

# DRIVING DIGITAL STRATEGY IN SCHOOLS

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### 1. FOREWORD BY LOUIS COIFFAIT, HEAD OF EDUCATION AT REFORM

*"Instructure asked us to be part of this UK-wide initiative, calling for a new approach from Government to help schools, colleges and universities engage with digital learning.*

*This project chimes with our own work, which examines how education policy can help realise everyone's potential, particularly the most disadvantaged, in a cost-effective and sustainable way. Technology has to be a part of that. Additional perspectives on the challenges of implementing the right digital learning tools in classrooms are useful for everyone.*

*It is, of course, very hard for an often constrained and highly accountable public sector to be innovative. But crucial to changing that is finding those teachers who "get it," and understand the potential of technology. While any such grassroots movement can be slow, we need these initiatives to reach a tipping point and so ensure that harnessing technology is prioritised by the Government."*

## 2. INTRODUCTION

The benefits of technology in the classroom are becoming widely recognised by teachers and students in the UK. The majority of teachers believe that technology can fundamentally enhance the teaching and learning experience, and are willing to embrace digital learning in some form. And in a fast-moving global market, we see savvy institutions aiming to improve results by providing innovative technology to a tech-literate, collaborative student base.

But, despite this surge of enthusiasm for education technology, there is a lack of coherent UK-wide digital strategy for educators in the UK. The Department of Media, Culture and Sports UK Digital Strategy (2017) contains a section on digital skills embedded in education, and the Building Our Industrial Strategy green paper (2017) includes a section that highlights the important role technical education can play in improving UK productivity. However, guidance is fragmented, and teachers often report a lack of independent information to help them when procuring classroom technology.

Working with schools around the world, Canvas is in a position to examine how Government, and more widely, the education-technology industry, can help educators make informed decisions in technology purchasing, and post-implementation, can help them ensure ROI on their investment.

This instructional whitepaper provides concrete guidance for Government on what is required from a UK-wide digital strategy for the education industry—focusing specifically on primary and secondary education. This paper includes feedback from industry figures including Reform, FutureGov and the British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA), as well as from schools across the UK.

**“There’s no doubt that technology has the potential to revolutionise the education industry. In the face of dwindling budgets, an evolving employment market and a focus on academic rigour, institutions are looking to tech to deliver a better, more engaging learning experience that prioritises self-directed and investigative study. However, it’s crucial that there is information and guidance available to help institutions choose, procure and implement the right technology to improve learning — and ultimately to achieve better results. We hope that this initiative will kick-start more formal conversations in Government and industry, where a more cohesive strategy is prioritised.”**

- Rachel Matthews, Communications Director, Canvas

While educators and governments may have been initially swayed by the efficiencies and cost savings promised by education technology, the education system has now moved to a new, pragmatic understanding of ways in which technology helps to meet pedagogical ambitions.

It’s important to look at the progress in the industry—charting the history of technology in school is a critical part of any planning for change. It allows us to examine successes and learn the mistakes which we can avoid.

#### **KEY MOMENTS:**

- While business and industry were embracing the new technologies, successive Conservative governments under Margaret Thatcher and John Major until 1997 were not proponents of prescribing how IT should be used.
- While in 1995 there was virtually no internet use in schools, by 1998 BESA reported 34 per cent of primary and 87 per cent of secondary schools having some internet connectivity. This leap represented the start of the education technology revolution.
- In 1999 Labour launched the New Opportunities Fund using National Lottery funding to provide £230 million until 2002 to be spent on ICT training for teachers. On the basis of questionnaires completed by teachers, BESA estimated that only a third of teachers had computers with internet access at home that year, and a very high proportion said they needed training before they could make best use of the technology arriving in their classrooms.
- Tony Blair launched Curriculum Online in 2001 and announced £50 million worth of e-learning credits (eLCs) for schools to purchase software from the curriculum website. In 2003 the eLC budget was increased to £280 million over three years.
- But with almost all secondary schools connected to the internet in 2005 and all primaries by 2008, teachers were facing a new obstacle to using technology: bandwidth. Internet bandwidth was considered less than half the optimal level in 2007.
- Becta imposed legislation in 2008/9 academic year which stated that every school had to have a virtual learning environment (VLE) in place. This mandate was unpopular with education institutions, and was rescinded before the liquidation of Becta in 2011.
- Despite the recession, ICT budgets reached their peak of £420 million

across the UK by 2010. By then the purchase of hardware had slowed down, and personalised learning and learning platforms were changing the way computers were used in schools.

Technology is now an intrinsic part of school life, from management to teaching and learning in the classroom. Every school now has a website and usually a learning platform, giving pupils access to curriculum materials 24/7. There’s electronic registration, smart cards for meal payment and email contact with parents. Interactive whiteboards and touch screens are enhancing whole-class teaching, while tablet technology and smartphones have the potential to make personalised learning a reality.

But the UK education system is not based on prescription, and schools and colleges are largely free to adopt technology and use it as they wish. Attempts by governments to use ring-fenced funding and approved lists of suppliers or resources to influence take-up have not always proved successful.

And so, in an increasingly mature but often confused market, many feel that education technology adoption is fragmented, and there is a piecemeal approach to technology acquisition. This may negatively impact institutions. Without coherent guidance educators may struggle to measure the ROI of their technology purchases, lack the tools to decide how best to integrate tech seamlessly into pedagogy, and more simply, not know where to turn for advice on which technology to choose.

### **3. THE REQUIREMENT FOR STRATEGY**

Henry Warren, a consultant for UNESCO, Cambridge Education, Pearson and others, confirms that there is no UK-wide digital strategy for educators in the UK. He says: “The lack of strategy reflects a fragmented education industry, where the potential of technology has not yet been fully realised. There have been lots of great pilots, and we’ve seen examples of spectacular uses of edtech in individual institutions, but to date this has been difficult to scale.”

Denbigh High School is one such example of innovative use of education technology. The school was awarded the Naace ICT mark in 2014 in recognition of its outstanding use of technology to support learning. The school supports the use of a range of devices to improve access and engagement with courses, and encourages a collaborative learning environment which is powered by the use of tools like Skype. In addition, the school also has a wider range of subject-specific software that is used daily by both staff and pupils in individual departments.

However, Louis Coiffait, Head of Education at Reform, argues that there is too much complacency about progress, and that most learners are losing out. Louis suggests that on one hand, there is a lack of impetus for the industry to prove its impact, and on the other, for educators to make full use of technology, partly due to a general sense of progress in education standards. “Schools are largely better than 10–20 years ago, and London is a particular success story. It’s rare to see really bad schools, rare to have a really bad experience. But while we’ve improved overall in the UK, other nations seem to be improving too, and at a faster pace. That sense of global competition hasn’t filtered through, change doesn’t seem to be pressing. Whatever you think of Brexit, it will expose us to international competition like never before, and we need to make sure all of our learners are properly prepared.”

The approach in Scotland is more robust and coherent; the national

strategy, Enhancing Learning and Teaching Through the Use of Digital Technology (Scotland, 2016), empowers leaders, promotes digital literacy and, crucially, ensures that digital technology is central to curricula. Scotland also benefits from a streamlined approach to technology procurement through the Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges (APUC) framework.

In England and Wales, Ofsted does not measure the use of technology in the classroom.

**“Teachers, politicians and the technology industry itself have all played their part over the last three decades, as did parents raising funds to provide equipment and children themselves driving it forward with their enthusiasm. But there has been no ongoing or long-lasting strategy from above—and it’s time we had more coherent guidance,”**

—UK FE institution

Attempts by governments to influence tech take-up have not always proved successful. However, at Canvas, we see a clear need for a digital strategy from Government. We believe that strategy should not dictate the amount of equipment needed, but should clearly show how technology can be used to improve teaching and learning. We also believe that digital strategy should be based on guidance and not mandate. This approach will empower educators to drive change, providing legitimacy for digital-first teaching strategies and delivering guidance through procurement, implementation and adoption.

A more uniform approach to technology use will provide a better student experience which increases the value of education provision and prioritises a pathway to employment, the development of adaptable and practical learning skills, and a focus on learning gain and better measurement. Furthermore, it will promote a collaborative learning experience which sees the UK as a leader in inclusive and open teaching practices.

Government intervention is vital in helping to create equal opportunities for tech adoption—overcoming rural broadband issues and competing with inner city resources. Educators are calling on Government to promote an approach which levels the playing field and looks to virtual learning as a mechanism to ensure that rural schools get the same access to resources, materials and experiences as their urban counterparts.

However, some educators are wary of Government edicts which remove choice for educators. Guidance, they say should be exactly that: advisory services to help promote technology usage. Mandates from above are less welcome.

**“Of course it’s important for Government to set broad aims for education, but dissatisfaction occurs when strategy is imposed on local communities and schools—people working in those areas tend to know best. The premise of ‘big society’ was to have local people making decisions, but education strategy remains very prescriptive. I’d prefer for schools to have access to ICT experts available to give guidance, in the setting of a support system where schools can take advice and apply it to their own specific needs.”**

—David Taylor, Headteacher, Stanley Park School in Carshalton

## A. TIMING AND IMPETUS

Why is now the right time to demand a digital strategy? A new Government and the European Union Withdrawal Bill, one of the largest legislative processes ever undertaken, provide impetus for policy review and revision. Funding cuts are widely reported, and together with teacher shortages, this means that many do believe that industry is at ‘crisis’ point.

For one UK college, it is the relentless pace of automation which calls for a much more urgent need to focus on technology adoption. “It’s long been recognised that automation threatens to make many well-established jobs obsolete,” says the head of faculty there. “But while automation jeopardises predictable physical work, data collection and processing, it increases the need for other skills. The application of expertise to make decisions will become increasingly important, together with people management, collaboration and creativity.”

He continues: “We have a crucial role in equipping future employees with the right skills for this critical thinking and applied knowledge skills to match the demands of this new job market, and this means getting better tech in the classroom. Technology will not only improve digital literacy and help address productivity issues, but will also power more flexible and independent learning where critical thinking is prioritised.”

For many, the urgent need to address fear and inertia in the education system is paramount in driving a coherent and useful digital strategy. The current economic climate, in which unemployment is low, can present a falsely optimistic picture, which perpetuates a state of inertia for educators. This is married with a fear of change—the risk that fundamental pedagogical shifts may have a negative impact on schools and students.

Henry Warren adds, “The current economic environment means that nobody is in panic mode—yet. Unemployment is currently low, will fall further with Brexit as fewer people are available for jobs. Until crisis point the pressure is almost nil, but the education industry needs to address the inertia, as this static environment will not continue.”

And, while we often hear from technology proponents in studies like this, it is also important to consider the more reluctant group of educators. In November 2015, we found that nearly half of teachers (46 per cent) rarely use the technology in their classrooms, despite the significant Government money used to put it there. This “tech dormancy” is having

a detrimental impact on learning, and requires Government support to overcome. Even in new academies and free schools, which enjoy greater budgetary independence, dormancy is a problem with “regular usage” at just over half.

The barriers to this usage are complex, but our research suggests broad scepticism among the teaching community about the efficacy of some technology, with many unsure how to integrate it into their teaching. Help in properly integrating technology into schools, removing cumbersome legacy systems and ensuring adoption is necessary to maximise Government investment into IT spending and minimise wasted money.

Added to this is a requirement for more assurance about security, privacy and safeguarding, in addition to the safe housing and distribution of data. In a particularly sensitive field, involving vulnerable parties, Government assistance in ensuring safety and security is crucial.

Although there is widespread agreement that the internet should do more to promote children’s best interests, we found that Government responsibility for this was fragmented both between and within departments, resulting in a lack of coordinated policy and joined-up action. We found a similar lack of coordination in the voluntary sector. In addition, self-regulation by industry is failing. And making progress is made still more difficult by public ignorance of how the internet works.

—House of Lords Communications Select Committee  
- Growing Up With The Internet (2016-17)

## B. DEFINING EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

This consultation uncovered an important distinction. Classroom technology, as a category, often focuses almost exclusively on physical devices used to complement (or supplement) teaching. From laptops to mobile devices, it’s true that this equipment has significantly altered the delivery of education. However, in this paper, when we talk about education technology, we are referring to any technology which is bought and used to enhance learning or change pedagogy. As a representative from one of the UK’s leading FE colleges explains:

*“The distinction comes down to ‘who serves whom’ in the education/tech industry relationship. If schools are just tech consumers, like any other customer, then the impact of that tech on learning is limited. If technology is bought and used to serve pedagogical need, to enhance the learning experience, the possibility of that technology is much more expansive—and the results will be long lasting.”*

## 4. WHERE SHOULD THE ONUS LIE?

Though Government support and funding has played a significant role in technology adoption, the enthusiasm of teachers has always been an important driving force. Nina Iles, Head of EdTech at British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA), says, “A number of companies that are members of BESA were started by teachers who thought they could teach their subject a lot better with the right ICT resources and set up companies to prove it. Many successful edtech suppliers in the UK began life that way.”

Canvas has previously identified the emerging role of the “digital trailblazer” in education. Reflecting the propensity of educators to turn to

fellow teachers rather than IT staff for guidance on classroom technology<sup>2</sup>, this group of teaching staff is increasingly assuming responsibility for spearheading new digital learning techniques and introducing technology to the classroom.

A democratic approach is essential to ensure that technology is implemented successfully. This is a key part of the “digital trailblazer” role. Where senior leadership unilaterally acquires technology, it frequently leads to waste, particularly when the purchase is made with short-term financial factors in mind.

But “digital trailblazers” need more formal support if they are to improve technology implementation in schools. And more uniform guidance from Government is required if all schools are to have equal opportunity to benefit from technology in the classroom.

**“These digital trailblazers are making progress in some schools. But, frankly, a lot of teachers are learning on the job when it comes from ICT, so many won’t be able to have that input. In a fast-changing sector, what’s revered today is probably obsolete tomorrow, and to address this we absolutely need to build on guidance from Government.”**

- David Taylor, Head Teacher at Stanley Park High School in Carshalton

## 5. TOWARDS A STRATEGY: THE KEY COMPONENTS

The benefits of technology in the classroom are clear. Technology use can vastly increase efficiency, streamlining processes and allowing teachers to collaborate with parents, students and peers in a dynamic and immediate manner. However, our research shows that technology should not be seen as a shortcut to success, but as part of a pathway to understanding, creating conditions that make students want to learn.

In order for technology to work for tertiary education, the cohort of influencers and teachers we interviewed for this paper pointed to a digital strategy being most urgently needed in the following areas.

### i. Procurement

Many of the testimonials we see from schools and colleges are that the procurement process is muddled, inefficient and even frightening. The rapid growth of academies has denuded the power of most local authorities to support consortium purchasing, which has affected many primary schools in particular as they don’t have enough staff to spend time working on a procurement process. Therefore, purchasing is difficult to achieve, and streamlining the procurement process is key to ensuring investment in technology is maintained.

Henry Warren told us, “Procurement is a fundamental barrier to meaningful and impactful technology adoption. Legislation is frequently misunderstood, and fears around protracted and difficult procurement procedures add to the inertia we currently see in the industry.”

But caution is needed when it comes to inflexible or prescriptive approaches to procurement. Technology is bought, but not used, by institutions when a “top down” approach has been applied—when tech is not selected by the staff who will be using equipment or programmes,

but by governors or managers. Put simply, a more democratic approach to procurement is required to ensure adoption.

For many respondents, this is an area where UK Government can take lessons from other territories, and indeed other areas of education. In Scotland, the Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges (APUC) combines a balance of technical and commercial award criteria and means that institutions are able to choose the technology which best fits their needs, from a roster of rigorously vetted suppliers.

**“The robust review process APUC carried out gives us the peace of mind that suppliers have been rigorously tested, which significantly speeds up the procurement process.”**

—Kathy McCabe, University Librarian and Director of Information Services at the University of Stirling

We believe that there are lessons to be learned from these territories, and that elements of these initiatives can be successfully applied to the UK education sector, while remaining mindful of the importance of choice and freedom in purchasing decisions.

#### ii. Training

Closely related to procurement is the requirement for educators to be properly trained in using technology to the fullest extent. In November last year, our education customers reported that almost four in 10 (38 per cent)<sup>3</sup> believe their school isn't providing sufficient training to either teachers or students in how to employ mobile and other technology in the classroom. Government help to support training initiatives is vital.

“Ensuring that educators are adequately trained in using technology in the classroom is a big focus for BESA,” confirmed Nina Iles. “Some of the inertia we see in the public sector comes from a fear of the unknown. And schools don't have resources to invest in training to alleviate this concern. This is where Government intervention can be crucial.”

#### iii. Dealing with legacy equipment and services

Respondents told us that there is a perception in the education industry that new schools are leapfrogging state schools because they don't have to deal with issues surrounding the replacement of legacy equipment. Government strategy can help interoperability and support schools in a difficult process of retiring outdated legacy systems.

**“I have been in IT lessons in Uganda and Zambia where the teachers begin by explaining what a computer is with chalk. This means that there's a blank canvas for IT procurement, implementation and use, and it can kickstart a fast-moving process.”**

—Henry Warren, Independent Consultant

#### iv. Ofsted and accreditation

There is no current requirement for technology provision in the Ofsted

<sup>3</sup>Canvas study from 2016

framework—and no encouragement for schools to use tech and allocate resources and funding accordingly. According to Ofsted, technology should be seen as facilitator to academic success, but respondents in this consultation confirm that a hands-off approach can leave schools adrift and doesn't reflect the crucial position of technology in ensuring teaching and learning success.

There is an argument that there needs to be a level of accountability for using of technology in schools and classrooms. As Louis Coiffait of Reform says, “Ofsted is fundamentally, and to some extent rightly, old-fashioned about its views in terms of what schools are for and how they do things. A systematic shift is required, so that what is measured is the extent that education delivers the skills required for a lifetime of learning. Of course—digital literacy, and technology use, is a vital component of this. Changes to computer science will help, but it needs embedding across the curriculum, and beyond.”

#### v. Measurement

Mirroring the increasing use of data analytics in the commercial world, many educators are turning to technology to help measure outcomes and track results.

However, there is a call to fundamentally reevaluate the way that progress in education is measured. “Instead of standardised tests which assess the ability to absorb and regurgitate rote materials, many call for ongoing measurement to appraise research skills, applied knowledge and practical ability—vital in paving the way for employment and beyond,” said Nina Iles at BESA.

During the consultation period we heard from many educators who are already harnessing data to track results in a dynamic and useful way. Craig Ring, Music Teacher at Rooks Heath in Harrow confirms, “Using data in the correct way, as a tool for intervention, not for retrospection, is important. At Rooks Heath, we can track students' learning behaviours, which courses are being consumed and where students are excelling or struggling. Harnessing data allows us to personalise learning journeys and demonstrate added value.”

However, some report a feeling of inertia, where change is theoretically possible but is slow to come to fruition. Risk-averse educators are unwilling to act without clear guidelines.

**“There is a culture of conformism in education. For instance, even though academies have been theoretically given lots freedom in terms of curriculum, these schools are still reluctant to break away from received wisdom, sticking to tried and tested methods due to accountability pressures. There's a feeling of risk in doing something new, and of course, assumed responsibility if things don't work out well. Government support would help provide reassurance here.”**

—David Taylor, Stanley Park High School

Gary Spracklen, Acting Principal at IPACA and Member of the UK Gov's Education Technology Action Group, confirms a feeling of nervousness around change. "The big fear for any educator is: Where does the point of failure sit? From the perspective of sending a set of exam papers to a school, very little can go wrong. It's simple. Whereas as soon as you introduce online examinations, the room for error or cheating increases and naturally causes concern. Educators need to be assured that safeguards are in place, particularly around testing and measurement."

Many experts call for hard evidence to support technology adoption: case studies, trials and data to prove its effectiveness and quantify the benefits it brings to schools. Nina Iles from BESA explores this further. "It's a chicken-and-egg situation, though. It's natural for educators to want evidence that something is going to work, before they invest. But until people take the risk, and invest in new technology, that evidence won't exist. We see other sectors leading the charge and understanding that someone has to go first, but educators are more reticent."

So with shifting priorities, a risk-averse sector and a new reliance on technology, we see measurement as a critical area where more guidance from Government is required. Educators require guidance on how to measure learning gain, and a look again at what standardised testing like SATs set out to do is required. Respondents to this consultation questioned whether rigid and inflexible measures have delivered adequately, and explored the benefits of a skills-focused assessment environment.

**"Measurement in education is currently a conveyor-belt approach—year level and prescribed outcomes. What the future of education wants is adaptability, dynamism and connectivity, ideas that are in opposition to the rigid and inflexible measures currently offered. The current system has not evolved from 150 years ago and must evolve to the current societal pressures that are applied to it."**

—Henry Warren, Consultant

## 6. CONCLUSION

This whitepaper provides a starting point for more in-depth conversations about what informed and strategic technology acquisition means for educators. It is clear from our consultations that technology can significantly improve teaching and learning, but that fragmentation and unfocused digital strategies can lead to disillusionment, lack of adoption and even negative impacts on learning experience and outcomes.

It will be important for Government to build a more coherent digital strategy for educators, and in doing so, ministers must seek guidance from other territories. Respondents to this consultation highlighted Scotland's Enhancing Learning and Teaching Through the Use of Digital Technology report and the APUC framework as existing examples of more complete guidance for education technology. Other institutions looked to Nordics' NORDunet framework as an enviable approach to government help with technology acquisition, where guidance is flexible enough to meet institutions' individual needs but prescriptive enough to provide security and peace of mind that technology acquisition is controlled and suppliers are vetted.

However, while there is significant impetus on Government to formalise a digital strategy for educators, there is also widespread feeling within the industry that technology adoption will still be driven by grassroots movements from teachers and students themselves.

Ultimately, this consultation recognises that widespread industry change is unlikely, but a vital starting point is to address the complicated and prohibitory procurement process. Streamlining procurement will have a knock-on effect on innovation, getting tech into schools and making it easier to make the right choices. In effect, it removes a bottleneck in the whole process.

Similarly, participants admitted that the sheer pressure of exam results, league tables and Ofsted leads to widespread inertia and fear across the profession. The reluctance in teaching to do things differently is the response to a culture where children as young as four and five are judged on their ability in relation to guidelines and peers. But this consultation shows there is a willingness to start having conversations about change and innovation. These conversations currently happen behind closed doors; progress starts with bringing them into the open.

## PARTICIPANTS

### Louis Coiffait

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### Alison Critchley, Chief Executive

RSA Academies (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce)

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Director of Technology for Learning, Denbigh High School, Luton

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## WHITE PAPER ADDENDUM - ADVICE FOR GOVERNMENT

This report has been created by Instructure Inc., a leading software-as-a-service (SaaS) technology company that makes software that makes people smarter. It follows a series of consultations.

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2. The current state of play
3. What should a strategy look like?
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#### **1. INTRODUCTION: A DIGITAL STRATEGY IS COMING, BUT IS IT WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR?**

Despite a surge of enthusiasm for classroom technology, there's a lack of coherent UK-wide digital strategy for educators in the UK. The Department of Culture, Media and Sports UK Digital Strategy (2017) contains a section on digital skills embedded in education, and the Building Our Industrial Strategy green paper (2017) includes a section that highlights the important role technical education can play in improving UK productivity. However, guidance isn't unified, and teachers often report a lack of independent information to help them procure classroom technology.

Without a focused digital strategy, schools are more likely to face fragmentation, lack of adoption and even negative learning outcomes. Last summer, Instructure lobbied for Government intervention. Our extensive consultations with UK schools and industry experts, outlined in the Driving Digital Strategy in Schools Report, were aimed at identifying ways to ensure that digital tools deliver a better experience for teachers and students.

It appeared policymakers listened to the advice we provided. At BETT in January 2018, we expected the Department for Education (DfE) to announce that a strategy was forthcoming, and we've had a number of conversations with the Department that have indicated this is a priority area. However, with a new Secretary of State appointed in January, this announcement was stalled and the teaching community in the UK remains without guidance.

In lieu of more formal intervention, we gathered a small group of teachers, policymakers and journalists to talk about how schools can best capitalise on classroom technology, and to give the DfE guidance on what any forthcoming strategy should include.

Representatives from industry heavyweights, such as Reform and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Education, as well as education teachers and leaders from both primary and secondary, met at this Instructure-led roundtable.

The group raised a pressing concern that the DfE has not been speaking with the right people in its consultations, as it focused squarely on engaging with the most tech-savvy industry figures and school leaders who are already proponents for the use of technology in the classroom. Strategies, it was said, which are formed only by consulting with the digitally engaged will never help convert the tech naysayers or those who are fearful of change—those who need a digital strategy the most.

Indeed, Anna Wolffe, the secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Education said that the Government is not getting the balance right on several levels. "It's clearly not speaking to the right people," she said, "but it's also failing to balance autonomy and guidance and is maintaining an 'arm's-length approach' to budgets. The Government is good at telling schools what 'the end goal' should be, but then how they get there, frankly, is entirely up to them."

#### **2. THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY - TOWARD A STRATEGY**

There was universal agreement among the group that technology has the potential to improve teaching and learning, but only when combined with strong school leadership and a clear strategic vision. However, it was agreed that while digital trailblazers (those who advocate for technology) often push the agenda, there's still a large contingent of teaching staff that's reluctant to engage with classroom technology, unsure of how it could benefit them. Their experiences cast doubt on the efficacy of digital learning, and it's this group that requires the most guidance.

**“Groups like this one are the converted, whom we don’t need to preach to. I see many more teachers reluctant to engage with classroom technology because many don’t have the time or external motivation from senior management or local authorities to do it, and this is a significant barrier to making better use of tech in our schools.”**

–Guy Colnbrook, Head of Computing at Old Vicarage School in Richmond

Craig Ring, Pastoral Leader and Music Teacher from Rooks Heath College, added that some teachers are reluctant to spend time experimenting with technology when their day is already full, especially if they have had a bad experience with older equipment.

Craig also spoke of the need for guidance that isn’t too rigid, saying: “Because there are no universal guidelines, it’s very difficult to convince teachers, particularly old-school teachers [of the efficacy of classroom tech].” Without leadership from the Government or the school’s senior team, it’s down to individual teachers to drive change within their classrooms.”

Andrew Murden, an e-learning consultant at the Focus Learning Trust also affirmed the need for clear leadership and strategy, pointing out: “Schools often don’t have a clear adoption strategy, i.e. clear aims and objectives for implementing a particular technology, together with a plan including timescales, milestones, training and monitoring/evaluation. For example, a BYOD policy without clear outcomes, appropriate policies and high-quality training will fail to produce the hoped-for improvements in attainment and progress.”

However, though help to realise these aims is needed, all parties agreed that a “tick box” approach to technology use, where it’s mandated by the Government, wasn’t required. Instead, the group felt the possible ways tech can be used in class required better explanation, driving the need for a more coherent digital strategy.

**“Frankly, the landscape is muddled. There is so much choice when it comes to technology, and time is a barrier to decision-making. How do educators find the time to research the options open to them?”**

–Anna Wolffe, Secretariat for the APPG for Education

Rachel Matthews, Director of International Communications at Instructure agrees. “Procurement, and the time it takes, is a significant barrier to tech adoption. Other territories, such as Scotland and Scandinavia, manage the process more effectively. Other areas of need include dealing with legacy systems and equipment, a closer look at how to measure the ROI of technology and adequate training to ensure adoption.”

Some participants warned that tech shouldn’t be seen as a “PR exercise.” Rachel Matthews commented: “Giving children iPads to impress parents

just won’t work. Technology adoption needs to be pedagogically driven, with clear ambitions to fundamentally change teaching and learning.”

Emilie Sundorph, who works on edtech for the think tank Reform, agreed, adding that some still feel tech is a distraction. Emilie said, “There’s still a feeling that edtech is an extra. We need to show how edtech can contribute to closing the attainment gap.” Edtech is an upfront investment in terms of time and money, and schools want to be seen as fiscally responsible. In the long term, though, Emilie predicts that adoption of digital technology will reap rewards in terms of pupil attainment.

Emilie adds, “The strategy needs to demonstrate exactly why technology is essential to improving status quo in schools.”

### 3. WHAT SHOULD A STRATEGY LOOK LIKE?

There was universal agreement that, currently, the Government is not getting it right when it comes to driving digital learning and helping promote technology in the classroom.

**“Part of the issue is the emphasis and focus of different ministers—not just Secretaries of State, but junior ministers too. They see-saw between a view that textbooks and traditional learning are the best approaches to teaching and embracing a completely digital agenda. And there is no vision of how the two can live happily side by side.”**

–Anna Wolffe, Secretariat for the APPG for Education

However, as explored above, educators are wary of Government edicts which remove choice for schools. Guidance, they say, should be exactly that: advisory services to help promote technology usage. Mandates from above are less welcome. Anna Wolffe says, “We do understand that the Government doesn’t want to be too prescriptive. When they have set guidelines in the past, success hasn’t necessarily followed. But the mixed rhetoric we’re experiencing at the moment simply doesn’t help those at the coalface.”

Looking towards a solution to a currently muddled approach, Andy Murden, an e-learning consultant at Focus Learning Trust, added: “Those who are implementing Government strategies don’t want to be told what to do, but actually they need some guidance. So there is room for a halfway house, an advisory service, which can point to a choice of technologies and ways to get the best from them.” However, he warned that this guidance should not be partisan, and perhaps should not come from the Government at all. An independent third party was discussed as a potential route to completely unbiased information.

Indeed, this discussion cemented the idea that while there is significant impetus on the Government to formalise a digital strategy for educators, there is also widespread feeling within the industry that technology adoption will still be driven by grassroots movements from teachers and students themselves—and that any strategy should be devised by speaking to the right people: the educators at the coalface, delivering teaching.

Participants felt that should the DfE do more to engage with the grassroots, it would empower educators to drive change, delivering guidance through procurement, implementation and adoption, and providing legitimacy for digital-first teaching strategies. Currently, the group's understanding of DfE consultations is that they're speaking to tech-savvy commentators, not the more reluctant educators who, the group felt, ultimately needed the most guidance.

#### 4. THE OFSTED CONUNDRUM

**“We recently had an INSET day where we looked at what an ISI and Ofsted ‘outstanding lesson’ comprised. Technology wasn’t mentioned once. This is at odds with everything we’re trying to achieve, not just as a school or a group, but, frankly, as a nation. We’re trying to equip children with skills to operate safely in a digital society. That technology use isn’t measured or recognised by Ofsted completely counteracts that.”**

—Guy Colnbrook, The Vicarage School in Richmond

The group universally believed that accountability or inspection frameworks should include strategic use of ICT. It was agreed that Ofsted inspectors need guidance to help identify what constitutes good use of ICT, but currently the framework does not promote this as a priority.

“Ofsted inspectors should be able to recognise good use of technology,” said Andy Murden, noting also that without any formal accreditation or measurement there is little impetus for schools to prioritise the better use of ICT.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, discussions during this roundtable have confirmed that the industry welcomes more Government guidance—with the proviso that strategy is determined by consulting teachers and learners on the ground. And there's a feeling that, to date, the DfE and other authorities aren't engaging with the right people. Strategies which are formed only by consulting with the digitally engaged will never help convert the tech naysayers or fearful: those who need the strategy the most.

Of course, we all know that collaboration isn't always greeted with open arms. In a time-poor industry where opportunities to interact with other schools are rare, making collaboration happen is difficult. We know there's a significant challenge to changing the status quo and encouraging better and more democratic collaboration.

Events like this move us closer to discovering what it is the industry really needs from the Government. While we aren't able to write the strategy ourselves, we are able to provide a starting checklist to DfE, as follows.

#### A DIGITAL STRATEGY MUST:

- Be devised for the many, taking into account considerations of those who can't or don't understand technology, as well as the digital trailblazers who drive conversations and move the agenda
- Help formalise accreditation or measurement of effective use of technology in schools
- Be advisory, moving away from the mandated use of some systems we've seen in the past
- Provide help in overcoming common challenges to tech use, including procurement, training and dealing with legacy systems
- Help teachers make the most of technology, beginning with a clear strategy and goals for its use
- Demonstrate how edtech can help teachers and students and provide guidance on measuring its ROI

#### APPENDIX

##### FULL LIST OF ROUNDTABLE ATTENDEES:

##### **Mark Lowe**

Founding Partner, Third City (moderator)

##### **Rachel Matthews**

Director of International Communications, Instructure

##### **Sophie Beyer**

Former editor of Education Technology, freelance journalist and edtech expert

##### **Anna Wolffe**

Secretariat for the APPG for Education, an All-Party Parliamentary Group co-chaired by Nic Dakin MP and Andrea Jenkyns MP which aims to maintain a dialogue between the education sector and Parliament to support improvements to the education system

##### **Emilie Sundorph**

Researcher at Reform, an independent, non-party think tank whose mission is to set out a better way to deliver public services and economic prosperity

##### **Andrew Murden**

Former Assistant Headteacher at Beardwood Humanities College, Blackburn, founder of Telios Education and e-learning consultant at Focus Learning Trust

##### **Guy Colnbrook**

Head of Computing at The Old Vicarage School in Richmond

##### **Craig Ring**

Year 8 Pastoral Leader, Head of Canvas and Music Teacher at Rooks Heath College, Harrow