The British Steel Challenge

— a case study in collaboration between education and industry in project planning and implementation

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In August 1991 I began a year's secondment to British Steel as part of the 'Headteachers Into Industry Scheme' based at Warwick University. As is the case with most teachers I have had some experience of the world of work outside of education. However this was many years ago and mostly confined to digging part of the new motorway system in Kent! The opportunity to work on a specific project during which I could attempt to apply the theories of project planning and implementation was a chance too good to miss. The opportunity was also there to look at many of the elements which made up the philosophy of Technology in the National Curriculum, that is budgeting, planning, evaluation and product development as well as many others.

The British Steel Challenge involves 120 crew volunteers in ten identical steel yachts sailing around the world against the prevailing winds and currents. My seconded role has been to manage an education support project which utilises this unique race in a way which supports student learning. From the outset the programme had a specific budget and initial targets were established simply through the race starting in September 1992. The deadlines for the development of any publications were already tight and were complicated by the race started date just after the summer holiday. It was clear that the Challenge 'Race' was to take on different connotations for me than I had at first imagined!

The Challenge is an immense operation, and offers so many opportunities to educational activities and the first activity had to be to priorities the areas that would provide the focus of the programme. Another challenge in my earliest days on the project was the understandably high expectations and enthusiasm which such activities engender in everyone connected with them. My background as a non-sailor, from a land-locked county, and my concept of sailing as someone standing in oilskins for hours under a freezing shower tearing up five pound notes firmly in mind, were to act as balances in our early meetings.

The temptations was to rush on and develop a set of resources as quickly as possible using the extensive opportunities offered by the Challenge. However it was a very different course which we took, and one which, I believe, will provide more genuine support for students in classrooms, and which owes more to a systematic project planning approach.

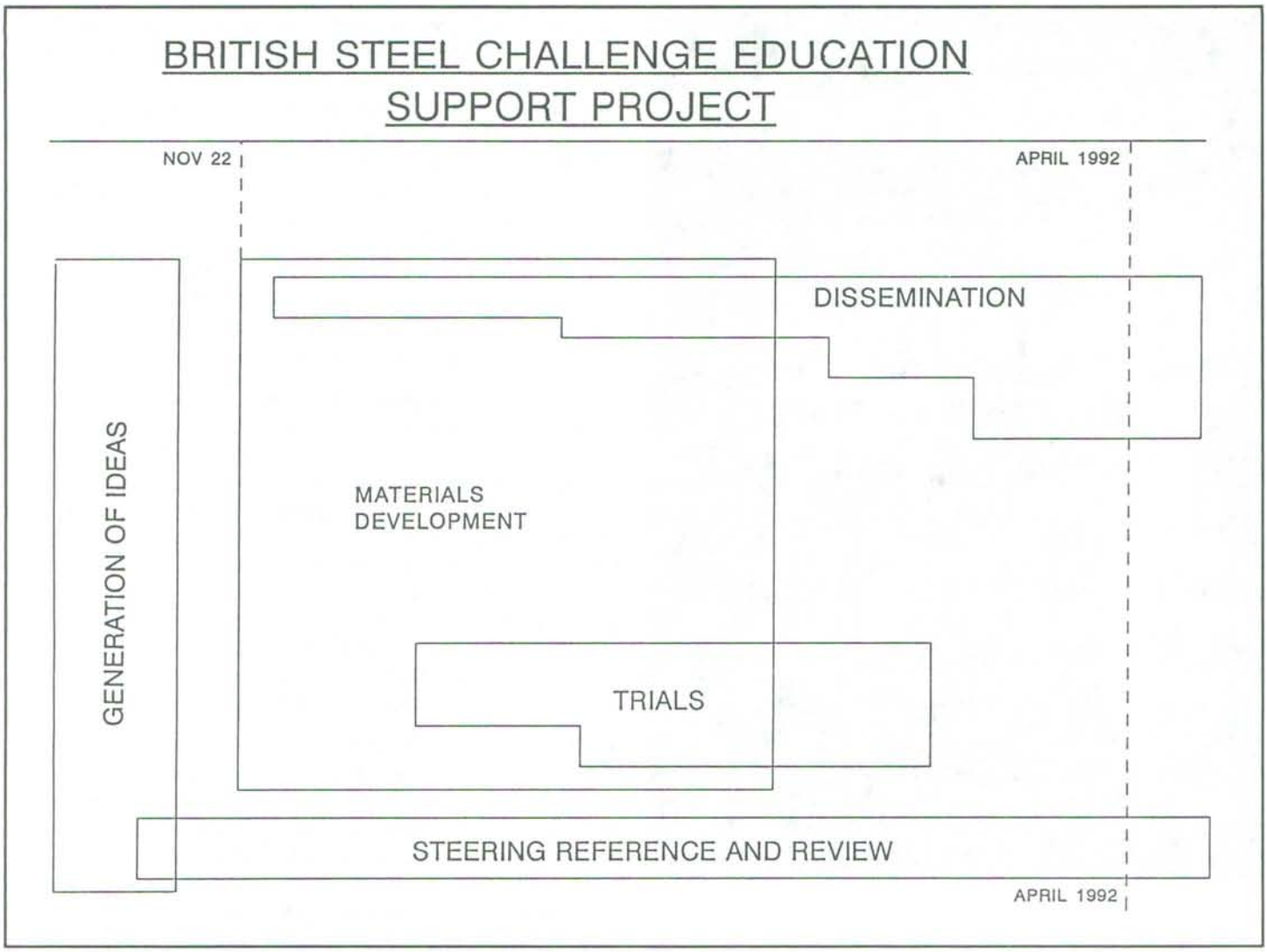
The first stage of the programme was to establish and disseminate a clear set of principles for the programme. The process of identifying the principles involved considerable discussion with teaching colleagues, appropriate LEA advisers and colleagues from within British Steel who had extensive experience of linking with education. The process was filtered by a small group which focused in on the final principles which were then to go to a wide variety of discussion groups and forums both within and outside British Steel. The principles are:

— activities and resources must be of tangible benefits to students and staff

— they should encourage an interactive approach to learning

— they should support equality of opportunity

— some open learning strategies should be included



— they should support a range of classroom approaches

— they should provide access for a broad range of students

— they should be consistent with British Steel's education support policy

— they should be complimentary to, rather than duplicate, existing projects

— they should recognise that lasting education/industry partnership is essentially a local activity, and support this.

These principles were agreed through a wide variety of forums, and then became a tool which helped to focus the programme, and enable the project group to 'see the wood for the trees'.

The next stage was to establish a broad project plan and to prioritise resources. (chart)

The deadlines have been very tight and the time for materials generation and trials have been limited. However the allocation of resources to the steering, reference and review process was underpinned by the principles and was now a firm part of the programme. This has, I feel, been a real bonus to the programme and not only involves formal review sessions with the Steering Group established to oversee the project, but entails extensive reference to a wider core group looking at what really would support teachers and students in the classroom. It is only by taking heed of the opinions of the classroom practitioner that real support can be offered, and this meant the establishment of a wider reference group of teachers.

The feedback from the review process has been included in the final programme and has positively changed the direction we have taken. The view was that it is important to produce something broader than just a paper-based activity pack in order to try and make the programme genuinely interactive. This has led us to explore the use of Information Technology through Campus 2000. The ideas generated in our initial discussions with Campus suggested that this element would provide the essential component to deliver all our principles. The idea was to have a daily update on the Challenge from logs and environmental information, as well as develop opportunities for schools to link with the other schools in the Challenge ports of call in Rio, Hobart and Cape Town. Additional conferencing opportunities are to be developed which would enable schools to focus in on global environmental issues and to download weather maps from the journey around the world. It is certainly interactive!

The focus of the dissemination process was also reviewed and the outcome was that it should be useful rather than simply informative. In response there an 'Into Schools' project was developed which asked crew volunteers if they

The British Steel **CHALLENGE**

THE TOUGHEST YACHT RACE EVER

On 26th September, 120 crew volunteers aboard ten identical steel yachts start the challenge of a lifetime. Sailing around the world against prevailing winds and currents, the British Steel Challenge follows the route of Chay Blyth's record breaking voyage in the seventies.

As part of this unique event, educational materials and activities have been developed to provide an opportunity for students to experience some of the excitement of the Challenge.

A cross curricula pack of materials aimed at supporting classroom activities at Key Stages 2 and 3 will be available; it covers the following areas with photocopiable materials:

- *Sailing, 15th Century and today*
- *Maps*
- *Life on board*
- *Navigation and communication*
- *Flotation and forces*

A regular update magazine will be sent to schools obtaining these resources with information and pictures of the race.

The pack will be available in June 1992.

The cost for these materials will be £7.00 to cover administration, postage and packaging. To order, please complete the order form and send it to the British Steel Challenge, PO Box 10, Wetherby, Yorkshire LS23 7EL.

British Steel has also worked with Campus 2000 to develop a unique opportunity to link with The Challenge. A daily log, environmental information, maps and international schools links will all be available to Campus users.

For further information contact: Campus 2000 at Campus 2000, Priory House, St John's Lane, London, EC1M 4BX.

CAMPUS 2000

Name: Mr / Mrs / Miss / Ms Initial(s) _____

Surname _____

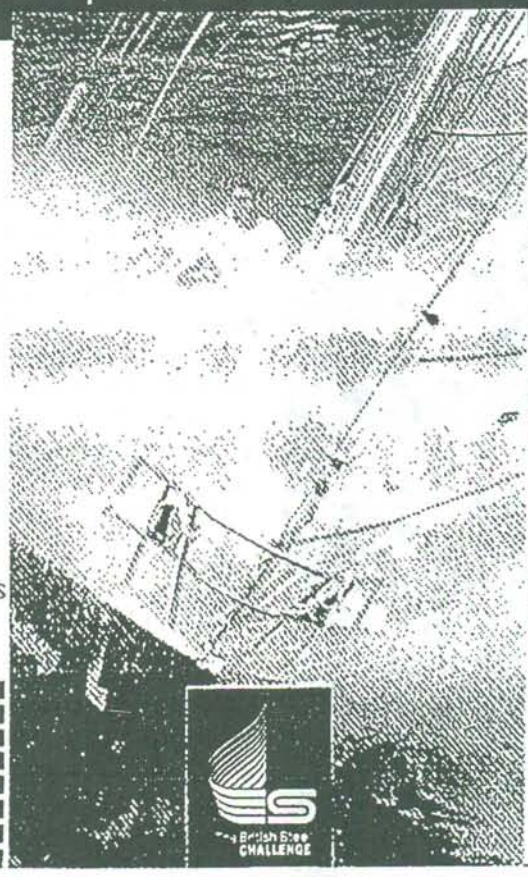
School _____

Address _____

_____

Age range of pupils _____ *Please send* _____ *Challenge Education Resource Packs at £7.00 each. Total* _____

(All orders of £25.00 or less must be accompanied by a cheque.)



THE CHALLENGE COMPETITION

Here is an opportunity for teachers to get direct experience of the Challenge. Five winners will sail on a Challenge yacht for a day as the guests of British Steel. Accommodation will be provided for the winners and their partners.

To enter the competition answer the following questions, complete the entry form and post it to: Teachers' Competition, British Steel Challenge, PO Box 10, Wetherby, Yorkshire LS23 7EL.

QUESTIONS:

1. Who was the first woman to sail around the world single-handed?

_____

2. In which year did Chay Blyth successfully complete his single-handed round the world voyage?

_____

In no more than 20 words suggest why you think both Chay Blyth's voyage and the British Steel Challenge feature yachts made of steel.

_____

_____

_____

Name: Mr / Mrs / Miss / Ms Initial(s) _____

Surname _____

School _____

Address _____

_____

Daytime Phone No _____

RULES: The competition is open to all teachers in Primary and Secondary schools in the United Kingdom, except relatives of British Steel employees.
Closing date for the competition is 15th May 1992. The draw's selling will be on 8th June 1992. The results for the competition will appear in the Challenge Update magazine.

TEACHERS' COMPETITION
BRITISH STEEL CHALLENGE, PO BOX 10,
WETHERBY, YORKSHIRE, LS23 7EL

would like to go into local school and offer a link with the Challenge. The response from the crews has been encouraging and ranged from simply sending a postcard to a class from each port of call to satellite communications from the yachts as they are sailing. Every link is different and makes the Challenge, in some small way, belong to students as well as the crew volunteers.

In the consideration given to national advertising the discussions were again on how we can make everything we do useful. The way we decided to approach this was to resist very firmly the pressure to have a student competition, and to focus upon staff instead. The idea was simply to offer tangible evidence that British Steel values the contribution of teachers and supports their efforts in trying times. With a limited budget, perhaps a better advertising strategy is to invest in a full page colour advert. This approach would not have been complimentary to the principles of the programme. So a staff competition with prizes was developed and launched.

The Challenge has provided me with much to reflect upon, and with the benefit of perfect hindsight no doubt certain features of the programme would have been different. However the element which I believe has been essential is one which is so often missing in project developed by industry to support education, that is, the investment of time in devising effective principles and a commitment to applying them through the life of the whole project.

The most effective principles are the ones developed through partnership, and this is a lesson which will remain with me after my secondment is complete. My time with British Steel plc has provided me with a vast array of experiences, at Ashorne Hill Management College, Head Office and at works around the country. Perhaps the most abiding impression I will take with me though is of unlimited good humour, unstinting courtesy, professionalism, and friendship.