

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT – Becta Closure

Title

Closure of Becta.

Description of the policy

Becta closed on 31 March 2011. The functions formerly carried out by Becta have been reviewed in detail and some were brought into the Department, into LSIS or elsewhere.

The evidence base

Becta was set up to lead the national drive to ensure the effective and innovative use of technology throughout learning. While Becta has offered a valuable service to schools over the past 9 years in providing universal support for ICT, our judgement is that schools are now in a position to manage much of this themselves. There are however some particular equality issues related to how ICT can increase access for disabled children, and support their attainment. Research shows that: the use of technology can help children with special educational needs (SEN); pupils with dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD; and that ICT helps improve the self esteem and motivation of pupils with SEN. [Sources: - Becta (2009) *The impact of digital technology*. Underwood, J A review of the evidence of the impact of digital technologies on formal education; - Balanskat et al 2006 *A review of studies of ICT impact on schools in, 2006*; - Ofsted 2004 *Report: ICT in schools - the impact of Government initiatives: Primary Schools*. - Becta 2007 Condie, R and Munro, B. *The impact of ICT in schools – a landscape review*; - Ofsted 2009 *The importance of ICT: information and communication technology in primary and secondary schools*; - RNID (2004), *Using information and communications technology (ICT) with deaf pupils*; - Somekh et al 2007 *Evaluation of the Primary Schools Whiteboard Expansion Project*]

This EQUIA looks at how DfE has managed the closure of BECTA in ways that will mitigate disadvantage to disabled learners. Some aspects of BECTA's work, which are significant for disabled learners, and also for learners from minority ethnic communities (because they are over-represented in poverty statistics) have already been completed and thus BECTA's closure will not cause disadvantage to such learners from this direction. For example the Home Access Programme will be successfully completed this year, having issued 12,000 grants for learners with special needs, providing tailored assistive technology packages, including an individual assessment.

What the evidence shows – key facts

We have reviewed key functions formerly carried out by Becta and for which schools will continue to require support, and established where these are significant for equalities. We stated in September that once we had completed the review of which functions would be retained that we would update the EQUIA accordingly. The points below set out the Department's on-going commitment with regard to functions previously fulfilled by Becta.

Accessibility of educational technology and infrastructure.

The Department will continue Becta's commitment to ensure accessibility through its support to schools on procurement arrangements for ICT solutions and services. As we move forward we will endeavour to ensure that accessibility and SEN are specifically featured within the requirements that underpin these arrangements.

Access to technology for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

(i) The Home Access programme, which included provision for pupils with special educational needs, had a planned closure date within 2010-11. The Department is handling programme legacy issues including appropriate management of follow-on casework and transfer of programme records.

(ii) Alternative and augmentative communications (AAC). The SEN and Disability Green Paper, *Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability* explains that, subject to Parliamentary approval, the commissioning of highly specialised services, including AAC, will become a core responsibility of the NHS commissioning board. The Department will also be continuing the Becta grants programme for regional AAC bodies.

SEN e-forums

The Department has transferred hosting of 20 online communities which facilitate peer to peer support and advice to a range of SEN and disability professionals.

E-Safety.

The Department will continue to publish e-Safety information to schools to help them protect pupils, including vulnerable pupils, and educate them to use the internet safely and responsibly.

Challenges and opportunities

We have addressed, through the support noted above, the challenges of ensuring that support is not lost for those that need it most; and that the benefits of using technology which have been identified, particularly for those children with SEN, continue.

We are committed to keeping this under review.

Equality impact assessment

The closure of BECTA does not mean that pupils and schools will not receive support to deliver ICT. The government is committed to continuing to invest in schools within this new context.

Next steps

Responsibility for building evidence on the use of technology has transferred to the Department's Technology Policy Unit. The Department continues to research the role of technology in improving educational standards and narrowing attainment gaps. It will also continue to explore the issue of access to technology for disadvantaged and SEN pupils, consulting with third sector bodies and industry.