



Australian Government

Department of Education, Science and Training

Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Regional Broadband Policy and technical Support
(BC-CN@dcita.gov.au)

Department of Education, Science and Training Submission on Broadband Connect and Clever Networks Discussion Paper, November 2005

DEST supports the general aims and objectives of the Broadband Connect and Clever Networks programmes and welcomes the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper.

The education sector as a whole is increasingly using a wider range of more sophisticated applications to support both online and face-to-face education. Sector needs are generally greater than those of domestic users of broadband because of the type of usage e.g. access to bandwidth hungry learning resources and video-conferencing are increasingly important in education at all levels. If education in Australia is to keep pace with its counterparts in the developed world, integrated, affordable and sufficient broadband is necessary for every education institution whatever its geographic location and whatever its size. Broadband is not only important for the education of Australians but it also supports our international education industry which is worth some AUD\$7.5 billion per year.

Eligibility

DEST is pleased to see that education is included in the objectives of the Clever Networks programme. We would urge the use of a wide definition of education to include both public and private not-for-profit education providers as well as institutions such as public libraries.

Innovation and Strategic Infrastructure Investment

DEST would encourage the support of projects that leverage under-utilised existing fibre infrastructure wherever possible rather than projects which duplicate existing infrastructure. This may require collaborative, iterative processes with stakeholder groups, assisted by broadband advisers and brokers, rather than purely competitive processes at least for infrastructure development which can then be used for competitive provision of services/applications.

Ensuring the complementarity of proposals under Broadband Connect and Clever Networks programmes would also serve to provide more cost-effective solutions and target funding to areas that are currently under-resourced and/or lacking in competition.

Upfront funding

We agree that projects that require large-scale broadband rollouts would benefit from up-front funding. This would be more likely to encourage stakeholders to propose the most cost-effective option to meet needs rather than the options which fit with in their current financial constraints.

Long-term sustainability

DEST supports the requirement for proposals to demonstrate that solutions will be sustainable, upgradeable and interoperable. To that end it may be useful to provide a technical policies, standards and services framework to ensure quality of service and ensure that individual projects are able to form part of a national infrastructure strategy.

Role of Advisers and Brokers

Broadband Advisers and Brokers should be able to play a crucial role in providing information and advice to communities about possible options and to facilitate collaborative proposals. Brokers need to be aware of the overall national strategy so that they can encourage options that add to the overall strategy and not get too closely focussed on options that will serve only the region in which they are working.

Infrastructure vs Applications

While DEST would support the focus of the programmes being on infrastructure, it would encourage a degree of flexibility in assessing proposals so that where applications that are necessary to the overall success of the proposal are included, these will be funded.

Terrestrial or Satellite Expansion

While DEST would generally support the view that the technology used should fit the needs of the stakeholders, with the exception of a small percentage of very remote schools where satellite may be the only solution to communication needs, this technology is limiting for education uses. As far as possible, terrestrial options should be favoured if educational facilities are a stakeholder and for the sustainability and future upgrade of the infrastructure.

Should you wish to discuss any part of this submission, please contact Ms Anne-Marie Lansdown (02 6229 4162 or at anne-marie.lansdown@dest.gov.au) or Mr Peter Nicholson (02 6229 4165 or at peter.nicholson@dest.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

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