

**LIFELONG LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE**  
**REPORT ON COMPUTERS IN SCHOOLS**

**1. Aim**

To investigate the present level of computer provision within Buckinghamshire Schools and to compare that with our own targets and with the level nationally. To review forward plans and progress towards targets. As necessary, to initiate or encourage action to ensure planned targets are met in all schools on a timely basis.

**2. Summary of Recommendations**

1. Before targets are set they should be fully costed, and the financial consequences and funding arrangements for them recognised as an integral part of the initial decision-making process.
2. Every effort should be made to take up appropriate Standards Fund offers on a timely basis, especially when failure to do so may unfavourably impact on an ability to reach specific targets.
3. Funding of the replacement and maintenance of computers must be recognised and established. Ideally this should be identified in the Section 122 Budget Statement or in the County's capital programme.
4. In recognition that there may be no further NGFL funding beyond 2001/2002, a clear line item in the Medium Term Financial Plan should identify the required financial expenditure over the next three years (reflecting the possible worst case spending pressure.)
5. The establishment of an appropriate series of measures to reflect the progress of ICT in the teaching and learning processes.

**3. Programme of work and background**

The Computers in Schools Working Group met as follows:

23 January 2001  
20 February 2001  
6 March 2001

The Cabinet Member for Schools was invited to attend the Select Committee on 6 March.

**National Grid for Learning**

The Government has pledged to develop a National Grid for Learning (NGfL) by the introduction and/or development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) within all schools by the year 2002. Nationally, spending

plans of £1.7 billion have been announced. Amongst the stated objectives of the programme are that:

- By 2002 serving teachers should generally feel confident, and be competent to teach, using ICT within the curriculum.
- By 2002 all schools should be connected to the Grid, enabling perhaps 75% of teachers and 50% of pupils and students to use their own e-mail addresses by then.
- By 2002 most schoolleavers should have a good understanding of ICT.
- From 2002 general administrative communications to schools and further and higher education bodies by the UK Education Departments, Ofsted and non-departmental public bodies, and the collection of data from schools, should largely cease to be paper-based.

The use of ICT is growing in most schools but is often not subject to the same controls and scrutiny as are placed on corporate IT service. ICT will become increasingly vital for curriculum delivery and schools administration.

Only computers less than five years old were counted, including desktop PCs, portables and pocket books.

#### **4. Issues**

The working party discussed the available data with the ICT adviser Dale Hodgkinson on the 23 January and concluded:

- Primary and secondary schools will not reach the National Standards targets without action being taken.
- Buckinghamshire County Council target of pupil to computer ratios of 13:1 for primary schools and 8:1 for secondary schools by January 2002 will be revised to be in line with Government targets of 11:1 and 7:1 respectively by August 2002.
- Even though extra money has been given to help reach the targets, it will not be enough (a further £1 m would be needed just to purchase hardware).
- Ongoing maintenance is a major funding issue.
- How ICT is used to support the whole curriculum in existing classrooms and teach ICT maths etc., in specialist classes as well as help head teachers with school administration etc., is considered important.

It was agreed to seek clarification from the Cabinet Member for Schools to address those issues, and answer questions concerning:

Given that the data shows that Bucks is behind on numbers -what will Buckinghamshire County Council do to improve funding? Where will funds come from and how will they be monitored to ensure spending is in

appropriate areas? Can we forecast our position from 2002/3 and how will we communicate with schools and governing bodies?

Mr Appleyard, the Cabinet Member for Schools, provided written answers to a number of questions which were formulated after discussion at the Select Committee meeting of the 6 February (Appendix 1). In the light of these answers, Mr Lawrence compiled data information which helped inform the discussion which took place with Mr Appleyard at the Select Committee on 6 March 2001. (Appendix 2).

The following information was confirmed:

- \* Funding is provided as follows - Age weighted unit for each pupil (awph) provided revenue funding. Computer provision is funded via capital or grant funding from National Grid for Learning.
- \* With regard to spending over the four years to the end of 2000/01, £3,687m from a possible £4.618m was spent. The discrepancy was due to the county being financially unable to take advantage of the full potential allocation.

The allocation of funds for this period is as follows:

1998/1999	£1,250,000 of which £1,187,500 devolved to schools
1999/2000	£1,125,000 of which £1,068,750 devolved to schools
2000/2001	£1,250,000 of which £1,187,500 devolved to schools (+ £61,831 for broadband)

2001/2002	£1,854,451 (+ £93,850 for innovative projects + £474,385 for
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broadband)

Every school will have received funding over the 4 year period to August 2002.

The funding provided for 2001/02 will provide half the amount needed by schools in order to meet the targets. Schools are being asked to match fund or lease.

- \* It was noted that most schools in Buckinghamshire now lease computers. Mr Appleyard confirmed that some schools have funded a leasing arrangement, and that the ICT adviser is available to schools and would support schools wishing to consider this way forward.

Few schools are pioneering new technology but rather choosing to wait until it becomes more established. Some have invested in whiteboards. However, a number of exciting projects are already taking place and these have been disseminated through conferences (e.g. the Broadband Conference last June), the Management Briefing and the ICT Newsletter. In future the focus for dissemination will be through the ICT team web site where there are already details about:

- A Buckinghamshire Net Day where pupils emailed information in the form of text, graphics about their local neighbourhood -what they would like to change etc.

- Sixth form Psychology group who video conference with a tutor in Wales.
- Digital Artist working with middle school pupils.
- Development of a historical simulation for Key Stage 3 based on events around the battle for MonteCassino. The narrative takes in his capture of a Polish soldier by the soviet army and his imprisonment in Siberia, joining the British army in Palestine, the allied forces in North Africa and taking part in the invasion of Italy.
- Pupils at Grendon Underwood are collating local materials, including pictures, interviews based on their locality.
- Multimedia project which involves pupils from across the region being involved in developing multimedia resources.
- The outcomes of NGFL projects.
- Through the liaison with the South East Grid for Learning we are exploring content which will be shared over broadband for Literacy and Numeracy at Key Stage 3.
- We have an electronic Whiteboard project looking at how whiteboards can be used successfully in support of learning.

## 5. Conclusion

Despite progress made to date and the raising of the issue of computers in schools through the work of the Select Committee, there are still issues to be considered:

- Agreement needs to be reached that the number of computers is a proxy for the state of plan of development of school ICT.
- There remains some uncertainty or lack of commitment to the target, and the success in this area is an appropriate issue for the LEA as a whole.

Given that many measures in performance management are set, it is important to consider carefully how and when each target is set and how it will be developed.

The use of incentives or bonuses should be explored when exploring ways of encouraging schools to meet their targets.

There is a need for ongoing funding arrangements to be developed which show how best/worst case scenarios should be addressed.

Leasing vs buying options need to be clarified for schools with a clear position statement from the LEA.

Finally, the LEA should provide guidelines on the disposal of computers.