

In conversation with Becta

Join the debate – leading voices from FE and Skills give their views to stimulate discussion around progress in learning technology



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Foreword



Jane Williams

When we published the *Technology strategy for further education, skills and regeneration implementation plan for 2008-2011*¹, I said it represented both an end and a beginning for us. Research and widespread consultation had helped us develop the plan and now it was time to begin our work with the further education system to achieve our objectives and reach our targets. In developing the implementation plan our guiding principle was to consider the views of those most interested and more than 420 national organisations offered their views and experiences – national agencies, membership organisations, Government departments, businesses, and educational and training organisations .

We are now in a new and exciting phase which will build on what has already been achieved, while offering us new challenges as we move forward. There are three essential elements which will ensure success: dialogue, partnership, progression. And, to these ends, I am launching the first in a series of regular publications, *In Conversation*, to promote discussion and debate at all levels – locally, regionally and nationally – so that we may achieve together the best possible outcomes for learners across the further education system.

As technology advances at a pace, immediate challenges face all of us working in education and training across further education. These challenges include improved 14-19 delivery, better apprenticeships and greater access for all through e-learning, blended learning and initiatives such as the Home Access programme.

This first edition of *In Conversation* includes a range of opinions and comment on new technologies, such as Web 2.0, mobile technology and the way developments, such as podcasting, are replacing the traditional lecture. These developments open up a whole debate about what the most appropriate teaching methods and styles will be in the future as systems become more participatory and accessible to all learners.

The debate must involve learners, tutors, trainers – all those engaged in a further education system in which learning when, where and how an individual chooses will be the norm. If you would like to join us in our ongoing conversations and /or give us feedback on this first publication please email feskills@becta.org.uk

Jane Williams

Executive Director, Further Education Regeneration and Delivery, Becta

¹ www.becta.org.uk/feandskills/technologystategy

1. Introduction

Ten leading voices among learners, providers, leaders, managers and policy advisers involved in learning technology gave their views in conversation with Becta about the recently launched *Technology strategy for further education, skills and regeneration: Implementation plan*. Their judgments on the scope for change, the best way forward and the role partners and stakeholders can play in getting the best out of the developing strategies are presented in this report, *In conversation*, in order to stimulate wider debate across the FE and skills system.

Their views are encouraging. They can see that Becta's wider strategy recognises the need for a national approach to seize opportunities to exploit technology across the further education system. They appreciate that the new technologies in themselves do not offer a clear set of goals since everything is changing rapidly. The point, therefore, for Becta, they say, is not to define the goals too specifically but to provide the means for all those involved – learners, providers and policy makers – to be creative in their approach.

"Success in achieving the Government's skills targets demands a technology-based solution", says Karen Price, Chief Executive of e-skills, the Sector Skills Council for IT and Telecoms. "If we consider the skills needs laid down in the Leitch review, the cost of delivering those in the traditional way is unaffordable, but Becta's strategy will help us to reach the targets without putting up the cost."

"Such costs would be too high", says Diana Laurillard, Professor of Learning with Digital Technologies at the London Knowledge Lab. "If we continue with the same method of delivery, we would need an additional 35 FE colleges to achieve the targets set out in the Leitch Review of skills."

Efforts to cope with change require considerable support for staff and managers through training and mentoring. It also calls for commercial ingenuity, with increased efforts by Becta and its partners to persuade the private sector to invest in and develop new learning technologies. Indeed, many people involved in such work insist that companies will, in the words of Tim Marshall, Chief Executive Officer for the Joint Academic Network (JANET UK), "bite your arm off to get into education" once they see the commercial potential.



There are concerns that potential advantages could be undermined by the unintended consequences of devolution, funding rules and other regulatory requirements around issues such as information gathering. Will the new political powers vested in the regions and local authorities undermine economies of scale and consistency of policies needed for effective use of the new information learning technologies?

But, in the end, the central issue has to be the nurturing of "community cohesion" which is essential to spread best practice to the widest possible number of people – all participants agreed that this need could not be overstated. Indeed, without it, no real advances could be made.

Their views coalesced around four principles underpinning the Becta report *Harnessing Technology for Further Education, Skills and Regeneration: A progress report*. The four principles are:

- a responsive, demand-led system,
- improved learner participation and achievement,
- personalised learning that responds to the diversity of needs and
- high-performance providers who are confident in their sustainable use of technology.

A consensus is beginning to emerge from these interviews regarding strategy and the need for new directions in supporting learners, providers, partner organisations and other stakeholders to enable the whole further education system to derive the full benefits of technology for its learners.



Robin Ghurbhurun

National Chair of the Association of Colleges' National Information and Learning Technology Association (AoC NILTA)



Robin Ghurbhurun



Building on the past to shape the future

Overall, Becta has the right approach in seeking to create a strategy for and owned by the FE sector. This was clearly lacking when, fifteen years ago, the FE ILT Committee highlighted the challenges of newly incorporated colleges, many of which still exist today. They concentrated on three things: infrastructure, content and staffing. Then, five years ago in 2003, there was the DfES paper led by Professor Diana Laurillard, *Towards a Unified e-learning Strategy*. This added substantially to the debate about the need to bring together the key stakeholders, and pointed to the lack of synergy between partners and industry. Schools and HE had their strategies but we did not in FE: in fact, there was no unified approach across the education service.

In the past ten years, £1.5bn has been spent on ICT in the post-16 sector which, I believe, should have brought us to a significant tipping point. We need to build on this investment, and Becta has added three things that will help significantly. It is concentrating on leadership, personalised learning and engagement. In my view, engagement is important for creating an appetite for learning, which we as a nation lack. Furthermore, to generate such an appetite for e-learning is a challenge in itself and anything that moves us towards this is to be warmly welcomed.

In 2008, it is unacceptable that so few colleges are where they should be with ICT (as revealed in Becta's research). For example, many colleges are embarking upon significant new-build programmes. But are they getting it right with regard to technology? There is a danger of the buildings themselves becoming iconic white elephants where the learning practices simply have not changed.

For the strategy to be really effective we need to develop a sound pedagogic model, which we do not have at present. Also, in my view, Becta must be more radical. There is some 'carrot' but insufficient 'stick' at present and we need clear measurement of just what investment in technology institutions are making. It worries me; I do not want to be here in ten years time having this same conversation reflecting on these same issues.

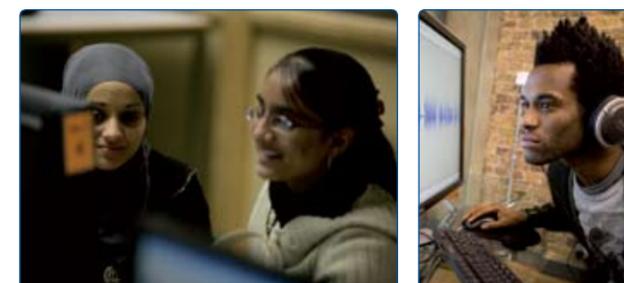
I welcome the greater emphasis on institutional support. This needs the backing of rigorous inspections and quality assurance systems that report on the impact of technology on learning. If the inspectors are thorough, then senior management teams will have to sit up and take note, being provided with a strong evidential case for change. There is also a need for greater awareness in initial teacher training. And, beyond that, I would have e-CPD as part of the new Principals' qualifying programme and, even more radically, deliver at least one of the modules as online training only, so senior managers can experience being an on-line learner.

Ten years ago under the Further Education Funding Council, investment was aligned to infrastructure and the number of accessible PCs. Such a target is inappropriate now but it was needed then as you had to get equipment in place. We are smarter now and know that access doesn't equal use, but there should be targets and penalties for non-engagement.

This raises big questions about what is the appropriate curriculum, how people learn with new technology and how we assess the costs of new styles of teaching and learning online, in the workplace and home. The cultural shift required to deliver institutional digital dividends is lacking and at its core will be issues such as staff terms and conditions. We need to address the question of teaching and assessor contract hours and the proportion of their time devoted to online learning. We need to do this since, increasingly, there will be more learners in the workplace and other places remote from the college. What will that mean for professional teachers and the question of how and where they are teaching? In my view, that is not currently receiving sufficient attention. And then there is the question of work-based learners who may never attend college on site? We need to redesign our support infrastructure to really deliver a demand-led system.

There are big issues here around leadership and staff development that AoC Nilta as significant partners with Becta will need to address. The AoC needs to think through the implications of the wider strategy. What are the working relationships? Some colleges are very radical in terms of CPD entitlement linked to staff supply and performance whilst others have a long way to go. All these issues are key to the 21st century college. In FE terms, what kinds of contracts are being signed up to?

Much still needs to be done on partnership working, and all the while the emphasis must be on partnership. We still have some way to go in making sure schools, colleges and HE institutions co-ordinate provision and realise the true benefits of empowering learners through technology.



Chris Swingler

Learning Manager, Association of Learning Providers (ALP)



Chris Swingler

alp association of learning providers

Recognise the needs of the work-based learning (WBL) sector and bring them more fully into the strategy

As an organisation we welcome the opportunity to work with Becta, and sign up to the thrust of their overarching themes. What Becta is trying to achieve is fantastic – and we, for our part, are focusing on how we can make technological innovation even more effective.

One of the key things Becta has been good at is that they're working under Government direction, and that's a huge job. They're looking at the e-maturity framework and that will allow them to see where the gaps are. They're now looking at how they can fit our sector into Phase 2 and they're able to do that because of a huge body of evidence built up over the last few years about where the technology is and where it's going. That's one of their key functions.

The big challenge for Becta now is to address specific issues within the sector that ALP is concerned with. Since we have the knowledge and wider experience of how independent work-based learners operate, we can provide the support needed in partnership, not only with Becta but also with the other stakeholders involved in the strategy. Work-based learning organisations are very diverse and what they provide is entirely different to most colleges.

Becta's also got an issue in terms of how the sector understands what they do and how they do it. The average provider in the work-based learning sector could be very small, offering just a handful of apprenticeships, for example, and it's difficult to get the message across to so many small providers. It's also difficult for learners. From the learner point of view, most learners are off-site, working in places like construction sites, and the issues they experience are different from spending your day in college or school.

The independent work-based learning sector are businesses first and foremost, with funding delivered directly by Government. As they're constrained by those funding models the demand led approach has to be tempered. Within independent WBL – as separate from colleges – providers are constrained by receiving funding per learner on completion, not by demand made by the learner. It's an incredibly complex area. Until the funding regime is more fluid, there's going to be constraint there. There needs to be a bit of recognition that it's not "one size fits all".

How that's translated is the important bit. There must be clear and concise messages for all sectors. It's good that Becta is beginning to take this up, but how do we do that – to ensure that there's a fair and consistent approach across all of the sector? We are beginning to have that dialogue and Becta is becoming aware that our sector needs to be addressed in a different way and that is beginning to happen.

We are seeing increased investment by the Government and increased attention from Becta to work-based learning and the independent training providers, which is crucial as we move to Phase 2 developments. There is a lot of work going on. For example, the *Learning Innovation Grant programme*² has had huge success and was a big boost for the sector. We have been working with other partners and providers are signing up to it. We have really gained momentum and must not risk losing that. I think it's about taking account of all that and building on it, making sure our sector has the capacity to move into the next phase. It still needs support in staffing and capital funds. How's that translated into something useable? We're all at a point now where Becta is trying to collate everything. Maybe the track needs to have some branch lines so we can be brought into the main track. The needs of our sector need to be recognised.

Becta does make opportunities for the voice of the sector to be heard and we're at a critical stage of how that's translated and it's not quite clear how we do that collectively. There's lots of work done, but this area is still a work in progress.

Becta also needs to get much better in the language it uses because in work-based learning we don't use the same language as that used in schools and colleges. We refer more to 'training' rather than to 'education'.

The Learning Innovation Grant is given to training providers by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to enhance their provision of e-learning. In Birmingham, for example, Greenspring Training is using their new equipment and software, such as computers, musical software and interactive boards, to persuade young people that learning can be fun.

Greenspring works with some of the most disadvantaged young people in the city. Many come from backgrounds of generational unemployment and some face additional problems of learning difficulties, mental health problems or involvement with crime. The new equipment, and on-line training for staff, will help to involve the young people in Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes, improving retention and achievement.



² <http://alp.qia.oxi.net/learning-innovation-grant>

Karen Price

Chief Executive, e-skills



Karen Price
e-skills uk

Training must be flexible to meet the needs of employers and individuals and drive efficiencies

Our job is to work with the Skills for Business network and employers on how e-learning can transform the skills of our people. We're able to articulate how employers are seeing things.

Employers require employees with an increasingly high level of skills. Seventy per cent of the UK's 2020 workforce has already completed its compulsory education, so to compete effectively in a global economy, the UK must focus increasingly on improving the skills of its existing workforce.

The FE sector has a particularly important role to play in developing the skills of those who use IT in their everyday jobs and we are delighted that Becta is championing how technology can, and should be, used to deliver flexible and tailored learning that is "fit for purpose" and better meets employer and individual needs.

An example of how technology can be used in this way can be seen in the recent case when doctors were updated on how to deal with a possible epidemic of avian influenza. Meetings are expensive to run and often poorly attended but, through a website, doctors were able to check and supplement their own knowledge, take part in interactive discussions and conduct a self-assessment. Over 15,000 doctors used the website and well over ninety percent of these said that it had improved their knowledge of the contingency plan and their confidence to deal with patients during a pandemic.

With the Becta strategy for FE and Skills there is a particular emphasis on the skills of the FE workforce itself, and that's absolutely critical. We need to invest in technology, but everybody tends to forget to invest in the skills of the people – we mustn't underestimate the importance of that. And it can't happen in silos or sporadically, there's a need for coherence.

People assume that technology can enable learning, but there are so many other things technology can do in terms of making things more efficient, such as assessment. It's not just about providing e-learning content. Employers use technology 'end to end'; looking at skills, the platforms they need to put in and how they can track the learners and their competence. Employers are finding it's better to work with end-to-end solutions because it can drive efficiencies.

Employers want access to flexible, 'bite sized' learning programmes that maximise learning opportunities whilst minimising time away from work and this is particularly important for smaller firms. Our research found that eight in ten employers said e-learning provides a uniquely accessible, flexible and cost-effective method of delivering training.

An example of this is the ceramics industry in the West Midlands. The Association for Ceramic Training and Development recognised the need for a radically new approach, since traditional classroom-based "off the job" training was not meeting industry needs. Equally, "on the job" training which focussed on "sitting by Nellie", was not capable of responding to rapidly changing technology. The solution was *The University of the Shopfloor*, an IT-based network of ceramics companies, supported by the DfES, the DTI and the West Midlands RDA, to share knowledge and best practice on training.

If we consider the skills needs laid down in the Leitch review, the cost of delivering those in the traditional way is unaffordable, but Becta's strategy will help us to reach the targets without putting up the cost. I was disappointed that Leitch didn't make learning and technology more prominent. Technology-based learning will become even more important in the future – today's generation of 'digital natives' has grown up with technology and it forms a natural part of how they expect to learn and communicate.

Geography is history now. Small businesses are working in a global economy and technology is transforming the way they work – they are reaching out beyond geographical boundaries. A small business in Edinburgh may be using talent in India and California. Businesses can access learning and talent anywhere in the world. Traditional learning was based on geography, but moving towards technology reduces the impact of geography and that opens up opportunities for smart people who can grasp that.

One thing I'm really keen to do is to see Becta in an enabling role. There are enormous opportunities around skills. There's always resistance around technology, but Becta can provide trusted advice and support.

Becta needs two things. It's a balance between resources and influence. If Becta is given the leadership role, that needs to be clearly understood, and it needs the resources to deliver that leadership role.



Tim Marshall

Chief Executive Officer, JANET UK



Tim Marshall



Involving the commercial sector in wider learning technology developments

Learners are more powerful than ever. They have money to spend and some of them will spend it on their education. If we don't give them a good education they will complain. They are also more powerful than us in their IT knowledge. Even the newest and youngest of teachers who think they are digitally aware will find that the learners, particularly the younger ones, have moved on.

This stuff is new. Web 2.0 and Facebook, social networking. How can we use it for education? As soon as you try to pin down anarchic Web 2.0 technology, you destroy the sense that makes it good. That's the landscape in which Becta has to work now, where it was used before to be working with linear technology such as television. Technology is no longer linear, it's democratic.

It's massive change. All business plans we have ever known are meaningless now. You cannot rely on traditional approaches to business – nor to education – whether private or public sector. I come from the commercial world but started life in the public sector – I moved from the BBC into the aggressive world of Walt Disney.

At Disney, I was trying to do digital reworking of Winnie the Pooh as an education resource. This was not for schools but for the parents. Disney wanted to hear them say: "This Winnie the Pooh stuff is high value and my kids are learning with it." If we in education really understand the game, we should get commercial interests to pay for the software developments. I see no reason why the taxpayer should.

I don't think Becta could have tried harder in its strategy and its progress report illustrates this – the need to respond to learners' demands, the need for a personalised approach, empowering the learners and making sure we have really effective provision.

But where are its efforts best directed? The challenge is to deliver and keep delivering anew in a world that is constantly changing where the rate of ongoing development is exponential. For as long as we can envisage, we will always have to be responding to new challenges.

Becta needs to engage commercial groups and help convince them of the educational value and potential of technological innovation. If you did, they would bite your arm off. It would give them a good selling point if they could build in education as well.

Is the Becta approach right? They have got it as right as they can. As an agency, it must on the one hand sing the same tune as – and resonate with – politicians while, on the other hand, making sure that the things get done which require longer-term commitment than politicians see as being reasonable. The downside of democracy is that people go for the short-terms.

So strategy should be to encourage commercial interests to support development of the technology and software, while working with those organisations like JANET who create support systems. You go for networking, it's a community. We can drive the synergy working with schools, colleges, universities, councils and other providers.

For example, we are developing the Janet Collaborate prototype which allows people, universities, colleges, schools and researchers with shared interests to collaborate via video conferencing, educational resources and best practice projects. For lecturers, teachers and support staff, it will be technologically "agnostic", accessible through whichever service you subscribe to (JCVA Venue, Skype Handle, MSN email address) and enables people to take part in groups, forums and wikis.

Also, operated by JANET, on behalf of JISC and Becta, there is the UK Access Management Federation which gives access to online materials and exchanges on information through a secure network.

What is the added value of Becta? It might not work as fast as I would like but they are the people who can start addressing this at the systems level. There is still the problem of Local Authorities etc trying to be autonomous. But Becta has a remit to drive synergy and make it happen.

We live in a disruptive world. Young people are quite used to it and the markets know how to target this younger demographic group which on the whole is very resilient to change and disruption. It's the teachers and lecturers who have the problems. The fact is that there will be disruption and business must continue irrespective. It is therefore incumbent on those responsible for the management of teachers and lecturers that they provide training and mentoring for those going through this, just as is provided in other organisations going through significant change.



John Stone

Chief Executive, Learning and Skills Network



John Stone



Everything is changing – don't try to define it, but provide the means to be creative about it

It's a very difficult patch, creating strategy in something as fast moving as ICT. Becta's got a very wide remit – it covers schools and colleges and wider providers – but it's not got a great deal of resources. I've got sympathy with the size and complexity of the agenda.

I've been involved with the design for the e-maturity framework, creating a definition of what an e-mature organisation would look like. It's easy to write down the characteristics of an e-mature organisation, but when things are happening faster than you can write them down you don't want to write down something too fixed. The challenge is to create a strategy that's open rather than closed.

Becta's strategy is very comprehensive, but one thing that worries me is to do with Becta's remit, which is focused on institutions. There are fundamental things going on that are not institutionally bound. The ways that people develop new uses for new technologies has helped everyone to access and control and define the networks they have. Youngsters are going on line and have the ability to move effortlessly and seamlessly between a number of networks. Web 2.0 is a good example of technology that isn't focused on institutions. What Becta needs to do is to exploit is the fact that ICT is more than just a better way of teachers delivering and controlling the agenda. What's actually happening is that we are seeing the potential for informal learning outside institutions. It's a philosophy of participation – you're invited in and you can contribute your ideas. I can sense that in Becta's strategy, but it's not fully there. You're no longer constrained by the school or college that you attend to access a network, but I'm not sure the strategy has got that as yet. It's very focused on institutions, management and teachers.

The strategy is focused on core competencies, which are very useful for people to have. But what you also have to do is set much more open-ended goals and provide opportunities for recognising and capturing things that are going on. It's very fast moving, so you've got to have a feedback loop so that you can refine your strategy.

We've got to stop feeling we can know what the future will look like and recognise that whatever you write down is going to change. When something is about progress and change and creativity, if you can write it down, you've missed the point.

³ www.becta.org.uk/feandskills/exemplarnetwork

The Creative Industries Sector Skills Council asked the question: "What is the role of a government agency?" They came up with three things. It's to provide resources, to provide spaces for people to get and exchange ideas and it's to tell stories so that people can be inspired by them, like the *Technology Exemplar Network*³. Obviously there's a skill set that's important, but it can't be closed and Becta can provide structures for people to come together.

We've got to recognise that we're in an evolutionary situation, that some things will succeed and others will fail, and not try to define what an ICT utopia will look like. We must, therefore, remain responsive and not focus too much on the end point but look at the process. We've got a dynamic, creative situation and we're always trying to maximise that creativity. All of us, including Becta, must be prepared to accept uncertainty and change and to see the strategy as organic and developing, not as a fixed point.



Peter Mayhew-Smith

Vice Principal and Director of General Education at Lewisham College



Peter Mayhew-Smith



Using technology for learning is more important than perfecting the system

At Lewisham College, we support the development of the Technology Exemplar Network, which is a valuable approach to sharing expertise and best practice.

We like many of the ideas that Becta has been developing and we want to see what these initiatives deliver. Inevitably, there is a need to think through the various priorities carefully. For example, there is considerable emphasis on software and on new learning products etc. In addition to this focus, we need to seek solutions in practitioner development and ownership by teachers and managers developing new ways of learning. There are lots of new tools out there but they don't always meet our greatest need. Besides, a proportion of our college still has a lot of learning to do with the delivery of e-learning and use of blended learning in programmes.

To Becta, I ask the question, "how will you help us take that more into our organisation and make sure we have a real army of people to take things further?" Also, I ask, "how can we help Becta pass on our knowledge as we develop?"

I am in charge of quality and curriculum development. This is not so much about technology and new tools and applications but making it established practice. To what extent has Becta informed LLUK professional standards for teachers and how is that being embedded in taking it forward? Such partnerships are the key, which I think they will understand. We are entirely content with and welcome the role of Becta in our organisation and the sector as a whole. It will provoke in us the desire to bring in new ideas.

Another big question is around the best use of limited resources. On procurement, we do use Becta as one source of advice, but it's one of many sources. Again, which are the most urgent priorities here? For example, in talking about a Virtual Learning Environment, we talk of potential integration between different elements of the Management Information System and other arrangements but we do not have that as a principal factor. The issues for us are: Is the software, the system, user friendly? How well does it work? What is the ease of access? What are the security risks? Interoperability is desirable but it is more of a luxury than a necessity.

The point is democratisation of systems, more than rationalisation of them. We need it to be put into the hands of everyone and to find they are comfortable with it in their learning. Whether they can then use it for, say, the Individual Learning Record (ILR) is not really the first issue, crucial though it may be.

On cutting-edge technology, Web 2.0 and the rest, we employ a team of people to advise on that. It's a very detailed and extended question. The principle you have to apply here is one of asking – what is the gain? The obvious response is to say that we need to absorb all these things into our infrastructure in order to motivate people to learn. However, you still have to test whether that process will improve teaching and learning and deliver better success rates, or whether it's just a very interesting hobby for learning technologists that doesn't really deliver on the promises made. Our preference is to choose one or two successful routes into these tools and test them, rather than try all the different ways of doing things and end up learning not very much along the way.

That said, we cannot keep control of the range of technologies young people are using; it's a losing battle. To be able to work with these technologies is the best bet. Our best example here is the use of mobile phones as a learning platform, stimulating lines of inquiry. You create small pieces of programming and video tutorial content that are cropped and adapted for PDA or mobile phone and use the technology to run the artifacts on. The other thing is evidence gathering; what you are asking them to do is use mobile phones and PDAs to record activity. From being seen as disruptive and problematic, you welcome the mobile phone's potential for supporting learning.

The biggest and most immediate issue to tackle here is the need to create incentives for using online and blended learning, as suggested in the *Implementation Plan*. To achieve this, the LSC definition of what counts as a funded-learning area must be redefined. At present, there is too much emphasis on face-to-face activities so there are no big incentives to diversify into the new media. This makes it more difficult to pay for the work. Becta can help the LSC and its successor begin to define what the right approach to this is from the funding point of view so there is no disincentive. Instead, allow the technology to create new learning opportunities.



Alastair Clark

Senior Development Officer for ICT and Learning,
National Institute of Adult Continuing Education



Alastair Clark



Using partnerships to widen access and end exclusion

One reason for poor community provision of technology is the higher levels of home penetration in the UK compared with other countries. Some 60 per cent of homes now have broadband. Home access is good, of course, but users may not be involved in the community. So the isolation this can bring for many has to be our concern.

Particularly for older people, there is a need to make sure they are not left behind as effort is concentrated on the young. The focus of Becta on FE and Skills over the past year is, therefore, welcome and refreshing and there has been a more listening approach that is appreciated.

We are working closely with Becta on the Next Generation Learning campaign⁴ to enrich the learning experience for people of all ages. While the uptake of technology has grown rapidly in teaching and learning, there remain real challenges around access for all and Becta's *Implementation Plan* offers key points to help take this forward.

Used well, ICT is a great thing; used badly, it's a disaster. On this, we are in line with Becta. The point I am making is that Becta can achieve a great deal if it really develops the partnership approach underpinning the *FE Skills and regeneration progress report*.

It is not a question of what is missing from the strategy but what should be done to get the best out of it. One area in which we would welcome Becta being a little more strident is the way funding is arriving for e-learning with a significant focus on capital without the revenue to support it. This is a problem and it has always been a concern that the installation of equipment without the proper support mechanisms around it is not helpful. Becta needs to be more vocal about this.

Another thing is that more clarity about strategy and operational roles would be helpful. They say they are strategic but they do also get involved in operational stuff. Operationally, we at NIACE have the local connections and credibility. So, a formal partnership, with operational stuff being devolved, would be helpful. I think too there's room for a little more elementary 'blue skies' thinking around the use of technology.

We also need a lot more considered debate on things we too often take for granted. I give an example: the mantra about integrating management and education systems is not proven. Our experience on the ground is that management systems dominate when there's new technology, not the other way round. The desire to link them up does not always lead to what you want. It can end up shaping education to fit the needs of management, not of the learner.

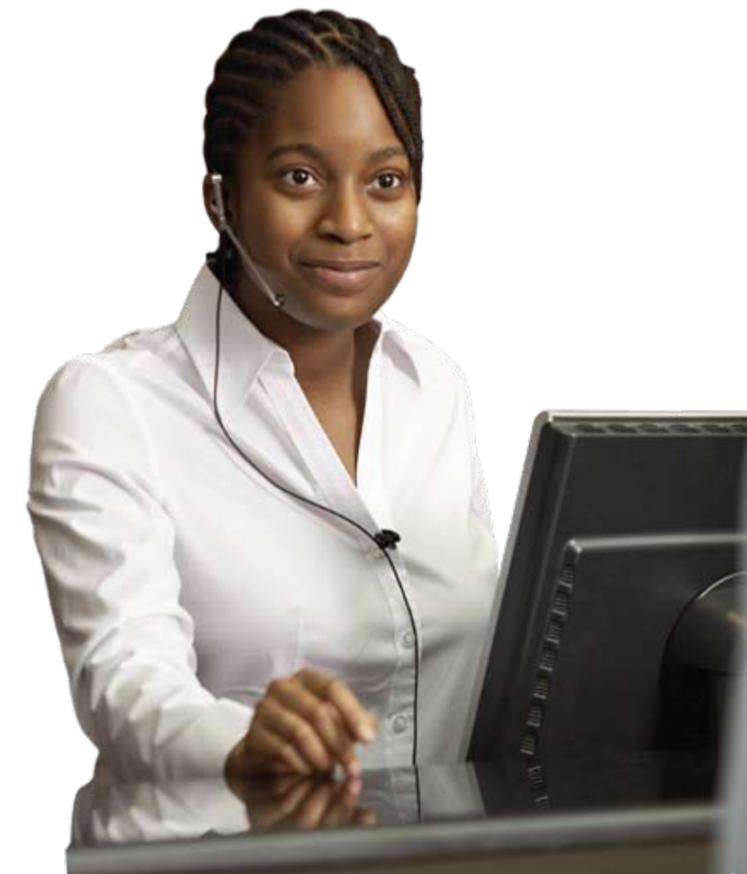
⁴ www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk

⁵ ITQ is the National Vocational Qualification for IT Users which demonstrates staff competence in the use of IT in the workplace.

So, on the best way forward, I say there is a need to forge more sustained partnerships with Becta, where we can be the familiar voice to providers, so we are a trusted voice and can pick up what people are saying. As a rule, organisations like NIACE and others will always do better than agencies. They are the policy drivers but there is also the bottom-up approach and, of course, they can and often do meet in the middle.

We are also working closely with Becta on revisions to the e-maturity framework for FE and adult learning. There is a shared understanding here of the need to build on previous frameworks in a way that helps people understand why change is necessary. The key here is to get all teachers and managers involved, so they do not feel the goal posts are being moved for the sake of it. So there is clearly a need for close partnership.

I am optimistic about Becta drawing partners in. One of the things Becta has agreed to support is its venture with us on the review of informal adult learning and the role technology may have. The fact that it has a level of ministerial profile means they it should be taken seriously. Becta is also supporting NIACE to enable us to work with e-skills, in developing the ITQ⁵ for Learning and Skills project.



Gaye Warwick

Vice chair of the National Learner Panel (NLP)



Gaye Warwick



Community cohesion to spread best practice

Becta is on the way to getting it right. I think they are on the right lines. Nationally, the thing is to try and make sure that technology is accessible to everyone in everything they do educationally. They (Becta) are advancing well in doing this for learners up to the age of 19. However, as an adult learner, I am interested in how they move on to adults.

The pre-19 agenda is the big one at the moment and I fully understand why. You have to start somewhere – but we now see big discrepancies between adult learners and the pre-19s. Of course, you have got to get it right for the young because they are the workforce of the future. But we have a big problem with many adults 30-plus who don't know they can be brought up to speed. Even though they see TV and other media campaigns around IT or basic reading skills, with things like the Gremlins, still too many people do not see it as being for them. Here's the big challenge.

How do you reach them? What about access to the internet? I don't see that anything significant is missing in Becta's approach. It recognises that the issue for adults is access. For example, the library is not always accessible. You have to book time and space, they shut inconveniently in the evenings – often the only times when adults are free.

Where else can they go? There are huge gaps in other forms of access. Go to Germany and you have an internet café on every street corner, being used by everyone all of the time. I was surprised to find how many there were in foreign countries and how accessible they were. I worked in Germany briefly when at the European Family Learning Network. I used the Internet cafés day and night. But here, at home, I have only used one once when my system was down. In Rugby where I live, which is quite a sizeable town, there are no internet cafés. Or if there are, I don't know where they are.

We need investment in local services to help people learn at home and in the community – more cafés, more accessible community centres and more encouragement for adults to attend them. But wherever you are, you still need access to teachers.

Harnessing the technology is one thing, but you have to step back from the technology in order to learn. It is not a substitute for the teacher. Some years ago, we were being told that by the year 2000 we would all be learning in pods without the need for human intervention. Well, it did not happen and it will not. There is no substitute for human contact, whether it's in the home, at college or work.

For learners in colleges nowadays, so much work is with technology and assignments are done through it. They tell us that so many people already have access. In reality, they do not. And for the lecturer to say that you have an assignment and "it's on the web, so work on it then drop it in", is a cop out.

The national picture is patchy. Go to one college and you get really good access. Go to another and you get very little. I have taught in two FE colleges and I have a daughter going through the system. I am back learning and I have come to the conclusion that community access is paramount.

If asked where the priority lies, for me adult and community learning is quite high. I suppose it has to come second to education and training pre-19. They talk about community cohesion but there are lots of things that can form communities, such as being able to access information through shared means.

For Becta, FE colleges had to be the first port of call. You have many people leaving school with no clear certainty about what direction they want to take. You have full-timers alongside people in for an evening's pottery once a week. In working closely with FE, providers show them that by using technology, a whole new world is open to them. You see, all these providers should be working in partnership.

Partnership making – everyone talks about it, but how true is it? In some parts of the country it works, in others it has not done so as yet. How does Becta access local information to help spread this best practice? I'm not sure whether they do. I am trying to say that, if you work together, you can move forward.

The problem is that some people are really developing while others are 20 years behind. If Becta has the role of trying to pull that together, heaven help them. When Becta talked to the NLP about technology⁶, the panel said that it sounds fantastic but how is it going to work on the ground? How will they make it work down the road?



⁶ How technology can benefit learners in further education (November 2007, code: NLP/BEC) available by sending an email quoting the code to Personalising.FE@dius.gsi.gov.uk

Emma Pearson

Chair of the National Learner Panel (NLP)



Emma Pearson



Value of good access to technology

Has Becta got it right? – I think so, but there are things to bear in mind. Not everyone has access to or is able to work a computer. There's not an easy answer to that. I recently went to a meeting with the Apprentice Panel in Humberside and they were reporting that even apprentices don't always have access.

Mobile technology is useful, but it's a bit of a Catch 22 situation – if someone's got a mobile phone that can get access to the internet, then they've probably also got access at home. Older people, though, probably haven't.

Examples of using technology? – You've just got to look at the OU, that's completely based around technology, where you do need a computer to complete your assignments. They didn't start with computers, but they have adapted the way society has adapted.

I'm an apprentice and I submit my assignments to my tutor on-line. She spends time visiting me about every six to eight weeks and we can make good use of that time because she's already seen my assignments. I'm in contact with her without her having to be here: through e-mails, through the training provider's dedicated website for submitting assignments and through mobile phones. We also used instant messaging to have a professional conversation at nine o'clock at night because that time suited both of us. There are good things available if you choose to use them.

One thing that has been raised by the National Learner Panel is the role of an on-line support network for apprentices using the technology of social networking (Web 2.0). DIUS has asked Becta to conduct a feasibility study into such a network and the National Learner Panel is very keen to see the outcomes of this work.

Bob Harrison

Vice chair of governors, Northern College, Barnsley



Bob Harrison



Let's work together to build colleges for the future – harnessing the potential of technology for our learners and our staff.

As governors we need considerable support in our role – especially when it comes to being aware of the future trends. We are charged with deciding the strategic direction of the College for the 21st Century. To do this, we welcome help from the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the agencies who share the responsibilities of government.

We are volunteers, remember, with substantial duties. I have been involved in Further Education for many years, the last five as a governor of Northern College, an adult residential and community college in South Yorkshire. We provide second, third and fourth chances to adults, many of whom have not had the best experiences of secondary education and have been disadvantaged and disengaged – often for many years.

The *Implementation Plan for FE and Skills* is welcome and provides the impetus for the step change many of us working in this area support. Technology is crucial in helping Northern College reach, engage and support its learners.

Becta has always had a strong reputation for supporting schools and it is most encouraging that they are now putting in place a range of support mechanisms for our sector – for example, the Technology Exemplar Network which provides a great opportunity for colleges and providers to learn from each other in a structured and supportive way.

The *Technology strategy and implementation plan* covers the main areas in need of development. Northern College is particularly pleased at the focus on a "systematic national professional development programme and regional support". At a national level this is an area which urgently needs addressing. The confidence and competence of the workforce is the critical issue and I am glad to see that Becta now has a clear remit to lead in this area.

This is not about technology, boxes or bandwidth – it is about hearts and minds and the skills set and support of the education professionals. The learners are already using new and digital technologies in their working and social lives. We need to catch up. We need to take full account of the transformative potential of emerging technologies, especially for learning.

Take, for example, the Leitch report on skills for the year 2020 and the challenging targets it sets out to ensure that we have a workforce able to compete in a global market with boundaries of time and space being dismantled through technology. I believe the same technology can help us meet those challenges and, frankly, I cannot see how we can survive to meet the needs of our learners without harnessing technology.

College principals and management teams need a lot more support to help them understand the potential that harnessing technology has to transform learning and teaching. There is a pressing need to get this right and for the new qualification for principals to ensure that it includes a strong focus on technology and its role in planning colleges for the future. With the level on new build activity happening across the sector, we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to rebuild the FE estate and make sure it is able to fully exploit the benefits of technology for our learners and our staff. If we don't take full advantage of the technology available we will risk building "colleges of the past" for the future. This is a massive area of concern for me as it is for all governors.

The *FE and Skills Technology Implementation Plan* provides the sector with a sense of direction, and a coherent way forward to build on the work that has been achieved to date. Becta has been listening to the voices of the sector and this is clear when you read the *Implementation plan*. Now we all need to work together to turn these plans into reality. The governors, leaders and staff are willing to make the effort: our learners deserve nothing less.



Conversation points

- Is it possible to have clear definitions of e-maturity given the pace of unending change in the new technologies available to learners?
- Should we leave the development of educational software and technology systems to the commercial sector and free markets?
- Is home computing growing at the cost of community developments? A metaphor is the decline in quality and quantity of public transport with the rise of the private car. If so, what can or should be done about it?
- Is the opening of more Internet cafés the answer to adult isolation and exclusion from new technological opportunities?
- Do we need to rethink our definitions of "basic skills" and "other" adult learning in the face of the new technologies? Do the Foster and Leitch reviews give the whole picture of adult learning needs?
- Do we have the balance right between capital spending and revenue support for staff training and other developments? Will the current funding model generate sustainable technologies with proper support and development?
- Is there a danger of putting too much emphasis on the development of software and systems rather than staff support and development under the current funding priorities?
- Is the goal of a single integrated IT system for management, learning and record keeping feasible or desirable? How do providers avoid situations where management tasks dominate learning rather than vice versa?
- Is it more or less important to achieve such integration than to have user-friendly systems which are accessible to all?
- Will the new Machinery of Government that devolves powers to the regions and local authorities make it easier or harder to achieve the goals set out in the Harnessing Technology strategy?
- Can teaching and learning hours involving learners using technology at a distance from the classroom be properly and adequately costed under the current funding regulations? If not, what needs to change?

- What should count as funded learning?
- Are there significant differences in the ways colleges and independent training providers work? What lessons can each learn from the other about the application of new technologies to learning?
- Will the differences between schools, colleges and other providers become more marked or less so with the roll-out of the Leitch reforms?
- Does the sector need a new high-profile campaign, equivalent to the “Gremlins”, in order to promote opportunities for adults to improve their technology skills?
- New technology is changing the relationship between teacher and learner. Will we eventually see a reduced role for the teacher with the rise of the new independent learner?
- What role is there for the school or college “without walls” and will we see the demise of the independent and free-standing school, college, university and training provider?
- Is there a more prominent place for the third sector in the development of learning technologies?
- Does Becta give sufficient opportunities for the various voices in the FE and skills system to be heard?
- What more should Becta do to enable the skills revolution through the application of technology?
- Should the teachers try to keep up with the learners?
- How do we ensure that we build colleges for the future – harnessing the potential of technology for our learners and our staff?

Key messages

1. Role of Becta

When interviewees spoke about the role they see for Becta, they raised many key issues, including the need to:

- provide resources
- create opportunities to exchange ideas
- provide inspiring narratives
- highlight good practice
- build up evidence on the use of technology
- support investment from the government in work-based learning, e.g. the Learning Innovation Grant
- help to embed widespread good practice – this is more important than the latest software
- be a two-way conduit for information, e.g. between government and the users, between national and local bodies
- point out where regulatory frameworks may be contradictory, e.g. LSC data requirements and those of the Information Authority
- be a trusted source of advice and support

2. Technology is not an end in itself

In discussing the role of technology the main comments from interviewees were:

- establish the use of technology in everyone’s daily practice
- focus on technology for learning, not technology as a hobby for enthusiasts
- focus on the needs of employers and learners
- show how technology can drive efficiencies by supporting administration for learning, e.g. assessment, but without losing sight of learning being the key purpose.

3. Coping with constant change

How can Becta deal strategically with a situation that is constantly changing?
The advice from respondents was:

- don't try to define it too closely
- don't try to regulate it too closely
- involve commercial and third sector groups as well as the public sector.

4. Access and involvement for adult learners

Various respondents addressed the question of how more adults can be involved in learning. The issues they raised were:

- how can we improve access, especially community access?
- is the digital divide about more than access to technology?
- providers for adult learners need support to maintain learning through technology, not just help with the start-up costs.

5. The role of government, the private sector and the third sector

Some respondents felt that so far Becta has been focused on institutions, public sector management and teachers and that it is time to spread its net and involve the private sector and the third sector more fully.

Biographies

Robin Ghurbhurun

National Chair of the Association of College's National Information Learning Technology Association (AoC NILTA)
www.aoc.co.uk/en/Policy_and_Advisory_Work/aoc_nilta

As a senior manager in three FE colleges, Robin Ghurbhurun has helped transform IT systems from basic skills development tools into major learning resources. He developed new concepts of open access centres for college staff training and intranet systems to put learning resources into the workplace and outreach community centres. Recently appointed Director of Innovation at City College Norwich, Robin is a key contributor to the Centre for Excellence in Leadership "e-gazing" series and seminars.

Chris Swingler

National Projects Development Manager Association of Learning Providers (ALP)
www.learningproviders.org.uk

Chris Swingler joined ALP in 2005 to promote innovation within work-based organisations as part of the Harnessing Technology strategy. Previously, she worked with the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions youth advice and guidance service, using e-learning to encourage higher 14-19 stay-on and achievement rates. Chris also worked on a range of successful projects to promote partnerships across education, business and government and tackle ICT skills shortages.

Karen Price

Chief Executive, e-skills
www.e-skills.com

As CEO of the employer-led Sector Skills Council for IT and telecoms, Karen Price has played a key role in helping colleges and other providers meet the changing skills demands of the e-economy. After an early career in education, she joined private industry, holding directorships in construction and publishing firms, helping create new companies and playing a leading role in IBM UK. Karen led the mergers which created e-skills UK in 2000 and in 2006 was awarded OBE for her services to the IT industry.



Biographies (continued)

Tim Marshall

Chief Executive Officer, JANET

www.ja.net

Tim Marshall is the executive director leading on innovative strategic development for JANET, the education and research network. He aims to develop the best commercial practice in the public services, with a strong focus on e-learning. Tim brings a wealth of technological experience from both the public and private sectors, having been a senior manager in the BBC before joining the Walt Disney Company as Senior-Vice President and then Buena Vista Productions International as Managing Director.

John Stone

Chief Executive, the Learning and Skills Network

www.lsneducation.org.uk

John Stone is a leading proponent of e-learning in further education. As Principal of Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College he was vice-chairman of JISC, where he also chaired the learning and teaching committee. Since 2006, he has been chief executive of LSN, where he expanded its work on personalised learning to include support for the Mobile Learning Network (MoleNET).

Peter Mayhew-Smith

Vice Principal at Lewisham College

www.lewisham.ac.uk

As Director of Quality and Curriculum Development, Peter Mayhew-Smith must ensure that new technology applications are established across the college. With 20 years as a Skills for Life practitioner in community education, he has extensive experience of distance and home-based learning, notably in basic skills and creative writing. He was also an education inspector and has published works including Access to London for people with disabilities.

Alastair Clark

Senior Development Officer, NIACE

www.NIACE.org.uk

Alastair Clark was recruited to NIACE from Becta in 2003 to promote e-learning across the range of further, adult and higher institutions, nationally and internationally. After his early career in teaching, he spent 13 years as a community education worker in Derbyshire, evolving e-learning programmes for formal and informal educational settings. In 2000, he joined Becta, working on UK online centres and Community Grids for Learning. His responsibilities now include the promotion of partnership working among national agencies.

Gaye Warwick

Vice chair of the National Learner Panel

www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/DG_068290

Gaye Warwick is a self-confessed "committed lifelong learner", having continued to study part-time as a mother, carer and educator. Currently Project Manager for Family learning at ContinYou, Gaye worked previously for the YMCA as project manager (with young offenders), and with the PEEPUL Centre in Leicester (empowering the local community through access to sports, health and fitness, while providing training opportunities).

Emma Pearson

Chair of the National Learner Panel

www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/DG_068290

Emma Pearson has studied in FE for some years, since starting work. Her studies range from NVQ level 3 to A-levels, attending traditional college classes and taking additional opportunities through distance learning and work-based learning for a modern apprenticeship. She has a passion for work-based learning and actively promotes initiatives such as e-learning to help tackle the isolation felt by many work-based learners.

Bob Harrison

Vice Chair of Governors, Northern College. www.northern.ac.uk

Bob Harrison was principal of South Nottingham College, with 20 years teaching and management experience in FE and schools, when he formed the consultancy Support for Education and Training in 1997. He is a consultant and education adviser to many organisations including the National College for School Leadership and Toshiba Information Systems (UK) Ltd. He currently serves on a number of steering and advisory groups involved in e-learning or m-learning.

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