Evaluation of the Framework for ICT Technical Support (FITS)

Information sheet

This information sheet summarises an evaluation of the Framework for ICT Technical Support (FITS) in 16 secondary schools. The aim of the evaluation was to understand how FITS is being adopted in schools and its positive impact upon ICT support and user satisfaction.

The findings showed that schools with strong and committed senior management support to the implementation of FITS obtained the greatest benefit. Implementing the FITS guidelines required an initial investment of time and effort, but most schools were prepared to do this in order to enjoy the longer-term benefits.

The most successful schools believe that implementing FITS encourages greater use of technology in teaching and learning, which ultimately increases the likelihood of improved school performance and inspection outcomes.

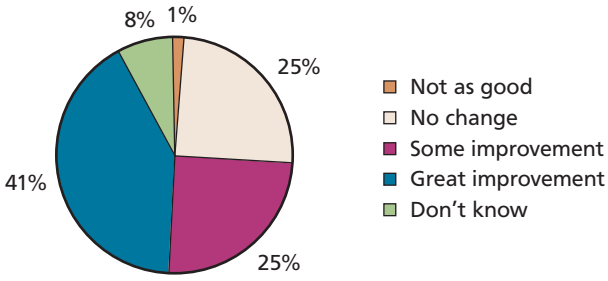
What senior managers think

The results of the evaluation have been conclusive and senior managers in all the schools where FITS has been implemented have seen significant improvements.

FITS is a catalyst for change in improving ICT support, planning and communication. Any gaps in technical support can be identified and technical support staff are guided to solutions for improved service delivery making it more robust and methodical.

ICT users are also very positive about FITS and the way in which it improves ICT service delivery. ICT users at schools that had implemented FITS were surveyed about the quality of support that they received; the results in the chart below show that two-thirds believed that FITS had made an improvement to ICT service delivery.

Change in user perception of ICT service since implementing FITS



What technical support staff think

Technical staff were universally positive about FITS, happy to adopt it and recognised the benefits that implementing the processes could bring to ICT management and service delivery.

The fact that FITS is based on the industry best practice standard – IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) – was considered a real benefit, and all were appreciative that it had been tailored to suit a school environment. The FITS guidance and processes address every aspect of ICT management and support and are well structured, logical and pragmatic.

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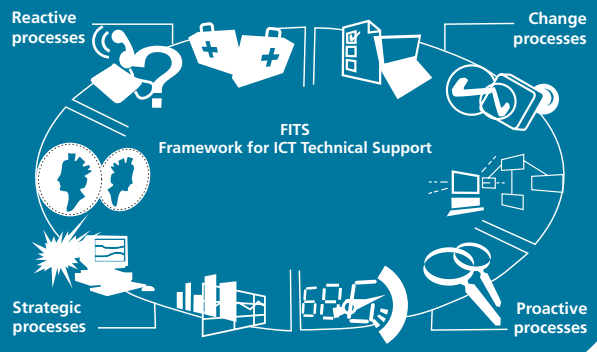
What is FITS?

FITS stands for Framework for ICT Technical Support and is a toolkit of advice and guidance designed to help school technical staff manage and support ICT in a structured and effective manner.



FITS is based on the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) and is derived from the collective experiences of ICT technical support providers all over the UK. This experience has been distilled into a common set of processes applicable to any establishment using ICT. These processes have been adapted by Becta for schools, enabling you to bypass all the mistakes commonly made and implement the processes successfully from the start.

Service Desk	The single point of contact within the school for all users of ICT
Incident Management	Quickly fix faults by restoring the ICT service to the user
Change Management	Manage, record and approve the introduction of ICT changes
Release Management	Plan, test and control the installation of new software and hardware
Configuration Management	Implement and maintain up-to-date records of ICT hardware and software
Problem Management	Detect the underlying cause of faults and apply a permanent fix
Availability and Capacity Management	Carry out proactive detection and prevention of ICT problems
Service Level Management	Define, agree and document the required service levels with the users
Service Continuity Management	Minimise the impact on ICT service of an environmental disaster
Financial Management	Ensure that the ICT is implemented and managed in a cost-effective way

Reasons for implementing FITS

There are many benefits to implementing FITS. The emphasis of FITS is on both proactive and reactive tasks. It views technical support not just as a function responsible for resolving incidents, but as a service provider whose main objective is to prevent incidents from occurring in the first place.

Although aimed primarily at technical support staff, the benefits of FITS extend beyond the management and support of the network as it will also deliver:

- Improved strategic and financial planning for ICT.
- Reduced Total Cost of Ownership through increased efficiency, effectiveness and management of assets.
- Better communications and relationships between ICT support teams and users – an improved customer service ethos.
- A move away from firefighting to a more structured, proactive approach to service delivery.
- Faster response times to requests for help and support.
- Increased reliability through planned and methodical roll-out of new equipment and network changes.
- Increased user satisfaction by setting their expectations more clearly.

Ultimately, FITS can help improve teaching and learning since teachers feel more confident in the reliability of the network equipment and can focus on using the technology rather than worrying if it will work.

Five steps to implementing FITS

The evaluation provided some useful lessons in how to best implement the FITS processes.

1. Visible leadership team support

One of the biggest challenges in implementing FITS is getting teaching and administration staff to follow the new processes, which they may initially perceive as more bureaucratic than what they are used to. Strong, public support and visible leadership commitment to FITS can overcome this initial reluctance and helps embed the new processes quickly and effectively.

Technical support staff may also need support in the early stages of the implementation, particularly with help in planning, prioritisation and some of the more strategic aspects of the framework. In schools which have implemented FITS most effectively, the technicians have worked closely with a senior manager to mutual benefit.

2. Thoroughly plan the implementation

Plan carefully how you are going to implement FITS in order to get the most out of it.

- Encourage the technicians to follow the advice given on the Becta website and take time to read all the information and downloads. This will give them a good understanding of the overall scope of FITS and what it will involve.
- Work with the technicians in completing a FITS assessment spreadsheet so that there is an agreed baseline understanding of your current ICT management and support practices.
- Attend a FITS expert workshop – this provides an excellent overview of all the FITS processes and guides you through the planning and implementation process.
- Ensure technicians carefully manage the implementation and agree an action plan detailing what is going to be done and who will do it as well as defining objectives.
  - Make this a series of small steps and tasks so it doesn't seem too daunting.
  - Regularly review progress against plan.
  - If the plan isn't working, don't be afraid to change it.

3. Make time available to implement FITS

Schools that have already implemented FITS know that it takes time and effort. Indeed, it can take six months to a year to introduce all the FITS processes successfully. However, all schools agree that this investment is worth doing and saves time in the long run.

- Create time for implementation by working with technicians to prioritise their current workload and identifying tasks which are not critical.
- Consider restructuring the technical support team so FITS becomes the main focus of someone's role – progress will be made more quickly this way.
- Be creative in findings ways to implement a single point of contact for the Service Desk, for example, the use of administration staff. Customer-facing skills and organisational ability are more important than technical skills in this role.
- Network managers at some schools planned FITS processes for their own schools in their own time. Although this is not to be encouraged, all of them were glad to have done so since they found the process interesting and felt that this investment has led to longer-term benefits.

4. Have a formal 'launch' of FITS

One of the challenges in introducing any new system is getting the users to follow the process. In order to do this effectively, some schools held a formal 'launch' of the FITS processes which has worked well.

- Formally introduce FITS at the regular staff meeting.
- Explain why it is important and what the benefits will be for the network users.
- Explain the challenges the technical staff will face in introducing these processes and ask staff to support them in doing so.
- Make it easy for users to ask for help by:
  - publicising the Service Desk process and contact details to all staff (you can use posters or the school intranet)
  - making mugs or coasters featuring the Service Desk number and explaining how to request ICT support
  - putting 'request for help' forms in all classrooms and offices to make it easier for ICT users
  - providing Service Desk information and forms on the school intranet.

5. Create a FITS 'support group'

Several schools found it useful to share their experiences of implementing FITS and work together on some of the processes. You could consider creating a FITS 'support group' with other schools in your area.

- See if you can get a local or regional organisation such as the local authority or city learning centre to chair the support group and co-ordinate its activities.
- Hold meetings regularly (at least once or twice a term) to share experiences and lessons learned.
- Make opportunities to visit other schools to see how they have implemented solutions and overcome challenges that they have encountered.
- Share information and data with other schools.

Case study: Turton High School, Bolton

Turton High School has invested extensively in ICT over the last few years which it sees as imperative to future curriculum delivery and maintaining its status as a specialist college.

Tom Kwiatkowski manages the support team who look after the school network of over 450 computers and laptops as well as interactive whiteboards, projectors and specialist media equipment. Tom said: "When Becta and the local authority approached us about a project to implement FITS guidelines late last year, I was very keen to see how it could improve the service we provide to the staff and pupils at the school. However, the outcomes from FITS have exceeded our expectations – it has been a very worthwhile process."

The school's approach to implementing FITS was to overview all the areas covered by the processes, identify those that need addressing and focus on those areas that added benefit to the school. They have downloaded and implemented the majority of tools and materials, adapting them where necessary to align more closely with the school's specific requirements.

The technicians have used a combination of software developed in-house for the Service Desk and commercial software provided under educational licensing agreements to deliver the network monitoring and management. Additional equipment for Service Continuity Management has been justified under a Total Cost of Ownership approach as a result of improved Financial Management.

The biggest challenge faced by the technicians was getting network users to follow the revised processes. This has now been overcome, however, with public support from senior management and an improvement in service delivery. Network user perception of the technical support service – already high – has improved still further as result of implementing FITS, and the technical team now play a greater role in strategic development of the network to support teaching and learning.

Case study: Birley Community College, Sheffield

Birley Community College is a secondary community comprehensive with over 1,300 pupils on the roll and 100 staff. The ICT support team comprises an ICT strategy manager who reports to the school's business manger, supported by a network manager and three technicians. Together, the team supports more than 500 computers, interactive whiteboards and data projectors as well as supporting local primary schools.

The school has implemented significant parts of the FITS guidance with most focus being placed on establishing a Service Desk to provide users with a single point of contact and a mechanism by which the activities of the ICT support function may be co-ordinated. ICT Strategy Manager Mark Chadburn was responsible for implementing FITS and did much of the development and documentation in his own time in the evenings. He believes that this investment was well worthwhile since FITS has improved reliability of the network and ICT resources at the school. The whole team is under less stress as a result.

FITS made the technical support staff aware of what they were not doing by identifying big holes in the service and enabling them to work out solutions to improving service delivery and making it more process-driven and robust. One of the major challenges is getting staff users – particularly teaching staff – to follow and accept the system and procedures. The network manager worked very closely with the business manager to roll out FITS and ensure there was visible leadership team support.

James Beighton, School Business Manager, is delighted that the school has implemented FITS and sees it as a real catalyst for change within the school. It has enabled a more efficient service and freed up technical staff to focus on more strategic issues.

Communication and understanding between curriculum staff and IT services has also improved. Teaching and learning using ICT is already beginning to improve since staff have more confidence in the reliability of the network and can focus more on using the technology rather than worrying if it will work. It is considered that this will eventually manifest itself in improved inspection outcomes.

Further information

If you would like more information on FITS, and how to plan and implement it, please refer to the following:

Becta information
http://becta.org.uk/publications

Framework for ICT Technical Support
http://becta.org.uk/fits

FITS evaluation report
http://becta.org.uk/fits/evaluationreport

FITS case studies
http://becta.org.uk/fits

FITS assessment
http://becta.org.uk/fits/assessment

FITS expert workshops
http://becta.org.uk/fits/expertsworkshops

Total Cost of Ownership model
http://becta.org.uk/schools/procurement

SLICT
http://www.ncsl.org.uk/slict

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