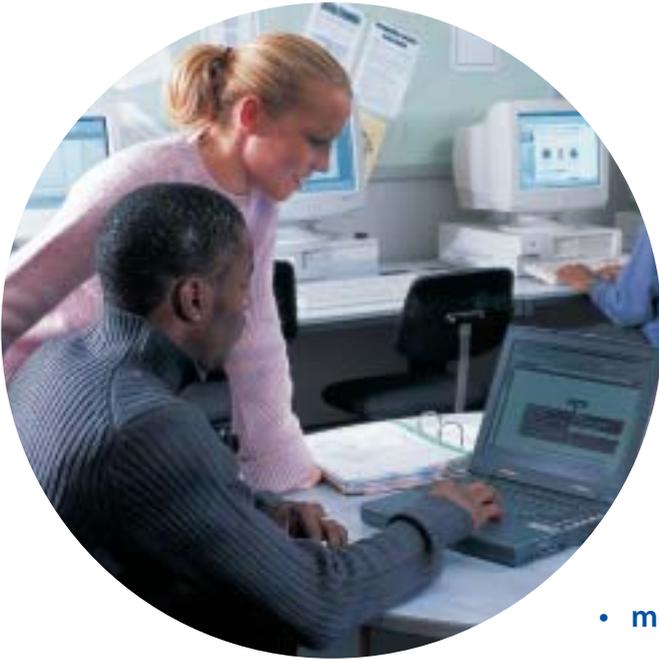# Reflections on success

## LEA support for ICT in schools

Becta
**ICT Advice**

Leadership teams in LEAs have a key role in supporting their schools in the use of ICT for learning, teaching and management.

LEAs that had a successful Ofsted inspection have some common characteristics in their development of ICT in schools, and this report identifies some highlights of current practice in:

- vision and planning
- implementation of support, training and infrastructure and resources
- monitoring and evaluation.

The outcomes provide clear guidance and pose some challenging questions for LEA leaders.

# Vision and Strategic Planning

## The issue

LEAs are in a position to drive forward the development of ICT in their schools, but to do so, they need a vision – and a strategy that will realise their vision. The vision also needs to be shared – with their schools, the Local Authority, Further and Higher Education and other stakeholders.

The LEA's strategy will outline how the vision will be realised. It should provide a framework for schools' own ICT development plans, outlining the support which is available, the manner of implementation and the way in which the LEA intends to use ICT to raise standards and support local and national priorities. It will complement and inform relevant sections of the LEA's Development Plan, and should be a working document which is endorsed by all the stakeholders.

**Is the realisation of the vision for ICT a responsibility shared by everyone? Do all advisers understand and promote the use of ICT? Does the LEA promote its ICT aims in its forums with schools?**

**Do all stakeholders have input to the ICT strategic plan, ensuring that it is relevant and owned across the Authority?**

## What was found

The most successful LEAs develop their vision in conjunction with other stakeholders. They have clear communications and the trust and confidence of the schools. This is usually through full involvement with representatives from schools and other departments within the LEA – a paper consultation is less likely to be successful.

*The strongest strategies are developed by joint working groups of LEA and corporate staff and schools. The LEA officers take into account relevant local and national priorities and embed them in their strategy.*

The messages of both vision and strategy are evident in the work of all advisers and consultants. There are clear links between the curriculum advisers and school improvement officers, with clear lines of communication and responsibility.

*Concern was expressed in some LEAs that too much rests on a few individuals (in some cases one), to take forward their ICT strategy. These LEAs need a contingency plan in case the individuals are unavailable.*

Publication of the strategy is important. A brief, relevant guide is likely to influence and continue to be used. It should be available in a range of media – paper and electronic. Consistent messages about the value of ICT need to be presented across the LEA service, by all officers and advisers.

# Implementation

## Support and guidance

### The issue

LEAs can provide significant assistance to teachers in their effective use of ICT through guidance and support. This can be support for subject leaders in their development of the quality of teaching using ICT in their subject and in the dissemination of good practice and the encouragement of peer support. Schools value guidance in pupil tracking and assessment, from the levelling and moderation of pupils' work to advice on standard software and data structures that can be used across the Authority.

LEAs can also provide guidance and support for school leaders in the formation of ICT plans and policies. They can support procurement through generating options of technical support (in-house or contracted out) and by establishing contracts and advice for equipment, software and digital content – the last of especial relevance for Curriculum Online.

### What was found

Many authorities have among their staff particular individuals who have wide experience and whose support and guidance is highly valued and trusted by schools. However, these officers may be shouldering an extensive burden in a fast changing area with increasing levels of demand. They need to be recognised, nurtured and provided with a team context to share and moderate their delivery of support.

*They may have a high level of independence, which whilst enabling them to work very efficiently with little external direction, could lead to an individualistic approach.*

Knowledge and experience of ICT should not be restricted to specialist groups: there needs to be wide involvement and understanding by all advisory staff to make it part of their agenda in the same way as literacy and numeracy. To achieve the integration and embedding of ICT within schools it is important that the teams providing support for communications and management systems co-ordinate their work with the advisory staff so that both are working to a common agenda and strategy. The focus must be on learning rather than the technology.

*The bigger the Authority, the more problematic this linkage appears to be. The recognition that ICT has a curriculum wide and potentially transformational effect needs to be across the LEA if effective support is to reach teachers in schools.*

The most important indicator of success is the trust and confidence that schools have in their LEA's ICT services. Strong, direct links and structured communication between the LEA, headteachers and ICT co-ordinators are necessary to achieve this.

*Many successful Authorities had staff who did not see their role as purely strategic but also practical in providing direct guidance and training.*

> **How will the LEA strategy improve teaching and learning, and is it clear to schools who is leading on which aspects of the strategic plan?**
>
> **How broad based is the support for ICT in the authority? Is it embedded in the work of the LEA or is it still a specialist activity?**

## Training

### The issue

The greatest inhibitor to the successful use of ICT in schools is the confidence and competence of their staff. The facilitation of training (CPD) for teachers and support staff is a critical role for the LEA. This responsibility includes an analysis of the needs of schools, using, where appropriate, self-assessment tools. Provision of these requirements may be available either in-house or through a range of external resources. These approaches will also be apparent in the training provided to meet the ICT needs of LEA staff.

### What was found

Successful authorities made considerable efforts to provide a range of courses that met their view of school needs and continually adjusted these as issues and technology changed. The type and range of courses varied but many authorities provided, as part of their programme, lengthy professional courses for newer staff, particularly ICT co-ordinators.

*An example of developing good practice is the provision of the course notes on CD-ROM that enables trainees to access them on their own machines, to review what they had been taught and encourages them in the use of the technology to edit materials to their own requirements.*

## The issue

Teachers will be reluctant to integrate ICT in their teaching until they can be confident that ICT resources are not only available but also reliable. For this, schools need funding and guidance in procurement so they obtain best value – and LEAs can help through support and contracts. LEAs need to advise schools on cost-effective and low-risk purchasing and provide guidance on sustainability so that schools are fully aware and supported in planning to meet the Total Cost of Ownership. ICT should be a theme within the Asset Management planning of the authority and will include factors such as environmental issues and security.

There are specific responsibilities for LEAs in this area in the achievement of national targets for pupil:computer ratios and broadband connectivity. These provide a necessary, but not sufficient, basis for the LEAs' assistance to ensure appropriate access which will be both in and out of schools, for staff and learners.

A key element for LEAs is the provision of support services ranging from pedagogical guidance and training to technical design, development and services. The authority should take a role in enabling innovation in ICT use in schools through the choice of preferred infrastructure and suppliers.

**Have you an authority-wide approach to the exchange of information, technical standards and provision of infrastructure?**

**Is the LEA working with schools to identify cost-effective service providers to help schools get the most out of their ICT investment and reduce the technical demand on teachers? Can teachers focus on teaching rather than the technology?**

## What was found

Successful LEAs are managing the interface between schools and suppliers by specifying the needs and contexts of schools, in addition to monitoring and evaluation. There can be problems where technical support is unfamiliar with schools and/or the educational context.

*There are positive examples of where LEAs have established positive partnerships with external suppliers such that the LEA staff support and monitor the performance of the suppliers in a positive, not punitive fashion.*

Initiatives should be captured and used to deliver positive outcomes relevant to the local context. Some authorities have made NOF a success and the NGfL has generated a huge momentum. Other programmes (Community Access to Lifelong Learning, for example) have been devised to support the overall learning agenda. Initiatives can bring the funding to support innovation. *Many LEAs have taken a positive approach to working within their Local Authority to identify congruence in the provision of services, especially connectivity; there have also been gains from the shared approaches within Regional Broadband Consortia.*

Integrated approaches to ICT in schools – where there are strong links between curriculum, management and communication systems – are showing dividends. There is a need for transfer of data within schools and between schools; interdependencies are emerging between schools and LEAs and between LEAs and other agencies. Successful schools and LEAs are using ICT to manage such data transfers and to enhance relationships with other groups at Authority level. *Exchanges of data and information are positive elements in successful LEAs.*

It appeared that successful authorities made special efforts to harness initiatives to their own aims and had, in particular, embraced NOF training as a way to deliver improved ICT competence.
*This had led to a successful use of resources available to schools while the programme was guided to support the delivery of needs that the LEA perceived.*

The provision of support backed by training for the development of school ICT plans was seen as important. This included the provision of annual workshops and the sharing of good plans and practice.
*Useful information about a school can arise from monitoring their development plans over the years and plotting progress.*

Although training programmes may be driven by innovation in ICT, it was felt important that the focus was on learning, teaching and management.
*A new area was the use of projectors and whiteboards in which there is considerable interest in schools but the key issue is one of emerging pedagogy and good practice.*

**Does the training offered through the LEA consolidate the aims of the strategy? How does the LEA evaluate its impact on increased staff confidence and raised standards?**

**Are there self-assessment tools to enable schools to generate their ICT development and their training plans? Has the LEA considered the NAACEMARK Standard for Schools for ICT plans?**

# Monitoring and evaluation of impact

## The issue

Monitoring the implementation of the strategy is likely to be an issue for LEAs where the education leadership team has not been involved in the development of the vision or the strategy. Schools need to be aware of and participate in, the monitoring of the strategy, and how it relates to the EDP and other LEA or national initiatives.

Evaluation of the impact of the strategy and vision needs to employ a number of different methods. The impact of the strategy on standards in schools will depend on a variety of factors, and these need to be taken into account. There are unlikely to be short-term gains which are attributable to the ICT strategy, so a longer term evaluation will be needed. Many other initiatives, local and national, affect standards and untangling the effect of these from the ICT strategy is not easy.

**Does the LEA monitor the implementation of the strategy through a joint process with schools? Does this include its impact on school development plans?**

**How does the LEA know where there is good practice in ICT in their schools, and how is this celebrated? Does the LEA willingly share with and support other LEAs through, for example, regional consortia?**

**Is the focus of the evaluation on the curriculum rather than technology? Is the way in which the ICT is used a more important factor in the evaluation than the ratio of computers to pupils?**

## What was found

The most successful LEAs use any means of evaluation that are available, such as schools' Ofsted reports, school achievement reviews, course evaluations, direct observation and attainment in schools. Effective LEAs work with other LEAs to share expertise and provide mutual support.

*There is a huge weight of anecdotal and teacher assessment evidence of improved learning through ICT. Evaluating this is not easy.*

Integrated approaches to ICT in schools are yielding benefits. This is not only bringing together the ICT resources in schools and connectivity to the outside world but also providing more sharing of information and resources in school. The transfer of data between the LEA and schools and between schools will build a bank of data that can be used in evaluation.

*The sharing of comparative information was seen to be of positive assistance to schools.*

The effectiveness of ICT in an LEA does not appear to be linked to hardware or software or who supplies them. *Too great a reliance on numerical targets for hardware or communications is unlikely to be useful in delivering improved standards.*

Good practice is identified, celebrated and disseminated through a variety of means – publications, regular meetings, newsletters and conferences.

## Further information

Becta provides a range of products and services to support LEAs and Support Providers. This information can be accessed from:

**http://www.becta.org.uk/leas**

Additional information for LEAs and support providers can be found at:

**http://www.becta.org.uk**

**http://buildingthegrid.becta.org.uk**

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