

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Crispin Weston on 07780811806.

European Commission asked to investigate Becta's Learning Platform Procurement

Bridport, Dorset – January 5th 2007. Alpha Learning Ltd has asked the European Commission to investigate Becta's Learning Platform procurement framework on the grounds that it breaches European regulations.

In his letter to the Commission, Alpha Learning's Managing Director, Crispin Weston, says that a significant number of the successful tenders fail to satisfy criteria which were described under the contract notice as mandatory. The main purpose of European regulations for public procurement is to ensure that selection criteria, announced at the beginning of a competition, are applied objectively.

Weston commented, "Becta did not enforce its own mandatory requirements when it realised that no-one would meet them. While smaller companies and open source products have been excluded from this competition, larger companies have been awarded contracts even though they do not meet necessary standards for interoperability.

"Becta has for many years failed to implement technical standards for interoperability for learning software in schools. The result has been an inefficient market with a poor record for innovation. The lack of support for these standards is also making it difficult for the BBC to meet the conditions under which it is required to operate the Digital Curriculum".

Weston's letter to the Commission, along with a range of supporting documentation, is published at www.alphalearning.co.uk/ojeu.htm.

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Notes to editors

A press conference will be held at 12 noon on Wednesday, 10th January on Alpha Learning's stand S95 at the BETT show. If you are planning to attend, it would be helpful if you could let us know in advance on 01308 485054.

Alpha Learning is showing its learning platform, *Engage*, at BETT. Alpha Learning did not compete in the Learning Platform competition because it was too small to meet the financial criteria for qualification.

Weston is an expert on standards for interoperability who has sat on the DfES' Technical Standards Working Group, Learning Platforms Stakeholders Group and Becta's Learning Services Technical Sub Group.

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One hundred MPs have signed John Pugh's Early Day Motion of 21st November, expressing concern at the distorting effect on the market of Becta's 'outdated purchasing frameworks'.

The BBC has started to roll-out content under its £150 million 'Digital Curriculum' initiative, which operates under DCMS conditions. Doubts were first raised about the interoperability of BBC content by the government's Content Advisory Board in December 2005. Alpha Learning submitted a complaint to Becta on 25th September and it has recently been reported that the roll-out of the BBC's Digital Curriculum has been frozen while their support for interoperability standards is reviewed.