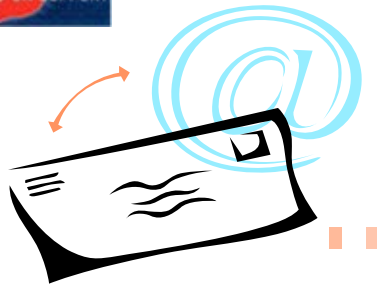




March 2006



ICT briefing note

Regarding: Learning Platforms

Following: SEGfL Learning Platforms Roadshow, Maidenhead

The SEGfL event helped to outline some of the key ideas and issues surrounding learning platforms, which the Government wants to see in all schools by 2008. This is a rapidly evolving and currently poorly understood aspect of ICT in schools, but some important findings are beginning to emerge from schools/LAs where the use of these systems have been pioneered. I have attempted to outline these below.

Key points

- Learning platforms have the potential to transform learning and teaching, especially with regard to the personalisation of learning
- There are significant benefits to be derived from all the schools in an area using the same learning platform
- Learning platforms are fundamentally about people
- Success is about managing change, not managing the technology
- We need to move towards “industrial strength” ICT infrastructure, with a very high degree of resilience and reliability

Some of the main benefits of learning platforms are:

- Being an easy to use repository for the full range of electronic learning resources *finding resources on some school networks is very difficult due to the sheer volume of material stored and the resulting complexity of the folder structures needed to organise it*
- Tailoring content and tasks to user needs and learning styles *supporting the management of learning, breadth, flexibility and the customising of learning*
- Continuity of learning *supporting home learning, parental involvement and access to performance information, allowing remote access (from anywhere with an internet connection) and promoting links between institutions*

- Enabling peer to peer dialogue *promoting communication, sharing of ideas and networking of both pupils and staff*
- Supports assessment for learning *by supporting the sharing of aims, tracking and monitoring as well as reflection and assessment*

Quotes

Barry Kruger, Head of Content at Becta, made three important comments.

“Learning platforms are fundamentally about people.”

“Success is about managing change, not managing the technology.”

“Service is more important than product” *(when purchasing)*

Key areas of change management

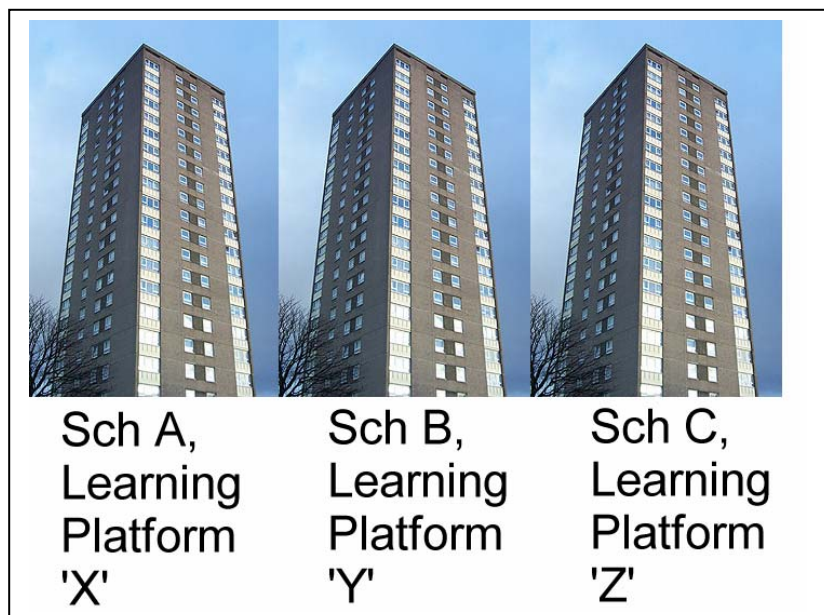
These need to be considered in the plans for implementing learning platforms in a sustainable way.

- Vision *what does your school want to achieve through implementing a learning platform?*
- People *staff, pupils, parents and governors*
- Culture *what is the current culture of your school and how do you think this will need to develop?*
- Infrastructure *data storage requirements will increase significantly – will your infrastructure support a learning platform? Data backup and disaster recovery plans become even more important.*
- Processes *what will need to be put in place to support implementing a learning platform?*

What are the advantages to all Bracknell Forest schools using the same learning platform?

Steve Snowball, the East Sussex e-learning manager and ex-primary Head, described each school in an area having a different learning platform as the “Doomsday scenario.” He drew a parallel between each school building their own learning platform with the construction of adjacent tower blocks and he likened trying to collaborate 6th form provision with this setup as being akin to the people on the top floors of the tower blocks having to communicate by opening their windows and shouting at each other.

Michael Harris of Harmans Water could see how a common learning platform for Bracknell Forest could help “to weld the community together”.





Other advantages to adopting a common learning platform include:

- We could achieve better value for money through aggregation
- Our various networks within the Borough, as well as technical and curriculum support from the LA, would be much more effective if everyone was using the same platform, promoting much easier exchange of materials, ideas, processes, etc.

Some key areas to consider

Interoperability – how well will the chosen learning platform work with other software and content that you use

Connectivity – how fast and reliable is your internet connection?

Resilience of your infrastructure

Your disaster recovery plans – eg in the event of fire/flood/theft

On-going support

Training and staff development

Other ideas and comments

“If schools don’t provide learning platforms then pupils will find them [the functionality] elsewhere.” The implication being this might expose them to less well controlled and less safe environments.

The current generation of school children are “pioneering a new childhood”. *Whilst this could be said for each generation, it is particularly so for the current generation who are living through unprecedented change.*

After pupil/computer ratios, the next targets will be concerned with the resilience/reliability of ICT in schools.

And finally...

The LA is continuing to work with the ICT Advisory Group, SEGfL and other local authorities to formulate plans for moving forwards with procuring and implementing learning platforms.