

# OBE for special needs and technology expert



Chris Stevens honoured for his work as Head of Inclusion at Becta

I am delighted to report that my former boss Chris Stevens received an OBE in the Honours list at the weekend. Chris was head of Inclusion Policy at Becta from 1996 until 2009. He led the special needs team through several re-organisations and changes of leadership and was respected for his honesty and integrity.

During his tenure, the special needs team worked on many high profile developments including Senco Forum, the CAP Project and the Home Access Project as well as smaller schemes of work such as art and mental health, Community Languages and ESOL.

Chris's own particular specialism was children and young people with severe learning difficulties and he drew widely on his experience as head of a special school so that work on policy was always informed by practice.

Now retired and living in North Yorkshire, Chris is still involved in the field of technology and special needs. He is on the board of BATA (the British Assistive Technology Association) which campaigns for the rights and interests of those needing assistive technology and provides expert and impartial support and advice to government departments and agencies.

Now that Becta is being closed down, this organisation is likely to influence government policy and Chris's expertise will be invaluable.

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# Becta an early casualty of cuts

So Becta is to be one of the first victims of the cuts. Last year I wrote that the Tories were interested in boxes and wires and the Labour Party in the uses of technology. How wrong I was! The Conservatives seem technophobic and are set to cut all spending on IT and not just in education. Some of the key figures in the world of ICT and education such as Professor Stephen Heppell believe that there is a groundswell of informed opinion that will inspire and sustain educators at the difficult time. 'Many wise and helpful bloggers and podders and tweeters are already providing a mass of inspiration and effective practice for others.' I am not so sure. If money is not the driving force, teachers will find other things to do with their time rather than keep up to date with technology developments and new software opportunities.

The last government was behind the Home Access Project, a wonderful way of providing access to the internet and e-government for the poorest families.. My article about the demise of the Home Access Project and the impact on young people with severe disabilities can be accessed from [Merlin John Online](#)


If push comes to shove, I think there are 3 key things the government needs to preserve

- e-safety – keeping children safe online and reducing the power of the predators to get at vulnerable young people
- narrowing the digital divide – making sure that the smooth faced boys from Eton aren't the only ones with E-power
- making a commitment that ICT for children with disabilities is the number one priority

If we lose any one of these, then it is back to the dark ages.

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## [Bett Round-up 2010](#)

Did you make it to Bett earlier this month? It was as busy as ever with over 30,000 visitors. There was lots to see and here is a round up of some of the key products. First there were [my top ten products](#), ranging from Skin Deep by Northumbrian company Shoofly to My Zone, the nearest thing to a VLE for people with learning disabilities. 

Then there was [I Progress from Rising Stars](#). This was launched on stand at BETT and showed some really good resources for maths for gifted and talented pupils

Have a look at [my review](#) in the Guardian which is a round up of suppliers showing the latest products for pupil assessment and for literacy:

Those of you who are working with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and communication difficulties, might like to read about Laura Cryer's class at Norfolk Park in Sheffield. They have built really good modules of work round a new piece of software called [Pretty Things](#).

Don't forget – next stop is the [Education Show](#) 4-6 March at the NEC in Birmingham.