



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN FURTHER EDUCATION

www.CanvasVLE.co.uk • 0800 358 4330

© 2016 Instructure Inc. All rights reserved.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN FURTHER EDUCATION

CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Understanding the challenge
3. Defining a successful strategy
 - a. Empowering institutions to embrace change
 - b. Ensuring successful adoption
 - c. Getting measurement right
4. In conclusion

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite media rhetoric about the threat of globalisation to British jobs, forward looking experts believe the next wave of economic dislocations won't come from overseas. Instead, the relentless pace of automation threatens to fundamentally reshape the employment market, rendering some jobs obsolete, while calling for new skills in a range of different (and unpredictable) areas.

Educators have a crucial role in equipping future employees with the critical thinking and applied knowledge skills to match the demands of a rapidly changing job market. But many are behind the curve. And while there is an industry-wide move towards more flexible and independent learning, rote teaching and theoretical knowledge is still prioritised by many institutions.

We believe that FE colleges are different. Firmly focused on vocational training and in touch with the changing demands of industry, further education providers are already taking a more progressive approach to teaching and learning. Rather than encouraging the development of narrow skill sets that can (and ultimately will) be commoditized, FE colleges are laying the groundwork that encourages the development of a polymath mindset, one that produces workers who are adaptable and multi-skilled.

But this sort of refocusing requires significant pedagogical change. It relies on students' ability to learn independently and moves away from the 'chalk and talk' model of traditional classrooms. Empowered, confident and self-directed

students who are able to acquire, question and contextualise materials will make adaptable and influential employees because they will have the investigative, critical thinking skills needed in the new economy.

Such fundamental change requires a new delivery method, and this means that education technology is no longer a luxury, but an all-important necessity to deliver new skills and priorities. Indeed, using technology is itself a crucial tenet of employment success today. Many FE colleges are already using institution-wide tech to power a collaborative, self-directed learning environment - and those who are not yet there, are cognisant of the need to catch up.

However, [Canvas's Driving Digital Strategy Report \(DDS\)](#) uncovered a lack of concrete guidance to support FE colleges in embracing tech and powering this new, dynamic, way of learning. As part of our report FE leaders called for Government to provide a digital strategy, but in the absence of this guidance we believe that it's our responsibility to provide information on the best way to implement, and get the best from classroom tech. This paper aims to provide counsel on the most important steps in a digital transformation programme.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE

We know that it's a tough time to work in Further Education. 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, FE is a sector often overlooked by policy makers, who focus squarely on schools and universities. In the Chancellor's most recent budget, the FE sector was ignored, with extra funding allocated to primary and secondary education.

However, 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.

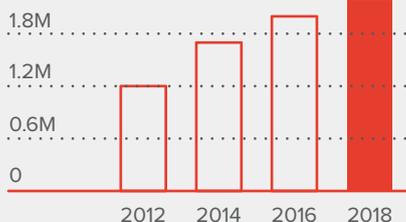
Indeed, we believe that the ability of the UK to remain competitive on a global scale will depend on how well its FE colleges rise to the significant challenges they face. And in order to build a pipeline of skilled and knowledgeable young people, ready to enter the working world, FE colleges must deliver 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.

Currently, FE leaders cite several key barriers to a fully tech enabled learning environment, and tell us that all of these needs to be addressed in order to succeed:

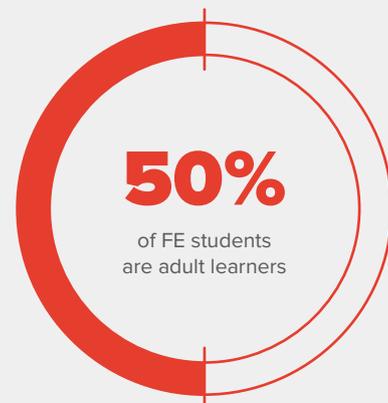
These barriers include; purchasing challenges, low digital fluency among faculty, a relative lack of rewards for using technology, budgetary constraints and a lack of access to evidence base and resources to guide technology purchasing.

2.2 M

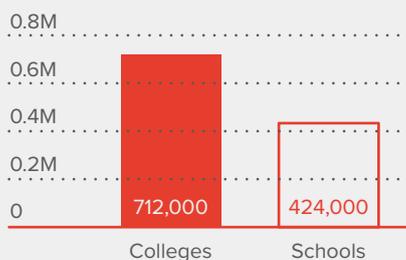
students are currently being taught in UK colleges



colleges in the UK, with 181 dedicated FE institutions



16-18 year olds studying in colleges vs. state funded schools



90,000

students are 60+

1200

apprentices trained on average by college's

Nearly every college in the UK offers an apprenticeship scheme

2 in 10

FE students have a learning difficulty

Source: <https://www.aoc.co.uk/about-colleges/research-and-stats/key-further-education-statistics>

3. DEFINING A SUCCESSFUL STRATEGY

A. Empowering institutions to embrace change

The single biggest driver of successful digital transformation projects are when institutions are led by firm objectives, which can be regularly assessed and measured against. Knowing what an institution wants to achieve is a crucial tenet to the successful implementation and adoption of education technology.

For many, technology is primarily chosen by senior management who are working towards operational efficiencies and to deliver on medium to long-term institutional strategies. Just as in commercial industry, many colleges are gathering, storing, accessing and analysing data to help leaders make better decisions in such areas as budgeting and finance, student recruitment, staff training and enrollment. Automating tasks like correspondence with students and stakeholders saves staff time and ultimately then saves the college money.

But for some critics, streamlining initiatives and better teaching quality aren't natural bedfellows and there is an understandable wariness that automating tasks may diminish the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Case study - Hull College

In 2017, Hull College Group underwent significant structural changes. With a new management team, an overhauled curriculum offering and the commitment to rehaul its infrastructure, Hull College embarked on a mission to develop a modernised curriculum to better cater to a diverse student base and to deliver a blended approach to course delivery.

"It's no exaggeration to say that the VLE would be one of the key components of our drive for modernisation," said Graham, Raddings, Executive Director of Marketing and Innovation at Hull, "And, as such, the college undertook a robust review of all curriculum, seeking the VLE that best supported the new strategy."

The college's decision was also informed by recommendations from other institutions. "Hull University is right on our doorstep, and together with information from other local institutions, we were able to select a VLE that had a proven track record in driving pedagogical change."

Canvas was selected as it delivered a flexible and intuitive solution that would be easy to use and quick to implement. "Consistency was also key," says Graham. "Moodle had become a bit sprawling, and we needed a more consistent framework which would help drive institution-wide change. Canvas offered this in spades."

The ability to work with applications and plugins is also supporting Hull College Group as it moves from a more static IT infrastructure to an environment which encourages BYOD, mobile working and a more flexible approach to the systems and products used in the classroom and beyond.

However, evidence shows that operational efficiencies and better teaching can be achieved simultaneously if all stakeholders are empowered to be part of the technology procurement process.

Technology is bought, but not used, when a 'top down' approach has been applied – when tech is not selected by the staff who will be using equipment or programmes. But, similarly, when too many participants are involved in a selection process, decision making is hampered and a project can be stymied. Institutions require strong leadership, combined with the ability to listen to and to understand the priorities of multiple stakeholders.

It is crucial that technology projects are driven by pedagogical goals, rather just than by IT or management. And so to ensure that tech innovation leads to better learning for everyone, teachers must be involved in all aspects of the decision making and procurement process, allowing them to feel empowered and to continue to put their own stamp on the course they deliver. When teaching and learning is at the heart of a tech project, the technology can increase efficiencies, save time and improve the teacher and student experience.

There are plenty of resources available to help institutions select the right technology for them - from analyst reports to online user forums. We believe that colleges benefit from listening to the experiences of others when buying technology - the authenticity of a review is more compelling than sales literature from a vendor. In the VLE market, one of the top business software review platforms, [G2 Crowd](#) leverages more than 450,000 user reviews to drive purchasing decisions. With unbiased ratings being a top priority, G2 Crowd manually verifies each and every review to ensure authentic data from qualified users.

And when selecting technology, institutions must allow ample time to consider the needs of all stakeholders. Listen to each party equally; getting student and teacher buy-in from the outset is crucial. Students and teachers alike will use and benefit from a product which they'd helped to choose - not one that was foisted on them from above.

Most institutions use a points system to make decisions on technology purchases. It's a useful tool to score individual systems and compare them with each other. But being tied wholly to these points systems is limiting. Instead the numbers should be used as a starting point to fuel discussion - giving way to more emotive responses, qualitative assessment and even 'gut feel'. In the same way as we call upon evaluation of students to be more flexible than rote-based exam-heavy analysis, our response to the goods and services we buy should be less rigid and prescriptive, too. Being given a chance to respond to and challenge the figures is vital.

Finally, at the very earliest stage of tech selection, institutions should be thinking ahead to how they will be able to measure whether a project has been successful. Ongoing training, measurement and evaluation is just as important as the selection process. A commitment to managing the products and services we buy reinforces their importance - and recognises their ability to dramatically change and enhance learning.

B. Ensuring successful adoption

FE colleges which have invested in technology must establish an adequate framework for faculty to use it successfully. This includes not only formal incentive structures but also the development of a sufficient infrastructure and a satisfactory framework for educational technology support.

We know that some institutions are still struggling to recognise the complexity of introducing educational technology into the classroom and curriculum. The majority of colleges understand that faculty and teachers need guidance on how to use the features of a new educational tool or platform, but support often stops there.

The primary investment that colleges need to make to ensure technology is adopted is time. Of course, the level of time commitment from staff depends upon organisational incentives and on individual variables such as personal values and goals. Management need to ensure that staff and students fully understand the value of technology and its ability to enhance performance and results.

The second investment that a college needs to make to ensure adoption is sufficient training and learning. The 'learn one, teach one' approach has worked well for many, where colleges begin a relationship with a VLE by using it to complete their own training or CPD. They get used to the tools, see how easy they are to interact with, and then are comfortable and confident when it comes to helping students to adopt the system.

Many also find the creation of a tech ambassador role important to ensuring adoption. An early adopter or tech enthusiast, even when appointed in an informal role, can help provide guidance and support to less tech-savvy faculty, and extol the benefits of technology to those who haven't yet used it.

Aligned with this is the need for strong leadership, executives who lead by example and are both invested in technology and able to use it well themselves.

C. Getting measurement right

Technology has radically altered the surface of the educational landscape. From simply mining the web for information, to engaging in AI simulated experiences, we increasingly credit educational technology as the driving force in learning. And we continue to integrate technology into teaching practice, we can struggle with understanding the true value of these various technologies in learning.

For some FE leaders, the remit of Ofsted has served to muddy the waters. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills doesn't measure tech usage in education - despite many calls for it to do so - but instead focuses on learning outcomes, however they are achieved.

It is, of course, easier to measure the efficacy of a discrete project, like the implementation and use of a virtual learning environment, than more generic 'classroom tech' - and so it's perhaps why institutions who have successfully implemented a tool like this are more likely to embrace tech more generally - they can see the value of it and the specific rewards it brings.

Case study - Middlesbrough College

For Middlesbrough, re-evaluating the college's VLE was a vital step in an ambitious digital transformation project, which prioritised the delivery of a consistent and compelling learning experience. However, the team there knew that their ambitions could be realised if teachers, students and managers all embraced the technology.

James Wells, the Head of Digital Curriculum told us: "We knew that an intelligent selection process would ultimately lead to greater adoption and satisfaction. Our procurement team was made up of IT, teaching and management staff—and later in the process, students. A mix of participants was vital. We prioritised pedagogy-led objectives, but absolutely needed IT buy in and support, too. We knew that an inclusive approach to procurement would ultimately help us to ensure adoption.

As part of the selection process, we visited customer sites. It was important to us to see tools in use, and we'd advise other institutions to do the same. In this setting, Canvas stood out from the competition. Its ease of use and navigation, clean user interface and integration with social media and apps were streets ahead of other tools.

And our approach has worked - Canvas has risen to the task, surpassing our expectations. We have a 97% adoption rate in the first year; it took us more than a decade to reach this level with our old system.

To ensure that colleges are able to see how a tech project is working, we advise them to take a holistic approach to measurement. Too often, technology is evaluated just by the users, rather than returning to the senior management and leaders who purchased a product in the first place - to ascertain whether it's delivered against broader institutional goals.

Both measures of success must be considered - and teacher advocacy shouldn't be underestimated. If a product is producing some results, but teachers don't like the product, then the investment may not have been worthwhile. Dissatisfied teachers are less likely to use a product faithfully. Teachers are also the experts in their classrooms, and their opinions should be strongly considered when measuring the success of new products.

Finally, the ease of use with any product should be taken into consideration. Technology products that are difficult to use or buggy, no matter how great they are in theory, are rarely going to be successful.

If a product or program cannot be faithfully used, there is little chance it will provide the desired outcome.

Of course, the best measurement starts even before a product is bought. Before a college even starts using a technology product or service, they should be thinking about how they can evaluate its tech. Administrators should develop a list of goals or targets that they hope to meet with the help of the technology they're buying.

By taking a holistic approach and a continuous approach to measurement, it's possible to measure the impact that technology has on student engagement, course consumption, efficiencies - and even learning outcomes.

Case study - Careers College Trust

Using technology to teach digital literacy is not without its challenges. It's natural that lecturers or college management feel hesitant to use technology if they're not as comfortable with it as their students. To address this, we provide all of our continuing professional development (CPD) courses for teachers online, using Canvas. This approach immerses teachers in a digital learning environment in a natural and low-pressure way, familiarising them with the process and the benefits of using technology at work.

Training the teachers on the digital literacy framework is key, and they must also be taught digital skills if they lack confidence or knowledge. We address this need by giving our colleges time to train and to explore. Learning digital skills is often a self-directed activity, and engaging with tools by testing and investigating their capabilities is crucial in becoming an enthusiastic proponent of technology.

This is clearly just a starting point, but it's a solid one. As our students well know, technology is all around us, transforming the way we live, work and do business, and it's vital that learners are equipped with the digital skills they need to get a headstart in their careers. And, to provide tangible and useful digital literacy training, colleges must look to a flexible framework which measures how skills are developed and what they mean beyond the classroom.

4. IN CONCLUSION

We know that education technology offers tremendous opportunity to improve learning outcomes, improve access, and cut institutional overhead costs without reducing faculty or instructors.

As such, Digital Transformation strategies are no longer a luxury, reserved for the most innovative institution, but a fundamental necessity for all. Without the absence of formal guidance, though, buying the right tech, and getting it used by the right people, at the right time, can be difficult.

We believe that there are three key areas that institutions must get right in order to get the most of education technology. They must focus on gathering the right information to make informed choices about the tools to buy. They must then dedicate time and resource to ensuring that students and faculty are able to use technology successfully. And they must continuously and rigorously evaluate its effectiveness. Only by setting clear objectives at the beginning of a project can institutions properly measure return on investment.

To negotiate this process, we believe we must work more collaboratively as an industry. Reports like this, and sharing experiences through forums like peer reviews, are an important first step to getting it right. And an industry, we have a responsibility to put in place the structure, processes and resources to collectively reap the transformative benefits of education tech.

NOTES

A series of horizontal dashed lines for writing notes.

