

Background to the Home Access programme

HOME ACCESS

NEXT GENERATION LEARNING



The vision for Home Access is to ensure that more learners in state-maintained education in England have access to technology at home to support their learning. The Home Access programme was borne out of the recognition that there are still a significant number of learners who lack computer and internet access at home. These children are disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds, and their limited access to technology reinforces attainment gaps and deepens their level of disadvantage.

In response to this challenge, in January 2007 Jim Knight, the former Minister of State for Schools and Learners, announced the creation of the Home Access Taskforce. The Taskforce was charged with considering and advising on ways in which home access to technology can be delivered, ensuring that any plans included and promoted safe and responsible use.

The Taskforce initially established an evidence base for Home Access, looking at both the educational and wider socio-economic benefits of having access at home. They found that cost constitutes a major barrier to access and, whilst the costs of internet access are falling, they will not do so quickly enough to prevent a large number of low-income families from being excluded from the benefits of home access. The Taskforce identified evidence of market failure and a clear business case for Government investment in support of widening opportunities to home access.

Following an exploration of a variety of different delivery models, the Taskforce recommended in June 2008 that any home access programme should utilise 'national central solutions for administering and delivering funding and accreditation of technology suppliers who can provide safe, appropriate solutions'. The decision was made by the Minister to adopt a consumer-based model to deliver Home Access, rather than the more traditional centralised procurement of devices.

There were a number of key policy principles which underpinned the work of the Taskforce. Home access to technology has major potential for supporting the Every Child Matters agenda and its importance is flagged in the Department for Children, Schools and Families' (DCSF) Children's Plan, which states "there are significant educational benefits associated with having access to technology at home... Research shows that this helps to motivate learners and improve attainment. We also know that learning technologies in the home can serve as a focal point for parents to become more actively involved in their child's education."

In June 2008 Becta published the revised Harnessing Technology Strategy. It promotes a technology-related learner entitlement and aims to enable all learners to access and use technology effectively, safely and purposefully in support of their learning. Home access is a key component of this entitlement for all learners.

In addition, the Home Access programme has a significant role to play in terms of adult skills and employability. The Informal adult learning White Paper, 'The Learning Revolution', which was published in March 2009, calls for Home Access to provide support to the parents and carers of the children the programme will reach. Estelle Morris's Independent Review of ICT User Skills also makes the same request of the programme.

Finally, the Home Access programme has been cited as part of the wider government efforts to tackle digital exclusion issues. The Digital Britain report, published in June 2009, identifies that cost is a major cause of digital exclusion and notes that the Home Access programme is the Government's first step towards tackling this issue.

Home Access Grant helpline

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