

Further Education, Skills and Regeneration

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Becta leading
next generation
learning

Making technology work for FE colleges

Advice for governors



Introduction

Technology plays a central role in the effective leadership and efficient management of colleges. It is a key resource that helps governors to support learning and teaching and other services offered by their college.



Colleges are required to demonstrate the quality of their provision, their planning and their review processes. The Common Inspection Framework, the LSC's *Framework for Excellence* and the QIA's *National Improvement Strategy* all focus on quality in further education.

These quality requirements fall under four headings:

- **Excellence**
- **Enterprising leadership**
- **Self-improvement**
- **Partnership.**



“In Becta, we know from the evidence base that there is a ‘technology premium’ – that when it is deployed efficiently and creatively, technology can make a real difference in education and skills. It motivates learners, thereby improving retention and results. It opens up a world of resources and materials for teachers, trainers, tutors and learners. And it helps colleges and providers operate more effectively, saving money, eliminating duplication, and reducing workloads.”

Stephen Crowne, Chief Executive, Becta

“The use of technology by colleges has the potential to make real improvements to learners’ experience at college. Adopting technology and making a success of it is not easy – it requires effective leadership, investment and a willingness to experiment.”

Bill Rammell MP, Minister for Lifelong Learning,
Further and Higher Education

Excellence

Technology supports and improves the processes of data gathering and analysis, the provision of self-assessment tools, reporting and publicity. By integrating learning and management technologies, the college improves self-evaluation and reporting to learners, local communities, employers, partners and the workforce.

In turn, the college benefits from feedback and increased participation from these groups.

Case study

North Devon College

Response rates for student satisfaction surveys have shot up since they went online at North Devon College, and John Laramy, Head of Learning and Performance, is delighted: "This not only makes it easier to respond to student concerns, but also to pass on praise to members of staff." However, the online service is just one part of a total transformation of the way technology is used.

The success of the college earned it exemplar status for its strategic approach to the embedding of technology for learning across the organisation. For any college to succeed in really changing the organisation, he says, "ILT strategy must be driven from the top."



Is your college achieving excellent practice, outcomes and results from its use of technology? Technology engages learners, accelerates learning and improves progression.

However, the motive must be to improve teaching and learning, not simply to have the latest technology.

North Devon College spends about £750,000 a year on ILT, so this has to be written into the budget from the earliest stages. “You can’t use ILT if you haven’t got a computer,” he says. “You need support from senior management team level to make sure the budget goes into it.”

It is also important to invest in the whole infrastructure, he adds. If staff are to feel confident in the system, the servers have to work and the hardware system has to be considered as a whole. He compares this to analysing why you like a good car. “It’s not just because of the steering wheel or the wheels, but the way in which all the parts work together.”

Any college hoping to embed technology across the organisation needs a strategic approach, John Laramy says. At North Devon, first the registers went on-line so that staff interacted with ILT on a daily basis. Now, most information is on the college central information system and staff can access it in a way that is “timely, accurate and at their fingertips.” The W-drive, or “wonder drive” as staff

call it, allows any file to be accessed from anywhere in the system, making information sharing much easier, for example, sharing material for tutorials.

Students benefit because their reports, reviews and many individual learning plans (ILPs) are on-line, making it easier for staff to access the information they need to personalise learning and support individual students.

Holding information centrally but accessing it from anywhere saves time and effort – on the principle of “input once, use many times”, he says. This is particularly useful in the self-assessment process for inspections.

None of this will work, however, without training all staff to use the technology effectively. While some of the training is done centrally, most is based in the departments where people work and each department has a dedicated “ILT champion” – not necessarily the most technologically capable person but a “good teacher” who happens to use technology. The college also found the most effective training to be that which was done in small groups – to meet both individual and departmental need – driven by a manager in the area.

Enterprising leadership

Governors need to make major decisions about their college, sometimes against tight deadlines. Often the information they base their decisions on is paper based, and does not assist the analysis or discussion of alternatives. Using email and web services, and giving governors remote access to the college website, intranet and MIS data can speed up the interchange of information as well as broadening its scope. Technology can also give governors better day-to-day contact with the college – without increasing their workload.

Case study

City and Islington College

City & Islington remains the 'first choice' college for North London students and is heavily oversubscribed despite fierce competition from an increasing number of school sixth forms.

Jane O'Neill, Director of Students, attributes the success substantially to the levels of learner satisfaction brought about by the college's advances in new technology. "We are a widening participation college. Many of our students have part-time jobs or care for brothers and sisters. They have to have access to resources from their homes in order to stay successful. This has resulted in high levels of satisfaction."

Indeed, success rates are extremely good for a college in an area of relatively high urban deprivation. More than 4,000 of the 14,500 students last year were aged 16 to 18, with 89 per cent attracting widening participation funds and 54 per cent coming from black and ethnic minority communities. The overall pass rates were 97.7 per cent for A-levels and 94 per cent for vocational courses, with 1,034 students progressing to higher education.

What role is technology playing in supporting your college leaders? Technology is the solution to many of the challenges leaders face, not the problem.

“But the starting point for any college seeking to sustain such levels of satisfaction and success has to be staff support and confidence in the system”, she says. It is this emphasis that won City & Islington Exemplar status. Its strategic management of culture change has seen technology embedded in the system at every level of organisation.

“The main issue has to be supporting the staff to increase their confidence. This is not just about the technology but culture change. People feel comfortable with ways of working and even for very good teachers, it can be unnerving if you are trying something new for the first time,” says Jane O’Neill.

The college already had a good track record, with its own intranet system in place in 1998 and winning the Nilta Award for Innovation in Information Systems in 2000. Even so, staff and management knew when they embarked on a high investment four year new build and accommodation strategy that a major cultural change was essential.

All staff were involved in an initial three year strategy and ‘roll out’ of an effective self-assessment review process that generated development plans at course, curriculum and college centre level. From this came the priorities

and devised ICT and e-learning development plans. Everyone – staff and students – undergo induction into the system, with full support to boost confidence in a system that is continually monitored by a range of development groups for ICT, e-learning, e-champions and separate ICT user groups for each of the five centres.

The college has now created a new ILT-based customer relationship management system, as well as an employer satisfaction system, as part of a range of developments that led to the college taking the unofficial role as JISC RSC Exemplar in the area prior to the award.

Frank McLoughlin, the Principal, says: “The importance of becoming a Technology Exemplar Network exemplar for us is the recognition it gives all our staff who have embraced e-learning and taken on the challenge of striving for the very highest quality of teaching and learning for our students.”

Self-improvement

Improving quality through effective self-evaluation and self-improvement is a key aspect of inspection. Technology supports both processes by gathering, analysing and presenting data for decision-making purposes and also by collating views and responses to contribute to continuous self-evaluation.

Technology supports staff training and development just as it widens opportunities for all learners. Learning platforms can provide skills development and updating on demand. Staff can link with other colleges or training providers for training and assessment. They are also able to produce their own professional development plans and create personal learning opportunities in the context of their work for the college.

Case study

Brockenhurst College

Brockenhurst College has eliminated mountains of wasteful paperwork that have been a drain on time and resources through its innovative use of new information and learning technology.

The latest development to help achieve this is the electronic self assessment report system, for which it has been awarded Exemplar status in the Technology Exemplar Network. The system integrates the entire college management information system (MIS) and learning platform.

Robin Gadd, head of information services, said: "We desperately needed to aggregate departmental responses on everything we did in order to improve the efficiency and timeliness of the college's Self Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan." Brockenhurst is a Beacon College, noted for its excellence in self assessment, and it needed to keep up the momentum.

But this was about much more than kudos and awards. "The Ofsted Common Inspection Framework in 2006 created the imperative,"

How is technology supporting your leadership team in helping the college to improve? Technology should be a key tool for engaging staff and students in helping your organisation develop.

he said. “Also, the self-assessment review is crucial to the whole self-regulation agenda that the Government is promoting.”

With success rates already at 97 per cent, it was difficult to see where improvements in learning could come, he said. “The big benefits were around reductions in bureaucracy. The previous system meant printing out hundreds of sheets of paper per department, which were time-consuming and very difficult to process. This system eliminates duplication and makes it easy to pull together common issues.”

All staff – teaching, support and management – were trained to use it for departmental self-assessment and record keeping. It is an accessible, easy-to-use software application, available online for use whenever and wherever staff wished to use it, and incorporating data sources that were traditionally only available as separate reports.

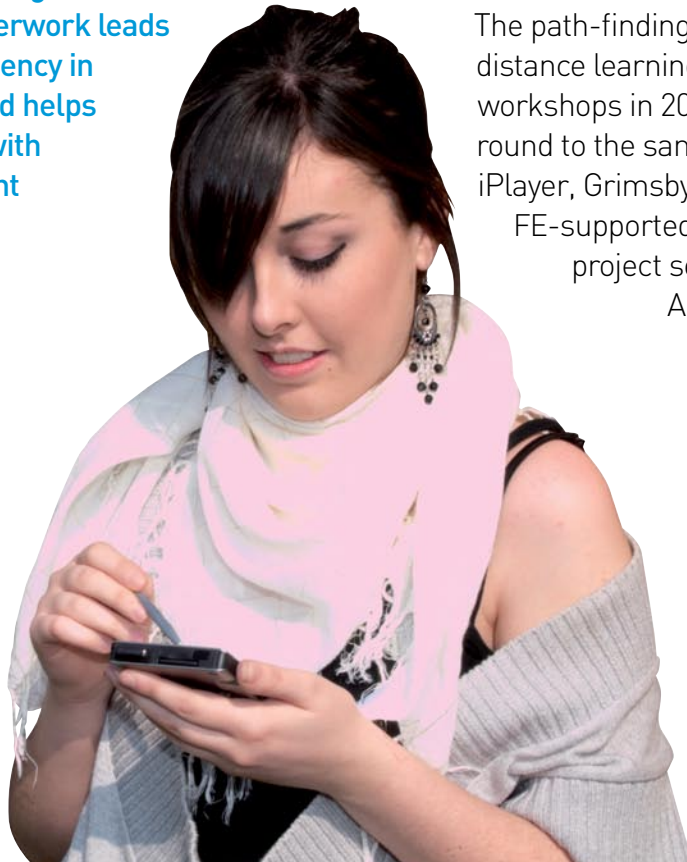
“They have the chance to talk to each other, record outcomes and see how other departments were doing it,” said Robin. Self-assessments were also more accurate since

they were subject to constant non-threatening peer review. “You get a better sense of whether departments claiming to be good are actually outstanding or vice versa. Staff like it because, prior to this, the whole thing was a bureaucratic chore that people just had to get through.



Partnership

All colleges are involved in partnership arrangements of some kind – whether with employers, schools or providers of adult and community learning. Each of these partner organisations has to supply data on their partnership operations to a range of inspection and audit bodies. Sharing resources via technology and using common software and paperwork leads to increased efficiency in administration and helps partners to deal with data in a consistent manner.



Case study

Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education

The BBC's iPlayer facility was only recently introduced – but Grimsby Institute for Further and Higher Education was offering a similar service two years ago.

The path-finding college had “video-on-demand” distance learning support for lecture theatres and workshops in 2006, and yet the BBC has just got round to the same with iPlayer. Also, through iPlayer, Grimsby was the first on the scene with an FE-supported Sky TV education channel – a £3m project set up with Regional Development Agency support.

How can technology help your college to be more open and effective in its partnership working? Are you making the use of technology a core principle in all partnership agreements?

Adrian Clarke, director of information services, says: “In terms of technology we are brave and will take risks in trying to take on new things and make them work. We are also very customer orientated, very enterprising, in our focus on business.” It is an approach that has seen the institute expand from a £16m to £39m business within six years, substantially as a result of ILT developments.

Where many colleges are only just considering whole-college networking with whiteboards and wireless systems, Grimsby is a generation on, dismantling whiteboards for smart boards, complete with voting systems and other advantages associated with the most advanced technology. Even so, they take nothing for granted and are seeking wider consultations with other colleges, training providers and businesses on even more radical improvements as they plan to move into a 700-room hi-tech building in three years.

“We want to use the status and resources that come with the Exemplar status to think anew, to help others and to bring them in to advise us on what we are doing right and what wrong. Are we planning to have the right network and kit? We want to discuss with colleges whether we should have breakout areas? What do they do with their equipment? And so much more.”

Adrian Clark knows the institute has done well, with its innovative “Learning Curve” room for quality development work and staff development. And, over the past two years, it has succeeded in embedding e-learning across the whole organisation, using peer support and sharing of technological ideas – for which it won the Becta Exemplary status. “Instead of us dictating, we allow staff to bring technology to us,” he says.

As an exemplar college, they want to study the barriers and problems encountered when facing change. How are or were these barriers broken down? It is what has won the Grimsby college Ofsted accolades, Star Awards for leadership and Innovation and Beacon Awards for lifelong learning in the community.

Its latest ventures include £6.9m of research work for business, creating ICT toolkits for business production improvements linked to NVQs and Foundation Degrees, working with everyone from the local community, sector skills councils and even the UN.

Leading technology

In 2005, the Government released its e-strategy for education and its digital strategy to link in with its policies on e-governance and e-citizenship. The strategy was set out in the document *Harnessing Technology: Transforming learning and children's services*. Becta, as the Government's lead partner for the development and delivery of this strategy for the schools and the learning and skills sectors, has now developing a strategy, *Harnessing Technology for Further Education, Skills and Regeneration*, published in spring 2008.

Becta's challenge within the FE and skills sector is that we take a fresh look at how we can best support colleges and training providers to ensure that technology underpins the government's response to the Leitch Report and the implementation of 14-19 reforms.

There are four key priorities emerging from *Harnessing Technology for Further Education, Skills and Regeneration*:

- **A further education system that is fully confident in the use of technology**

Colleges need to be confident that they are using technology well and for the right parts of their activities.

We aim to develop a capable and confident workforce which understands the transformational power of technology.

- **Equality and social cohesion**

We want to ensure that learners and employers are aware of the opportunities for learning through technology and particularly that there are equal opportunities for disadvantaged learners and small businesses.

- **Raising the quality of technology products and services**

We will focus on driving up the standards of digital resources and promote the business benefits of investing in technology, making sure that the full technology premium is obtained from public investment.

- **Driving up quality improvement**

We will work with our partners to ensure that there is a clearly understood vision for a further education and skills sector which is fully confident in the use of technology and which has the right incentives for delivering technology-based services.

Further information



For further information about Becta's work in this area, and the *Harnessing Technology for Further Education, Skills and Regeneration* strategy, go to
www.becta.org.uk/feandskills

The colleges featured in this document are all part of the **Technology Exemplar Network. For more information go to**
www.becta.org.uk/feandskills/exemplarnetwork

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