

## Response to the BBC's Digital Curriculum proposal

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From the point of view of an independent producer at the leading edge of broadband content production, the main observations I should want to feed back on the BBC's Digital Curriculum proposal documentation and industry presentation to PACT members on 15.7.02 are:

1

It is important the BBC commissions full programmes from the independent sector, not simply assets. Clare Riley (at the aforementioned presentation) spoke in terms of commissioning "Flash movies" (i.e. small animations) from independents and made it sound like full-scale co-produced projects would be few and far between. This would mean the Digital Curriculum would miss out on the wealth of educational programme-making talent and, importantly, innovation vested in the independent sector.

Commissioning substantial projects is also essential to provide a reasonably consistent, not too 'bitty' environment for independents to trade in in the medium to long term.

2

Old chestnut though it is, it is imperative that when the BBC propose 50% of production to go to the independent sector they really mean 50%. We have seen in the last few days that 25% still doesn't mean 25% even after two decades of independent TV production.

3

At the aforementioned presentation constant emphasis was placed on the fact that the proposed service was an "application-based service" and there was a strong sense of a template-based approach. It is vital that the DC application does not become a straight-jacket which precludes creative, innovative approaches to learning. A boundary-pushing approach is essential in catalysing the take-up of broadband learning - more narrowband only faster is not going to set alight any young imaginations.

4

The BBC has an understandable tendency, given its public service nature, to develop to the Lowest Common Denominator technically to ensure universal access. The problem is that this largely prevents the corporation breaking new ground in online content production. Developing for almost defunct browsers, for example, is a millstone in this regard. It is important, especially in view of this government's ambitions for broadband, that there is room in the DC for exciting, ground-breaking forms of content which take real advantage of the emerging higher bandwidths. Compromises need to be made with regard to universal access in the name of pushing the medium forwards and the BBC has made such compromises with its digital TV and radio stations, so why not here too?

5

It is important that the BBC are completely open with the technology (technical and functional specifications) behind the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment). Other interactive commissioners have been far less than open about their technology making it an uphill struggle for outsiders/independents to develop for their platforms.

6

The Proof of Concept includes a poetry programme which provides a Flash animation alongside a piece of Romantic poetry illustrating the poem in a fairly literal way. This typifies an approach involving making content and pushing it down some kind of pipe to the young audience at the other end. But it is the opposite of poetry where the whole pleasure comes from the fact that the images in your head are of your own creation. The BBC need to take on-board the importance of peer-to-peer internet and user-created content. The poetic and pedagogically effective approach in the above example would have been to allow the young people to create their own pictures of what the poem suggested to them. And they would learn more from that on a number of (cross-curricular) levels including not only poetry but also technology.