

Learners have told us that:

- technology contributes to effective learning by making it more accessible, interactive and personal
- they would like to see tutors using technology creatively, making it relevant to their learning
- they expect ICT guidance and support from their college or training provider to help keep them up to speed with technology developments: while many are confident in the use of technology in their social lives, they need support to maximise its use for their learning
- they would like to see a fairer, more flexible and transparent policy which enables the best use of technology facilities in their organisation, enabling and empowering them to embrace technology and influence policy.

Harnessing Technology, Embracing Learner Voice

Since December 2008 Becta and the National Union of Students (NUS) have been exploring the role of technology in the learner experience, with a view to increasing learners' awareness, interest and demand for learning through technology and strengthen learner participation in the FE and Skills sector. This includes a consideration of key issues such as safeguarding. Here we summarise our findings and key recommendations for Becta, NUS, colleges and providers.

Making learner voice heard

How can we engage learners in policy debates and discussions about technology in the FE and Skills sector? What do learners use, want and need when it comes to using technology in and outside the learning environment? What training is needed for learners and the workforce when it comes to using technology? Where do learners see things heading for future use of technology in education?

These are all questions that our work set out to address. By working with more than 180 learners and over 60 representative organisations, we have identified some common themes:

- The sector recognises opportunities to engage learners through the use of technology and is keen to exploit such opportunities.
- Approaches to engaging learners with or without the use of technology vary throughout the sector: some colleges use technology well for teaching and learning but not for communications, while for others the opposite is true.
- Social media and open source tools provide efficient and low-budget ways to engage learners but bring with them concerns about safeguarding and cultural change.
- Technology provides opportunities to support learner voice by opening up feedback channels, providing information and supporting representation.

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The future

By 2020 learners would like to see:

- accessible, interactive and personalised learning experiences using technology
- a blended approach to learning, catering for differing learner needs
- greener education providers and approaches to education
- access to technology and connectivity to enable them to learn anytime and anywhere
- interactive and dynamic technology such as touch screen computing and virtual worlds embedded in the learning experience, with Bluetooth technology, intelligent buildings and voice verification used to enhance the on-site education experience
- online assignments and assessment
- access to the learning materials in a range of formats to personalise education for individual needs.

Next steps: recommendations for the FE and Skills sector

A series of detailed recommendations have been outlined, including:

- further work to support colleges and providers to enable learners to access networks using personal devices, without compromising safety and security
- providing guidance for producing flexible acceptable use policies that encompass learner views
- providing evidence of effective practice in the use of social media as a teaching and learning tool
- providing guidance on maximising the benefits and potential of virtual learning environments
- supporting the development of digital literacy among learners
- promoting e-mentoring and the benefits of peer-support among learners to develop their own use of technology.

Questions to consider in your college

- How are your learners using technology in their social lives and for learning?
- What support do your learners need to understand how technology can be used to enhance their learning?
- How do you involve your learners in the use of technology?
- Are learners involved in strategic decisions about the use of technology?
- How do you use, or plan to use, technology to attract learners before they enter your college?

To request a full copy of the report, please email:



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