



DRIVING DIGITAL STRATEGY IN FURTHER EDUCATION

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Known for making teaching and learning easier through open, usable, cloud-based technologies, Instructure has connected millions of instructors and learners at more than 3,000 educational institutions and corporations throughout the world.

This report is based on an extensive consultation period with Further Education institutions, policy makers and industry leaders across the UK. Interviews for this report were conducted between April and August 2018.

If you'd like to join the discussion, get in touch at marketing@canvasvle.co.uk

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1. FOREWORD

The UK has both a precocious capability and critical mass in edtech. Global edtech market is predicted to reach £243.8bn by 2022 and the UK is home to some of the world's leading edtech firms.

Yet we see the same issues time and again which prevent FE institutions from realising the true potential of tech. Colleges' infrastructure and connectivity is not a level playing field. Many find it difficult harness data and analytics due to a lack of common standards, and we see an impedance mismatch between edtech start-ups and education institutions.

Perhaps even more importantly, the development of digital skills in teaching and support staff has not been adequately prioritised and an evidence base of "what works" in edtech is lacking, along with shared resources that educators can tap into.

For these reasons, we believe that a formal education technology strategy offers the potential for educators get the best from technology for their learners. Without a strategic approach, institutions are more likely to face fragmentation, less likely to adopt new technology and could even suffer

negative learning outcomes.

That is why we at Jisc welcome the Education Secretary's five-point ambition set out in the summer, which seeks to address the positive application of edtech in schools as well as further and higher education sectors, where insight and guidance is required. We're working with our members to help capture the intelligence and understanding needed to show the great opportunity that edtech can offer them.

We see numerous examples of FE institutions jumping ahead of the game in integrating the latest and best tech services and products into the way they teach, some of which are highlighted in a [Jisc report on the subject](#). And FE's close alignment with industry means that institutions are often directly responsible for equipping students with the digital skills required to operate in a fast-changing employment landscape.

And yet, employment of existing and emerging tech is not widespread because of the barriers caused by a lack of funding and resources. And so, reports like this one are important in making sure this important sector is top of mind for policy makers when it comes to setting digital strategy, as well as being important for other sectors to learn from examples of good practice in this field.

Paul McKean, Head of Further Education (FE) and Skills for Jisc

Despite a surge of enthusiasm for classroom technology, there is a lack of coherent UK-wide digital strategy for educators in the UK. In summer 2017, Instructure embarked extensive consultations with UK institutions and industry experts in order to identify ways of ensuring that digital tools deliver a better experience for teachers and students, and outline what guidance is required from Government.

And, policymakers have listened. The Department for Education has announced that it is now working towards a vision. However, we see a distinct lack of guidance for FE colleges, with much of the news from the DfE focusing squarely on schools.

We believe that it's a tough time to work in Further Education (FE). FE leaders are tasked with delivering the most diverse curricula, to the most diverse student audiences, against a backdrop of economic uncertainty.

And while some sixth form colleges received a boost from academy conversion, for many, pockets of funding have disappeared in recent years – and budget cuts are hitting further education institutions particularly hard.

However, while FE is a sector often overlooked by the media, who focus squarely on schools and universities, many agree that FE teachers play the most pivotal role in UK education - helping prepare people for the world of work. Unprecedented levels of social and economic change and high rates of youth unemployment mean that it's more important than ever to help young people to make the difficult transition from education to working life. From school leavers to people who are changing careers, or those who weren't able to get the most out of the school system, further education caters for students from all walks of life.

Indeed, we believe that the ability of the UK to remain competitive on a global scale will depend on how well its FE colleges rise to the significant challenges they face. And in order to build a pipeline of skilled and knowledgeable young people, ready to enter the working world, FE colleges must deliver a rounded education experience which meets the needs of employers and students alike. And this can only be achieved through coherent and consistent use of digital technology.

For this reason, we have expanded our Driving Digital Strategy consultations to focus squarely on FE institutions. We have interviewed a range of policymakers, teachers and tech experts, to ascertain what is required from a digital strategy for further education. We hope the findings of this report will help Government ensure this important group is not overlooked in the drive to formalise a digital strategy for education.

Sam Blyth, Director of Schools, FE & Learning Providers - Europe, Instructure

2. INTRODUCTION AND MARKET CONTEXT

The widespread availability of mobile and desk-based devices with incredible computing power and functionality means that learners are now able to consume and interact with learning content provided by their teachers, by their peers, and by individuals and organisations around the world. And they can do this in ways that were not possible before the widespread advent of the internet.

That's a fundamental shift in the way that education is available to learners, not least because it makes it accessible to those who would have previously found it extremely difficult to enter formal education. On a global scale, people are now able to learn in ways that would not have been possible without digital technology, for example using massive open online courses (MOOCs).

Integrating technology adds flexibility of learning, which means being able to alter the place, the pace and the mode of learning. The growing use of blended learning provision, hybrid and fully online distance learning courses is offering choices for learners about how to integrate their education with other aspects of their lives. This is a fundamental change in the access to learning as a result of digital technology.

Secondly, there is a fundamental change in the way that learners are able

to gain knowledge, skills and competencies through the use of technology, which is going to be useful for their future employment in our increasingly digital world. Learners are gaining digital skills when learning online and educators are increasingly recognising the need to focus on honing these skills to cope with the massive amounts of information that needs to be searched, refined, categorised and understood.

And finally, there's a fundamental change in the way that learners are able to interact with other individuals, both their peers and educators, from all around the world as a result of digital technology. This is supporting increased cultural awareness and globalisation.

From the teaching perspective, digital technology is enabling teachers to create more interactive, engaging, flexible learning materials in a range of digital and multimedia formats and make them available to students online. But there are a number of barriers to integrating technology into the classroom, or more widely, across an institution. Respondents to this consultation cited the following key barriers:

- Low digital literacy among faculty
- Relative lack of rewards for using technology
- Budgetary constraints and risk
- Lack of collaboration between the IT and non-IT departments
- Lack of access to evidence base and resources to guide technology purchasing

To overcome these barriers, educators need constant and continuous tech guidance to help them plan their courses and improve their pedagogy. And the result of our in-depth, country-wide, consultations we have identified several key areas where Government guidance is required for a successful digital strategy for Further Education:

3. STRATEGY COMPONENTS

A. LEADERSHIP

According to Weston College, an Ofsted outstanding college of further and higher education in Weston-super-Mare, which provides education and vocational training to nearly 30,000 learners across the country, strategy starts from within a college - in the form of strong and clear leadership.

Jon Hofgartner, Assistant Director Of Technology, Learning Resources and Skills at Weston College, told us: "Leadership needs to have an understanding of what needs to be achieved, and a solid digital strategy in place. We believe that that the introduction of digital-specific leadership teams could go some way to raising the level of understanding of and willingness to develop the use of technology within a college, but tech cannot be a gimmick. There needs to be a genuine desire for long-term tech use and digital transformation from leadership, not just quick wins."

Catherine Evans, Teaching & Learning Manager at Coleg Gwent expands on this idea. "The key with technology leadership is to remember [that technology] is a tool to improve and drive teaching and learning. It should be holistic, and form part of the overall vision for the college at the very top level. Leadership on training is important too – accepting that it might take staff a little longer to do certain things while learning and that things might not be correct right away – it's about the freedom to explore and make mistakes."

Another key leadership issue, for many respondents, is in improving the relationship between IT departments and teaching staff. An Educational Technologist / ILT Team Leader at a large UK college told us: “While this issue doesn’t apply to our college, I have found that there is often a disconnect between teaching and learning priorities and those of a technology team. For example, ‘bring your own device’ is talked about a lot by teachers as being an important tool to enhancing student engagement, but security pressures make it difficult for IT to implement BYOD strategies. So tension exists between what staff and student needs, and what law requires.”

However, they continue: “If you’ve got strong leadership, this gap between the needs of tech teams and educators is not insurmountable. It takes forward thinking though, and someone tasked with making that relationship stronger.” For many, this is where digital ambassador schemes come in.

The Government’s TechFuture Ambassadors programme sought to provide some digital guidance, by offering tech and digital professionals from across the sector who volunteer their time in colleges. But, as a representative from Exeter College told us: ‘Digital ambassador programmes are a good start but for many time-strapped institutions, where is no time devoted to allowing them to actually make a difference. This is where clear guidance is required, rather than a ‘work it out yourself’ mentality.”

According to Exeter, this is where Government intervention can help, not least in fuelling collaboration and allowing institutions learn from others. “A central repositories of success stories is crucial in helping institutions define strategy. Case studies as part of reports like this are a helpful start.”

Case study - the experiences of Paul McKean from Jisc

“I passionately believe in technology as an enabler – it provides opportunity – whereas a lack of technology and connectivity can be a blocker, as I have also experienced. I took a master’s degree course in e-learning, but I had a relapse with my back and couldn’t travel. Ironically for an e-learning course, it wasn’t all delivered online, which made studying too difficult, so I had to delay finishing that course for a year.

In terms of how the sector is responding to the need for technology-enabled learning, it’s a mixed bag. Even in the same college there may be some teachers who’ve completely embraced technology, using videos, games, and 3D animations to show how an engine works for example, and there will be others who prefer to teach using a real vehicle.

Put simply, technology makes teaching more efficient; it’s not about replacing teachers, but about giving them more opportunity.

B. MEASUREMENT

There is currently no Ofsted measurement related to use of technology in colleges, and therefore little encouragement for institutions to use tech and allocate resources and funding accordingly.

According to Ofsted, technology should be seen as a facilitator to academic success, but respondents in this consultation confirm that a hands-off approach can lead to the de-prioritisation of technology adoption. Stephen Grix, Regional Digital Learning Technologist at the LTE Group confirms. “There’s no Ofsted measurement related to use of technology in colleges. Teachers value their Ofsted rating, and there would be more incentive for them to use technology if it was tied to their professional performance.”

Peter Kilcoyne, founder of the Blended Learning Consortium adds “Our recent Ofsted inspection highlighted the effectiveness our blended learning, and this was a real motivator for the staff. If this was something that Ofsted included in their specifications it would be beneficial for uptake.”

Deb Millar, Group Director of Digital Learning Technology at Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education, provides further guidance on what’s required from policy makers like Ofsted. “Giving a measurement-based incentive drives people to use tech, but it must be positioned as a support rather than a stick” she says. Echoing a commonly held view that technology is bought but not adopted if a top-down procurement approach is taken, Deb reminds us that the value of technology “must be clearly explained to teaching and support staff, as well as appreciated by management teams.”

For many respondents, measuring the efficacy of technology once it is in situ is problematic - and an area where government guidance is crucial. “The FE sector is in a rut with regards to embedding technology into teaching and learning” comments Jon Hofgartner at Weston College. “There is often a ‘paint-by-numbers’ box ticking approach to tech use, without considering how tech can be most effective for teaching and learning.”

A Director of Employability at a large UK college says “Understanding how to measure the success of technology is crucial, but the criteria don’t have to be complicated. In relation to our digital employability support, the measure of success is a simple one – are we engaging with more people who wouldn’t otherwise walk through our door? We also collect data for those engaged with digitally to compare with face to face and see what’s working best for different groups.”

C. BUILDING ON PAST EXPERIENCES

Stephen Grix at the LTE Group told us “There are inevitably issues of stigmatisation. Educators have had bad experiences with technology in the past, and they are unwilling to try again. This is where the reassurance of coherent and tangible guidance is key.”

But more than that, there is a feeling that the Government intervention

has been unsuccessful in the past, and that this must be recognised and built upon in order for any strategy to succeed at this time.

An anonymous respondent stated that their college “follows guidance from dictats like FELTAG - but they’re often vague, vendor non specific - and is designed for people with unlimited funds.” They went on to tell us that “the result of incomplete guidance like FELTAG was a rise in the adoption of ‘online modules’ to meet requirements, which often had the impact of reducing quality and student experience.”

All respondents felt that more needs to be done to develop an end-to-end strategy and that both Ofsted and government need to begin with a fulsome definition of what digital literacy is, and for them to actively use digital learning and digital skills themselves in order to lead by example.

In discussing what can be done to build on strategies of past government, Deb Millar at Grimsby says “FELTAG may have done a job, but it’s not the job it was intended to do. It may have been beneficial in jolting people out of complacency, but more needs to be done to prioritise technology. The Blending Learning Consortium is a helpful resource but too few people are aware of it, and instead they’re struggling to produce their own tools - and this is where a fulsome government strategy, based on guidance and ideas sharing, can be useful.”

D. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Training staff to get the best from technology is a perennial problem for educators across the school system, and our consultation revealed that FE institutions are no different. One senior lecturer at a major UK college told us: “Our staff are willing to learn but currently there are not enough at the level that they need to be in order to get the most out of technology. For Government intervention to be really useful, consistent training needs to be made available and CPD must be prioritised in this area.”

Peter Kilcoyne at the Blended Learning Consortium added: “There is no central support system for educators in terms of developing digital skills, and this can be a roadblock for educators who are nervous or digitally underskilled.”

However, respondents feel that there needs to be a more supportive approach to training and CPD so that teachers feel confident to use the tech rather forced to do so. This is an area where organisations like Jisc are already taking steps to address industry-wide shortcomings, working directly with the Government to advise where changes need to be made. Jisc has a toolkit to assess and measure staff competencies in ILT/ICT, and helps develop strategies in training staff holistically.

Looking at where training is most crucial, Paul McKean comments: “Feedback from Jisc studies indicate that CPD initiatives aimed at increasing effective use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) are an important area of teaching practice. Using VLEs as the platform for CPD activity can further embed their use and develop staff capabilities. And providing guidance or set standards that stipulate minimum content can help staff. As can offering structured templates designed to help staff meet these standards.”

The consultation warned, though, that overarching Government guidance should not come at the expense of peer-to-peer learning, which is working effectively in this sector. There are many peer learning models that have successfully been used to maximise the efficacy, reach and impact of CPD initiatives. These include mentoring, coaching, communities of practice, collaboration and networking with subject specific groups or neighbouring providers addressing similar problems. Communities of practice vary in size and range from large scale and open networks to small groups.

Less sustainable, although often found, are enthusiastic individuals who create pockets of effective practice. But, while these enthusiasts, or champions, may have some influence on immediate colleagues, unless the roles are formally recognised, supported, resourced and deployed in a strategic manner they are likely to struggle to reach and have an impact on significant numbers of people, irrespective of how valuable their practice is.

Case study - Grimsby Institute’s innovative approach to CPD

Grimsby Institute has received industry applause for a training and development initiative which helped to make a difference to the daily working lives of its staff. For this consultation, Deborah Millar, Group Director of Digital Learning Technologies, Grimsby Institute Group told us about its Level Up programme.

“The main aim of the Level Up initiative was to promote innovative and embedded technologically enhanced teaching and learning. All staff - regardless of ability or position in the organisation – had the opportunity to explore and utilise innovative technologies and training methodologies that encourage them to modernise their working practices and to promote outstanding teaching and learning.

One of the objectives was to use the staff social media platform Yammer to actively promote the success of staff members and encourage them to nominate their colleagues. This would ensure every staff member felt part of the success.

The Level Up initiative is the most successful staff CPD and ILT training programme in the history of the college, achieving widespread positive praise and attention regionally and nationally. In particular, Ofsted specifically identified the training scheme and its innovative approach as outstanding practice in the recent inspection.

Further to this, Level Up as a methodology was presented at a digital teaching and learning event receiving enormous support as an adaptable and credible solution to the wider engagement of staff in ILT and CPD.”

E. PREPARING FE STUDENTS FOR THEIR FUTURE

It's universally agreed that use of tech in FE needs to be rooted in providing students with the skills they need to be successful in their working lives. Any framework from Government needs to ensure that it incorporates 21st century skills, and is cognisant of what employers need from their new employees.

Grimsby's Deb Millar warns that currently "students are not being taught the skills they need to be successful because there is not enough focus on how technology will be used in non-traditional tech sectors, like construction." It is this view, that technology touches on all industries, and is not about sector specific skills, which drove much of the conversation around employability and employment.

Respondents agreed education must provide skills capable of morphing to suit the changing workspace. Rather than encouraging the development of narrow skill sets that can (and ultimately will) be commoditized, FE educators need to be laying the groundwork that encourages the development of a polymath mindset. To do this, the use of technology, not just to obtain digital literacy, but to become independent and skills-focused learners, is crucial.

"Guidance on digital literacy is important" confirms Kate Pearce at Gower College. "I think your average 16-19 student is confident in using a mobile device. But they often need help in effectively and efficiently using them. For instance, any student can access lots of things on a phone, but doing quality research on internet, they miss critical analysis."

Cath Jenkins, Better Jobs, Better Futures added "Now the world of work is about problem solving using technology. Independent learning is so key too and collaboration using tech equally important. Students might know the devices and apps and how they work – we need to prepare them to use it in the work context."

6. CONCLUSION

Of course, all of the tech issues faced by FE colleges are underscored by the chronic lack of budget in the sector. And so, there is significant pressure to ensure ROI of any technology. This means that for a risk averse community, guidance in the form of a coherent Government strategy is crucial.

This programme of consultations has provided a starting point for more in-depth discussions about what informed and strategic technology acquisition means for FE educators. It is clear that technology can significantly improve teaching and learning, but that unfocused digital strategies can lead to disillusionment and a lack of adoption.

It is important for Government to build a more coherent digital strategy for educators, but this won't happen unless those who work in the sector ask for it. And it's reports like this which this move us closer to discovering what it is the industry really needs. We can't write the strategy document ourselves, but our consultations have provided the following guidance.

A digital strategy must:

- Take into account all levels of technical aptitude - for 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 colleges
- Be advisory, helping to guide a market burned by Government edicts in the past
- Provide help in overcoming common challenges to tech use
- Help champion digital leadership, and demonstrate how edtech can help teachers and students and provide guidance on measuring its ROI
- Be closely tied to the wants and needs of industry - boosting employability and prioritising digital skills

APPENDIX

List of named interviewees

Catherine Evans, Teaching & Learning Manager at Coleg Gwent

Stephen Grix, Regional Digital Learning Technologist, LTE Group

Jon Hofgartner, Assistant Director Of Technology, Learning Resources, Weston College

Peter Kilcoyne, Founder, Blended Learning Consortium

Paul McKean, Head of Further Education (FE) and Skills, Jisc

Deb Millar, Group Director of Digital Learning Technology at Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education

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