

**FINANCE AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE – 1 MAY 2001
EDUCATION COMMITTEE - 24 APRIL 2001**

IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL GRID FOR LEARNING IN ANGUS SCHOOLS

**JOINT REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE DIRECTOR
OF EDUCATION**

ABSTRACT

This report outlines the progress made in implementing the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) within Angus schools and seeks approval to allocate further funding to complete the infrastructure part of the programme.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Education Committee is recommended to note the progress made within Angus schools in implementing the National Grid for Learning and the Council's achievement in meeting the Government targets.

The Finance and Information Technology Committee is recommended to approve the allocation of £250,000 from the unallocated balance within the Information Technology Renewal and Repair Fund for the procurement of 300 computers and associated networking components for secondary schools across Angus.

2. BACKGROUND

The Government announced in 1998 the plans to implement the National Grid for Learning. This constituted a major national initiative and set schools and local authorities in particular very challenging targets. Among these were the government's intentions that every school would be connected to the Internet by 2002 and that every school pupil would have their own e-mail address. In addition the ratio of pupils to modern computers in secondary schools was to be 5:1 and in primary schools the ratio was required to be 7.5:1. The Scottish Executive also announced the creation of the Excellence Fund which was designed to help local authorities meet these targets and also establish the foundations of the other essential components of the National Grid for Learning, namely the training of teaching staff in ICT skills and the development of materials to be accessed via the new technology.

3. CURRENT POSITION

From the outset of the programme, senior officers from both the Education and IT Departments were convinced that, although the resources available from the Excellence Fund were substantial they would be inadequate to finance all of the required investment to meet the pupil:computer ratios and also meet the establishment of the other areas of ICT staffing, training, material development and communications networking required. Both departments were also acutely aware of ensuring that the implemented infrastructure would be technically and financially sustainable in the longer term.

To this end the departments have liaised closely in the development of the ICT infrastructure to support the NGfL initiative and members will recall a number of reports coming before them in the past two years as the rollout of the programme has progressed. Maximum value has been sought from the deployment of Excellence Fund (Programme 9 –NGfL) resources totalling £1,166,000 in the past three years (including 2001/02) and these have also been complemented by the investment of Council financial resources totalling £400,000 during the same period.

The approach taken to date has been not to concentrate solely on the procurement of stand alone computers and focus on the pupil:computer ratio but rather to take a more holistic view of the total requirements of implementing and sustaining the deployment of technology as a genuine aid to the teaching of pupils across the whole of Angus irrespective of geographical location.

As a result of this coordinated planning approach to technology, staff training and curriculum development considerable progress has been made to date. By the beginning of the new school session current projects already underway will ensure every school in Angus will have managed filtered access to the Internet. Every school pupil/student and every member of staff within schools in Angus will have a managed personal e-mail address which adheres to national addressing conventions. Primary pupil:computer ratios of 7.5:1 will have been met and all primary school administration centres will be connected to the corporate e-mail network as secondary school offices have been for some time. Every secondary school already has a whole school network and this also applies to a number of larger primaries. The new session will see all primary schools benefit from networked access to information.

All networked computers across Angus are protected by virus detection devices which are centrally managed by the IT Department and sophisticated network management tools have been developed to minimise the effect on teaching time spent managing the complex networks within secondary schools

Staff training is underway to develop the required skills to maximise the educational value of using the technology infrastructure and the introduction of local intranets within secondary schools has begun.

In terms of technical infrastructure only two main requirements are still outstanding, namely the provision of high speed, high capacity telecommunication links and the meeting of the pupil:computer ratio for secondary schools. The former is being dealt with through the Council's angusnet project which with partial funding from the Scottish Executive Modernising Government Fund will provide a broadband communications network between the burghs of Angus. While this network will increase the existing network capacity for secondary schools by a factor of 32 it will not increase the recurring revenue costs. This is a direct result of the previous planning and coordination initiated at the start of the design of the response to the NGfL initiative.

It is proposed to address the remaining issue ie the pupil:computer ratio in secondary schools by the procurement of a further 300 computers during the current financial year. In this way the Council will not only have met the challenging targets set by government but also provided a sustainable technology based teaching and learning environment in which considerable pride can be taken.

Schools will be encouraged to maximise the value to be realised by the procurement of these computers by submitting plans as to how the equipment could be most effectively deployed within the school and it is proposed to provide £50,000 which will be utilised to assist schools to network these computers where the planned deployment meets agreed criteria.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is estimated that the procurement and networking costs will be £250,000 and it is proposed to allocate this sum from the current uncommitted balances held in Information Technology Renewal and Repair Fund in the current (2001/02) financial year. A further report on the procurement of the computer hardware will be submitted to appropriate committees in due course.

5. HUMAN RIGHTS

There are no Human Rights implications arising from this Report.

6. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive and the Directors of Finance and Law and Administration have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

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NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.