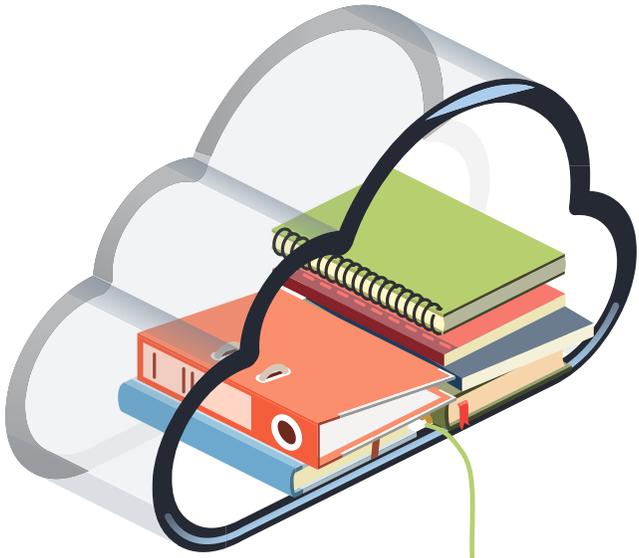


# TECH IN FE



Connect

Collaborate

Create



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# FE Week

## RIGHT TIME TO TACKLE TECH CHALLENGE

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**W**ith the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) holding its annual conference earlier in September, we thought this was the perfect time to take a look at all things technology-related for the FE and skills sector.

The title of this supplement – Connect, Collaborate, Create – is taken from the theme of the ALT conference.

On the next 16 pages we look at some of the many ways that colleges and other providers are working together to create innovative tech solutions to the challenges

facing the sector.

On page three, Bella Abrams gives her unique insight on those challenges from her perspective as both a trustee for ALT and head of innovation and technology at Hull College Group.

There was much to learn for FE delegates at the ALT conference, held from September 6 to 8 at the University of Warwick.

We've pulled together a round-up of some of the highlights on pages four and five.

No discussion of technology in FE would be complete without mentioning the FELTAG report – so on pages six and seven we speak to a number of people including Maren Deepwell, ALT chief executive, about how the FELTAG agenda has moved on since its publication in 2014.

One of the biggest challenges facing the sector at the moment is undoubtedly the area reviews of post-16 education and training. On pages 14 and 15 we look at the role that technology is playing in the review process, as well as some of the support that's available to colleges to help them to make the most of technology during and after the review process.

It's also important to keep tabs on

what providers think are the biggest recent developments with tech for FE over the past year – so we dedicated a double page spread to provider responses to our survey on this issue, in the hope that others working in FE will pick up some good tips. These include Daniel Scott from Barnsley College, who won individual learning technologist of the year at the ALT awards this month.

The supplement also reports on an exciting new research project, overseen by former Association of Colleges chief executive Martin Doel, that aims to be the first to provide hard evidence of the benefits of blended learning, and tech implications for FE and skills area reviews.



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# WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPLEMENT TECH REVOLUTION

I was recently elected by members as a trustee of ALT for a three-year term following one year as a co-opted trustee, and it is my intention during that time to ensure that FE remains well represented in ALT decision making and that as a sector, we make as much use of these benefits as possible.

I was pleased that FE was well represented at this year's ALT conference.

Despite it being in the first week of term for us — I did manage to come to Warwick and was able to pack in 10 incredibly useful sessions, a surprising amount of networking, enjoying the awards ceremony and meeting some useful new supplier contacts.

I think it is a really useful and engaging event for FE professionals to attend (one day may not be enough though) and will certainly return next year.

The use of technology across the FE sector varies a great deal in my experience.

As in all sectors, for practitioners to deliver impactful change depends on the knowledge, skill, level of interest and experience of the most senior members of staff to best embed use of technology.

If the senior leaders and governors understand the aims and outcomes and are committed, then change is certainly possible, as is the case in Hull.



Across the sector, it is clear to me, that the publication of the FELTAG report represented a shift in thinking about technology and the benefits of use but the lack of formal implementation and KPIs by the government means that some organisations can, if they choose, to avoid using technology to its best effect.

Furthermore, the area review process asks colleges to assess their use of technology, but have not yet (as far as I am aware) made formal recommendations that ensure that mandated use of technology and process improvements are used to streamline and improve the operational business.

The sector could really benefit by putting both FELTAG recommendations and

Bella Abrams, Association for Learning Technology trustee, and director of innovation and technology at Hull College Group, reflects on this year's ALT conference and key themes covered in this supplement including progress with tech implementation since the 2014 Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG) report, and through the national programme of FE and skills area reviews.

## The ALT community shares best practice from a wide variety of areas to understand what works well and critically allows us to avoid pitfalls

- Bella Abrams

technology focused area review outcomes together as a really interesting and effective way to drive beneficial change in the sector with a solid business case.

We face many challenges, such how to develop and implement meaningful and

beneficial change in an increasingly cash constrained environment.

My role in ALT allows me to spend time seeing how my peers are overcoming similar challenges.

The ALT community shares best practice from a wide variety of areas to understand what works well and critically allows us to avoid pitfalls (and help other to do the same).

The FE sector is particularly creative in how we use technology (and often faster paced than our higher education cousins) so by learning quickly, we can implement quickly which is particularly critical for us.

I see my role as a trustee of ALT firstly to represent the FE sector on the board of trustees (together with my other highly qualified peers).

We are less well funded than HE institutions, but using technology is more critical for us to remain efficient and competitive in our challenging market.

### MESSAGE FROM SUPPLEMENT SPONSOR

## CAN'T DECIDE WHICH SYSTEM TO BUY JUST THINK HOW YOU CHOOSE YOUR PHONE

Nick Pidgeon, managing consultant within our sponsor Tribal's financial benchmarking team, gives his thoughts on how the FE sector should approach upcoming tech challenges.

So Apple has once again decided that we need something new. The launch of the iPhone 7 was accompanied by the usual social media storm and wails of dismay. "Where's the headphone socket?" "Great, now we'll all have to buy expensive wireless earphones". "Apple's screwing us over again!"

But people will still go out in their millions and buy the iPhone 7 and Apple's wireless earphones too. Why?

Our mobile phones now touch every aspect of our lives – communication, shopping, entertainment, health and fitness. Everything you need to do or want to do is covered by the portable screen in your handbag or pocket.

Your phone is a single device that has replaced many devices. Once you've made

your choice of operating system/mobile phone, it's difficult to change. Especially if, deep down, you trust the people who make your phone.

Millions of users worldwide trust Apple to lead the way with technology advancements. A few years ago Apple changed the charger socket, rendering peripherals and accessories (eg speaker docks) redundant.

This was a bit of a pain but users swallowed it because the phone charges faster. Now we are told there will be no traditional headphone socket? Shrug. This is probably the way things are going to go, so we might as well embrace it (also tangled headphone wires are annoying).

Critically, millions of users also trust Apple to keep their data secure. Apple famously refused the FBI's request to unlock the iPhone of a US gunman. Whatever your opinion of the moral issues at play, that's a powerful message for Apple's customers.

People will continue to use iPhones to run their lives, because they trust Apple to lead them through technological advances, because their data is secure – and because they enjoy the experience of using the

device.

You're probably wondering how I'm going to bring this slightly tortuous analogy back to education, and make it relevant. Perhaps I won't manage it! But let's have a go.

As I see it, colleges and training providers have similar decisions to make.

As phone users we ask "which phone do I trust to help me run my life?" So, as colleges and training providers, you need to ask "who do we trust to help us run our organisation?"

That single question covers many more questions like who will provide our student administration system? Should we move to cloud-based solutions? Who can advise us on transformational change and process engineering? And who can help us make savings?

It's a crowded marketplace. There is an exciting mix of new entrants and established players, meaning colleges and training providers have choice and buying power.

Area-based reviews are disrupting the market by creating new, larger colleges who are asking all the above questions and more.

How do you make your choice? Is it about the latest "new thing" technology-wise? Or is it about finding technology that is market leading and progressive, while trusted and well established? And, alongside your chosen systems, will you get other services? Is the supplier a genuine expert partner with deep-rooted experience empowering educational institutions?

Yes, I'm an iPhone devotee. Why do I stick with it? It's reliable – it just works.

Technologically, the rate of advancement suits me and I can go at my own pace, (I'm usually a model behind, preferring to let others wrestle with initial bugs and fixes).

The mix of cutting edge tech and low risk appeals to me. And I enjoy using the device. Colleges and training providers should look for something similar: great systems, a wealth of expertise, all delivered by friendly people.

# VALUABLE LESSONS LEARNED

There was much to learn for FE delegates at this year's Association for Learning Technology annual conference.

The three-day event, held at the University of Warwick between September 6 and 8, gave leading lights from across the sector and beyond the opportunity to discuss key issues around learning technology.

It featured a number of high-profile keynote speakers, including cyberbullying expert Josie Fraser, and the Wellcome Trust's lead on education and neuroscience, Lia Commissar. Games Workshop founder Ian Livingstone meanwhile took the theme of the conference as the focus for his talk on the Wednesday morning.

**Online learners are not a distinct and separate group of learners that you can wave at in a corner – they are any and all learners.**

- Helen Beetham of Jisc

His entertaining speech – which included a potted history of early computer gaming as well as a throwback to the 1980s and the choose-your-own-adventure books – also had a serious message as he argued for the educational value of computer games.

"If you think cognitively, what's happening when you're playing a game – interactivity, problem-solving, the critical thinking, the analysis, the social aspects – these are real skills for the real world," he said. "And it's fun, it's an enjoyable learning."

It was standing-room only for a talk later that morning from Lou McGill, Helen Beetham, Heather Price and Sarah Knight – all from education tech specialists Jisc – on the subject of 'creating online learning experiences that learners will value' (see boxout on right for its findings).

The four presented the findings from a newly published research project investigating online learners – including what those for example in FE are like and do, and what support they need.

As nearly all courses now include an element of online learning, such people are not "a distinct and separate group of learners that you can wave at in a corner – they are any and all learners," said Ms Beetham.

One of the key findings from the study was that "online learners – having defined them so broadly – must be found to be incredibly diverse", she explained.

As a result, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting online learners. The report recommends that staff should "teach responsively" and remain "aware of these differences and how you might respond differently to them".

'What is digital capability?' was the question asked by James Clay and Lawrie Phipps, both senior co-design managers at Jisc, during a hands-on workshop about its digital capability project.

The team is developing a tool that staff and institutions, including those working in FE, can use to map and improve their digital capability.

The two defined "digital capability" as a wide range of different digital skills – including communication skills and data-literacy skills – which they said many staff did not have.

"We assume that people can do stuff – go do VLE, go do Twitter – and often people don't know what they don't know," Mr Clay explained.

Ensuring that staff are digitally capable is essential to giving students the best possible learning experience, they argued.

Upskilling staff was also the topic of a presentation by Neil Morris and Diana Laurillard, both co-directors of the Blended Learning Essentials course.

This online course is designed to provide teachers and trainers with the knowledge, skills and confidence to use a wide range of digital technologies to deliver effective blended learning.

Mr Morris and Ms Laurillard reported on interview case studies they had conducted with 10 people taken from the pool of more than 30,000 who have signed up for the course since it was launched last November, to highlight the impact it has had on teaching.

Meanwhile, the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG) Special Interest Group (SIG) held its first-ever physical meeting on the Wednesday afternoon – having been meeting online since the group's launch at last year's ALT conference.

This small but passionate group of FE and skills practitioners, together with those with an interest in the sector, discussed a number of issues of significance to the group – including whether the FELTAG name was still relevant, and the need for using more digital technology in delivering apprenticeships.

Closing out the afternoon was a presentation by Jisc's Helen Beetham and Sarah Knight, concerning the findings from the company's pilot student digital experience tracker.



Ms Knight said the tracker had been developed so colleges could do more around "speaking with learners" and "engaging with their learners in the developments around digital".

The tracker was "a series of short questions that could be run as a survey to learners to gather a view of their experiences and expectations of

technology," she said.

Colleges can use it to start to track changes over time, while she added that "it could inform how they develop their digital environment" and "look at areas that are identified as issues for learners".

The presentation included case studies from three of the institutions involved in the pilot – including one for Barton Peveril

## CREATING ONLINE EXPERIENCES THAT LEARNERS VALUE

Jisc launched its report into creating the kind of online learning experiences that learners value during a workshop session on the Wednesday morning of the conference. The report, which had been based on a literature review as well as an advisory group and a consultation, made a number of important findings and recommendations:



### Key findings:

- Online learners are highly diverse; differences include prior learning, self-efficacy and self-regulation, confidence, and motivation
- There are many continuities between online and offline learning
- Contexts and motivations for online learning vary across stages of life
- The complex relationship of motivation to success: learners see them through the same lens
- Readiness to learn online is metric that's consistently used but often contested; providers are devising one-off instruments with little evidence-base
- Emotional responses are significant to success: curiosity, confidence, independence and pleasure, compared with boredom, frustration or loneliness

# FROM 2016 ALT CONFERENCE



Delegates in the main auditorium Games Workshop



James Clay with participants in the digital capabilities workshops



Ian Livingstone



Delegates listen to Jisc's Heather Price

Sixth Form College, in Hampshire – with information on why they got involved (see the box to the right) and how the tracker has helped them.

Earlier in the conference, Lucy Foley and Grainne Hamilton, both from City and Guilds, reported on a project by Youth Focus North East on open digital badges – which provide evidence of the

skills that people have beyond traditional qualifications – and how they were perceived by both unemployed learners and potential employers.

And on Tuesday afternoon Nick Jeans also of Jisc reported on the findings of a survey into the kinds of technology used by learners in the skills sector, how they use it, and their expectations.

## Recommendations:

- Teach responsively, with consideration to learners' differing motivations, interests, learning histories and resources
- Prepare online learners to study online, including norms, practices, expectations, good study habits and functional access
- Enable learners to use their own devices, services and skills
- Support access to rich and diverse learning content
- Provide a digital environment that is accessible, social and personalisable, meaning open for some learners but secure for others
- Address the barriers to success identified for specific groups of learners



Andy Taggart, Barton Peveril SFC



Helen Beetham and Heather Price, Jisc

## DIGITAL TRACKER PROVES VALUABLE TO BARTON PEVERIL

For Barton Peveril Sixth Form College in Hampshire, one of the main benefits of using Jisc's student digital experience tracker has been the reassurance that what it had been doing digitally really works.

The college had already been in the process of developing a digital strategy when the opportunity to take part in the pilot of the tracker came along.

With 3,000 students, the college needed around 300 students to respond to the survey in order to collate meaningful data.

But thanks to a sustained promotion campaign – which included a poster competition, a prime spot on the college's intranet, and talks to tutor groups about the survey – the college more than doubled its target, with 700 responses.

The results enabled the college to compare its performance alongside other similar providers – so, for example, it showed that it was doing better than average in FE in terms of access to wi-fi and hardware.

But Andy Taggart, the college's systems

developer and e-learning manager, said it was the qualitative data – commentary from the students – which had given him the most insight.

They told him that they wanted “to be more engaged”, “more involved”, and to be “more interactive”, all information that he found incredibly valuable.

Their comments revealed that “where staff were using online resources and online learning, the students were very appreciative of it,” he said. “The only complaint was that there wasn't enough going on!”

The survey also revealed that almost three quarters of learners found technology helpful, that it got them better results, and that staff needed training to feel confident using technology.

The results will form an evidence base for the college to develop its digital strategy, knowing that “we're not just simply imposing or doing things to students, without really asking them whether what we are doing is effective”, Mr Taggart said.

# TRACKING PROGRESS OVER TWO

It is now two and a half years since the groundbreaking Further Education Learning Technology Action group (FELTAG) report on how tech could be better utilised in FE. We take a look over the next two pages into how well or otherwise the recommendations have been introduced.

Any discussion of learning technology and the FE sector will inevitably refer to the groundbreaking report published by the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG) in March 2014.

The report, developed by the leading lights in technology, learning and FE, made a series of recommendations for how the FE sector – then perceived to be lagging behind technologically – could make better use of digital tech.

But two and a half years on, many of these ideas – such as the call for learning technology adoption to be included in Ofsted's inspection framework – have not been acted upon.

And in July, the Skills Funding Agency confirmed that it would not be setting a percentage target for online learning – going against FELTAG's headline-grabbing proposal that 10 per cent of publicly-funded course programmes should be delivered online.

So has the report achieved what it set out to do? FE Week spoke to Maren Deepwell, chief executive of the Association for Learning Technology – one of the brains behind the report – to find out.

"One of the aims of the original group was to really highlight learning technology in FE and what needed to be done in order to make sure that all learners would benefit, regardless of which provider they were with," she said.

In that respect it has succeeded, she believes; not only had the report "created much more awareness of the issues in FE across different provider groups" it also highlighted "case studies of things that work".

But while Ms Deepwell feels that awareness among government agencies about "taking account of learning technology within their frameworks" had improved, it was clear she is frustrated by the overall approach taken by the government towards the report's recommendations.

"I don't think a lot of the bodies that govern FE have taken an active enough approach," she told me.

"I think they have taken the approach of letting providers decide what to do, more or less, and said, 'we don't say we're for or against using learning technology or how, we're just being agnostic and our frameworks enable everything'," she explained.

It's an approach that has not found favour with ALT members, who she said would have preferred the government to be "more proactive and positive" and "directly reference good examples of learning technology and how that can benefit providers and learners".

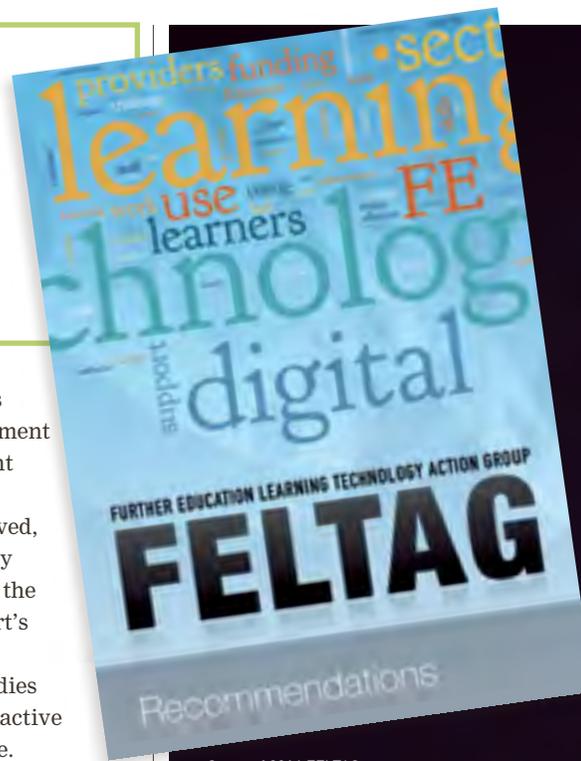
She would also like to see new skills minister Robert Halfon taking "an active interest in promoting learning technology".

"Not just in FE but across sectors," she insisted. "There needs to be some real joined-up thinking. I think any minister would welcome that brief."

I asked how she felt about the scrapping of the 10 per cent target.

"It is disappointing that they don't show a stronger commitment to what's common practice among providers," she said.

The benefit of the target was that it "encouraged all providers to be more



Cover of 2014 FELTAG report



proactive and articulate better when they're using technology".

"By not recognising how much blended learning or online delivery is already taking place in the sector they appear to be somewhat behind the times."

So how much learning is being delivered online now? Is it more than 10 per cent?

Deepwell said she believes there was "more online and blended delivery going on", a fact that "seems to be a trend that's going to continue".

As evidence of this, she pointed to the

"real increase" of around 30 per cent in the number of FE teachers getting involved with ALT (Get figures off ALT) since the FELTAG report was published "in order to upskill, in order to network, in order to share practice that works, and I think we're only seeing the beginning of that".

With the FELTAG agenda now clearly in the hands of providers, this upskilling and sharing of best practice is all the more important – with organisations such as ALT, and educational tech specialist Jisc, helping to facilitate.

## REPORT FINDS NO SUPPORT IN SECTOR FOR P

There should be no percentage targets for online learning, according to a report commissioned by the Skills Funding Agency and published in July.

The research, carried out by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (now the Learning and Work Institute), aimed to answer a number of key questions on the SFA's actions arising from the FELTAG report.

A key recommendation was for 10 per cent of all publicly-funded learning programmes to

be delivered online from 2015/16 – rising to 50 per cent by 2017/18.

But the NIACE research found "no support" within the sector for these percentage targets, even though it recognised that they had been helpful in "putting online and blended learning back into senior leaders' priorities".

Difficulties in defining what 'online learning' is would also make it impossible to measure whether those targets had been achieved, while the focus on targets risked putting



Attendees for Jisc's morning presentation

# YEARS SINCE FELTAG REPORT



## OFSTED SLOW TO ADAPT TO RECOMMENDATIONS

The FELTAG report made a number of recommendations for Ofsted – including a call for “capacity to innovate using learning technology” to be included as a judgment in the new Common Inspection Framework.

But when the CIF was unveiled in June last year, there was no mention of learning technology. In fact, the proposal had been dismissed not long after the FELTAG report was published.

In the government’s initial response to the FELTAG recommendations, published in June 2014, Ofsted said that it did not see a need for such a judgement to be included in the CIF.

Instead, any positive impact of learning technology would be measured under the existing judgements – outcomes for learners, effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment, or quality of leadership and management.

But Ofsted did accept two other recommendations from the report – that learners should be asked, as part of the Learner View questionnaire, if technology and online learning resources support their learning, and to increase its training and guidance for inspectors around education technology.

FE Week asked Ofsted what further action it had taken since the initial response; a spokesperson said: “Inspectors of FE and skills providers all have a thorough background in the sector, and undertake regular training.

“Ofsted has no preferred style of teaching or learning. However, inspectors will take into account the way in which colleges and skills providers use their resources – including education technology – to deliver effective teaching and learning, as well as good outcomes for learners.”

## CONFERENCE BACKING FOR KEEPING NAME

The Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG) name still carries weight and should be kept, according to an influential group of stakeholders.

The FELTAG Special Interest Group reached the conclusion after a discussion about its ongoing relevance at a meeting during at the Association for Learning Technology conference on Wednesday (September 7).

Chair Geoff Rebbeck (pictured), an e-learning adviser, posed the ultimate question: “There are some very valuable things that came out of FELTAG that must not be lost – the question is, is FELTAG the right word to describe what those things are?”

But the group, made up of e-learning practitioners within the FE sector, and others with an interest in the field, was unanimous in its agreement that the name should be kept.

Sarah Knight, senior co-design manager at Jisc, said she valued the power of the FELTAG

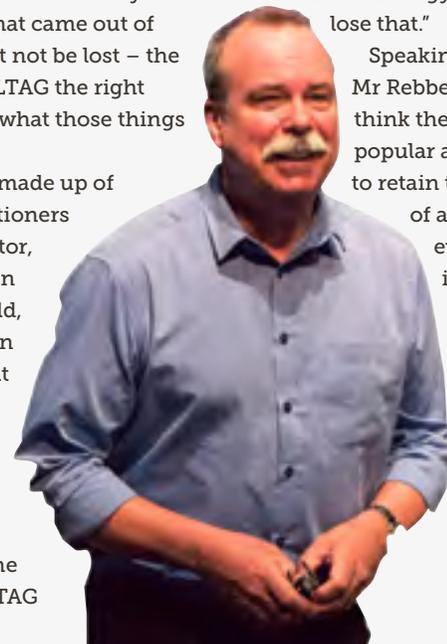
hashtag, “to bring people together and keep an eye on information and work related to this area”.

Meanwhile, others insisted that the FELTAG name carried a lot of weight with senior managers, and that to lose it would risk losing their buy-in.

Bella Abrams, director of innovation and technology at Hull College Group, said: “Having traction with senior managers is really important. It does mean there’s a policy element when you’re trying to encourage investment in technology and to lose it would lose that.”

Speaking after the meeting, Mr Rebbeck told FE Week: “I think the reason why it’s so popular and why people want to retain the name is because, of all the initiatives we’ve ever had in e-learning, it’s the one that seems to have engaged people the most.”

He added: “It hasn’t run its course because that journey isn’t ending – it’s still going on.”



Chief executive Maren Deepwell



Audience member at ALT conference

“I think what people would like to believe is that you succeed if you invest in the right tech, full stop. That’s what the easy answer would be,” she said. However, “those colleges that collaborate and network beyond their own four walls seem to be far more successful”.

A spokesperson from the Department for Education said that it had issued an update to FELTAG in February 2015, when it welcomed the progress that had been made, but made it clear that the area was for the sector to take a lead on.

## PERCENTAGE TARGETS WITH ONLINE LEARNING

“compliance by any means ahead of innovative high quality practice”.

The NIACE research also found little support for a separate funding rate for online learning.

In addition to problems with defining online learning, the research found “concerns that the funding rate should not determine behaviour as a matter of principle”.

It also asserted that the SFA should not introduce sanctions or incentives to encourage the use of technology, nor should it introduce a

definition of online learning.

It recommended that the SFA commission research to determine demand for online learning by those who are unable to access face-to-face learning.

An SFA spokesperson said: “We welcome the findings of the report we commissioned from the Learning and Work Institute (NIACE). It provided us with practical recommendations aimed at ensuring the effective use of technology in FE teaching and assessment.”

# TRIBAL

## Your map to student services success

Our intrepid explorers have been mapping out the perfect route to student services success and have been travelling the further and higher education landscapes to bring you your starting point and your ideal map to that all important destination.

Find the full report at:  
<http://info.tribalgroup.com/goingbeyond>

Research by: Tribal Group



# HOWEVER

Whilst the majority record data via grouping and categorising queries...

THE  
LOW  
VALUE  
DATA

?!  
?



35%

of participants are unable to group queries by academic department or subject category

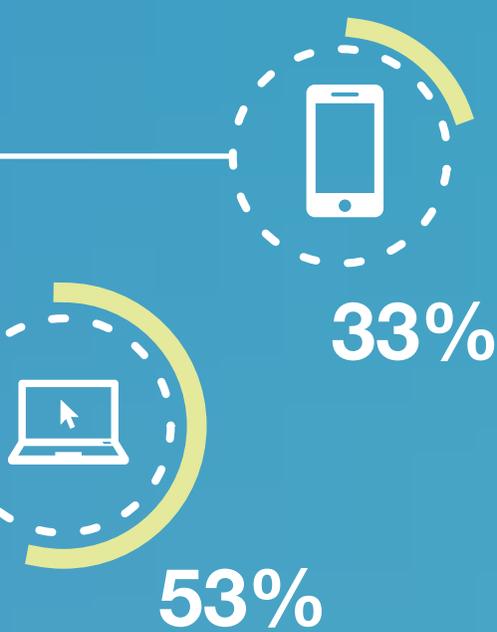
ONLY  
48%

group queries by staff member assigned

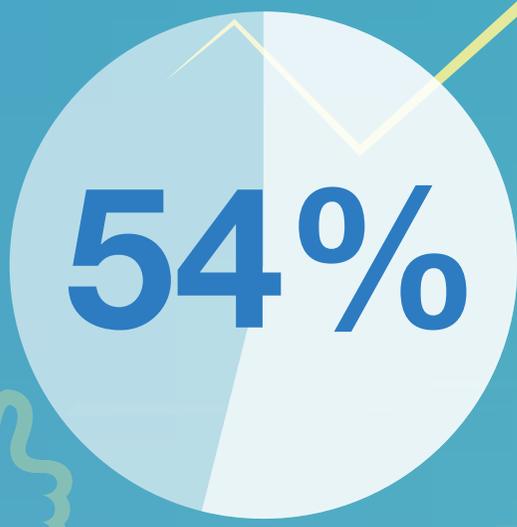
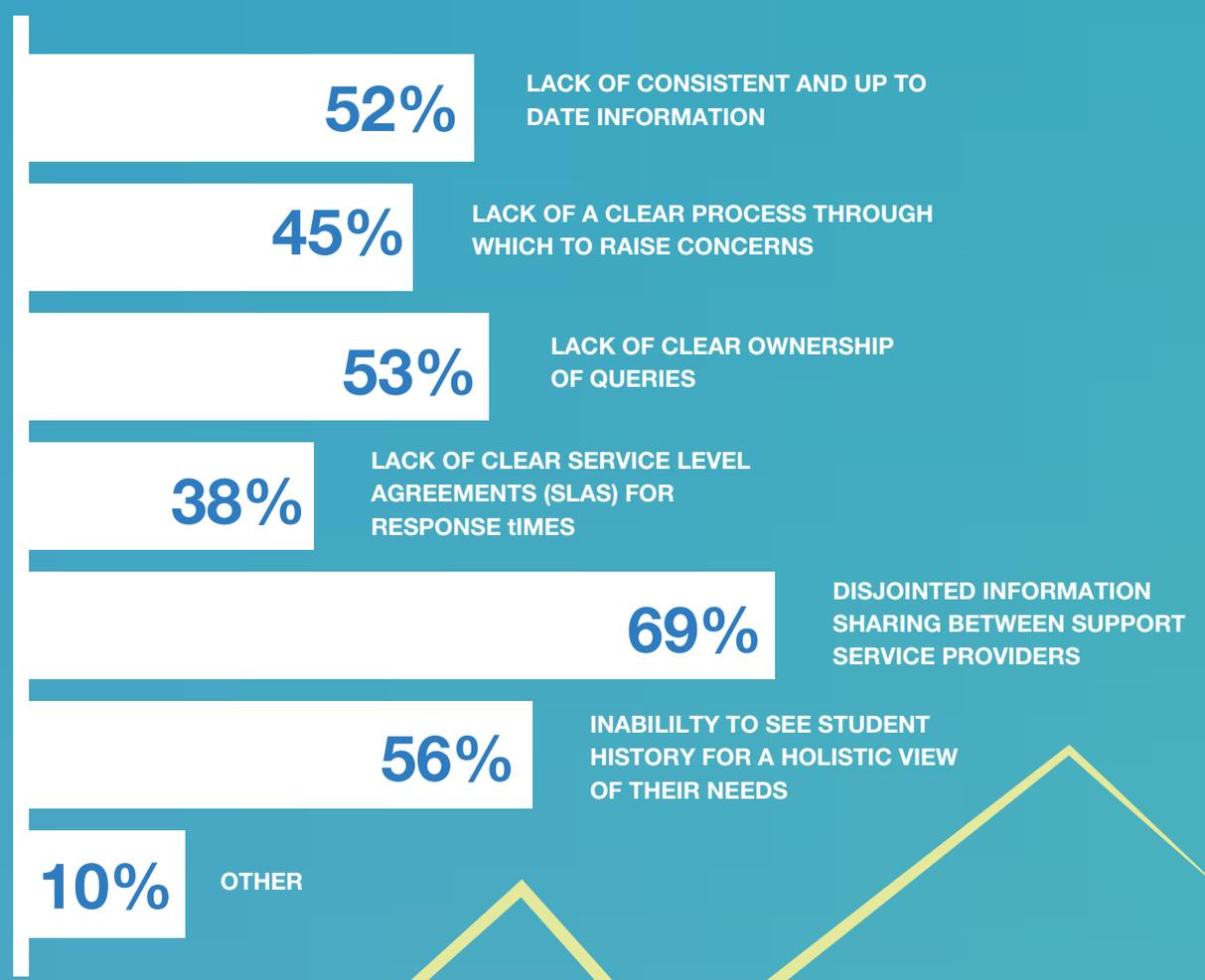
ONLY  
32%

can group queries by the time taken to close a call

THEY'RE  
USING  
VALUABLE  
DATA!



BARRIERS to Effective Support



Over half of those surveyed had a **centralised support service.**

- SPEEDY RESPONSES**
- QUICK ACCESS**
- ON-SITE SUPPORT**

What do people want from a student services solution?



- 86%** want the ability to keep information consistent and up to date
- 83%** want to be able to generate a complete audit trail so they can see the complete history of every student interaction
- 79%** want to be able to track the progress of every query from start to finish
- 71%** want to integrate with their student information system to see a complete view of student welfare
- 68%** want to manage appointments with academic staff, specialist staff and counsellors
- 68%** want to log queries via multiple channels
- 67%** want to be able to predict critical periods to allow for better resource planning
- 50%** want to alert staff and students about their position in a queue

# WHICH TECHNOLOGY HAS MADE THE MOST DIFFERENCE TO THEIR LEARNERS. HERE'S WHAT THEY TOLD US:

We asked FE colleges which technology has made the most difference to their learners. Here's what they told us:

## Leeds City College

### Google Apps for Education

Steven Hope,  
Learning first coordinator

"Leeds City College is moving forward with implementing Google and has this year introduced GAFE (Google Apps For Education) into the classroom. This platform has allowed the college to progress with their delivery of online learning. Students can now be more collaborative with their peers and staff, while gaining independence and staff have also benefitted from using the tool.

"This year the tool will support a new model of teaching with the implementation of independent learning zones, which will be found across all our Leeds and Keighley campuses. This will be a great opportunity for new and current students to develop their independent study skills and we hope it will give them the autonomy to steer and drive their learning."



## Portsmouth College

### iPad/iPad mini

Simon Barrable,  
Deputy principal

"Portsmouth College decided to focus its innovative 2014 ICT strategy exclusively on Apple iPad technology, which has enhanced students' experience and interaction in the classroom. Staff and student ambassadors have received extensive training in the use of this powerful technology and have developed imaginative delivery techniques to engage students in a variety of ways.

"The college has funded the purchase of iPad Minis for 16-to-18 students, teachers and student-facing support staff and has invested in a robust wireless network across the campus.

"The project gives students the chance to develop their independent research and digital literacy skills that are vital to their success at college and in the world beyond, and which are much valued by leading universities and employers."



## Hackney Community College

### Click View

Steve Hedges,  
Head of learning resources  
and e-learning

"Through the Blended Learning Consortium, we've been able to introduce a very strong new mix of interactive learning materials. This has helped teachers enrich the classroom experience by delivering a variety of activities with positive results.

"However, the greatest breakthrough last year was probably the focused development of some existing technologies, bringing applications together in a more coherent way for both staff and students. For example, Click View is an online video platform that comes with content specific to study levels and subjects. Last year we fully embedded it into our Moodle VLE.

"Excitingly, Hackney Community College merged with Tower Hamlets College on August 1 this year, presenting even more opportunities to share best practice and to develop new learning technologies."



## Cornwall College

### U-Space

Rebecca Harrington,  
Head of e-learning and  
innovation, Cornwall College

"Cornwall College's study programme is branded as the USP to support the development of universal, personal and specialist skills. As well as a range of staff to support these developments, accessed via a physical U-space on each campus, a range of support is also available online.

"Future developments include virtual kiosks to enable students to access staff on one of the other college campuses. This is a personal one-to-one on-demand extension of the connected classroom developments that were piloted last year, and which will be further developed this academic year across the group. It enables a teacher to deliver lessons to students in classrooms across multiple campuses with students collaborating and communicating virtually using a range of online resources."



## West Nottinghamshire College

### Student Portal

Gavin Peake,  
Director of IT and learning  
resources

"At West Nottinghamshire College, the newly-developed student portal has proved extremely beneficial for students. Developed in-house, the portal is an online one-stop shop for students to find any piece of information they need and every IT system is linked from it.

"It's been one of the best IT developments yet at the college. Students can see the money they have on their ID card for use in our catering facilities, how much print credit they have, and any items they may have on loan from the library.

"The system has been in use for a year now and has attracted many positive comments from students and they've been forthcoming with suggestions for changes and improvements."



# WHAT IS THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE TO YOUR LEARNERS?

## Sussex Downs College Google Apps for Education

Kevin Jones,  
Innovation lead

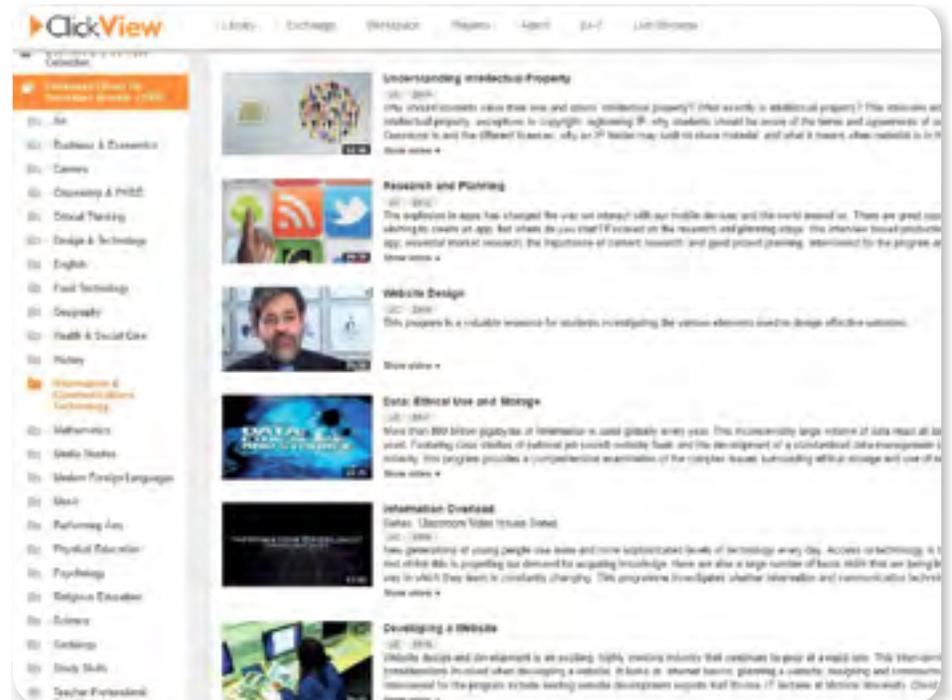
"The Sussex Downs College Badge Academy system enables students to earn digital badges once they complete a skill that employers are looking for. This is unique to SDC – we worked with employers to create the framework and specific curriculum areas within the college. Some badges are more generic for employability, whilst others are tailored for areas such as motor vehicles or hospitality. Just launched for new students is the Expert Learner Framework, where students achieve nine skillsets – for example being a "team player" – these are all behaviours to help students be successful during their time at college. Students who achieve the badges shown can get paid work experience with the businesses shown; including the Grand Hotel, Eastbourne."



## Central College Nottingham Fracit

Jo Shirley,  
Head of training and learning technologies

"This year we piloted a Blended Learning Log which details the blended learning hours, activities and reflections each student completes. This log is now available to all internal curriculum areas, allowing us to better evaluate progress in online learning as outlined in the FELTAG report. Central joined the Blended Learning Consortium (BLC) in March 2016. This has enabled our content development team to concentrate on developing game-based interactive content that is innovative, adding value to the BLC content as it engages and maintains student motivation during online learning sessions. This is working very well. The most recent example is Fracit, a maths fraction-matching game that is highly enjoyable and educational – effectively learning through play!"



## Hartlepool Sixth Form College Youtube

James Donkin,  
Curriculum developer for science and maths

"I decided to make my own YouTube videos three years ago with the intention that my A-level chemistry students would access them to support their learning and encourage independent study. Initially, I only planned to include those topics which learners found the most difficult. However, they received such a positive response from the students, I decided to keep going and two years later, I'd covered the entire A-level specification. Last academic year decided to deliver flipped lessons to my classes. The positive impact on student outcomes has been noticeable with an increase in high grades of over 20 per cent. Since the videos are freely available to all, I have also been inundated with success stories from around the country, mainly from students, but also from fellow teachers and parents."



## Barnsley College Student Portal

Daniel Scott,  
Learning support technologist

"Barnsley College has its own in-house company that creates bespoke digital learning materials, Elephant Learning Designs, which I helped set up in 2014. Much of what the company creates is online learning packages, which go on the virtual learning environment (VLE) to be used in the classroom and outside, to help consolidate learning. We also create animations, graphics and icons to make the resources more visually appealing and interactive. It has transformed how the VLE is used. It's more engaging, it's no longer passive – people are doing things on there, collaborating with each other. Uniquely, we employ apprentices on level three and four digital learning design diplomas who help to create the packages and also deliver training to staff – so we're helping to create pathways into elearning design careers, too."



# NEW BLENDED LEARNING STUDY

A new research project hopes to be the first to provide hard evidence of the benefits of blended learning in FE.

Dubbed HUBBLE – short for ‘Heutegological Unification by Blended Learning Environments’ – the project will test digital learning materials with a number of colleges in an effort to work out how they can best be used to help students.

In a major coup for the team, Martin Doel, the former chief executive of the Association of Colleges – who moved on after eight years at the helm earlier this month – will oversee some of the project as part his new role as professor of FE and skills at the Further Education Trust for Leadership.

Blended learning describes the mix of digital and traditional face to face learning. The research will try to establish what the best proportion is between the two, and the wider benefits of a blended approach.

The project is being led by Basingstoke College’s principal Anthony Bravo, and coordinated by Martin Biron, the managing director of Global Vocational Skills, which produced the materials being tested.

Mr Biron, who was formerly head of construction at the College of North West London, said there was an “assumption” that blended learning could benefit vocational learners, but little evidence.

“We felt that in order for people to fully understand the significance of blended learning in vocational education, we needed to demonstrate the benefits that come with the use of digital,” he explained.

He and Mr Bravo invited Mr Doel to oversee quality assurance for the project.

The former AoC chief executive, who once sat on the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG), “has an in-depth knowledge of the needs and wants of the sector”, they said.

“I think having someone of [Mr Doel’s] credibility on there will be really good,” Mr Bravo said.

For his part, Mr Doel said he was “very interested” in the research, and was keen to contribute.

He agreed that there had not been as much research into blended learning in the FE and skills sector as there had been in

schools and higher education, and acknowledged that “a gap” exists, “in terms of how blended learning can assist with technical and professional skills that are useful in the workplace”.

“The nature of the sector mitigates against that research in some ways,” he explained, “in that the sector is very diverse with lots of different occupations and professions that it supports, but not at a scale that would interest large-scale software developers.”

One of the areas that Mr Doel said he was most interested in exploring through the research is the way the sector will move “towards the democratisation of content, now that content can be produced at many places and at many times”.

He added: “The difficulty sometimes in the sector has been sharing that material and those approaches effectively, so I’m interested to understand through the research what the state of play is and what the opportunities might be.”

So far six colleges have signed up to take part in the research – Basingstoke College, Richmond upon Thames College, Hopwood Hall College, Barking and Dagenham College, Canterbury College and Heart of Worcestershire College.

The materials they will be using have been designed to work alongside the core teaching curriculum in a number of key vocational areas, including vehicle maintenance, health and social care and business administration.

Students can use the resources to reinforce their learning in their own time – either to prepare ahead of class, or as revision after class.

The software is designed so that teachers can monitor students’ knowledge and understanding, through the use of built-in tests, and how long they’re spending using the materials.

While the full research phase of the project will not begin until September 2017, each of the colleges is currently producing a five-week snapshot of how they’re using the GVS software.

Case studies of these snapshots will be presented at this year’s AoC conference, according to Mr Biron.

Basingstoke College has already been trialling the materials with its level-two automotive students.

Mr Bravo said he was impressed by how “intuitive” the GVS software was when he first saw it in action at last year’s AoC conference.

“It seems probably the best prepared work we’ve come across, especially in terms of evaluating the performance of the student and their activity,” he said.

Around 50 students have been involved in the trial. Mr



Bravo said they “loved it”, with some of them treating it “like a computer game”.

“They go home and they spend the whole weekend going through all of it,” he explained, “so they actually end up being far more engaged and knowledgeable than they would ever have been beforehand.”

The teaching staff involved in the trial initially “weren’t really that excited by it”, according to Mr Biron, but once they’d seen how the students had taken to it, they became “evangelical” about it.

The materials are now being rolled out to other departments at the college, including care and hospitality, with students given up to two hours of free study time a week to use them.

Monitoring this free study time and ensuring that students were actually studying was one of Mr Bravo’s main concerns, Mr Biron said.

The GVS software would “provide the college the metrics, with the analytics that they need to be able to prove and demonstrate that in fact learning has taken place and that the student has benefited from that hour of independent study”, he



Martin Biron, managing director, Global Vocational Skills

said.

Mr Bravo hopes the research project will provide him with the evidence to justify using the software with other departments across the college.

“Putting it crudely,” he said, “I want my students to improve their learning experience. I want them to learn new ways of learning. I want to be able to monitor that very carefully. And I want to actually embed it within the college.”



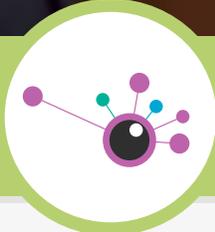
Anthony Bravo, principal of Basingstoke College

# FOCUS FOR FORMER AOC BOSS



Martin Doel, professor of FE and skills, Further Education Trust for Leadership

## OVER 70 COLLEGES JOIN CONSORTIUM



A group of colleges is clubbing together to boost blended learning without breaking the bank. The Blended Learning Consortium has used the £5,000 fee that's paid by each of its 71 members to develop digital learning resources which each college then has access to.

The approach means that each college is getting £355,000-worth of blended learning content in return for its small initial investment.

The consortium is the brainchild of Peter Kilcoyne, head of information learning technology at Heart of Worcestershire College, which has been running a blended learning curriculum for a number of years.

One of the biggest challenges the college had faced was "getting good-quality content that was appropriate for FE learners", he said.

"Developing quality materials is too expensive for one individual college to do."

The solution that he hit upon was to share the development costs across a few other colleges, so he set up the Blended Learning Consortium in August 2015, aiming to get around 10 or 15 colleges to join.

But a little over a year later there are 71 colleges involved – a number "which has far exceeded our wildest dreams!"

The group is currently developing around 1,000 hours of quality interactive learning resources.

Members can all suggest topics they would like to see covered, and suggestions are all voted on to decide which resources get developed – with the development work done by the member colleges.

Membership of the consortium has other benefits besides access to the blended learning content, too; the group has negotiated "significant savings" with a number of software providers.

And the consortium has encouraged a culture of sharing – both of resources and knowledge.

"Members can also share the best practice that they've developed, the policies and procedures that they've enacted that have helped make blended learning work," explained Mr Kilcoyne, "which makes it much easier for other colleges that are looking to make this journey."

## CONFIDENCE BOOSTING COURSE

Thousands of teachers and trainers from the FE and skills sector have increased their knowledge of online learning technology, thanks to a dedicated training course.

The Blended Learning Essentials course, funded by the Ufl Trust, is a two-part massive open online course (MOOC) which helps practitioners improve their knowledge and confidence of using the different technologies available to them.

Since it launched last November, around 15,000 people have completed the course, the "great majority" of whom are from the vocational and training sector, according to Diana Laurillard, professor of learning with digital technology at University College London (UCL), and co-director of the course.

One of the strengths of the course is that it encourages practitioners to work together and share their knowledge and experience, she said.

"When they do, you see how passionate they are about what they do for

their students."

She continued: "And when knowledgeable professionals are sharing their ideas, then it's really powerful. So I've been delighted by that."

Evaluators have so far found "significant, positive changes" in participants' knowledge, skills and practice after finishing the course.

Ms Laurillard said the team had collected case studies to help them evaluate the impact of the course on teaching practice.

These included an ESOL tutor at an FE college who used 'flipped learning' techniques with her students after

learning about them on the course, creating more interest and excitement in learning.

A further independent evaluation report, looking into the effect on the learners of teachers using techniques they've learned on the course, is due next year.



Diana Laurillard

## BLENDED LEARNING A POTTED HISTORY

### 1960s and 1970s –

Mainframes and mini-computers open up the possibilities for technology-based training for the first time.

### 1970s and 1980s –

Video networks begin to be used to provide in-house training for companies, as a kind of precursor to webinars and video conferencing. Learning can be delivered via a video, so instructors do not need to be on-site – but if learners have questions they can't be answered immediately.

### 1980s and 1990s –

With the evolution of technology comes new methods of using it to deliver learning. CD-ROMs are used by many, including schools and other educational organisations, for a more interactive learning experience including videos and sound. Their physical format means they are also ideal for distance learning.

### Late 1990s –

The development of the internet and the increasing availability of computers to the general population leads to the first generation of web-based learning. It is around this time that the phrase "blended learning" came into use for the first time.

### 2000s –

As internet speeds get faster and technology becomes more commonplace, blended learning starts to take off in colleges, with the introduction of tools such as virtual learning environments, e-portfolios and messaging

### 2010s onwards –

The 2014 FELTAG report brings blended learning to the attention of many college leaders with its call for a target of 10 per cent of all learning to be delivered online. At the same time, the range of digital learning technologies explodes – with tablets, e-book readers, social media, collaboration tools, flipped classroom and massive open online courses all added to the mix.

# IMPORTANT ROLE FOR TECH IN

Government guidance on nationwide post-16 education and training area reviews launched a year ago has put technology at the heart of the process. Of the 18 general principles underpinning the reviews, four relate to technology – including how to make the best use of technology to meet needs, a plan to embrace the possibilities of technology, innovating with blended learning and making efficiencies through shared services and back office systems. FE Week decided to take a look at how well these are being implemented.

Article

## JURY STILL OUT ON HOW WELL AREA REVIEWS HAVE EMBRACED TECHNOLOGY

With technology so important to the post-16 education and training area reviews, the message from the government about the central role that technology should play in the process is clear.

And this was reinforced in May, when Bobbie McClelland, deputy director of FE and skills at what was the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, told attendees at an ALT symposium that learning technology was essential to meet the needs of learners, employers and local economies through the area review process.

But has the message got through to all the reviews? Not according to ALT chief executive Maren Deepwell.

She said that feedback she'd received from ALT members indicated that the reviews had been hit-and-miss in terms of how they'd embraced technology.

In some reviews, "learning technology has played a significant role and has informed the process strongly" – but in others that hadn't been quite the case, she said.

"It seems to be quite dependent on who has been involved in the area-based reviews themselves," she added.

This split in how the reviews have engaged with technology appears to be borne out through conversations with some of the colleges involved.

Peter Rudd, vice-principal of Portsmouth College, which is involved in the Solent review, said he wasn't aware of any discussions that had arisen from the review process about how technology could be used to make significant savings.

"With the time allocated to the process it was

never likely to be a significant element, and certainly the visitors to the college who came in for a single short day weren't going to be giving us advice on this during that visit," he said.

On the other hand, one outcome to emerge from the Birmingham and Solihull review was a proposal to develop an Institute of Technology in partnership with a number of local universities and employers in the area.

Andrew Cleaves, the principal at Birmingham Metropolitan College, said that the proposal had come about after "all participants recognised the opportunities in the increased use of technology to deliver learning".

FE learning technology specialist Bob Harrison, a member of the national area review steering group, said he had been disappointed by the way learning technology had been approached in the reviews.

"I don't think it's had the profile that it should have had, and people are coming to it as a second or third thing – saying 'right, now we've got the merger sorted, now we've got who's in charge, now we know where the site's going to be, now we're going to think about technology'.

"And that's the wrong way round. I think it's been a missed opportunity."

But Paul McKean, head of FE and skills at education technology specialists Jisc, argued that it was too early to judge how the area reviews had embraced technology – and that its main role could come during the implementation phase of the reviews.

He believes that colleges will be making decisions

about the review outcomes – such as possible mergers – "probably for financial sustainability reasons", rather than due to technology.

But, he added, "once they've made a decision, what technology can do is drive the quality of that provision and ensure the quality moving forward – and realise some really good efficiencies, particularly mergers of systems and things like that".

Jisc is involved in the area reviews as a supporting agency, to provide guidance, information and advice on technology to the colleges involved.

As part of this, Mr McKean said he had spoken at a number of briefings for principals and governors at the start of the review process about the support that his firm could offer – including a tool that can help colleges to understand and review their current use of technology.

He told the colleges "these are the things you should be considering at this point", but assured them that Jisc didn't believe "technology should take the lead at this point – actually technology comes in at later stage".

A number of colleges involved in the first

wave had not used the Jisc tool until after their review had completed, at which point they needed it for implementation, to make better decisions.

"The next step – the critical part – is once the colleges themselves have made the decision around their future state," he said.

Apprenticeships and skills minister Robert Halfon said: "The objective of the post-16 education and training area reviews is to establish a financially stable set of colleges delivering high-quality further education across England for young people and adults.

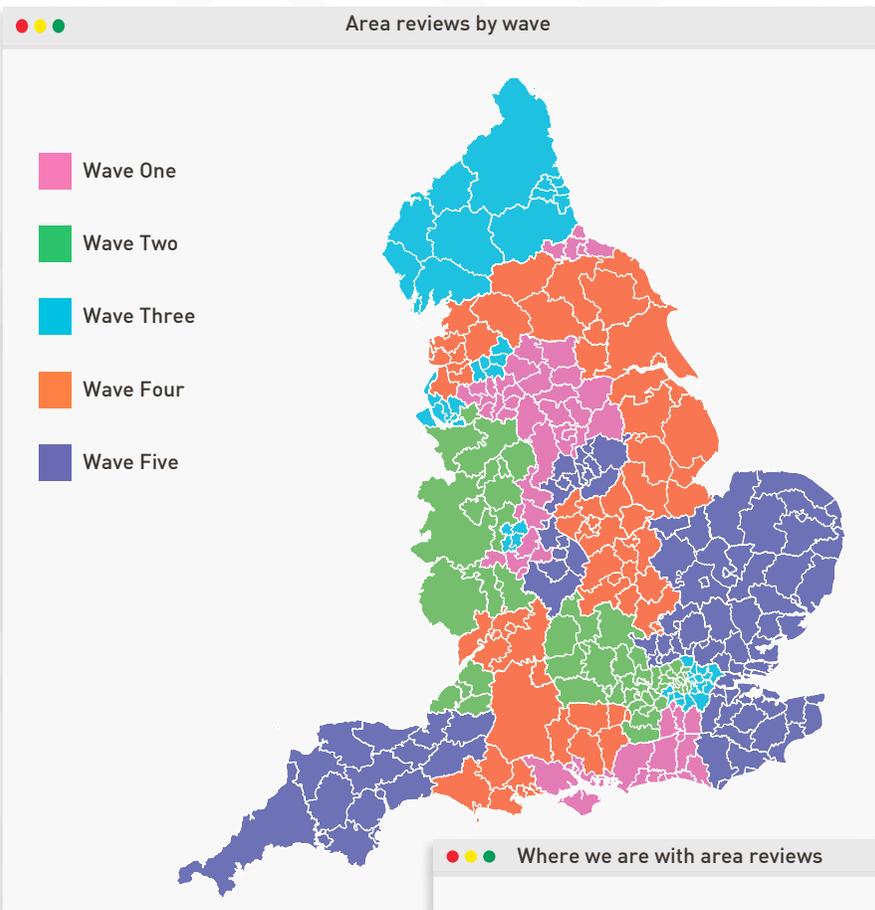
"Technology, and ensuring colleges are harnessing the benefits it can bring, is at the heart of the area review process. We have been clear that we expect the sector to take a leading role in making use of technology through the area reviews and Jisc has been instrumental in supporting them to do this.

"This includes offering advice on best practice and best use of technology in the sector, and helping them to implement recommendations so colleges can take them forward for the benefit of learners."



# FE AND SKILLS AREA REVIEWS

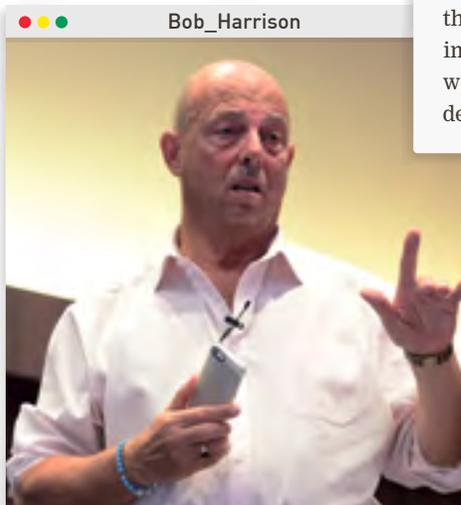
Education technology specialist Jisc has been providing tech support to colleges going through the area reviews. As part of that role, it has produced a new guide outlining the key technology services all colleges should have in place. Paul McKean, head of FE and skills at Jisc, outlines how the new guide will support colleges through the implementation phase.



Where we are with area reviews

The first wave of the reviews of post-16 education and training began in September 2015, and the final wave is expected to be finished by March 2017.

All of the areas in wave one and most of those in wave two have finished the review process and are now at the implementation phase – where they will put in place the recommendations developed through the review.



## ELEVEN TECHNOLOGY FUNDAMENTALS FOR COLLEGES TO CONSIDER POST AREA REVIEW

The area reviews have given colleges the perfect opportunity to review how they do things – including how they use technology, according to education technology specialists Jisc.

It's for this reason that the company was commissioned by the Department for Education to produce a guide for colleges going through the review process, outlining the technology services they should all have in place.

The guide, entitled 'Fundamental technology services that every college should embrace during area review implementation', lists the 11 basic services that all colleges should have in place, based on Jisc's previous experience of working with colleges that have gone through mergers across the UK.

These 11 fundamentals are: high-security broadband; cyber-security; digital technology advice and guidance; learner enrolment and tracking; blended learning content; learner-management systems; business continuity and disaster recovery; user identity-management; cloud-based or shared services; continuing professional development; and business support systems.

The guide's author, Paul McKean, head of FE and skills at Jisc, said: "Technology has a real opportunity to influence the way in which the delivery can happen – and the area reviews really gave people an opportunity to take a step back to review what they're doing, and the systems and services that are supporting that."

The guide is designed to ensure that technology has a major role to play in colleges following the area reviews, he believes.

"That's not just around efficiency savings – that's about driving quality improvement within the learner experience," he explained.

However, he said, it's not just about "implementing a certain system – this is about making sure that technology is at the forefront of driving the really good-quality learning experience post-area review," he continued.

One of the key drivers behind the area reviews – and also the guide – is to ensure that colleges are sustainable in the future, he explained.

"We recognise that post-area reviews, there's going to be probably more learners going through the system, but with less funding – so technology really has a role to equalise that, to make sure that the learners don't lose out, and are still benefitting from that independent and personalised learning."

Many of the services listed in the guide "are things that most colleges have in place", he said, but they could be done more efficiently post-merger.

One example he gave was college servers: do colleges going through a merger "continue to have several servers in several different sites", he asked, "Or do they take the opportunity to move to the Cloud, which is a more efficient way of doing it?"

"It's a safer environment, it's a more secure environment, and there's less risk. Again, area reviews have given the opportunity for colleges to look at it in that, and say 'we can make this decision at this point in time'."

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