

Summary: Progress on the *emPowering Schools* Strategy

The new strategy for ICT in schools in Northern Ireland - *emPowering Schools* - was drawn up through extensive consultation with all of the mainstream stakeholders in the school service. In March 2004, the Minister then responsible for Education published the strategy for comment, under a letter of endorsement. Responses were received between April and August 2004; contributions from various conferences and meetings have also been incorporated in this report.

The strategy, which focuses on the role of technology in enhancing and transforming education in the schools sector is broadly welcomed and attracts widespread support from schools, virtually all education organisations and from private sector partners.

The broad policy framework, the vision statement, the strategic direction and the dynamics identified in the strategy for making progress with ICT in schools are endorsed widely. It is encouraging that many schools and educational organisations see the strategy as an appropriate framework within which they can embed ICT into those aspects of educational policy and practice for which they are responsible

Respondents believe that *there is much to be commended* in the strategy. The focus on the learning needs of young people in the 21st century set in the context of the future social and economic well-being of the province is seen as the right imperative.

The vast majority of respondents highlight, with justifiable pride, what has already been achieved within the service and by teachers in particular. Given the achievements so far, a few (education organisation) respondents believe that the strategy could afford to be more ambitious. Most, however (including the vast majority of schools), believe that achieving the goals set may take them longer than projected, will need increased support, a strong leadership focus and commitment. Above all, respondents wish to see the implementation of *emPowering Schools* adequately resourced.

There is universal support for the approach taken in *emPowering Schools* that technology has a key, enabling role to play in tackling all developments in education policy and practice, and that strategic coordination of its use needs to be well linked into policy coordination across the school service as a whole.

Respondents point to the need for a strategic and unifying coordinating group accountable for, and focused on, the integration of education technology across the complex range of school services, encompassing curriculum development, school leadership and professional development.

Responses from initial teacher education institutions point out that they have a much more significant role to play than the strategy allows: ET SMG believes that a specific elearning strategy for initial teacher education, to complement *emPowering Schools*, may be required.

While some respondents make suggestions for different shades of emphasis here and there, this does not detract from the sound endorsement which the *emPowering Schools* strategy, as a whole, has received.

Progress on the *emPowering Schools* Strategy: Report

Background

The new strategy for ICT in schools in Northern Ireland - *emPowering Schools* - was drawn up through a process of extensive consultation throughout 2003. The process of open consultation comprised 38 meetings, sessions and workshops with attendance figures of 922. Draft chapters, placed online as they were written, were accessed over 1,300 times¹.

The strategy was developed collectively by ET SMG, the ET Strategy Management Group chaired by the Chief Executive of NEELB, which acts as a lead board for the strategy on behalf of the Department. ETSMG represents fifteen of the mainstream stakeholders in the school service: schools themselves, the Department of Education, the Education and Library Boards (both CASS and the School Library Service), CCMS, the teacher unions (through the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council), CCEA, CnaG and C2k. There are four school principals on the group, an industry representative and the chief executive of Becta, bringing a UK-wide dimension to strategy development.

ET SMG signed off the final version of the strategy, which was submitted to the Minister in December 2003. In March 2004, the Minister responsible for Education published the strategy, under a letter of endorsement on a dedicated website²; 5,000 print copies were circulated to schools and other agencies and comments were invited. The period for receiving comments was extended over the full summer term 2004 and through to August 2004.

Contributions from a number of conferences, seminars, annual reports and meetings have also been incorporated in this report on responses³.

In addition to responses from schools, several of the organisation stakeholders, who were significant contributors to the development of the strategy, took the opportunity to comment again.

¹ See Briefing Note 12 for full details

² www.empoweringschools.com

³ A full list of responses and relevant meetings and documents can be found on www.empoweringschools.com

Responses by Section

Vision and Strategy

Responses acknowledge the major achievement of the goals of the ET Strategy, and believe that it is appropriate to build upon them and seek to deliver the educational benefits of the major government investment in schools. ET SMG is commended by respondents for building on this foundation by establishing a new strategic framework which is regarded as challenging, yet appropriate.

The policy framework, the vision statement, the strategic direction and the dynamics identified for making progress are endorsed widely. It is encouraging that the strategy is seen as a framework within which schools and organisations can embed ICT into those aspects of educational practice for which they have responsibility. Respondents believe that *there is much to be commended* in the strategy. The focus on the needs of young people in the 21st century set in the context of the future social and economic well-being of the province is regarded as the right imperative for schools to address.

Universally, respondents wish to see the implementation of *emPowering Schools* adequately resourced in all ways.

ET SMG recognises that what has been achieved here sits on a world stage and that it is of interest beyond Northern Ireland how our community makes best use of the excellent resources and opportunities provided. Partners, both public and private, have complementary roles to play and both need to develop *further* their sense of partnership to ensure that the needs of young people are well served.

The strategy's private sector partners also warmly welcome the strategy, emphasising the value and benefits of networking schools with parents and the wider community.

The briefing notes which support the published strategy were found by schools to be most informative.

The strategy as an enabling framework

The enabling framework which *emPowering Schools* provides of policy, vision, strategy and milestones and the dynamic for future progress is welcomed and endorsed. Some respondents call for even more targets to be identified, yet, within the concept of a coordinated approach to education technology, many others recognise the strategic value of

the principle of organisations and institutions taking the responsibility for developing and growing their own strategic action plan.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Respondents agree with the Minister's requirement that the implementation of targets in *emPowering Schools* should be the subject of regular progress monitoring and reporting so as to ensure that the stakeholders are working in collaboration, and to ensure that the technology is used to its maximum for the benefit of learners.

The need for independent evaluation of the impact of ICT in learning is strongly supported by respondents to provide a local evidence base of the benefits accruing.

Inspection

The role of inspection, and the updating of inspection criteria, is identified in a few responses as an important lever for ensuring progress in schools and elsewhere in the service. ET SMG perceives the need to develop appropriate inspection criteria for e-learning provision in particular. These criteria should reflect and strengthen the quality standards already developed over several years of pilot work in e-learning.

Quality standards

Respondents strongly support the need for quality standards for elearning (both for curriculum development and for professional development) in Learning NI - C2k's new learning environment - and other significant online environments used in schools. The first edition of the *Northern Ireland eLearning Quality and Standards Indicators*⁴ has been published by the ET SMG. ET SMG believes that to avoid any risk of wasteful duplication and lack of consistency in the implementation of standards, these should be widely adopted, endorsed and applied by **all** stakeholder organisations and their further development and use should become universal.

Towards a unified strategy for elearning

emPowering Schools is a strategy for schools, and the schools sector, under the accountability of the Department of Education. It sits in parallel with e-learning strategies for further and higher education and public libraries. Respondents see the potential for progress towards a more unified approach between schools and other sectors. This progress will be assisted when e-learning strategies are developed, where they currently do not exist, including for instance, in initial teacher education, for adult education and in the youth sector.

There is universal support to move towards a more unified approach through cross-cutting projects such as, for instance, the creation of a Unique Personal Identifier and linking the FHE network (JANET) to the C2k data-centre, in the context of compliance with the e-GIF interoperability requirements⁵.

ET SMG recognises that this requires project leadership and coordination across at least three government departments (DE, DEL and DCAL) and their relevant agencies. DE and DEL officers are working out the practicalities of cooperation on the *emPowering Schools* strategy and the Vocational Enhancement Programme.

Scope of the strategy

Responses from two of the initial teacher education institutions indicate that the sector has a greater responsibility, and could do more to contribute to school development,

⁴ A copy of the latest version may be downloaded from www.elearningfutures.com

⁵ The e-Government Interoperability Framework see www.egifcompliance.org

than is represented in *emPowering Schools*. One such response provides a thorough and constructive analysis of the challenges facing initial teacher educators, reviewing what has been achieved already in some areas. The analysis supports a view expressed by some respondents that all student teachers are entitled to the experience of e-learning.

The comments from this sector suggest to ET SMG that a specific e-learning strategy for initial teacher education should be developed to complement *emPowering Schools*.

The opportunities for using technology to improve the equality of access for pupils with special educational needs are highlighted in a number of responses.

One response suggests that the scope of this strategy for schools should be extended to encompass adult learning. However, while wholly appropriate for teachers, the jurisdiction for this public sector rests with DEL, and, adult e-learning will be part of a specific DEL strategy development in the near future. ET SMG believes that the DEL strategy will complement the focus already provided in *emPowering Schools* on laying the foundations for lifelong e-learning for young people.

The same response suggests that the strategy should be re-titled 'Empowering Learners'. While ET SMG agrees that empowering learners is the central thrust of *emPowering Schools*, it feels that such a characterisation would not represent the broad vision and scope of *emPowering Schools*, which is to empower learners, empower staff in school, empower school leaders, empower parents, empower the professional education support community and to build a resource infrastructure for schools suited to the needs of the 21st century.

Governance arrangements for the *emPowering Schools* strategy

While there are variations in the views expressed about governance, there is universal support for the approach taken in *emPowering Schools* that technology has a key, enabling role to play in tackling all developments in education policy and practice, and that strategy coordination needs to be well embedded in change management across the school service as a whole.

The multiple, complex changes needed are greater than can be achieved by any single agency. There are risks where expertise is developed in silos – within individual organisations – without a service-wide commitment, of the kind articulated in *emPowering Schools*, to openly share knowledge and learning in a way which **builds capacity** across the entire school service.

The cultural and behavioural changes required in schools are challenging. Schools say they expect to rely on highly coordinated support from statutory and non-statutory agencies. They have little time for what they perceive to be uncoordinated, and sometimes even contradictory, advice and guidance which they receive at times.

This strategy should help to develop closer working relationships between all the traditional agencies supporting teachers and schools.

Several respondents endorse the recommendation in *emPowering Schools* that there should be a formal link with the Strategy Group for Planning for Improvement in Learning⁶ (PILSG, *formerly PICSG*). The view is expressed that strategic management should be mainstreamed within statutory agencies and that funding should sit within their budgets.

Other respondents argue strongly that the challenge of continued change and innovation in technology solutions in the school curriculum requires well-informed specialist management. They point to the need for a strategic and unifying coordinating group accountable for, and focused on, the integration of education technology across the complex range of school services, and encompassing curriculum development, school leadership and professional development.

Several respondents argue for continued, strengthened partnership. They call for coordination at a regional level to meet shifting challenges. They would be concerned, they say, if the regional approach were to be diluted or diminished by being directly managed by a group which was distracted by other management remits and did not have reporting accountability for ET as its main focus.

The responses from Boards argue that the strategy is a coherent whole, rather than a piecemeal set of unlinked moves, and should be delivered holistically – while remaining in tandem with other initiatives. GTC (NI) believes⁷ that the inclusive nature of the e-Learning Partnership, set up by the ET Strategy Group, mirrors appropriately the professional community that GTC (NI) seeks to develop.

ET SMG, comprising 15 mainstream stakeholders in the management of strategy, provides an effective forum for the challenge, drive and synchronisation which is necessary across the statutory and non-statutory agencies if they are to act together to support schools in an effective, complementary manner. Several respondents point out that the effectiveness of strategic management arrangements would be improved by including the RTU, GTC(NI) and the ITE community.

ET SMG reaffirms that the strategy itself, being a coherent whole, provides a framework which can help to develop even closer working relationships across all agencies, while remaining responsive to schools' concerns.

The consensus of responses is that partnership has worked well to get us here and needs to work even better to move forward.

⁶ "PILSG has a role to bring coherence to the many and sometimes diverse initiatives and strategies and present them to schools as an holistic programme."

⁷ GTC (NI) Annual Report 2003

Enhanced Practice for the Learner

There is a universal welcome for the entirely appropriate emphasis placed by *emPowering Schools* on **learning** and the experience of education for young people, enhanced and enriched through education technology. The strategy is endorsed by CCEA as being consistent with the changes in the statutory curriculum to develop personal skills and competences.

The emphasis on the use of technology to support the development of **lifelong learning** is recognised and welcomed by respondents.

Some respondents say they are unclear about CCEA's intentions for the place of ICT in the revised curriculum with respect to the current four stranded, eight level cross-curricular requirements and the future of the KS2 and KS3 ICT accreditation schemes. A concern is expressed that the plan to treat ICT as a distinct competence, to be reported on annually to parents, runs a risk of ICT being treated, taught and tested in isolation, rather than being embedded in subject teaching to support teaching and the development of other skills and competences.

emPowering Schools identifies seven main ways in which ICT impacts on learning (targets 1 to 7, pages 6-13) Very broadly, schools identified that they are already making progress with the targets, roughly in the order given in the strategy – with greatest progress at the top end of the list, especially with the first and second. Primary schools *tend* to give more emphasis to building home-school links (7) and post-primary to employability (6). All see the fifth target – e-learning – as the most remote from their present experience.

1 *The learner's experience*

Enjoyment of learning through technology is a *sine qua non* for many respondents.

It is also noted by Boards that using technology successfully to develop independence in learning depends wholly on schools being committed, in their own educational goals, to flexible, independent and personalised learning.

CCEA undertakes to extend its research and development in the role of technology in teaching and learning and to review curriculum proposals and teaching plans accordingly.

2 *Literacy and numeracy*

3 *Creativity*

It is recognised by several respondents that schools need to understand more fully the profound impact of technology on literacy and numeracy, to appreciate more clearly the knowledge, skills and understanding that comprise digital and visual literacy and to develop more uses of ICT for creative purposes. Respondents say that those in CCEA and CASS who are responsible for curriculum guidance should take a lead in this regard. CCEA recognises the need for it to define, promote and support wider literacies in the curriculum.

4 *Personalised learning and e-assessment*

It is recognised that for technology to be used for assessment *for* learning, as part of the learning process, then not only will a wide range of differentiated online assessment resources be required, but also that the development of teacher competence in using assessment for formative purposes needs attention.

With respect to assessment *of* learning, some respondents call for more innovative in e-portfolios and types of e-assessment, arguing that ICT's role in examinations must not be limited to the word-processing of coursework and tests.

ET SMG notes the ambitious plans for e-assessment (online assessment of learning) set by the DfES Secretary of State and the QCA⁸ which provide some challenging targets up to 2009, setting a context for CCEA innovation in this area.

Respondents agree with the target (10.1) related to the need for appropriate professional development for teachers to match the increased access to management information system (MIS) data.

It is noted by some respondents that Learning NI (LNI) must to be able to meet the expectations about e-assessment in the classroom and that it must also accommodate schools in making use of the full range of examination and awarding bodies across the UK, especially where innovations in e-portfolios and other forms of e-assessment are already being implemented.

5 *e-learning*

Blended approaches to online teaching and learning are widely seen as being the appropriate way forward. There is a call in Board and other responses for additional evaluated pilot work, which engages educational partners as widely as possible, to build their capacity across the service.

Several respondents underline the opportunity to give pupils experience of communicating, learning and working with their peers in other countries.

The potential, identified in the strategy, for addressing the needs of pupils outside schools (EOTAS) is also underlined by several respondents.

6 *Employability*

This is seen as a vital target area, and one in which respondents believe standards and expectations need to be set. The competence of working in online teams is seen as important for young people.

ICT advisers' responses support the view that the foundation of skills in information and internet literacy is readily laid in key stages one and two.

⁸ See www.qca.org.uk/eassessment for details

7 Home-school links

The ethos of lifelong and community-based learning is warmly endorsed. Some responses from Boards and schools point to the examples already provided by community schools as existing models for making school networks accessible to pupils and community outside traditional school hours.

Respondents believe that government should act in partnership with commercial partners, through their voluntary and charity ventures, to make technology available in deprived homes.

Many responses reveal a lack of insight into the potential of using technology to improve communication with parents and for enhancing the teaching partnership with the home. School websites (through which *information about teaching* in the school can be published) are confused with intranets (through which pupils and parents can *be given access* from home to the courses on which pupils are enrolled and to the resources used). Some schools say they feel least confident about their ability to make progress with this target area and will require considerable support and guidance.

Enhanced Practice for school staff and school leaders

Responses from schools evince three broad trends, which may be characterised as ‘proactive’, ‘passive’ and ‘top-down’.

‘Proactive’ responses, roughly half, are ‘bottom-up’ in their approach. These schools report that they already have a strategy and actions in place which address at least some of the aspects of *emPowering Schools*. They are able to report where their current emphasis lies across the seven target areas for learners given in the strategy.

For proactive schools, ICT is:

- central to whole school improvement
- embedded in teaching and learning
- something that ought to be embedded in assessment
- embedded in school development planning
- a matter of changing practice for all staff – the role of the teacher will change
- already secured as central to professional development for all the school staff, both teaching and non-teaching
- further enhanced by additional spend
- likely to support emergence of innovative styles of teaching
- likely to drive reorganisation of the school day

What marks out the responses from proactive schools is their grasp that the use of technology *changes* educational practice. Others tend to see technology as an *addition* to existing practice, an addition to which some teachers say they cannot see themselves responding.

Proactive schools are clearly self-reliant and self-sustaining in their ability to make further progress with ICT.

In ‘passive’ responses, the second most frequent, the schools indicate that *emPowering Schools* is timely in drawing their attention to the bigger picture. For instance, post-primary schools, in particular, have been preoccupied with the technical issues of installing C2k. They report that they are stimulated by the publication of the strategy to re-think and re-energise their planning on a school-wide basis.

These schools say that they would value external support in making progress with ICT, both at the level of whole school planning and in terms of practice with ICT in the classroom.

In ‘top-down’ responses, the least frequent, schools see many problems about moving forward. In their responses, they do not refer to having a vision, strategy or plan of their own, and do not commit to creating one. They see the responsibility for producing such a plan as resting outside, and beyond them, with government, who should be, in their view, disseminating it to schools to follow, together with the necessary earmarked resources. They are nervous about being inspected in this aspect of their work.

Top-down schools identify various obstacles to moving forwards, including: inadequate hardware provision within their school; insufficient technology access for pupils at home; inadequate training and support; insufficient financial resources; the supposed detrimental influences of technology on young people. Respondents at times express some bewilderment at the pace of technological change and the degree of challenge to traditional teaching methods. It is evident that *top down* schools perceive these obstacles as lying beyond their control.

Schools whose responses tend to be *top-down* do not always have an integrationist view of ICT (where ICT is seen as becoming a means of teaching and of learning in the curriculum). Rather, they see the use of ICT as ‘competing’ unsuccessfully in the classroom for precious curriculum time.

In contrast to *proactive* schools, *top-down* schools hold the view that specialist teachers should be responsible for ICT and ICT teaching. ET SMG is concerned that the risk in this stance is that it would fail to promote uptake by all teachers and is likely to leave the competence and practice of the majority of teachers unchanged.

Top-down schools are in evident need of considerable external support to assist them to take ownership, over a longer period of time, and engage in the internal process of vision-making and strategic planning.

Staff competence, post-NOF

Continuing professional development (CPD) for staff in schools (all staff, not just teaching staff), is seen, by the vast majority, as the top priority for ET SMG and the Department to address. ET SMG is of the view, post-NOF, that subject-based CPD should be enabled and delivered through ICT, addressing teaching approaches across the entire subject, and embracing the role of technology.

Responses from schools and CASS both indicate that teachers would welcome some form of certification/recognition to motivate and record their further professional development and that this recognition should sit within a defined range of competence for online educators agreed across the Northern Ireland Teacher Education Partnership.

The point is made strongly by some respondents that a cascade model of mandatory in-service training would be unwelcome. An alternative model of peer to peer dissemination, on a classroom-focused, collegial basis, of examples of effective practice (target 14, page 20) is advocated by ET SMG in *emPowering Schools*, and needs to be transformed into a programme of action. GTC (NI) see this approach aligned to its commitment to develop a culture of critical reflection, shared through innovation networks, and RTU believe that it reflects its ongoing work in building dynamic communities of professional practice, through its emerging virtual college for school leadership.

The importance of each school drawing up and implementing its own professional development programme is highlighted by many responses. Some respondents ask for the excellent work uncomplainingly completed by many teachers during the NOF programme to be recalled and built upon.

Many responses stress that the development of competence, and the provision of staff access to Learning NI and to C2k school networks, is just as important for *non-teaching* staff in schools as it is for teachers.

School Leaders

The quality of school leadership and the approach of the school leadership to change are seen as essential for a school to become '*emPowered*'. It is vital, say respondents, to educate school leaders in the purpose and benefits of e-learning.

Responses indicate that support for embedding technology in schools could be given more emphasis in school improvement programmes run by Boards. RTU reports that it provides leadership development programmes which assist principals and aspiring principals to meet this challenge, for example through the mandatory use of virtual learning environment through PQH programmes: this is most welcome. There are already some CASS officers involved in supporting RTU's leadership programmes, which itself helps to build capacity.

Student teachers and initial teacher training

Several respondents recommend that the experience of e-learning must become an entitlement and requirement for all student teachers, so that all beginning teachers are already well experienced and equipped to use technology when they start to teach.

ET SMG is aware that, since early 2002, students and staff in initial teacher education institutions have been provided, at no cost, with the educational software from the C2k systems in schools, licensed for their use by C2k. More recently, C2k networks, identical to those in primary schools, have been installed in the appropriate ITE sites and, finally, we understand that student teachers will have personal user access through the Internet to LNI, when it is launched.

While some difficulties are identified⁹: lack of confidence about the delivery of e-learning experiences in ITE; lecturer expertise and change management issues; resourcing; and the highly variable student experiences of ICT whilst on teaching practice – other responses reflect on the considerable benefits already seen where e-learning has been introduced in the ITE curriculum on a pilot basis.

ET SMG recommends that a strategy and business plan, setting milestones specifically for the ITE sector in the context of *emPowering Schools*, would be most helpful in addressing and resolving the issues raised by the sector.

⁹ *ibid*

Enhanced Practice for the professional support community

The need

to model good practice in terms of using technology as we develop teachers

is recognised by respondents in the professional support community.

Developing the professional capacity for e-learning across the CASS service and other agencies, including CCEA, is identified as a high priority. Responses from Boards identify the need for further professional and skills development for advisory staff to equip them in their role of supporting schools, including in the exploitation of management information systems. CCEA commits itself to raising the awareness of its entire professional staff by taking advantage of appropriate professional development opportunities.

The accredited On-line Learning and Teaching for Educators (OLTE) programme, provided by the Regional Training Unit, is appreciated for the competency development in e-learning which it already provides to a number of education staff. ET SMG recommends that the programme needs to be expanded and extended in the short term to address the e-learning needs of professionals in CASS, CCEA and in the other education organisations.

ET SMG recognises the need for e-learning to become part of the professional competence of all education staff. We are aware that Higher Education also provides opportunities for professional development through online courses addressing e-learning. ET SMG is of the view that RTU, which already works closely with HEI providers and the National College for School Leadership in England, could usefully provide benchmarks which set the standard of professional development for the different roles of online educators: such as, online course designers, online authors, e-learning managers and online tutors.

Respondents recognise that an important feature of CASS support for schools will be the blending of:

- **peer to peer networking:** building online communities to share evaluated practice
- **differentiated** programmes of **face to face support** for schools

Board responses state that immediate action should be taken:

A phased approach to the implementation of online support with a meaningful context and purpose should be applied to forthcoming Board INSET provision.

Professional eportfolios should be part of a formal CPD accreditation scheme (for teachers).

As can be seen from school responses, while some are self-sufficient in embedding ICT, others need intensive care from CASS to develop a sense of the big picture and for detailed curriculum and professional planning.

ET SMG believes that the opportunity must be taken by CASS and others to foster a sense of ownership of the *emPowering Schools* strategy by engaging teachers in a debate about the impact of ICT on education, and the response of the school service to the impact which ICT is already having on society and on the economy.

We recognise that the CASS community, CCEA professional staff and others in the education service face a number of major challenges in the coming years arising from curriculum review, post-primary reorganisation and inclusion policies. We advise that it will be essential for planning, - *such as that being managed for the Revised Curriculum by the Programme Management Board of the PILSG* - to take a strategic approach to developing e-learning as a complementary means of delivering professional support to schools.

Innovation with technology and the school estate

Technology enhancements

The infrastructure, connectivity, content and services provided by C2k are widely welcomed by respondents, even if, we believe, the radical implications of this significant change to the educational environment are yet to be fully appreciated.

C2k has already taken positive action in response to *emPowering Schools*. An outline business case has been submitted to DE to refresh, using wireless technology, the primary managed service.

C2k has also made the business case for providing technology for teachers on a one-to-one basis. When, and if, approved, this will be welcomed widely by respondents, including those who desire to see improvements in administrative efficiency amongst school staff and the delivery of the savings of between 3.25 and 4.5 hours per week shown in the Teacher Workload Study¹⁰. A number of responses also call for a 'salary-withholding' laptop purchase scheme (for instance, the HCI Home Computer Initiative¹¹) to be extended from Board staff to all teachers. Such a step, if taken, would, we note, need to be coordinated strategically for the benefit of all teachers, rather than implemented piecemeal.

Taking advantage of the strategy window opened by *emPowering Schools* on the early years, the C2k business case covers the provision of connectivity for nursery schools, which will be welcomed by respondents.

If the potential educational gains from government's investment are to be fully realised then the need to further improve pupil access to technology in all schools, but especially in all post-primary school classrooms, was stressed by the vast majority of respondents. In addition, the concept put forward in *emPowering Schools* of enhancing existing networks so that pupils and school staff are able to make use of their personally-owned wireless devices in schools is welcomed.

Social access

The plan for C2k to connect the People's Network¹² in public libraries to the C2k data centre is seen as an important step which will improve access for the minority of pupils who do not have Internet access at home.

Many respondents endorse the proposal that social access schemes should be explored by government in partnership with the private sector.

Broadening access to LNI for parents in the home is regarded an important longer term goal by some respondents.

¹⁰ PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2001, DfES, London

¹¹ See www.club-it.com and www.knowledgenetwork.gov.uk/oe/hci.nsf/0/F374136D3AD2881680256E0F0041F296?OpenDocument

¹² See www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk

School designs

A review of school design criteria is already making itself evident in the design of some recently planned and completed schools. However, more creative examples of the use of space and technology would be greatly welcomed by the school sector. ET SMG understands that private sector partners such as CISCO and BT are willing to assist with technology design and build advice through a Building Schools of the Future programme.

Safe practices

Safety, security and acceptable use policies and practices are recognised to be a high priority for both C2k and the Department of Education to address. C2k already operates a Joint Security Forum to propagate technical standards in this area.

Editorial Board

Respondents recognise that online content and services must be relevant to the Northern Ireland Curriculum and to professional development needs, should conform to standards and be of the highest quality possible. The need to coordinate the development and the provision of online content and services through Learning NI, and other significant online environments used in schools, especially given the variety of public and private providers, is recognised by respondents.

ET SMG recommends that the implementation of quality standards for e-learning, building on the first version already published through the *emPowering Schools* eLearning Partnership, needs to be managed effectively. We understand that assuring quality and standards is not just a matter of publishing criteria, but is a professional development process. Close coordination with teacher education providers will therefore be required.

As the agency responsible for procuring the educational content for LNI, C2k has already taken steps to set up the Editorial Board called for in *emPowering Schools*.

Conclusion

The *emPowering Schools Strategy* articulates the big picture and can facilitate coherent progress both within individual stakeholder organisations and in partnership between them.

While many of the *education organisations*, in their response to *emPowering Schools*, point to the range of achievements already secured and actions already taken, the vast majority of *school* responses generally reflect that the impact in classrooms is still relatively modest, seen in the context of what is yet to be achieved.

We recognise that the contrast in the responses, at this point, is a timely reminder of the gap that exists between provision and response, and of the combined efforts needed to bridge it.