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The Secretary of State  
Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Dear Secretary of State

You have asked for comments on the BBC's proposed Digital Curriculum. I wish to suggest that your agreement to this proposal should include a requirement that the material in the project be subject to independent external validation.

The reason for this requirement would be that the BBC's existing interactive educational provision is of variable quality in terms of content, indicating that current quality control procedures are inadequate (see Appendix 1). This should not be acceptable for the new Digital Curriculum project, in view of its size and cost.

There are precedents for such a requirement. Independent external validation is common in the educational world, both at university and school level. It has also been used within the BBC, without being seen to compromise editorial independence (see Appendix 2).

Yours sincerely,

D. J. Saunders

### Appendix 1:

The BBC currently presents “AS-Guru”, an interactive website. The quality of some parts of the mathematics section of this website is extremely poor, although other parts are perfectly acceptable. One of the worst examples is the section (under calculus) on differentiating the exponential function, which will leave any student completely baffled: different techniques are muddled up, and the essential principles are obscured rather than explained. This variability means that the website cannot be relied upon by students: BBC education, like BBC news, should be reliable.

### Appendix 2:

The collaboration between the BBC and the Open University was a successful example of external validation of BBC programmes. Each programme had its content agreed by the appropriate course team: this consisted largely of university academics, but had BBC involvement. The BBC retained editorial control over the presentation of the material.

### Appendix 3:

David Saunders is a research mathematician who for many years was a BBC producer working on Open University productions. He has also taught undergraduates at Oxford University and evaluated multimedia projects in mathematics teaching.