

National Strategies could face shake-up



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The contract, due to end in October, has yet to be renewed, and the DCSF says it is keeping an open mind about the future

The future form of the National Strategies programme is uncertain, it has emerged.

Robin Alexander severely criticised the initiative - designed to give teachers professional training in literacy, numeracy, early years, school support, emotional development and ethnic minority achievement - in his three-year review of primary education last month.

The Cambridge University professor said the programme reinforced the divide between the three Rs and the rest of the curriculum. He recommended it should be abolished and its responsibilities for English and maths reabsorbed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority or a similar body.

It has emerged that the Government is procrastinating over renewing the five-year, Pounds 177.5 million contract with Capita. The company took over from the CfBT Education Trust in 2005, one month before the last general election.

The contract was advertised in May 2003 and awarded in October 2004. If the same procedures had been followed this time, the Government would have needed to advertise for bidders last May to award a contract this autumn.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families said there were no plans to abolish the programme or to bring it in-house, but it was keeping an open

mind about its future direction. Capita's contract has a clause allowing it to be extended for 12 or 18 months.

Funding has already been agreed for local authorities to deliver training and consultancy services to support struggling schools, improve core subjects and develop specific areas such as ethnic minority achievement and Assessment for Learning. The Government has given authorities Pounds 59.9m towards "the co-ordination of delivering the next phase" of the strategies.

But a department spokeswoman said: "We plan to informally consult a range of stakeholders on all aspects of the National Strategies before we go out to tender for the next contract. We are currently considering the procurement strategy for the contract, as part of a wider review of ... arrangements supporting the delivery of the Children's Plan."

The department said there had been no correspondence between it and the Treasury or Capita about the future of the National Strategies post-2010.

Both the National Strategies and Capita declined to comment.

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