

Press Cuttings

Client: Easynet Global Services
Publication: Education Today
Date: 09.03.10
Frequency: Online
Circulation: 25,000

Education today

Education as one of the biggest global growth industries for Britain in the 21st century?

Phil Mullan, UK Managing Director

Earlier this year Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced that "education will be one of the biggest global growth industries for Britain in the 21st century". Whether or not the term 'industry' is the appropriate way to describe the role of enlightening and inspiring our children with knowledge, we can safely assume that education will be an area that will feature heavily in each party's campaigning before the imminent general election. A key channel that can be utilised in order to achieve the necessary improvement in the quality of education is broadband provision for all schools and all families, irrespective of income. Whether enabling parents to keep abreast of their child's progress through online reporting or giving children a platform both at school and home to research, develop and cross-reference their work through high speed internet connections, the ways in which broadband access can facilitate and improve a child's education are manifold.

Aiming to provide free laptops and broadband access for 270,000 low income families is being promoted as the cornerstone of the government's new drive on education. Furthermore the deadlines put in place in order to achieve this are stringent, further supporting the investment that has been proposed. In fact, the public should see a notable difference relatively quickly, the self-imposed deadlines of broadband provision in 2010 for parents whose children are in secondary schools and 2012 for those who have dependants in primary education speak volumes. However this zeal and determination to support the improvement of education through high speed internet accessibility is not simply an innovation that is restricted to the UK.

This policy has been partially inspired by the education leadership instituted in Finland, where broadband accessibility has become a legal right. In order to demonstrate the Finnish government has pledged that by July 2010 every Finn will have access to a 1 Megabit-per-second broadband connection.

It is this model that is being earmarked as the shape of things to come. During a virtual telepresence meeting between Easynet Global Services CEO David Rowe and Belgian Minister Vincent van Quickenbourne, the politician stated that he expected more countries to follow suit.

It seems then that this proposal, if managed effectively, could provide communities as a whole with unrivalled benefits. However the key to this policy's success is in the implementation. The government needs to ensure that infrastructure put in place to support this initiative is rigorous, thorough and consistent.

One way to make real strides in this area is by sharing and reapplying instances of public sector best practice. The UK is lucky enough to benefit from the Regional Broadband Consortia (RBC) model, in which RBCs combine their purchasing expertise for the procurement of Internet services. Their collective purchasing power ensures safe, accessible internet services at best value prices. This model is held in high regard across Europe: in fact, countries have approached UK RBCs for examples of best practice, and advice on adopting the model.

Over the last decade, RBCs - like the Northern Grid for Learning and E2BN which work in partnership with Easynet Global Services - have gone beyond their original remit to deliver a much wider array of value-added benefits to their constituencies. From lower deployment and running costs to increased efficiency and consistency of systems, RBCs in the UK deliver strong results across the country, including driving down both deployment and running costs, speeding project delivery time and helping to roll-out applications more quickly and effectively.

In order to maintain their commitment to universal broadband-access in the UK, the government needs to establish and encourage sustainable organisational systems like the RBCs that can support this new investment. Can education be one of the biggest global growth "industries" for Britain in the 21st century? Yes; though technology alone does not make a higher standard of education, one key contributor can be if the UK continues to deliver accomplished work through partnerships like the RBCs. It's through this type of investment that political leaders can provide the tools that can help build and grow the education of the UK's students for generations to come, ensuring that this new initiative institutes lasting change.