

## **P.22 How can Technical Support in a school help teachers?**

Rhodri Stone

Warren Junior School

### **Technical Support**

How can the implementation and progression of technical support effectively cover all aspects of ICT within the school, specifically considering how teachers request assistance and submit faults?

### **Background**

Warren Junior School is a four form entry school located in Chadwell Heath, the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. The school has approximately 420 pupils and 40 members of staff who have access to the network.

As the ICT Technician for Warren Junior School, I have been keen to develop a structured support system for the school, in order to track jobs, identify training issues, and monitor overall maintenance of the school network.

Prior to the Test Bed project there was significantly less need for a rigid technical support structure; faults were reported by filling in a fault sheet and handing it to the ICT Coordinator, or mentioned in passing meaning very little was documented.

The implementation of Test Bed provided ICT equipment made apparent the need for a clear and effective method of logging and recording the increasing number of technical issues in order to manage time and faults efficiently.

Over an 18 month period, the school ICT infrastructure increased to 40 workstations (including interactive classroom kits), 70 laptops, a wireless network and a web-cache & storage server.

The additional equipment required a more effective support role to allow my technician role to operate on a priority basis; it was decided that a helpdesk based system would provide the most effective organisation.

### **Progress**

I began to develop a fault reporting method – this went through three main stages:

- 1) A basic MS Word template for users to fill in and email to me. This would have required manual overseeing by each user and been time consuming, having to type-fill each field (see Attachment Image 1).
- 2) An MS Outlook (email) custom form - located on desktops, users would fill it in from drop down menus (with optional notes) and simply click to mail it to a support account. This email address was defined prior to help speed the reporting process and avoid incorrect spelling in email address. Key asset – time saving. (see Attachment Image 2)
- 3) Liberum Helpdesk – a free helpdesk program, recommended by the Robert Clack IT department. This software runs from the school intranet, and is accessible via Internet Explorer (available to all school users). (see attachment image 3 & 4)

The first two methods would have required the writing of a comprehensive database to catalogue all support requests submitted, with an end user interface to allow me to assess and prioritise tasks. However, method 3 supplied a pre-written MS Access or SQL database, automatically providing me with the user interface, and priority management tools. Having trialled the first two methods previously, we instantly recognised the benefits that the software could bring to our technical support infrastructure. This system is still being used 9 months on.

I did two questionnaires which were made up of simple multiple-choice questions. I carried out the questionnaires in two staff meetings using the CPS voting system. This ensured a 100% response rate from the members of teaching staff present.

Prior to implementing the online helpdesk, we used a paper-based reporting system which made it difficult to respond appropriately and effectively to the needs of the staff. It also made it difficult to analyse any trends in the types of problems that people were experiencing.

### **Evidence of change**

The helpdesk software has made it easy for teachers to report faults and book resources at literally the click of a button. Even the least IT confident staff have embraced the system. Teachers do not need to leave classrooms, wait until break times or send children with messages. The online system has been commented on by members of staff:

*"The online support system is great as I don't have to leave my classroom.*

*On a more serious note – I know that the problem is logged and that it will be dealt with at the earliest opportunity." (Teacher - Year 3)*

Incorporating the helpdesk into the intranet has helped encourage users to understand intranet technology and use, and as a result the intranet has been developed to include such information as the staff notice board as a webpage.

To support the change we administered two questionnaires with staff – one prior to the implementation of the online helpdesk, and the second 9 months later. The two questionnaires were almost identical, with only a minor change to reflect the shift in use i.e the question "How do you rate the current paper based method of reporting faults?" was removed. In terms of response, I hoped to see an improvement in satisfaction of technical support, and an increase in use of the technical support system – this would be due to an increased use of equipment as user's confidence grew. We insisted on using classroom interactive voting systems (CPS) to record the questionnaire results. The responses to the surveys were quite revealing (see attached survey 1 & 2); question1 "How satisfied are you overall with technical support arrangements?" showed a slight increase in satisfaction, but also a 'Very Unsatisfactory' response (5%). This would indicate to me that while I have succeeded in increasing overall satisfaction through the new support system, the raised awareness of ICT may have made people more critical of weaknesses or changes (such as the need for a queuing system/ less personal responses etc.).

The questionnaire has been useful to show me where I still might be able to make improvements to the support system – more in terms of user satisfaction than system changes. One change I could clearly implement is show by the response to the question "Do you use the helpdesk to check the status of your faults?" With 68% response as 'No', this would indicate to me a need for a CPD session, in which I could show users how to check status on their problems on the helpdesk.

The incorporation of the helpdesk system has increased time management efficiency for me – having a queued system of issues allows jobs to be prioritised according to urgency and importance. As the technician for Warren Junior, this system has drastically helped me

manage day to day tasks, plan project work and maintain effective support throughout the working week

### **Advice**

The helpdesk system will be gradually developed to incorporate a booking system that will follow the same process as reporting faults. This will make it easier for staff to book resources or equipment, and see at a glance what equipment is available from day to day and week to week. Members of staff said that,

*"The online technical support system allows me to log problems quickly at the computer while I am using it. I can log the problem as it happens and actually even attach a copy of any error message I get. With the paper version, I had to remember to write one out and then take the time to bring it down to the office. The online system is more efficient as well as quicker too." and that "The online system for registering technical support issues is really efficient. It means that I don't have to personally fill in and then take a piece of paper to the test bed office or send a message with a child. The main advantage is that I can complete the online form from ANY workstation that I am logged on at. I can also track the progress of the issue by reading the emails that Rhodri sends us. This saves me from going and wasting his time by calling in at the office to ask." (Teacher - Year 5)*

In February 2005 74% of teachers were very satisfied with the level of technical support.

There is a firm belief that this system has been of some benefit to everyone in the school, since it has allowed support to be provided in the most effective manner, which ultimately means the teaching process using ICT is able to run as smoothly as possible. It has also enabled my role to be more manageable, allowing time to be freed for other pressing tasks, such as the preparation of software for classes, the maintenance of AV equipment in classes etc. Teachers have been very vocal in their support of the new system, despite the cautions they had at the implementation stage:

*"I was a bit worried at first that a message might not be read and the online system might be less efficient than logging problems face-to-face, however I know a problem has been logged because I receive a reply email and issues are always followed up by a further series of emails to ascertain the problem, or the technician visits me to look into it further." (V Bailey, Teacher - Year 3)*

The results of the questionnaire showed that 95% of teachers were either satisfied or very satisfied with the response time to a reported fault.

I would recommend using this system (and indeed have done) to all schools using a server based network. The system has made a significant difference to the way I work because of how it has enabled me to manage my time better. It not only provides me with evidence of the types of work required, but has helped the IT department to highlight potential CPD opportunities (for example, if users are frequently submitting jobs that merely require them to have a more detailed understanding of a certain piece of software, then we can write a handbook or run a training session).

A solid technical support infrastructure is fast becoming a necessity in junior schools as well as secondary; with more ICT equipment being utilised in schools each year, it is integral that the support element can match, and cope with the demand, and where possible pre-empt and counter issues by training.