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## **Response to the consultation on the BBC Digital Curriculum Service**

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I am writing in response to the proposal from the BBC to establish a coherent on-line service providing learning resources mapped from the school curriculum.

The National Extension College (NEC) is an educational charity with nearly forty years' experience of developing distance learning courses and learning resources, designed mainly for adult learners, but including the GCSE and 'A' level curriculum. NEC therefore has a strong interest in the BBC Digital Curriculum Service, and has the relevant expertise to contribute to the consultation on this proposal.

It is our experience that high quality learning resources can contribute significantly to raising standards and enriching teaching and learning. Specifically, they can provide an important additional source of support for learners, teachers, tutors, parents and mentors. The proposal from the BBC promises considerable investment in such resources, and also makes these resources free at the point of delivery.

There are understandably concerns from parts of the educational publishing community that such an injection of free materials will distort the market. NEC might have been expected to concur with this view, as, although we are a non-profit making organisation, we do have to earn the income necessary to operate the NEC. More importantly, we have to invest in new courses and resources, and have to ensure that our existing materials are kept up-to-date. A considerable proportion of our income comes from products designed for the GCSE curriculum.

Despite this, after much debate within the NEC, we are writing to give our strong support to the BBC Digital Curriculum proposals. Our reasons are that:

1. Although we do understand the view of commercial companies that the Digital Curriculum Service, funded from the licence fee, is unfair competition, NEC

considers this argument is outweighed by the greater good of improving standards of teaching and learning for all.

2. The substantial investment being proposed will stimulate the schools market, and increase its willingness and ability to engage with *all* online materials. We know that many schools have been unable or unwilling to invest in materials, platforms and staff development because of the lack of suitable high-quality content.
3. The implementation of good learning design in the development of schools-specific materials for delivery on-line is still at a relatively early stage. All providers and publishers still have much to learn. The BBC has the resources to help to establish benchmarks of good practice, and to invest in piloting and evaluation. This will inevitably raise standards.
4. The BBC is in a position to make a financial commitment to the continuous need to update materials to align them with the changes to the National Curriculum.
5. We consider that the 'unfair competition' argument is exaggerated. The BBC is committed to not covering more than 50% of *any* subject, only investing 25% of its budget in core subjects, and concentrating 35% of the budget on developing materials for minority subjects and on cross curricular activities.
6. The BBC has stated that 50% of the licence fee funding will be spent commissioning content from other providers. Rather than stealing the market, this investment will have the effect of stimulating the market. The government's commitment to £50 million of electronic learning credits for schools will further stimulate the market.

Our recommendation is therefore that the positives of the BBC's Digital Curriculum proposition far outweigh the negatives. NEC is keen to work closely with the BBC to develop the Digital Curriculum, both as a content provider and as an experienced source of good pedagogical design.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Ros Morpeth