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Governance and technology

Governors play a key role
promoting technology

The evidence is now clearly established that technology can substantially increase the efficiency and effectiveness of colleges and lead to a significant reduction in costs whilst maintaining the quality of learning. These improvements can only be achieved through the focused application of technology in teaching, learning and management.

This brief paper looks at the challenges and shows how a number of colleges have achieved significant gains – often recouping investment costs within three years.

The paper draws on case studies, issues discussed in workshops and key questions raised by delegates at a one-day conference in Leeds on The Strategic Leadership of Technology and Governance.



Read more about our work:

Harnessing Technology Review 2009: The role of technology in further education and skills

www.becta.org.uk/publications/fereview2009

Delivering results with learning technologies in the workplace:
Evidence for employer efficiencies and tangible business benefits

www.becta.org.uk/publications/employerefficiencies

Foreword

Our starting point is that we live in a technology-enabled world and that, used properly, technology improves teaching and learning and business processes. Research shows that it motivates, improves grades, enables people to achieve more quickly on a 24/7 basis, is cost effective and efficient.



Jane Williams,
Becta

But piling more computers into your building will not be enough. Developing a successful technology strategy takes time and expertise and needs leadership from principals, department heads and governors. So far, only 8 per cent of colleges are truly pioneering in their approach.

We need to get to the position where technology is not a special case or just for the enthusiasts but comes as standard. Governors are often uniquely placed to lead the agenda because of their experience outside college and their impartiality. In this crucial leadership role they can rely on Becta to support them with research findings, guidance, procurement framework and training, all developed in partnership with the sector.

I am conscious that all public institutions are now particularly concerned about their finances, and want every investment to show a good return. Technology can seem expensive upfront but the evidence in this paper shows that if the investment is made strategically, it easily pays for itself and more.

We want governors to take the lead and drive forward this agenda.

Jane Williams
Executive Director for Further Education
& 14-19, Becta

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Latest research findings on technology in FE and Skills

What are the critical success factors and what level have we reached so far? Telling research evidence gives governors a yardstick by which to measure the progress and potential for improvement using appropriate technology. An organisation's e-maturity – its ability to deploy technology effectively across the whole organisation – depends on leadership, infrastructure and systems, and the knowledge and skills of practitioners.



Cathy Ellis,
Director of
Harnessing
Technology
in FE & Skills
(Improvement &
Leadership), Becta

Leadership:

- One third of colleges have a whole college plan for technology and have a college-wide committee to oversee developments
- 26 per cent designate a senior manager with responsibility for technology.

Infrastructure and systems:

- There is an average of 4.5 students per computer
- The integration of Management Information Services (MIS) with learners systems has gone up from 17 per cent to 63 per cent
- But only 29 per cent offer remote access to the college system at all times
- One quarter of colleges use their Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) for independent learning and teaching – elsewhere the resource bank model is dominant.

Practitioners:

- Practitioners' technology skills, as reported by their managers, have been improving – with competence in user skills now up to 77 per cent and in using technology with learners up to 65 per cent.

The Government's Harnessing Technology strategy has four strategic priorities:

- Learning and skills workforce development
- Content and digital resources
- Performance management, incentives and data
- Communications and networking.

To support these priorities Becta, working with partners, has:

- launched the eProspectus, an online directory of technology-focused e-CPD
www.thenationalprospectus.com
- developed Generator, the leadership tool for benchmarking and improving your organisation's use of technology – now used by 83 per cent of colleges and 15 per cent of universities and provoking international interest
www.generatorfeandskills.com
- established the Technology Exemplar Network – 129 providers working together to innovate the use of technology in FE and skills
www.becta.org.uk/feandskills/exemplarnetwork
- seconded people from FE colleges, Ofsted, NIACE, AoC and the NUS to work with Becta
- developed collaboration websites to share good practice
- published guidance and discussion documents on a wide range of technology-focused issues.

Next year, our priorities will be to increase the:

- number of colleges using technology efficiently and effectively
- number of learners able to use technology safely, legally and effectively
- use of learning technologies in the workplace
- number of local authorities, 14–19 consortia and providers using technology for diplomas, apprenticeships and Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs).

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Case studies

Case study 01



Chris McLean,
North
Hertfordshire
College

Using technology to support outstanding governance

*Chris McLean, Vice Principal, Quality and Information Services,
North Hertfordshire College*

At North Hertfordshire College, governors can feel integrated into the organisation because technology gives them access to the same information as staff and students.

Through SharePoint governors have access to:

- interactive data aggregated from college systems – staff do not write separate reports for governors
- Key Performance Indicator (KPI) dashboards – ‘traffic lights’ indicate whether performance measures are on track
- notifications of events
- calendars of college life
- student voice via discussion forums, student blogs and the student helpdesk
- North Hertfordshire College TV
- focus groups to meet staff and students
- reports on the college in the media.

Governors can be confident of the information because it is live and is the same information staff are using. The Audit Committee is able to access interactive Risk Management information online during meetings, which makes staff more accountable and shows how well systems actually work – whether deadlines are reasonable, for example.

This leads to an improved culture and better teamwork. And it works both ways – through the website, governors are also more accessible to people in the college.

Case study 02



Sue Griffiths,
Wakefield College



Sue Slassor,
Wakefield College



Steve Bell,
Wakefield College

Governors get to grips with strategic leadership of technology in their college

Sue Griffiths, Principal, Sue Slassor, Director of Quality and Performance, and Steve Bell, ILT Development Manager, Wakefield College (Becta Beacon Award winner for Excellence in the Use of Technology)

Without using technology really well, it is difficult for a college to be excellent. Strategic use of technology can improve every aspect of a college's functions and meet the FE agenda.

For example:

- Machinery of Government changes – improve collaboration with new funding bodies
- Diplomas – collaboration with local authorities and other providers, e-learning
- personalisation – flexibility of approach
- self-regulation – access to data
- workforce development – flexible and cost-effective training
- reduce waste
- bring all departments together for a whole college approach.

While it is not necessary for leaders to be technical whizz kids themselves, they have to develop the strategy and appoint the right people to the right levels in the hierarchy. They should constantly ask the question – How does this impact on teaching and learning?

Staff need to engage with the data at every stage of the learner's journey – from enquiry to enrolment to learning to assessment. And staff and governors need a single source of data that they can trust and rely on.

Governors can support the use of technology by asking their college about its:

- ILT strategy
- E-enabled estate
- IT investment
- resource utilisation
- Link Governors for ILT (shadowing students and staff)
- capital projects.

Conference workshops



Sally-Anne Saull,
Becta

Benchmark technology progress more effectively with Generator

Sally-Anne Saull, Head of Personalisation and Improvement, Becta

Generator is a free, online self-assessment tool that enables senior managers to improve their organisation's strategic deployment of technology. It allows you to benchmark your use of technology against that of other organisations across the country and to compare its use between different departments within your own organisation.

Once you have mapped your own practice, you can use this data to assess strengths and weaknesses. This creates an evidence-base from which you can demonstrate progress against targets and set priorities for investment, development and CPD.

Generator was launched in March 2009 and is now used by over 70 per cent of FE and Sixth Form colleges. As these organisations feed in their data, Generator is providing a mine of real time information that is becoming ever richer.

 To find out more or try Generator for yourself visit:
www.generatorfeandskills.com



Sheila Selwood,
West Herts College

Paperless board meetings save time and money

Sheila Selwood, Clerk to the Corporation, West Herts College

Moving from paper to an electronic system for Board meetings saves money. West Herts College saves on average £160 per meeting, in the savings made on printing, paper, postage and administrator time, and an electronic system enables swifter access and more reading time for members.

Successful transition needs careful planning with:

- a trial of the system prior to training
- training for all governors
- a planned implementation programme.

Governors need to be reassured that they will have secure access, full training, dedicated laptops and no requirement to produce printouts. In particular, they need to be confident that accessing and annotating electronic documents will be as easy as using a paper-based system.



Harry Greiner,
City College,
Norwich

Come fly with me: a learning adventure in cyberspace

Harry Greiner – Head of New Media, City College, Norwich

Virtual worlds are not just for playing games – they can also be used for teaching and learning, for modelling scenarios and for meetings.

Learners can get an experience of places they cannot visit, from the streets of Krakow, to a building site or the inside of a molecule. IT, fashion and business students can collaborate to design clothes and sell them – all in a virtual world. Creating avatars can also give insight into what it is like to be someone else – to be a member of a government or live with a physical disability, or with schizophrenia. And the fun element of technology can be a powerful tool to engage disenchanted learners!

Leaders can save travelling time and expense by meeting or having training sessions in virtual spaces, where everything can be recorded and viewed again.

But particular care is needed. Not everyone in cyberspace is who they say they are and safeguarding is an important issue here.



Carmen Wills,
St Helens College

Online strategic modelling clarifies your policies and procedures

Carmen Wills, Deputy Principal, Chris Jones, Clerk to Corporation, St Helens College

Governors have a responsibility to determine and review the educational character and mission of the college but it is easy for the overall vision and mission to be obscured by a blizzard of initiatives and policies.

St Helens College has developed an online, interactive strategic model which provides a single portal approach to all aspects of their business and activities, giving the clearest line of sight from the governors to the learner and back again.

A radical review of the college's many strategies reduced them from 25 to five! A live model now maps the college's strategies, processes, themes and values against mission and vision – clicking on any part of the model guides the user to understand the purpose and process of all college activities.



Chris Jones,
St Helens College

This single point of access to all strategies, policies and procedures via the intranet enhances corporate planning and decision making, enables governors and staff to understand the planning and performance imperatives and to feel confident that the college is effectively leading and managing its core business.



Marianne Green,
Becta

Safeguarding your people in a digital world

Marianne Green, Head of Workforce and Leadership (Colleges), Becta

Safeguarding is considered to be essential in assuring the quality of the development and well-being of young people and adults and is one of the limiting grades in the common inspection framework.

Working with schools, teachers, young people, local authorities, Ofsted and Government, Becta has developed a model of support that can help to manage the level of risk. This structure is known as PIES, and sets out questions you need to ask about your Policies and practice, Infrastructure, Education and training and Standards and inspection.

Key messages for safeguarding:

- Provide confidence and give clear messages about working safely online
- Educate learners, empowering them to make informed choices
- Equip all staff with the skills to support learners to work online
- Make lines of responsibility for safeguarding online clear to all
- Develop robust and resilient e-safety policies and systems.

Becta has recently produced key messages for leaders on Safeguarding Further Education and Skills learners in a digital world

www.becta.org.uk/publications/safeguardingfe

At your corporation governing body meetings have you discussed the strategic leadership of technology relating to:

- learners and the curriculum
- efficiency and business processes
- effective governance

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What next?

Key questions from governors

As a result of attending the conference, these are some of the questions governors have decided to take back to their colleges:

1. What aspects of technology (for management and learners) should my college make use of?
2. Do we have an ILT strategy for our college, and if so, how well is it being implemented?
3. Who was involved in developing our eStrategy and how do we use it?
4. How can we develop our current e-governance site to include traffic light monitoring KPIs?
5. How easy is it for staff/learners to access strategies and e-policies – Can we improve?
6. How can we make progress to paperless meetings?
7. How well is our principal engaged in technology?
8. Are we using Generator and to what purpose?
9. How can we plan for dynamic paperless governance and open transparent information for all governors?
10. What do we actually measure in our use of ICT?
11. How connected are we?
12. How can we move towards integrated systems for the college? (MIS, enrolment, payroll, etc)
13. How can we get SharePoint working in the college?
14. How far are we down the path to e-maturity?
15. Do we have a strategic plan, and if so, is it a whole college approach?
16. How can the creative use of ICT help improve governance and help us also to achieve grade 1 in Learning and Development in our next Ofsted?
17. How can governors be better included and informed about technology initiatives? What training is there to support governors, e.g. in Generator? Are there statistics on the impact of technology on learners and workforce and where can a governor find the information?

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