Among policy makers, it is widely believed that information communication technology (ICT) investment has an important role to play in raising educational achievement. Economists are more likely to reach the opposite conclusion after a number of studies have not found any evidence for a positive relationship between computers or computer software and educational achievement. In this paper, we examine this issue for England, in a context where the government has substantially increased ICT investment in the last few years. It is envisaged that ICT should contribute to teaching and learning across the whole school curriculum.

The main methodological difficulty in evaluating the relationship between ICT and educational achievement is that schools may have other characteristics that are correlated both with their ICT investment and with pupil outcomes. The challenge is to find an instrument that provides exogenous variation in ICT investment. In this paper, we deal with this issue in a quasi-experimental setting. Specifically, we consider how a change in the rules governing ICT investment in different regions of England led to changes in ICT investment and subsequently changed educational outcomes. Our approach identifies the effect of being a ‘winner’ or a ‘loser’ in the new system of ICT allocation to schools.

Our preliminary findings suggest that the change in ICT investment did have a positive impact on students’ performance in English at the end of primary school. There is a smaller impact for Science and no impact for Maths. English in primary school happens to be the subject for which ICT is most intensively used for teaching purposes (outside the teaching of ICT itself and design in secondary schools).