ALT responds to Digital teaching and learning during the coronavirus pandemic: Call for evidence[1]

Written response submitted by Dr Maren Deepwell, chief executive, on behalf of the Association for Learning Technology, registered charity number 1160039.

Our response is focused on the case studies and input provided by ALT Members. Many of ALT's Member Institutions have also submitted individual responses.
This sections provides a summary of the key questions we have responded to (you can access the full list of questions here):

Summary

1. ALT is making this submission as a membership body, representing over 3,000 individuals and organisations, including universities, colleges and e-learning businesses from across the UK;
2. As the leading professional body for Learning Technology in the UK, ALT has been providing crisis support throughout the pandemic and we are well placed to respond rapidly to the changing needs of our Members and the wider community we serve;
3. Learning Technology professionals have an important role to play in advising

[1] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/digital-teaching-and-learning-in-english-higher-education-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-call-for-evidence/

policy makers, helping institutions develop informed and effective use of technology for learning, teaching and assessment, and supporting educators and learners to develop appropriate skills;
4. With a greater shift to online provision Learning Technology expertise is essential to help institutions make informed decisions and set longer term strategies beyond the current crisis.

In our submission we make the following recommendations:

5. Institutions should support Learning Technology professionals more strongly in particular where overall digital learning and teaching has been upscaled significantly and resources have been stretched including offering staff professional recognition through established accreditation pathways such as CMALT.
6. Institutions should adopt ethical frameworks for the adoption of Learning Technology such as proctoring software.
7. Government should increase its efforts to support people to develop their digital skills and improve access to online learning in particular for those in digital poverty.
8. Government should mandate that all publicly funded educational resources be licenced openly as Open Educational Resources (OERs) to support knowledge sharing and collaboration between institutions and encourage providers to support the Open COVID Pledge for Education[2].
9. The Office for Students should work with professional and sector bodies to highlight best examples of online learning and to promote these more widely.
10. The Office for Students update its definition of digital poverty to apply to staff as well as students and that this should be taken into account in this review as it impacts on learning and teaching.

We would further welcome that the Office for Students consider use of broader definitions instead of 'remote delivery' and 'digital learning and teaching' in future, reflecting the rich reality of Learning Technology in active blended, hybrid and fully online learning, teaching and assessment. Assessment is a key part of the student experience and a driver of learning design and delivery.

[2] https://www.alt.ac.uk/about-alt/what-we-do/open-covid-pledge-education

ALT's consultation response

Responses to key questions

Our response is focused on the case studies included in this document and input provided by ALT Members. Many of ALT's Member Institutions have also submitted individual responses.

This sections provides a summary of the key questions we have responded to (you can access the full list of questions here):

How did the move to remote teaching and learning affect you (or your university or college, subject, students, or business)?

ALT's Members were severely affected by the move to remote teaching and learning. Members had to adjust to working from home and under difficult circumstances for themselves and their families, often having to make the move with little or no notice as campuses were closed.

At the same time Members had to support everyone else in education moving online, scaling up support for staff and students overnight and in a crisis situation. Learning Technology professionals played a pivotal role in enabling institutions to continue to provide learning, teaching and assessment, often working far above and beyond what could normally be expected for weeks and months at a time. Their expertise and commitment has been a key factor in allowing HEIs to continue to operate during this period. The role of the learning technologist is often under-appreciated and under-valued, but the pandemic has highlighted how central they are to the robust operation of all HEIs.

In contrast to workers who were on furlough or working reduced hours, professionals working in Learning Technology saw their workload, responsibilities and pressure increase significantly and this has continued to be the case as the autumn terms get underway. See also Digital Education Practices Podcast for first hand accounts.

> *The pandemic has simply served to accentuate inequalities that we already had in teaching and learning, especially in wider further education - which was a neglected area in learning technology use/research compared to HE in the first place.*
> *Though many large general FE colleges are relatively well financed and well served digitally, the digital divide between them and other areas in the sector - particularly adult and community learning (ACL) , third sector learning, some work-based learning (WBL) and particularly offender and secure estate learning - is stark.*
> Lynne Taylerson, Director Real Time Education, CMALT

How has digital technology supported the move to remote delivery?

We have seen that technology has supported online delivery through a) providing the tools and platforms necessary to support learning, teaching and assessment, b) connecting students and staff and c) enabling resources and content to be shared openly, providing crisis support across sectors.
In the context of professional development and upskilling the workforce, examples from

ALT's Members include the development of a Digital First model at the City of Glasgow College (https://www.cityofglasgowcollege.ac.uk/learningandteachingacademy), Practical Teaching with Technology MOOC - University of London and Online Pivot – some Open University resources show how strongly technology has been used to create and share resources supporting learning, teaching and assessment.

What are the advantages of delivering teaching and learning digitally?
Without being able to digitally deliver learning and teaching, education provision would have been disrupted even further during this year and the workforce would have been unable to work from home as widely as has been the case.

Learning Technology has been widely and successfully used for many years and at scale to enhance the learning experience. This reflects not only the expectations of both learners and employers, but also the rich, creative and engaging pedagogical strategies deployed in education. from online degrees to blended learning, bite-sized CPD provision and global collaboration in partnership with industry experts.

Yet the discourse about technology in education, particularly in this crisis, has been dominated by a different narrative, one that reflects not the professionalism and expertise we have in the UK's education sectors, but the worst examples of emergency provision, devised in haste and delivered by staff facing a global pandemic.

The power of technology and the internet to connect us, help staff and students to collaborate and share knowledge and resources has been absolutely crucial to our ability to weather this crisis.

How do you envisage teaching and learning delivery will change in the next three years?
We expect to see greater recognition of the importance of Learning Technology professionals at all levels of education providers, from technical to academic and leadership roles. ALT's Annual Survey highlights how widely decision making within institutions now includes professionals with expertise in Learning Technology, recognising the value of that experience.

We further anticipate that we will continue to see an increase in demand for Learning Technology professionals including Learning Technologists, Learning Designers, Instructional Designers, ICT Specialists, Educational Technologists, Digital Learning Specialists and so forth. These roles will need to be more highly valued and respected than hitherto, given their central role in HEI operation.

We also already see a steep rise in the demand of upskilling and supporting academic and administrative staff in skills relating to the effective use of Learning Technology. Providing agreed means for achieving and accrediting these skills will be important for the improved recognition of learning technology within institutions.

We have seen an increase in individuals and institutions sharing content, and accessing free open education resources (for example the Open University's OpenLearn repository). There is an opportunity to encourage the development and sharing of learning resources, thus drastically reducing the overall replication in the HE/FE sector

and improving quality overall.

ALT is currently working on a new ethical framework for Learning Technology which will provide an important basis for upscaling use of technology procurement, design and implementation. Many HEIs are now in the position of shifting most, if not all of their learning online. As such they are adopting technology at a quicker pace than normal. The impacts of these technologies on students should be foregrounded, and not just adopted for institutional convenience, for example serious ethical and privacy issues have been raised around the deployment of exam proctoring software.

What are the strategic opportunities arising from the shift in delivery mode for the medium to longer term?
We see the main strategic opportunities to be growing individual, institutional and national expertise in Learning Technology, and we have already seen a steep rise in recruitment of roles with such a focus.

There is an urgent need to recognise the professional standing of Learning Technology further, and to ensure their expertise informs institutional policies and future planning to a great degree - enabling providers to sustain the upscaling of technology used for learning, teaching and assessment.

We also see this as an opportunity to continue to upskills the general workforce and student communities in critical digital literacies including data privacy and ethical implications.

The shift to digital delivery modes also presents an important opportunity to increase support for the adoptions of Open Educational Resources and Open Educational Practices[3].

What is the main way government, higher education provider leaders, teachers or students could improve digital teaching and learning across the higher education sector?
Institutions should support Learning Technology professionals more strongly in particular where overall digital learning and teaching has been upscaled significantly and resources have been stretched including offering staff professional recognition through established accreditation pathways such as CMALT.

Institutions should adopt ethical frameworks for the adoption of Learning Technology such as proctoring software.

Government should increase its efforts to support people to develop their digital skills and improve access to online learning in particular for those in digital poverty.

Government should mandate that all publicly funded educational resources be licenced openly as Open Educational Resources (OERs) to support knowledge sharing and collaboration between institutions and encourage providers to support the Open COVID Pledge for Education[4].

[3] https://repository.alt.ac.uk/2425/
[4] https://www.alt.ac.uk/about-alt/what-we-do/open-covid-pledge-education

The Office for Students should work with professional and sector bodies to highlight best examples of online learning and to promote these more widely.

The Office for Students update its definition of digital poverty to apply to staff as well as students and that this should be taken into account in this review as it impacts on learning and teaching.

We would further welcome that the Office for Students consider use of broader definitions instead of ‘remote delivery’ and ‘digital learning and teaching’ in future, reflecting the rich reality of Learning Technology in active blended, hybrid and fully online learning, teaching and assessment. Assessment is a key part of the student experience and a driver of learning design and delivery.

References and case studies

ALT consulted its Members and the wider community through an open consultation from 17 September to 9 October 2020.

Also included are the resources previously collated for and by ALT's Members and other bodies whom ALT collaborates with.

We note our thanks to all who responded and provided input to this consultation response.

- Move to Online Learning: 12 Key Ideas - A reflection on the lessons of the last eight weeks of helping people think about teaching online.
- Planning for Autumn 2020? For those who made a rapid #PivotToOnline in response to #COVID19, our reflective tool prompts you to think about what worked well, what was less successful and implications for Autumn 2020 and beyond.
- Supporting Student Learning Online: Rapid Response Toolkit - Heriot Watt University
- Digital Education Resources - Heriot Watt University
- Blog: Supporting Student Learning Online: Rapid Response Toolkit - Heriot Watt University
- The Participation Pivot...by Sheila MacNeill
- Pivot to Online: A Student Guide - Sean Michael Morris
- CILT online teaching portal
- Practical Teaching with Technology MOOC - University of London
- The online pivot – student perspective - Martin Weller
- Online Pivot – some Open University resources - Martin Weller/OU
- Pivot to Online Wakelet - Dom Pates
- When the VLE becomes your campus: some thoughts on engaging learners online - Gabi Witthaus
- The Covid19 2020 Educational Classroom Change: Transition from Face to Face to Teaching Online - Margaret Krone
- Videoconferencing Alternatives: How Low-Bandwidth Teaching Will Save Us All
- ACADEMIA IN THE TIME OF COVID-19: OUR CHANCE TO DEVELOP AN ETHICS OF CARE
- A Remote Learning Guide written by Students for Students: How to ensure your remote learning experience is effective, supportive and fun.
- Extraordinary Stories of Open and Online in the COVID-19 Era
- OER Commons Education Resources
- The Mason OER Metafinder
- Supporting Student Learning Online - contributed by Heriot Watt University
- How to #KeepTeaching During Covid-19 - contributed by Dublin Technological University
- How colleges can prepare for coronavirus closure - Kate Parker
- The COVID-19 online pivot - Martin Weller
- Open Educational Resources - University of Edinburgh
- Back To School After Lockdown – Tips From An NHS Psychologist
- Online Delivery of Intensive Software Engineering Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic - Barr, M. , Nabi, S. W. and Somerville, D. (2020)

- Learn from AnyWhere - Duncan Peberdy
- Digital Education Blog UCL - Samantha Ahern
- Digital Education Practices Podcast - Dustin Hosseini
- The Learning & Teaching Academy City of Glasgow College - Joe Wilson
- Making Digital History - Jamie Wood
- Open at the Margins - Lynne Taylerson
- ERASMUS+ Virtual Exchange - Theresa MacKinnon
- UCL Moving to Online Teaching and Homeworking (MOTH) - Jo Stroud
- Case studies - Jo Stroud

A note on the terms used

We note that for the purposes of this call for evidence the Office for Students has taken defined the terms used as follows:

- **Digital poverty**: We propose that a student is in digital poverty if they are without access to one of the core items of digital infrastructure, which are: appropriate hardware, appropriate software, reliable access to the internet, technical support and repair when required, a trained teacher or instructor and an appropriate study space.
- **Remote delivery**: Teaching and learning that takes place away from a central learning hub, where the teacher and learner are separate.
- **Digitally enhanced remote delivery**: Teaching and learning designed for in-person delivery but is delivered remotely using digital technology. For example, a lecture designed for in-person delivery but because of campus closure is delivered online using video conference software.
- **Digital learning and teaching**: Teaching and learning designed to be delivered using digital technology.

We would welcome that the Office for Students consider use of broader definitions instead of 'remote delivery' and 'digital learning and teaching' in future, reflecting the rich reality of Learning Technology in active blended, hybrid and fully online learning, teaching and assessment. Assessment is a key part of the student experience and a driver of learning design and delivery, so its role should be reflected in the terms used.

We also note that digital poverty applies to staff as well as students and that this should be taken into account in this review as it impacts on learning and teaching.

ALT's definition of Learning Technology has been used widely by policy makers and professionals since 1993 and has been updated in 2019 and we provide here as a reference point for future policy making:

> *ALT defines Learning Technology as the broad range of communication, information and related technologies that are used to support learning, teaching and assessment. We recognise the wider context of Learning Technology policy, theory and history as fundamental to its ethical, equitable and fair use.*

About this Call for Evidence[5]

In June 2020, the Secretary of State for Education commissioned Sir Michael Barber, the Chair of the Office for Students (OfS) to conduct a review of digital teaching and learning in English higher education since the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The review will consider:

- the use of digital technology to deliver remote teaching and learning since the start of the pandemic and understand what has and has not worked
- how high-quality digital teaching and learning can be continued and delivered at scale in the future
- the opportunities that digital teaching and learning present for English higher education in the medium to longer-term
- the relationship between 'digital poverty' and students' digital teaching and learning experience.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic most universities and colleges have adopted some form of remote teaching and learning. This call for evidence seeks to understand the challenges the sector has faced in making this change and the lessons it has learned. We would like to hear about experiences from across the full breadth of the sector.

We are keen to gather case studies, views, and perspectives to hear about what worked well, and what worked less well, to learn lessons about the potential, and the limitations, of this mode of delivery at scale.

The review will conclude with a report in spring 2021, providing recommendations for government, higher education provider leaders, teachers and students.

The information we receive from the call for evidence is intended to be used to inform the recommendations of the digital teaching and learning review and to identify case studies; the call for evidence is intended to collect ideas and responses.

Who should respond?
We welcome responses from anyone involved in the delivery, design and oversight of digital teaching and learning in English higher education.

We are particularly (but not only) interested in hearing from higher education teaching staff, professional services staff and leaders in higher education who have been engaged in the recent shift to remote delivery. We welcome views from all types and sizes of provider, and across all subjects. We would also like to hear from students and students' unions.

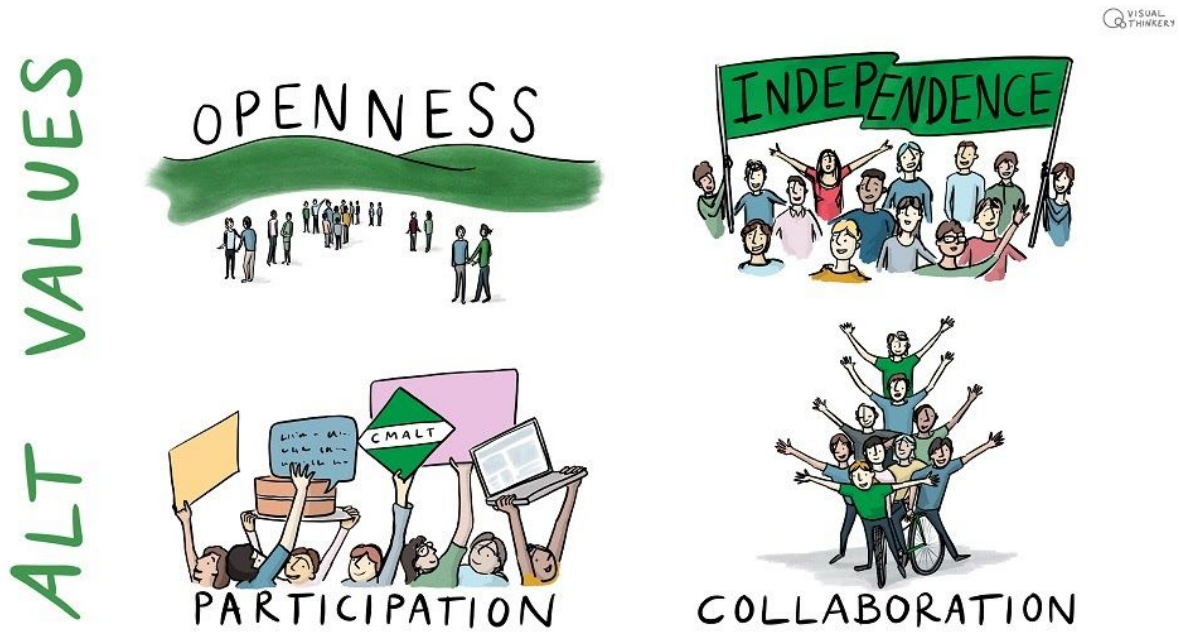
We welcome the insights of employers, technology companies and start-ups, third sector organisations, professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and policy bodies with experience of higher education digital teaching and learning.

[5] See https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/digital-teaching-and-learning-in-english-higher-education-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-call-for-evidence/

About the Association for Learning Technology (ALT)

The Association for Learning Technology (ALT) is the leading professional body for Learning Technology in the UK. We represent individual and organisational Members from all sectors including Further and Higher Education and industry. We provide recognition and accreditation for all with a professional interest in Learning Technology.

Our overall charitable objective is "to advance education through increasing, exploring and disseminating knowledge in the field of Learning Technology for the benefit of the general public". Our core activities are focused on membership services that help us achieve our strategic aims and generate the majority of ALT's income as an independent charity.



What we value and what we do

Our strategy sets out our aims for 2020-2025, a shared vision and values. We work across the UK and internationally to:

1. Strengthen recognition and representation for Learning Technology professionals from all sectors;
2. Enhance professionalisation of Learning Technology nationally;
3. Increase the impact of Learning Technology for public benefit.

How we define Learning Technology

ALT defines Learning Technology as the broad range of communication, information and related technologies that are used to support learning, teaching and assessment. We recognise the wider context of Learning Technology policy, theory and history as fundamental to its ethical, equitable and fair use.

Measuring our impact

The Board of Trustees reviews progress against our strategic aims and objectives annually, reporting to Members and the wider community at the start of each year. Since 2017 we have published an Impact Report, showing how we make a difference as the leading professional body for Learning Technology.

We work across the UK and beyond

Learning Technology research and practice expands beyond national frontiers, and in order to serve our Membership as effectively as possible we collaborate actively with a global network of partners. We work together with other professional bodies and sector organisations in the UK and internationally in order to achieve our aims and generate the strongest impact for our Members.

ALT is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), registered with the Charity Commission in the UK, number 1160039. We represent Members from all parts of the UK, including the devolved nations.

Further evidence

We are available to provide further evidence. Please contact:

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