and digital curriculum resources can be purchased provided that the resource being paid for can be treated as capital in accordance with normal accounting rules. This usually means that the resource being paid for (or the perpetual licence to use the resource) passes into the ownership of the school or local authority at the end of the service period; or that payment results in the school or local authority receiving a licence to use the resource for a specified time period longer than one year.

Subscriptions to services that provide digital curriculum resources on an ongoing basis would normally be treated as revenue, unless the service includes the creation of a capital asset owned by the purchaser.

For a precise definition of what is classified as capital, advice should be provided by local authority accountants who interpret accounting principles and guidance.

12. Can the Harnessing Technology grant be spent on a learning platform?

Rather than being a single 'off the shelf' product, a learning platform is a collection of tools that provide a range of functions, including: content management; curriculum mapping and planning; learner interaction and administration; and other tools and services. The capital nature of the Harnessing Technology grant means that it can be used to pay for some of the core elements involved in implementing and operating a learning platform:

- Technology hardware items (e.g. servers) count as capital assets and can be purchased using the grant.
- Software associated with learning platforms can also be covered by the grant provided that the software being paid for has a productive lifespan beyond the financial year in which it was paid for. This means that, following payment, the school or local authority either has outright ownership of the software product or a licence to use it, without any restrictions on the time period for which this applies; or has a licence to use the product for a specified time period that is longer than one year.

Some costs associated with running a learning platform may not qualify as capital expenditure – for instance, remote online hosting services provided by a third party.

Schools and local authorities have other sources of revenue funding available to them to cover such costs.

13. Related programmes

Home Access

In September 2008, the government announced an investment of £300 million to provide funding directly to parents for home internet access for disadvantaged learners in England. Becta has piloted the programme in Oldham and Suffolk in 2008–09, and its wider roll-out will begin in 2009–10.

While Home Access is a separate technology-related funding programme that goes directly to parents, local authorities can use the Harnessing Technology grant and other sources of funding to help realise the benefits of Home Access – for example, by investing in learning platforms that enable pupils with Home Access grants to access their schoolwork and digital learning resources from beyond the school.

The Becta procurement offers all participating local authorities desktop, laptop and ultra-portable solutions with connectivity for up to two years, together with support services for a three year lifespan.

Further information about the Home Access programme is available on the Becta website (see link in the Annex).

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Capital programmes

Technology is a key component of all major capital buildings programmes in the school sector. All these have the aim of transforming learning; they are not just about rebuilding and refurbishment.

Building Schools for the Future (BSF) provides a very high level of ICT (information and communication technology) capital funding – equivalent to £1,675 for every pupil place provided in the new and remodelled schools. This money is to pay for passive network infrastructure, active network equipment, hardware, software and setting up an area-wide managed service for ICT, usually as part of the Local Education Partnership (LEP). Schools then commit to providing revenue funding to maintain this managed service.

In academies and One School Pathfinders (OSPs), similar funding to that provided in BSF is incorporated into the funding agreement. Where academies are being built as part of the BSF programme, they are expected to join in the area-wide managed service. Where there is no BSF-managed service available, academies and OSPs are expected to use the Becta Infrastructure Services Framework to procure their ICT infrastructure, equipment and supporting services.

ICT is an integral part of the primary capital programme; however, unlike BSF, there is no specific budget for it. Local authorities are expected to ensure that a suitable proportion of their primary capital funding is allocated to technology to ensure that their primary schools are equipped for 21st-century learning.

Allocation and use of the Harnessing Technology grant should be considered in the context of how capital programme and other sources of funding are drawn on and used.

City Learning Centres

Some local authorities receive both capital and revenue funding for their City Learning Centres (CLCs). Revenue funding for CLCs either sits within a local authority's Area Based Grant (ABG) or a school's School Development Grant (SDG), depending on how CLCs are managed locally. If the CLCs are managed centrally, the funding sits within the ABG; if managed by a partnership of schools, it sits within the SDG allocation of the schools in the partnership. In each case, the funding is not ring-fenced: the ABG can be spent on any local authority service; and the SDG can be spent on any purpose to raise the standards of teaching and learning in schools. Local authorities and schools should continue to have regard to any commitments they have entered.

Capital funding for CLCs is released once the Annual Performance Agreement has been approved by Becta. The funding is passed from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to a local authority via the usual channels. Individual local authorities will have their own, different processes for releasing the funding to the CLCs.

Funding to support rural local authorities

Details of DCSF funding to support 14–19 provision in selected rural local authorities can be found on the DCSF website.³

³ DCSF Rural funding www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?go=site.home&sid=57&pid=500&lid=596&ctype=None&type=Contents

Annex: Further information and publications

For a range of information and support for local authorities, please visit the Becta website
www.becta.org.uk/publications

TeacherNet website page on the Harnessing Technology grant
www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/resourcesfinanceandbuilding/capitalinvestment/guidanceindex/harnessingtechnology/

DCSF Consistent Financial Reporting resources on its Value for Money site
www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/vfm/financial/

Improving schools: What is the self-review framework? A guide for school leaders
www.becta.org.uk/improveyourschool

Inspiring parental engagement: www.becta.org.uk/inspireparentalengagement

Home Access www.becta.org.uk/localauthorities/homeaccess

Safeguarding learners online: www.becta.org.uk/safeguardlearnersonline

Making learning personal: www.becta.org.uk/makelearningpersonal

Getting best value from your investment – a guide for school leaders
www.becta.org.uk/achievebestvalue and www.becta.org.uk/schools/procurement

For best practice in IT Technical Support: www.becta.org.uk/schools/fits

Harnessing Technology for Next Generation Learning: www.becta.org.uk/publications/childrenschoolsamilies

Next Generation Learning: www.becta.org.uk/nextgenerationlearningcharter

Planning sustainable success: www.becta.org.uk/plansustainableuccess



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