

## Proceedings from the ALT Symposium, 16th May 2016: Learning Technology in Further and Higher Education



Major changes face us across sectors, from area based reviews and development of Apprenticeships in the Further Education system to how we demonstrate excellence in teaching and research in Higher Education. These challenges provided the context for this symposium. The key question explored was how organisational culture can enable effective innovation in Learning Technology - innovation that goes beyond small pilots or islands of best practice. Participants critically considered what common challenges - some concrete, here-and-now, some less tangible at present - we face, and how Learning Technology can help meet them.

The symposium brought together practitioners, leaders and managers in FE and HE and was organised around presentations from speakers with cutting edge experience of Learning Technology projects and discussion with participants. The event focused on the following questions:

- how policy and organisational culture can enable effective innovation in Learning Technology;
- the relevance of Learning Technology to area-based reviews and the development of apprenticeships in the further education system and
- how HE can demonstrate excellence in teaching and research through the use of Learning Technology.

The speakers – Martin Weller, Bobbie McClelland, Peter Kilcoyne, Bryan Mathers and Neil Morris - from across HE and FE, and government addressed these challenges with participants responding. The outcomes of this dialogue will provide valuable input to the development of ALT's next three-year strategy as well as further inspiration for the drive towards better understanding and application of Learning Technology in Further and Higher Education.

### Executive Summary

Martin Weller from the Open University talked about *Open policy in higher education*. He covered a number of examples of open learning and open access policies across the education spectrum. Projects showed improvements in performance, retention and cost savings, and the potential for pedagogical change. However, overall, there are few signs of the widespread increase in the use of technology in the teaching and learning process. For possible solutions, Martin looked to new models, among them the

Open Data Initiative and the EU project *The changing pedagogical landscape*. Policy change, he concluded, needs to be driven by champions, evidence, money and lobbyists.

From a government perspective, Bobbie McClelland (*The strategic and policy perspective on Area Reviews and the role of technology*) looked at the current reviews of post-16 education and training, which aim to bring about a platform for change. Incorporating learning technology in FE is part of that change and essential to meeting the needs of learners, employers and local economies. JISC is playing a major role in ensuring that the effective use of technology is embedded in area reviews and that technology must be integrated into not only curriculum delivery but also college back office functions

Neil Morris, the University of Leeds director of digital learning, gave a comprehensive assessment of the opportunities provided for students by digital technology. In *Scaling up innovation using digital technology to enhance learning* he described campus-wide technology integration, developing students' digital literacy, creating online course portfolios in addition to campus-based blended learning modules and the interactivity and sharing in MOOCs. Neil showed how HE can embrace the ultimate, joined up approach to enhance learning.

From the FE sector, Peter Kilcoyne illustrated how a consortium-based approach (led by Heart of Worcestershire College) has achieved significant efficiency savings – the benefits of sharing costs – built capacity and improved independent learning and digital literacy skills. More than 20 per cent of colleges have joined this award-winning cross-college collaboration and hundreds of hours of content is either being used or is in development.

Bryan Mathers, also drawing on his experience from across vocational and training sectors, shared his perspective on learners' needs and innovation. He focused on how technologies can meet the changing needs of learners and employers and explored how micro-accreditation like Open Badges can change practice.

Drawing on the ideas and issues raised in the presentations, participants discussed topics ranging from institutional culture and strategy to digital skills in staff and learners, and learning outcomes. There was general agreement on the need for:

- *A cultural shift*; senior management need the understanding, vision and, consequently, commitment to implement and resource policies around digital learning.
- *A greater degree of understanding that learning technology is a not “bolt-on”, an optional extra, or a “cheap alternative”*.
- *The exploitation of the pedagogic potential of technology*; learning technologists, with their wealth of expertise, can add value through co-creating learning design with teaching staff.
- *CPD for teaching and professional staff*, giving people the space to try new things and look across sectors for examples of best practice.
- *The seamless integration of digital across the learning environment* - the skills and expertise are available to this achieve this, if there is institutional support.
- *Digital literacy throughout the education lifecycle from Primary to HE* and particularly for policies which recognise and understand the role and value of learning technologists.

Participants concluded that the skills, expertise and experience are now available to make a step change and achieve a seamless integration of the digital across the learning environment. With institutional open policies, collaboration and government support as well as recognition of the key role of learning technologists, strategic change can be achieved.

## Thanks

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## Proceedings

Full proceedings and presentations are available via the ALT website at <http://go.alt.ac.uk/2aasOQh>