

# Contents

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<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2: Programme logic model and evaluation methodology .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3: Assessment of rationale and objectives .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4: Assessment of inputs and activities.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>5: Assessment of gross and net outputs .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>6: Assessment of outcomes and impact .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>7: Assessment of value for money.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>8: Conclusions and recommendations.....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Annex A: Stakeholder consultees and case study schools .....</b>	<b>A-1</b>
<b>Annex B: Contextual conditions .....</b>	<b>B-1</b>
<b>Annex C: Case studies .....</b>	<b>C-1</b>

## Executive Summary

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1. In September 2008 the previous administration announced the Home Access Programme – positioned as a £300 million initiative, with Becta as the delivery agent, subsidising the provision of computers and internet access at home for low income families with learners.
2. This is the final report of the evaluation of the Home Access Programme, conducted by SQW in partnership with Ipsos MORI and the London Knowledge Lab.

### Rationale and objectives

3. In our evaluation of the pilot phase of the programme we found that, in retrospect, the Home Access Taskforce report was published in the middle of the biggest up-turn in household internet penetration for several years. **The assumption that a plateau in internet penetration would persist, and that the digital divide (in terms of physical access) was not being narrowed, may not have been the case after all.**
4. However, we suggested that **there did remain a sound case for intervention**, given the acceleration of educational benefits, and given the cost barriers that still exist for the lowest income groups, provided that a) it was focused on benefiting those that previously did not have a computer and/or connectivity at home, and b) it was tightly coupled to initiatives to realise the pedagogical and parental engagement benefits of universal home access for learners.
5. The programme subsequently re-articulated its headline target in terms of households rather than learners, though this did not include reference to whether those households already had functional home access.
6. Our findings for the national roll-out suggest that **the changes previously proposed (in the interim evaluation report) to the articulation of objectives would have helped to improve the value for money of the programme** – in particular by bringing more explicit focus on the need to ensure that the programme benefits those without any access whatsoever, and in helping to make a more explicit link from the programme back to the classroom.
7. Becta considered that programme objectives couched in terms of households which did not already have home access would be difficult to fulfil, as this would entail incorporating an eligibility criterion which would not be verifiable in practice. Furthermore, they argued that there are still significant benefits for households which already had the internet at home, as access to the existing computer may previously have been rather limited for learners in large families and/or in households where the existing equipment was relatively old. We note, however, that inclusion of such a criterion would have helped to improve the programme's value for money (by deterring at least some households which already had functional home access).

## Inputs and activities

8. A total of **£194 million was spent on the Home Access Programme** – substantially less than the £300 million originally envisaged.
9. The programme was successful in attracting its target number of beneficiaries, approving applications and issuing grants in a speedy and efficient fashion to eligible households<sup>1</sup>. The programme adopted a ‘consumer’ model that was unique compared to its predecessor schemes, and was viewed positively by stakeholders; **many local authorities welcomed the approach as it reduced the administrative burden on them.**
10. The **supplier accreditation** process was seen as rigorous and fair. **Fraud was minimal**, despite early concerns – largely thanks to the payment card mechanism, which also helped minimise any stigma for beneficiaries. Becta **programme management** was viewed as effective; and stakeholders reported a positive experience in their engagement with Becta during the programme.
11. However, certain aspects of the programme did not go as well as was expected. Procurement of **Assistive Technology** suppliers was protracted, causing delays in issuing grants to this group of beneficiaries. Although the programme succeeded in achieving its intended volumes, many stakeholders perceived there to be **insufficient targeted marketing to harder-to-reach groups**. Authorities that chose the **aggregation** model reported a significant time commitment on their part, with some complaining of issues with the Home Access Grant Administration Service process; in the end only a small proportion of the grants were distributed through the aggregation model.
12. The **application documents and marketing materials were in the English language only**, a significant issue given that a fifth of eligible pupils would have been from families which do not have English as their first language. Schools organised support sessions to help struggling parents, and some local authorities provided translated material themselves (a process that could have been organised more efficiently centrally).
13. The consumer model did not require regular and intensive **engagement with schools**. Nonetheless, there was general consensus among stakeholders and teachers that school engagement is crucial in the success of a programme such as this. The more proactive schools with Home Access beneficiaries targeted and supported the neediest parents, and considered how best to change their pedagogical practices.

## Gross and net outputs

14. The **programme rapidly succeeded in achieving its target number of beneficiaries**. Including the pilot phase, the total number of households benefiting from the programme was 267,244 – approximately 4.5% of England’s six million households with dependent children.
15. The **profile of beneficiaries was largely as expected** – with younger age groups (typically less likely already to have a computer at home) accounting for relatively high proportions of

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<sup>1</sup> In the national roll-out, these were households eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) with a child aged 7 to 14 in state education in England.

approved applications, and a relatively even split by gender (52% male and 48% female). The ethnicity mix was broadly in line with that of the FSM population, but Asian/Asian British households were somewhat under-represented (9.9% of beneficiaries, compared with 13.7% of the FSM Key Stage 4 - KS4 - cohort in 2010), and only 7% of grants were awarded to beneficiaries for whom English is not their first language (though this group accounts for 22% of the FSM population).

16. The programme's **consumer model was very effective in addressing a highly dispersed target group**. In the national roll-out, grants were awarded to learners in a total of 18,984 schools (the vast majority of England's c. 21,000 maintained primary and secondary schools), and half of the beneficiaries do not live in England's 20% most deprived Lower Layer Super Output Areas. Alternative models targeted at schools with high proportions of FSM pupils, or at particularly deprived geographic areas, would have missed many of the low income households that did end up benefiting from the programme.
17. However, the 'leakage' was high – **most (55%) of beneficiary households already had both a computer and internet at home**, before they received the Home Access grant.
18. This does not imply, though, that there were no educational benefits associated with the package provided to households which already had a computer and the internet – a large majority of these (72%) felt that the Home Access device was 'much better' than the computer they used previously.
19. Amongst the group that didn't previously have it, we estimate that programme brought forward home access by about 2.8 years on average. For every 1 direct beneficiary household, we estimate that a further 0.36 households will have purchased home access for the first time, at least partly as a result of hearing about the programme.
20. Across the pilot and the national roll-out, **the overall net effect of the programme was to accelerate home access in a total of 163,000 households by a total of about 456,000 household-years**.

## Outcomes and impact

21. We found a number of positive indications that the programme is leading to improved outcomes in terms of **enhanced use of home access for education**. Beneficiary learners are on average using a computer 10.1 hours per week at home, of which 4.7 hours are on learning-related activities. There was strong agreement amongst interviewed children that having the Home Access computer is making learning more interesting, lets them use a computer much more often to help them learn, and is helping them to do better at school. In the case studies we found that some pupils reported such benefits being restricted though – sometimes due to technical difficulties with their package (primarily slow or inconsistent mobile broadband connectivity) and sometimes because of the set homework not involving the use of a computer.
22. There were also positive signs that the programme had contributed to **improved Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills and confidence** for learners, with strong agreement amongst the surveyed children that their computer skills have got a lot better

because they now have the Home Access computer. Teachers in most of our case study schools cited recent improvements in ICT skills and confidence amongst pupils – although they were not necessarily able to attribute these improvements solely to the programme.

23. The case studies also provided evidence of the programme enhancing **opportunities for personal learning**. Pupils value the flexibility a home computer provides, in allowing them to do their homework or online research at home, rather than having to come into school early or stay late after school. Teachers in some schools observed that pupils were taking a more active role in their learning, by doing additional research at home, or using external internet resources to support revision.
24. Furthermore, it was clear that there are benefits in terms of **enhanced attitudes to technology amongst parents**. The vast majority (89%) of interviewed parents agreed that the Home Access computer is something the whole family can use, and most (57%) agreed that they were themselves more interested in using the internet than they were before they got the Home Access computer. This appears to have contributed to a high proportion of families continuing to pay for broadband access: only 9% of households whose free internet period had finished said that they didn't still have broadband connectivity.
25. Teachers in the majority of case study schools found it difficult to attribute any improvements in **learner motivation and behaviour** to the programme, mainly since they were often unsure as to which of their pupils had benefited. However, in general the use of ICT in learning is perceived to have a positive difference on motivation, with several pupils commenting that using the computers had made their work more interesting or fun.
26. The evidence regarding the effect of the programme on the **use of learning platforms** is quite mixed, and it is difficult to determine what effects can be attributed to the programme, as opposed to what would have happened anyway. More parents are now logging on to school resources than was the case in our 2009 baseline survey; but amongst the beneficiary learners, more children disagreed than agreed that they are logging on to their school's learning platform more often since getting the Home Access computer. In our case studies we didn't find any notable impact of the programme on the school's propensity to use their learning platform.
27. The findings regarding the effect on **parental engagement with their children's education** are also somewhat mixed. In the majority of case study schools, home access was not seen to have increased parental engagement, though teachers did acknowledge that email gave parents an additional means of engaging with the school outside parents' evenings or telephone calls. Lack of parental ICT skills, and understanding of what constitutes an appropriate use of the computer at home, was highlighted as a concern by some teachers.
28. It appears that the potential **adverse outcomes** of the programme were largely avoided – although there is a minority for whom the availability of home access (or easier access to a computer at home) is potentially displacing other valuable activities to an excessive extent.
29. In terms of **impact on reducing the digital divide**, we estimate that the programme accounted for a net increase in home access of approximately 167,000 households – equivalent to about 2.8% of England's households with dependent children. Data from Ipsos

MORI's Technology Tracker survey suggests that internet access amongst households with children increased by eight percentage points in the course of 2010, and we reckon that the programme accounted for about a third of this increase. **We estimate that home access penetration levels for households with learners in the 5 to 19 age group are now likely to be in the order of 95%, and still rising.**

30. It is as yet too early to judge the **educational attainment** impacts associated with the programme. However, encouragingly, FSM children's average attainment at KS4 appears to have increased sharply in the last year in the two pilot areas (where pupils received packages in 2009). Furthermore, the national attainment gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils has reduced substantially in the last two years – which is consistent with the hypothesis that 2008's sharp increase in internet penetration rates in low income households with children has helped to lead to improvements in educational attainment for these children.
31. While it was also too early to tell the extent of enhanced **parental engagement with their own skills development**, given that the Home Access package had only been received a matter of months before the interviews, the parents were generally positive about the potential benefits for themselves, with 78% agreeing that having home access will help them develop new skills, and 70% agreeing that it will help them find employment opportunities.

### Value for money

32. Our view is that the programme has been **effective** in achieving most of its intended targets, outcomes and impacts – although the programme would have been still more effective in achieving its overall aim (to move towards ubiquitous access for learners aged 5 to 19) if leakage had been lower, with the available resources more tightly focused on reaching those who didn't have any home access.
33. In terms of its '**economy**', we judge that this has been a relatively expensive programme to design and deliver – with an overall average expenditure of £727 per beneficiary household, of which £165 was on non-grant costs. However, this needs to be put into the context of the high risks and demanding timescales associated with the programme, complexities around tailoring packages to learners with special educational needs, and the fact that the programme was brought to a halt sooner than was originally anticipated.
34. Regarding its **efficiency**, on the basis of the business case model developed for the programme by PricewaterhouseCoopers (using updated assumptions for leakage and deadweight informed by this evaluation) it would appear that the projected benefits do outweigh the costs, with a positive Net Present Value of +£768 million – primarily through the model's anticipated impact of the programme in improving educational attainment, and hence enhancing the lifetime earnings potential of beneficiaries.

## Recommendations

35. In the light of our evaluation, we offer the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 1. The Department for Education should **consider how the operational learning from this major intervention should be applied in future programmes and projects.**
- Recommendation 2. The Department for Education should work with partners - including local authorities, the National Association of Head Teachers, the Association of School and College Leaders, the e-Learning Foundation, and Ofsted – to **develop mechanisms that encourage schools to obtain information on the extent of home access for their pupils, and to exploit better in their pedagogy the existence of near-ubiquitous home access.**
- Recommendation 3. Race Online 2012 should **consider the potential for a further promotional push specifically on the benefits of getting learners online at home, in the run-up to Christmas 2011.**
- Recommendation 4. After Christmas 2011, local authorities and schools should **review the extent to which there remains a gap in ubiquitous home access for learners, and explore local solutions** for addressing those families left without a computer and internet at home.
- Recommendation 5. The Department for Education should **further explore the relationship between home access and educational attainment.**

# 1: Introduction

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## Background

- 1.1 The previous administration's vision for Home Access was "to ensure that all pupils aged 5 to 19 in state maintained education in England have the opportunity to have access to computers and internet connectivity for education...at home."
- 1.2 In July 2008, the Home Access Taskforce report identified evidence of market failure, and made the case for government intervention in providing home access to technology, particularly to lower income families with children. The Taskforce proposed that a programme of intervention should address three key strands of activity:
  - maximising the benefits of home access to all
  - increasing the perceived value by parents
  - removing the barriers of cost for families with low incomes.
- 1.3 Following these recommendations, the Government announced in September 2008 the Home Access Programme – positioned as a £300 million initiative, with Becta as the delivery agency. This programme was to allow for eligible families to apply for a grant to purchase a Home Access package from an accredited supplier.
- 1.4 The programme was piloted in Oldham and Suffolk in 2009, and was rolled out nationally in late 2009. The national roll-out of the programme was targeted at pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) aged 7-14 years in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 only, compared to the original target group aged 5-19 years during the pilot phase<sup>2</sup>. The delivery model involved awarding grants to eligible families by means of a single pre-loaded card, which could be used to purchase a computer with one year's connectivity from approved suppliers.
- 1.5 In December 2008, Becta commissioned SQW – with Ipsos MORI and London Knowledge Lab - to conduct a longitudinal evaluation of the programme over the period 2009 to 2011. The evaluation was to be formative, in that it would identify lessons from the pilot phase in order to help shape the design of the national roll-out, and summative, in that it would be seeking to establish the net impacts of the intervention.
- 1.6 The overall evaluation research questions were as follows:
  - Has the programme succeeded in providing home access to technology for the target group? What has been the net effect of the programme (over and above what would have happened anyway)?

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<sup>2</sup> Becta and the Department for Education (DfE) had originally envisaged that the other age groups would be targeted with additional funding beyond the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period. However, following the public expenditure cuts and the announcement of Becta's closure, it was decided that the programme would cease to operate beyond March 2011.



- Is there a measurable increase in the proportion of families within the target group who use Information and Communications technology (ICT) to support their learning? How does this proportion compare with that in more wealthy socio-economic groups?
- Is there a measurable increase in the proportion of families within the target group whose perception of the value of having ICT at home to support learning has increased?
- Does home access to technology lead to the intended benefits, including greater use of home ICT for educational purposes, a more personalised education, enhanced motivation and skills, and increased educational attainment?
- Is the programme effective and efficient in delivering home access to the target group?

## This report

- 1.7 This document is the final report of our evaluation of the Home Access Programme. It includes findings from: beneficiary surveys, a series of case studies, stakeholder consultations, and analysis of monitoring and secondary data. Evaluation research methods are explained in more detail in section 2.
- 1.8 The report qualitatively assesses programme impact to date, using evidence from school-based case studies, and provides quantitative analysis of the extent to which it has achieved its intended outputs, outcomes and impacts, using survey data. Secondary data provides an updated national context on the take up of home access to connectivity. We have also utilised Becta's programme monitoring data to assess various aspects of programme activities, and also to profile programme beneficiaries.
- 1.9 The structure of the report is as follows:
- section 2 sets out the programme logic model and explains our evaluation methodology further
  - section 3 summarises our assessment of the programme rationale and objectives
  - section 4 presents our assessment of inputs and activities
  - section 5 sets out an assessment of gross and net outputs
  - section 6 is our assessment of outcomes and impacts
  - section 7 summarises our assessment of value for money in the programme
  - section 8 presents our conclusions and recommendations.
- 1.10 There are three annexes:
- Annex A provides details of stakeholders that have been consulted, and profiles of the case study schools

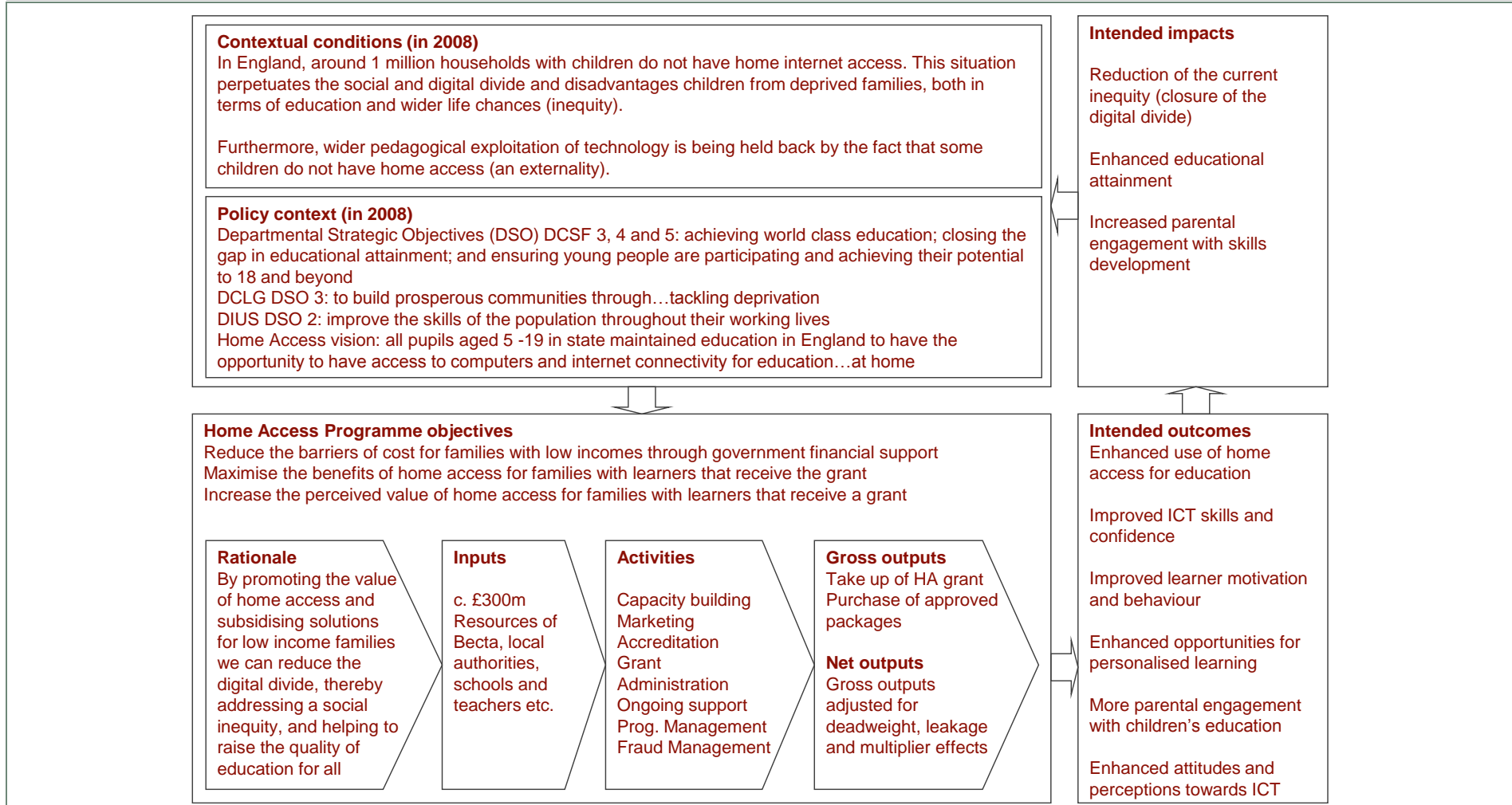
- Annex B sets out our analysis of the contextual conditions for the programme
- Annex C presents summary reports for each of the 15 case studies.

## 2: Programme logic model and evaluation methodology

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- 2.1 The purpose of logic modelling is to establish and challenge the main linkages between a programme's rationale, activities and effects. In summary, the framework explores the relationships between the following factors:
- **contextual conditions** and **policy context** – the problems that are being addressed, and the relevant over-arching policy drivers
  - programme **rationale** and **objectives** – the 'theory of change' as to why government intervention is justified, and the overall aims of the programme
  - **inputs** – resources that go into a programme
  - **activities** – the specific programme tasks undertaken using the inputs
  - **outputs** – the quantifiable results of the programme's activities, distinguishing between 'gross outputs' and 'net outputs' (those outputs in the target group which can be attributed directly to the programme activities and are in addition to those that would have occurred anyway, in the absence of the programme)
  - **outcomes** – behavioural changes and benefits for the target groups as a direct result of the net outputs
  - **impact** – the long-term changes in the contextual conditions that the programme seeks to address, resulting from the beneficiary outcomes.
- 2.2 Figure 2-1 below presents a summary of the logic model for the Home Access Programme, based on our review of the programme documentation and our discussions with stakeholders.
- 2.3 This logic model was tested throughout the evaluation, and formed the basis for the design of key evaluation methods. This helped to explore any potential lack of alignment between certain parts of the logic model – for example, between the rationale and the stated programme objectives, or between the rationale and the intended outputs, or between the activities and the intended outcomes. Where this was the case, we highlighted any such findings to the programme team, as a key part of our formative evaluation during the early stages of the research.
- 2.4 In presenting the findings of this evaluation, we have structured our report to set out our assessment of the evidence for each of the key components of the logic model.

Figure 2-1: Summary logic model (as at programme inception, in 2008)



Source: SOW, based on review of programme documentation. Note that department names in this diagram refer to those current at the inception of the Home Access Programme. Also note that this diagram reflects the £300 million originally envisaged to be spent, rather than the £194 million actually incurred.

## Evaluation methodology

- 2.5 Our methodology for the Home Access evaluation has comprised two principal aspects:
- a *formative or process evaluation* of the programme pilot in Oldham and Suffolk – this analysed the programme rationale and objectives, and identified a number of lessons from the pilot phase to inform the design of national roll-out activities
  - a *summative or impact evaluation*, to assess the net impact of the full programme.
- 2.6 The evaluation activity was in two phases: Phase 1 (January 2009 to December 2009) and Phase 2 (September 2010 to March 2011).
- 2.7 Table 2-1 summarises the approach and the core methodologies that were used in the evaluation.

Table 2-1: Summary of evaluation research methods

Research method	Evaluation phase	Purpose and details
Evaluation framework development	Phase 1	The evaluation framework was articulated in SQW's scoping report to Becta and outlined what would be assessed, how it would be assessed in terms of research methods, and the key indicators that would inform our assessment.
Stakeholder consultations	Phase 1, 2	26 in Phase 1 and 30 in Phase 2  Phase 1 consultations were aimed at testing the programme rationale and objectives, framing the key research questions to inform design of research tools, and identifying lessons learned from the pilot  Phase 2 consultations were aimed at gathering intelligence about delivery and implementation of the national roll-out. Both phases included consultations with local authorities, suppliers and wider stakeholders, including members of the Home Access Programme Board.
Research and policy reviews	Phase 1	The purpose of the literature review was to contribute to evaluation design by identifying the key benefits that the evaluation needs to focus on, and topics and hypotheses for testing in research tools.
National and local indicator data review	Phase 1	The review of secondary data sources linked to indicators of interest for the evaluation was aimed at identifying the core datasets for constructing a baseline and allow for trend analysis to contribute to the understanding of shifts in desired outputs and outcomes (take up, internet penetration, educational outcomes) during the course of the programme.
National and local indicator data analysis	Phase 1 and 2	This analysis took the core datasets identified above and collated and analysed data accordingly, to set up a baseline in Phase 1 and conduct trend analysis in Phase 2. Annex B presents the findings of the final analysis of contextual conditions using data from a number of sources.
Survey of beneficiaries and non beneficiaries in pilot areas of Oldham and Suffolk	Phase 1	The aim of the pilot area survey was to obtain perceptions of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the pilot, with a particular emphasis on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the pilot design, processes and operations. Interviews were with parents/carers by telephone (Ipsos MORI), using a questionnaire agreed by Becta.

Research method	Evaluation phase	Purpose and details
		A survey of 400 households in Oldham and Suffolk was undertaken during May and June 2009, half with a named sample of known applicants and half with a random sample in areas of the two local authorities within England's 20% most deprived.
A national household survey – baseline and post intervention “NS wave 1” and “NS wave 2”	Phase 1, 2	Wave 1 = 808; Wave 2 = 295 <sup>3</sup>  The survey use a before-after methodology, with Phase 1 providing a baseline and Phase 2 providing a post-intervention picture. The survey was designed to provide quantitative data on the programme's outputs, outcomes and impacts. It used an in-home, interviewer-administered survey, involving two interviews per household – one parent/carer and one child, for up to 30 minutes each.  Wave 1 comprised face to face interviews with 808 households (parent/carer and child) across England in summer 2009, to provide a 'pre-treatment' baseline for the evaluation. The sample was drawn from an extract of the National Pupil Database, for households with addresses within England's 20% most deprived Lower Layer Super Output Areas.  Wave 2 comprised interviews in December 2010/January 2011 with a sample of 229 known beneficiary households drawn from Becta's monitoring data extract, plus a longitudinal sample of 66 households that were interviewed and did not have home access in wave 1.
An effective targeting survey in two waves “ETS wave 1” and “ETS wave 2”	Phase 2	Wave 1 = 350; wave 2 = 350  This 15 minute telephone survey with known beneficiary parents was an additional piece of work commissioned by Becta, to track levels of leakage and deadweight in the national roll-out, given the findings of the pilot evaluation.  ETS wave 1 was conducted in March 2010; ETS wave 2 took place in September 2010
Case studies	Phase 1, 2	Phase 1 = 7; Phase 2 = 15  The aim of the case studies was to gain qualitative insights into people's experience of the Home Access Programme. Where the survey was much looking at 'what', 'how many', etc., the case studies looked at 'how' and 'why'. A case was a school. Interviews were held with groups of children and with teachers and the ICT co-ordinator at the school.  Phase 1 case studies took place in the pilot areas of Oldham and Suffolk.  Phase 2 case studies were conducted in schools across England.  The case studies were selected to give a mix of schools, based on a number of criteria including levels of take up of the Home Access Programme grant, school type, Index of Multiple Deprivation and/or incidence of free school meals eligibility.
Monitoring data analysis	Phase 1, Phase 2	Financial and beneficiary monitoring data collated by the programme was used to provide evidence on programme inputs, activities, processes and key outcomes. It provided evidence on a number of indicators such as the numbers and characteristics of beneficiary households, types of packages and devices taken up, and the efficiency of the application process. It also provided financial data for our value for money assessment.  We analysed beneficiary monitoring data collated for the

<sup>3</sup> The original SQW/Ipsos MORI evaluation proposal for the NS wave 2 survey was to undertake similar number of interviews as NS wave 1. However, in the light of public expenditure cuts and the announcement of Becta's closure, SQW and Ipsos MORI were asked to reduce the scope and scale of the second wave.

Research method	Evaluation phase	Purpose and details
		pilot in Oldham and Suffolk. We also gained access to, and analysed two extracts of the national roll-out monitoring data collated by Capita.
Data linking – National Pupil database and Home Access Programme beneficiaries	Phase 2	<p>We undertook an exploratory analysis of beneficiaries' attainment using information from the National Pupil Database (NPD).</p> <p>The Department for Education provided NPD attainment information for the 290 pupils who benefited from the pilot in Oldham in 2009 and took their Key Stage 4 (GCSEs and equivalent) in 2010. SQW undertook exploratory analysis of the data to compare patterns in attainment amongst Home Access Programme beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in Oldham.</p>

Source: SQW

- 2.8 The mixed method approach outlined above has allowed us to combine the evidence from quantitative survey methods and administrative data with qualitative case studies, in order to validate the emerging findings from the research and ensure their reliability and credibility.
- 2.9 The remaining sections of this report present our assessment of each key component of the logic model, incorporating evidence from these various research methods.

## 3: Assessment of rationale and objectives

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- 3.1 In this section, we examine the programme's rationale and objectives, to consider whether the rationale for intervention was valid, and whether the programme's objectives were appropriate.

### Summary of key messages

#### Programme rationale and objectives

In our evaluation of the pilot phase of the programme we found that, in retrospect, the Home Access Taskforce report was published in the middle of the biggest up-turn in household internet penetration for several years. **The assumption that a plateau in internet penetration would persist, and that the digital divide (in terms of physical access) was not being narrowed, may not have been the case after all.**

However, we suggested that there **did remain a sound case for intervention**, given the acceleration of educational benefits, and given the cost barriers that still exist for the lowest income groups, provided that a) it was focused on benefiting those that previously did not have a computer and/or connectivity at home, and b) it was tightly coupled to initiatives to realise the pedagogical and parental engagement benefits of universal home access for learners.

The programme did subsequently re-articulate its headline target in terms of households rather than learners – though without including any reference to whether those households already had functional home access.

Our findings for the national roll-out suggest that the **changes previously proposed (in the interim evaluation report) to the articulation of objectives would have helped to improve the value for money of the programme** – in particular by bringing more explicit focus on the need to ensure that the programme benefits those without any access whatsoever, and in helping to make a more explicit link from the programme back to the classroom.

Becta considered that programme objectives couched in terms of households which did not already have home access would be difficult to fulfil, as this would entail incorporating an eligibility criterion which would not be verifiable in practice. Furthermore, they argued that there are still significant benefits for households which already had the internet at home, as access to the existing computer may previously have been rather limited for learners in large families and/or in households where the existing equipment was relatively old. We note, however, that inclusion of such a criterion would have helped to improve the programme's value for money (by deterring at least some households which already had functional home access).



## Stated rationale and objectives

- 3.2 The rationale for intervention was set out in the Home Access Taskforce report from July 2008:

*Strong evidence exists for the potential educational, economic and wider benefits of home access to technology. Despite this growing body of evidence, approximately 35 per cent of families still do not have access to the internet and the digital divide is not being narrowed. It is clear that cost is a major barrier to access and, whilst costs of home access are falling, they will not do so quickly enough to prevent a large number of low-income families from being excluded from the educational and wider benefits of home access. This exclusion of low-income families results in an inequitable exploitation of home access and means that it is impossible for all learners and their families to experience these educational benefits without some intervention.*

*The Taskforce has identified evidence of market failure and is convinced there is a compelling business case for Government investment in support of widening opportunities to home access. The educational benefits alone justify such investment, but there will also be significant personal, social and financial benefits from any programme.*

- 3.3 We would summarise the **rationale** as follows:

- By promoting the value of home access and subsidising solutions for low income families we can reduce the digital divide, thereby helping to address a social inequity, and providing opportunities for schools/colleges and local authorities to raise the quality of education for all.

- 3.4 The Home Access Programme's intended contribution to the Government's vision of universal home access for learners was set out as a combination of three aims, four objectives and six 'benefit-recognition events':

- Aims:
  - To reduce the barriers of cost to families with low incomes, through government financial support
  - To maximise the benefits of home access to all eligible families with learners that receive the grant
  - To increase the perceived value of ICT for learning at home to all eligible families with learners that receive the grant.
- Objectives:
  - To increase the attainment of pupils
  - To provide wider opportunities for pupils to engage in formal and informal learning
  - To increase parental engagement with schools and colleges

- To increase awareness and enable improvements in economic and social benefits of having access to ICT at home.
  - Benefit-recognition events:
    - Decrease in the technology gap between the varying income groups
    - Special needs learners gain access to software or assistive technology, appropriate to their needs
    - Improved learning of eligible pupils
    - Increased parental involvement in child's learning
    - Increased number of parents using technology for learning for themselves
    - Improved economic status of eligible families, caused by use of technology.
- 3.5 Becta had begun work on rationalising programme objectives and aims in early 2010. However, with the announcement of Becta's closure in May 2010, and the need to achieve cost savings, it became clear that the additional work needed to maximise the benefits of home access for learners and families would not take place. On that basis, Becta's revised remit letter from the DfE focused the programme on its first aim: *to reduce the barriers of cost to families with low incomes, through government financial support.*
- 3.6 The Chief Executive of Becta (Senior Responsible Officer for the Home Access Programme) wrote to the Permanent Secretary for DfE, confirming the focus for the work for the remainder of the 2010/11 financial year, and alerting the Department to issues around how it would reap the benefits from the programme.
- 3.7 The original headline programme target was for 330,000 learners aged 5-19 years to receive financial support for an approved Home Access package by March 2011. However, for the national roll-out, the programme targeted learners aged 7-14 years only (Key Stages 2 and 3) as it was hoped that other age groups could be targeted once the programme was extended beyond March 2011. The target was subsequently reduced to 258,000 households.
- 3.8 It is important to note that although the *programme* aims, objectives and benefit-recognition events were focused on families eligible for the Home Access Programme grant, stakeholders thought that the evaluation should also gather evidence in the spirit of the wider *policy objectives* addressed by the Home Access Taskforce. As such, the Home Access Programme ought to be evaluated against its brief but within the context of contributing towards the vision of universal home access and its associated intended benefits for all learners and their families.

## Assessment of the rationale and objectives

- 3.9 In retrospect, it is clear from subsequent data that the Home Access Taskforce report was published in the middle of the biggest up-turn in household internet penetration for several years. The assumption that a plateau in internet penetration would persist, and that the digital

divide (in terms of physical access) was not being narrowed, may not have been the case after all.<sup>4</sup>

- 3.10 Was there still a sound rationale for intervention, then, in the light of recent market developments? Our research for the evaluation of the pilot phase suggested that there *did* remain a sound case, given the acceleration of educational benefits, and given the cost barriers that still exist for the lowest income groups, *provided that*:
- the national roll-out is designed to minimise the amount of ‘leakage’ (into households that already have a computer and internet access) and ‘deadweight’ (where public funding is used to buy a computer and internet access that the beneficiaries would have purchased with their own money)
  - the programme is tightly coupled to initiatives to realise the pedagogical and parental engagement benefits of universal home access for learners – for the majority who already have home access, as much as for the minority obtaining home access for the first time via this scheme.
- 3.11 The programme aims, objectives and benefit-recognition events noted above were couched in terms of the benefits to the learners and families that receive the Home Access grant – the reasoning being that wider benefits (cited in the Taskforce report) are not within the control of the programme. However, our evaluation of the pilot phase suggested that an additional explicit objective should be considered around stimulating an acceleration in the rate of pedagogical exploitation of home access – either for the programme or for related Becta activities.
- 3.12 Furthermore, we recommended that the headline programme target should be re-articulated in terms of the number of *households* with learners that are to be connected to the internet (via a computer) *which did not previously have functional home access*. The leakage associated with the pilot was high, and we suggested that the national roll-out must be very firmly focused on the households that are the hardest to reach and that do not (and will not) otherwise have home access.
- 3.13 Finally, we note that the three aims, four objectives and six benefit-recognition events described above were developed as the programme matured. Taken together, the aims, objectives and benefit-recognition events were a somewhat complicated articulation of what the programme intended to achieve, and the mapping from aims to objectives to benefit-recognition events was not straightforward. Our evaluation of the pilot phase suggested that rationalising and simplifying the aims, objectives and benefit-recognition events into a single set of programme objectives with explicit links back to the rationale for intervention articulated in the Home Access Taskforce report, would help to ensure internal and external clarity on what the programme is formally intended to achieve.

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<sup>4</sup> Also, the statement within the rationale for intervention, set out in the Home Access Taskforce report, that 35 per cent of families still do not have access to the internet at home, requires clarification: ‘households’ would have been more accurate than ‘families’ (many of the 35 per cent are elderly people with no children at home); in early 2008, approximately 17 per cent of England’s households with children (approximately 1 million households) lacked a computer and internet access, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

- 3.14 The programme did subsequently re-articulate its headline target in terms of households rather than learners – though this did not include reference to whether those households already had functional home access.
- 3.15 Our findings for the national roll-out suggest that the changes previously proposed (in the interim evaluation report, from the pilot phase) to the articulation of objectives would have helped to improve the value for money of the programme – in particular by bringing more explicit focus on the need to minimise leakage (which turned out to be higher in the national roll-out than in the pilot), and in helping to make a more explicit link from the programme back to the classroom.
- 3.16 Becta considered that programme objectives couched in terms of households which did not already have home access would be difficult to fulfil, as this would entail incorporating an eligibility criterion which would not be verifiable in practice. Furthermore, they argued that there are still significant benefits for households which already had the internet at home, as access to the existing computer may previously have been rather limited for learners in large families and/or in households where the existing equipment was relatively old. We note, however, that inclusion of such a criterion would have helped to improve the programme's value for money (by deterring at least some households which already had functional home access).

## 4: Assessment of inputs and activities

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- 4.1 In this section, we describe programme inputs and the various activities undertaken by Becta and its partners, and examine the effectiveness with which these activities were delivered.

### Summary of key messages

#### Programme inputs and activities

A total of **£194 million** was spent on the Home Access Programme – substantially less than the £300 million originally envisaged.

The programme was **successful in attracting its target number of beneficiaries**, approving applications and issuing grants in a speedy and efficient fashion to eligible households. The programme adopted a ‘consumer’ model that was unique compared to its predecessor schemes, and was viewed positively by stakeholders; **many local authorities welcomed the approach as it reduced the administrative burden on them**.

The **supplier accreditation** process was seen as rigorous and fair. **Fraud was minimal**, despite early concerns – largely thanks to the payment card mechanism, which also helped minimise any stigma for beneficiaries. Becta **programme management** was viewed as effective; and stakeholders reported a positive experience in their engagement with Becta during the programme.

However, certain aspects of the programme did not go as well as was expected. Procurement of **Assistive Technology** suppliers was protracted, causing delays in issuing grants to this group of beneficiaries. Although the programme succeeded in achieving its intended volumes, many stakeholders perceived there to be **insufficient targeted marketing to harder-to-reach groups**. Authorities that chose the **aggregation** model reported a significant time commitment on their part, with some complaining of issues with the Home Access Grant Administration Service process; in the end only a small proportion of the grants were distributed through the aggregation model.

The **application documents and marketing materials were in the English language only**, a significant issue given that a fifth of eligible pupils would have been from families which do not have English as their first language. Schools organised support sessions to help struggling parents, and some local authorities provided translated material themselves (a process that could have been organised more efficiently centrally).

The consumer model did not require regular and intensive **engagement with schools**. Nonetheless, there was general consensus among stakeholders and teachers that school engagement is crucial in the success of a programme such as this. The more proactive schools with Home Access beneficiaries targeted and supported the neediest parents, and considered how best to change their pedagogical practices.

## The delivery model

- 4.2 The Home Access Programme adopted a delivery model that involved awarding grants to eligible families via a pre-loaded grant card that could be redeemed for computer/connectivity packages specified by Becta, and offered by a number of approved suppliers. This ‘consumer’ model differed from predecessor schemes such as Computers for Pupils which provided funding to local authorities and schools to provide equipment, support and advice to families.
- 4.3 However, an aggregation scheme was also offered as an option to local authorities and schools, alongside the main consumer model. Participating schools and local authorities were responsible for the promotion of the aggregation scheme to their families, distributing application forms, and then the subsequent ordering of compliant packages on behalf of those who decided to take part.
- 4.4 A majority of grants in the programme were issued via the consumer model. Almost all stakeholders, including schools, local authorities and suppliers were positive towards this model, and were of the view that it worked extremely well in terms of empowering families to exercise choice and own their home access equipment, which was not necessarily the case in earlier schemes. Furthermore, it ensured that local authorities were not burdened with delivery, allowing them to focus on promoting the scheme in their local areas.

## Programme inputs

- 4.5 A total of £194 million was spent on the Home Access Programme (including the pilot phase, but *excluding* the separate Home Access for Targeted Groups activity with local authorities), as summarised in the table below.

Table 4-1: Summary of programme expenditure (in £000s)

Type of expenditure	Actual 2008/09	Actual 2009/10	Forecast 2010/11	Total
Revenue	8,553	17,975	16,423	42,931
Capital	4,300	49,300	97,691	151,291
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,833</b>	<b>67,275</b>	<b>114,114</b>	<b>194,222</b>

Source: Becta, February 2011

### Unit costs

- 4.6 A total of 258,253 grants were redeemed under the national roll-out, which implies an average cost of approximately £727 per beneficiary household, if all programme costs are considered (including the costs of the pilot, and adding in the 8,991 beneficiary households from the pilot).
- 4.7 As shown in the table below, the overall unit costs were skewed somewhat by the relatively high expenditures associated with the pilot and with providing assistive technology. Excluding these elements, the unit costs of the national roll-out were approximately £657 per beneficiary household.

Table 4-2: A breakdown of the units for different elements of the programme

	Total revenue spend (£000s)	Total capital spend (£000s)	Total spend (£000s)	Number of beneficiary households	Cost per beneficiary household (£)
Pilot	6,044	7,100	13,144	8,991	1,462
National roll-out (excl assistive technology)	33,182	128,400	161,582	245,831	657
Assistive technology	3,704	14,191	17,895	12,422	1,441
<b>Entire programme</b>	<b>42,931</b>	<b>151,291</b>	<b>194,222</b>	<b>267,244</b>	<b>727</b>

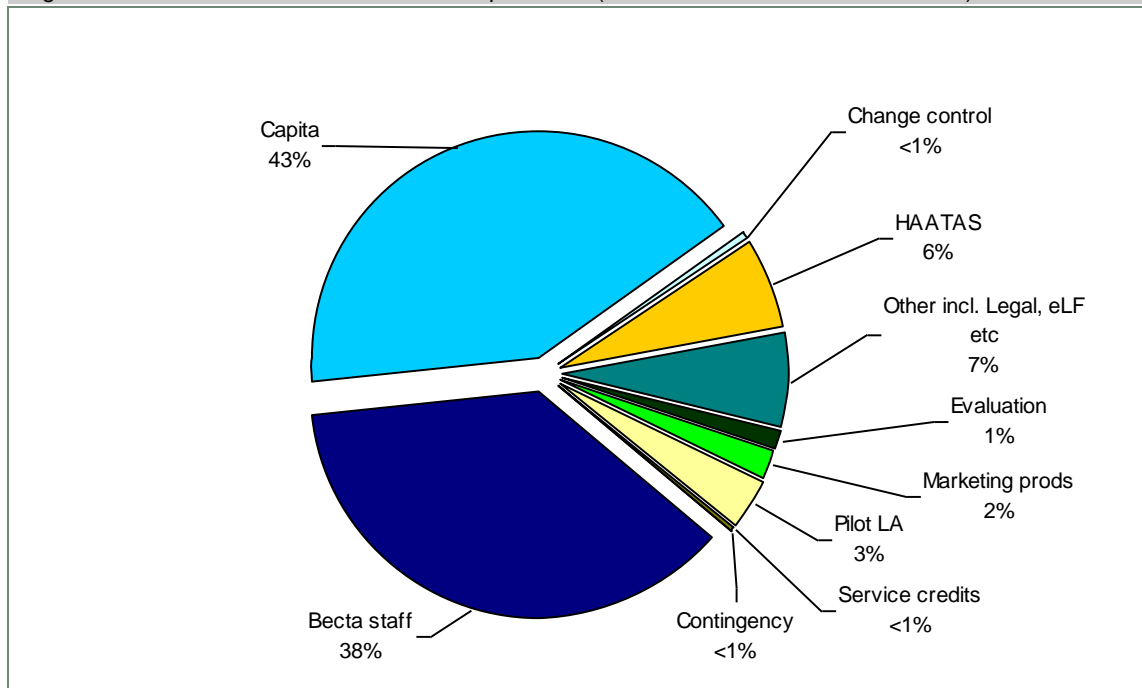
Source: Becta monitoring data March 2011, and financial data, February 2011

### Breakdown of programme expenditure

#### Breakdown of revenue expenditure

4.8 Figure 4-1 provides a breakdown of the total revenue expenditure (actual for 2008/09 and 2009/10, and forecast for 2010/11) amounting to nearly £43 million over the life of the programme. Spend was dominated by two main categories - 43% on the Home Access Grant Administration Service (HAGAS), and 38% on Becta staff costs. The HAGAS service costs included costs for operating the call centre, processing and validating applications, and supply of the payment card, as well as marketing and demand generation activities. Becta staff costs included programme management, procurement of HAGAS and suppliers, contract and supplier management, fraud management and monitoring, and central support services.

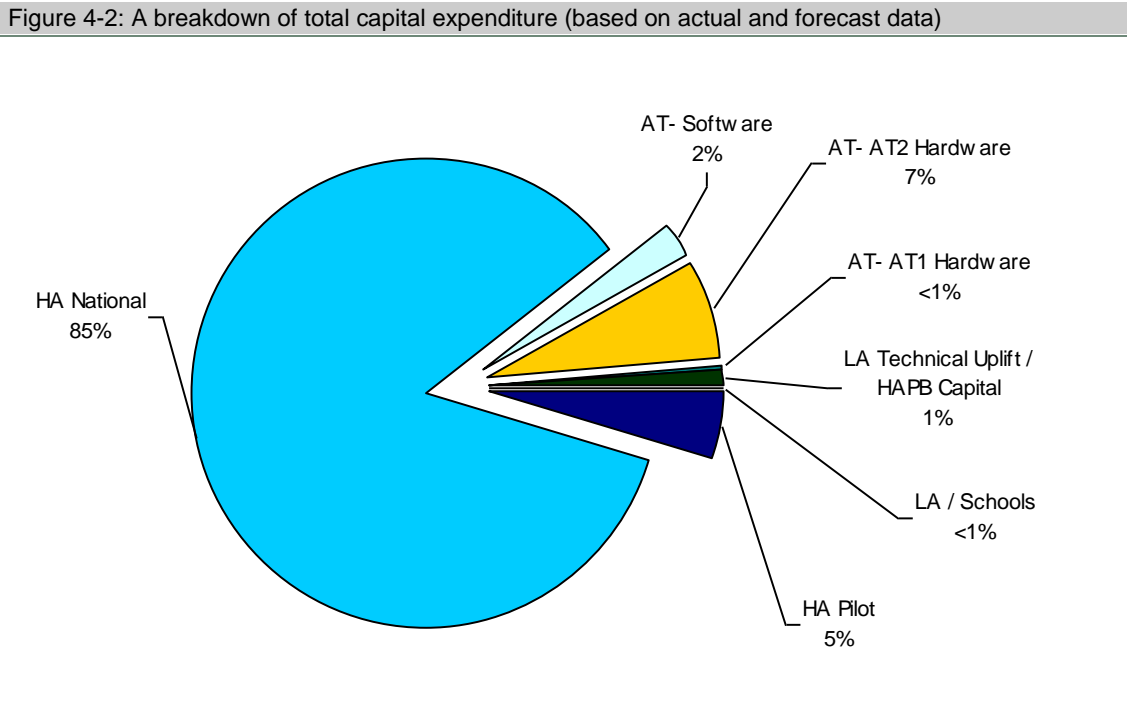
Figure 4-1: A breakdown of total revenue expenditure (based on actual and forecast data)



Source: Becta, February 2011. HAATAS = Home Access Assistive Technology Administration Service

*Breakdown of capital expenditure*

4.9 Figure 4-2 provides a breakdown of the £151 million capital expenditure – actual for 2008/09 and 2009/10, and forecast for 2010/11. Unsurprisingly, a large majority (85%, £128.4 million) of total capital expenditure was spent on the grants issued in the national roll-out. Assistive technology hardware accounted for a further 7% (£10.46 million) of the total capital costs.



Source: Becta, February 2011. Note that LA Technical Uplift refers to expenditure on ICT infrastructure within the two pilot local authorities, which was not incurred for the national roll-out. AT1 refers to Assistive Technology that was offered as part of the main package, and AT2 refers to Assistive Technology offered via bespoke solutions.

**Observations from consultations**

- 4.10 All fifteen local authorities that were interviewed as part of this evaluation appeared to have been involved in some way in promoting the programme, albeit in varying degrees. Since no additional funding was provided to local authorities by Becta to promote or deliver the programme, authority staff with responsibilities for ICT and learning tended to undertake Home Access Programme related activities as part of their day to day responsibilities. Although resources used were minimal, some authorities reported significant amounts of time spent by staff to promote the scheme, all of which appeared to have been absorbed by the authorities. Some authorities also indicated that they had been working with the E-Learning Foundation alongside the Home Access Programme to help families get home access.
- 4.11 Local authorities also reported that, although school engagement with the programme was variable, some schools had spent considerable amounts of their own time and resources in promoting the programme and helping families apply for the scheme.
- 4.12 The three local authorities that had adopted the aggregation scheme reported that they had spent significant amounts of time and resource in administering the scheme, although there was no funding made available for this.

























































































































































































































































































































































































































