



Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee inquiry on the digital economy

29 October 2015

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

Executive summary

1. ALT is making this submission as a membership body, representing as members over 1750 individuals and 180 organisations, including universities, colleges, Government departments, agencies, and software, hardware, and e-learning businesses from across the UK;
2. We identify a technology skills gap across the workforce and provide evidence about how the education and training sector can contribute to upskilling the current and future workforce;
3. We recognise the crucial role teachers and trainers have and the urgent need to provide more consistent support for their professional development as well as recognition in particular in regard to Learning Technology and the role professional bodies can play in delivering this;
4. We consider how tech start-ups can engage more effectively with their target markets in particular in the education sector;
5. We highlight the importance of policy frameworks to provide effective guidance in relation to intellectual property and copyright in a context where disruption through increasingly open models is increasing;
6. Based on the evidence available to us from across our membership, we include four key recommendations for the Digital Economy relating to recognition of the broad contribution of learning technology and its intelligent use, a coherent, cross-programme and cross-department approach to the encouragement and deployment of Learning Technology to assist in development planning and capacity building and requiring teacher training and development schemes to have appropriate provision for Learning Technology.

About the Association for Learning Technology (ALT)¹

7. Founded in 1993, ALT is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), registered charity number 1160039. We are the UK's leading membership organisation in the learning technology field. Our purpose is to ensure that use of learning technology is effective and efficient, informed by research and practice, and grounded in an understanding of the underlying technologies, their capabilities and the situations into which they are placed.
8. We do this by improving practice, promoting research, and influencing policy, through bringing together practitioners, researchers, and policy makers in learning technology as set out in our current strategy².
9. ALT is making this submission as a membership body, representing as members over 1750 individuals and 180 organisations, including universities, colleges, Government departments, agencies, and software, hardware, and e-learning businesses from across the UK.
10. ALT's members are at the forefront of delivering teaching and training of the current and future workforce including digital and data literacy.

Submission

What are the major barriers to UK business success in the digital economy? What steps could the Government take to help businesses to overcome these barriers?

11. The key barrier we identify is lack of skills and development opportunities for the UK workforce, as identified by business organisations, professional bodies and independent researchers;
12. Gaps exist at high, intermediate and low levels and the recent Government report³ on the UK's Digital Future identifies millions without basic digital skills;
13. Education and training is a key route for delivering skills and development for the current and future workforce and at present support for teachers and trainers is limited and short-term. This affects businesses who struggle to resources skills, in particular technology skills, not only for specialist roles but across different industries.

How effective are UK financial markets in supporting the digital economy? What actions could the Government take to improve their effectiveness?

No response submitted.

What lessons can be learned from the Government's support of tech start-ups and other measures targeted at the digital economy? How is this developing around the regions and nations of the United Kingdom?

14. Tech start ups in the education sector in particular struggle to understand their

¹ <https://www.alt.ac.uk>

² Strategy 2014-17 <https://www.alt.ac.uk/about-alt/what-we-do/alt-strategy>

³ <http://goo.gl/OmC7Kb>

- target market and the needs of learners, providers and employers. We work with start up organisations such as the edmix consortium⁴ to provide routes for start ups to engage and gain better insight, but there is very limited support for such activities;
15. Professional bodies could play a larger part in the work of organisations such as Tech UK, but are often ineligible for funding if they are not teaching or training providers, which prevents tech start-ups from gaining access to their networks and knowledge base;
 16. Initiatives such as presence of tech start-ups at education exhibitions such as the BETT show provide rare opportunities but work well.

Does the UK's Intellectual Property regulatory regime provide effective protection for the digital economy and sufficient scope for innovation and competition?

17. With regard to technological developments in education open licencing schemes, such as Creative Commons⁵ licencing, are becoming more important for innovation. ALT is a member of the Open Policy Network⁶ and in particular tech start ups and education developers now actively use and contribute to knowledge exchange or code sharing sites for their work;
18. Open resources are being adopted more widely to provide wider skills development and more equitable access to learning resources for all learners. This approach for example has now been promoted by the U.S. Government⁷;
19. We would question whether the UK's Intellectual Property regulatory regime provides effective guidance on open licencing schemes and their benefits for a Digital Economy.

What actions could the Government take to foster the development of potentially disruptive technologies? Are further safeguards warranted to help existing businesses adapt to the impact of these technologies on their traditional business models?

20. While the impact of new digital technologies is evidenced in many contexts including learning, teaching and assessment, we would caution the use of the term 'disruptive' as it can be unhelpful and instead consider the need for approaches to be flexible, responsive and agile to make effective use of technology and harness its potential;
21. Learning Technology has played a major role in the design and delivery of education and training for over two decades in particular in Vocational Education and Training. We have published a position paper with the Association of Colleges on this topic in September 2014⁸ and conducted a survey⁹ on the effective use of Learning Technology in education led by Prof Diana Laurillard as part of our work for the Education Technology Action Group (ETAG) ;
22. ALT has also contributed to the former Further Education Technology Action Group (FELTAG) recommendations to Government including the role of disruptive technologies in education. The key issues identified for businesses such as education or training providers we can summarise thus: lack of awareness, preparedness and

⁴ <http://edmix.com/about>

⁵ <http://creativecommons.org/>

⁶ <https://openpolicynetwork.org/> and <https://goo.gl/cguBTj>

⁷ <https://goo.gl/aj4QWL>

⁸ <https://goo.gl/ow1Qfh>

⁹ <https://goo.gl/UmN8Hn>

skills to engage with disruptive technologies; lack of support for senior staff to effectively assess, procure and recommend implementation of new technologies and as a consequence over-reliance on commercially procured advice and guidance and thirdly a lack of understanding of the importance of digital technology and related skills for learners and employers. One example of ALT supporting its membership in this area is its FELTAG Special Interest Group¹⁰, which has over 100 members.

23. One of the key issues faced by businesses across the education and training sectors is that collaboration which could help harness new technology more effectively is not sufficiently valued, resulting in many individual organisations repeating each other's learning processes and mistakes and thus being unable to keep pace with technological innovation sufficiently. The most recent Annual Survey¹¹ carried out amongst ALT's membership highlights common areas of interest for which we support collaboration and knowledge exchange;
24. With many businesses in the education sector focusing on a reduction in funding or changes anticipated in the area reviews, our observation is that the potential of education technology for promoting individual initiative, team working, creativity and innovation can be overlooked as technology is seen as a disruptive force instead of a way to solve problems.

What actions could the Government take to ensure the availability of a workforce with the skills to support businesses in the digital economy?

25. Development of digital and data literacies within the school, vocational education and university sector is essential for the UK workforce, in a global community. More focus should be placed on use of learning technology and technology enhanced learning within schools and universities to ensure graduates are entering the workplace ready to use technology effectively;
26. Promote the intelligent use of learning technology: Learning technology used intelligently works at many levels to support digital economy, allowing education providers to compete in the increasingly global market for online learning supporting creativity, initiative and team-working in skills development and higher education, developing digital literacy skills in a broad base of learners through exposure to technology-supported methods
27. Focus on action, not just evaluation and review. A good example of this would be the work carried out following the Government's response¹² and progress report to the FELTAG recommendations, which provide practical examples of achievements as well as evidence supporting much needed action in future which we hope Ministers will help champion;
28. ALT runs one of the only professional accreditation schemes¹³ for education professionals recognising skills and experience in Learning Technology which the teaching and training workforce requires to support learner success. There is currently too little support for this kind of development and its recognition at all levels and across sectors.

¹⁰ <https://goo.gl/RPZZXm>

¹¹ <https://goo.gl/oGkw9F>

¹² <https://goo.gl/8ofGSz>

¹³ <https://goo.gl/8XXD4K> and for an example of a current initiative <https://goo.gl/AzydEo>

Recommendations

Based on the evidence available to us from across our membership, we include the following recommendations:

29. Recognition of the broad contribution of learning technology including a commitment to level up standards e.g. through FE area reviews and a move from short term, limited initiatives to strategy based cross-programme digital skills and information literacy are crucial across all sectors of the economy;
30. Stronger support for and recognition of the intelligent use of Learning Technology can help build the capacity of those engaged at whatever level in the digital economy, e.g. by supporting professional bodies and government-funded agencies in putting recommendations such as those of FELTAG into action;
31. A coherent, cross-programme and cross-department approach to the encouragement and deployment of Learning Technology to assist in development planning and capacity building;
32. Greater recognition of the importance of teachers and trainers in upskilling the current and future workforce and their professional development, for example by requiring relevant teacher training and development schemes to have appropriate provision for Learning Technology.

Further evidence

We are available to provide further evidence to the Select Committee.

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