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January 1998

Staff room

## Teaching in the 21st century



1997 saw the publication of two important documents with many implications for teaching in the next century. PASS Maths has added its voice to the subsequent debates.

### ***The Report of the Dearing Commission***

Following our article "[IT and Dearing](#)" in Issue No. 3, the CTI (Computers in Teaching Initiative) through their publication *Active Learning* invited open letters, via email, in response to the Report, which had been published in July 1997. Ours is reproduced below.

Replies to Sir Ron  
Active Learning

Dear Sir Ron,

When reading your recommendations we were heartened by the fact that the committee had recognised the importance of projects which aim to encourage progression to higher education. Our project, PASS Maths, publishes an online magazine with this as one of its central objectives. Of primary importance to projects such as ours is the efficiency of the network infrastructure which links schools and further education colleges to higher education institutions.

Members of HE institutions have enjoyed the benefits of a well connected community, provided by JISC. However, connections with UK organisations outside of this community are limited by one modest gateway. This makes it hard for schools and colleges to share resources with HE as they must compete with the network traffic generated by commercial companies.

The report calls for "appropriate network connectivity" to be secured for all sites of further and higher education delivery. It is our opinion that good links with sites of secondary education are vital and should form part any future policy.

Yours sincerely  
Steve Lay and Robert Harding

PASS Maths Project  
<http://pass.maths.org.uk/>  
6th November 1997

***Connecting the Learning Society***

The Government published the above consultation paper in October 1997. Its promised National Grid for Learning was launched by David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Employment at the BETT (British Education and Training Technology) exhibition on 14th January 1998. Our response to the consultation paper is reproduced below.

Eve Trueman  
Superhighways and Multimedia Unit  
Level 3C  
Department for Education and Employment  
Caxton House  
Tothill Street  
London SW1H 9NA

Dear Eve Trueman

This response is from the PASS Maths project. PASS Maths stands for Public Awareness and Schools Support for MATHEmaticS. The project aims to increase public awareness of the importance of mathematics in everyday life. It does this through an electronic magazine, published on the world wide web, designed to appeal mainly to 16 to 19 year old school pupils and others studying for GCSE and A-levels or equivalent qualifications. The magazine provides support to teachers both in teaching and promoting the subject with a view to exciting greater interest and encouraging pupils to further study at any level.

We welcome the *Connecting the Learning Society* consultation paper, in particular the recognition of the contribution that the Internet can make to integrating the activities of schools, colleges, universities and other community institutions.

We would like to raise two points in answer to the *questions for consultation*:

- ◆ We do share the Government's view that it is important to develop the content of the proposed National Grid. We would like to draw attention to recommendation 3 of the recent Dearing report, Higher Education in the Learning Society, which recommends the funding of projects which promote progression to higher education. The proposed Grid would provide an excellent environment in which such projects could operate. We suggest that seed funding should be provided for this type of initiative in the pilot phase.
- ◆ Our experience in delivering an online magazine to schools has demonstrated to us the inadequacy of the existing communications infrastructure linking UK schools to JANET, the existing academic network managed by UKERNA. We are particularly concerned that the proposed action on connection and on-line costs may not provide the connectivity that national projects such as PASS Maths require to develop further. We suggest that (i) the Internet link between JANET and organisations connected through the UK's commercial service providers be expanded to allow the academic community to participate fully in the Grid or (ii) consideration be given to expanding JANET's terms of reference to include connections to schools, sixth form colleges

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and any future Grid consortia.

Yours sincerely  
Robert Harding and Steve Lay  
4th December 1997

BETT'98

CTI (*Computers in Teaching Initiative*)

Connecting the Learning Society

Dearing Report (*The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education*)

National Grid for Learning

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*Plus* is part of the family of activities in the Millennium Mathematics Project, which also includes the NRICH and MOTIVATE sites.