Questions and Answers on the Government's digital literacy initiatives

Digital literacy reference group

When will the digital literacy reference group be set up and how long is its term?

The group is expected to be established by May 2013 and to meet the work plan which will take at least one year.

What is the purpose of the digital literacy reference group?

This group will have input to developing a strategy that provides direction for the future of teaching and learning in 21st century learning environments. The group will also work through some of the more challenging recommendations of the select committee report.

Who else will have input into developing a digital literacy strategy?

The purpose of the digital literacy reference group is to provide education and technology related policy advice. There will also be input from a number of Government agencies, employers, education and technology sectors, local government, students and communities in the development of a digital education strategy. The Associate Education Minister will work with these groups to ensure adequate consultation on specific recommendations.

Investment

What has the Government invested in 21st Century learning environments and digital literacy?

This Government has invested significantly in ensuring New Zealand students have access to the best, most innovative 21st century learning opportunities.

This includes:

- $1.5 billion in ultrafast broadband.
- More than $200 million to be spent on connecting schools to ultra-fast broadband and the Schools Network Upgrade Project (SNUP) to upgrade internal school network infrastructure. The plan is to ensure schools will be connected to fibre or an alternative technology by 2016.
- A $1 billion commitment to invest in more modern school environments.
- Digital literacy will be included as an educational priority area within the $13.8 million funding for Adult and Community Education in schools this year.

How many submissions did the Education and Science Committee receive on 21st Century learning environments and digital literacy?

The committee received 90 submissions and heard 55 oral submissions.

What were the recommendations of the committee?

The committee's investigations resulted in 48 recommendations on structures, tools and communities to enable young students and teachers to be well prepared to operate confidently and successfully in the 21st century.

The report and recommendations can be found here: http://www.parliament.nz/NR/rdonlyres/FD34151C-744B-4B49-86F2-6FE5850123AE/256992/DBSCH_SCR_5695_Inquiryinto21stcenturylearningenvir.pdf

Which recommendations has the Government progressed so far?

There are a number of recommendations underway. Below is an update on some of these.

Recommendation 5

Creating best practice design templates for school buildings so that newly built schools and upgrades are more open, flexible and networked.

Last year the Ministry of Education completed the evaluation of four learning plans pilots to inform classroom development ensuring learning spaces meet the needs of 21st century learners in open, flexible and networked environments. The Ministry of Education is undertaking further work on best practice design templates for schools.

Recommendation 13

To ensure that policies and guidance are guidance are developed to help prevent cyber bullying and inappropriate online content.

The Government's recent announcements on holding cyber bullies to account are important because they will help ensure greater safety as more students learn online.

In addition, a school charter must show how the school's board is ensuring it provides a safe physical and emotional environment for all students. This means any anti-bullying and cyber safety plans the school has developed must at least be referenced in the school charter.

The Ministry of Education provides a number of programmes and supports to help schools provide a safe environment including Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) and Wellbeing@School.

More information on the Government's proposals to protect victims of cyber bullying and hold perpetrators to account can be found here:

http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/time039s-cyber-bullies

Recommendations 19 and 20

That it review the definitions of digital literacy to consider a common definition that can be used across the sector.

That it review 21st century skills in the context of digital literacy in our education system.

The Ministry of Education is working with other government agencies on a common view of both the definition and 21st century skills.

Recommendations 22 and 23

That it consider enhancing the role of information science in the education sector.

That it better position ICT skills, knowledge and understanding as educational options that lead to high-value careers.

These are both underway. The Ministry of Education has worked with NZQA and the wider business, technology and education sectors to create Achievement Standards on the NZ Qualifications framework around information science and ICT skills.

Computer science at NCEA Level 3 was added to the NZ Qualifications Framework this year (2013).

Students studying digital technologies, including computer science, can gain top academic awards if they meet the standard expected. Specialist areas including digital information, digital infrastructure, digital media, and electronics and control technologies are also available on the NZ Qualifications framework.