Digital Learning Strategy for Scotland Consultation

17 December 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 broadly agree with the overall themes set out in the strategy and recommend a much stronger emphasis on the professional digital capabilities needed for leaders, teachers and learners;

3. We provide examples from across our membership how the Association supports professional communities, knowledge sharing and dissemination and include suggestions as to how we may make a contribution to delivering this strategy successfully;

4. We emphasise the importance of Open Education for the strategy and recommend that the Scottish Government support the Open Scotland Declaration;

5. We highlight how Learning Technology should play a central role in delivering success for all learners and its potential for solving some of the biggest challenges we are facing in education across sectors;

6. Building on the experience of our members in Scotland we use ALT's peer-based accreditation scheme CMALT as an example of how teachers professional development could be supported and how the openly accessible resources in our community can support this process.

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 strategy[2].

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

Consultation Question 1: Is the strategy founded on the right principles? Are there other principles that should be considered as we continue to develop the strategy?

11. We agree that the principles set out are sound.

12. We suggest that the strategy make a firm commitment to supporting open educational practice and the development and sharing of open educational resources (OER). We would urge the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to lead by example and become signatories to the Open Scotland Declaration[3] and its implementation. Whilst the financial benefits of open educational practices remain contested with an estimated 1 billion Creative Commons resources[4] openly licensed there is an opportunity not only to benefit from these in learning and teaching but to also contribute sharing Scotland's culture and expertise with the world. This would be inline with other initiatives such as the National Library of Scotland's 'The way forward 2015-2020' which is making its collection available online.

13. We further suggest that the strategy will not work in isolation and whilst other frameworks have been referenced the proposed strategy should be closely allied to the Information Literacy framework for Scotland[5] and have information literacy and digital capability as a core principle.

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[1] https://www.alt.ac.uk
[2] Strategy 2014-17 https://www.alt.ac.uk/about-alt/what-we-do/alt-strategy
[3] http://openscot.net/declaration/
[4] http://creativecommons.org/weblog/2015/12/08/46651
[5] http://www.therightinformation.org/temp-framework-levels/

Consultation Question 2: Are the four key themes identified the right ones to focus on? Are there other themes that should be considered?

14. We agree that in general the key themes identified are appropriate. However we would like to see the inclusion of digital capability across the themes. We would recommend that the strategy references for example the current work of Jisc around developing student[6] and staff[7] digital capability in terms of providing examples and frameworks for students, teachers and leaders. We provide as a further example the work this Association has undertaken in mapping professional competencies for those delivering learning, teaching or assessment to national frameworks such as the UK Professional Standards Framework[8]. We would also want to ensure that the digital strategy was clearly mapped to other priority development areas for the sector for example the NIF and not seen as competing for priority. Digital capability should be an underpinning principle for all strategic endeavours and not stand alone.

15. There is a growing understanding that the effective use of Learning Technology can help us address some of the big challenges we are facing in education, enabling providers and teachers to deliver learning and teaching for greater success for all learners. By acknowledging the broad range of skills or literacies that are needed to increase digital capability this strategy will be strengthened in its future outlook. This is by no means a new argument as our work in 2012 in partnership with Naace on 'Better Learning through Technology' and its subsequent report[9] shows.

Consultation Question 3: Do you agree with the proposed priorities for action outlined in the 'leaders' theme? Are there other actions that should be considered?

16. In order to take effective decisions leaders require appropriate skills and knowledge themselves as well as advice from staff with the capability to assess digital technology. In our experience the support that Learning Technologist or staff with equivalent skills provide for senior leaders can significantly increase the effectiveness of leadership. Professional bodies such as ALT can play a stronger role in supporting leadership and the Open Course in Technology Enhanced Learning (ocTEL)[10] which was funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education is one example of the work our membership undertakes to build networks that enable leaders at all levels to share knowledge, keep up to date with Learning Technology and build communities. ALT already supports a group of its members in Scotland (the ALT Scotland Members Group[11]) which for example could be a starting point for scaling up provision for this audience and provide ways to share practice across institutions and sectors.

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[6] https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/developing-students-digital-literacy
[7] http://digitalcapability.jiscinvolve.org/wp/
[8] CMALT and UKPSF mapping https://goo.gl/fQq0QY
[9] Schoolstech report http://repository.alt.ac.uk/2219/
[10] http://octel.alt.ac.uk/
[11] https://www.alt.ac.uk/get-involved/special-interest-groups/scotland

17. In our experience the most effective way to use Learning Technology is to build capacity and capability across all levels of the organisations and we would thus advocate that any networks used for senior leadership collaboration were accessible to all practitioners and, where appropriate the wider sector. A core part of digital leadership should be leading by example so leaders should be working with their teams to develop and share their effective practice as widely as possible and illustrating explicit impacts and relationships between the use of digital approaches in terms of meeting key milestones.

18. We would further suggest that inspections should also reflect the use of digital technology and should not be predicated solely on onsite visits, but utilise network sharing capabilities offered through the Glow network.

Consultation Question 4: Do you agree with the proposed priorities for action outlined in the 'access' theme? Are there other actions that should be considered?

19. We support the broad themes identified. In terms of partnership engagement we would encourage Education Scotland and the Scottish Government to ensure more sharing with the wider education community - this is an area where ALT and its membership could make a useful contribution.

20. Across our membership we see examples of shared priorities[12] across sectors there is much that can be learnt from the school sector in terms of access and policy. This is an important point and is demonstrated for example by the contribution[13] ALT made to the Education Technology Action Group (ETAG[14]) chaired by Prof Stephen Heppell. For example, as we progress to more sophisticated use of educational data, ensure that relevant data standards are shared cross sectorally is important to ensuring that our learners can have one core data set (portfolio) for the whole of their education journey. We support the principles of the Open University's guidelines on the ethical use of student data[15] and the guidance provided elsewhere on ownership and ethical implications[16] of data collection and storage.

Consultation Question 5: Do you agree with the proposed priorities for action outlined in the 'curriculum and assessment' theme? Are there other actions that should be considered?

21. The last proposal in this question is most relevant to our expertise, namely exploring ways in which digital technology can support the individual needs and capabilities of learners, and provide feedback to practitioners that is specific to the

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[12] Findings from the 2014/15 ALT Annual Survey
https://www.alt.ac.uk/news/all_news/findings-association-learning-technology-annual-survey
[13] https://www.alt.ac.uk/sites/alt.ac.uk/files/public/ALTsurvey%20for%20ETAG%202014.pdf
[14] http://etag.report/
[15]
http://www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents/ethical-use-student-data-learning-analytics-policy
[16] https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/code-of-practice-for-learning-analytics

individual learner. We recognise the great potential of Learning Technology to help personalise learning for all and provide a more tailored approach for learners with different needs.

22. We would like to see the inclusion of feedback into this theme as it is a key part of the assessment lifecycle, for example exploration of the EMA[17] (electronic management of assessment) lifecycle. We would also encourage the further development, use and recognition of alternative digital forms of assessment, in particularly Open Badges. Across our membership we have significant expertise in the effective usage of Open Badges not exclusively for learners, but also for supporting professional development. We are for example currently piloting Open Badges for teachers[18] as part of the Blended Learning Essentials course that is running on the FutureLearn platform[19].

Consultation Question 6: Do you agree with the proposed priorities for action outlined in the 'teachers' theme? Are there other actions that should be considered?

23. Digitally confident and capable teachers are key to the successful use and development of digital technology and more importantly to the development of digital literate and confident lifelong learners. However we know that there are skills gaps across the board and that the main challenge in building skills is the rapid pace of technological innovation. Using Learning Technology in every classroom requires support for teachers on a collaborative basis, enabling lessons learnt to be shared. This has been a key aim for ALT for close to 25 years and in this area our membership has significant expertise and many of the references provided above are relevant to this question also.

24. We work in partnership with other organisations in Scotland and other parts of the UK and have strong international links with professional communities at a national and international level including in Australasia, the United States and Europe[20].

25. We strongly support the need to recognise digital capabilities for teachers and support the priority for official recognition with GTCS Standards and would encourage the Scottish government to ensure that the development of teachers digital capabilities was embedded throughout all professional develoments. One of the key challenges that we have come across in the English context is to provide meaningful standards in a rapidly changing context. This is why the approach to professional recognition via ALT's peer-based accreditation scheme CMALT we have developed focuses on the skills and capabilities that remain essential even as Learning Technology changes, such as communication, critical understanding of the wider context and policies as well as management and teaching with Learning Technology.

26. CMALT[21] professional recognition scheme already maps to a number of recognised CPD frameworks including the UK Professional Standards Framework

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[17] https://www.jisc.ac.uk/rd/projects/electronic-management-of-assessment
[18] http://blecourse.alt.ac.uk/open-badges/
[19] https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/blended-learning-getting-started
[20] https://www.alt.ac.uk/about-alt/what-we-do/partnerships
[21] https://www.alt.ac.uk/get-involved/certified-membership

(UKSPF). We would be happy to explore the potential extension of this for teachers in Scotland with relevant mapping to GTCS standards.

Further evidence

We would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence.
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