

MEETING	SCHOOLS FINANCE FORUM
DATE	3 November 2014
TITLE	Strengthen the provision of IT connectivity
PURPOSE	The Welsh Government has invested around £2.5m to develop the infrastructure that delivers Wi-Fi connectivity whilst increasing the speed to a minimum of 10mbps for primary and 100mbps in secondary schools and primary schools with more than 300 pupils. There is on-going revenue obligations to support the provision.
RECOMMENDATION	Proportion additional costs to the schools
AUTHOR	Huw Ynyr, IT & Transformation Senior Manager
CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION	Councillor Peredur Jenkins

Background

Historically, Wales and especially Gwynedd, because of its rural landscape has suffered poor connectivity to the internet. The Welsh Government has introduced measures to improve the internet connectivity, targeting a minimum of 10mbps for primary and 100mbps in secondary schools and primary schools with more than 300 pupils. In addition to improving the throughput connectivity, the Welsh Government measure also included the introduction of Wi-Fi connectivity throughout the schools to provision for the use of technology in every corner of the school. The main driver for this, and core to the grant conditions is the support to “Hwb+”. The Welsh Government describes “Hwb+” as follows:

Hwb is the Wales wide learning platform, supporting a collection of national digital resources from a variety of contributors. Hwb will sustain cooperative learning environments that will facilitate professional learning communities throughout Wales.

Hwb+ is the provision of learning platforms to each and every school in Wales. A learning platform is a collection of resources and on-line services that enhances digital learning. Hwb+ will offer the following for each school – public website, virtual classroom, events and announcements, blogs, wikis and forums, personal interface for users and access to Office 365.

Investment

The new provision has been possible with a grant investment of £2.5m by the Welsh Government, however additional revenue costs are incurred from April 2015 onwards. The initial grant from Welsh Government supported the revenue costs up to March, 2015.

From April 2015 onwards, there will be additional costs of £270,000 per year to support the provision. This figure is a combination of:

- Increasing the connectivity speed within the schools from their previous speed to 10/100mbps
- Strengthen the supporting infrastructure to cope with the increase in the connectivity
- Licencing costs for the Wi-Fi service which includes web filtering to protect the users from accessing inappropriate content
- Additional staffing costs to support the service

Technology

Technology continues to evolve and change with greater emphasis on services through the internet, with these services becoming richer in their multi media content. Traditionally, the use of technology within the school would see pupils move to a room or an area provisioned with technology to use a computer as part of their digital education. Today, the emphasis has changed, with the technology following the pupil, however to enable this Wi-Fi needed to be introduced on a grand scale. The work carried out within the schools will support this way of learning and pupils will be able to use tablet PCs such as iPads and laptops anywhere within the school.

This new provision will also lead to other possibilities, offering opportunities to present the public with access to Wi-Fi or to social organisations, which makes the school and establishment that can be marketed for activities beyond the core teaching hours.

The network has been architected to introduce telephony services that could lead to a convergence of the data and voice networks, releasing the need to pay for additional telephone lines and a cheaper way of making telephone calls. Additional investment would be required to enable this, however it would lead to savings on current expenditure.

Funding the Provision

As indicated above, additional funding of £270,000 is required to support this provision, active from April 2015 onwards, and this cost will be proportioned to the schools.