

BBC Digital Curriculum – New Service Approval Application

Consultation Response from TEEM Ltd.

TEEM is the leading evaluation service of educational digital media and resources.

Key points:

- Four years experience in educational software evaluation
- Independent evaluation by teachers in classrooms
- Supported by DfES and publishers
- Evaluated products from 245 CD-ROM and web publishers
- 8000 teachers a months are using the site for advice on choice and use of software.
- Trained over 300 teachers as TEEM evaluators.

1. Recognising the need for evaluation.

If the BBC application is accepted and new resources are published the it should be essential that these products are independently evaluated using the same criteria applied to commercial products and services. The provision of free resources does not of itself imply anything about the quality and appropriateness for the educational context of the resource, and it is appropriate that teachers should be in a position to compare the educational value of BBC software alongside other commercial titles.

2. The existing software market

The UK education software market has a first class international reputation for innovative and creative educational software. With over 20 years experience of research and development, high quality products are developed to meet teacher's needs. The industry has been quick to respond to changing demands with new curricula and changing technologies. This wealth of experience and healthy competition has driven the market forward. The future of all commercial software companies is threatened by the delivery of free software to schools from the BBC.

3. The schools' position

The BBC brand has a good reputation in schools as a result of broadcast products. Teachers will expect that they can trust BBC products without specifically questioning the quality of the BBC digital curriculum and they are likely to plan to use these with confidence irrespective of the quality. Early models of the BBC digital service were evaluated by TEEM in the Digital Learning Services project undertaken Oct 2001-Jan2002. The quality of these resources was felt to be poor and failed to deliver what teachers expected. It is not evident that the BBC is aware of these concerns, and does not suggest that their planning of future materials will address these teacher concerns.

Teachers use software resources as one of their teaching and learning resources. A survey of 200 teachers carried out by TEEM at BETT 2002 identified that all teachers knew and recognised the BBC web site address. Teachers will be readily able to find these 'free' BBC resources and they may look no further. As a practical issue, acquiring any resource from the COL portal will require some administrative effort, and thus the BBC's Digital Resources will become an easier option for pressed teachers.

For eLCs to be effective long term funding is essential and should be related to hassle-free administration for schools.

4. Challenging a distinctive service?

Exemplar materials that the BBC has been able to show suggest that the service appears not to be distinctive in design and functionality, technology or learning objectives. Indeed it competes directly with existing product. For the service to be distinctive, it may be possible for the BBC to focus entirely on minority markets. These are difficult for commercial organisations to address effectively, and may serve to facilitate truly differentiated resources for teachers to use.

