What is a multimedia suite for languages?

A multimedia suite for modern languages consists of a suite of networked computers with multimedia capability appropriate for the enhanced teaching and learning of languages.

This means that pupils and teachers should be able to work with multimedia software which may comprise audio and video material as well as digital images and text. In addition, microphones and headphones should be available for pupils to record themselves and play back to improve pronunciation and intonation or improve spoken performance in areas such as accuracy, fluency, and range of expression.

Audio or video editing tools open the door to creative activities for pupils while authoring software with multimedia capability enables a teacher to prepare interactive materials across the four language skills to be accessed from the suite. In fact, the value of a multimedia suite is that it facilitates work in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

A customised digital language laboratory from a specialist provider is also a form of multimedia suite but with more special features.

This document examines the value of a multimedia suite for language learning. It also offers guidance on the physical layout of the suite, hardware, software and technical support and provides links to sources of information.

Why use a multimedia suite for languages?

Becta's **Impact2** study indicated a correlation between regular ICT use and improved grades at GCSE.

In the classroom, a data projector and laptop offer a teacher tool providing focus, enhancing the quality of presentation of language, and supporting the engagement of pupils in whole-class activities.

The multimedia suite complements this with an individual learner tool allowing purposeful practice, repetition and supported production of language, with immediate feedback to individual pupils.

Commentary in this section highlights some of the key advantages of a multimedia suite for languages.

Independence and privacy

In the languages classroom the teacher controls the pace of language input. In the multimedia suite the learner, while working within a teacher-directed framework of activities, controls a workstation, thereby gaining the freedom to listen to stimulus material, or speak, record and playback as often as necessary. This helps to increase confidence and reinforce skills of pronunciation and comprehension.

Differentiation is clearly supported in this context; the ICT provides a tool to challenge or support pupils of all abilities.

Pupils need opportunities to develop their speaking skills without embarrassment. Practising

individually with headphones before performance in public is a great benefit.

Competition and reinforcement
Frequent repetition of core language supports memorisation and language-specific software, such as authoring applications, reinforces core language in attractive and enjoyable game formats: these add the extrinsic motivation to score highly and repeat activities in order to raise personal scores.

Feedback and support
When learning a language a delay in correction of spelling, meaning or pronunciation can reinforce error; the direct response provided by ICT is both motivational and personal.

Moving from the practice stage into language production, pupils are often put off by making mistakes, especially in writing. The facility to draft and edit, and the availability of spellcheckers in the target language, give a greater sense of control in the production of language. Additional support can also be given through writing frames or dedicated language software: pupils can experiment safely.

Genuine interaction with authentic sites
Pupils need to see the language they are learning in real world contexts, and to apply their skills to genuine tasks. Providing access to selected authentic websites can not only stimulate 'reading for pleasure', but can also give opportunities to find out what new language means, to explore content of personal interest and to develop cultural awareness.

Creativity and teacher time
Learners of languages need to use the language they have learnt, in order to embed it. The range of ICT tools available on the computer (text, graphics, sound, and video) supports the production of high quality work.

While pupils are working independently, the teacher can engage with a pupil or a small group.

Increasing ICT capability
In some schools, languages are the context for delivering the KS3 or KS4 ICT National Curriculum.

The room and its equipment

The computer station
An upright monitor is comfortable for the pupil, especially if it can be adjusted (or if the seat is adjustable).

It saves time for teacher and pupil if on each desk there is a print-out of accent shortcuts: for example, a list of commands with the ALT key and numeric keypad. It is possible to obtain mousemats with the accent shortcuts printed on them.

Computers in a dedicated languages ICT suite may be equipped with language-specific software designed to make it easy to place accents appropriately. For French, try FRKeys, which can be purchased from **Camsoft**.

A webcam can be used for conferencing over the Internet.

A headset is essential for listening, for recording audio files, and for teacher intervention. Inexpensive headsets are perfectly adequate and reasonably cheap to replace.

When setting up activities:
- One computer per pupil gives maximum flexibility.
- One computer between two allows for collaborative learning.

A teacher console enables:

- Better supervision and monitoring – ensuring pupils are all on task at a glance.
- Effective use of time for interacting with pupils.

However;
- Teachers may prefer to establish a face-to-face rapport rather than via headset.

When planning desk use:
- A deep desk allows pupils to have books easily accessible. However, as planning will be for tasks to make maximum use of the equipment, this may not be important.
- A 'physical divide' offers more privacy, but looks daunting and makes teacher intervention more awkward.
- Convertible desks, which allow the monitor to be hidden below the surface of the desk when not in use, give maximum flexibility, and are very useful where space is an issue.

When setting up a multimedia suite:
- A data projector allows the teacher to demonstrate an activity for a short part of the lesson. If the budget is tight, it is not the priority within the multimedia suite.
- An interactive whiteboard can be useful in a multimedia suite for whole-class work before pupils begin independent work at their computers. This may be particularly useful in large rooms where pupils can move from desks or tables to their workstations.
- Sufficient network storage is needed for CD-ROMs and other software.
- Ensure also that sufficient cupboard storage is available to store CD-ROMs and hardware items such as microphones and headsets.

See the 2005 paper "Setting up effective digital language laboratories and multimedia ICT suites for languages" on the **Downloads** section of the **Languages ICT** website.

What infrastructure and software is needed?

Network capability

A network giving shared access to a file server, the Internet, email, a CD-ROM server (and potentially a caching server) ensures equal entitlement to resources available in school. Careful thought needs to be given to cabling and hardware to ensure sufficient bandwidth for video usage.

The choice of operating system for each computer is a whole school issue.

Internet access/Protection.

In order to make best use of languages-dedicated suites, access to online audio or video is essential. Internet access for work with podcasts, blogs or wikis is also advantageous as this allows pupils to generate online content themselves. This can be very useful for developing writing and speaking skills or promoting collaborative work.

For multimedia work computers must be able to use a range of common media players (Real Player, Quicktime, and Windows Media Player). These should be updated regularly.

A school will need to have protection in place against unwanted downloads or access to undesirable websites.

Generic software

To create text, audio, image and video files, pupils need access to basic applications such as Sound Recorder and Movie Maker which are incorporated into Windows XP. Enough space needs to be allocated to pupil storage areas for audio or video work created by pupils using these or other multimedia applications.

Specialist software

Free downloadable audio editing software such as **Audacity** is of great value for developing language skills and promoting creativity.

Authoring software is invaluable for creating attractive language reinforcement activities and games which can be placed on the school's network or VLE (Virtual Learning Environment). Digital photos and audio can be included as well as text in common authoring applications. **Hot Potatoes** and **Spellmaster** are example of authoring software currently (2008) available free to schools. There are other authoring programs available for purchase such as **Task Magic** and **Fun with Texts**.

Many teachers use the Internet to access free resources created by other teachers for shared use. For a list of useful online resources at Key Stage 4, but usable at other key stages, go to **Key Stage 4 resources** in the Technology for Languages section of **Languages ICT**. There is a pdf download specifically dealing with key interactive resources available on the Internet.

Email and messaging

There are various methods for electronic communication (e.g. school and/or web-based email and messaging programs), each of which needs careful planning from the technical and usage point of view.

Social networking sites are familiar to pupils in their personal lives: **ThinkQuest** is a social networking site developed specially for educational use and offers facilities such as personal page creation, file sharing, including multimedia uploads, closed groups, messaging, chat rooms and password protection.

Management

Technical support is vital to ensure teachers can concentrate on lesson delivery and class management. 1:100 may be an appropriate ratio for technician to pupils.

Where technical support is usually on hand pupils may call for attention by displaying a coloured card on their desk, using different colours to indicate a technical or a linguistic query.

Common rules between colleagues who use a shared room can help to address problems quickly: e.g. seating plans, 'house rules', a system for recording faults or getting technical help.

For Managing a Multimedia Centre and a wealth of guidance and case studies, see the **ICT4LT** (ICT 4 Language Teachers) website.

Where to look

Audacity: **audacity.sourceforge.net**

Becta Impact2:
http://partners.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=rh&catcode=_re_rp_02&rid=13602

Camsoft: **www.camsoftpartners.co.uk/frkeys**

CILT-ALL Languages ICT: **www.languages-ict.org.uk**

CILT-ALL Languages ICT Downloads: **www.languages-ict.org.uk/download**

CILT-ALL Languages ICT Key Stage 4 resources:
www.languages-ict.org.uk/technology/ks4

ICT4LT: **www.ict4lt.org/en**

ICT4LT Managing a multimedia centre: **www.ict4lt.org/en/en_mod3-1**

ThinkQuest: **www.thinkquest.org**

Authoring software

languages ICT

Fun with Texts: **www.camsoftpartners.co.uk/fwt**

Hot Potatoes: **http://hotpot.uvic.ca**

Spellmaster: **www.spellmaster.com**

Task Magic: **www.mdlsoft.co.uk**

CiLT The National Centre for Languages

ALL Association for Language Learning