

V Overview of the BBC's Digital Curriculum service

5.1 In order to understand the BBC's proposed Digital Curriculum service, it is helpful to break down the proposition into its constituent parts and establish a working definition of the service that can be applied in the market definition and impact assessment sections that follow.

5.2 The BBC states that its proposed Digital Curriculum service is⁵⁷:

"envisaged as a coherent set of interactive digital learning resources delivered online to personal computers and similar devices".

5.3 The following discussion focuses on two key aspects of the BBC's proposed Digital Curriculum service:

- the production and packaging of educational online content; and
- the delivery of educational online content.

The production and packaging of educational online content

5.4 The questions to be addressed are:

- what is being produced;
- how is it being packaged; and
- who is producing and packaging it?

What is being produced?

5.5 The BBC would like to provide learning materials for 30-40 educational courses depending on the level of funding secured. It is not financially possible for the BBC to fund the provision of learning materials for all UK educational courses. The Digital Curriculum would be a service for all pupils in the UK, whether learning at school, home, work or elsewhere (e.g. libraries).

5.6 The course content would be based on the material outlined in the curricula of each of the Nations: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The learning materials produced by the BBC would represent no more than 50% of the learning objects for each course and would cover all Key Stages (i.e. 1-4). The approximate break down of the BBC's projected spend⁵⁸ on each subject category would be⁵⁹ :

- Category A (e.g. mathematics, English and science) – 25% of the BBC's content spend;
- Category B (e.g. design & technology, ICT, history, geography, modern foreign languages, art & design, music, PE, RE) – 35% of the BBC's content spend; and
- Category C (e.g. national curricular variations, welsh language versions, minority subjects (e.g. business studies, media studies), cross-curricular areas, community language resources and resources for those with special educational needs or accessibility issues) – 40% of the BBC's content spend.

How is it being packaged?

5.7 The educational online content would take the form of multimedia materials, video sequences, interactive exercises and printable worksheets. In the future, the Digital Curriculum service could also contain a series of user applications such as SATS and GCSE tests, grading and capability diagnostics.

5.8 These individual resources would be presented within the BBC's own Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in order to create a coherent service and deliver against the BBC's policy objectives. This online

⁵⁷ See Annex 1 to PwC's Terms of Reference.

⁵⁸ Further details of the BBC's spend on the Digital Curriculum service can be found in Section II.

⁵⁹ The terms Category A, B and C, are our own and have been used to avoid confusion with the use of the word 'core' in the context of the nature of a course's content. Category A subjects are the most commonly studied subjects (in terms of pupil numbers) and referred to by the BBC as 'core'. Category B subjects are less commonly studied and referred to by the BBC as 'non-core'. The least studied subjects i.e. Category C, are referred to by the BBC as 'minority'.

software application would enable teachers to manipulate the order of content items to develop their own personalised lessons and allow pupils to work through the content. Performance information, where appropriate, will be recorded locally and outside of the VLE. There are no plans for the VLE to offer student personalisation or for it to interface with school management information systems⁶⁰.

5.9 We understand that the lead-time from a decision by the Secretary of State (if positive) would be at least 9 months. The rollout of the service would be staged over a period of five years. The BBC intends to have materials for at least 4 courses at launch, and materials for 13 courses, 21 courses, 27 courses and 30 courses for each year thereafter. The BBC would also inform DfES and DCMS of its planned service offerings well in advance of introducing the material online.

Who is producing and packaging the content?

5.10 The BBC would be committed to the twin objectives for its proposed Digital Curriculum service of universal supply and free (at the point of use) access⁶¹.

5.11 The BBC is proposing to spend 50% of the content production funds (approximately £40-45 million over five years) with external suppliers, covering a selection of subjects. The BBC might adopt a variety of the following; commissioning for the whole/part of the course with significant freedom for the supplier; commissioning for the whole/part of the course but with elements subject to tight design briefs; co-developed or co-produced materials; licensing of pre-existing materials. The remaining content would be produced 'in-house', by the BBC.

5.12 Other content suppliers could apply to the BBC to acquire and use unbranded BBC materials for incorporation into their own educational online resources in the UK. Subject to certain terms and conditions⁶², third parties could obtain up to 20% of their demand for materials of a specific asset type (e.g. video, interactive game) from the BBC, up to a maximum of 10% of the BBC's total portfolio.

The delivery of educational online content

5.13 The BBC's choice of distribution model is heavily influenced by the inadequacy of the ICT infrastructure in schools and homes, and its obligation for universal coverage. Given the lack of broadband connectivity and sufficient network capacity in schools, the BBC is limited in the degree of media-rich, interactive content it can offer. There simply is not the capacity in many schools local networks to facilitate the simultaneous download by 30 or so pupils of say, a video clip⁶³.

5.14 The BBC has therefore identified two potential distribution models for its proposed Digital Curriculum service, i.e.

- Real time – for those schools that have adequate broadband connectivity and local/regional networks, individual pupils will be able to access the BBC's online site and use the full, media-rich service. This would probably be the chosen model for teachers undertaking group learning i.e. a one PC/interactive whiteboard presentation in front of the whole class. This would also be the format available to home learners, possibly with the choice of downloading different sized features depending on their speed of connection. Pupils would have access to their teacher's homepage or a 'group' homepage. From there, the pupil would be able to locate their homework. Alternatively, independent learners could use the search engine to locate the material that he or she wishes to study.

⁶⁰ The BBC intends to review its strategy with regard to the use of a VLE following an independent review of the iLMS provision for Curriculum Online. The BBC would use a market iLMS if there were one that satisfies its requirements in terms of editorial vision, control of presentation/branding, zero incremental cost to the user and the BBC, and the provision of universal coverage (to both homes and schools).

⁶¹ Beyond any costs involved in accessing a platform e.g. ISP charges.

⁶² For example, the BBC's material must be incorporated into alternative products for the British Government's Curriculum Online initiative.

⁶³ Given these limitations, there would have to be a staged rollout of the service.

- Download – for those schools that have inadequate broadband connectivity and local/regional network capacity, teachers will be able to create a lesson online and then download⁶⁴ the material. The material would then be stored, viewed or distributed within the school network.

5.15 To supplement these models, the BBC would also offer to any commercial iLMSs (provided they are Curriculum Online approved) all Digital Curriculum materials for caching locally and for BBC-branded presentation to schools, alongside other materials.

Conclusions

5.16 It is evident that the BBC's proposed Digital Curriculum service:

- is an educational online resource that would be delivered as a coherent set of services to schools, homes and other such places; and
- would build on the BBC's existing expertise of providing television and radio programmes of an educational nature and publishing learning materials in various formats.

⁶⁴ There would be a limitation on the amount that can be downloaded, based on the storage capacity of the school server and the pupil's PCs.