The British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta) is the Government's lead agency for the National Grid for Learning.

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The National Grid for Learning

The NGfL is a vital part of the Government's committment to the creation of a connected learning society.

The National Grid for Learning (NGfL) is a Government initiative which is both an architecture of educationally valuable content on the Internet (the NGfL portal) and a programme for the delivery of ICT infrastructure, support and training.

The NGfL is a vital part of the Government's commitment to the creation of a connected learning society. It is intended to increase and widen access to learning for everyone and accommodate the needs of learners in all sectors of education, formal and informal. The NGfL is managed and developed by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta), the Government's lead agency for ICT in education.

Background

The NGfL was first launched in early 1998 by the Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, at the British Educational Technology and Training show (BETT), following the publication of the Government's consultation document 'Connecting the Learning Society' in October 1997.

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The prototype of the portal focused on content for use in schools and was aimed primarily at teachers, but the launch of the full framework of the NGfL in November 1998 by Prime Minister Tony Blair established it as an educational resource for everyone. Since then the range of content has grown significantly to include materials for students, parents, governors, lifelong learners and the whole educational sector.

The portal was given a major update and redesign in January 2001 and relaunched at the BETT show. Currently the site has over 5,000 pages of hosted content, 300,000 pages of indexed content and receives more than 2 million hits per week. This represents a 65% increase in the number of weekly hits on the portal over the last two years.

NGfL portal

Anyone with a connection to the Internet can access the educational materials and resources available via the NGfL. The portal is a network of websites that provide content to support learning, teaching, training and administration in schools, colleges, universities, libraries, the workplace and the home.

All the sites linked from the portal must go through a registration and approval process which includes meeting a set of quality criteria (the NGfL 'Ground Rules'), so that users can be confident that any website carrying the NGfL logo has pledged to maintain high standards.

These criteria include providing access to educational, learning or administrative resources, technical accessibility, acting as a showcase of quality and innovative teaching or learning resources and facilitating non-institutional, lifelong learning.

The NGfL Content team at Becta is responsible for developing the content on the NGfL and is continually working to identify existing online resources and liaising with content providers to draw in suitable sites.

What's on the NGfL?

The content on the NGfL portal is currently organised into the following sections:

⇨ Schools
⇨ Further Education
⇨ Higher Education
⇨ Lifelong Learning
⇨ Career Development
⇨ Libraries & Archives
⇨ Museums & Galleries
⇨ Community Grids
⇨ International Networks
⇨ Government & Agencies
⇨ Media
⇨ E-Commerce
⇨ Jobs

Each area contains a directory of links to specific websites of interest in or for that sector. For example, the Museums & Galleries area features online collections, information and interactive exhibits from many of the UK's cultural institutions.

A teacher searching for lesson plans on a particular subject can access the Virtual Teacher Centre (VTC) through the Schools area of the NGfL. The VTC provides a focus for information and materials for teachers, including subject resources, curriculum information (schemes of work and teaching frameworks), support for professional development, education policy guidance, school management, special educational needs and online discussion groups.

The VTC's search engine delivers relevant content based on the user's needs, which can be specified by subject, age and area of interest.

Regional Learning Directories

As well as browsing the NGfL by sector, users can access resources targeted at a local level through the regional Learning Directories, reached via the map on the portal home page.

Content on these pages includes news and events of interest to the local learning community as well as online content appropriate to the region. For example, a parent in Leicester can find a list of primary schools in the city through Leicester Integrated Online Network (LION), which is one of the links in the East Midlands Learning Directory.

Updated fortnightly, the What's New pages highlight educational news of interest to the broad learning community and also contain separate feature areas for Parents & Guardians,

A teacher searching for lesson plans on a particular subject can access the Virtual Teacher Centre through the Schools area of the NGfL.

Teachers & Lecturers, Children & Young People and Lifelong Learners.

Each of these sections focuses on new NGfL content relevant to the particular user group, together with news and events.

Monitoring content

GridWatch is the safety-checking mechanism for the NGfL and has been set up to monitor approved content on the portal to ensure that it is both safe and appropriate for users.

Samples of websites are checked for unsuitable material (anything which is illegal, undesirable, inaccurate, misleading, out-of-date, contravenes copyright regulations or breaches the requirements of the NGfL 'Ground Rules').

GridWatch enables action to be taken to correct any problems discovered or the link to be removed from the NGfL, depending on the gravity of the situation. Users are encouraged to assist GridWatch by reporting any unsuitable content they see on the NGfL.

The future

The NGfL Content team plans to expand its advisory role and work closely with content providers to ensure that their online resources are appropriate to user needs.

Above all, the team will continue to foster the development of educational resources on the portal to improve its scope, quality and accessibility for the learning community and maintain its status as a leading source of educational content on the Internet.

Useful websites:

http://www.ngfl.gov.uk/
National Grid for Learning

http://www.becta.org.uk/
British Educational Communications and Technology Agency

http://www.dfee.gov.uk/grid/challenge/index.htm
'Open for Learning, Open for Business' (NGfL Challenge document, published November 1998)

For further information please contact the NGfL Content team at the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency. Tel: 024 7641 6994 Email: webkeeper@ngfl.gov.uk