

DCMS and HM Treasury Digital Communications Infrastructure Strategy consultation response from the British Educational Suppliers Association

The British Educational Suppliers Association, BESA, represents some three-quarters of the UK's educational resources industry including a large number of leading educational technology companies.

The UK's education tech supply sector is renowned for being a world-leader in its innovative design and provision of outstanding educational software and hardware solutions to schools, colleges and universities. BESA has been carrying out annual research into the uptake, size and use of ICT and educational technology products in UK schools for the past twenty years.

BESA would strongly urge that if the Government wishes to help support the UK's educational technology industry to maintain its position as a world leader in developing and providing innovative ICT educational products and services rapid action is needed to expand bandwidth and access to wi-fi in UK schools.

Even more importantly BESA calls on the Government to fast-track any national plans for improved connectivity to focus on schools, colleges and universities first to ensure that our current and future generation of young people do not endure an education without access to the widest possible range of educationally enhancing technologies and curriculum resources.

The following figures are drawn from **BESA's ICT in UK Schools Vol 1: September 2014** and highlight a stark need for speedy investment into the UK's digital communications infrastructure in order to safeguard fair and equitable access to technology for learners and to maintain the UK's strong reputation and history as a world-leader in educational technology and classroom use of ICT.

BESA's ICT in UK Schools research report 2014 surveyed 1,225 schools (727 primary and 498 secondary) across the UK (Scotland, Wales, NI and England).

It found that:

- 60% of ICT leaders indicate being under resourced with wi-fi networking.
- Access to ICT. The number of schools indicating poor access to computers for teachers is declining; however poor access for pupils continues to be an issue, with half of schools (52%) indicating poor access. Internet access for teachers and pupils is also considered poor in a third of primary and a quarter of secondary schools.

"By 2010 there were rapid above trend increases in those feeling well-resourced with wi-fi coverage; however, this position has been short lived. Each year since 2010 the number of schools indicating being well-resourced with wi-fi coverage has declined. The recent BESA tablets and connectivity report revealed the greater demands being made on wireless networks even as schools invest more in the technology.

"As more schools move to laptop and tablet computers the demand for continuous onsite wi-fi access is increasing. In the past schools may have considered

themselves well-resourced with wi-fi if they had access in admin areas, staff rooms and library and resource centres. Such access may now be considered limiting as teachers and pupils need wi-fi access in classrooms. Even with additional investments in provision the number of schools indicating inadequate provision may continue to grow across primary schools, while investments in secondary schools appear to be leading to an improvement in resourcing.”

Other key statistics highlighting the current inadequate ICT provision in UK schools:

Wi-fi connectivity

39% of primaries consider themselves well resourced with wi-fi. 4 percent fewer will be well resourced by 2015. 65% will continue to be under resourced.

41% of secondaries consider themselves to be well resourced with wi-fi. 5% more will be well resourced by 2015. 54 % will continue to be under resourced.

Broadband provision

Primary. 58% consider themselves well resourced down from 64% in 2013. 0% more will be well resourced by 2015. 42% will continue to be under resourced.

Secondary. 65% consider themselves well resourced, the same as in 2013. 4% more will be well resourced by 2015. 31% will continue to be under resourced.

Access to ICT

By 2015 there will remain a significant number of schools that provide poor access to computers for pupil use, even at a time when spending on ICT is increasing. There is a clear demand for more computers than in the past and this is largely due to the introduction of tablet devices. Similarly, while access to digital content is improving as broadband speeds and school wireless connectivity improve, there remains significant pockets of schools where access to content is limited by available technology.

Of all schools the top three rankings cited for ‘not always available or poor access by 2015’ were:

52% poor computer access for pupils

35% of digital content not always available

30% of poor computer access for teachers.

These figures highlight the need for further action by Government to map future usage and digital requirements for schools and other educational institutions at the upper tier of mapped demand to ensure that our pupils and young people have access to world-leading technology and inspirational educational ICT products and resources in our classrooms and universities and the UK does not fall behind its

international competitors in the world skills development market due to poor digital infrastructure planning and provision.

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September 2014.