

The National Education Network

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the presentation by The National Education Network. I would like to thank the Honorable member for Eccles Mr Ian Stewart for kindly agreeing to sponsor this event.

The National Education Network or NEN is a public sector physical IT infrastructure stretching across the length and breadth of Britain, to which schools and local authorities can connect in order to gain access to a private, secure broadband network.

ICT is transforming the way children learn. Parents in your area will want to know that their children are being offered the best opportunities in using ICT to improve their learning. Teachers and children need to be ready for the new literacy of the digital age. We, within the NEN provide the essential infrastructure to do this and critical support for other services.

I would like to share with you a short history of the NEN but mainly focus on how the achievements of the NEN support learners, teachers and parents in your constituencies.

In 1999 Local Education Authorities were encouraged by Central Government to form Regional Consortia, or learning grids, to help schools procure new technology. Within a year they were specifically tasked with procuring Broadband for schools. Soon after that, the new regional networks and those built by the devolved administrations were linked together to form a National Education Network (NEN).

In 2002, the Government pledged to deliver a broadband connection to every school by 2006. The English Regional Broadband Consortia (RBCs) and the UK wide National Education Network community achieved this. We have not only met the Government challenge of 2002 but in many cases delivered this ahead of schedule, within budget and over minimum specifications. I'm pleased to say that we're one of the few public sector IT projects since 1990 to have had that level of success. Our effectiveness, improvements and transformation of broadband delivery have established the NEN as a world leader with many other countries such as Spain and Germany looking to emulate our strategies and successes.

Today we and our partner Local Authorities provide broadband connections to over 99 per cent of all state schools where Secondary schools typically benefit from 100 Mb connections and primary schools 10 Mb.

If the NEN were not to exist, vital opportunities and savings for schools would be lost. Whilst schools are free to choose, the vast majority opt into this network, using their devolved 'harnessing technology' funds to pay for their last mile broadband connections. There has to be concern that when the harnessing technology grant programme ends in March 2011, radical changes in funding could undermine this asset.

I will now set out some of the reasons why the NEN is important, why it matters to you and your constituents and hence why it should continue to be funded after March 2011.

The individual learning grids manage the NEN and its offerings to schools. We are responsive to the needs of schools, teachers and local authorities in your area and constituency. This means that the support we provide is tailored to specific local needs.

The infrastructure is important because it is robust, reliable and promotes safety and security. However, important through the boxes and wires are, the most visible and recognisable aspects of the NEN are the services, learning opportunities, online support, resources and sometime face to face support which are accessible to learners, teachers and parents across the whole of the UK and right on your doorstep. Providing important tools and materials to keep learners safe online is very important. NEN e-safety support and expertise is freely available to all. You will be able to re-assure your constituents that public funds have been well spent to improve the safety and well being of young people and the adults who work with them.

The NEN community provides high quality online teaching and learning resources, free at the point of delivery. We provide important links to powerful regional and national archives and cultural collections. These materials support parents in engaging with their children's learning. Our partnerships with museums, libraries, galleries and archives provide important routes for learners, their parents and teachers. We bring art, history and culture into homes and classrooms.

Because of this, we believe that the NEN is an important vehicle to extend life experiences. It helps improve life chances for young people and supports transformation and the raising of standards in schools. Without the NEN and our work in your neighbourhoods, schools would not be able to access the secure, high capacity and business-critical services that they need at affordable costs. We in the NEN in partnership with Local Authorities deliver these economies through strategic management of grant funding.

Not only do we provide broadband connections for schools but in many areas the NEN provides cost effective broadband for other public services. In the recent floods, emergency services' communications were delivered across that part of the NEN provided by CLEO, the Cumbria and Lancashire grid for learning. In Middlesbrough and Stockton on Tees, part of the Northern Grid for Learning, SMES can now benefit from fast affordable broadband connections which are important consequences of improving broadband services for schools. These are only two examples of current and future possibilities which the NEN can deliver to important sectors of your constituencies. In many rural areas the NEN is the only available broadband provider. This availability should be further extended and exploited. The NEN community wants to be able to do much more for rural communities and for SMES.

The NEN delivers broadband services at affordable costs. The NEN, its infrastructure, resources, information, advice and support are valuable national assets, which would be worth billions in capital and revenue if in private sector hands. You will want to re-assure your constituents that The NEN has saved them and the tax payer millions each year. This is delivered through aggregating procurements, by sharing powerful broadband infrastructures and collaborative and collective developments at local and regional levels. We can confidently say that estimated annual savings exceed £100 million per year. In the current economic climate, this is an important matter to you, your party and your constituents.

UKplc needs these developments to fuel economic growth. You will be pleased to know that our work within the NEN is supported by major industry suppliers. We wish to continue our work with central government not only to exploit existing investment but to deliver future savings and efficiencies in the current challenging climate.

This will ensure that your constituents and their families receive the highest and best services possible which will support ongoing improvements and transformation within the education system and beyond in wider public and private sector arenas.

Ladies and gentlemen many thanks for your time today. Some of my colleagues from the NEN are here and will be pleased to answer any questions you may have about our developments in your constituencies. I would like to introduce:

Phil Moore from Yorkshire and Humberside Grid for Learning

Hilary Guckian from South West Grid for Learning

Brian Durrant from London Grid for Learning

Cathy Olsson from E2BN

Heather Pettit from South East Grid for Learning

Mike Kendall from East Midlands Broadband Consortia

John Parmiter from West Midlands Grid for Learning

Please stay and enjoy the refreshments on offer and discuss with my colleagues how we can support broadband delivery in your constituencies.