

Educational ICT Services (EdICTs) Response to the Application by the BBC for a Digital Curriculum Service

EdICTs is a vibrant, dynamic and adaptable company who deal with all aspects of ICT in education. We have two main strands to our business; firstly we provide consultancy and advice to commercial companies who have an impact on educational ICT, good examples of these being Lego Dacta and the Kingswood Activity Centres. Secondly we offer educational ICT support to Government Agencies such as BECTa, QCA and Local Education Authorities. The States Education Council of Guernsey, Lancashire and Cumbria are amongst our clients. All of our work is based on a thorough knowledge of communication, schools and educational change. We constantly evaluate and analyse what is happening and changing in schools and then look to match opportunities that arise with our clients' needs.

Our position as described puts us in an interesting category. We are not responding as a content provider (who could possibly be badly affected by this service if launched), but nor are we replying as a party directly involved with the delivery of ICT in the classroom (to whom this service could be of great benefit). However, we do have close dealings with both of these parties in our line of work. As such we are torn between two very different opinions and so will have to find some form of compromise.

In response to the first point mentioned in the letter from Kennedy Humphreys dated 23rd May 2002, EdICTs believe that the proposed new service is compatible with the BBC's primary public service role as set out in the Charter and Agreement.

The second point asks if the value to the public of the service is proportionate to the likely impact on the market. EdICTs believe that the details of the proposed service, as they now stand, would have an overall negative affect on the market. We do not doubt that the BBC brand would encourage users to trust this on-line resource, promoting user confidence in electronic resources as a whole and so helping to drive demand in the wider market. However, we also believe that if the BBC's Digital Curriculum were to cover $\frac{3}{4}$'s of subjects and 50% of their desired learning outcomes (DLO's), that this service would have a severe affect on existing content providers.

As mentioned previously, our business leads us to work with people who are directly involved with the delivery of ICT in the classroom. After discussion with schools in a number of LEA's in the UK and the Channel Islands, it is perfectly obvious that this service would be of great benefit to teachers. The basic fact is that the BBC produces quality educational materials and that although EdICTs are sympathetic to the industry, we have to support services that would be of benefit to teachers.

We believe that the BBC would create quality educational materials which others could be judged against. EdICTs also strongly support lifelong learning, which we believe would be enhanced by BBC's Digital Curriculum. By supplying children and young adults with free, quality on-line resources, they could extend their learning which would no longer be restricted to normal school hours.

The DCMS also wish us to comment on whether the BBC's new service would be suitably distinctive from those already available. From the information provided in the documentation, EdICTs have been supplied with no evidence that the service would be adequately distinctive, but then there were no details provided of individual resources. The Secretary of State would have to be certain that there were no products too similar to those currently available to buy on the market or some content providers could be involuntarily removed from the market altogether.

EdICTs are of the opinion that the BBC should proceed with this service in some way, but not in the form that has been proposed in these documents. Our Directors believe that the service should not cover $\frac{3}{4}$'s, but **all** of the curriculum subjects for 5-16 year olds. This free service should take up more of the subjects that the rest of the industry cannot perhaps afford to give quality treatment to. We also think that a higher percentage of the funds should be spent on the non-core and minority subject areas, as these are the topics that are currently lacking quality on-line resources.

Although it may appear that by only covering 50% of the DLO's for any one subject, the BBC are leaving the industry with the other 50% to work with, this is not the case. Not all of a subject's DLO's are applicable for development through ICT and as such, we are of the opinion that the percentage of DLO's covered for any one subject by the BBC's new service should be reduced to 10 or 15%.

In summary, the Directors of Educational ICT Services are not in support of the current application by the BBC for a Digital Curriculum Service. However, we would support a future application if the alterations suggested above were to be made and the BBC honoured their promise to commission 50% of the content production to external suppliers.

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