

Mr Kennedy Humphreys
Policy Adviser
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Broadcasting Policy Division
2-4 Cockspur Street
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17 July 2002

Our Ref: JC/JB7

Dear Mr Humphreys

NAEIAC RESPONSE TO DCMS CONSULTATION ON THE BBC'S DIGITAL CURRICULUM PROPOSAL

Thank you for your letter of 17 June 2002.

This Association broadly supports the enhanced deployment of modern educational technologies within schools envisaged in the government's "Curriculum Online" initiative, and our Executive Committee has given due consideration to the nature of this project itself and to some of the longer-term implications of this initiative for the future evolution of schools as significant social institutions, and of teaching as a professional activity.

In our formal response to the original DfES/NGfL consultation exercise on "Curriculum Online", we therefore strongly endorsed the associated vision of a coherent set of digital educational resources and also pointed to the potential benefits for pupils/students with special educational needs and those suffering from long-term sickness. With regard to an appropriate market base for ensuring innovative future content, our Association accepted that competition could probably help to stimulate new and imaginative approaches and noted that a range of suppliers was anticipated by DfES, with the BBC's public service remit and ethos likely to ensure its rôle as a significant contributor to the new array of services and products.

We have now duly examined the formal BBC application for a digital curriculum service, and the associated documentation placed on the DCMS website, and wish to register our general support for the May 2002 BBC proposal.

Economic Considerations

This Association has studied with particular interest the Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) market assessment relating to the likely impact of the BBC's proposed service, as provided for the BBC's use, and notes that this report stresses the breadth and depth of the envisaged curriculum coverage, the significance of universal access at zero cost, and the coherence this service could provide to the development of the educational online resource sector. The detailed PwC analysis concludes that these factors would tend, on balance, to lower barriers to the future development of this important and wider market, and that there are distinct features surrounding this application that are likely to prevent the Corporation exerting market power – including the regulatory framework governing BBC activities

and the projected phased introduction of the digital curriculum service over time as schools' utilisation of modern technologies increases. Naturally, we are aware of different perceptions within the commercial software sector, and in particular the views of the Digital Learning Alliance, but we believe that the DfES proposal for publicly-funded electronic learning credits should serve to reassure the commercial sector with regard to future levels of market participation in this significant field.

Technology and Creative Education

We would also highlight the link between identifiable advantages within the BBC's proposal, and the necessary development of the national debate over more creative and innovative approaches to education. We are conscious of the point that our future high-knowledge economy requires a workforce with rather different skills from those of the mass-production era which helped to shape our conventional school and college system. The "Curriculum Online" project, ultimately designed to offer the entire school curriculum and more through up-to-date electronic media to schools and homes, brings the era of creative education much nearer. Modern education technology – electronic whiteboards, more inter-active software, multi media presentations – encourages more creative and original approaches by its very nature. The significant degree of flexibility it provides allows students to adapt their own learning to their desired pace and other individual needs, hopefully guided by supportive teaching and assisted by relevant technical support. This opens the door to the new and more diverse forms of teaching and learning we will need in order to promote creative modes of thinking.

The BBC proposal for a coherent and zero-cost service to both formal and informal educational settings would assist progress in this necessary direction, adding value to the longer-term impact of this application.

BBC Charter and Agreement

We understand that the Secretary of State will reach her decision in line with the established guidelines for assessing BBC public service approvals, and the related criteria, given the terms of Article 3(b) of the Royal Charter. We note the significant rôle played by the BBC in the field of education since the early decades of the last century, and trust that this new proposal will be viewed as equally in accordance with the specific requirements placed upon the Corporation.

The National Association of Educational Inspectors Advisers and Consultants is grateful for this opportunity to respond to the DCMS consultation exercise, and looks forward to the decision of the Secretary of State.

Yours sincerely



John Chowcat
General Secretary