

Next generation learning

Is your school really up to date with new technology or do your pupils simply use computers in exciting and innovative ways while at home?

Harnessing children's motivation and enthusiasm for technology in the classroom was the subject of a talk2learn discussion hosted by Stephen Crowne, Chief Executive of Becta.

Ensuring that staff were up to speed with the latest developments should be a priority, according to many contributors.

"I believe *the greatest challenge is to raise the confidence and competence of the educational workforce* and to develop systems and processes which are agile enough to cope with learners' own devices. This is a major challenge for the Building Schools for the Future programme," said Bob Harrison, an education adviser and school governor.

Jo Williams, a primary headteacher in Lancashire, said every staff meeting at her school included a 15-minute ICT session.

"It gives us the opportunity to look at new software or websites and also share good practice, such as the use of interactive whiteboards and digiblu cameras and so on, in the classroom."

Even though he considered himself fairly computer literate, one school leader said he felt left behind by technological change.

"If we are to train tomorrow's generation in the use of technologies that haven't yet been invented, *we need to be at the cutting edge of technology*, not receiving hand me downs from everyone else after they have tried it out."

Sharing ICT expertise between schools is a good way of training staff, according to another school leader. "We did this with one of our staff and it was very successful. We also met the costs of an expert between six schools who did training with our ICT people who then themselves cascaded that knowledge to the other staff."

Elsewhere, many contributors felt the problem lay with old school buildings that weren't up to the job – "What use is state of the art technology if your fuses blow because the electricity supply is not



modern enough?" asked Kathy Forsdyke, a school admin manager in a Northampton primary.

Amanda Taylor, an office manager in a small rural primary in Bedfordshire, felt schools such as hers faced particular problems as there were no ICT experts among the small, dedicated staff.

"While we buy into the LA's IT support service, this is not an instant turnaround. I've suggested that we discuss the issue of a dedicated full-time technician shared among local schools, each contributing towards the salary costs."

But others argued that ICT development posed significant challenges for primaries across the board.

"The size of some primary budgets makes it difficult to plan and implement effective approaches," Stephen Crowne acknowledged.

"My own view is that we need to go further down the road of local collaboration. And we need to work very closely with parents to ensure we have a balanced approach to using the technology – *building skills and experience that will enable young children to use it effectively.*"

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