CREATING A POST-COVID-19 EDTECH STRATEGY WITH NO-ONE LEFT BEHIND
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FOREWORD

STEVE FRAMPTON MBE,
PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES

In her message delivered in March, shortly after the (partial) closure of colleges, Gillian Keegan, Apprenticeship and Skills Minister, stated that the FE “sector has been characteristic in terms of its commitment and ingenuity. It has been innovative and, most importantly, it has been caring.” These sentiments were also shared in meetings between the AoC CEO and President, with the Secretary of State for Education. They have long been expressed by AoC and others within the sector who can attest to the resilience and agility of colleges that have had to deal with chronic underfunding in an ever-changing policy landscape. Yet, even an ardent supporter would not have expected that colleges would have been equal to a challenge on the scale of the digital transformation that they have had to oversee to maintain high quality learning provision.

The breadth and depth of the transition to digital has been immense. Based on an AoC survey responded to by over half of England’s 244 colleges, 70% reported that most of their subjects had been converted to scheduled online delivery and 91% reported that for the majority of their subjects, materials were being made available for students to access by email or a website. The survey also indicated that 52% of colleges were delivering 75% to 100% of their planned learning hours remotely to learners who were under 19. In terms of recruitment, 94% of colleges reported sending remote ‘keep warm’ messages to support students in their transition to college, 55% have offered online content to prospective students and 57% have offered virtual campus tours. From the survey it was clear, some, if not many, students preferred this online support and learning model, and 80% stated their learning and support experience was good or better. These more flexible programmes, with individual tailored support suited many young people very well, especially those who didn’t fit into a regular educational setting. Food for thought as we go forward, but we also need to remember the potential wellbeing consequences, and impacts on mental health, as will be considered in Article 7, for both students and staff, from East Coast College.

A participant in the first of AoC’s series of governance webinars quite aptly pointed out that “colleges have accomplished in two weeks a transformation project that would have been planned for at least a two-year period and would have included a vision, detailed strategy and oversight.” The speed, scale and efficacy of the transition in almost all areas of college life has indeed been extraordinary, but now that the digital genie is out of the bottle, colleges will need to reverse-engineer a strategy and governance approach for the medium- to long-term future of their corporations based on a very complex picture.

This book has kindly been funded by Ufi VocTech Trust, and is dedicated to the amazing FE sector staff and students, leaders, governors and professional associations who turned an estate-based learning experience sector into an online support and experience sector in eight working days. As a sector we delivered the best learning and support for our learners in any part of the educational ecosystem, after nine years of minimal government investment. How typical of FE. This was much appreciated by our students, parents and employers, especially stressed and busy parents who, if they had school-age children, were sometimes required to print out daily resources and often understand multiple learning platforms to home educate. It was achieved through good leadership, governance and support from key stakeholder partners including Jisc, AoC, the professional associations, and mainly because staff and students rolled up their sleeves and got on with all that was needed, swiftly, effectively and by working all the hours needed to do it well. Going the extra mile was the norm, going the extra marathon was commonplace. It was “love our colleges” at its best, and was done collaboratively, working with our communities and especially with our wonderful health care professionals. It is now very important we don’t waste that effort, pain and learning and create a legacy.

Going forward we will need a more diverse and inclusive leadership and thinking with new voices helping shape the agenda, as the post-COVID-19 world will be uncertain, yet very different. As Chris Lewis argued in The Leadership Lab, only more diverse thinking, and inclusive leadership, will help us get the productivity we will need to address the challenges ahead. A view echoed by Matthew Syed and Akala, at AoC’s Annual Conference last year in Birmingham. The authors in this text, who had a vision and implemented it, are now offering to share their hard work and experiences, to help all our students and staff produce the support, learning, assessment, leadership and governance we will need. A future where
we will need this collaboration, diversity, inclusion, and innovation. One where blended and online learning will dominate, in the short-term and beyond. One where the main constant will be uncertainty. One which offers us the opportunity to do things radically differently, and better, and not merely to replicate the past, when colleges do re-open in a world that is and will continue to be operating and evolving in a very different context.

This publication is your window to look at that new blended and online digital learning future incorporating the wisdom gained from our rapid COVID-19 response. Your digital passport and visa, full of interesting and innovative ideas and tools to help with your planning for re-opening, and delivering high quality support and learning for our future students. More importantly, the lessons gained and short cuts to success, so we don’t waste all the learning from the crisis, and ensure no-one gets left behind. Student, staff, college or community. Ty Goddard, Mr EdTech to many, and an inspiration to more, once said to me “Let’s not just change the lightbulbs .... why not do a total digital redesign?” And that’s the opportunity we now have to future-proof learning in the FE sector, and seize the opportunity, working collaboratively. Here is your ideas toolkit of inspiring articles written for leaders, governors and the amazing staff in our sector. It represents the shared learning of over 0.33 million learners and staff over the last nine years, and especially nine weeks, all in one space.

This is your passport to explore, and visa covered in the first six articles:

- **V - VISION AND LEADERSHIP**
  East Coast College and Weston College

- **I - INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENT**
  Jisc/AoC

- **S - SECURITY AND SAFEGUARDING**
  Kirklees College, National Centre for Cyber Security and Jisc

- **A - ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL**
  McNaught Consultancy Ltd and TechAbility

- **C - CO-CONSTRUCTION**
  Portsmouth College and Unloc

- **C - COLLABORATION**
  British Council, Education and Training Foundation and Heart of Worcestershire College

These will enable secure, safe, stable and sustainable success for all, with their learning, personnel development, progress and especially their wellbeing and mental health. As Article 11 examines, ‘digital can be dynamite’. Our final articles cover the role of stakeholder partners, ETF, British Council and Unloc in supporting this transformational agenda. Finally, we consider the critical role of digital governance from the perspectives of governance professionals and chairs, and new younger governors, and students representatives on our boards.

Now we need the investment to capitalise on this learning, so we can ensure no-one gets left behind on this digital journey. The status quo is not an option. The alternative is a widening of the digital poverty divide, and increased socio-economic disparity. The most vulnerable will suffer most, and we will not be able to meet the future needs and aspirations of our learners and communities, will not be able to meet the future needs and aspirations of our learners and communities, and develop the skills needed for our businesses in the new economic landscape. The COVID-19 crisis could, and should, be a catalyst for real inclusive change.

The real issues going forward are cash and culture, not technology. We clearly have the proven mindset, imagination, motivation and momentum. We have demonstrated the commitment, clarity and vision, and the collaborative models and solutions. We have the acknowledged deep and embedded culture needed in our FE sector. Now we need the infrastructural investment and resources to enable us to implement our vision “that no-one in FE, staff or student, college or community, gets left behind.” And we need it swiftly; every day we don’t have these investment decisions is a day wasted getting better prepared for re-opening for our employers, and communities, our staff and learners.

Investment now is the key to tackling the constraints, barriers, risks and threats, and turning them into sustainable opportunities. Investment that will allow us to build imaginative, innovative digital colleges and communities fit for purpose in a post-COVID-19 future, and meeting the needs of our Climate Change crisis.

Now enjoy being inspired by these Ufi VocTech Trust-funded articles and linked webinars. Thank you for engaging, and huge thanks especially to all the amazing FE staff, governors, leaders, students and our partners for their incredible contributions.
In recent years, infrastructure within FE has suffered from a lack of both investment and strategic alignment between IT and the organisation. Despite this, IT teams continue to deliver services in a challenging environment. Hardware is often unsupported and deficient in security updates. Teams can also be stretched in both headcount and skills, making it difficult to provide ongoing support and service improvements.

Jisc has worked extensively with FE members and has carried out 107 infrastructure reviews. This article reflects the experiences of the sector in areas including IT team skills and service management, networks, servers and storage, applications and device management. It will highlight areas of best practice and where investment could improve infrastructure and enhance services. It will highlight concerns such as the use of unsupported server operating systems, as well as areas where colleges have successfully delivered high quality services in a challenging environment through greater use of automation.

As the UK’s membership body for education and research, and provider of the Janet network, Jisc has worked across the sector providing services, advice and guidance to members. This has provided an insight into the state of infrastructure within further education. Much of the evidence within this article has been gathered through the infrastructure review service which has been offered since 2016.

The review involves discussions with IT managers and other staff where appropriate covering areas including strategy, team structure, networks, servers and storage, core enterprise services, applications, device management, security and governance. It is intended as a supportive review and is not an audit; as such, it is based only on what members are willing to discuss. The majority of these reviews (91%) have been conducted at FE member sites. This is largely due to the more extensive provision and generally better funding of IT teams within HE.

**STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT**

In addition to limited investment in IT, colleges are often restricted by a lack of technology-related strategic planning, evident in the majority of colleges. Jisc recommends that there is clear alignment between IT and the overall college strategy. Organisations which have a Chief Technology Officer (CTO), Chief Information Officer (CIO) or Head of Technology-type senior role are able to make embedded use of technology due to improved organisation-wide technology decision making. When this occurs in the right place, at the right time, it can make a real difference to service delivery.
IT TEAMS

Firstly, it should be noted that IT teams within FE colleges are to be commended for the work they have been doing in ‘keeping the lights on’. This has taken place despite significant challenges; in particular, it has been observed that in many cases, departing staff are not replaced. As a result, the ratio of IT support staff to supported users based on infrastructure review data has increased to 1:814. When Jisc last analysed this ratio in 2017, it was around 1:450. Lack of capacity also makes training and keeping up to date with technological developments challenging. Most colleges have gaps in the skills profile required for an IT team to effectively function, have key person dependencies which exposes them to risk should they leave – or both. A number of colleges have engaged with third parties to provide managed services, with most reporting positive experiences of doing so. Where capacity does not exist, there is an opportunity for an IT team to effectively function, have key person dependencies which exposes them to risk should they leave – or both. A number of colleges have engaged with third parties to provide managed services, with most reporting positive experiences of doing so.

There is limited use of IT service management frameworks such as ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library). Those who have made use of such structures typically derive management and delivery benefits. While most teams have a basic operational plan in place, service level agreements and service catalogues are generally not applied, exposing IT teams to unrealistic expectations, as well as the risk of delivering inefficient services which are not strategically aligned.

Recent weeks have seen IT teams doing an excellent job in maintaining services to facilitate the rapid transformation to remote learning. Behind the scenes, though, the sector is at risk of major service failure and data loss due to the lack of investment in technology from both a staffing and capital expenditure perspective.

There are also 32 English FE colleges (13%) which have a resilient internet connection, especially when connections under pressure. Increased reliance on cloud services also places additional reliance on connectivity. All colleges should have a resilient internet connection, especially when there is a reliance on cloud services. Currently, there are 150 colleges with only a single Janet connection. There are also 32 English FE colleges (15%) which have a connection speed of less than 1Gbps. Increased use of cloud services and remote delivery will place such connections under pressure.

EQUIPMENT

The majority of colleges who have undertaken an infrastructure review find capital spending on IT infrastructure difficult. While most are able to deliver services, and have been successful in moving to remote delivery, a lack of investment in equipment increases the risks they are exposed to. There have been some good examples of colleges extending the life of end user equipment, including desktop and laptop fleets, such as by installing solid-state drives; however, the number of end-of-life devices remains high.

The AoC/Jisc survey also found that on average only 55% of colleges consider most or all of their desktop devices fit for purpose, decreasing to 46% for portable devices such as tablets and laptops. 95% of respondents reported that devices which were not fit for purpose were due to their age/wear and tear.

With the recent move to remote learning, it is vital to ensure that there is adequate investment in devices so that learners, particularly disadvantaged learners, are not left behind. Jisc’s digital experience insights research has found that 5% of learners do not own their own device.

Core infrastructure such as servers and storage which is ‘end of life’ is regularly in continued use due to a lack of capital funding. Such equipment is typically no longer supported by vendors should it fail and is not receiving security updates or patches which are essential to ensuring the security of systems. The use of legacy server operating systems including Windows Server 2003, are still in use for core systems. This, among other issues uncovered during infrastructure reviews, leads Jisc to conclude that 85% of further education members reviewed have concerns relating to gaining Cyber Essentials certification in line with the ESFA expectations in 2020/21. There is also evidence that there are a small number of providers who have received certification based on self-assessment, which would not withstand the external validation of their cyber security posture as is required to achieve Cyber Essentials Plus certification.

Jisc recommends that there is clear alignment between IT and the overall college strategy.

CLOUD AND CONNECTIVITY

The sector is making increasing use of software as a service (SaaS) delivery, with applications hosted in the cloud. This is an approach endorsed by Jisc, encouraging the use of a hybrid model where cloud services are adopted wherever they are appropriate. The AoC/Jisc college IT and digital technology survey found that 68% of respondents were taking a hybrid approach, with 30% using in-house-only systems, and 2% cloud only. Of those who are not using the cloud, 65% cited concerns around costs as a barrier to doing so.

Increased reliance on cloud services also places additional reliance on connectivity. All colleges should have a resilient internet connection, especially when there is a reliance on cloud services. Currently, there are 150 colleges with only a single Janet connection. There are also 32 English FE colleges (13%) which have a connection speed of less than 1Gbps. Increased use of cloud services and remote delivery will place such connections under pressure.

With the recent move to remote learning, it is vital to ensure that there is adequate investment in devices so that learners, particularly disadvantaged learners, are not left behind.
As already discussed, many colleges will find it difficult to achieve Cyber Essentials certification in line with the ESFA expectations in 2020/21. Jisc recommends that colleges achieve this as soon as possible as a solid base from which to work to achieve Cyber Essentials Plus and ISO27001, as this is expected to be a requirement in the future.

Nearly all colleges have adequate firewall technologies. Web filtering and monitoring arrangements in the majority of cases meet Ofsted’s best practice expectations in line with the Prevent Duty. A small number, however, are unable to use their logs of internet usage to identify traffic to an individual user. It is encouraging to note that increasing numbers of colleges are ensuring devices such as laptops which are taken offsite are encrypted. This is particularly relevant given that homeworking has increased significantly.

Password policies vary across the sector. Many apply password requirements which need strengthening and enforce password expiry. Jisc recommends that colleges adhere to the National Cyber Security Centre guidance in requiring strong passwords which do not expire.

Most colleges offer some form of training and awareness raising on cyber security issues for staff (67% of Jisc/AoC survey respondents make training compulsory for all or some staff). Only 27%, however, do so for all or some students. A more co-ordinated approach may be beneficial for the sector.

The back-up and disaster recovery procedures in the majority of organisations reviewed is a concern, although there are some examples of sector best practice which should be replicated across all colleges. The current situation in most colleges represents a major business continuity risk. It is reassuring to note that most colleges have mitigated against the risk of physical damage such as fire and flood. The main concern is that many back-up systems are not logically offline or physically offline (for example, by using a tape library). This increases the risk of a total loss of data including that held on back-ups in the event of a cyber-attack. A total loss of data would have enormous implications for colleges.

APPLICATIONS

A wide range of applications are in use across the sector, with no evidence of any particular vendors of systems such as student records and finance being favoured by colleges. Email and Office applications are primarily Microsoft Office 365, with some using Google GSuite. There is little evidence of enterprise architecture frameworks being applied, which is to be expected given the capacity constraints within teams. Where it is being applied, there are a small number of sector exemplars where colleges have created data warehouses, enabling self-service reporting and the ability to easily replace systems where appropriate.

SECURITY

As already discussed, many colleges will find it difficult to achieve Cyber Essentials certification in line with the ESFA expectations in 2020/21. Jisc recommends that colleges achieve this as soon as possible as a solid base from which to work to achieve Cyber Essentials Plus and ISO27001, as this is expected to be a requirement in the future.

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DISASTER RECOVERY

The back-up and disaster recovery procedures in the majority of organisations reviewed is a concern, although there are some examples of sector best practice which should be replicated across all colleges. The current situation in most colleges represents a major business continuity risk. It is reassuring to note that most colleges have mitigated against the risk of physical damage such as fire and flood. The main concern is that many back-up systems are not logically offline or physically offline (for example, by using a tape library). This increases the risk of a total loss of data including that held on back-ups in the event of a cyber-attack. A total loss of data would have enormous implications for colleges.

CONCLUSION

Based on the evidence seen by Jisc working with the sector, the following requirements are considered necessary:

A RESILIENT AND MINIMUM 1GBPS JANET CONNECTION, accelerating the upgrade path for those who do not yet have this using the £300m per annum capital fund.

CONTINUED INVESTMENT IN END USER DEVICES to support learners, especially for disadvantaged and vulnerable learners.

UP-TO-DATE SERVERS AND STORAGE, and the discontinuation of legacy operating systems.

INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES TO INCLUDE OFFLINE BACK-UPS where they do not exist. Ensure server and back-up solutions comply with Cyber Essentials Plus and ISO27001.

THE CREATION OF A SENIOR TECHNOLOGY ROLE where there is no such position within an organisation’s structure.

BETTER STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT OF TECHNOLOGY with the overall college objectives, with a clearly defined service catalogue in place.

ENSURE STAFFING LEVELS ARE APPROPRIATE WITHIN IT TEAMS, staff are replaced when team members leave, and staff have the opportunity and capacity to access appropriate training and development, particularly on cloud services.

A CO-ORDINATED APPROACH TO END USER AWARENESS TRAINING and awareness raising on safeguarding and cyber-security issues.

Author: Marc Dobson, Subject Specialist (Infrastructure: Applications), Jisc
FE institutions have been investing more in cyber security training, products and services in the last few years, with more colleges using third party services to help with detecting and managing threats. There has been an increase in FE organisations achieving Cyber Essentials certifications. However, evidence from Jisc’s security operations centre and the National Centre for Cyber Security (NCSC) has shown that colleges are still being impacted by attacks and concerns about the growing threat of cyber-attacks have increased.

This chapter describes the current cyber security landscape and its effect on Jisc’s FE members. It highlights common issues experienced by colleges, including ransomware and denial of service attacks and recommends how FE, with a lack of dedicated security personnel, can help meet cyber security challenges by adopting managed services.

Over the past few years, Janet CSIRT has handled between 5000 and 6000 incidents and queries a year. **FIGURE 1** shows a breakdown of the types of incidents affecting Jisc’s members:

**FIGURE 1 - Incident ticket breakdown (all Jisc members)**
These statistics help illustrate the breadth of incidents experienced across the education sector; the actual figures are heavily influenced by the activity of Janet CSIRT and the detection of events rather than their actual rates of occurrence. For example, a successful investigation by researchers into a botnet will cause that month’s malware figures to rise even though the malware may have been active, but undetected, in previous months.

Although the move to remote working for staff and students has changed the threat model facing colleges, it hasn’t changed the fact that security remains a high priority. Criminals are notorious for taking advantage of news events and piggybacking on emerging and trending issues, and the current COVID-19 situation is no different. Very soon after news of the crisis arose, attacks started adapting to take advantage of the new context. Phishing emails have always been a problem and are even more so as criminals use coronavirus-related emails to encourage victims to follow links or download malware. NCSC warned the public about this in April this year.

Although not COVID-19 related, Janet CSIRT has had to respond recently to some extremely serious ransomware incidents. This included one college that had to close all their systems down for more than a week. With all incidents, and particularly business-disrupting examples like this, the sooner Janet CSIRT is contacted, the more effective digital forensics can be, and the quicker normal service can be resumed at the college.

In the last 12 months, Jisc has detected 569 denial of service attacks against colleges in England, which is more than 10% higher than the previous 12-month period. However, looking at the statistics from the start of lockdown until the time of writing (20 March-20 May 2020), we detected 26 DDoS attacks targeting 15 UK colleges, which is fewer than those seen over the same time period in 2019 (100 DDoS attacks targeting 33 UK colleges). The number of DDoS attacks seen in March and April for both years was fairly similar but May has shown a significant drop with 1st-20th May 2019 having 47 attacks and 1st-20th May 2020 with just five.

It is too soon to determine if this is due to lockdown changing the way everybody is working (including criminals) or if it is an anomaly. From previous analysis of attacks, and where we have managed to work with colleges to identify perpetrators, Janet CSIRT strongly suspects that a large proportion of DDoS attacks are being launched from within colleges. With many systems hosted in the cloud rather than on campus, and resources and systems being accessed directly from home networks, there is potentially less to gain in launching a denial of service attack against the college network during lockdown.

In one example, Jisc’s security analysts were mitigating an attack at a college that was launched at about 9am. It finished at 12pm and then started up again at 1pm before petering out later that afternoon. This suggested that the attacker was somebody on campus who themselves wanted to get online at lunch time.

The Jisc Security Operations Centre has also detected access from colleges to websites that provide ‘attacks as a service’: so-called Booter and Stresser sites allow attackers to launch denial of service attacks against any organisation for just a few pounds. If more colleges sign up to Jisc’s Janet Network Resolver Service (JNRS), then we can help prevent access to such sites from the college network. JNRS can also help mitigate the risk of users’ web requests being directed to compromised or dangerous web sites (for example, as a result of phishing or related attacks). It is also important for colleges to maintain adequate logs on college systems to help identify attackers and determine what they have been up to.

When a college experiences a cyber incident they are able to call on Janet CSIRT for assistance. This could involve just providing some advice and guidance over email or by phone but quite often entails a detailed investigation. This can include digital forensics to identify what exactly has happened, and how an attacker managed to get access, for example. The team helps staff at institutions to get systems back up and working, to enable teaching and learning to continue. Janet CSIRT not only provides a reactive service, but also proactively contacts colleges when incidents have been detected or we have been alerted to a particular threat.
70% of respondents to the (pre-COVID-19) AoC/Jisc College IT survey said they either agreed or strongly agreed that their college is able to deal with a cyber security risk. This is an even more confident response than that given in Jisc’s 2019 Cyber Security Posture Survey, where a mean score of 6.6/10 was given in response to the question ‘on a scale of 1 (not at all well) to 10 (very well protected) how well do you feel your organisation is protected?’ Almost a quarter of respondents gave a score of 8/10 or higher. Although Jisc has witnessed good practice within some colleges, such as good processes and policies in place including patching policies, as with all organisations, choices and priorities need to be made.

There is some concern that not all colleges are aware of the range of threats and that there is underreporting of incidents: more than half of colleges stated in the 2019 Posture Survey that they had not reported cyber security incidents in the previous 12 months. In the AoC/Jisc IT survey, 11% of colleges reported experiencing at least one cyber security incident that caused significant business disruption and nearly all (96%) had experienced at least one minor incident.

Very few colleges have dedicated cyber security staff. In fact, just 11% of respondents to the 2019 Posture Survey stated they have specific security roles and having small teams with wide-ranging responsibilities means you can’t do everything so you have to prioritise. This might mean important attack vectors get overlooked. Making good use of technology or working with a trusted partner, can help here.

Although adoption of Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) systems is low within FE currently, (4% according to the 2019 survey) having a central place for logging information from disparate systems helps save time in manually searching for signs of attack and can alert teams when something suspicious has been detected. Similarly, if you know what assets are connected to your network, it is easier to effectively manage threats.

From the findings of Jisc’s 2019 survey, we know that an increasing number of colleges are ensuring they have basic security controls in place, by gaining the Government’s Cyber Essentials certification. From just 4% of colleges in 2018, the 2019 survey results showed a large jump, to 31%. We expect this figure to have increased much further in this year’s survey as colleges strive to meet the data security requirements in the Education and Skills Funding Agency’s funding agreements.

Cyber security is both a technological and a cultural issue. Having technical controls in place to ensure that systems are kept up to date, patched, scanned for vulnerabilities etc, is key, but so is user training and awareness. It is encouraging to see more colleges training their staff, with an increase from 55% reporting mandatory training for some or all their staff in the posture survey from June 2019 to 67% in the AoC/Jisc IT survey in December. The number that reported training their students is not as positive, however, rising from just under a quarter in the June survey to 27% in December.

Ensuring staff and learners are aware of the risk of phishing and malware as well as the need to back up their data is even more important with the current ways of working. Cyber security awareness training should be in place for everyone across the organisation; getting the Board and the directors to buy into the college’s cyber security strategy and embedding it throughout the whole organisation is vital. Remote working due to COVID-19 has changed the threat landscape but it still means the basic security controls and training needs to be undertaken. Attackers only have to find one weakness to exploit, so the more eyes on a network, the better the chance of blocking those weaknesses before the attackers get in or very soon after.

Although no institution is immune to cyber-attacks, there are a number of controls that should be in place to make colleges a harder target and to minimise the impact of an attack or breach. Colleges should ensure that systems are patched and kept up to date; networks should be segmented; all users should have information security awareness training; and consideration should be given to implementing a SIEM, either internally or via a managed service to maximise visibility. Jisc is very keen to work with institutions to improve their cyber security posture and to ensure no college or their students get left behind when it comes to good security practices.

Author: Dr John Chapman, Head of Security Operations Centre, Jisc

There is some concern that not all colleges are aware of the range of threats and that there is underreporting of incidents.
The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) is part of GCHQ and is the UK Government’s technical authority on cyber security.

Hannah H, who leads NCSC’s engagement with the FE sector, sets out how COVID-19, and in particular the rapid move to teaching online, has put renewed emphasis on the importance of keeping college IT networks secure.

INTRODUCTION

At NCSC we’ve long said that cyber security isn’t just an IT issue: it’s something that needs to be understood and put into practice by everyone in every organisation. That certainly includes colleges.

After all, from exam provision to assessment data, email and online classrooms, intruder alert systems and food payment mechanisms in the canteen, colleges are digitally connected in many ways and they depend on that connectivity to keep them functioning.

Life in the COVID-19 era has brought this into sharper focus and with online teaching and learning set to continue for the foreseeable future, keeping colleges’ IT systems up and running is more important now than ever. After all, if a college’s network goes down, how could students learn? If you can’t access data or resources, how could you teach and support those students?

This chapter discusses two aspects of how staff can support their colleges with their cyber security.

Everyone has a role to play, so first we need to look at cyber hygiene – the actionable measures we can all implement in our online life. The second section takes a more strategic view, posing some broader questions about how cyber security might be embedded across the whole college. We raise some discussion points that we hope staff in all roles will want to engage with.

After all, if a college’s network goes down, how could students learn? If you can’t access data or resources, how could you teach and support those students?
BACKGROUND

Cyber security is how individuals and organisations reduce the risk of cyber-attack. Its core function is to protect the devices we all use (smartphones, laptops, tablets and computers), and the services we access – both online and at work – from theft or damage. It’s also about preventing unauthorised access to the vast amounts of personal information we store on these devices, and online.

When we refer to the cyber security of a college, we mean how each college can reduce its chances of being impacted by a cyber incident, incidents such as ransomware that encrypt data, perhaps, or maybe a phishing email that tricks people into handing over their credentials or spreads malware across a network.

Cyber risk is a fact of life for all organisations and FE is no exception. Recent research by AoC, DfE and Jisc showed that more than three-quarters of colleges had experienced at least one minor cyber incident in the past 12 months – and some of them faced at least 10. Meanwhile, 81% of colleges also reported a major cyber incident in the past year, and whilst some of these are well-publicised – especially if the campus needs to temporarily closed – many stay under the radar.

The current pandemic has brought some additional cyber security challenges. First there are cyber security implications of having so many more people working remotely. There are many aspects of this for IT professionals to grapple with and, in response, the NCSC has produced guidance to help organisations manage this transition as safely as possible.

How we’re working has changed too, not least the rapid uptake of video conferencing. There have been some much-reported security issues around this and NCSC was quick to bring out guidance about how both organisations and individuals can best protect themselves when using video-conferencing to stay in touch.

There have also been some more direct cyber security implications of COVID-19 including cyber criminals preying on people’s fears with scam emails.

WORKING FROM HOME

Cyber security is how individuals and organisations reduce the risk of cyber-attack. Its core function is to protect the devices we all use (smartphones, laptops, tablets and computers), and the services we access – both online and at work – from theft or damage. It’s also about preventing unauthorised access to the vast amounts of personal information we store on these devices, and online.

When we refer to the cyber security of a college, we mean how each college can reduce its chances of being impacted by a cyber incident, incidents such as ransomware that encrypt data, perhaps, or maybe a phishing email that tricks people into handing over their credentials or spreads malware across a network.

Cyber risk is a fact of life for all organisations and FE is no exception. Recent research by AoC, DfE and Jisc showed that more than three-quarters of colleges had experienced at least one minor cyber incident in the past 12 months – and some of them faced at least 10. Meanwhile, 81% of colleges also reported a major cyber incident in the past year, and whilst some of these are well-publicised – especially if the campus needs to temporarily closed – many stay under the radar.

The current pandemic has brought some additional cyber security challenges. First there are cyber security implications of having so many more people working remotely. There are many aspects of this for IT professionals to grapple with and, in response, the NCSC has produced guidance to help organisations manage this transition as safely as possible.

How we’re working has changed too, not least the rapid uptake of video conferencing. There have been some much-reported security issues around this and NCSC was quick to bring out guidance about how both organisations and individuals can best protect themselves when using video-conferencing to stay in touch.

There have also been some more direct cyber security implications of COVID-19 including cyber criminals preying on people’s fears with scam emails.

1: CYBER SECURITY AWARENESS FOR ALL

A good place to start is Cyber Aware, the Government’s advice on how to stay safe online during coronavirus and beyond. Although the guidance is aimed mainly at individuals rather than employees, with the lines between home and work increasingly blurred, there’s plenty of useful advice there for everyone.

The themes most pertinent to home working are:

- CREATE A STRONG PASSWORD USING THREE RANDOM WORDS
  - Weak passwords can be hacked in seconds. The longer and more unusual your password is, the stronger it becomes and the harder it is to hack. If you are able to choose a password without constraints on the number of letters / numbers / special characters etc., we recommend you use a sequence of three random words you’ll remember.

- TURN ON TWO-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION
  - Two-factor authentication is a great way of checking you are who you say you are by asking for information in addition to your password, such as by entering a code that has been texted to you. It’s particularly recommended for your most sensitive accounts.

- UPDATE YOUR DEVICES
  - Cyber criminals can exploit weaknesses in software and apps to access sensitive personal data but providers release regular updates to fix such weakness. Using the latest versions of software, apps and operating systems on your phone or tablet can immediately improve your security.

WORKING FROM HOME

Whether you’re using your own devices or college-provided equipment, you need to be concerned with both the safety of the device and the security of your college’s data. We recently published a blog outlining tips for safer online working at home, aimed particularly at those using their own devices.

Issues highlighted include:

- First, check if you have a Bring Your Own Device policy. If you have, read it and follow it!
- Enable password protection on your home Wi-Fi if it isn’t already set up.
- (If using your own device) Switch on firewalls - Firewalls help protect your computer when you’re connected to a network. Most popular operating systems now include a firewall so ensure this is switched on.
- (If using your own device) Set up a separate account for work – If you’re using your own computer, particularly if this is used by others in your home, keep your work information separate from your family’s by creating a separate account on your device. This will help to avoid any accidental access or loss of sensitive information by family members.
- Spend 30 minutes on our online cyber security training - Our Stay Safe online training has been devised for staff in organisations of all types and covers how to defend against phishing, use strong passwords, secure devices and reporting incidents.
2: BROADER CYBER SECURITY ISSUES

Good cyber security is so much more than about what individuals could and should be doing. It's also much more than relying on IT professionals – although we've lots of advice on guidance for them on our website.

Cyber security needs to be considered across the organisation. It needs to be embedded throughout. But how can this best be done? Here we provide four discussion points that, we hope, will prompt some interesting conversations between technical and non-technical staff at all levels.

LEADERSHIP: HOW DO SENIOR LEADERS AND GOVERNORS UNDERSTAND AND DISCHARGE THEIR CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CYBER SECURITY?

Cyber security is a corporate responsibility because a college is dependent on being digitally connected – now more so than ever. That said, we recognise that few senior leaders and/or governors are likely to have expertise in this area, and so they could be unsure how to even start detailed discussions about the topic.

The Cyber Security Toolkit for Boards can help. It's been designed to enable boards of all types – including boards of governors – get to grips with the basics of cyber security and to give them a framework to ask questions that will help them to gain assurance on key issues and/or to understand what improvements need to be made.

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CREATING A POST-COVID 19 EDTECH STRATEGY WITH NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

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ARTICLES: CYBER SECURITY FOR ALL: WHY KEEPING COLLEGES ONLINE IS A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

CYBER SECURITY STANDARDS: DOES YOUR COLLEGE HAVE A CYBER SECURITY BASELINE?

Working towards an external benchmark can be a useful way to help colleges on their cyber security journey.

Last year’s cyber security posture survey from Jisc showed that 31% of responding colleges were certified for Cyber Essentials, a government-backed programme that can help to protect organisations of any size against the most common cyber-attacks. It’s a self-assessment scheme based around five controls and is needed by organisations bidding for central government contracts which involve handling sensitive and personal information.

 Colleges that are further along their cyber security journey might want to consider working towards IS27001. Few colleges hold this at present but the framework, a best practice approach to managing information security, would help colleges best understand how prepared they are to meet a range of cyber security challenges.

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CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on some of ways that individuals can help keep their college cyber secure as well as posing some broader questions that might prompt useful conversations about how best to embed cyber security.

There's no need for each college to be tackling these issues on their own; we want to hear what we can do to help you keep your college stay safe online.

Author: Hannah H, Further Education Engagement Lead, National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC)

CULTURE: DOES YOUR COLLEGE HAVE A POSITIVE CYBER SECURITY CULTURE?

It's great if staff understand policies and ideal if they follow them, but if they understand why these procedures are needed they are more likely to have a sense of shared responsibility for your college's information security. A great example of the power of involving users in improving security is the recently launched Suspicious Email Reporting Service which, in six weeks, saw the public flag 688,00 suspicious emails which led to the removal of almost 1500 fake websites.

A positive security culture, where people feel safe to raise concerns and challenge ineffective practices, will help build security that works. Focusing solely on technical issues when considering cyber security can risk overlooking the needs of people and can result in staff finding workarounds and/or having a negative attitude towards security.

In practical terms, you might want to consider if staff and students are, for example, encouraged to report suspicious emails or to let someone know if they may have clicked on a dodgy link. Do they know who to report suspicious emails to? Or, perhaps, are they being overburdened by needing to remember many different passwords or needing to change them too frequently?

USER TRAINING: ARE STAFF AND STUDENTS GETTING THE TRAINING THEY DESERVE?

Recent research from AoC/DfE/Jisc showed that 54% of colleges had mandatory cyber security training for staff and 18% required this of students. Wouldn't it be great if all staff and students were given this opportunity?

Although user awareness is no panacea, done well it can make a real difference to an institution's vulnerability so it's worth considering what cyber security training is offered, to whom and how effective it is.

After all, Jisc's Cyber Security Posture Survey last year showed that respondents (mostly IT managers) considered the greatest risks to security to be phishing and social engineering, and then procedures not being followed: all areas that can be addressed in part through user education.

If you have gaps in your provision, you could embed our own staff training e-learning into your own training platform: the files are available on our website and you can tweak the package to meet your own needs.
As the Principal of one of the fastest growing colleges in the UK, I wanted to share that we are not at the start of our digital journey but we are not at the end of it either.

To be honest, I don’t feel that there is ever ‘a technological end’ - only evolution. What I do know is the importance of vision, ethos and leadership ‘buy in.’ Without a clear vision, it is so easy to buy the next bit of software, because this is what everyone else is doing and before you know it, you have cobbled together a ‘digital monster’ with departments purchasing in silos, implementing systems that cannot communicate with each other. This approach will cause students to disengage and leads to more problems for staff than they initially started with, all as a result of a fragmented approach.

Weston College, (a Microsoft Showcase College), launched its Technology in Learning Strategy in 2015. The strategy was designed to holistically embed accessibility to enable inclusion, reduce barriers to learning, foster digital communities, respond to emerging technologies in industry and embed modern ways of working. This was centred on improving productivity and digital capability for students, staff and our employers, including fostering digital wellbeing. The strategy was guided by recommendations at the time, including the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG) and Jisc, on how UK FE colleges should engage (and can become world leaders) in digital learning.

The college regularly reviews the approach against national strategies, research and initiatives, including the recent DfE EdTech strategy; Wales’ Digital 2030 strategic framework and Jisc’s Education 4.0. With this in mind, I cannot overstress the importance of working within national strategies and agendas. Colleges must use expert advice and guidance/best practice offered by Jisc, AoC, Education Training Foundation, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon AWS, GCHQ, Young Minds, Big White Wall, Kooth and others leading digital optimisation, wellbeing and security.

As the Principal, I felt it was imperative that we had a clear vision for digital education to support our ethos of ‘Creating Brighter Futures’ – in other words it was important to include everything that the college stood for within the overarching technology strategy. With Weston being one of three National SEND Centres of Excellence (with over 1,000 SEND learners, 511 of whom were designated High Needs), supported by my brilliant team of inclusive practitioners (Queen’s Anniversary Prize 2017), I have always believed that if the teaching and learning strategies were right for these students (and other vulnerable groups such as NEETs; disadvantaged backgrounds; Looked After Children etc), that our unique ‘personal learning approach’ would benefit all of our students.

Without a clear vision, it is so easy to buy the next bit of software, because this is what everyone else is doing and before you know it, you have cobbled together a ‘digital monster’ with departments purchasing in silos, implementing systems that cannot communicate with each other.
Creating a Post-COVID 19 EdTech Strategy with No One Left Behind

Creating a post-COVID 19 EdTech strategy with no one left behind

With success rates above the national average in all areas including work-based learners, (traineeships, apprenticeships/degree apprenticeships) as well as the 10,235 offender learners we educate in 19 prisons across the South West/South East of England, this has certainly proved to be the case.

Therefore, when COVID-19 hit, as a result of the college having a ‘clear strategy’, e.g. significant investment in digital infrastructure (£2.5 million since 2015), an expansive CPD programme (e.g. Microsoft Certified Educator; Digital Advocate peer mentoring), and leadership buy-in through the appointment of a Director of Digital Education to the college’s Senior Leadership Team, we were able to flip the switch prior to closure. We moved all of our provision/support services for Day One readiness to create #MyVirtualCollege so that no-one got left behind!

Building a sense of a virtual college community was crucial. Over 4043 virtual teaching/support sessions were delivered in the first week, and all existing timetabling/support sessions working remotely were in place from day one. The strategy was designed to make the learner still feel part of the college learning experience through highly accessible digital connectivity to their course and their wider college community. Learners work/learn together within a shared digital conversational space connected to their tutor with peer support encouraged. Learners can quickly access wider college services, including welfare, specialist SEND support, careers, mental health support, learning mentors and more, just as they did prior to lockdown.

Students and staff have digitally engaged in ‘body and mind’ (such as fitness/mindfulness) and have created strategies to reduce self-isolation e.g. #TuesdayTeamTea, #MentoringMonday, #NetflixNattersandvirtualsupportgroups(#LGBTQ+, for example). Substantive remote networking has also taken place for employers with virtual business support e.g. hosting #WednesdayWorkingLunch, with topics covered such as ‘Crisis Leadership’ and ‘Rebuilding for the New Normal’, in order to promote networking and create successful roadmaps for economic recovery.

The strategy has seen impressive results during lockdown, with 88% overall remote lesson attendance (with A level/apprentices at 97%). The remaining 12% (e.g. SEND, Vulnerable, Looked-After Children), being supported/attending via a differentiated 1:1 style individual approach and overcoming personal barriers to engagement linked in to wider support teams. This was attainable with daily contact via the college’s inclusive practice/welfare teams to reduce isolation/identify safeguarding concerns in real time.

Our vision was to capture Weston College’s outstanding approach to engaging inclusive personalised learning and embed this within effective digital learning pedagogies. Prior to the college closure, this strategy was boosted with a £200K bursary fund injection, to rapidly bridge the ‘digital poverty’ divide, getting devices out quickly to where needed most and ensuring Day 1 readiness for all students. Staff readiness was further bolstered prior to closing, with all staff inducted/supported to access a purpose-built COVID-19 ‘EdTech Hub’, which provided a dedicated online community/digital space for staff to learn from. The Hub was supported by the college’s expansive learning technologists, enabling staff to regularly attend bite-size CPD based around emerging themes.

If you are creating virtual learning, you need to capture (and act on) staff/learner/employer feedback and see how they want it designed. From day one of lockdown, the #MyVirtualCollege dashboard was set up, to allow myself and college leaders to access and circulate ‘real-time’ learner, parental/carer, staff and employer feedback, with the aim of shaping innovation at pace. I cannot stress the importance of ‘actioning’ rather than ‘sitting’ on feedback. For COVID-19, I wanted a ground-up approach to ensure as many staff could contribute ideas/best practice. It meant innovation remained high with staff feeling motivated and connected to their peers and leaders who would listen and make change happen.

Through extensive CPD, the college has grown a new generation of highly professional digital tutors trained in synchronous online delivery, digital feedback, assessment and differentiation. Across the Weston curriculum, you will see a range of quality multimedia content, interactive activities, quizzes, simulations, live lectures, conversation threads, video tutorials and integrated social media throughout, with the aim of maximising engagement levels. Without doubt, you’ll have your own ‘Digital Advocates’ out there; how can you develop a culture for digital teaching and learning using peer mentoring? What does a virtual classroom mean for your college?

Monitoring and attendance tracking tools for timely interventions are utilised throughout the college with virtual quality assurance processes, e.g. remote internal quality, and employer observations already embedded at Weston. Inclusion technologies (often under-used or unseen) can be transformational with many free ‘off-the-shelf’ tools available to integrate for educators and learners, including accessibility checkers, translation tools and screen readers. How does your digital environment enable digital accessibility? Are your staff and students aware of all available tools?
HOW ARE YOU USING YOUR EMPLOYER LINKS, STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERSHIPS TO SHAPE AND ENHANCE THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE?

At Weston, virtual employer engagement has been a key focus for #COVID19. A new ‘digital’ training needs analysis has ensured that we can respond at pace to create new online/blended programmes to meet the needs of employers. For example, innovative bespoke training has been created for apprentices and the region’s employees in furlough.

The college’s in-house Digital Learning Development team have also worked collaboratively with employers, learners and awarding bodies to introduce a range of different digital teaching methodologies, approaches and technologies and to bring employer-led teaching/learning ideas to life. This two-way co-design with employers/stakeholders has ensured that the college remains abreast of new and emerging industry technologies and innovations. A strong ethos of partnership has provided a directory of industry contacts, ready to offer virtual guest speakers to raise the aspirations of learners with real-world examples from industry leaders. There is no doubt, however, that as acknowledged in AoC’s early summer survey, reform of funding flexibilities, audit and evidence collection more befitting to a digital world (including online enrolments) also needs to be in sync.

HOW ARE YOU ENSURING THAT DIGITAL LEARNING IS CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVING, SUSTAINABLE AND HOLDS A VALID ASPIRATIONAL PLACE WITHIN THE COLLEGIATE STRATEGIC PLAN?

Investment in capacity, capability and CPD is key. Cost/benefit analysis, strategies for risk, financial acumen, lean methodology, strong governance and an acknowledgment at a leadership level that this is not just a strategy for teaching are all essential. All departments from HR, MIS, Finance, Health & Safety, Quality, Exams etc must embrace the new normal to avoid silos, and to prevent the same old meeting culture and lethargy emerging, which can definitely weaken an organisation’s immune system in relation to change.

AND WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

If we can achieve true blended delivery, then work-life balance, delivery models and learner satisfaction will themselves help to sustain a very different future.

Authors: Dr Paul Phillips CBE, Principal and Chief Executive, Weston College
Jon Hofgartner, Director - Technology Learning Resources Skills & Progression, Weston College

FOOTNOTE:
Weston College through the #MyVirtualCollege Dropbox was able to capture feedback from students, parents/carers, staff and employers to chart its journey following lockdown, gaining probably the most comprehensive feedback obtained by the sector. To view the #MyVirtualCollege round-ups visit https://www.weston.ac.uk/my-virtual-college
DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

McNAUGHT CONSULTANCY LIMITED

THE LEGISLATION, THE CHALLENGE, THE OPPORTUNITY

September 23 2020 is the deadline for compliance with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. For many senior leaders, this seems like yet another responsibility, another drain on budgets and another box to tick. But seen through a different lens, this is potentially a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to significantly increase return on existing investments, increase productivity and foster improved student outcomes.

WHAT IS DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY?

In the physical world of buildings and classrooms, accessibility is easy to understand. Automatic doors, ramped access to buildings and lifts between floors are all tangible demonstrations of the social model of disability. A wheelchair user is disabled not by the wheelchair, but by a poorly designed building. A well-designed building ‘un-enables’ them.

In the digital world, the same concepts apply. A student is disabled by poor digital practice. For example, a tutor uses formatting instead of Styles to create section and subsection headings in a long document or web page. This is very challenging for a print-impaired student to read. The same content created with heading styles transforms the experience – it can be:

- instantly navigated by assistive technologies like screen readers
- turned into a list of nested headings for instant overview of the content
- instantly transformed to a mind map with compatible mind mapping tools.

And, like ramps in the physical world, digital accessibility benefits users far beyond the target audience.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY?

The core problem with digital accessibility is that it appears to ‘belong to somebody else’. The disability support team don’t own it (it’s about technology). The e-learning team or IT services team don’t own it (it’s about disability). Teaching teams don’t own it (it’s about technology or disability!).

They are all wrong. Digital accessibility belongs to anyone who communicates digitally. This includes everything from documents and presentations to systems and tools. If you don’t know what good practice is (the basics can be learned in 30 minutes), you are likely to be creating barriers. It is the educational equivalent of employing chefs with no understanding of allergies or food intolerance.
A SUMMARY OF THE CORE PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS:

PROBLEM: The benefits of digital accessibility are usually untaught therefore unappreciated and underexploited.

SOLUTION: Digital training of any kind needs to include ‘good digital accessibility practices’ with a focus on the benefits for ALL students.

PROBLEM: Even when resources have high accessibility, students don’t know how to exploit the benefits.

SOLUTION: The productivity and personalisation benefits of digitally accessible content and assistive technologies (like text to speech and voice recognition) need to be promoted to all students via study skills guidance and student inductions.

PROBLEM: The basics of digital accessibility are not difficult to master. They make a significant difference to a range of students with and without disabilities, yet most staff remain ignorant of the basics and training is rarely mandatory.

SOLUTION 1: Digital accessibility needs to be more discoverable in many policies. Vague terms like ‘valuing diversity and inclusivity’ need to be turned into specific commitments like ‘accessible course materials’ or ‘accessible library platforms’.

SOLUTION 2: Digital accessibility needs to appear in quality assurance processes such as self-assessment reviews.

A SUMMARY OF THE CORE PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS:

WHAT IS THE LEGAL POSITION?

The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 is already partly in force. The final provisions for web content become law on September 23rd 2020.

There are two implications for colleges and universities. They must:

• meet the accessibility requirement on their websites/ VLEs etc. The accessibility requirement relates to level AA of this suite of objective technical standards.
• produce an accessibility statement that details.
• the extent to which they have succeeded or failed in meeting the accessibility requirement.
• alternative formats/services available to people who cannot access the content.
• the complaints and escalation process (up to and including the Equality and Human Rights Commission).
• how they are addressing current failures.

For the first time since the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), the onus is not on a disabled person to request support or alternative formats every time they meet a barrier. The onus is on the institution to get rid of the barriers.

Training is likely to have lasting value once its purpose is embedded in the cultural values of an organisation. Unless digital accessibility is a tangible part of the culture, training will not deliver long term change.

WHAT IS THE THREAT?

The key threat to colleges is not Government Digital Services auditing your websites and finding them lacking. The bigger threat is from individual students or speculative lawyers.

The key vulnerability is Section 12 of the legislation. It defines Reasonable Adjustment for the first time in 25 years’; “a failure by a public sector body to comply with the accessibility requirement is to be treated as a failure to make a reasonable adjustment.” This maps directly to a failure to sections 20, 21 and 29 of the Equality Act 2010 and sections 19 to 21 and 21B to 21E of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995(13).

The key issue here is the “60-second vulnerability” – in less than a minute, an automated accessibility checker like the WAVE tool can report on the accessibility issues of your website. It is an objective measure of your “failure to make a reasonable adjustment” and can be used against you – unless your accessibility statement has a convincing and realistic roadmap of planned improvements.

It also applies to content uploaded to your digital systems such as multimedia and ‘office files’ – documents, presentations, and spreadsheets etc.

Government Digital Services (GDS) are responsible for auditing and reporting on compliance. They have stated that their approach will be supportive rather than punitive – but the real threat is not from GDS.

FIGURE 1: Screenshot of the WAVE tool results for a college website.
WHAT’S THE OPPORTUNITY?

Digital accessibility is less about disabled people and more about being digitally grown up. Accessibility is an emergent property of good practice. When digital technology is properly implemented using best practice techniques, the user experience is significantly enhanced.

Resources can **reflow** when magnified, change **colours**, navigate by **heading levels**, **speak** content, **work** without a mouse, **interact** with assistive technology tools and plug-ins.

**FIGURE 2** - Screenshot showing two versions of an accessible PDF in Adobe Reader. Users can navigate to any point in the document using the bookmarks panel. The right-hand version has been magnified and reflowed into a single column to make reading easier. The background colour has been changed. This document also works with text-to-speech.

Adaptable content that can be personalised to a user’s needs and preferences helps in focus and makes them more productive. Fewer barriers mean fewer support requirements, allowing support staff to provide better quality interventions for students with more complex issues. Accessible content is also more adaptable for use on mobile phones and tablets.

The differences in **FIGURE 3** have been achieved in seconds using features inbuilt to Adobe Reader.

Most colleges and universities have already invested in tools and infrastructure that can give enormous flexibility and personalisation to end users, but organisations could get considerably more return on investment if those:

- creating content know the simple author practices that make it so flexible.
- consuming content are introduced to the options to navigate, reflow, speak out loud or change colours et cetera.

The combination of the public sector web accessibility legislation and a global pandemic provide a unique opportunity to use the lever of legislation to improve staff digital skills.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIG PICTURE

Digital accessibility is about more than teaching people to make better use of Office, Google classroom or the VLE. The **Accessibility Maturity Model for Education** (extract below) helps an organisation view their practice through different cultural lenses. Accessible online teaching and learning is about more than accessible content; it is also about inclusive pedagogy, inclusive course design, accessible assessments etc.

**FIGURE 3** - Screenshot from the Accessibility Maturity Model for Education.

The accessibility maturity model can be freely downloaded and used as a tool to generate discussion within the organisation. Alternatively, a **guided service is also available** that helps you collate staff perceptions, explore evidence and produce recommendations for priorities.

The critical starting point is to ensure responsibility for digital accessibility is properly distributed. It cannot belong to a single team such as disability support, e-learning or IT. Anybody involved in creating digital content or procuring digital products has a responsibility. The planning template in the Appendix provides an outline that may help you.
WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

Since digital accessibility involves the whole organisation, different types of support are required for different types of role. The examples below include both freely available and paid-for services from different providers.

FREE SUPPORT

Technical support – benchmarking and auditing
- Automated and manual (in-house) testing is a good starting point. Automated tests pick up about 30 – 50% of potential issues. Test websites with WAVE tool or Accessibility Insights.
- Evaluate the accessibility of Word documents using the in-built Accessibility Checker. Check PDFs in Adobe Reader for Bookmarks. Try to reflow them (View, Zoom, Reflow) and magnify to 300%. Try selecting text across a page break and reading it with text to speech.

Staff training and awareness raising
- The Education and Training Foundation’s Enhance digital teaching platform has specific bite-sized training resources for accessibility and inclusion. Badging and self-reflection opportunities are included.
- For more in-depth training on 19 topics relating to online and blended learning, see the Erasmus funded Future Teacher resources or join the Future Teacher Jiscmail list.

Strategy and policy
- Join the Digital Accessibility Regulations Jiscmail list and attend the monthly Jisc accessibility clinics. Explore the LincDis Accessibility toolkit. Join the Jisc Accessibility Teams site.

PAID-FOR SUPPORT

Technical support – benchmarking and auditing
- AbilityNet’s HE/FE Digital Accessibility bundle of services create a benchmark of accessibility and a roadmap for inclusive student journeys. Also see their automated & manual testing services and website accreditation service.

Staff training and awareness raising
- McNaught Consultancy focuses on role-related training for teaching teams, library staff and disability support staff.
- AbilityNet provide a range of technical training opportunities for IT and web teams.
- Techability provide a range of training options.
- AbilityNet and D&A Diversity and Ability provide training on disability awareness.

Strategy and policy
- AbilityNet/McNaught’s FE/HE bundle and Accessibility Maturity consultancy are very effective at helping organisations get a realistic sense of their strengths, weaknesses and priorities. This includes an Accessibility Statement Mapper, which uses the process of creating a compliant accessibility statement to identifying organisational digital accessibility priorities.
- AllAble provide a wide range of services around strategy, policy, and accessibility statements.
- Linc’s consultancy team have a range of support offers. Whilst none are specific to digital accessibility, many relate to the student’s end experience.

APPENDIX

WHO IS INVOLVED? A PLANNING TEMPLATE

Digital accessibility involves everybody in one way or another. The table below gives you some prompts for identifying key leaders to take responsibility in different areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE ROLE</th>
<th>THE ISSUES</th>
<th>NAMED LEAD?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Procurement teams</td>
<td>Ensuring accessibility is embedded in the procurement process. Identifying the additional costs inherent in purchasing less accessible products.</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital system leads</td>
<td>Ensuring the current accessibility strengths/weaknesses are known for each digital system. Accessibility statement and improvement plan in place by September 23.</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing and comms</td>
<td>Ensuring branding is compliant with accessible colour contrasts. Ensuring course descriptions, prospectuses, application processes etc are fully accessible.</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching staff</td>
<td>Ensuring teaching staff know how to create accessible teaching resources and assessments.</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student support / ALS teams</td>
<td>Ensuring team supporting disabled students know how to help students exploit the benefits of digitally accessible content.</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student induction</td>
<td>Ensuring students understand their rights to accessible digital content and the benefits to their productivity.</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality assurance</td>
<td>Ensuring accessible practices are part of quality assurance and self-assessment reviews.</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Author: Alistair McNaught, Lead Consultant, McNaught Consultancy Limited
Safeguarding has, for a number of years, been an increasingly challenging area of work. To continue to deliver an effective safeguarding service throughout a period of lockdown has presented a number of issues for safeguarding practitioners in the FE sector. This paper will provide an overview of how colleges are addressing these, with reference to feedback from 22 colleges in the NAMSS network.

Safeguarding is an area of work which typically includes face-to-face exchanges in a confidential safe space. Such meetings allow us to employ the wider and more subtle tools of our trade; the reading of body language, the observation of physical warning signs of harm, the delicate and sensitive searching for clues to assess risk and danger and the eye contact and the all-important building of trust. Without being able to physically see the student, an important element of safeguarding interaction is lost. Further, if the student has no means at home for online communication, there is no opportunity for a video chat to get a better picture of their wellbeing and be able to assess their non-verbal cues, for example.

Another primary concern for safeguarding practitioners during lockdown is ensuring students do not feel even more vulnerable, as they have found themselves being suddenly cut adrift from the routine of college life and the ready access to pastoral and safeguarding support. There has been an enormous amount of activity in colleges to establish which students, if any, felt that they wanted or needed to attend college and, as has been widely reported, the numbers taking up that offer have been extremely low, despite all best efforts to encourage attendance, open buildings, provide transport, facilities and staffing. Thus, there have been very few actual meetings with vulnerable students to date, even with social distancing measures in place.

The mobile phone has been the most common mode of communication for maintaining contact with vulnerable students. Potential barriers including text and call limits and low phone credit do not appear to have presented a problem for the majority. Regular welfare checks have swiftly been put in place by most colleges to ensure safeguarding reviews are carried out; appointments are diarised and text reminders sent, so no planned call is missed.
Colleagues report that some of those students who struggled with direct face-to-face communication feel more confident in texting or speaking on the phone and are more comfortable in disclosing information.

Other support provision was quickly converted to alternative methods; counselling services have continued via phone and in some cases email. Regular newsletters have directed students, parents and carers to alternative online resources such as Kooth and various phone apps such as SAM and Shout. Texts and emails to both students and parents have promoted a variety of supportive agencies such as Samaritans and NSPCC.

This signposting has been useful in response to increased reports of stress and anxiety related to numerous factors such as exam grades, starting university, apprenticeships and employment. Mental health support has also been focused on specific student groups, such as males in Construction and Engineering and apprentices, where mental health has been a particular concern.

The potential impact of isolation on mental and emotional health doubtless would be further exacerbated without the technology to communicate with the wider world.

Much of this paper relates to vulnerable students who are already known to college safeguarding teams. To further ensure that no student is ‘left behind’, the wider student bodies have also received calls and communications from a variety of support and teaching staff, to assess risk and need, and new referrals to safeguarding have emerged from this activity. The whole team’s inclusive approach is to ensure that, in whatever way, and by whomever, every student is contacted and checked, wherever possible. This has been very positive whilst requiring extraordinary efforts in co-ordination and tracking.

Safeguarding practitioners and educators have had a consistent focus on raising awareness and understanding among student bodies about online safety. An online presence is now essential and encouraged to access learning and support, and the students who are at risk of grooming, radicalisation and exploitation need careful attention. A key resource in our safeguarding toolkit is online monitoring software to identify risk and initiate timely intervention.

Significant reductions in online alerts have been reported, reflecting the corresponding reduction in student use of college devices during closure. However, for devices which are being used by students during lockdown, there has been an alarming increase in risky behaviours involving online gambling, sexting, grooming, pornography and a huge spike in talking to strangers. (https://www.esafeglobal.com/articles/lockdown-analysis/)

Many local authorities in England are taking advantage of the E Safe monitoring software offered at no cost to monitor equipment used by vulnerable children. This is a huge benefit to assist in the early identification of risk and danger. The numbers of students using their own devices at home leaves a serious gap in safeguarding monitoring. Parents can give permission, if they wish, to have such software installed on their home computers and colleges are now discussing how to take that forward.

Most colleges commented on the number of changes to government safeguarding guidance over the past eight weeks, and the urgency of immediate response to each publication, which has proven extremely demanding for college staff. There is a collective request for early consultation with safeguarding...
specialists in education, achievable even under such sudden and severe conditions and potentially reducing the need for numerous revisions of guidance.

From a wider partnership perspective, there are many reports of greater efficiency in ways of working: Microsoft Teams, Skype and Zoom meetings with external agencies have proven useful and more timesaving. PEP, Child in Need and Child Protection meetings are reported as more concise and just as effective as meeting in person; the ability to share screens and documents has been mentioned in discussions as being very helpful.

Colleges report that newly established online weekly meetings involving multiple key partners, such as social care, housing, police and education teams have enabled a highly effective, triage approach to ‘remote’ safeguarding of individuals, giving opportunities to triangulate information, discuss a collective approach to individual cases, share information and agree on responsibilities and actions.

One lesson we have learned and discussed among colleagues across the sector is the importance of agreeing a joined-up strategy with other internal (curriculum) and external colleagues, to avoid an overload of calls driving the student to shut down communication altogether. We have a number of cases reported where students have protested at the number of calls they have received, to the point of simply stopping answering the phone at all. Overall, the online meeting aspect of safeguarding, and wider, is definitely a way of working which seems to be having a positive impact, and hopefully will continue in the longer term.

As a sector, FE has consistently responded positively and productively to government duties; safeguarding has been robustly embedded across our practices, as we have proven that we are strong and effective front-line practitioners in safeguarding young people. We have, and will continue to need, appropriate support for the work which we currently do and the work which lies ahead.

Across many aspects of safeguarding where we expect increased demand, including impact of trauma, domestic violence, bereavement, unemployment and poverty, it is across the entire scope of mental health issues where we continue to need significant, specialist and timely resources. This has been reported as significantly lacking and must be urgently addressed if we are to effectively assist and sustain our students’ healthy and resilient transition back to ‘normal’ life, education and work.

Author: Polly Harrow, Assistant Principal, Kirklees College and Chair of NAMSS
There are many obvious pedagogical advantages to using digital technology to enhance opportunities but as we hurtle down this rapidly changing digital learning landscape, consideration must be given to the social and psychodynamic aspects of online learning approaches. Mental health is rarely part of the discourse related to digitisation. It is worth exploring those excluded and the subsequent unintended consequences if academic progress is viewed in isolation. A wider consideration of the ‘whole student’ is paramount so no student is left behind.

According to the Mental Health Foundation, 20% of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in a given year and 75% of mental health problems are established by the age of 24. The college sector has highlighted this as a significant strategic risk for a number of years. Despite individual and collegiate interventions, we see poor mental health rising. The Young Minds March 2020 survey suggests over 83% of students with existing mental health conditions feel more unwell in the recent COVID-19 crisis.

Correctly, mental health is now one of the five top priorities for AoC. This is entirely and undisputedly the right call, pointing to a direct, immediate and likely long-term human cost of COVID-19 to which colleges will need to respond on the front line.

As chair of the AoC Mental Health Policy Group, we have supported this vital work with a Mental Health Charter, training and resources. This was to encourage a better and more coherent strategy for staff and students, with no student left behind. When combined with mass online or digital technology, how would the deployment of this strategy survive?

At East Coast College, we have witnessed a 177% increase in wellbeing and mental health referral across the tail end years of austerity. The government Green Paper ‘Transforming Young People’s Mental Health’ published in 2017, referenced the potential impacts of social media on mental health as a line of enquiry but failed to draw conclusions or make firm recommendations. Any debate in the efficacy of digitisation and learning online without exploration on the potential impacts on mental health would feel insubstantial and no doubt incomplete.
Our college has taken a proactive and nationally recognised strategy around mental health and wellbeing, suggesting that micro-interventions aggregate into institutional improvement. In other words, small adjustments can make big impacts. Our strategic plan notes the college approach to developing the skills to support mental health and wellbeing, helping students to plan their future pathways. The college demographic is listed among the most deprived nationally. This has implications in terms of academic achievement at age 16. This also impacts support needs, wellbeing and mental health issues and speed of progress.

The college continuously seeks and develops statutory, private and voluntary sector partnerships offering students and staff expert internal and external support, advice and opportunities. East Coast College has a commitment to lead and respond to the national and local mental health landscape, ensuring student and staff voices influence positive change in the delivery of services. We ensure all students participate in a wellbeing programme as well as providing support services that enhance student resilience and personal development. Both initiatives are responsive to needs and teach students how to look after themselves. We do utilise technology as a significant and important element of this support service, but not exclusively.

Materials online have been found to be restorative and develop the communication and mental health literacy of students. Their main focus is preventative (not crisis) and fulfilling a signposting function. We use materials provided by the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust, the Mental Health Foundation, Action for Happiness and Mind, all long-term partners of East Coast College. For the core learner population, this online and face-to-face blended learning approach is effective. Emphasis on wellbeing and support in student induction and tutorials led to 57% of 2018/19 mental health disclosures by the end of term one, enabling the college to provide effective support early in the student journey.

The pedagogical experiment that COVID-19 has provided (or forced) upon colleges will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the effects on mental health in the perspective of digital learning and support. Whilst it is early, it is fair to assume that there are vastly different ‘experiments of lockdown learning’ and a complex range of students, with a complex range of needs, both academic and support. Despite this, there appears to be a tsunami of futurists emerging claiming the digital learning revolution has happened without fully testing the impact and results.

So how do students with mental health difficulties fair in this brave new world? There are a number of issues related to digital inclusion or exclusion, with a number of groups that can forgivably be clumsily clustered together. Any teaching, learning and assessment solution must be cognisant of this fact. Therefore, within any development of digital curricula, students require an individual response regardless of physical place or media of delivery.

The Centre for Mental Health points to evidence that social demography plays a significant role. We are beginning to see that not only social deprivation and lower school attainment play a role in poor mental health, but levels of access to technology and levels of digital literacy can have both an amplification factor and acceleration factor for some students.

We can identify three broad groups: students who have a pre-existing mental health condition, students who have an emergent difficulty created by tech and a third group with no condition. We’ll focus on the first two groups in this article conceding the opportunities technology affords to the third.

For learners with pre-existing conditions, we have found in online learning these have quickly subdivided into binary groups; those students who have had a positive experience and those who have had a negative experience. Some students through digital only learning have experienced the discovery of resilience, they have practiced established coping strategies that they have carried into the online world. They have increased communication 1:2:1 through digital platforms.

Students doing well often have a good level of independent learning and high levels of communication skills which can be deployed. Those that thrive have high levels of intrinsic motivation and well-structured local support through families. They hold well-structured and resourced care plans supported by external agencies such as counselling or mental health workers.

A second group that has reported thriving under ‘lockdown learning’ are those students where social anxiety was a root cause or contributory factor to their suffering. Not physically attending college has removed this barrier and created new possibilities and routes into fuller participation.

There is, though, sadly a student group for whom online learning has pushed them further into social isolation. Spending increasing time out of human contact and increasing time ‘living in their own heads’. They struggle with how to be alone and as such any condition is significantly amplified. These students often lack skills in self-regulation. Being out of direct physical contact means support needs might be slower and disengagement increased. Some students report lacking structure and momentum being lost as routines, previously used as social and mental health anchors to guide the week and help regulation, are eroded with flexibility and choice becoming a tyranny.

Some students who have no pre-existing condition and previously have thrived in a college environment have failed to adjust to digital norms and morays. They are struggling to find motivation and belonging. They value social learning, with interactions with teachers reported as the critical dimension rather than the quality of the digital assets. East Coast College is now conducting some academic research to better understand the experiences and barriers.

Mental health concerns are rapidly rising for those that are left behind by digital poverty. Digitisation in this scenario becomes a damaging exclusion factor. Exclusion can come from the lack of financial ability to get access to kit; including many households in our catchment area not having broadband connections. We witness exclusion from digital literacy or poor mental health, such as anxiety creating additional barriers to online participation. In this instance, digital learning amplifies existing inequality. Our students in disadvantaged groups tell us there are rarely quiet work spaces in the home, and technology, if it exists, is shared between siblings. Concentration is more difficult. Sadly, some report that their home isn’t “safe like college”.

Often excluded from any pedagogical discussion, our apprentices are used to completing a significant portion of their learning online (in terms of knowledge transfer and recording of assessment). Digitally, they
experience a richer range of pedagogy and as such think about learning in a different way. The hidden risk is once again one of pastoral care. Identification of mental health referrals are slower and at a lower rate. Support often happens not at the preventative stage but when issues become acute. As contact becomes more digital and remote, it seems a risk worthy of further reflection.

Adult learners seem to hold a dual experience. Some suggest that flexibility creates very positive learning which is less stressful. Others miss the social dynamics of the group. They cite that learning is more effective as a social activity, which is disrupted by complex family life. Attending college provides physical and mental respite.

Colleges have moved support services into the digital space with virtual student council meetings, peer-to-peer wellbeing support, increasing communication posts on social media, online anxiety groups and wellbeing checks and ‘virtual coffees’. We are seeing an emergence of online counselling services, although the take-up appears lower and there are challenging and conflicting definitions in this arena.

Richard Caulfield, policy lead for mental health at AoC, recently remarked “Colleges have had to respond rapidly to providing all their services at a distance. What we do know is that many colleges are doing fantastic work to support students and staff alike, and this is something we can all learn from, and that there are partner organisations who have expertise that can help.’ The test is whether these digital support services are effective or should they only augment physical delivery?

Digital learning can easily be argued as a more fertile environment for flexibility and creative, engaging (or at least entertaining) teaching but for me, it is easier to see how those learners who require structure and motivation may fall behind. This can easily lead to increased instances of amplified levels of stress and anxiety.

Consideration must be given to the added value of educational interventions that stretch beyond knowledge transfer and delivery of entertaining content. How can students see modelled behaviour, experience healthy conflict and conflict resolution? How can they develop essential social skills which help them in a safe, more human environment, experience failure, tests of confidence and acceptance of others? All of these can be avoided online and may have longer term negative societal effects.

In conversation, Paul Grangier, Director for the Centre for Education and Work at Institute of Education at UCL and member of the G20 Task Force for Education and Training in the Digital Era, suggested: “Technology will not generate values. If it does, they will be of a fiscal nature, but technology does not cherish morality. The focus of technology is expediency, which is not always the correct course or purpose in education.” Online learners might experience a less culturally rich experience. For many of our learners, home life can be less supportive with less healthy relationships. The digital world excludes colleges from effectively providing a bridge into another world of possibility and the creation of better relationships.

The conclusion must be it is too early to adequately define the relationships and impacts between digital learning and mental health. However, early evidence suggests that mental health can be impacted by delivery models. Online learning has not been fully tested and the indirect effects are unknown on different groups. We need to fully understand, or at least (I would argue) better understand what we may have unintentionally taken away in digital learning. Delivery may have amplified, or created new, significant educational, societal or psychological inequalities and reduced opportunity rather than enhanced it.

Author: Stuart Rimmer, Chief Executive Officer, East Coast College and Chair of the AoC Mental Health Policy Group
A DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY CO-CONSTRUCTED WITH OUR STUDENTS

PORTSMOUTH COLLEGE

In 2012, Portsmouth College sought to embark on a co-constructed journey of transformational change in partnership with our students and community.

We wanted to improve every aspect of our work and to achieve an impact on recruitment, achievement, the quality of holistic education and the student experience using an AAIE approach:

- Ask
- Analyse
- Implement
- Evaluate, and share the learning with our sector through twice-yearly free open days .... Eduvate

2012 – ASK AND ANALYSE

In 2012, the then Principal, Steve Frampton (AoC President 2018-20) interviewed over 500 prospective, current and former students aged 14-19 and asked them: “What do you want? Design your own FE experience and evidence your asks.”

STUDENT RESPONSES WERE CONSISTENT IN 96% OF CASES:

EMPLOYABILITY

Students wanted to be very well prepared to make their way in the world. Digital skills were seen as important regardless of the courses they were following.

ENVIRONMENT

Students wanted to see the improvement of both the environment of the college and the city. The later start to the day addressed emissions by reducing the number of cars during peak times and the streamlined timetable also meant students didn’t make repeated journeys and didn’t need to attend every day. The 1-to-1 iPad scheme also allows students to learn independently away from the classroom, as they can access both materials and teaching to fit in with their busy lives, responsibilities and commitments. This fundamentally changed the perception of the learning environment both in and outside of college, and significantly contributed to the Climate Change targets for the city.

WELLBEING

Students wanted learning to be more engaging, with more fun and less stress. They wanted to be treated with respect and for the working patterns of the college to support them in managing their lives as a whole. They appealed for a compact day and a later start time and the removal of trapped time in the timetable, linking their asks to the research of leading world experts on sleep patterns1 and wellbeing2.

STAKEHOLDER VIEWS

We also asked stakeholders across the city – head teachers, our MP, councillors and business leaders what they really wanted and needed from FE. They highlighted the attributes that would support the employability of our young people: positive, hard-working, optimistic, flexible and punctual; collaborative workers, with good data analysis and communication skills who were problem solvers, and critical thinkers with strong digital skills.

2 Lewis.C. (2016) Too Fast to Think: How to Reclaim Your Creativity in a Hyper-connected Work Culture
In response to student feedback, we radically transformed the timetable and were the first in the UK to go for a compact, two-period, late-start day.

**THE CURIOUS AND CREATIVE LEARNING PROJECT**

With the radically new and popular timetable, we saw the opportunity to transform the way we designed learning and gave opportunities for students to work creatively, collaboratively and independently. Our vision was always one of a collective learning journey within a learning institution. We were determined to build trust and a culture of innovation and experimentation as the central tenet of the project.

Moving to the new timetable empowered staff to innovate in their design of learning, but we wanted to go further. We wanted the teachers and learners at the college to have access to the very best learning tools, wherever and whenever they needed them.

**IPAD 1-1 PROGRAMME**

Our research was supported by our community. We networked, through one of our parent governors, with a local Apple Distinguished School who outlined how they had achieved gains in achievement and engagement through their use of an iPad in the hands of every learner. We crafted our vision for using the mobility of the iPad to expand learning beyond the walls of the classroom, to give students and staff the opportunity to use a range of creative tools and to increase collaboration and flexibility through new digital platforms.

**IMPLEMENTATION OF PHASE TWO: 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OLD</th>
<th>NEW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 option blocks across the week</td>
<td>5 option blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 lessons a day, and early 08.30 start</td>
<td>2 lessons a day with a late 10am start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trapped time for students</td>
<td>No trapped time for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited enrichment activities during trapped time</td>
<td>Extensive enrichment opportunities through our E5 programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not fully fit for purpose to meet study programme requirements and wellbeing</td>
<td>Supports meeting study programme requirements, wellbeing and improved learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This was based on the best internationally available research, latest scientific evidence and best practice with leading UK and global employers. We were the first UK institution to implement this innovative, co-constructed ‘Late Start, Compact Day’ timetable model. A model featured in the bestselling business leadership book by Chris Lewis, ‘Too Fast to Think’, and now increasingly used in the UK, Japan and USA.
We created E6, working with Unloc, a student-led social enterprise, to embed provision into students’ study programmes that actively enhances their work readiness, builds digital skill sets and presents students with a pathway to employment. Students can develop skills valued by employers and higher education, as well as increasing their digital literacy. E6 has revolutionised our student progression. OFSTED recognised the contribution this provision was having on our students. ‘Students benefit from attending the college, flourish and become more confident, articulate and purposeful.’ (OFSTED 2017).

EVALUATING THE PROJECT: DID ANYONE GET LEFT BEHIND?

Key to the project was that no one, student, staff or partners, were left behind and everyone became a learner in this co-constructed, inclusive culture of fun and learning. Phase one of the project was the transformational timetable. This increased attendance by 6%. The impact of the timetable was also highlighted by OFSTED ‘Enterprising and innovative changes to the timetable have helped to focus student learning and are improving attendance.’ (OFSTED, 2017). 98.7% of students over the 5-year period 2013-2018 cited this as the main reason for their improved attendance, wellbeing, improved learning and skills, and progression opportunities. Staff loved it as much!

In 2019, we were awarded the status of Apple Distinguished School in recognition of our innovation and excellence in the use of iPads to enhance learning and outcomes for our students. We continue to share our learning journey, and you can read our book on the Apple Book Store.

TRAINING FOR STAFF

95% of front-facing teaching staff have achieved Apple Teacher status. Staff develop their digital skills through regular training sessions from Apple Professional Learning Specialists, bespoke workshops from our Apple Distinguished Educator and our own Learning Champions as well as regular Teaching & Learning Community meetings. INSET sessions are fresh and innovative. As an example, when all staff became students for the day, teachers experienced first-hand how students learn and engage in an iPad-driven lesson, allowing them to reflect on their own practice and to adapt and change.

TRAINING FOR STUDENTS/STUDENT AMBASSADORS

We recruited a large group of Apple Ambassadors, who received training from Apple Professional Learning Specialists. Apple Ambassadors assisted other students and staff with the use of the technology and were a key factor in the success, as students are curious and natural users of technology. This further developed their digital literacy skills, enhancing their employability skills as well as providing an ‘in class’ student expert for staff. Apple Ambassadors continue via our E6 programme where young people work with staff, students and partner schools, led by our Apple Distinguished Educator.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Our IT infrastructure needed a complete refresh to support all students and staff using mobile devices so we rebuilt our entire network infrastructure during the summer holidays. We had basic wireless coverage at the time and needed to ramp this up significantly, averaging one access point per two classrooms. We also overhauled our firewall and filtering policies, allowing staff to be curious and creative but not be faced with technical barriers through restriction, as well as increasing our internet connection from 100Mbps circuit to 1Gbps; we now regularly see usage of 400Mbps.


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The implementation of the 1:1 iPad scheme in 2014 saw an improvement in the overall student pass rate and the narrowing of the attainment gap both between genders and between disadvantaged and advantaged students, at both Level 2 and 3. In GCSE English, the pass rate increased from 40% to 70%

Innovation is a cornerstone of the project, with the development of digital skills for staff and students being paramount. In 2014, 88% of staff did not use their iPad in every lesson due to limited skill and confidence. By 2016, 72% of staff identified themselves as a confident or a mastery level user. In 2020, the department-level student voice demonstrated that iPads were used in almost all lessons with flipped learning embedded in the teaching and learning ethos of the college. “An excellent example of how the effective use of technology can transform pedagogy and improve learning outcomes” - Jisc’s Head of FE and Skills. This work has been recognised at the highest level, including the Jisc AoC Beacon Award 2017 for the Effective Use of Technology in FE.

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With the start of lockdown in March, staff and students were well placed to continue providing engaging remote learning using their iPad.

- Using video communication to introduce the lesson in person, alongside Google Hangouts for students to ask questions, creating personal interactions, which is an essential means of supporting the mental health of students at this time.

- Google Classroom is being used in more creative ways by breaking up activities into manageable chunks. Students have also been paired up using Google Meet, where they then answer exam questions collaboratively using Google Docs, sharing understanding and knowledge.

- In practical subjects, teachers are increasingly turning to video. Uploading videos of professional dancers, actors and sportspeople as models for student analysis and as well as using TikTok to share evidence of the development of individual skills.

- The principles of change that have supported us since 2012, such as student and staff voice, have guided us into remote learning. Our emphasis is on enhancing communication across the community using digital tools, increasing opportunities for staff to share and supporting the development of skills as a team.

- Teachers have embraced the opportunity to innovate as they look for more ways to engage and inspire. Sharing ideas, offering support and good practice remotely has been central to this with our creation of the Portsmouth College Digital Learning website.

**EXAMPLE: CREATING AN INTERACTIVE VIDEO PRESENTATION LESSON**

Simplicity of using video to deliver instructions to students can bring a sense of normality. Using iPads, we developed a way to narrate over any app or presentation, which is then uploaded onto Google Classroom for students to access. Staff have revolutionised the engagement and personal touch with their learners, with this one simple idea. Watch the [tutorial](#).

The challenge we all face now is how to continue to confidently deepen engagement in learning when attendance at college will be only part of a blended learning experience.

**EXPERIENCE IN RECENT YEARS HAS TAUGHT US:**

- Change is best embraced with students and staff – co-constructing learning experiences
- A common technology platform can enable an equity of access to learning
- Students can work harder and learn more independently if they have access to the best tools
- Staff enjoy phases of innovation and can drive learning in amazing ways with technology
- Technology can spark creativity in every area of college and community life
- The teacher’s voice in the delivery of learning and feedback remains the most powerful tool we have, amplified by technology when co-constructed with our learners

**Authors:** Emily Pountney, Vice Principal Curriculum, Teaching & Learning, Portsmouth College

Chris Wood, Curriculum Leader for Performing Arts and Apple Distinguished Educator, Portsmouth College

Gemma Conway, Curriculum Leader for Science and Access to HE, Portsmouth College
A COLLEGIAL AND COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO BLENDED LEARNING

HEART OF WORCESTERSHIRE COLLEGE AND THE BLENDED LEARNING CONSORTIUM

The rapidly changing landscape of education technology presents challenges to institutions to keep up with new and emerging technologies, let alone how to apply them consistently to ensure online content retains the blended, personalised approach that is so important to assure relevance and standards. Further, a new ‘Internet of Skills’ will revolutionise capabilities for industries across all sectors that will require vast innovation in the way we teach, learn, and interact with learners for this next generation of 5G-aligned skills priorities.

At Heart of Worcestershire College, it is our aim to ensure that no matter where people are on that journey, we can help to develop their abilities to live, work, compete and thrive in society and workplaces utilising digital tools to improve their experience.

COLLABORATION ACROSS THE FE SECTOR

Building capacity across institutions after a decade of cuts to the further education sector has been challenging, yet institutions have been resilient and inventive in their approach. Heart of Worcestershire College (HoW) recognised that collaboration amongst peers is the most economically efficacious strategy; we initiated building a library of high-quality interactive and immersive blended learning resources for all participating members to use through the hugely successful Blended Learning Consortium (BLC) which now has over 135-member colleges across the UK. Member institutions not only share and co-create resources but have developed rich communities of practice in which peers discuss and demonstrate emerging technologies and developments. Rather than competing, colleagues are collaborating and supporting one another.

HoW College concurrently developed and refined its own blended learning model, SOLA (Scheduled Online Learning and Assessment), which has since been successfully embedded and replicated by several colleges across the UK. Each learner at Level 2 has one hour of SOLA per week on their timetable; Level 3 learners have two hours. This blended learning time has enabled learners to develop digital skills as well as develop transferable employment skills such as time management, work prioritisation, online communication and professional image perception.
DEVELOPING A DIGITAL CULTURE AND PEDAGOGY TO ENABLE BLENDED LEARNING

The Senior Leadership Team at HoW have been instrumental in driving a digital culture across the institution. Investment in digital has been significant and strategically focused on the core requirements such as improved channels of communication, an ‘anytime, anywhere, anyplace’ approach to accessing learning material and to provide tools to enable learners to participate regardless of level or ability. The college is a Microsoft Showcase College and benefits from a strong and supportive partnership that champions our ongoing position in the skills sector for Worcestershire.

Digital Learning Advisers at HoW have developed a robust digital induction that supports learners of all abilities by offering tailored digital solutions to ensure they are equipped with the right tools required for them to engage, progress and thrive. Additional integrated tools for accessibility such as Immersive Reader and Read Aloud are introduced at this point to encourage learners to explore these technologies and build up a unique toolkit to use as part of their everyday academic life.

PEER-TO-PEER COLLABORATION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY CHANNELS

The recent increases in remote learning offer opportunities for wider peer-to-peer learning through digital mediums. This enables learners from different campuses, institutions, even countries to work, share, curate and create together. Not only does this encourage development of professional communication and networks, it helps to maintain presence and the development of critical thinking skills. Teachers can facilitate sessions, rather than taking a didactic approach to delivery where learners are often passive and can instead begin to focus on the development of 21st century skills such as problem solving, social and cross-cultural interaction and productivity.

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Although formal learning is the core of life at college, an integral aspect to character development is informal and social communication. Working remotely offers flexibility, although learners still require a ‘social space’ to encourage what would normally be corridor conversations. These informal discussions often build relationships, offer a sense of belonging to the institution and can spark relevant conversation around study. Whilst delivering wholly remote learning, HoW have ensured that ‘community channels’ are available across cohorts within Microsoft Teams to enable learners to build on the vital social aspect of their time. Feedback from staff and students confirm that community channels, or a small amount of time for informal conversation allocated before lectures, enables lessons to be more focused.

Careful consideration is required to ensure teachers, support staff and learners are well supported to manage the online space as part of a blended learning environment. Support needs to be given to help teachers and learners develop enhanced communication skills; neither can rely on non-verbal cues to address misunderstandings or observe needs or disengagement. Time management and workload can be a challenge in asynchronous classes with learners expecting to be online at any time, so teachers cannot predict when heavier workloads will occur. Teacher planning time may need to be extended at least initially and enriched content developed. Finally, as in the traditional classroom, teachers must be able to adapt online content for reaching students with physical or learning disabilities although huge progress has been made with resources to support these additional needs by software providers over the last few years.

COLLABORATION WITH INDUSTRY

The opportunity to re-imagine the curriculum has been presented during college closures through a case of necessity. Many industries will have had to diversify to survive. Some industries will look very different after COVID-19. This diversification may have also brought with it the need to develop additional skills that weren’t previously required such as transformed kitchen management in a hospitality setting for takeaways, highly contagious infection control and barrier nursing in health and social care settings, or video calling for initial consultation for areas of trade work. As vocational providers we can use this opportunity to work with industry to better understand what these new skills are and integrate them into the curriculum.
The conception of a remote/blended curriculum should be co-created with industry to aid workforce development and equip our learners with an updated and relevant skill set. At HoW, learners have been working on live, co-created remote projects in conjunction with industry, mapped against current skill capabilities. In turn, this has offered the opportunity to develop ‘real-time’ problem-solving tasks and offers an acute insight into what is currently happening in their chosen industry. In addition, the remote work learners have undertaken alongside industry have holistically developed softer employability skills that will now be required as we move into a new way of working – video conferencing etiquette, cloud-based digital skills, time management, and the importance of a healthy work/life balance.

Dual professionals across the institution have used their professional network to engage with industry who have been hugely supportive across vocational areas – delivering guest lectures, attending virtual mock interviews and setting project work for learners. It is vital that this rich partnership work continues in the post-COVID-19 landscape.

The enforced scaling of online learning of recent times provides a huge opportunity to also revisit and refresh curriculum content. We all know that we live in a time of fast-paced change and we know too that in the workplace there is a need for different skills/abilities alongside technical/vocational skills. There is a clamour of opinion and evidence from employer/industry bodies for greater ‘soft’ skills development. Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2019 and the CBI’s 2019 report, Getting Young People Work Ready’ are just two of the many contributions to this long-held debate about education and skills provision.

The blended learning approach offers a fantastic opportunity to meet these multiple outcomes. Instead of asking ‘what do you want to do when you leave education?’ our focus and our curriculum content should be more focussed on ‘how do you want to go about solving problems?’ and ‘what is your analysis of this information?’, along with encouraging debate. Approaching the learning experience much more as a constructive participatory experience where learners develop meaning from what they learn and teachers means they can evaluate that learning against application in the real world/employment.

**COLLABORATION TO DRIVE THE NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY AND SKILLS AGENDA**

This ‘new normal’ prepares us comprehensively for the increasing move away from anachronistic approaches, environments and pedagogy. Methods of teaching and support which prop up simple transmission of content are already under scrutiny in the new OfSTED framework which seeks to balance less data weighting with more examination of knowledge, skills and behaviours of learners: what do learners know (knowledge) that they didn’t before, and how well can they demonstrate (skills) it but also how well do they understand that progress in order to be able to apply it for the setting for which they have trained (behaviour)? This fine balancing act is at the heart of the challenge for most educators today who are still required to meet qualification criteria and curriculum policy expectations, themselves arguably due an upgrade. In all circumstances, the additional use of technology-enabled learning should never determine teachers’ decision making rather, pedagogical goals and objectives should always govern whether a blended lesson model is the best approach for each particular topic/outcome sought.

Despite the many benefits we have set out in this paper it remains central to any strategy that, like all approaches to pedagogy, different methods work well for different objectives. The intended outcomes should always be the determining factor in deciding an approach; blended learning done well may be a longer-term choice to consider rather than just a lockdown solution and a fantastic opportunity to truly engage all learners whilst ensuring no one gets left behind.

**Authors:** Stuart Laverick, Principal & Chief Executive, Heart of Worcestershire College  
Claire Heywood, Vice Principal Inclusive, Commercial and Employer Learning, Heart of Worcestershire College  
Amy Hollier, Head of Blended Learning, Heart of Worcestershire College
CREATING A POST-COVID-19 EDTECH STRATEGY WITH NO-ONE LEFT BEHIND

PIONEERING CREATIVE AND COLLABORATIVE DIGITAL APPROACHES TO HELP RAISE STANDARDS OF ENGLISH AND MATHS AT LEVEL 2

BASINGSTOKE COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

The COVID-19 global pandemic has had an unprecedented impact throughout the world, and the FE sector has not been immune to this. Colleges across the nation have seen face-to-face lessons halted, teaching and support staff suddenly working from home, and timetables and deadlines continuously being altered and rescheduled.

Whilst the global pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on FE institutions, Basingstoke College of Technology (BCoT) has found itself well-equipped for such a situation, as a result of a strong ethos of putting digital technology at the heart of teaching and learning. It is this long-term ethos that has seen the college rewarded with a higher standard of Level 2 English and Maths results in recent years, utilising new technology and working with external stakeholders to ensure that students who have previously struggled with these subjects do not get left behind.

ELEVEN YEARS IN THE MAKING

Despite the sudden impact that COVID-19 has had worldwide, remote learning did not come as a major change of direction for staff and students at BCoT. The transition has been swiftly and easily implemented as a result of utilising a wide range of digital teaching and learning tools. This ardent belief in using technology to create a different, more engaging approach to teaching and learning is not a short-term focus for the college. It has been one of the guiding principles and values of Anthony Bravo, Principal of BCoT, since he joined the college in 2009.

Anthony enthuses: “I am passionate about the transformative power of technology in education and am really proud of what we do at BCoT, putting digital innovation at the heart of learning and reaching students who may have been disengaged in a traditional education setting. We also have a fantastic creative digital team that have a willingness to try new things such as the AI project that we piloted to help improve attainment with GCSE retakes – a long standing issue for FE colleges.” For BCoT, this introduction of AI would prove to play a key role in raising the standards for students having to retake their GCSE English and Maths exams.
CASE STUDY: Raising the Standard in English and Maths at Level 2

1. THE CHALLENGE

Since 2014, students who do not achieve a grade 4 or higher in their GCSE Maths or English at age 16 must continue studying the subjects as part of their further education or training. Across the country, colleges and sixth forms are facing ongoing challenges around funding, reduced teaching time and student motivation in getting students to achieve the grades they need. In recent years, it has become apparent that our strategy and approach to students re-sitting these exams requires a rethink. According to figures from the education equality charity Impetus-PEF, in the summer of 2017, “more than 86,000 entrants to English or maths sat the exam for at least the second time. In English, over a quarter of resits were by those sitting the exam for at least the third time; in maths, the proportion stood at 37 per cent.” The cycle of resitting exams and failing again can lead students to a downward spiral of failure, lack of motivation, and resentment towards learning.

This ongoing challenge in education soon presented itself as an opportunity to BCoT’s Digital Innovation Specialist and Media Lecturer, Scott Hayden. In 2018, supported by his Digital Team at BCoT, Scott wanted to find a new solution: an innovative way to ensure students who have failed GCSE English or Maths can pass their exams and not be left behind in a cycle of re-sits. The primary objective was: “To rethink the way educators support and motivate learners who struggle to learn English and maths in a traditional learning environment.”

The first step was to place English and maths within the wider context of their chosen vocational subject, to make English and maths relevant to the students’ future career, and to make them realise why they need to work towards their pass grade.

2. PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

To enhance the higher standard of Level 2 English and Maths results, the project first started with a smaller sample size of Level 2 Automotive and Construction students. The Digital Team worked with internal stakeholders, as well as external organisations and technology, including CENTURY Tech and EquatIO mathspace, to bring studying English and maths to life for the students. The college then introduced a number of new technologies, tailored to each individual student’s strengths and weaknesses:

- New delivery model that includes a weekly blended learning session
- Integration of English tool Read&Write and maths app EquatIO mathspace
- Adoption of innovative Artificial Intelligence-based platforms with CENTURY Tech
- Creation of two dedicated revision sites: bcotmaths.com and bcotenglish.com
- Increase of digital learning allowed for more time for physical one-to-ones with students

Encouraged by the enthusiasm of Principal Anthony Bravo, the Digital Team at BCoT started working closely with CENTURY Tech in September 2018 to ensure that no student gets left behind when having to revisit their GCSE English or maths. CENTURY provided students with a number of benefits for the college and was a key part of BCoT’s success in raising standards. It gave students an individual learning path that was constantly personalising their learning every step of the way.

By identifying and adapting to their strengths, weaknesses, habits and behaviours, CENTURY ensured that the time spent studying English or maths was being used in the most effective way possible. CENTURY was also helping staff to manage their workload and spend more time giving one-to-one physical sessions with students. Automated marking and planning meant teachers could stay in the moment with their students and spend more time focusing and inspiring students instead of marking large amounts of student work.

Alongside the use of CENTURY, BCoT also introduced online toolkits such as Texthelp’s Read&Write and EquatIO mathspace to support teaching staff and students. The Digital Team at BCoT also created two bespoke revision sites to upload resources, self-marking quizzes and gamified revision tools.

Blended Learning is a weekly timetabled session which gives the student the opportunity to come into an interactive workshop and complete research and tasks that will develop their independent, collaborative and professional skills. Supported by a member of the college’s dedicated BCoT Digital Team, the sessions give students one-to-one support on using a wide range of digital tools that will equip them with the skills that employers in their industry will be looking for in the future. This weekly session, working with a range of digital tools, has also helped the students, and staff, become more prepared for the transition to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. RESULTS

The results of the 2018/19 GCSE exams at BCoT showed that the changes they have made are having a positive impact on their student attainment:

- In 2018/19, BCoT saw an increase in student retention in maths and English.
- 2.9% growth in GCSE maths students achieving a grade 4 or above, compared to 2017/18.
- 8.6% growth of students increasing their grade by at least one grade, compared to 2017/18.
- 9% growth of students increasing their grade by at least one grade, compared to 2017/18.
- Students used AI to help revise for their maths GCSE resits for as little as ten minutes a week improved their results twice as much as the national average.
- Students who used AI to revise for over one hour a week saw improvements of over ten times the national average.
- Three students received trophies for their use of CENTURY Tech.
- 321,500 questions were answered through CENTURY Tech.
- 781 combined hits to bcotmaths.com and bcotenglish.com in the week leading up to GCSE exams in May 2019.

4. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE IN A COVID-19 WORLD

The innovative changes that the staff have made to increase standards across English and maths is evidence of how integral digital technology has become at BCoT. More and more staff have been using the latest EdTech to make their teaching and learning more agile, engaging and productive for their students. Moving forward, the team want to roll out the use of AI to all students across the college, combining it with other digital tools such as virtual and augmented reality, as well as gamification to enhance the student experience and make sure they all get the opportunities they need to thrive.
OPPORTUNITY TO COLLABORATE

As part of the Ed Tech Demonstrator Programme, Scott Hayden and the BCoT Digital Team are now looking for further opportunities to collaborate and support other educational institutions. The EdTech Demonstrator Programme will provide peer-led advice and training to help schools and colleges in England use technology to support remote teaching and improve their digital capability. Speaking about the programme, Scott said: “We’re available to help other schools, colleges or universities. Our Digital Team is doing an incredible job at the moment helping staff and students across all subjects to implement teaching and learning remotely. We’re happy to share what we’re doing. We just want to help the sector as much as possible.” If you, or your institution, would like to receive support and training in utilising remote and digital tools, please declare your interest via the EdTech Demonstrator Programme website.

CONCLUSION

The current COVID-19 global pandemic has had an impact on institutions across the country, and organisations are constantly facing a number of challenges every day. However, adapting to these unprecedented times has come with relative ease to BCoT. As a college, their ardent and long-held belief in the possibilities and scope of digital tools in teaching and learning, combined with the long-term enthusiasm of their Principal Anthony Bravo, means they have been able to quickly, and capably, adapt to remote learning in such a short timeframe, and on such a large scale.

BCoT’s efficient and streamlined adoption of education technology in the English and maths department is just one example of how its reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic has been more of a smooth change of gear, as opposed to a sudden change of direction, for both staff and students. The college is looking forward to helping play a leading role in shaping EdTech across the sector and joining forces to help raise educational standards, while creating a level playing field for all, leaving no students behind.

Authors: Anthony Bravo, Principal, Basingstoke College of Technology
Scott Hayden, Digital Innovation Specialist/Lecturer of Creative Media Production, Basingstoke College of Technology
Delivering exceptional teaching and learning online to thousands of learners with 48 hours’ notice is no mean feat. Yet this is precisely what Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education (GIFHE) was able to do as a result of a digital strategy which had prepared staff and students for the fourth industrial revolution, and the impact of technology on all workplaces including its own during the COVID-19 lockdown. As a result, it was able to ensure that its learners were not left behind due to the considerable challenges they faced.

Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education is one of England’s largest providers of further and higher education. It is the largest component of the TEC Partnership, an Ofsted Outstanding, multi-award-winning FE group. GIFHE serves an area of the East coast which has a severe economic, social and educational disadvantage. 70% of its students come from widening participation postcode areas, prior educational achievement is low, and 60% of GIFHE’s provision is at Level 1 and 2. 60% of students join the college without maths, without English or both and around 30% of students have a learning difficulty or a disability. Achievement rates are in the top 1% of the country.

Innovation and ensuring students can achieve to a high level despite THE challenges they face is GIFHE’s lifeblood. When COVID-19 struck, it became just another challenge to meet and overcome. The size, scale and speed of the challenge was unprecedented, however, and we wanted to ensure that staff were fully supported, and no students got left behind.

PREPARING AND CARING FOR STAFF

With 48 hours’ notice, we were able to issue computer kit and equipment to all academic and support staff who needed it and provide a testing facility to ensure microphones, cameras and remote access all worked. Staff were encouraged to take their equipment home and test it, and we offered extended wrap-around IT and technology support to ensure everything worked as intended. GIFHE had a strong and well-embedded digital strategy which had been in place for three years. A significant number of teaching and support staff have achieved ‘Level Up’ training in technologies, which support remote working such as our Canvas LMS, OneDrive, OneNote, Teams and Skype in the Classroom. As a Microsoft Showcase College, the majority of staff are Certified Microsoft Innovate Educators or Experts and are therefore well versed in the cloud-based Office 365 suite and as part of a large and geographically dispersed group, video conferencing with colleagues elsewhere in the country was a familiar process. However, we decided to close the college entirely to students on the final day before lockdown to conduct some mass refresher training in Canvas and Teams, primarily to ensure that teaching staff had a clear strategy on how to operate remotely. We could not guarantee our students would not be left behind if we did not extend the same courtesy to our staff.

GRIMSBY INSTITUTE OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

ARTICLES: DIGITAL DYNAMITE: LEARNING AND TEACHING DURING COVID-19
A comprehensive online ‘Teaching & Learning Remotely’ guide including instructional videos on how to create and organise lessons including communications with students, facilitating online discussions, class announcements, creation or sourcing of online resources, integrating third-party apps, virtual teaching, online assessment and recording attendance.

- Dedicated IT and online learning support from our IT services and our Digital Innovation Team.
- Requests for technical support are our priority; therefore, help desks are fully staffed and operate extended hours.
- Yammer provides GIFHE with a centralised social and supportive communication channel. Yammer is a well-embedded aspect of the Office 365 suite at GIFHE and has over 1200 members who regularly contribute and comment. It provides vibrant information dissemination, praise and a good practice sharing environment for all staff. The ‘Teaching and Learning Remote Support’ channel is where staff share ideas, speak with experts, troubleshoot and celebrate success.
- A daily series of quick instructional videos, no longer than four minutes, has been created to provide sharp insights on how to extend digital skills in particular tools. Some well-received content includes: branching in Microsoft Forms, extending the functionality of Teams which hints and tips on how to manage stress, relax and socialise.
- Virtual quiz nights and Friday drinks nights.
- ‘Isolation TV’, a dedicated TV channel on Planet eStream administered by our learning centre staff containing a range of children’s films to educate and entertain the children of our staff; this was updated daily with new content.
- Copying and uploading viral videos to entertain our students and staff.
- A fully online staff development day on May the 4th called the ‘Jedi Training Academy’, involving hundreds of staff interacting and learning online while competing for the best Star Wars Costume.
- Friday night ‘Cookalong Live’ with one of our chefs via Teams.

As a result, staff morale remains very high and the entire team are skilled in online delivery. When staff feel secure, confident, supported and valued, student learning and support will always be engaging and effective. Staff have the very best wraparound pedagogical, technical and interpersonal support we can provide to nurture their online resilience and delivery. Communication is regular and supportive.

On average, 73% of students with no or limited access to the technology they needed in order to participate in online learning. The critical concern for us strategically has been 25% of students with no or limited access to the technology they needed in order to participate in online learning. Broadband is weak in many rural parts of the area, and students unable to afford to pay for data or at best had to share limited access with other family members; at worst, some didn’t have a device. We issued hundreds of laptops to our students, including driving to rural areas to deliver them direct to doors in a social distancing manner, supported by the purchase of dongles to provide internet access for those without Wi-Fi.

We mirrored our activity with staff and produced a ‘Students’ Guide to Remote Learning’, which used instructional videos to cover: logging in, links to support and helplines, what to expect from an online lesson, submitting work, dress to learn guidance, communication with staff and attendance. An uplifting and motivational video to reassure learners accompanied this guide.

We also covered the critical aspects of safeguarding, reinforced cybersecurity awareness and focused heavily on student wellbeing and mental health support. Each student is contacted at least weekly, either by their teacher or by the student support team. We are conducting socially distanced home visits for students who have not engaged, and who we perceived as ‘at-risk learners’.

We have revised the majority of the curriculum to online learning with the exception of highly practical trades sessions, although even here delivery did not stop. In addition to our standard online teaching,
which broadly matches the students’ timetable, we have provided:

1. Extensive guest speakers on Canvas conferencing, Teams and Zoom such as special effects artists, national charity leaders, environmental activists and politicians
2. Viral videos as morale boosters created by staff to entertain and motivate students
3. Online student of the month in all curriculum areas
4. Creation of virtual reality gallery display spaces for arts and photography students to showcase their work
5. Masterclasses with nationally based choreographers, dancers and hairdressers
6. Animal care masterclasses from zoos worldwide and pet shops locally exploring care, handling and health concerns of domestic and exotic species
7. Lambing live from a local farm
8. A community choir to support adult learners
9. Remote fitness sessions for all students
10. Nail art and self-care tutorials
11. Full technical and wellbeing support

Student engagement is high, student morale is positive, and the level of work submitted is exceptional in the circumstances. Students have generally adapted extremely well to online teaching and learning, and a dedicated and talented staff base ensures that no-one is left behind.

Learning online throughout COVID-19 has enabled our students not only to continue their studies but it has also given opportunities to develop their use of digital tools and methods that heighten employability skills for a digital landscape.

That’s digital dynamite at GIFHE.

Authors: Debra Gray, Principal, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education and Deputy Chief Executive of the TEC Partnership
Deborah Millar, Executive Director of Digital Innovation, the TEC Partnership
In 2015, Harlow College launched the ‘iPads for All’ strategy. We made a strategic decision, agreed by our Governing Body and students, to make a significant investment in our digital infrastructure.

This investment included:

- Ubiquitous wi-fi across campus
- Upgrades to internet service lines to allow at least 3000 devices to run simultaneously across the campus
- Establishment of a mobile device management system

This allowed us to begin to change the way we structured our curriculum and student learning whereby all learners experience using digital not only to support their learning, but also to prepare them for the digital workplace.

“The digital strategy is explained to students as part of their college induction. They’re provided with support and guidance to realise the powerful effect that using technology can have within their learning. They’re also given the tools to understand how they can use their iPad to enhance their college experience, improve their ability to study and to allow them to personalise their learning.”

(Kelly Edwards – Director of Quality)

As well as a significant investment in infrastructure and devices, our digital roll-out was supported by:

- Establishment of the Digital Innovation Team to support development and training
- Recruitment of digital ambassadors and leaders, from both the college’s students and staff
- A strong programme of continuing professional development
DIGITAL INNOVATION TEAM

Our Digital Team is central to the integration of technology. The team is part of the college’s quality improvement and professional development area, focusing on:

- Digital support for students and teachers
- Leading the Digital Leaders and Ambassadors group
- Bespoke training
- One-to-one training and support for staff and students on a drop-in basis
- Work with Apple Certified Trainers on five allocated training days
- Workshops and CPD training and support
- Setting up and managing staff Digilairs
- Carrying out digital projects
- Running the iPad roll-out/roll-back programmes
- Liaising with the IT frontline support team in assisting staff and students’ iPad use
- Carrying out audits of staff use of iPads
- Conducting surveys into iPad usage and on exit
- Running Jisc Digital Insights surveys of teaching staff and students.

Transition to fully online was made smoother during lockdown, as issues to do with access to devices, Wi-Fi and suitable applications for learning had already largely been resolved. Of the 3000 plus students learning online, only 18 reported issues with access to technology, and the Digital Innovation Team was on hand to provide support. The significant investment made over a sustained period by the college in its infrastructure and CPD has paid off in terms of student access.

Staff development and a growth mindset culture are key to using technology effectively in the classroom. Staff engage in professional development through five dedicated CPD days a year, weekly CPD Wednesdays and bespoke support for teams. At the start of our journey, we used free training days with Apple Certified Trainers to help us identify applications and tools for learning. We specifically focused on pedagogy and which applications made the biggest difference to learning, teaching and assessment. These are called our Digital Top Ten and are covered later in the article.

Establishing a strong culture of innovation and experimentation is key to success. We have worked hard to develop a ‘growth mindset’ culture. ‘The power of yet’ and ‘not there yet’ are phrases that are used on a regular basis. Staff need to be willing to try new things and adapt to change; they need to be keen to develop and improve; to reflect on where they are as teachers; to look at their skills and to try new and different methods of delivery, assessment and communication with their learners.

Professional learning

They assist both staff and learners to develop their digital skills. They also meet and demonstrate their use of digital technology to visitors. Any student can become a Digital Ambassador. The ‘no one is left behind’ policy has enabled a wheelchair-dependent student with cerebral palsy to be short-listed for a digital project run by Fujitsu as well as a Digital Ambassador on the autistic spectrum to successfully contribute to a panel discussion and Hackathon at Jisc’s 2020 DigiFest. Representing the college enables students to grow in confidence and to build their CVs.

"Being a Digital Ambassador has improved my personal skills and has given me skills to help other people. My CV is bursting with experiences and my confidence has grown.”

All staff are encouraged to gain their Apple Teacher qualification. Our Digital Leaders provide support and guidance across their delivery teams and on staff development days in relation to the Apple Teacher qualification. This provides staff with a sound understanding of a range of Apple apps, which develops confidence and creativity within the classroom.

"Being a Digital Leader has changed my role by encouraging me to support others with the use of technology in the classroom. It has also allowed me to explore different ways of using technology and to research, often drawing on the experiences of others to do so. Since becoming a Showbie Champion, Apple Teacher with Swift Playgrounds and now an Apple Distinguished Educator (ADE), I have been increasingly involved with staff training events and helping to support my colleagues.”
DIGITAL TOP 10

The Digital Top 10 grew out of the original Core 5 applications that the College adopted at the start of the journey to engage staff in using technology for effective learning and teaching. These tools and apps provide the structure that allows our teachers to engage with learners in a personalised manner, providing individualised formative and summative assessment through feedback designed to stimulate students’ creativity and imagination when they produce documents to evidence their journeys.

Bespoke training for teams has ensured that they can fully utilise the Digital Top 10.

Showbie is the most popular. Not only has it saved time and paper, it has greatly improved setting work and delivering feedback to learners either written or verbally with the latter being highly suited to students who struggle with reading for a variety of reasons including dyslexia. The graphic below shows our Digital Top 10, with the key uses for learning.

1. Showbie
   - The heart of your paperless classroom
   - Hand in and review assignments
   - Receive personal feedback from tutors
   - Stay on track with timeley notification

2. Padlet
   - The easiest way to create and collaborate in the world
   - Share thoughts on common topics
   - Post a range of content: text, images, video and links
   - Build your own communities of interest

3. Notes
   - Capture your thoughts, sketch ideas and create checklists
   - Quickly get ideas down on your iPad
   - Record in-class images and video for reference
   - List out your action points to help get things done

4. Keynote
   - Making it easier to create:
   - Stunning and memorable presentations
   - Presentations with dazzling effects

5. OneDrive
   - Do more wherever you go
   - Get to your files from anywhere on any device
   - Archive files and free up space on your iPad
   - Unlimited and safe storage for all your work

6. Adobe Spark Page
   - A suite of apps that allow:
   - Creation of video stories
   - Creation of web pages
   - Designing presentations and graphics

7. iMovie
   - A video editing tool to develop a professional-looking video containing:
   - T i t l e s
   - Music and voiceovers

8. Kahoot
   - A game-based classroom quiz played by the whole class. It can be:
   - Played on any mobile device or computer
   - Used as a refresher or assessment tool

9. Pages
   - A powerful word processor that lets you create breathtaking documents. Choose a:
   - Page style
   - Customised font and stunning images

10. GarageBand
    - A fully equipped music creation studio. It includes:
    - A complete sound library
    - Instruments, presets for guitar and voice
    - A huge selection of session drummers and percussionists

The College has also introduced Planet EStream to complement the Digital Top 10, allowing us to create our own “YouTube”-style web-based platform to provide simple around-the-clock access to our media library. The flexible format enables users to upload a whole range of digital assets including videos, photos, audio and documents, as well as having access to thousands of existing multimedia resources from the likes of the BBC. Built-in learning tools, designed specifically for education, dramatically increases engagement and flips the traditional passive video viewing model into an interactive and active learning experience.

Prior to lockdown, One Drive was expanded to include Microsoft Teams. This has proved invaluable for teachers and managers to meet on a regular basis and keep in touch. It has been carefully rolled out to students, taking into account safeguarding and mental wellbeing. As a rule of thumb, the College recommends no more than 20 minutes face-to-face screen input for every taught hour. The key is to provide short, sharp video-based inputs and allow time for activities, consolidation and learning.

Teachers use their choice of technology as part of their everyday teaching toolkit. It is not an add-on to their normal way of working but is seen as the norm. Technology is fully embedded into the way our teachers plan, deliver and assess their students. Students are also taught how to use technology for learning and how this can enhance their experience in preparation for the world of work.

TRANSFORMATIONAL TEACHING AND LEARNING

Across the College, there are examples of transformational teaching and learning. Our staff have fully embraced the use of technology to redesign and re-evaluate the way in which they work to ensure that all students achieve their fullest potential, and nobody is left behind.

The Carpentry team is a perfect example of how technology has transformed the way in which their students learn. More importantly, the team has revolutionised the way in which their students feel about their learning. Using QR codes and Padlet walls, students record their progress and development. The teacher accesses images, time-lapse videos and assessments on their programme providing ongoing, personalised feedback to individuals.

Mark – Carpentry teacher

In this way, the iPads and learning tools build confidence, enabling learners to complete their work when they might have struggled in more traditional settings.

All students operate on an individualised basis because of their ability to receive guidelines for progress, stretch and challenge on their individual Padlet walls. Parents/carers are invited to view their son/daughter’s wall, which has created an open forum for discussion on parents’ evenings and a fantastic live CV to show potential employers. The transformation has given students a voice to articulate their learning and show their passion for carpentry.
Staff and learners at Harlow College have benefited significantly from the strategic approach of ‘iPads for all’. When considering how to provide access to technology, colleges and policy makers need to:

- Embed their digital approach in their overall strategy – technology is a tool, not an end in itself.
- Consider and agree the investment required in infrastructure, devices and CPD.
- Develop a systematic approach to the roll-out of technology and invest in a team of practitioners to provide support.

- Start simply, focusing on key tools or applications that everyone can use consistently and to a high quality.
- Involve staff and students at all stages; they are the key advocates for change and will provide the right environment and culture to innovate.

For further information, please read our digital books at:


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THE TECHABILITY STANDARDS: IS YOUR DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY ‘CRISIS READY’?

TECHABILITY

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

For most learners across the UK, the education system has become less accessible because of COVID-19. As all too many have discovered, home learning is difficult – especially under lockdown and with other demands on households. It can be difficult to access materials, to focus and to communicate. For learners with Special Educational Needs (SEND) these barriers are already all too familiar and have been increased further by the lockdown. The TechAbility Standards exist to achieve two things: inspire by showing the potential digital technologies have to improve educational outcomes and give organisations an audit tool so they can find the ‘gaps’ in which to focus training and development. Digital learning can be a great equaliser for learners with SEND, but they have been held back by the rate of adoption. We can question why this is, but perhaps the question right now is: “How can we make the digital improvements permanent, and how can we ensure they are accessible?” That is where the TechAbility Standards come in.
CREATING A POST-COVID 19 EDTECH STRATEGY WITH NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

• If we have found the best solution for the learner we
• TRAINED STAFF
• This will ensure that the learner has a device that can
• APPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT
• Do we understand why the learner is facing this
• STANDARDISED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS NEEDS

Now let’s think of some of the pieces that may need to be in place to meet this need:

- • APPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT
- This will ensure that the learner has a device that can carry out the tasks they need. So it may be something that will help them write answers with their voice, it might be a prediction tool or it could be a physical keyboard that is a more helpful size or colour. The assessment (mentioned above) will help to find which piece of kit is best.

- • TRAINED STAFF
- If we have found the best solution for the learner we then need staff who will support it. If they cannot only understand the features but also anticipate issues before they occur, there is a much higher chance of the solution sticking.

If you unpick an example of digital accessibility, there is much more to it than might meet the eye. Let’s take a seemingly simple request: “I have a learner who can’t write the answers in tests fast enough.”

SUMMARY

- • STANDARDISED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS NEEDS
- Do we understand why the learner is facing this barrier? Is it an issue with processing, physical access, eye sight or something else? A standardised assessment will help to understand what the issues are – and then if this information is shared and stored, (especially in an EHCP) it can benefit all professionals who work with the learner.

- • APPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT
- All too often professionals are not given support in understanding how to change an environment to accommodate learners. We should be creating a space where all learners can thrive, not making them adapt and fit our requirements.

- • ACCESSIBLE COURSE MATERIALS
- If a college has all of the above in place, but course materials are not available in an accessible digital format, the learners will not benefit from the other changes made.

The single most important change is to make materials available digitally. This ensures that learners can access the materials on devices that are customised to them through a combination of settings, tools and adaptations.

A CLEAR SOLUTION

When TechAbility staff deliver training and consultation in both mainstream and specialist colleges, a recurring theme is that staff and learners are not aware of the benefits accessible technologies can provide. What could be considered the basics, such as using built-in accessibility settings or text-to-speech in software, often come as a revelation.

The standards state what learners should be able to achieve in an inclusive environment – whether that be face to face, video conferencing or asynchronous teaching. Interested in a sneak preview of the standards? Here is an abridged version of the standards which are most relevant to education during COVID-19:

ACCESSIBLE COURSE MATERIALS

All learning materials are accessible by design and provided digitally, so they can be accessed by learners’ access methods

The single most important change is to make materials available digitally. This ensures that learners can access the materials on devices that are customised to them through a combination of settings, tools and adaptations.

OWN DEVICES CATERED FOR

Learners are able to use their own devices when appropriate or requested and where this would improve their transition outcomes. This has value for learners who can use learning or access apps in their own time and outside of the learning environment. It brings challenges regarding concentration, but there are strategies and apps to help with this.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS

Learners are able to access online resources with all reasonable precautions taken against threats. The Department for Education have produced guidance on Teaching online safety in school and the NSPCC have also provided additional support on E-safety.

DISCRETE TRAINING

Learners have support from staff who have had specific training on supporting Assistive Technology usage. The key areas of knowledge required are in needs assessment and specific technologies (see Tools, Visual Methods of Working and Independence and Living)

TAKE ACCOUNT OF ACCESS METHODS

Learners have access to a learning programme that takes account and makes provision for individual access methods. This may mean having multimedia available in different formats, it may require extra time for activities, or it may mean alterations in the way the method the programme is delivered. An example is the Microsoft PowerPoint Translator plug-in that allows live subtitles for your presentations and translation of the written text.

Sessions may be delivered in a format that does not allow for the use of tools to access and complete work. TechAbility has created a webinar on Flipped Learning that can give ideas on how to change up delivery to suit Assistive Technology.
TRANSITION PLAN AND HANDOVER

Learners have a transition plan including a handover to professionals or other parties who will support their AT use in future.

Learners’ transitions should be considered early in their course. Technology support in a new setting may be different. If the assistive technology has a high degree of complexity, there is a chance of abandonment or diminished use. Technology solutions should be accessible while retaining functionality.

As learners prepare to transition out of settings, they must have documentation which supports their technology use. This should contain details of a mixture of:

- Usage
- Accessibility settings
- Hardware
- Software
- Set-up
- Troubleshooting

MENTAL HEALTH

Learners have access to technology that will help them cope with mental health issues. Mental health is a major issue and there are considerations when it comes to technology use. At times, it may be able to support mental health. Some popular apps and systems are Headspace and Calm.

Another issue to consider is overuse of technology, and there are apps such as Forest and SleepTown to encourage healthy use of mobile devices. The NHS also provides an app to order repeat prescriptions called Echo. Have you found these useful and want to know more? Here are the full TechAbility Standards, and also see the article on ‘Exploring Online learning and Student Mental Health’.

BENEFITS TO YOUR ORGANISATION

Embracing digital should be a great equaliser and ensure that no learner is left behind. However, unless resources are accessible and learners have the hardware and software they require, inequities will remain.

By meeting and applying the TechAbility Standards your organisation can:

- Achieve the highest possible outcomes by allowing learners to focus on course content, not delivery method.
- Reduce staff workload by enabling learners’ independence.
- Understand the skills and knowledge which staff teams need to develop.
- Reduce learners’ frustration, thereby increasing retention, wellbeing and confidence.

APPLYING THE STANDARDS DURING COVID-19

So what can organisations do about it now?

Here are four actions which can be taken immediately to ensure learners have the access they require:

1. Identify relevant staff and meet to discuss how the TechAbility Standards could benefit your learners.
2. Audit staff skills and experience. Use this time to skill up staff who may have more time for CPD.
3. Take a sample of course materials and see if they are accessible. Word and Powerpoint have built-in accessibility checkers. Accessibility Checker for Docs is an add-on for G-Suite.
4. Review your digital access assessment process. If this doesn’t exist in a formal manner, create a process and document it.

ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES

As colleges meet current and future challenges by developing hybrid teaching methods, the standards will assist them to ensure no learner loses out due to inaccessible technology. The TechAbility standards provide a benchmark for education organisations to measure themselves against. If the standards are met, learners with disabilities can have confidence that the college will use technology as an enabler rather than a barrier.

It is hoped that statutory bodies will refer to the standards to give colleges something concrete to work towards: a method of improving outcomes for learners through effective use of technology. EdTech companies have expressed interest in the standards to ensure their products are used well and in the correct context. TechAbility’s aim is “to improve outcomes for learners with SEND in mainstream and specialist further education”. We believe that the standards give an opportunity for colleges to hit new highs of excellence by including all learners.

“The opportunities in 2020 are fantastic. Content can be created accessibly from the outset – our tools for those with print impairments exist to both create and read content in quite individual ways. The TechAbility Standards provide a broad overview to support students with Special Educational Needs. It puts our tools in context and gives educators the knowledge they need to make them successful.”

NOEL DUFFY, DOLPHIN TECHNOLOGY & BRITISH ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ASSOCIATION

Authors: Neil Beck, Assistive Technologist, TechAbility
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Learning is defined as “the process of gaining knowledge and skills through studying” but our ability to study depends on several factors.

The psychologist will describe our ability to learn using an intrinsic lens, examining an individual’s attitudes, intentions, motivation, confidence, needs and self-efficacy, while the sociologist will explore extrinsic correlations such as the socio-economic status (the way an individual structures perceptions, experiences, and practices based on their economic and cultural background) and the habitus that Bourdieu describes as the “internalisation of externality” process². The economist will consider the return on investment and rewards commitment to self-development. Technophobia is addressed by approaching EdTech from a pedagogic perspective, using educators’ language to build know-how. EnhanceDTP embraces a strong accessibility and inclusion ethos to widen participation and uses algorithms (AI) to personalise the learning experience.

Other factors such as gender, educational and skills attainment, employed or unemployed status, race and ethnicity will also affect our disposition to learning³. Learning is not only an individual concern; it is important to promote the ideal conditions to foster engagement. The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) developed the Enhance Digital Teaching Platform⁴ (EnhanceDTP) to meet this aim and offer clear EdTech and Digital Skills development pathways to educators. Both the platform and its programmes have been designed to remove barriers to engagement. We adopted a user-centred design process to create an optimised user experience with a mobile first, adaptive and responsive design.

Content can be accessed cost free and without a sign-up requirement. The simple navigation and bite-sized modules are a response to our time restrictions and 21st century immediacy mindset needs. The recognition badging structure promotes intrinsic motivation and rewards commitment to self-development. Learning-oriented leadership manages the workplace as a generator of workforce digital capability support framework. At an organisational level, however, there is a need to foster the right conditions to learning. Ellström (2001) explains that the workplace is no longer a site limited to production, but also “an environment where formal training and informal learning can be integrated”⁵.

The workplace is now assimilated as a generator of training opportunities and each organisation will differ in how they support and encourage learning with shared practices and mentoring, as well as innovative pedagogic approaches.

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3 https://www.studymode.com/essays/Bourdieu%27s-Notion-Of-Habitus-666210.html
4 Webinar delivered by Ellen Boeren - COVID-19 and the Future of Adult Learning - 21 May 2020
5 https://enhance.etfoundation.co.uk/

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LEARNING SPACES AND COMMUNITIES: #ETFSUPPORTSFE

EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOUNDATION
During the COVID-19 lockdown, the Enhance platform has witnessed a surge in usage with educators who are eager to explore new ways of teaching and supporting their learners remotely. As well as a balance between curriculum and pedagogy, there is a third essential consideration: technology as a tool to communicate, collaborate and make knowledge and skills stick.

The lockdown triggered change. It was inspiring and spectacular to see how educator communities came together to support one another and respond promptly to working and learning changes.

There was some awareness that new technologies could and were changing our lives, but COVID-19 has precipitated the use of virtual communication opportunities through webinars, discussion forums, chat rooms, social media and online applications offering synchronous and asynchronous collaboration opportunities. With this, came the realisation that communication and information technologies can facilitate access to inclusive learning from anywhere, at any time, and from any device. They offer an empowering set of interactive, creative and personalised tools to effectively engage with learners and support them to revisit, access, interact with and create content.

On the negative side, lockdown restrictions have exacerbated the social digital divide and the need for the country to effectively support change through entitlement to digital literacy as well as universal access to technology and the internet. Automation will continue to shift the future of work. National re-skilling and up-skilling programmes must be rolled out to minimise the ‘Matthew Effect’, where the strongest individuals tend to participate more than those from disadvantaged groups. The technology revolution presents serious labour force and welfare concerns and government policies must address them seriously.

The launch of the two- and three-star awards marks the move of the EnhanceDTP to the third phase of its development with new learning spaces fostering communities of practice where reflection, metacognition, feedback, peer support and mentoring are facilitated. The badging scheme offers an opportunity for practitioners to reflect on a specific aspect of their practice and test out new strategies and resources in their context:

“The badging process almost acts like a catalyst because it helps you take a little bit of learning that is 100% relevant to your specific context and makes you think, ‘how would those principles be relevant in my context?’ So, in a way, the badging is almost a significant part of drawing out the learning because the badging is a handover from somebody telling you something, you reflecting on it and turning it into yourself.” (Reviewer 1)

Teaching is a practice and as such it adapts to the learning context in which it is delivered. With a reflection scaffold and personalised feedback from experts in the education field, educators can articulate their application of the training by demonstrating metacognitive practices. Experts’ feedback challenges practitioners to construct new pedagogic approaches to more effectively enhance inclusive teaching, learning and assessment with new technologies.

“I found it extremely useful in a mentoring context. Personal feedback adds value to the process of reflection and personalises the experience.” (Reviewer 3)

According to White (2015), teachers are isolated. The learning space created by the posting of reflections on the EnhanceDTP offers new learning perspective and communication channels to combat this. Shared reflections can be read by peers, spark a debate, promote critical thinking and impact on teachers’ individual learning processes. This can lead to the co- construction of knowledge and practice (Mercer et al., 2017). This is best achieved by a teacher using an ‘interactive dialogic pedagogy’ where digital technology provides valuable support to improve classroom interaction and learning (Mercer et al. 2019).

Feedback is an essential part of effective learning and has been recognised as one of the most impactful ways to drive learners’ progress. “Feedback is more strongly and consistently related to achievement than any other teaching behaviour...this relationship is consistent regardless of grades, socioeconomic status, race, or school setting.” Bellon et al.10

The badging process enables organisations to track CPD, provide localised support and upskill their workforce. It supports changes in curriculum delivery planning for increased learning offered online:

“I hope teachers start to question why they can’t use certain tools/approaches and that (especially now in current lockdown) senior leaders, managers and teachers start to think about whether they can deliver curriculums in different ways.” (Reviewer 2)

The feedback model is a direct response to the ETF’s two Edtech strategic priorities:

EDTECH LEARNING COMMUNITY
- to enhance research and innovation, and to build a community to share practices across the sector through improved collaboration, partnership and network opportunities. [SP4]

SUSTAINABILITY
- to place the FE and Training sector stakeholders at the centre of all our services and engage them in service developments and quality improvement, while encouraging the use of digital products to expand their own services and promote sustainability. [SP8]
Our vision is to foster practitioner communities of practice that are practitioner-led. We encourage practitioners to become EnhanceDTP contributors and reviewers to provide sustainable peer support. “The community creates a social framework for learning, based on the willingness to share ideas and experiments with others.” Sharples (2019).

Engaging with other practitioners through being a ‘reviewer’ offers professional development opportunities through finding out how practitioners and managers use technology to support their learners. It keeps knowledge and skills up to date and can provide evidence towards gaining Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status or Advanced Teacher Status (ATS).

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed new ways of working and engaging with learners in different flexible and personalised ways. The Association of Colleges’ (AoC) survey12 conducted in England across the 244 colleges in April 2020 identifies that 90% of the 125 respondents (chief executives and principals plus seven other returns) agree that “colleges have changed their mode of learning in around three weeks. Many are now thinking about how to capitalise on best practice and sustain this change post-crisis.”

EnhanceDTP’s ‘communities of practice’ social learning model and the organisation management dashboard facility offer an effective and sustainable approach to the development of a cohesive and coherent FE workforce digital capability.

Participation in learning is dependent on the country’s education and training policies, social security and other funding mechanisms. While we can influence the optimisation of the learning experience from access to content, there are several factors that remain out of our control.13 AoC’s report claims that for the country, “There is an opportunity to make a shift towards a ‘digital first’ sector but this may need:

- a national online repository of high-quality interactive content specifically designed for vocational and skills-based delivery. This will include ‘bite size’ micro-credentialled content endorsed by industry sectors
- resilient and reliable connectivity for FE learners so that they can access online resources
- development and adoption of a new assessment methodologies designed for secure remote delivery
- work on technical solutions to support teachers and administrators including digital assistants, automated workflows, data analytics, flexible working and reduced workflow.”

Closer and more robust FE organisation partnerships will promote a stronger sector that can embrace change and maximise the impact the sense of urgency triggered by COVID-19 has had, so that we can sustainably consolidate improvements and institutionalise the new approaches. (Kotter, 2011)

We learn, share and grow together as learners, teachers, trainers, governors and leaders. No one is left behind.

Author: Vikki Liogier, National Head of EdTech & Digital Skills, Education & Training Foundation

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FROM PANDEMIC TO POSSIBILITY: CAN DIGITALISATION HELP INTERNATIONALISATION?

ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND BRITISH COUNCIL

COVID-19 has disrupted the ‘traditional’ delivery of technical and vocational education everywhere. In the UK, colleges had to adapt to lockdown in record time, transitioning to virtual campuses almost overnight. There are few positive outcomes from the pandemic but, if necessity breeds invention, coronavirus may have provided new ways for colleges to work internationally.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, colleges have produced learning and teaching resources that could be adjusted to meet the needs of other countries. Can colleges use their domestic response to COVID-19 on the international stage? Can colleges ensure that not only their own learners (including international students) but also those in countries with developing economies do not get left behind?

THE GLOBAL RISE OF TVET

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) will play a key role in training, retraining and upskilling a post-COVID society. Pre-pandemic, global political interest and investment in TVET was on the rise (although in many developing countries this is from a minimal base). The Asian and African Development Banks have increased the funds available for TVET, yet much of the public focus and resources being shared during the global pandemic have been related to general education. TVET learners, who are more likely to be from marginalised communities in the UK and overseas, risk being ignored without the right policies.

According to the joint ILO/UNESCO/World Bank survey14, 90% of respondents from 126 countries reported that their TVET centres were closed. Many apprenticeships had been paused or ended due to businesses being unable to operate or because of the inability to provide learning support. There are signs, however, that international skills systems are starting to respond to the challenges. The same survey reports that over three quarters of respondents are providing remote learning either entirely or partly and that around half of all respondents reported that learning took place entirely online.

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The EU Vocational Skills Week COVID Survey\(^6\) observes that some EU countries are starting to develop central platforms and share resources. However, it reports that so far whilst a vast number of online courses or learning modules are available, few are TVET specific and in most cases those that are available focus exclusively on theoretical knowledge.

In India, Manish Kumar (MD & CEO of the National Skills Development Corporation) commented: “These are unprecedented times and digital learning initiatives are playing a critical role in keeping learners connected and in maintaining continuity.”\(^6\) COVID-19 has brought forward countries’ thinking about how technology can be used by TVET. As in the UK, other countries were already looking at how digital strategies can be used to enhance learning, reduce costs or increase access. Technology can make a difference in rural areas or for disadvantaged groups, whilst ensuring that the knowledge and competences students develop match those needed in the workplace.

**SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC**

As the coronavirus spread across Europe, international borders closed and flights were grounded. International students in the UK’s colleges faced a difficult choice: should they stay or should they go? During the pandemic, colleges have used technology to ensure that their international learners — wherever they are based – are not left behind.

Colleges are now delivering online to an international student body split between the UK and the rest of the world. The College of Richard Collyer was well placed to take advantage of an existing platform to deliver work and assessment remotely. The college’s tutorial system has continued to operate throughout this period. The key to this success has been an understanding that not all students will have equal access to technology at home, nor will they necessarily be able to follow prescriptive learning patterns. This has been especially important for their international students and so real-time delivery has deliberately taken a back seat in favour of content that is easily accessible for all students, regardless of time zones.

In response to the COVID-19 challenges, Lincoln College quickly transitioned its international delivery to embrace new ways of teaching and learning. It changed learning for over 4,500 students to online platforms which included remote lessons and interactive engagement. This ensured that teaching continued 5,500 miles away in the People’s Republic of China, using real-time annotations, voiceover commentary and daily support.

In Morocco, the king has been unusually outspoken in stating that he wants to shift the balance of young people’s education from HE towards TVET. Morocco’s ‘TVET Roadmap’ had already identified an objective to introduce online learning and increase knowledge of its pedagogical implications. The Ministry of Education has also set up a special unit to look at how distance learning can be used to transform TVET.

It can be easier to share internationally through digital means – issues around geography, demography and environment take a back seat. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the desire for countries and their institutions to learn from each other in a range of areas: technological infrastructure needs; learner management systems; virtual learning platforms; curriculum development in response to technological changes; online resource development; pedagogy; assessment; student support and virtual employer engagement. Colleges have a great deal to both contribute and gain from all forms of international collaboration whether partnerships, commercial contracts or the recruitment of international students.

**FROM PANDEMIC TO POSSIBILITY: CAN DIGITALISATION HELP INTERNATIONALISATION?**

**Colleges are now delivering online to an international student body split between the UK and the rest of the world.**

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, rapid college closures provided a positive catalyst for innovative learning styles and for demonstrating that the UK education system is able to adapt quickly and effectively. While COVID-19 has created unprecedented challenges, it has also accelerated thought leadership into how technology should be further embedded in educational reform and redesign. However, it was not just the curriculum that needed to move online but also student services. To support their international students during the pandemic, colleges have arranged virtual assistance for their learners via welfare check-in points and social media groups.

At East Sussex College, the international team has been running Zoom drop-in meetings to avoid student isolation. Adjustments to UK Government policy have helped to make sure that students and their sponsors do not experience negative outcomes due to COVID-19 and circumstances beyond their control. Shortly after lockdown, the UK Home Office introduced temporary concessions to student visa policy permitting remote study.

Online learning is not a substitute for face-to-face interaction; it brings different benefits and may well play a greater role within education in the future. At East Sussex College, an online English language programme has been developed for the college’s international students who had mostly returned to their home countries, as well as those left in the UK. Feedback from students suggested they were most interested in class scenarios that replicated classroom interaction.

Given it is unlikely that student exchange programmes such as Erasmus+ can resume quickly, could virtual exchanges be the safe way forward in the interim? Many Erasmus+ mobility placements scheduled for 2020 will continue to be cancelled. The scheme provides cultural and developmental opportunities for students (particularly from disadvantaged communities) and with no travel costs or time away from home, an online format may mean that a greater number of students could take part.

Online exchanges, courses and support require a degree of finance and infrastructure to operate effectively and may take up more lecturer planning time to prepare. Time zones, security, quality and connectivity are all considerations, but given the investment colleges have already made in moving to virtual campus mode, there is an opportunity to look at in-house online provision and expertise with an eye to domestic and (competitive) international markets.

Activate Learning is exploring the development of 100% online qualifications for the Health and Social Care industry, in addition to rolling out a fully online EFL summer school and EFL provision moving forward. It has also transferred a course for an Indian partner from face-to-face format to delivery via Zoom.

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\(^6\) https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/covid-19-nsdc-encouraging-skill-seekers-to-acquire-new-skills/story-JgLQva3S7n9QKmgzGDHNO.html
NEW PRODUCTS AND WAYS TO COLLABORATE INTERNATIONALLY

It is not just in direct teaching and learning that there is potential for colleges to make best use of rapid digitalisation. The expertise of FE and the UK skills systems are of interest to policy makers from dozens of countries who visit each year. Under the pressure of the pandemic, TVET challenges that were already present in some parts of the world could be magnified. Globally, there is a need to stop two things from happening: first, that more learners become marginalised as a result of coronavirus; second, that those who already were disadvantaged become more so.

A 2020 UNESCO report from Jordan\(^\text{17}\) states that “TVET has enabled the provision of learning opportunities to those most at risk in Jordan, including adolescent girls, refugees and vulnerable Jordanian youth. The immediate impact of COVID-19 must be monitored closely, targeting in particular TVET drop-outs and finding innovative ways to address this challenge.” The expertise of UK colleges in working with vulnerable groups is just one area that is valued highly by international counterparts. National Star College, winners of the 2019 British Council International Beacon Award, have undertaken outstanding digital international collaboration in this space already.

The recalibration of learning and teaching methodology can provide the impetus for further international collaboration. Hertford Regional College has been working with a network of training providers in Vietnam to pilot new institutional self-assessment guidelines developed with the Vietnamese Directorate of Vocational Education and Training. This will be delivered online in response to coronavirus. A shared online platform has been developed by the college to support partners during the project. The platform has given partners the opportunity to communicate, evidence progress, review materials and access mentoring support in a live environment.

Dudley College of Technology has developed a bespoke leadership development offer for overseas college leaders which was due to be delivered face to face but will now take place remotely. This approach offers advantages of scalability, minimises the staff time needed for delivery and reduces the carbon footprint of the project. Over time, this model could mean that international partnerships become more accessible to a greater number of organisations, their staff and students.

The British Council has developed new mechanisms to compare international policy and practice in TVET through an Inclusion of Refugees in TVET’ self-assessment tool and an online ‘Apprenticeship Benchmarking Tool’. Other agencies including the ILO, OECD and UNEVOC also provide virtual TVET materials and platforms.

With international travel curtailed for the foreseeable future, it is tempting to narrow focus and concentrate on the local and the day to day. However, in the face of the profound challenges sparked by COVID-19, now is also a time for colleges to reflect on how digitalisation can be utilised, not least in terms of inclusive ways of working, developing new programmes and international TVET demand.

The acute challenge of COVID-19, the effects of the fourth industrial revolution and the climate emergency are not limited by international borders. Nor should the virtual campus of the college of the future be limited; international collaboration will be key in order to address the challenges.

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Governance may be defined as a system of principles, rules, processes and relationships which determine the direction of an organisation and how it is controlled. Interestingly, the two characteristics that have been most prominent in governance in the past few months have been principles and relationships. In many of the AoC Chairs’ Network meetings, participants have reported providing more latitude for their CEOs/principals and senior teams to make the decisions (while retaining some scrutiny) to navigate their colleges safely through the crisis. For instance, one college chair I spoke with explained that the principal was unable to apply the usual processes for procurement of equipment. Another explained that it would have been crippling for executives to operate the usual lengthy cycle for approving plans. This governance shift has not been an abrogation of the responsibilities by the board; on the contrary, in many cases, college boards are meeting more regularly (through remote board meetings) and governance professionals have reported improved attendance and strong challenge. There is, however, the recognition that in these exceptional circumstances, boards need to rely on the competence of the senior post holders they recruited, the culture of trust they have created, the principles that guide decision-making that they have established and the relationships they have nurtured with governance professionals and senior post holders.

An AoC governance perspective – Kurt Hall

GOVERNANCE DURING THE PANDEMIC

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE

The experience of the delivery of digital learning in colleges is powerful evidence of strength in key aspects of college governance. However, as the country moves into a new phase of managing the pandemic and colleges make their longer-term plans, challenging questions are emerging that would (or should) have been addressed had the digital transformation taken place through normal processes. Questions such as: what are the characteristics of effective online or blended learning? In the digital context, what does student engagement mean and how can it be measured? How are vulnerable learners going to be affected? How can teachers be upskilled for a mix of remote and face-to-face learning? How much digital provision can colleges (or do colleges want) to retain after the crisis?

These are questions that a digital governance approach may support colleges in answering. Lisa Welchman, author of Managing Chaos: Digital Governance by Design, defines digital governance as a process allowing organisations to minimise challenges and uncertainty “by clearly establishing accountability and decision making for all matters digital.” The approach emphasises applying familiar principles of governance (e.g. accountability, clearly defined roles and decision-making authority) to three areas: strategy, policy and standards. As illustrated below, these correspond with Ofsted’s three Is.

Similar to the distance that governors have from the operational aspects of curriculum content and delivery, governance of the digital domain is not about understanding the intricacies of IT equipment. Instead, it entails governors:

1. testing the extent to which the plans for the digital activities (across departments e.g. marketing, curriculum, etc.) can be mapped onto the existing college strategy and how clearly the principles that govern decision-making have been defined (e.g. has the executive effectively unpicked the pedagogical requirements for fully or partially digital learning?)

2. setting out clearly who is responsible for what and the corresponding lines of accountability (e.g. as the digital offer becomes more complex in terms of courses and other college services, who ensures quality and makes decisions about resources?)

3. establishing mechanisms which provide effective assurance that the digital activities can independently (or alongside other methods) contribute to positive outcomes for students (e.g. how have students experiencing digital poverty performed and what specific interventions are being developed to address those with vulnerabilities?)

HOW BROADLY APPLICABLE IS A DIGITAL GOVERNANCE APPROACH?

One of the college chairs I spoke with in preparing this paper stated that as difficult as it was for his college to shift almost the entirety of its activities to digital in March 2020, it will be far more difficult to manage the return in September. The college has begun planning for a mixed programme and he anticipates that, by then, more issues with remote learning will be identified. With limitations to experience, training and resources, it will be a very big challenge to address them all effectively. Nevertheless, the college is looking ahead at its ‘digital intent’ for September 2020. As the conversation progressed beyond where the college has been and into next steps, a clearer picture was emerging that began to align with the key principles of digital governance mentioned above. He pointed out that an effective college strategy won’t be built for September but for two to five years. The conversation ended with a reflection on the expectation that executives will need to carefully calibrate digital learning to take account of the different academic levels of students, the numbers of students on different courses and, crucially, the nature of the skills (technical/vocational/academic/practical) that different courses entail.

Digital governance shouldn’t be viewed as an esoteric and unfamiliar new development. It uses familiar principles and tools (such as would be applied to projects) to organise the oversight of the digital landscape. Whether colleges have had a long established and extensive digital presence or have been forced to adopt a model of delivery they didn’t plan for, a series of challenging issues and decisions will emerge. As colleges begin developing systems for oversight of their digital estates, they will need access to experience from colleagues in other colleges and information. AoC is working with colleges and partners to amass expertise, data and resources to provide the necessary support to members.
A YOUNG GOVERNOR’S PERSPECTIVE – HAYDEN TAYLOR

There is no doubt that the sudden shift to ‘digital governance’ will have ramifications for the way in which we elect, induct and support student governors.

As a 23-year-old Governor and an ex-Student Governor of Portsmouth College myself, I know the trials, tribulations and challenges of trying to contribute to and influence a college board made up of way more experienced people than me, including accountants, local business people and academics.

So, three months in to digital governance as the only means of providing challenge and support, has it been easier or harder than normal?

It’s not a clear-cut answer I’m afraid; digital governance offers significant opportunities but, equally, some challenges we will need to be overcome if we are to truly ensure ‘no one is left behind’ by this shift in delivery mode. For many new student governors the concept of meetings being fully digital could make the prospect of taking on the role much easier and far less intrusive. Less travel, less idle chit-chat, less time consumed by conversations veering onto tangents and, overall, more flexibility. That certainly seems attractive to a student who is already time pressed to complete their studies.

However, during the trials, tribulations and challenges of trying to engage with their peers from across the UK.

It is crucial that we continue to find ways to support student governors as digital governance becomes mainstream. After all, engaging a student in governance now could create a lifelong ally for the sector.

A STUDENT GOVERNOR’S PERSPECTIVE – BEN BLANK

From a student governor perspective there have been challenges affecting the quality and efficiency of virtual meetings.

1. Members unable to join meetings, poor quality microphones leading to members having to repeat themselves and governors dropping out of the meetings due to losing connection to the internet.

This can lead to situations such as governors who would normally have a strong and insightful presence during a meeting having little to no impact or contribution.

2. Body language is key during discussions and conversations. Virtual meetings all but remove this aspect from the equation.

3. The flow of the meetings also changes. During the virtual meeting each participant will have their microphones muted aside from whoever is speaking. This leads to at times parts of the meeting becoming like a panel with one person speaking before others asking questions, opposed to a more interactive back and forth conversation during a traditional meeting.

4. However, virtual meetings do have their merits as corporation meetings tend to be very streamlined and more time efficient overall. Being able to participate in these meetings from home also saves the need for long, environmentally damaging commutes.

5. Another advantage to the digital format is the use of the chat function within Microsoft Teams. This allows board members to discuss the current agenda amongst themselves while somebody is talking. While not as interactive or as efficient as a traditional format, this chat function does aid in the efficiency of the meeting.

6. Since switching to hosting the virtual meetings on Microsoft Teams, our clerk has adapted the agendas to an interactive format, with each section broken down with hyperlinks to the relevant sections. From a student governor point of view this has been a welcome addition as it prevents becoming lost in a 400-page document and allows governors to quickly access the relevant section of the agenda.

This has been my first year as a student governor and one of the most challenging and limiting aspects at the beginning of the academic year was engaging during the meetings, and feeling the digital format to be harder. By sitting at home with your microphone muted, it can be difficult to engage without the personal aspect found in an in-person meeting.

Overall, this can potentially be difficult for new student governors to become involved as there are fewer natural opportunities to engage in a virtual meeting.

These three differing and helpful perspectives will highlight the issues and feelings of many governors, clerks and chairs. The future of governance will be digital and blended, so the challenges are now clear. Kurt at AoC, and Hayden at Unloc, will be supporting the amazingly talented, committed and generous governors in our brilliant sector to seek effective solutions to the challenges raised, so that we do, indeed, capitalise on all the opportunities for more effective governance.
CONCLUSION

DAVID CORKE, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & SKILLS POLICY, ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES

In these unprecedented and uncertain times, it seems clear from every article in this publication, it is inevitable that learning post-COVID-19 will be more blended and digitally enabled than it was before the lockdown. It is equally clear that we need to rapidly learn the lessons from the last three months and take urgent action now to realise the full potential of this blended learning future.

Tutors, support staff, governors and leaders have moved mountains to enable remote learning - but if there is one thing this pandemic has taught us is that previous inequalities, shortcomings and work / home life pressures are significantly magnified. Without urgent intervention, investment and action this will continue exponentially with potentially devastating social and economic consequences for individuals, families, businesses, colleges and their communities.

TECH CAPACITY

Technology is meant to be a great leveller, but it is obvious (especially to the students themselves, and their parents and tutors) who in their peer group has fallen either side of the digital divide. Some students were fortunate in having both a suitable quiet space for effective study and their own tech kit and reliable connectivity. Others, lucky to have a suitable device for learning in their home may be sharing it with many others or be connected via a capped or metered connection. At least 25% of FE students relied on mobile phones to try and access and complete their learning.

The government tried to respond quickly through device bursaries, however, the process is not working due to unnecessary bureaucracy. The response from internet service and mobile providers to calls to enable free access to ac.uk content has for the most part been woeful.

Wonderful ideas are starting to emerge in response to access problems, such as the concept of CitizenRoam - a global roaming service that would mimic eduroam or gavroam and be piggybacked off connections in the community.

A decade of substantial under-investment in the FE Sector has clearly contributed to the failure of Technology as the great leveller. Individual learners, and often in significant numbers in some communities, have got left behind, despite the incredible and widely acknowledged effort of all the sector. The risk now is more will, and the gap will widen further, with rapidity.

LEARNING CAPACITY

A recent AoC COVID-19-focused survey found that outside of those impacted by the digital divide, the majority of students were undertaking 75% or more of their planned learning hours.

On the surface this sounds amazing considering the rapid 8-day transition to online learning in lockdown. However, when you dig a little deeper you find that tutors typically report disengagement from many lower level students, ESOL students, students on practical courses and those on the second year of their A Levels. That would represent well over 50% of all those FE students who did manage to access their learning.

Inspectors also noted, unsurprisingly, significant and magnified variations and inconsistencies in the quality of the learning experience, especially between and within subjects and courses in a college, as well as across the 15 FE colleges in their survey.

A post lockdown move to blended learning is evident. However, the online tweak of face-to-face sessions is not working as intended. Online learning is very different from face-to-face contact of the classroom, not only for social interaction but also for the instant feedback and opportunity to ask questions that it provides. Ofsted also found that colleges had developed good protocols to safeguard students in live lessons, that the preferred sessions that allowed for interaction with tutors and other students. Interestingly, Learners also describe missing the face-to-face contact of the classroom, not only for social interaction but also for the instant feedback and opportunity to ask questions that it provides.

Government need to do more invest at scale in content curation and creation to meet the needs of these learners and those that teach them.

Ofsted’s recently completed survey of online provision of ‘visited’ 20 further education and skills providers and found very similar patterns. Ofsted also found that colleges had developed good protocols to safeguard students in live lessons, that the preferred sessions that allowed for interaction with tutors and other students. Interestingly, Learners also describe missing the face-to-face contact of the classroom, not only for social interaction but also for the instant feedback and opportunity to ask questions that it provides. Inspectors also noted, unsurprisingly, significant and magnified variations and inconsistencies in the quality of the learning experience, especially between and within subjects and courses in a college, as well as across the 15 FE colleges in their survey.

Another widely acknowledged and emerging issue is that online learning has a very different pedagogy, and skills set, to face to face learning. Many hard-working, talented, and very professional Tutors have not had the kit, or sustained effective training to develop their confidences and skills as masters of digital learning. The risk is we may lose these dedicated staff who feel inadequate and under-prepared for the challenge of a blended learning future.

CONCLUSION
LEADER AND SYSTEM CAPACITY

The demands on teachers and leaders right now is immense. Delayed/calculated or adapted assessments to deal with, keeping the remote learning show on the road whilst managing safe short and September returns to learning is no mean feat. The articles found in this eBook show that those that were able to invest in all forms of digital infrastructure, including tutor CPD are those that were best placed to respond to the crisis.

To ensure that no student or apprentice is left behind, we need to learn from their authors and this crisis to enable a 'digital first' FE sector. Informed by this work, Jisc and AoC are now working together to build a case for:

1. Funding to create a national online repository of high-quality interactive content specifically designed for vocational and skills-based delivery. This will include ‘bite size’ micro-credentialed content endorsed by industry sectors.

2. Increased funding to ensure accessibility for all FE learners to online resources is safeguarded through resilient and reliable connectivity.

3. Investment in the development and adoption of new assessment methodologies designed for secure remote delivery.


5. Supporting sector professionals to augment education where appropriate utilising digital assistants, automated workflows, data analytics, flexible working and reduced workflow.

6. The digital infrastructure required to support a skills led recovery.

With all this in place, in an integrated and timely fashion to allow for effective implementation, the future won’t just be bright, it will be blended.
AUTHORS’ BIOGRAPHIES

Steve Frampton MBE, President, Association of Colleges

Dorset born, with a lifelong passion for post-16 education, sport, music, student voice, entrepreneurship and environmental issues, Steve Frampton was the first in his family to enter post-16 education. He gained a BSc First Class Honours at Leicester University in 1979.

The following decade saw teaching roles at Princes College, Fareham, with Steve writing the CEE syllabus for Archaeology, and becoming the Chief Examiner for A Level Geography. During this time, he also became a published author, with 14 geology and geography textbooks, alongside leading a number of geology expeditions to Iceland and the Massif Central.

In the nineties, Steve was Head of Humanities and Earth Sciences at Peter Symonds College, Winchester, with additional part-time roles with Ofsted, before becoming Vice Principal of St Vincent College in his home town of Gosport.

From 2005 until August 2018 Steve was Principal of Portsmouth College, winner of the AoC Beacon Trust for Collaboration (2010) and the Use of Technology to Improve Learning (2017). He was director of several local community charities, including, PiTC to Improve Learning (2017). He was director of Portsmouth College, winner of the AoC Beacon Trust for Collaboration (2010) and the Use of Technology to Improve Learning (2017).

Steve saw Steve and the college featured in the business pages, a reputation for innovation and creative thinking was further reinforced. He is patron of the mental health Charity Off the Record in Portsmouth and Havant.

2017 saw Steve’s extensive career being recognised at the highest level, with the awarding of a MBE for Services to Education in the Queen’s New Year Honours.

In August 2018 Steve was appointed President of Association of Colleges. He is also Chair of AoC Services and on the AoC Sport Board and Charitable Trust.

David Corke, Director of Education & Skills Policy, Association of Colleges

David Corke has over a decade of experience in FE senior management and is now responsible for education and skills policy at the Association of Colleges. As well as working in and leading curriculum and business support areas at a number of FE colleges, David has led commercial and professional services departments at the Peter Jones Foundation and in the IT industry.

David is also a qualified teacher who has taught learners from entry level through to Masters level. His doctoral research and broad research interests focus on FE policy and the marketisation of education.

Kurt Hall, Governance Adviser, Association of Colleges

Kurt started his career as a Post-Doctoral Research Associate working on institutional governance at the University of Bradford. He then worked for the Future Leaders Trust (now Ambition Institute) overseeing the delivery of their leadership development programme for senior leaders in challenging schools in Yorkshire and the North East.

Kurt was a Senior Adviser at the New Schools Network where he aided new and established MATs in developing and improving their governance arrangements. While at NSN Kurt was the project manager responsible for planning and delivering the London Screen Academy (LSA), a flagship 16-19 college in North London. In this role he was able to support and collaborate with a number of FE colleges on governance.

AUTHORS’ BIOGRAPHIES

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TechAbility would like to acknowledge the funding from The Karten Network which enabled the start-up of TechAbility, along with Rohan Slaughter.
Currently, Kurt is the Governance Adviser at AoC where he supports college boards nationally. Kurt works with partners in and outside the FE sector to think strategically about the future of college governance and to develop resources, training and events for governors and governance professionals.

Emma Meredith, International Director, Association of Colleges

Emma Meredith is International Director at the Association of Colleges (AoC). After teaching English overseas, in 2002 she started working in international education taking posts within the public, private, higher and further education sectors in locations across England and Scotland. At AoC Emma is responsible for supporting colleges with their international strategies and for leading AoC’s international policy work with the government. She represents the FE sector on advisory groups with the Home Office, Department for International Trade and the British Council. WorldSkills competitions and Brexit are also in her remit. Emma joined AoC from Edinburgh College where she managed the college’s international portfolio and ESOL curriculum. She graduated in languages from the University of Cambridge after studying at her local sixth form college.

Anthony Bravo, Principal, Basingstoke College of Technology

He qualified as a teacher at Newcastle University, after gaining a degree in Agriculture and Environmental Science. Education has always been his passion, although he loved working in the private sector and became the first graduate management trainee at Marks & Spencer’s flagship Marble Arch store.

Anthony re-entered the education sector some 20 years ago and remained for 15 of those years in an FE environment, focusing particularly on partnership, community, income generation and most recently workforce development. In July 2003, he was appointed to set up Crossways Academy, Lewisham which became a CISCO world reference site for use of ICT in education, as well as providing a template for integrated smart building technology.

Anthony is also pleased to serve as a Governor for Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, representing North Hampshire and West Berkshire.

Scott Hayden, Digital Innovation Specialist/ Lecturer of Creative Media Production, Basingstoke College of Technology

Scott is a lecturer/manager of a digital team at BCoT that supports and trains students and staff in using digital, creative, and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. He has received praise and recognition for his work developing new pedagogical approaches using media and EdTech across all subjects. In 2018 the team he created and built around students and apprentices won the TES FE Award for ‘Outstanding use of Technology for improving Teaching, Learning and Assessment 2018’ and was named in the EdTech50. More recently, Scott and his team have secured BCoT’s EdTech Demonstrator status as one of the top-performing education providers in the country in the application of technology to support teaching and learning.

Scott is a Google Certified Innovator, a National Teaching Awards Silver Winner, and a National Adviser for EdTech UK.

Chris Cooper, Principal, Skills Systems, British Council

Chris is an economist with over 25 years’ experience of working in the skills development, lifelong learning and labour market policy environment. His particular expertise is in employer engagement and labour market intelligence. Chris joined the British Council in November 2012 and leads its skills systems technical assistance work. He has been technical adviser for our EC-funded skills projects in Macedonia, Morocco, Nepal, Libya and global VET Toolkit as well as our DfID skills projects in Bangladesh and Nepal. Previously Chris has advised on the establishment of the University for Industry and developing Becta’s E-maturity framework.

Andy Hall, Senior Consultant (Policy), Skills Systems, British Council

Andy is a Senior Consultant specialising in Skills Systems Policy at the British Council. He has worked globally on education reform projects focused on a range of issues including apprenticeships, labour market analysis and systems governance. He has commissioned a range of TVET research pieces including those on devolution and how systemic reform impacts upon employment outcomes. For the last four years Andy has led the British Council’s Skills Policy after including facilitating a range of seminars for Education Ministers and policy makers on topics such as inclusion, education in post-conflict societies and employer engagement. He has previously held roles at WorldSkills UK, the Skills Funding Agency and the King’s Fund.

Stuart Rimmer, Chief Executive Officer, East Coast College and Chair of the AoC Mental Health Policy Group

Stuart Rimmer is the Principal/Chief Executive at East Coast College. He moved to East Anglia six years ago from the North West to take up the principal role in Great Yarmouth before leading the merger of Lowestoft College and Great Yarmouth College in 2017 and then a further merger between East Coast College and Lowestoft Sixth Form College in 2018.

Stuart has worked in education at a senior level for over 15 years following a career in textile manufacturing and financial services. He now serves on the New Anglia LEP Skills Board and also chairs the national policy group relating to mental health at the Association of Colleges. He is considered to have a leading national role in the development of wellbeing and mental health within education. He contributes regularly to the Times Educational Supplement and many other national publications. He is a Visiting Senior Fellow for leadership and management at the University of Suffolk and also works as a wellbeing and performance coach with corporate clients.

Vikki Liogier, National Head of EdTech & Digital Skills, Education & Training Foundation

Vikki Liogier is National Head of EdTech and Digital Skills at the Education and Training Foundation, the national support body for the further education and training sector. She is French and has been living in England since 1987. She initially worked as a freelance illustrator and taught graphic design and illustration at South Thames College. In 1993 Vikki acquired her first Apple Mac, Wacom tablet, colour printer, Adobe suite and scanner, as she could foresee the impact such technology would have on the creative industries and education. From then on, she pursued her interest in the exploration and embedding of digital literacy and capability into her life and course delivery.

In 2008, as a keen technology early adopter, Vikki decided to refocus her career on change management and digital capability where she has worked since and was awarded a personal EdTech50 award in March 2018. @vikkiliogier

Debra Gray, Principal, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education and Deputy Chief Executive, TEC Partnership

Deb Gray has 25 years’ experience in further education, with 15 of those as a front-line FE teacher. She started her career in the North East teaching in prison and specialist adult education before a professional detour into the private sector to run an IT solutions company. The pull of FE was too strong, and she returned to the sector as a lecturer in public services before progressing into a variety of leadership roles. She was appointed Principal of Grimsby Institute in 2015 and was instrumental in the College being judged outstanding by Ofsted in 2017. Deb is a veteran gamer and a self-confessed science fiction geek; she credits these interests with the development of a lifelong love of the power of technology to entertain, create and learn. She has an MSc in Criminal Justice, an MA in Educational Leadership and an extensive publishing record. She
serves as a board member for Jisc, is a member of the DfE’s national EdTech Leadership Group and sits on AoC’s Quality and Accountability policy group.

Deborah Millar, Executive Director of Digital Innovation, TEC Partnership

Deborah Millar has over thirty years’ experience working in further and higher education. Since Feb 2018, she has been Executive Group Director for Digital Learning Technologies at the Grimsby Institute. Passionate about educational excellence, she is responsible for providing staff and students with an outstanding teaching and learning experience, enriched through the creative use of EdTech. With a background in creative communication, Deborah has practised as a design professional. She has led courses in graphic design, advertising and visual communication at both FE and HE level. Further to this, she has been a course consultant and external verifier for design schools in Malaysia, Indonesia and China.

Throughout her career, Deborah has forged successful collaborations with internal, external and international stakeholders. Her internationally recognised model of digital pedagogy, the LearningWheel demonstrates her proven track record for partnership working, sharing best practice and knowledge exchange via crowdsourcing.

Kelly Edwards, Director of Quality and Professional Development, Harlow College

Kelly Edwards has taught and managed in FE across a range of subjects for over 26 years. She believes that well-supported teachers are the key to student achievement and taking time to coach teachers to develop their toolkit is the way to positive and successful delivery teams.

As Director of Quality she led an outstanding college-wide strategy allowing Harlow College to achieve Apple Distinguished School status twice. Bespoke training has ensured staff have opportunities to embed the use of digital technologies within their delivery and assessment, whilst providing students with amazing learning and teaching experiences.

I am passionate about helping staff to achieve their fullest potential. I love the use of growth mindset to drive performance and innovation in individuals and teams. Presenting at a range of conferences including JISC Digital and the AoC and actively engage in support and development sessions for staff and students within college.

David Monk, E-Learning Development Coordinator, Harlow College

David Monk has over twenty years’ experience of working with the development of digital and information technologies to support learning, teaching and assessment at Harlow College. Starting from a learning resources background, he introduced learning technologies and digital information services in the college and has worked on various projects, including leading a Learning Futures project on blended learning in 2016 which helped to develop the introduction of the college’s iPads for All strategy. In his role as E-Learning Development Coordinator and member of the Digital Innovation Team he is fully involved in supporting the iPads for All strategy through leading the Digital Leaders and Ambassadors initiative, running training workshops, coordinating the adoption of Jisc’s Digital Insights surveys, assisting in the iPad rollout and rollback programme and carrying out digital projects.

Karen Spencer, Principal and Chief Executive, Harlow College

Karen Spencer is Principal and Chief Executive at Harlow College and Stansted Airport College. The colleges hold Apple Distinguished Status, an International Kitemark for Innovation in Learning Technologies.

Karen has worked in the post-16 sector for 25 years and takes an active interest in all aspects of education; she is particularly interested in how the curriculum can better meet the needs of young people and adults to make them more employable, giving them excellent careers.

Karen is also a Fellow of the Institute of Mathematics and its applications and is a member of the Royal Society Post-16 Mathematics contact group. She also sits on the NESTA Education Committee and Chairs a Parliamentary group for Aviation STEM Jobs and Skills.

Claire Heywood, Vice Principal Inclusive, Commercial & Employer Learning, Heart of Worcestershire College

Claire is currently a Vice Principal of Inclusive, Commercial & Employer Learning at Heart of Worcestershire College where she is responsible for areas of curriculum and corporate services including Inclusive learning (NEET, SEN, ESOL, Community, IT), Apprenticeships, Marketing and Sales and the Blended Learning team & consortium. Prior to this role she has been at the College for over 20 years and in that time has undertaken several other posts starting with learning support assistant after successful work experience on a BTEC ND Social Care course proving that retention and progression in FE is a real thing.

Along the way she completed her degree, teaching qualifications and MSc in Educational Leadership and Management and is passionate about the right and access to education for all, especially those for who it’s a less obvious or easy choice. One of her most successful students is her dog Harry; however, Claire can claim little credit for his good behaviour on account of his motivation by treat tendencies, being a Labrador.

Amy Holler, Head of Blended Learning, Heart of Worcestershire College

Amy moved into education after a career in the hospitality industry, specialising in wine. Her teaching career started at University College Birmingham where her interest in the use of emerging technologies within teaching and learning developed after wanting to find an alternative and engaging way of teaching wine studies to 16-18 year old students. This resulted in her developing Wine Find, a wine and food pairing app that achieved commercial success and went to the top of the app store lifestyle chart. Amy went on to complete an MBA at Aston Business School and became Director of Teaching and Learning Enhancement at UCB in 2016, before moving to Heart of Worcestershire College in 2019 as the Head of Blended Learning, leading the Blended Learning Consortium.

Stuart Laverick became Chief Executive/Principal of Heart of Worcestershire College in 2014 on its creation as a result of the merger of Worcester College of Technology with North East Worcestershire College, having previously been CEO/Principal of Worcester College of Technology.

His teaching career started in a comprehensive in Derby, where he progressed onto Derby College and then the University. Missing FE, he returned to the sector as Assistant Principal at Rotherham College of Technology, then as Vice Principal at East Durham College, before moving to Sunderland College as Deputy Principal/Deputy Chief Executive.

Stuart is a member of the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership Board and Finance, Audit and Risk Committee. Stuart is Chair of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) FE group, Post16/FE Committee and is a member of the Executive Board. He was instrumental in the formation of the Blended Learning Consortium (BLC), which Heart of Worcestershire College leads.

Dr John Chapman, Head of Security Operations Centre, Jisc

Dr John Chapman is head of Jisc’s security operations centre with responsibility for the teams of security analysts who help protect the Janet network and connected organisations. He has a particular focus on strategy, policy and researching the security landscape for education and research, including...
leading Jisc’s annual cyber security posture survey. John has a background in education technology strategy and policy and experience of working with schools, colleges, universities, suppliers, local and central government departments on the use of information and communications technology. He has an MBA in Cyber Security and is CISSP and CISM certified.

Marc Dobson, Subject Specialist (Infrastructure: Applications), Jisc

Marc Dobson is a subject specialist within the infrastructure team at Jisc. His particular focus is on applications but also advises Jisc members in all areas of infrastructure and management of IT teams within further and higher education. The team also provides a popular infrastructure review service to Jisc members. Marc has worked at Jisc as a subject specialist since 2015, prior to which he worked at the former Jisc advisory service Netskills based at Newcastle University and has been involved in technology within education and research since 1999.

Ben Blank, President of Student Union and Student Governor, Kirklees College

Ben Blank is the President of the Students Union and a Student Governor at Kirklees College, West Yorkshire. Originally sitting A Levels in Physics, Chemistry and Biology before deciding to follow his passion for animals, he is currently studying for an HND in Animal Management with a particular interest in population dynamics and ecology. Since attending a student governor training programme hosted by Unloc and the annual AoC conference, he has had a keen interest in student governance and the responsibilities that accompany it.

Polly Harrow, Assistant Principal, Kirklees College and Chair of NAMSS

Polly Harrow has worked in the further education sector for over 20 years, having started her career in education as an A Level Literature and Language teacher. Having progressed to college management, she took a keen interest in the pastoral care aspects of student life and ensuring that policies and processes offered equality and inclusion to all. She is a passionate advocate for the sector, particularly in the realm of the support and safeguarding of vulnerable students. Polly is currently Assistant Principal for Safeguarding, Support and Inclusion at Kirklees College in West Yorkshire and is also the Chair of the National Association of Managers of Student Services (NAMSS), a strong post-16 network of support and safeguarding practitioners. She is also an Associate of the Education and Training Foundation.

Alistair McNaught, Lead Consultant, McNaught Consultancy Limited

Alistair McNaught started life as a geography teacher. He was an early adopter of e-learning in a highly supportive environment at Peter Symonds College, Winchester. Exploring the pedagogical benefits of digital technology led to a secondment at BECTA’s Further Education team where his focus moved from pedagogical opportunities to accessibility and inclusion. He was appointed as a senior adviser at the Jisc TechDis service in 2004 until its restructure in 2015 where he joined Jisc as a subject specialist in accessibility and inclusion.

Hannah H, Further Education Engagement Lead, National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC)

Hannah H leads engagement with the further education sector for the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), part of GCHQ. The NCSC was set up in 2016 to bring together various parts of government tackling cyber security challenges right across the economy and society, seeking to make the UK the safest place to live and work online. NCSC’s work includes responding to cyber incidents, nurturing the cyber security capability of the country and reducing the risks to private and public sector networks.

Gemma Conway, Curriculum Leader for Science and Access to HE, Portsmouth College

Gemma Conway is the Curriculum leader for Science and Access to HE as well as teaching Biology and Medical Science. She has worked at Portsmouth College for four years and prior to being a teacher worked in coastal and marine management.

Since joining Portsmouth College Gemma has worked as a Learning Champion and as part of this role has worked with staff, through Teaching and Learning Communities, to embed technology with innovative teaching and learning. She was also involved in the college bid to become an Apple Distinguished School. Gemma is passionate about the student learning experience and how this can be enhanced through the use of technology.

Emily Pountney, Vice Principal Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Portsmouth College

Emily Pountney is currently Vice Principal at Portsmouth College. She has enjoyed working in sixth form colleges for over 20 years, with the last six years in senior roles in the areas of Curriculum Leadership, Staff Development and Teaching & Learning and strongly believes in the opportunities and aspirations sixth form education gives to young people.

As part of the Senior Leadership Team at Portsmouth College Emily has played a role in the successes of the college including the culture of innovation and creativity in particular the introduction of a new timetable, the college wide Apple project, the E6 ‘life curriculum’ programme and the introduction of Learning Champions to support the development of Teaching & Learning using technology.

Chris Wood, Curriculum Leader for Performing Arts and Apple Distinguished Educator, Portsmouth College

Chris Wood is the Curriculum Leader for Performing Arts, Music, Dance and Drama as well as teaching both Music Technology and Media Studies at Portsmouth College. He has worked at Portsmouth College for nearly ten years and innovation is at the heart of everything he does.

As an Apple Distinguished Educator and the digital lead at Portsmouth College, Chris spends a lot of his time working with both staff and students to drive teaching and learning through the use of technology. In 2020, Portsmouth College became an Apple Distinguished School - only the second college in the UK to achieve this, which Chris played a vital role in. As part of his Apple Distinguished Educator role, Chris also works locally in the community and with other schools to develop their use of Apple technology within the classroom.

Neil Beck, Assistive Technologist, TechAbility

Neil works in both specialist and mainstream education with both adults and children. He enjoys the challenges it brings, the difference it makes and the fantastic work he observes every day. Through assessments, training and helping organisations directly he is aiming to widen his impact and work towards raising the standards of technology across the board.

Neil delivers assistive technology consultancy and training on behalf of TechAbility, a Natspec service. TechAbility directly supports specialist colleges and Karten Centres as well as providing training to the wider FE and skills sector. Alongside supporting students at National Star College Neil also develops and delivers the colleges outreach programme, he is the Karten Lead for the organisation, is coordinating a number of European projects. The most recent of these projects is looking at practice and perspectives
across Europe in Assistive Technology. Talk to him about what you want to achieve with your learners, how technology fits into this picture and what yoga poses he has been trying/failing to get into.

Fil McIntyre, Assistive Technologist, TechAbility

Fil McIntyre is passionate about the advantages the right technology can give to enhance life, communication and learning. He has provided training in assistive technology hardware and software to a wide range of professionals from schools, colleges, universities, charities and healthcare. Fil delivers assistive technology consultancy and training on behalf of TechAbility, a Natspec service. TechAbility directly supports specialist colleges and Karten Centres as well as providing training to the wider FE and skills sector. In addition to his TechAbility role, Fil is the Lead Assistive Technologist at Beaumont College in Lancaster where he manages a team which assesses and supports students so they gain maximum advantage from technology.

Prior to Beaumont College, as part of The BRITE Initiative, Fil delivered Assistive Technology training and support to every college in Scotland. Other positions Fil has held in this field are at Inclusive Technology delivering training and consultancy in schools, colleges and care services across the UK and Assistive Technologist at Seashell Trust School and College in Manchester.

Hayden Taylor, Managing Director, Unloc

Hayden Taylor is a 23-year-old social entrepreneur and young leader. Hayden’s organisation Unloc works to develop the education system to put young people as changemakers at its heart. Unloc supports over 10,000 young people in UK schools and further education colleges every year through a range of initiatives on leadership, student voice, entrepreneurship and career pathways. Key to this work in further education is Unloc’s flagship National Student Governor Programme, in partnership with the Association of Colleges, which supports young people on governing bodies to be effective policy influencers. Hayden is also a proud One Young World Ambassador and Jo Cox Memorial Scholar, alongside his various trustee and directorship appointments.

Jon Hofgartner, Director of Technology, Learning Resources and Progression Skills, Weston College

Jon leads the development and mobilisation of the College’s digital strategy, including the integration of technology in teaching, learning and working. The strategy maintains a sharp focus on skills, workplace readiness and industry innovation, ensuring both learners and staff have the digital skills, capabilities and technologies to succeed in learning, life and work.

A regular member of the AoC Technology Special Interest Group, Microsoft Showcase Colleges group and Jisc Community Champions, Jon works across the sector on various themes of digital transformation, exploring new and emerging technologies to guide the College’s strategy and share best practice. With a background in Computer Science and IT services, Jon has been active in the EdTech sector since 2006, joining Weston College in 2012. Jon now oversees the development of digital learning, digital workforce development, technical support for learning technologies and library centres and programmes for digital skills, literacies and academic development.

Dr Paul Phillips CBE Ph.D D.Litt Ed.D, Principal and Chief Executive, Weston College

Dr Paul Phillips joined Weston College in 2001, transforming it from poor financial security and results to achieving Ofsted ‘outstanding’ (2013), TES ‘College of the Year’ (2015), and ‘TEF’ Gold for its University Centre (2018) - always placing the learner first.

He has driven the College’s national reputation (seven AoC Beacon Awards), including Mental Health and Wellbeing (2018) with his innovative Body and Mind strategy being a key factor in the College being awarded a place on the Young Minds ‘Amplified Trailblazer’ programme. His great interest in SEND won a Queen’s Anniversary Prize (2018) and saw the College become a national SEND Centre for Excellence (2019). His capability in workforce development (Investors in People Platinum) also led Weston College to win the 2019 Lloyds Bank National Employer of the Year.

He has represented colleges regionally and nationally e.g. AoC Board level/Principals’ Professional Council and was appointed a ‘National Leader in Further Education’ in 2017 as well as winning TES FE Leader of the Year in 2019. His significant investment in digital since 2015 has enabled Weston College to be recognised as a Microsoft Showcase College (2018). He is an active supporter of digital collaboration as an IOT/ digital T Level lead.