

Consultation

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Home Access to Technology

This consultation seeks views on the proposed Home Access programme that aims to ensure that every family with 5-19 year old learners in England has access to learning where and when they need it through access to ICT resources and support at home.

department for
children, schools and families

Home Access to Technology

A Consultation

To Anyone with an interest in the use of technology for learning at home

Issued 9 January 2008

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact James Ashbridge on:

Enquiries

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1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The gap between families with access to learning technology in the home and those without is not closing. Over one million children do not have technology and access to the internet in their home and this perpetuates the social and digital divide and disadvantages children from deprived families. Without access, children have significant difficulties in extending their learning beyond the confines of the school, improving levels of engagement and attainment.
- 1.2 In addition to this, many children with access to technology at home are not able to use it to best effect and many parents feel unable to support their children in its use. Without additional help, these families will not realise the full benefits of the technology and miss out on the many social, financial and other advantages that technology and the internet can provide.
- 1.3 To put these issues into context, we already know that the appropriate use of technology can raise education standards and we know that, generally, children have greater access to technology in the home than in school. We also know that parental involvement makes a significant difference to pupils' engagement and their achievement.
- 1.4 Placing learning technologies and access to appropriate support in the home can serve as a focal point for parents to become more actively involved in their children's education. Evidence indicates that children frequently turn to their parents for help with their homework far more than they do to a teacher. This is equally true for when they use technology or text books, but often parents feel less confident in providing help when a

computer is involved.

1.5 To respond to these issues Jim Knight MP, Minister for Schools, has established the Home Access Taskforce with representation from industry, education and the third sector. The Taskforce will shortly advise on a range of issues relating to Home Access and we would also like to feed in the views of other interested parties/individuals which is why we are launching this consultation.

1.6 As a result of initial discussions with the Taskforce and other colleagues within education, we are proposing to establish a programme of activities that have a central vision –

To ensure every family with 5-19 year old learners in England has access to ICT resources and support at home.

1.7 We hope to deliver this vision to families through a blend of support, services, devices and connectivity tailored to individual need.

1.8 This will allow all learners to engage with the curriculum beyond the school day and extend their learning into areas that match their interests, abilities and aspirations. Also learners will develop the skills they will need to pursue and drive their learning and participate fully in the digital world.

1.9 This range of support has yet to be finalised but is unlikely to be a “one size fits all” solution. Instead we intend to offer a menu of flexible options that families can “pick and mix” from, to use another common analogy. The support offered will also pay particular focus to children with special educational needs ensuring that all children can benefit. All solutions will have safety and security embedded through national standards and guidance to suppliers, educational provider, parents, and learners.

1.10 Much consideration is also being given to how we can make the programme financially sustainable without placing undue burdens on taxpayers, schools or families. That is why we are actively working with industry, the Third Sector and schools to look closely at all the costs of having access to technology and are also looking to reduce the cost of ongoing ownership through framework agreements.

1.11 Many of the benefits for learners are already being delivered for some learners in some schools (for example, in ICT Test Bed schools). The ultimate aim is for all learners, including those with special needs, to be able to reap these benefits. However, the delivery of the benefits will be differentiated according to need, with any government funds focused on the most disadvantaged.

- 1.12 The intended outcome for Home Access is to steadily increase the number of families who have, are committed to, and will benefit from home access to learning. The programme will help to ensure that every family in England will have access to a computer (or similar device), an internet connection, and all the support that they need both now and in the future.
- 1.13 We would welcome your views on the specific questions that we are posing and your comments on the proposal in general.

2 Background and Context

- 2.1 In March 2005, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, then Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown MP announced £25 million over two years (2006 – 2008) to put ICT into the homes of pupils in the most deprived areas of the country. In 2006, a further £10 million was added to the initiative, which would become known as 'Computers for Pupils', for Internet connectivity. At BETT 2006, then Minister of Schools Rt. Hon. Jacqui Smith MP pledged to extend the initiative to all learners, and plans to realise universal access were beginning to be developed. This would probably none the less mostly benefit learners from deprived areas, as both a DfES study (Valentine et al. 2005) and UK Children go online (2004) found that children from families with a higher socioeconomic background are more likely to have access to a computer and connectivity at home.
- 2.2 The Government's decision to intervene in this area can be seen as essentially evidence-informed. It was recognised that there was evidence available that home access could address several agendas that were, and are presently, seen as relevant. These include personalising learning, narrowing the gap, raising standards to increase the competitiveness of the UK economy, and assisting the transition to a knowledge economy as per the Lisbon Strategy.
- 2.3 However, it would be wrong to think that technology alone could solve the issues government is grappling with in education. Recent evidence says that:
- When computers are used for educational purposes, pupils with home access perform significantly better than those without. However, otherwise, they can impact on attainment negatively (Fuchs & Woessmann 2004). Similarly, a statistically significant relationship was found between households owning computers and GCSE results (Schmitt and Wadsworth 2004).
 - Access to ICT resources at home can increase children's confidence

and skills in using technology (Passey et al. 2004; Somekh et al. 2005).

- Home access to technology is seen as a useful means of encouraging parental involvement in the pupil educational success. Technology is currently being used by some schools to monitor attendance and keep parents informed of any absences. Parents also seem to take greater interest in their children's school work when this involves technology (Comber et al. 2002; Somekh et al. 2005).

- There are some indications that home access can also increase parents' / carers' ICT skills (David Perry Associates 2005).

2.4 In addition to this direct evidence, home access can deliver benefits in other ways and contribute to additional agendas, for example personalising learning; research suggests that pupils who use ICT at home show a greater capacity to learn independently (Passey et al. 2004). Kent and Facer (2004) have shown that home access to computers fosters a more independent, exploratory and iterative approach to learning. It is also thought that home access to technology would induce a greater number of teachers to set electronic homework. Thus home access would contribute to the objective of the Harnessing Technology strategy of transforming education through technology.

3 The Proposals

3.1 The Home Access programme aims to ensure that every family with 5-19 year old learners in England, irrespective of their circumstances, has access to learning where and when they need it through the use of ICT resources and support. The programme has established an educational vision where learners can be supported in achieving their potential through:

- increased opportunities for all learners to engage with the curriculum and interact with its resources beyond the confines of the school day
- increased opportunities for all learners to extend their learning into areas that match their personal interests, abilities and aspirations
- increased opportunities for all learners to develop the skills they will need to pursue and drive their learning independently
- increased opportunities for all learners to participate in, and to develop the skills needed to participate in, an increasingly 'connected' world
- increased opportunities for the families of learners to become more involved in supporting their learning and to develop their own skills and capabilities.

3.2 It is proposed that there are functional expectations for the Home

Access programme which build upon the educational vision. This starts from the learner's needs, and purposely does not pre-determine any specific technical solutions. The specification relates to all learners, regardless of their individual needs or disabilities and recognises that, to achieve the aims, certain learners will require specific technical and personal support that must be individually considered. All solutions will have safety and security embedded through national standards and guidance to suppliers, educational provider, parents, and learners.

- 3.3 Although primarily focused around the learner, the programme aims to deliver benefits to other stakeholders including parents, the community and schools and colleges themselves. These benefits may not be directly linked to formal education itself, such as increased access to online government services.

3.4 **Functional Expectations**

Learning experience

Home Access users shall:

- be able to use solutions to access information on their personal learning goals and progress against them
- have access to a wide range of online learning resources
- have access to a wide range of tools that allow the creation and manipulation of multi-media texts
- be able to access multiple applications and services simultaneously
- have access to a range of collaborative tools and opportunities to share and work with others.

Users should feel 'ownership' of their personal educational experiences and the home access solution.

Home access should deliver benefits, especially to families and the community, beyond involvement in the formal educational experience.

Learning environment

Home Access users shall:

- have access to the online learning platform services used by the establishment(s) the learner attends
- be able to continue learning experiences begun in-school when out of school, and vice versa
- be entitled to a solution that protects the user from inappropriate contact

and content and ensures data security and integrity regardless of location

- have access to solutions to recover data in event of failure or disaster and restore their ability to engage in their learning in a reasonable timeframe.

Home Access users should:

- be able to experience high quality online learning experiences both in-school or college and out-of-school or college
- experience a familiar set of learning experiences over a reasonable length of time
- have a wide choice of home access solutions.

Learning support

School, college and other educational infrastructure shall be capable of supporting a variety of services to all home access users concurrently.

Educational establishments shall be supported, motivated, and measured against changing pedagogy to take advantage of home access.

Home Access users shall have access to formal user support (educational and technical) when needed and within a locally agreed timeframe.

3.5 Developing a Home Access Programme

We propose that a programme of activity is constituted to achieve this aim, covering three main components:

3.6 a) Maximising the benefits of home access

The benefits of home access for all families need to be unlocked by modernising school policies, developing teaching practice, engaging parents and the wider community, and encouraging learners to use ICT safely and purposefully. The current digital divide acts as a barrier to change in schools and teaching practice because of concerns about inequity of home access. Achieving universal home access potentially unlocks significant benefits for all learners and families but we cannot wait until we achieve universality to begin to realise the benefits of home access.

- 3.7 Within this component, we will also need to consider the impact of the greater use of home access on school infrastructure and in particular identify any further support needed by schools.

3.8 Our activities on maximising benefits may include:

- action to encourage local authorities and schools to make progress on embedding the use of personal learning spaces
- supporting schools to understand the impact on school infrastructure of the use of home access
- producing and marketing guidance and good practice case studies for schools and teachers
- detailed analysis of user requirements for pupils (including those with special needs), parents, teachers, and schools and the functionality and organisational changes required to deliver home access benefits to each group
- embedding the concept of home access in school leadership and teacher training
- aligning the activities of the various agencies that have an impact on change in schools
- leveraging supplier support and the UK online centre network to support parents to increase ICT skills and understand safety and security solutions for their children
- providing parents with standardised high quality information on safe and purposeful online learning for their children.

3.9 It is intended that Home Access should be of benefit to all family members. Wider benefits to families might include:

- access to online education services
- helping parents to engage more easily with their children's education
- access to other online government services through DirectGov
- developing skills for employability
- access to information to support hobbies and social networking
- access to online banking, shopping, and other services.

3.10 **b) Promoting the value of home access**

Research presented within this consultation and elsewhere highlights the importance both of the lack of awareness of benefits of ICT and the motivation to use it as key barriers to take up, alongside that of cost. We can therefore assume that for families with low incomes, and for those on relatively higher incomes who lack Home Access, we will have to overcome these barriers by increasing awareness of the benefits of ICT for educational purposes and for wider family use. Take up of Home Access by families with low incomes will depend partly on affordability but also partly on their awareness of the benefits of home access and the perceived value of the offer.

3.11 Our activities on marketing and communicating the benefits of Home Access may include:

- nationally supported marketing and communications activity delivered by a partnership of organisations in all sectors
- local authority and school level communications with parents
- a national brand for home access solutions
- targeted partner communications with teachers and schools by a number of methods
- targeted partner communications to parents through UK online centres and other partner organisations.

3.12 We expect that marketing and communications activity will have universal benefits and that it will be part of the offer to all parents.

3.13 **c) Removing the barrier of cost for families with low incomes and for children with particular needs**

We propose that families eligible for specified income-related benefits with children between 5 and 19 years of age in England in state funded education should be offered financial help in the form of an allowance or grant to remove cost as a barrier to home ICT access and connectivity.

3.14 The exact amount of the allowance will be informed by pilot activities and market research to ensure that all costs of Home Access are taken into account. We are also proposing to provide different levels of allowances according to family income and any particular individual needs of learners. We are currently working on the basis that families on very low incomes will receive a full allowance that will fully cover the cost of Home Access.

3.15 There are two main administrative delivery model options for the allowances being considered. The first is to administer through local authorities or another local or regional intermediary body and the second is to administer through an existing national organisation. Administering any financial assistance to families through a national organisation or agency would ensure consistent quality of application and payment services and it is likely to keep administrative costs to a minimum. Under this option, it is intended that local authorities and schools would play a key role in promoting take up and maximising benefits of home access but without the administrative burden of assessing and delivering any financial assistance to families.

3.16 The procurement of devices, internet connections and support services will depend on the eligibility criteria and delivery model selected. We are

currently exploring how to engage a wide range of suppliers in any future procurement process.

4 How To Respond

4.1 You can respond online at www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/

by post to:

Consultation Unit
Department for Children, Schools and Families
Area 1A, Castle View House
East Lane
Runcorn
Cheshire WA7 2GJ

or by e-mail to: home-access.consultation@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk

5 Additional Copies

5.1 Additional copies of the consultation documents and response form are available electronically and can be downloaded from the Department's e-consultation website (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations>).

6 Plans for making results public

6.1 The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be published in June 2008 on the DCSF e-consultation website (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations>).