

# **Numeracy Matters**

**RM plc's Response to the Numeracy Task Force's Consultation Paper**

**March 1998**



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## - RM plc's Response to the Numeracy Task Force's Consultation Document

1. This document has been prepared by RM plc in response to the call for consultation in **Numeracy Matters - The Preliminary Report of the Numeracy Task Force**. RM plc is the leading supplier of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) products to UK schools and has a particular competence in core skills learning software.
2. Both as a significant employer and an organisation closely involved with education, RM welcomes the aims of the Numeracy Task Force. RM strongly endorses the view that numeracy is an important skill for all pupils. To be truly effective any numeracy intervention must address the long tail of under-achievement we see in UK schools. The stretching targets set out in paragraph 1 of **Numeracy Matters** do just this by demanding high achievement from a large majority of pupils.
3. This response concentrates on RM's specific area of competence, which is the use of ICT to achieve learning objectives. Numeracy is an area where ICT can bring significant benefits, both by enhancing traditional teaching techniques and by enabling new pedagogical approaches.
4. **Numeracy Matters** recognises the valuable contribution ICT has already made to the teaching of numeracy. However, as with the use of ICT in education generally, the quality of implementation in individual schools is variable. There is clear evidence that, when used well, ICT aids understanding and enhances motivation. To achieve maximum benefit from ICT, the generality of primary school teachers need to be familiar with the approaches adopted by the most successful of their peers. *RM recommends that the lottery-funded initiative to provide ICT training for all teachers should ensure that ICT for primary mathematics is given appropriate priority.*
5. There are many different software products available which target the area of numeracy. However, there is very little evidence available about the contribution that these products make to learning. *RM recommends that the Task Force investigates the various products and classes of product available and establishes a database of best practice in the use of ICT to support the development of numeracy.* Wherever possible the judgements about quality of software product should be based on the evidence of classroom experience rather than expert judgement. If, in its analysis of available products, the Task Force discovers areas which are poorly served by existing software, it should challenge the learning software industry to provide new and better products.

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6. Integrated Learning Systems (ILS) have a significant contribution to make to improving standards of numeracy. One in seven secondary schools now use RM's **SuccessMaker**<sup>®</sup> product and, anecdotally, report significant learning gains. More formal research undertaken by the NCET and the TC Trust also supports the view that ILS can offer real benefits. RM has recently introduced **RM Maths Learning System**, a product aimed explicitly at the development of numeracy skills in primary schools, and again both anecdotal and formal research suggest the product offers real learning gains. *RM recommends that, as it moves forward with its work, the Task Force gives a high priority to investigating the potential of ILS.*
7. As **Numeracy Matters** points out, one of the key benefits of ILS is the diagnostic insight it gives teachers into the specific abilities of individual pupils. There is also an emerging class of assessment products derived from ILS which perform a similar task. A product such as **RM Maths Learning System** allows teachers to understand the development needs of their class in a highly individualised and analytical way. This kind of understanding is invaluable in helping teachers set appropriate objectives and develop lesson strategies for class teaching. *RM recommends that the Task Force gives detailed consideration to the value of ILS as a diagnostic, as well as teaching aid.*
8. Software systems can also be used to aggregate performance data at LEA, or even Central Government, level. This provides an opportunity for performing trend analysis and comparing value-added performance. *RM recommends that the Task Force considers the potential benefit of assessment software for managing standards improvement at LEA and Central Government level.*
9. The National Grid for Learning presents a significant opportunity for disseminating best practice information to schools and teachers. *RM recommends that the Virtual Teachers Centre should include a numeracy area, and that this area should be developed as an early priority.*
10. **Numeracy Matters** asks, "How can parents be most effectively involved in their children's learning of mathematics, and how can parents' own skills and confidence best be developed?" ILS products like **RM Maths Learning System** have the capability of being delivered over the Internet. This presents the opportunity of pupils continuing their numeracy work at home, with a common assessment base between home and school. With this approach pupils get more exposure to numeracy learning experiences and the teacher remains in control of the learning process. The use of this kind of product at home also allows parents to engage in their children's learning activities.