

# Cambridgeshire Software House

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Kennedy Humphries  
Public Service Broadcasting Policy Branch  
Department for Culture, Media and Sport,  
2-4 Cockspur Street,  
London SW1Y 5DH

18<sup>th</sup> July 2002

Dear Sir,

## Government Consultation on BBC Digital Curriculum

As one of the longest standing (if not the longest) educational software houses, it is with some concern that I am writing to you. From the early days of writing software for schools, without doubt the most innovative and widely used titles in the classroom have come from small independent software houses. I am not talking about word processors, databases and spreadsheets but am referring to specific packages that attempt to help educate our children in numeracy, history, mathematics, language and many other subjects besides. I am referring to the many software programs that have been written for children with special educational needs and also those programs that have helped disabled children communicate, via a computer, with others.

Many of those companies, like ours, are often making small profits and are run on the backs of 4 or 5 people. The very survival of these companies often depends on their innovation and expertise in curriculum based software. How often have we heard Ministers and senior educators stand up and say that the software produced by U.K. publishers for U.K. schools is the best in the world? How often have we heard Ministers and senior educators stand up and say that more money is needed to go to these companies in order to ensure that there is continuity in both innovation and supply. The answer to both questions is 'many, many times'!

It now seems that the Government is proposing to hand over the whole of this to the BBC and kill off our industry. I for one will no longer be taking the risk of borrowing considerable sums of money to help finance the production of a

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Partners:

Brian Richardson

Wendy Richardson

software package when there is a player in the market giving resources away into the same marketplace. It is irrelevant whether or not the BBC say that they are not going to interfere with innovation and will approach third parties to ensure the continuity that I mentioned earlier. Well I for one am still waiting for the call!

With announcements coming almost daily about the need to improve choice and standards in our schools, I find it almost incredible that the BBC Digital Curriculum is even being given the time of day. This service will result in the curtailment of choice, will stifle out any competition and create a monopoly; and we all know what that results in! What will happen once the BBC has become the virtual sole provider and then decides that the 2006 World Cup Final is worth paying that bit extra for or 'Bongo goes to Outer Space' does not sell as well as the 'Telly Tubbies' and the loss needs to be covered from elsewhere? The answer is quite simple in that the children of this country will no longer be quite so important to them as they would currently have you believe.

I have to say that in the 22 years since I started this business, this small industry has had its 'up and downs' but this, I think, will be the straw that breaks the proverbial camel's back. From what I can see, the BBC has not demonstrated that their investment would give their Licence Fee payers value for money, they have not demonstrated that they would raise choice and standards. However, what they have demonstrated is that they have scant regard for this industry, which I suppose is easy when you are using public funds and not your own hard earned cash, and that they have no real understanding of what actually happens in the classroom where ICT is concerned. I only hope that the people who have to make the decision on whether this scheme goes ahead or not have visited a few schools in recent months to see for themselves what goes on.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Richardson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

Brian Richardson