

Schools

January 2008

Becta leading
next generation
learning

Universal access

A guide for school leaders



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By 2009 18.5 million households in England will have broadband access. This growth reflects a shift in how we manage information and knowledge, and offers a fantastic opportunity for schools to raise attainment. But what about the 3 million or so households who are still without broadband? We think schools can help, and in doing so help themselves and their pupils. This guide will tell you more.



Why schools should welcome universal access

Right now we estimate that around 28 per cent of school children still do not have internet access at home.

That's a barrier to schools who are pursuing closer engagement with parents (it's clear that closer engagement improves attainment). It will become an increasing problem for all schools as electronic media becomes more and more the norm for many kinds of communication.

“For the first time we can give our students access wherever they are – from devices they carry round, from PCs in their home, from workstations in community centres or libraries. The time of ‘you can only come to school from 9 ‘til 4’, or ‘you can only pop into a library on a Saturday morning’, is gone. We’ll be able to support learning whenever and wherever they want to be supported, and that’s got to make a huge difference to their future.”

Sir Mark Grundy, Executive Principal –
Shireland Collegiate Academy

Children without home access to the internet tend to come from poorer families, and may already be struggling with many aspects of their school lives. New technologies have the power to help address these historic inequalities, but if we don't make sure that all households have access to these powerful capabilities, things could easily get worse, not better.

Schools minister Jim Knight set up a taskforce in 2007 to lead the ‘Home Access Programme’, specifically to make sure this digital divide does not get wider.

Ultimately we want to ensure that it is possible for all children in state education to learn whenever and wherever is best for them. There's plenty of evidence to suggest that if they do so, they will achieve improved results, as well as being better-equipped to engage with the wider demands of our interconnected world (it will help the other members of their families too).

To get there we are developing a programme of practical measures, partly to provide computers and broadband connections to homes, but also to ensure that the technology gets used in the best possible way.

That means supporting schools in developing their management processes and teaching range to take advantage of universal access. At the same time helping schools to engage parents and other local communities (many ethnic community groups are doing important work on this issue).



“One of the biggest issues we have faced was ensuring students could continue learning through technology outside the school gates. The school is in one of the most deprived wards in the city, and we were conscious of the ‘digital divide’ which could develop between those students who had access to computers at home and those who do not.

By giving our students home access to technology, learning continues after school hours; pupils regularly log on to discussion forums and debate issues they have talked about in that day’s lesson. Pupils can also send emails to their teachers or post questions on the subject’s webpage for help with homework. The result of embedding innovative technology throughout the curriculum is that students are on the whole so much more motivated and engaged, which has increased morale and improved performance.”

Assistant head of ICT development –
Djanogly City Academy

What it should look like

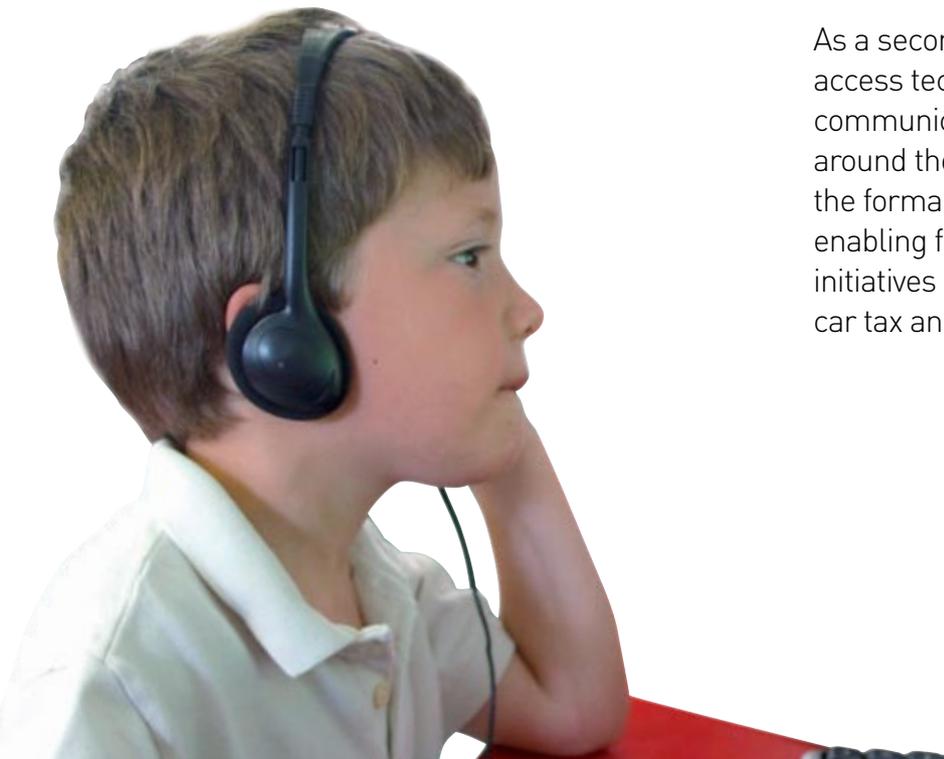
The idea of universal access builds on important current work like the two-year £60 million Computers for Pupils Initiative, which provides ICT equipment via local authorities and schools to the most disadvantaged homes.

But it goes further. So everyone can be clear about what we're trying to achieve we've defined what universal access should look like.

The learning experience

Learners must be able to access a wide range of online learning resources. These should include tools that allow access to a range of applications and services, and open up the ability to share insights and materials with others. Learners should feel that they are able to take more control of their personal educational experiences and have full access to institutional information about their learning goals and their progress towards them.

As a secondary but important benefit, these access technologies should offer information and communication capabilities to families and others around the learner, benefits that can go beyond the formal educational experience, for instance enabling full participation in online public service initiatives from local or national government e.g. car tax and social security.



The learning environment

Through universal access learners must be able to continue learning experiences begun in-school when out of school, and vice versa, enjoying the same high quality services regardless of their location. This means they must have access to the online learning platform services used by the school or college they attend.

This access must be robust and secure, protecting data integrity regardless of the access location (e.g. the library or UK Online Centre), and learners must remain safe from inappropriate online contacts.

Learners must be able to choose the access solution that best suits their needs or circumstances, and that solution should deliver learning experiences that remain consistent and so familiar over a reasonable length of time.

Learning support

The infrastructure schools or colleges use must be capable of supporting a variety of services to all home access users concurrently.

The learner's school or college must be able to offer formal user support (educational and technical) when needed and within a locally agreed timeframe.

Those schools and colleges must develop their teaching and administration to suit the demands of universal access. They should monitor the impact of the changes they make, and in particular ensure that no individuals or groups have access-related problems with their learning.

“Knowing what Daniel is doing from day to day, just from the series of questions he gives me, gives me an idea what he's up to which is great. It makes me feel more included on it and by having that information available to me, I don't feel as if I'm missing out.”

Parent

What schools should be doing

Over 1.4 million school age children don't have access to the internet at home. The government's plan for universal home access aims to address this problem by stimulating practical actions to ensure all learners can work with appropriate technology in a time and place that suits them.

Becta is working with a range of stakeholders, including schools, technology providers, local authorities and many other organisations who can support schools to review technological solutions, support and guidance and broader issues of community access to online information and resources.

To a greater or lesser extent your school may be working with the same people. You will be thinking broadly about how to personalise learning for all, the importance of out-of-school access to that learning, and how the things you are already doing could contribute.

You should seek support from those who have already taken advantage of home access in your planning, since their experience can help you anticipate the broader factors that may influence learner engagement outside the school.



Technology will be part of this thinking, but it is vital you consider issues like the skills and confidence of your staff, and what training they might need.

The Minister's Task Force is considering final recommendations after Easter 2008 and it is expected that the programme will start to be rolled out later in the year.

Expect further announcements on this topic area. You can find out the latest news online at

www.becta.org.uk/schools/extendingopportunities

“When you get to the point of universality, you can start thinking as a school, let's exploit this, let's build on the back of this, let's look at new ways of communicating with parents, let's look at new ways of engaging learners.”

Niel McLean, Becta

“The family is the centre of learning, and we welcome that. And the absolute prime movers here have got to be the parents. ICT is a great tool for communication, therefore it's possibly the best tool available to get parents actively engaged in the education of their children, making my life easier as a headteacher, and hopefully raising standards across attainment and achievement.”

Headteacher

Further information



Further details on the Computers for Pupils initiative are available on our website

www.becta.org.uk/schools/extendingopportunities

The DfES report, 'Children and Young People's Home Use of ICT for Educational Purposes' discusses the links between children's educational uses of ICT at home and their performance and attainment at school

www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR672.pdf

The ONS report, 'Office of National Statistics: Focus on the Digital Age (2007)' gives an overview of ICT use in the UK

www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/digitalage

The ONS survey, 'Office of National Statistics: First Release: Internet Access, Households and Individuals (August 2006)' is available at

www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/inta0806.pdf

A research project, 'Digital Inclusion: A Discussion of the Evidence Base (July 2007)' undertaken by FreshMinds for UK online centres

www.ukonlinecentres.co.uk/downloads

A research study into the social effects of lack of internet access on socially disadvantaged children and families, 'Ofcom: Children and the internet (2007)' is available at Ofcom's website

www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk/information/documents

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Parental engagement

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We know that if parents are engaged with their children's education, achievement levels rise. That's why the government is insisting that all schools provide real-time reporting for parents by 2012 at the latest. In this guide you'll find out more about real-time reporting and the broader parental engagement agenda.



Why parental engagement matters

If there was any doubt, recent research has shown that parental engagement is a decisive factor in determining learner achievement. What really matters is that learners feel their parents are paying attention, engaged in their learning and care about their performance.

The issue goes well beyond technology, but technology can have a vital role in energising the dialogue between schools, parents and their children. We know that where parents have timely and accessible information about their children at school it has a significant effect in stimulating this engagement.

Parental engagement is very much part of our broader work with personalising learning and universal access.

By September 2008 all secondary schools will be expected to provide information to parents covering achievement, progress, attendance, behaviour and special needs, on a timely and frequent basis – this should be at least once per term. By September 2010 all secondary schools will need to offer parents real-time access to this information (including the opportunity for secure online access) wherever and whenever they want.

Primary schools must meet the basic requirement by September 2010 and the real-time requirement by 2012, though many are already on this journey. To develop effective real-time reporting to parents schools will need to think about the three-way relationships between themselves, parents, and learners. It makes sense then to understand how all of us can use this opportunity to plan the broader changes demanded by personalising learning, and move towards better educational outcomes for all learners.

“It’s great as a parent that I can get into contact with how my children are doing through all their subjects...then I can help improve the quality of the work they’re doing.”

Parent, Wildern School, Hampshire

Becta is helping drive the parental engagement programme of work and is looking at a number of ways to ensure it has a positive impact on:

- two-way communication between parents and schools
- engaging the unengaged parents
- parental involvement/networks
- supporting the home as a place of learning.

Offering real-time reporting bears on all of these areas, and its urgency means that this reporting is our first priority.



Making real-time reporting a reality

We know from the excellent practice pioneered in schools around the country that real-time reporting makes a difference for learners, parents and schools. We have been working to develop a realistic timeframe for implementation and to ensure that any action plans are manageable for schools and meaningful for parents.



Through consultation with leaders and other staff in primary and secondary schools, we know that the best results are achieved where schools work together and learn from each other. Becta and its partners are providing a comprehensive range of support, guidance and advice.

Available support

You will be able to access:

- the latest and most influential research papers and education reports on the subject to support your thinking and discussion in school
- a growing and categorised resource based on the experience of a wide range of schools as well as the opportunity to share your progress with others
- real-time experiences of others through blogs written by teachers in the process of implementing real-time reporting in their schools
- the Becta self-review framework enabling you to set reporting in the wider context of school development

- a self-review template designed to help you assess your school's readiness for real-time reporting and determine priority areas for attention
- tips, ideas and resources to help you on your journey including video resources and information packs.

For secondary schools, information and advice is available on the Becta website at

**[www.becta.org.uk/schools/
extendingopportunities](http://www.becta.org.uk/schools/extendingopportunities)**

with further resources and support available from the end of January 2008.

Although the timescales for primary schools are longer, you need not wait until 2010 to start this journey. Specific examples for primary schools are also being made available on the Becta website at **[www.becta.org.uk/schools/
extendingopportunities](http://www.becta.org.uk/schools/extendingopportunities)**

“It’s really good to be able to see targets the children set themselves and the targets the teachers set for them. If you ever felt your child was not achieving their full potential you could check the online targets knowing that they have been agreed with the teacher and then support both the teacher and your child. “

Parent – Lent Rise School, Slough

“I like the idea of being able to go online to see what he is supposed to be doing because quite often they do not tell you themselves.”

Parent – Lent Rise School, Slough

What you should be doing next

Like many schools you may be well advanced along the road to real-time reporting, but as you plan your next moves it's a good idea to make sure you:

- identify a member of your leadership team to lead real-time reporting to parents
- start thinking about where you are on this journey to real-time reporting
- take some time to consider where you are in the areas of:
 - how you currently exploit technology to engage with parents
 - how your current arrangements for engagement with parents work
 - the ways your staff engage with parents and the ways they use information in their dialogue with parents and learners
 - how your leadership and operational management approaches are designed to support parental engagement
- consider how you will approach your whole school strategy and develop a shared understanding of the real-time reporting agenda with staff, parents and pupils – including how technology will support you.

Although the timescales for primary schools are longer, you need not wait until 2010 to start this journey. Primary specific examples are also being made available to support those wishing to improve their parental engagement and reporting arrangements in advance of the 2010 timetable.

“...ICT is a great tool for communication, therefore it’s possibly the best tool available to get parents actively engaged in the education of their children...”

Dave Brodie, Headteacher (retired July 2007)
– Prince Albert Primary School, Aston,
Birmingham
Winners of the 2007 ICT Excellence Awards
for Best Whole School (Primary category)



Further information



A report commissioned by SSAT details Warwick University research findings, 'Engaging Parents in raising Achievement: Do Parents Know they Matter?'

www.schoolsnetwork.org.uk/raisingachievement/engagingparents/default.aspx

The Becta review, 'Harnessing Technology Review 2007: Progress and impact of technology in education' details what current research and evidence tells us about harnessing technology for the benefit of learners

www.becta.org.uk/publications

The DfES report, 'The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A Review of Literature' is available at

www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR433.pdf

An Ofsted survey, 'Parental Involvement in Children's Education (PICE) Survey (2007)'. The survey was conducted between 09/06 and 02/07 to evaluate how schools involved parents and carers in the education of children and young people and how effective this involvement was

www.gnn.gov.uk/imagelibrary/downloadMedia.asp?MediaDetailsID=209441

'The Children's Plan: building brighter futures (Dec 2007)' details how the DCSF are putting the needs of families, children and young people at the centre of everything they do

www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan