

City Learning Centres and Building Schools for the Future

Background

105 City Learning Centres (CLCs) were established as part of the government's Excellence in Cities (EiC) programme from 2000-03. The EiC initiative was designed to support the educational challenges of the major cities. CLCs were set up in urban areas where there was a mixture of social disadvantage and underperformance in schools. The main aim of a CLC is to provide enhanced ICT based learning across the whole curriculum for pupils and teachers, particularly in secondary schools, and to provide access to education to the wider community.

In most cases CLCs are based at a building attached to a host school and they serve a network of schools in the area.

CLCs are no longer managed by the DCSF and from March 2009 oversight of all 105 CLCs are the responsibility of Becta. All CLCs should be delivering against national and local authority priorities agreed locally and need to submit an Annual Performance Agreement to Becta for final approval before their capital funding is released.

Funding for CLCs

Local authorities receive both capital and revenue funding for their CLCs.

Revenue funding for CLCs either sits within local authorities' Area Based Grant (ABG) or schools' School Development Grant (SDG) depending on how CLCs are managed locally. If the CLCs are managed centrally, then the funding sits within ABG; if managed by a partnership of schools, then the funding sits within the SDG allocation of the schools in the partnership. In each case the funding is not ring-fenced: ABG can be spent on any local authority service; SDG can be spent on any purpose to raise the standards of teaching and learning in schools. Local authorities and schools should continue to have regard to any commitments they have entered into through stakeholder agreements when making their spending decisions.

Capital funding for a CLC is released once the Annual Performance Agreement has been approved by Becta. The funding is passed from the DCSF to a local authority via the usual channels. Individual local authorities will have their own different processes for releasing the funding to the CLCs.

CLCs in the Building Schools for the Future planning process

The availability of funding for new technologies as part of Building Schools for the Future (BSF) offers a major opportunity for local authorities and schools as they seek to envisage how ICT might be successfully deployed in improving educational

outcomes. Many CLCs have been successful as test beds for the innovative use of technology and could be used by local authorities and schools to inform and support their BSF strategy.

In those local authorities with CLCs, unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary, the CLC managers should be part of the BSF planning group which:

- shapes the ICT elements of the Strategy for Change;
- supports and challenges schools over their individual Strategies for Change;
- develops the ICT Output Specification which will inform the procurement process.

Where this has happened in the early waves of BSF, the CLC presence has enhanced the process considerably.

It should be noted that:

- Becta Regional Advisers and Partnerships for Schools' Project Directors and Education ICT Advisors will help local authorities to understand the role that the CLCs can play in helping to shape their BSF strategy;
- the role of the CLCs (where they exist) should be clarified and established as part of the pre-engagement process;
- All local authorities already in the BSF programme who have not yet fully engaged their CLCs in the BSF process, should do so as soon as possible.

CLCs in supporting the implementation of the BSF strategy

One of the key challenges for schools and local authorities in BSF is to provide professional development of staff to enable them to derive maximum benefit from the greatly ICT-enriched environments in the new and remodelled schools. Many CLCs have developed reputations as providers of high-quality training for school staff and others. Local authorities will need to consider whether the CLC should remain under the direction and management of the local authority or be transferred to the private sector ICT partner under BSF.

It is possible, for example, for the local authority to specify an exclusive role for a CLC as a training provider at the time it procures its ICT partner. Equally, the local authority might prefer that a CLC competes cost-effectively with the private sector for any training work which results from BSF.

CLC Premises and BSF Estate Strategy

Where existing CLC premises might be affected by new building or remodelling programmes or are scheduled for demolition, the Local Authority should ensure that the functions of the CLC and its ability to support the local schools and community are considered as part of the BSF process. Local authorities should take account of the significant levels of investment that have already been put into CLCs when making their decisions. As CLCs will have built up relationships with a range of stakeholders (including primary schools) it would be good practice to consult the stakeholder group about any proposed relocation or change to the premises of a CLC through BSF. This consultation should take place as early as possible and the views of the stakeholder group should be taken into account by the local authority.

If the local BSF strategy is not to create similar accommodation as part of any building or remodelling programme then this should be discussed with Becta.

For local authorities in Wave 5 onwards, proposals for relocation or any other substantial changes to CLC premises must be included in the Estates Strategy section of Strategy for Change Part 2 and will be subject to approval or rejection by DCSF and Becta. Partnerships for Schools' Project Directors and Education ICT Advisors will ensure that consideration of CLC location is part of the early discussion with local authorities and that any recommendation for change is included in Strategy for Change Part 2 before submission.



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