Response by Crispin Weston
to the Oct 22 2012 Initial Draft of the ICT Programme of Study

This is a personal response. I am Chairman of SALTIS (www.saltis.org, a working group of the British Education Suppliers Association campaigning for better data interoperability), and Chairman of IST/43, the BSI committee concerned with IT in learning, education and training. My main interest is in the use of technology to improve teaching and learning.

1   While the draft follows the Royal Society report in proposing three strands (Computer Science, IT and Digital Literacy), it does not explain of what curriculum content these three strands are composed. This failure to disentangle the different aspects of ICT perpetuates all the intellectual confusions which are embedded in the term. The document should clearly differentiate between the three strands and make minimal use of the umbrella term "ICT".

2   The definition of *Digital Literacy* is poor: see points 3, 4 and 5. The definition given in the Royal Society report was much more precise. Digital Literacy ought to be seen as "the skills that teachers of other subjects at secondary school should be able to assume that their pupils have, as an analogue of being able to read and write" (Shut down or restart? page 17).

3   Digital Literacy is incorrectly defined as the ability to "access" technology. Being able to read a book is not the same as owning a book or belonging to a library. In as it requires certain skills, there is no sense conveyed by the term "accessing" that is not also conveyed by the term "using".

4   Digital Literacy is incorrectly defined as the ability to "express oneself using digital technology". The ability to express oneself is the subject of English, History, Science, Mathematics, or whatever subject concerns the substance of what is being expressed.

5   Digital Literacy is incorrectly defined as the possession of a "critical understanding of technology's impact on the individual and society". The fact that I can read does not mean that I understand the impact of literacy on society. This may be a worthwhile sociological study at GCSE or A level—but is unlikely to make a useful contribution to the pre-GCSE compulsory curriculum.

6   The definition of IT (which is substantially the same as that given by the Royal Society) is too vague to be helpful—particularly when the rest of the PoS does not specify what curriculum content composes this strand.

7   Most of the first page comprises a eulogy to ICT. This is (a) inconsistent with the general perception that the current ICT curriculum is "dull and boring"; (b) inappropriate in a Programme of Study—which ought to be a substantive document—and especially to one that has so little space to spare on this type of padding.

8   What I take to be the paragraphs relating to Digital Literacy (the first paragraphs for the first three key stages) are poorly defined (see points 9–11). These paragraphs should outline much more precisely what skills students require. What skills these are should be established by consultation with non-technical subject teachers, appropriate subject associations and Ofsted.

9   The DL paragraphs specify that students should be able to "select" appropriate software to achieve their goals. No software is specified other than internet search engines. Students can only select software with which they are already familiar. Unless they are taught to use such software in the first place, their selections are likely to be confined to the type of software they already use, e.g. for social networking. This represents a kind of abdication of responsibility for effective teaching.

10   The ability to use software creatively and to evaluate the outcomes is the domain of different subject specialisms (see point 4) and not of ICT.

11   The DL paragraphs place an emphasis on collaboration and presentation. These are "soft" learning objectives, much loved by the ICT community but of doubtful worth in the context of rigorous, academic subjects.

Further background and argument in support of this response is given in a blog post, *Digital literacy and the new ICT curriculum*, at http://edtechnow.net/2012/11/17/digital-literacy-and-the-new-ict-curriculum/.

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17 November 2012