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Study Support in Extra Time in the United Kingdom

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STUDY SUPPORT IN EXTRA TIME IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

In spring 1999, the United Kingdom launched a major initiative that will extend the use of school buildings. Good schools in both public and private sectors have always engaged in recreational and learning activities outside normal school hours. The government has now decided to invest 200 million pounds of National Lottery money to enable schools in deprived and under-achieving areas to develop or expand such initiatives.

Education Extra

The charity Education Extra, established in 1992, has trail-blazed the ideas by encouraging innovation and disseminating good practice and advice. Its director, Dr. Kay Andrews, well known for her articulate advocacy of out-of-school learning opportunities, has been a seminal influence in educational thinking. This small organisation has published research and evaluation reports on what makes a good study support club or activity and has a network of over 1 800 schools receiving and contributing ideas. Awards of between £250 and £5 000 are made annually to schools putting forward worthy schemes for development and reportage. This money comes from other larger charities and industrial sponsors, who sometimes provide gifts in kind such as computer or sports equipment or musical instruments. Education Extra also provides training materials for schools, local authorities, teachers and other adult helpers.

Education Extra has been generating and circulating ideas which have resonated with the objectives of the present government. Both see study support and activities outside normal school hours contributing to higher standards of achievement, raising the self-esteem and motivation of children and leading to school improvement. These are important morale boosters for pupils and teachers. The essence of study support and out-of-school activity is that it is voluntary, and therefore encourages a real sense of involvement and choice by the student. Informal education can also lead to better understanding and personal relationships among students, their parents and teachers.

An example is the establishment of a Reading Club in the small rural primary school at Newstead in Nottinghamshire. Every Tuesday from 3.30 to 4.30 p.m., after school ends, a group of parents set out literacy games, puzzles, computers, group listening audio equipment and a reading corner library. Refreshments are provided to help sustain the children for an extra hour. A parent-governor of the school co-ordinates and organises the session with the support of the headteacher. About 20 parents and helpers assist the children working busily at different activities – some individual and some in groups. Several 12- and 13-year-old pupils who used to go to Newstead, and who now attend a nearby school, join in supporting their younger brothers and sisters. Minister for Education Estelle Morris visited the club in February and later commented that it was “the highlight of her year”.



Parents and helpers support the after-school Reading Club at the rural primary school at Newstead in Nottinghamshire, United Kingdom.

Summer school

Summer schools have often been based on play, but in 1997 the newly elected government asked Education Extra to set up 50 Summer Literacy Projects to help bridge the transfer between primary and secondary education. This was intended primarily for pupils at risk of regressing in their achievement levels during the holidays. Summer schools have now increased to 900 in number and local education authorities administer them. They run for two or three weeks and are staffed by teachers, librarians, support assistants and volunteers. Many use older students as mentors. Information technology is widely employed to develop skills and to produce newsletters and project reports. Up to 30 selected pupils are invited to attend according to pre-determined criteria. Many schools have identified considerable improvements, particularly in easing the transition for more vulnerable youngsters.

New Opportunities Fund

"Study support" can be widely interpreted and encompasses any organised activity that engages youngsters in their own further development and enjoyment of learning – from homework clubs to sports, performing arts or community service. Schools can now apply for funding to the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). It will soon begin to distribute £180 million of National Lottery money for study support, and a further £20 million to study support schemes which integrate out-of-school-hours care for children with working parents. Stephen Dunmore, Chief Executive of NOF, and his team, supported by colleagues from the Department of Education and Employment (DfEE) and Education Extra, have been mounting roadshows around the country to raise awareness and to consult providers about the best way to allocate the funds. It is quite clear that the government and NOF wish to see this extra money address issues of disadvantage and social exclusion. They want to encourage active partnerships between schools and others such as youth workers and librarians. Examples of co-operation can be seen amongst the 50 pilot studies conducted so far (a DfEE report contains a brief description of the 50 pilot bids¹). Half of all secondary schools and one quarter of all primary schools are expected to benefit by 2003.

The first three New Opportunities Fund initiatives are: to set up out-of-school-hours activities in education and child care; to establish a core network of healthy living centres; and to train teachers and librarians in the use of information and communications technology. Future programmes will include cancer prevention, detection and care; green spaces and sustainable communities; and community access to lifelong learning. These will

inevitably have further implications for the use of school buildings. Many after-school care arrangements for children with working parents are already based in schools; private organisations and public social services can hire or share school accommodation. Adult education is often established in facilities of both primary and secondary schools. The schools reap rewards beyond the hire fee – particularly in the area of computer education; equipment can be shared with after-school clubs and is sometimes used by daytime classes. Another outcome is the availability of trained adults for study support in the local area – especially from the growing number of retired people in the community. Lifelong learning will provide the next big opportunity for schools to raise standards through co-operation and by sharing buildings.

Henry Morris, one of the great community educators, and Chief Education Officer in Cambridgeshire from 1922 to 1954, said in his famous memorandum to the Education Committee: "We must do away with the insulated school" and "There must be a grouping and co-ordination of all the educational and social agencies which now exist in isolation ... an amalgamation which, while preserving the individuality and function of each, will assemble them into a whole and make possible their expression for the first time in a new institution, single but many-sided, for the countryside."

We are now seeing a major initiative to involve students and the community in the wider use of school buildings after school hours and during holidays. It is a significant step towards the establishment of learning communities. The many-sided partnership of local and national government services and agencies, schools and communities, supported by charities like Education Extra, should prove to be a powerful engine for improving the quality of education, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

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1. DfEE (1998), *Extending Opportunity: Report of a Conference for Study Support Pilots*. Enquiries to 44 171 925 5098/5615, fax: 44 171 925 6979/6980, e-mail: info@dfee.gov.uk, Internet: <http://www.dfee.gov.uk>.