

The importance of ICT skills

Computers are becoming increasingly important in schools, both as essential tools for people to carry out their jobs, and because of the place of ICT in the curriculum. Schools make good use of the exciting opportunities that technology offers. However, ICT can often seem daunting, and many members of support staff do not feel they have the skills or confidence to make the most of their school's facilities – and to contribute as widely and expertly as they would like. Nevertheless, with proper support, anyone can learn to use computers and other forms of technology, and so reap the benefits.

*Make good use of
the exciting opportunities*

Personal benefits

Computers are not limited to the world of work – a wide range of tasks can now be performed quickly and simply on a computer (eg chatting to friends, looking up information, booking a holiday or writing a letter). Computer skills can open up a number of opportunities, and can make life easier and more rewarding both at home and at work.

ICT skills are valued by employers, since they are essential for many jobs and helpful in most. Expanding your skills can improve both your current role and future job prospects.



Administration and general support

Modern administration jobs depend heavily on ICT, and school administration is no exception. Many of the most popular software applications, such as Microsoft® Office applications, are designed to make standard administrative tasks quicker and easier. The ability to use these well will help you to work more efficiently and to produce better end results. There are lots of ways to learn about software, from checking the in-built help to full-scale training courses.

There is also specialist software for schools which you may already use. Are you using these resources as efficiently as you could?

Teaching and learning

ICT is a core part of the curriculum and schools use computers as a versatile and powerful learning resource. There are many CD-ROMs and other specialised teaching resources on the market, designed to enrich the learning experience. It can be equally valuable to incorporate more generalised software into teaching and learning, eg researching on the Internet, or presenting work using desktop publishing.

As well as contributing to general teaching aims, ICT may be able to help with the more specialised aspects of your job. For example, ICT is a very useful tool for supporting pupils with SEN. Specialised training in this field could greatly enhance your one-to-one support.

During lesson planning, consider and discuss with colleagues what ICT will be used. Make sure you are familiar with it and are able to answer questions and support pupils using it. Practise in advance if you are not confident with something, and be sure to ask for help if you still have problems.

Improving your skills

Think about how using ICT more effectively might help you to contribute more, to the benefit of your colleagues, and especially the pupils. Try to improve your ICT skills wherever you can, through



NAPTA sunflower project

NAPTA is giving your school the chance to grow its own sunflower garden this summer. Your school has been sent a free educational pack for key stages 2 and 3, which includes the seeds, information and educational materials needed to run this exciting, hands-on project. It offers a valuable, fun and varied learning experience for children. Why not get involved?

practice, learning from others or formal training. If there are any specific ICT skills you would like to develop, or you would just like to build your confidence, discuss this with your line manager, who may be able to help you find the appropriate training and support.

Training

Each school has its own approach to ICT training needs. Training can be tailored to individual and institutional needs, and does not have to be time-consuming for staff or expensive for the school.

As professional development can be so beneficial for both individuals and the institution, your school's management will often be supportive of requests for training.

If your school cannot provide training for any reason, there are a number of schemes to support adult learners in developing ICT skills. Try asking for information in your local library, or you can search for courses on www.direct.gov.uk/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/



Membership benefits

Remember that, as a NAPTA member, you are entitled to a range of benefits. You can access the individual members' area of the NAPTA Web site using your unique login code (printed on your membership card). Online membership benefits, which are updated regularly, include our free weekly wall planners and a document summary service, with information about developments in the world of education.

Also on the Web site, our expert information and advice service offers a store of useful professional information for support staff. It can also help to answer your specific questions about qualifications and job roles.

Coming soon for resubscribers

NAPTA is producing new resources to help support staff continue to develop as they enter their second year as NAPTA members. One of these resources is a guide to marking and assessment for teaching assistants, designed to boost confidence and give practical advice. Schools will also be provided with a CPD portfolio building tool, to help all support staff record their skills and professional experience. Your school will soon be invited to resubscribe for the 2006–07 year.