

Conall Gribben: Addressing the tech literacy paradox

Technology evolves and we continue to be dazzled by its pace and possibility. Everything connects. Communications underpin every aspect of modern life. But even though young people grow up surrounded by technology, many of them don't understand the basic concepts of how it works.



This is the tech literacy paradox.

2014 research by Ofcom found that 71% of children aged five to 15 now have access to a tablet computer at home. But only 4% of 15 year olds want careers in engineering and computing (OECD, 2012). This is what we need to change.

Solving the tech literacy paradox means helping them move beyond that and be confident with 'computational thinking' – for example by learning coding – and understanding that tech and data are the foundations of today's society. Achieving this step change will benefit both young people and the European economy. More broadly, understanding how things work, for example by learning how to code, demonstrates a deeper level of logical and problem-solving thinking that can be applied to other aspects of life. And used to develop technologies that can be used for social good.

To crack the code, we need co-ordinated action by Governments, corporations and schools. The UK Government has taken action this year – it's the first academic year that coding is on the curriculum. Despite that, research has shown that 60% of teachers are not confident in delivering the new computing curriculum (YouGov, 2014). It's not just England that's taking action – Denmark, Ireland and nine other European countries have already made progress in this space.

But even with coding now on the UK primary school curriculum, some English schools don't have the right access to the necessary technology or equipment. Two thirds of state primary schools in England say wi-fi provision is a major problem (BESA, 2014) – so governments and corporates will need to work with education authorities to help them overcome these barriers.

Companies like BT, BBC and Google have recognised this tech skills gap – not least because it'll directly impact their business if they lack a skilled workforce. BT recently launched a

programme to help improve the tech education of five million UK kids by 2020. These companies are partnering with the government, NGOs and each other through shared value propositions, developing tomorrow's working population.