

Paper 2 – Update on the Home Access Taskforce

Summary

1. At an earlier meetings, the Board received updates on the progress being made by the Home Access Taskforce. The Taskforce was set up in April 2007 with a remit to ‘Consider and advise on ways in which home access to technology can be delivered for all school-aged children in England, ensuring that any plans include and promote safe and responsible use.’ The Taskforce met for the last time on 22 April and Becta staff are finalising its report for Ministers. This paper updates the Board on the progress made and the next steps.

Background

2. The Task Force has advised that the programme should:
 - be of benefit to all children (between 5 and 19) and their families
 - be of educational and wider family benefit
 - target any government funding on low income families
 - provide schools, teachers, and parents with guidance and support
 - encourage all parents to make a contribution to the costs of home access
 - minimise the administrative burden on schools
3. In addition, the Task Force has delivered the:
 - initial evidence base for funding under various investment scenarios
 - educational vision for learners and their parents
 - functional expectations of solutions from a user perspective
4. These have been developed into a draft Implementation Framework which sets out the three core strands of home access programme activity:
 - **maximising the benefits** of home access, through focusing on the service benefits to all children, schools and families that will be supported through universal access
 - **increasing the perceived value** of home access for all so as to encourage those that can enter the market to do so
 - **removing the barrier of cost** for disadvantaged families through a proposed Educational Technology Allowance (ETA)

Recent Progress

5. The programme continues to gain momentum. The main highlights have been:
 - A review of market trends, carried out by Ovum, which pointed to continued market failure in the area of provision to the disadvantaged.
 - The launch of home access Proof Of Concepts which have demonstrated that well supported incentive programmes can quickly and effectively support low income families to achieve home access.
 - Completion of a Programme Impact Assessment bringing together a literature review of available evidence on pedagogical benefits, the economic appraisal of the programme, and the impact on society as a whole through a range of social, legal and environmental tests. As a whole, the Impact Assessment provides a robust case for government intervention.
 - A public consultation, designed to open up the process of decision making to as wide an audience as possible, which concluded on 2 April. A full report on the results is due shortly but interim results indicate overwhelming support (around 90%) from families, the education sector and industry for the proposed programme and the general concept of home access to technology.
 - Consultation across the education sector and departments to explore how best to maximise the benefits of home access. Two members of the Task Force (Sir Mark Grundy and Derek Wise) supported by Becta staff have met with colleagues from QCA, TDA, NCSL, PFS, SSAT, ASCL and NAHT. All of these organisations have been keen to engage and recognised the potential benefits of universal home access. Particular issues identified included the need for national leadership and support on pedagogy and practice, the role of local authorities in joining things up at local level, and the potential of existing programmes to be steered to support this agenda.
 - Consultation with other government departments on the potential for wider benefits of home access in terms of social inclusion, community cohesion and raising skill levels. Further bilateral meetings are planned, including with the new Ministerial Committee on Digital Inclusion. Particular issues raised in discussions to date have included:
 - with DIUS, the potential role of UK Online Centres in improving the skills of parents
 - with DCLG, local authority performance management and community cohesion

- with BERR, the availability and quality of broadband connectivity
- A programme of one-to-one meetings between the Schools Minister and key industry players aimed at securing their commitment.

Proposed offer to learners and their parents

6. The central offer of the home access programme is that by ensuring that there are affordable opportunities for home access for all there can be a transformed experience of education for all learners and their parents. Potential benefits for all learners and parents include:
 - increased opportunities for learning experiences and enhanced outcomes
 - better access for all parents to information about the school and their child's progress, and opportunities to engage more easily in their children's learning
 - access for all learners and parents to affordable, high quality, and tailored home access solutions that are age appropriate and have safety embedded
 - for families with low incomes and children with specific needs, discounted (subsidised) home access solutions and the associated benefits of cost savings on goods and services, improved access to government services, and all other benefits of being digitally included that the majority of families now increasingly take for granted
7. There are also wider benefits to government from universal home access and there is a programme of work underway with other departments to ensure that we maximise the wider benefits from universal home access.
8. In addition to these benefits for all families, the proposed new Education Technology Allowances (ETAs) will remove the barrier of cost for low income families by providing them with significant discounts on good quality home access solutions in the market place. As part of the programme, there will also be need to be consideration of any additional bespoke specialist support required (and not funded from other sources) by children with specific needs, for example looked-after children or those with specific physical disabilities. As well as educational benefits there are also other important tangible benefits for low income families such as:
 - Lower costs of insurance, white goods, holidays through access to online price transparency
 - Lower utility costs – Energywatch recently found that households using offline direct debit paid an average of £130 per year more for the same amount of energy than those able to take advantage of online direct debit accounts

- Access to online government services e.g. Car Tax, NHS direct through DirectGov
- Lower cost communications to distant family and friends (e.g. Skype)
- Access to everyday economic and social life through online employment opportunities, social networking etc

The Administrative Model

9. The administrative model being developed is intended to support schools and LA's current or planned activity on home access by providing some common central administrative components to ensure a consistent offer to all families across the country. These core administrative components are likely to be:
- A central system of quality assurance for parents. For example, we are exploring how a national home access solution supplier accreditation scheme might be linked to the Next Generation Learning campaign.
 - A national ETA account facility to provide helpline for individual parents, applications handling, eligibility testing, verification with schools. and payments direct to accredited suppliers. There are opportunities for locating ETA accounts with organisations that already have existing central account capabilities and already provide similar services. And we are exploring how LAs or others (for example retailers through loyalty cards) might 'top up' ETA accounts through an agreed standard mechanism.
 - A core set of guidance and advice materials for schools. teachers and parents on how to maximise the benefits of home access, including advice and guidance on safety issues.
 - National marketing support through the Next Generation Learning Campaign and a core set of marketing materials to support schools and LAs to communicate the benefits of home access to parents and to drive take up of ETAs.

Funding

10. The home access programme will need significant funding if it is to achieve the goal of ensuring that all families have an opportunity to afford a home access solution in the next 3 or 4 years. Potential funding scenarios have been discussed with ministers. The minimum level of funding for a credible programme is likely to be £50 million per annum - £150 million over 3 years. Ideally, government would provide funding of about £100 million per annum - £300 million over three years. In addition to kit and connectivity, costs to be covered by central funding include: administration, learner and parental support, and marketing and communications.

11. Ministers are currently considering policy in this area, and no decision on funding has yet been made.

Next Steps

12. Subject to discussions with officials at DCSF the next steps are, in outline:

- Finalising the Taskforce report
- Policy decision by the Government
- Funding agreement with DCSF
- Preparation for a possible announcement in September.