

WHITE SPACE

Home of Wordshark and Numbershark Software

41 Mall Road
London W6 9DG
Tel/Fax: +44 (0)20 8748 5927
E-mail: ruth@wordshark.co.uk
www.wordshark.co.uk

BBC Digital Curriculum New Service Approval Application

Consultation response from White Space Ltd

White Space creates and supplies digital products to assist the acquisition of basic Literacy and Numeracy. White Space programs are matched either to the National Literacy or National Numeracy Strategy. Development and programming is done almost exclusively by teachers and ex teachers. The products are now established and are bought in increasing numbers both in the UK and overseas, particularly in the Special Needs sector.

The proposed new free service from the BBC could be in direct competition with these products and could discourage their continuing development and improvement. Other companies may be similarly affected with the result that the variety of quality educational resources available in the UK will be restricted.

We wish to underline our support for the points made in the submissions made by BESA and ESPA of which we are members.

We have the following specific points of concern:

E-learning Credits will not available to all buyers

Only English State Schools receive the credits. Parents, independent schools and schools in other parts of the UK are likely to choose free offerings and may be tempted not to give equal weight to other potentially more effective alternatives.

If the BBC free service is available to parents and schools abroad then there will also be damage to current and potential exports.

Quality of BBC services in this field not proven

Much of the output of the BBC is to be admired but in the case of educational software there is **no certainty that BBC output will be equal or better than that of commercial suppliers**. The initial trials of the BBC products show that teachers welcome the new resources and find them valuable and useful. **This does not however distinguish their quality or uniqueness from commercial resources which have also been found to be effective and motivating.**

In surveys of educational software it does not appear that BBC products are exceptionally highly rated by teachers compared with commercial alternatives.

Proposed Commissioning of Work from 3rd parties by the BBC

1. We are concerned that commissioning **by the BBC** would be **restricted to a few large Media and Broadcasting Organisations**. This may not be the intention but we feel that structural, and maybe technical, barriers are likely **to prevent small educationally focused companies from contributing to the BBC on line content.**

2. The budget for commissioning, of £9 million p.a., is small compared with the intellectual property value of **innovative and effective software programs.**

BBC Disagreements with other suppliers of educational resources

Meetings between the trade associations and the BBC failed to reach agreement on several key issues and this has sadly led to legal action. This situation **augurs badly for the future development of the UK as a Centre of Excellence in the field of digital education.**

Structure and Accountability of the BBC

The BBC's unique structure with its emphasis on editorial independence is **not ideal for an organisation spending public funds to enter a commercial market.**

Any role for the BBC in this field must involve **practical checks to ensure that Public subsidies are used in a positive, effective and justifiable way to make an overall net contribution to UK Education. This applies particularly when services are supplied in competition with others who have to fully fund their activities.** Monitoring of this should encompass a much wider range of issues and level of authority than that of the CAB and it should contain strong representation from DfES and Industry.

Summary

We suggest that **the present application be rejected to allow the DfES and DCMS, the BBC and commercial suppliers to the UK education more time to evolve a constructive, and maybe smaller, role for the BBC. This should pay full regards to concerns about the threat to the actual and potential richness and variety of the UK education market.**

**John Savery
Director**

19th July 2002