

TECHNOLOGY IN FE AND SKILLS

ON LOCATION AT THE ALT 20TH
ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

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WELCOME TO THIS FE WEEK SUPPLEMENT

Rebecca Cooney
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This year, the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) celebrates its 20th anniversary and its 20th conference.

The technological landscape has shifted dramatically, in two decades, from computer labs with floppy disks to smartphones and tablet computers carried by students in their pockets.

With this shift has come new possibilities, and learning technologists are seizing the opportunity to work out new and innovative ways to reach and engage with learners.

The three-day ALT conference showcased a huge range of ideas and themes around how technology interact with and impact upon teaching and learning.

It also provided “a unique opportunity for members to share and be inspired by each other’s experience and expertise” as the event chair Malcolm Ryan said in his welcome to delegates (p.3).

On pages 4 and 5, we took the chance to get out and about at the conference and find out more about how technology is being used in education, from an app which teaches maths in everyday life, to

using social media to engage students and the increasingly popular Moocs (massive open online courses).

We interviewed the new ALT chief executive Maren Deepwell to find out what she thought of the event (p.4).

Back in January, *FE Week* reported on the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (Feltag), set up by Skills Minister Matthew Hancock to find out how the FE sector could embrace different learning technologies.

We caught up with Feltag at their open consultation at the conference (p.6), as well as speaking to Matthew Hancock to find out what they’ve been getting up to so far (p.7).

It’s not just the technology that’s evolved since computers first started appearing in colleges, but the thinking on how to use it as well, as Geoff Rebbeck explains on page 10.

However, this changed thinking has not yet expanded to include research

into the FE sector — in fact, as Nigel Ecclesfield explains (p.10), the amount of research done by the sector has fallen in recent years.

Emma Procter-Legg also picks up on this theme on page 11, as she examines the potential benefits of changing that situation around.

Educational institutions can often be caught out by rapidly changing technological innovations, leaving their practices and programs obsolete, and on page 11 Bruce Chaloux and Larry Ragan explore how a more responsive system could stop this happening.

One of the more obvious benefits of technology is the increased opportunities for communication, and this, says Sheila MacNeil (p.12) is how support and innovation can be developed.

Shaun Hughes (p.13) looks at the ways that, by replicating the

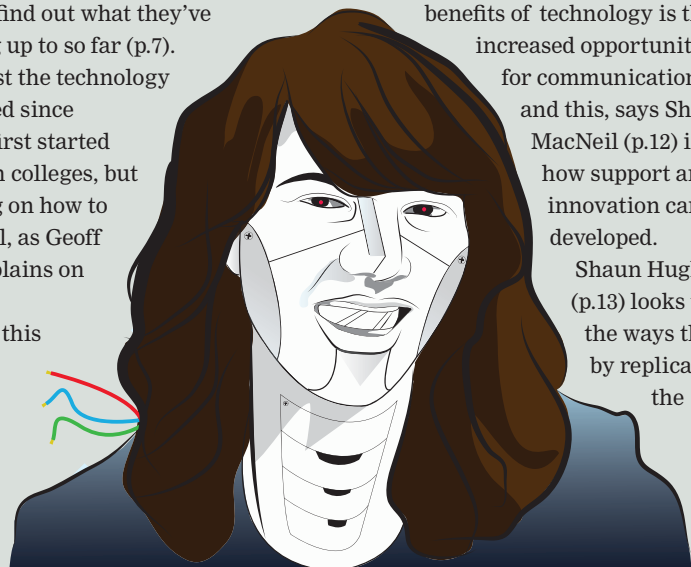
underlying mechanics and principles, games can be used to engage and teach learners, while on page 12, Chris Pegler checks out the learning materials available online.

The three-day ALT conference showcased a huge range of ideas and themes

On page 14, our roving reporter Shane Mann got chatting to some of the delegates on his mission to find out what the next big thing in learning technology is going to be.

Finally, we go out with a bang at the conference gala dinner where, along with fireworks, delegates saw the winners of the Learning Technologist of the year award (p.15), where teams from FE scooped the team prize and a learner of the year prize.

Don’t forget, as always, there are a couple of tech-savvy ways to getting on touch with us — you can add your own experiences on the *FE Week* website or you can tweet us @FEWeek.



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Twenty years of the ALT

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The Association of Learning Technology’s 20th annual conference opened with a new face – new chief executive Maren Deepwell.

Dr Deepwell wished delegates a “very enjoyable and rewarding experience” at the event, before handing over to conference chairs, Malcolm Ryan and Haydn Blackey.

“Who was at the conference in 1994?” Mr Ryan asked, and counted five hands raised in response.

He produced a copy of the 1994 conference pack, when the title of the conference had been ‘enabling active learning’.

“The introduction of technology, must not frustrate learning, but rather actively engage, challenge and motivate students or trainees,” he read.

“The conference will be a unique opportunity for members to share and be inspired by each other’s experience and expertise in addressing this challenge.”

Now, 19 years on, he said, this was still the aim of the ALT conference, this year built around the theme ‘it’s all about the learner’.

“Whether you’re presenting a paper or not, sharing your experience, no matter how small you think it is, it can always enhance someone else’s understanding,” he said.

Mr Blackley also pointed to the benefits of interaction and sharing ideas between learning technologists, and open source data, where ideas and codes behind technology projects are made freely available for others to use and adapt.

“As well as it’s all about the learner, we have that theme of “in the open” — open resources and open policy,” he said.

“In terms of technological innovation, for 20 years Malcolm has been talking about sharing good practice, and still we can do it better, and we can do it better by listening and learning from each other.”

Mr Ryan added that the conference could also be seen as a celebration of the association and its members.



Malcolm Ryan holding up ALT’s very first conference programme, as Haydn Blackey looks on.

“The fact that ALT has survived for 20 years is sufficient cause for celebration,” he said.

“It has changed and transformed over that time into a very different organisation to the one it was 20 years ago and that’s due in part to its membership and in part to the staff of ALT, and they have a vision, they have a new vision and it’s really exciting.

“This is a conference of celebration and we invite everyone here to identify and celebrate your achievements in technology, whether or not you’re making a formal presentation, celebrate your achievements by telling everyone about your work.”

Skills Minister Matthew Hancock also welcomed delegates to the event — through a recorded video message.

“We can’t make changes in the system to allow and encourage technology in education unless we hear from you about the changes that are needed,” he said.

“What gets in the way of the adoption of new technology? What’s helped to incentivise it on the front line?”

He added that he was keen to hear the results of delegates’ discussions, and hoped to put them into practice “to the betterment of people’s education everywhere”.

Mr Blackley added: “Together at ALT, we’re going to share and discover and by the end of our three days together have learned much that we can take back to our communities those things that will make a difference for them, for us and especially for our learners.”

Technostalgia

1993 was a year that saw not only the birth of the Association of Learning Technology but also a few innovations that would disrupt technology for years.

The Pentium microprocessor was introduced by Intel with a frequency of 60-66MHz

Microsoft releases version four of Microsoft Office.

Adobe introduced the PDF, the Portable Document Format, and its Adobe Acrobat and Reader software.

World Wide Web would be free for all and Mosaic, the first graphical web browser was launched.

And last but not least, who could forget the introduction of the Dyson cyclonic vacuum cleaner?



“The fact that ALT has survived for 20 years is sufficient cause for celebration

Surfing ALT conference to discover the latest tech in education



Learning and social media

One Welsh college has been experimenting with social media to give its learners the chance to direct their own learning, as music tech tutors Adam Richards and Deri Roberts (pictured below) explained.

The pair from Bridgend College in South Wales began using social networking sites Facebook and Twitter as learning tools when they found the college's VLE was not always an effective way to reach students.

"The reason for this was not a fault of the software itself," said Mr Roberts.

"It's the students, it's that the students weren't using it, they didn't live there and they weren't checking it regularly.

"So we decided that instead of forcing the students to come to us, we would go to them."

Facebook and Twitter, Mr Roberts pointed out, had the advantages of being free, always available platforms that were already "embedded in the students' experience". The pair set up a closed Facebook

group for each

class, where only group members could see and contribute to the content and a private Twitter feed for the course.

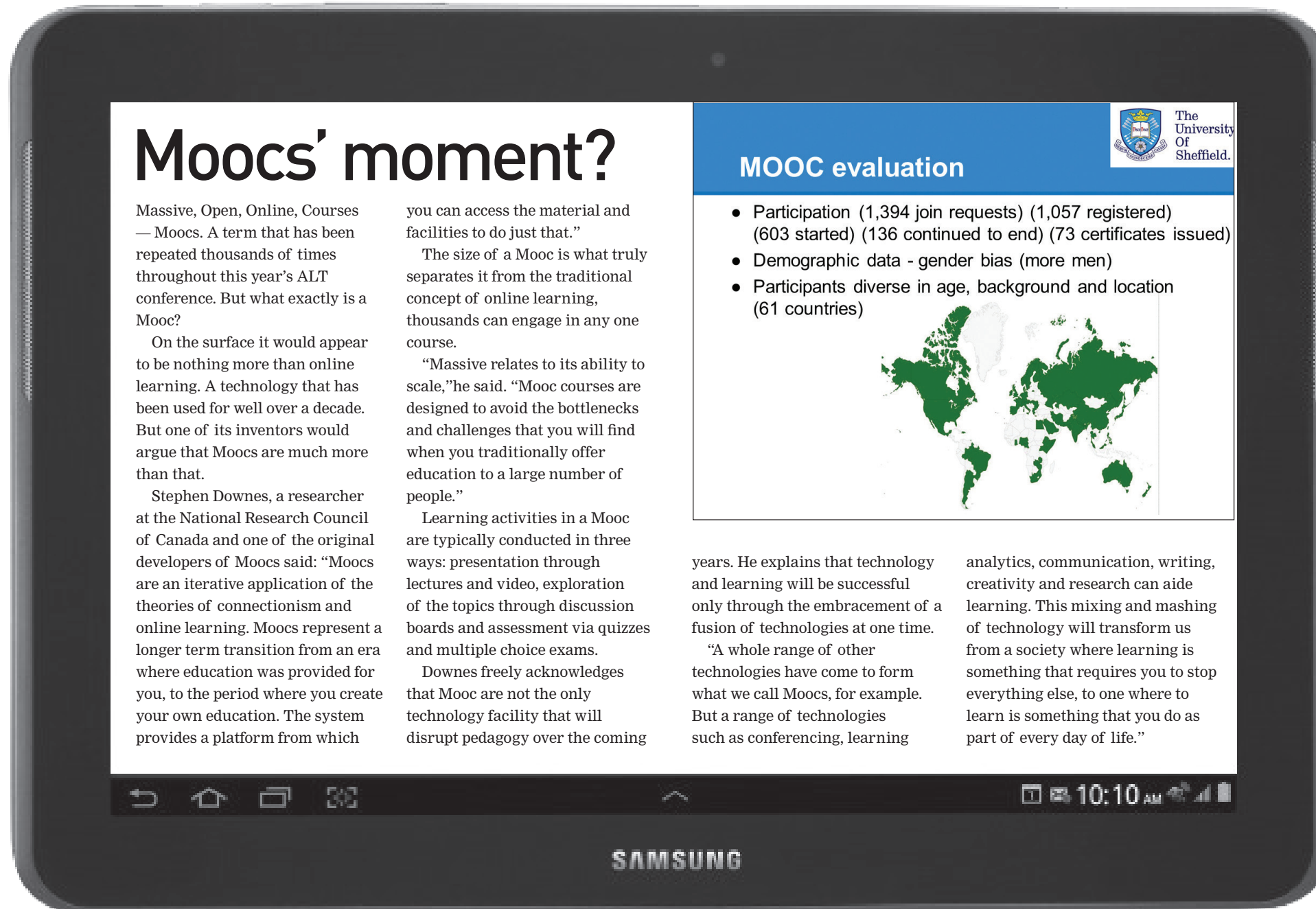
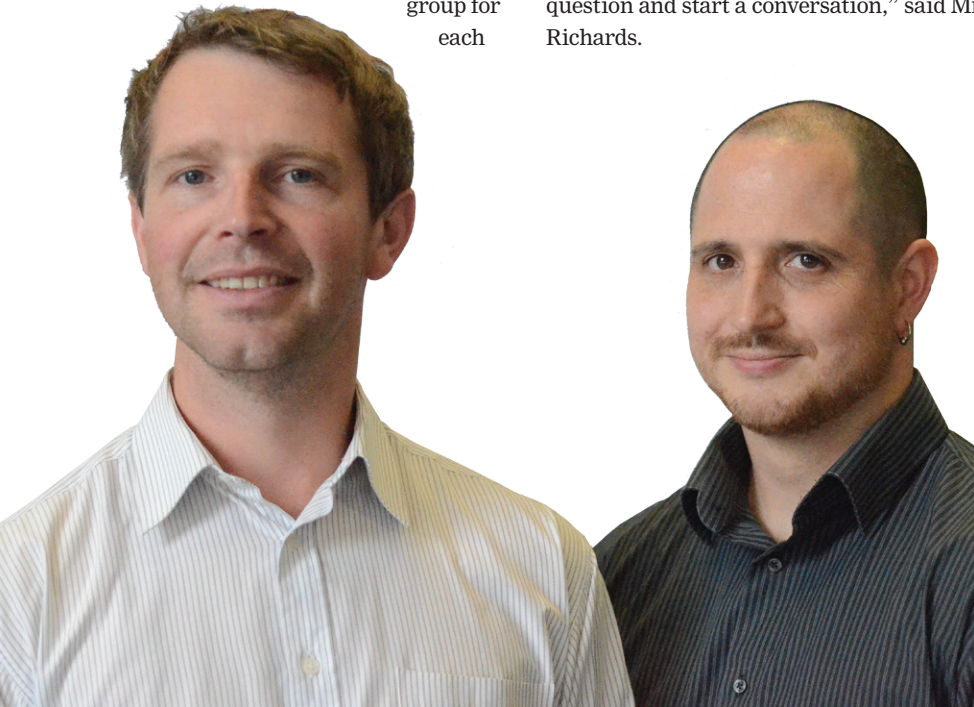
They found that beyond enabling tutors to communicate with students, there were numerous benefits in allowing students a space to interact with each other outside of the classroom environment.

"Unlike a university, our students are not in halls of residence and have no common area, such as a bar or cafeteria to meet up outside of college hours and are quite geographically spread out," said Mr Richards.

"We found this provided a way for the students to create a community of learning."

Ultimately, they realised, social media was allowing students to take charge of their own learning.

"If a student posted a question on the page and neither of us saw it for a while, what we were finding was that other students would come in and answer the question and start a conversation," said Mr Richards.



Interview with the ALT chief executive

Towards the end of the conference we caught up with ALT's new chief executive, Maren Deepwell (pictured right), to get her impressions of this year's conference.

Dr Deepwell took over the role from Seb Schmoller in April, having originally joined ALT in 2008 as membership services manager.

"These three days are my absolute favourite of the year," she told *FE Week*.

"I think it has gone really well this year — we have had lots of positive feedback, people seem to be enjoying themselves and getting lots of new ideas."

One noticeable difference to this year's conference is the high number of talks geared towards FE which she said ALT had made a conscious effort to include, although she acknowledged the timing,

during enrolment week, may not have been ideal for FE delegates.

"People may struggle to attend for the full three days, however they may be able attend one," she said.

Most FE-related events were held on the first day of this year's conference for this reason and, she said, she felt the response had been good.

"We had a lot of FE people participating this year," she said.

"Those I met seemed to have really enjoyed it, and some of our more experienced FE delegates have mentioned that they have seen lots of new faces."

"On a small scale we have made some success, but there is still a long way to go and we are currently looking at the potential to hold a conference at a different time of year."

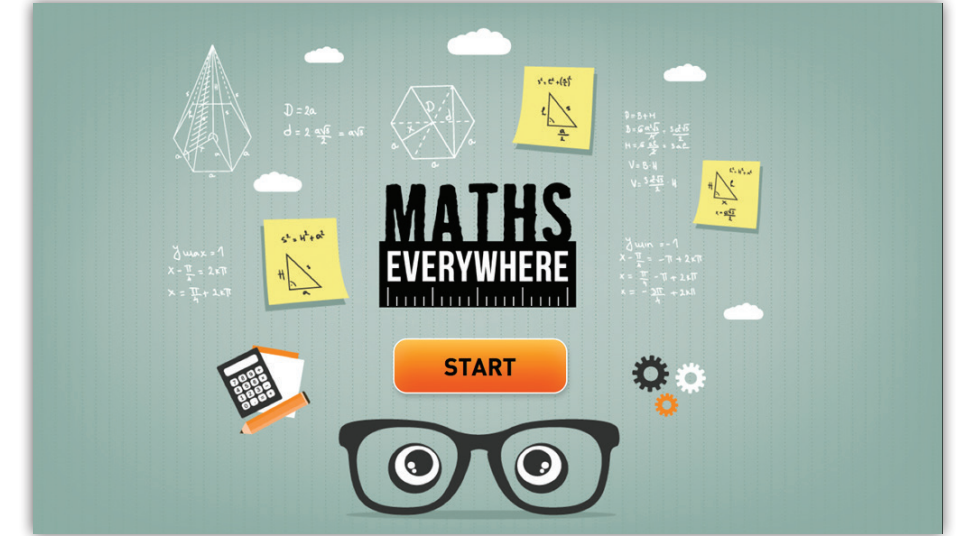
MOOC evaluation

- Participation (1,394 join requests) (1,057 registered) (603 started) (136 continued to end) (73 certificates issued)
- Demographic data - gender bias (more men)
- Participants diverse in age, background and location (61 countries)

years. He explains that technology and learning will be successful only through the embracement of a fusion of technologies at one time.

"A whole range of other technologies have come to form what we call Moocs, for example. But a range of technologies such as conferencing, learning

analytics, communication, writing, creativity and research can aide learning. This mixing and mashing of technology will transform us from a society where learning is something that requires you to stop everything else, to one where to learn is something that you do as part of every day of life."



Adult maths app equals win for Bolton College

A new app to help solve everyday maths problems and combat low levels of adult numeracy was presented at the conference.

Maths Everywhere is being developed by the National Institute for Continuing Adult Education (Niace) as part of the Maths4Us initiative in response to findings that almost half of adults in England (49 per cent) have entry level maths (the expected level of maths for an 11-year-old).

"Adults should be able to learn in ways that are relevant to their everyday lives," said Susan Easton, Niace lead officer for digital learning.

"It's not a question of just repeating what they heard in school — it didn't work the first time, it's not going to work the second time."

To solve this problem, Niace launched the maths app challenge, offering £70,000 for three teams to create an app and the winning design, created by the team from Bolton College, was chosen by public vote.

The app, which will be available through the iPhone app store, will provide tools to solve maths problems in everyday life, such as

measurement conversions, betting odds, price comparisons and calculating discounts.

The automatic calculators on the app will solve the problem for the user, and then encourage them to find out how to do it for themselves.

"The tools do the task for you, because when you're in an environment where you need the answer, you want the maths done for you, you don't want to learn how to do it, but we're hoping that once you've done this several times, you'll want to learn how to do this for yourself," said Paul McKean, information and learning technology development manager at Bolton College, who, along with maths lecturer Catherine Langstreth, presented the app.

Ultimately, he added, he hoped the app, which also includes challenges to practice newly developed maths skills, would give users the confidence to consider returning to education.

The app has been developed alongside games developers, tutors and learners, and is due to launch officially in December.

Plans for next year, she said, were already underway.

"I think that most important thing for us is that we don't just have an FE day that is exclusive to FE.

"No matter what area you are working in, to hear and learn of new ideas is important and we want the innovation and fun things in FE to have a great profile at ALT conference."

For her, a conference highlight was the showcase of learning technologist of the year award contenders.

"The achievements of this year's finalists have been humbling," she said.

"To see what they do every day, to make learning better for their learners and enhance their start in life, is staggering."



From left: Paul McKean, Susan Easton and Catherine Langstreth

Ministerial technology group in action

Skills Minister Matthew Hancock's further education learning technology action group (Feltag) invited delegates to share their thoughts and suggest directions for the group in an open consultation.

Feltag co-chair Manoj Badale (pictured right), ALT chief executive Maren Deepwell and Toshiba education adviser Bob Harrison (pictured below) were among the group members who outlined where the focus had been so far, with the group looking at issues such as learners as change agents, connecting employers and FE, funding, and charging Ofsted with an active role in evaluating the use of technology.

Mr Badale also revealed Feltag's plans for the near future.

"We are hopeful that we will be able to publish a report by the first of November," he said.

He added there would only be a limited number of recommendations within the report.

The recommendations that have come forward from Feltag will transform the sector

"We're going to focus on the not necessarily most intellectually interesting recommendations but the most implementable, so there's a real emphasis on the practicality of 'what we can do,'" he said.

Mr Harrison said he was pleased with the progress the action group was currently making but that it had been slow to get off the ground.

"I got very frustrated with it, if I'm honest," he said.

"It got kicked into the long grass. We set up a few working groups which had to be led by people in the sector who didn't have any time.

"So for about six months I got increasingly frustrated about the lack of progress."

However, he said he felt the situation had begun to

improve.

"We've had several meetings (using technology, using video conferencing) and where we are now, I'm a lot more confident that the recommendations that have come forward from Feltag will transform the sector," he said.

"The barriers are not with the teachers themselves, the teachers want to be innovative, they want to be creative, the barriers are with the regulatory system, the funding the audit, the inspections and I have to say the biggest gap is in governance and leadership."

According to Mr Harrison, this is where Feltag had the potential to make a real difference.

"We need to shift the paradigm from the current analogue mindset of governors and principals in the sector to a digitally aware paradigm," he said.

One of the major challenges, he said, was that learning technology was not seen as a priority within the sector.

"While there are some pockets of innovation in FE, the big challenge is, how do we spread that across the system in what essentially is a competitive environment?" he said.

Recommendations which the audience put forward included examining the capacity of the teaching workforce to deliver high tech teaching and learning, and adjusting teacher training accordingly.

It was also pointed out that with the arrival of new learning technologies, the role of the teacher would change to allow for learner creativity, and new pedagogies would need to be identified to allow teachers to facilitate discussion and allow for different learning patterns.

Another commentator said innovative use of technology did not have to remain solely in the classroom, pointing out that online enrolment could save time, money and resources, and remove barriers to education.

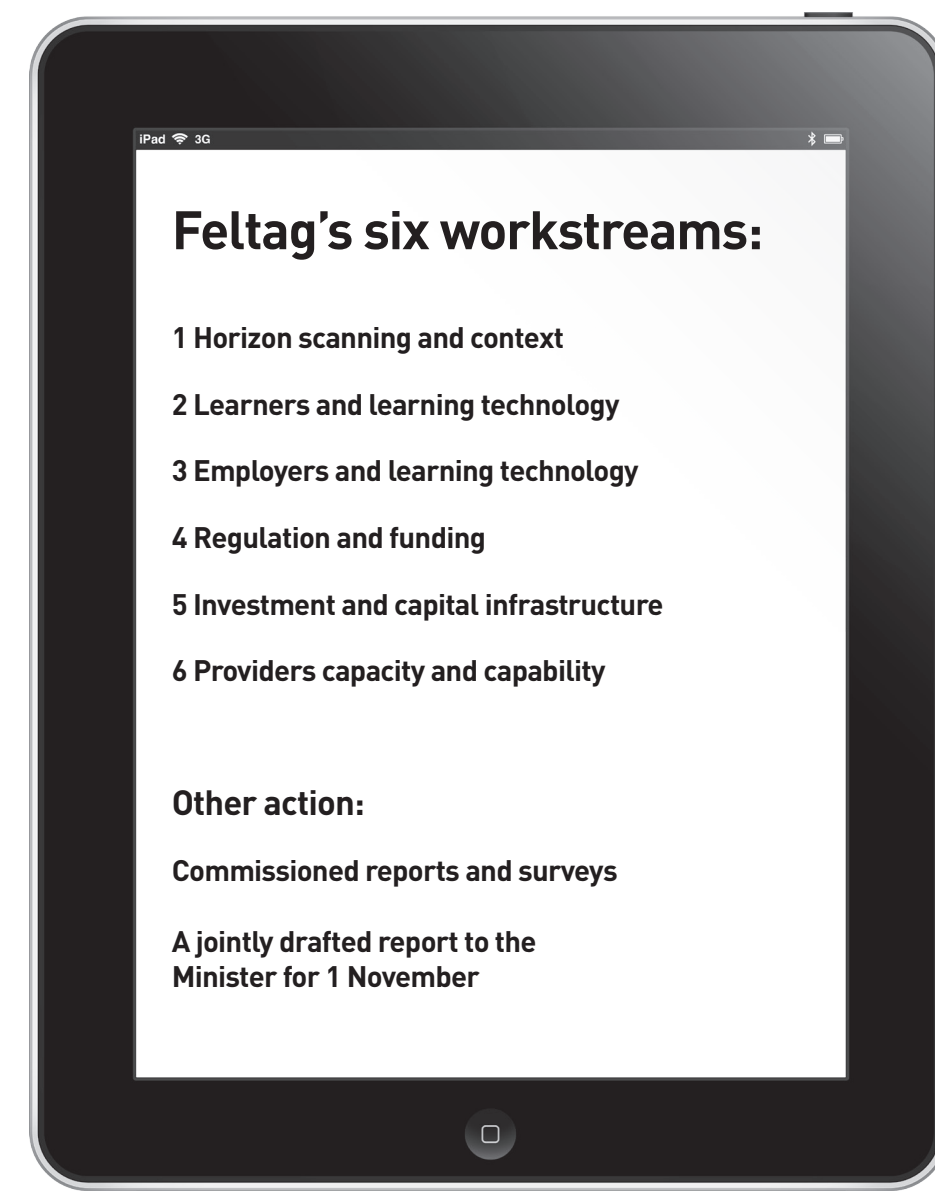
Mr Badale thanked the audience for their contributions and said the suggestions would be taken on board.

"I'm really, really encouraged, I'm excited about Feltag's work, I was frustrated and disillusioned but now I'm much more positive," said Mr Harrison.

"The next meeting is on the 23 October and I think the recommendations that will come out of that will lead to some action, and I think that could make a real difference in the sector."



Manoj Badale presents to delegates at the ALT conference



Skills Minister answers the questions you wanted asking

Why did you establish Feltag and what do you hope it will achieve?

I think there is huge potential for the use of technology in learning. This is evidenced by the impact that Moocs are having, in the first instance within the USA and now across the world. In further education I want to both encourage and support the use of new technology and crucially remove barriers, that may have been created by government and in-turn slow down its take up.

In government we need to be technology blind as we don't know what the next technologies are going to be.

Feltag is a group that brings together the sector, technology experts and key people from within government, to work out what it is we need to change to support the use of technology and learning. The point of having a group such as this, is to ensure that we [government] can listen

and play our part.

I am very clear that the role of government is to enable.

This could be through the use of our capital expenditure budget and also making sure the rules around funding and qualifications allow for development to take place.

Tell me about your choice of co-chair, Manoj Badale

I've attended a number of the group meetings now. I'm very keen that it is led from outside the government, so my co-chair, Manoj Badale has been chairing the group from outside.

Manoj both runs a learning provider that specialises in online and technology. He's a great business person with expertise in the implementation of new technologies. He understands FE and those sectors where technology has already had a big impact.

What do you see as the main barriers to the use of technology?

Feltag is focussed on finding out where the barriers of uptake to technology are.

I would not want it to try and predict these. The whole point is to try and make the system responsive to new technology and incentivise the uptake of new technology in ways that improve learning.

Of course that could be the use of only technology learning, technology in the classroom or blended learning.

Could a change to the funding rules be made to incentivise the use of technology?

I've encouraged Feltag to look as broadly as possible, they are looking at everything. I don't want to prejudge their report, but I cannot rule that out.

What's going to be the biggest disruptor for learning in the next 24 months?

The biggest disruptor will be something that I don't yet know about, and my job is to make sure its impact is as important as possible.

Matthew Hancock

@mathancockmp FOLLOWS YOU

MP for West Suffolk, Minister for Skills in the Departments of Business and of Education. Former economist, and cricketer. Co-author of Masters of Nothing

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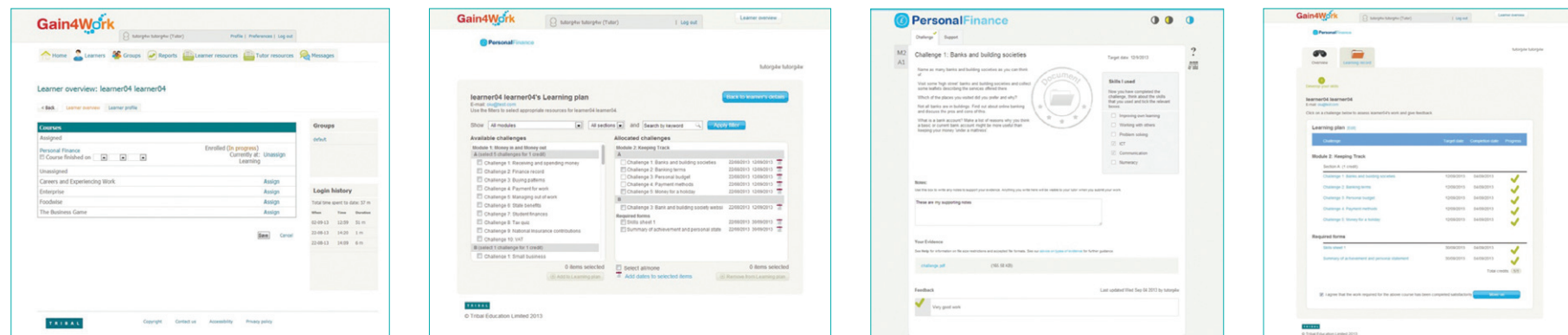
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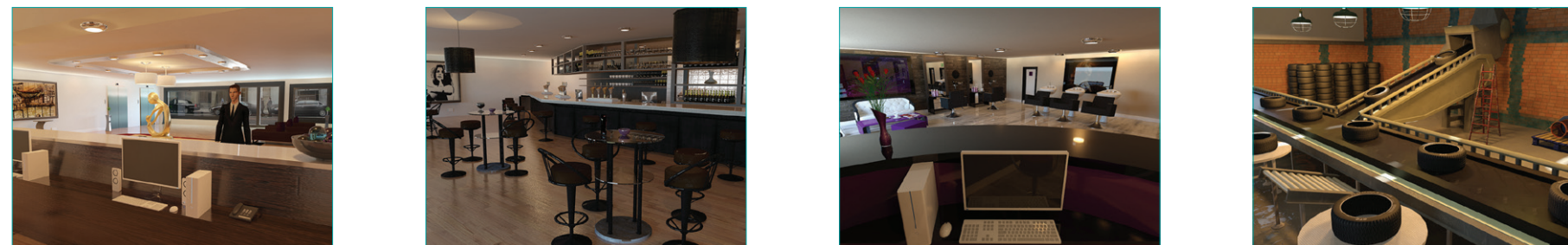
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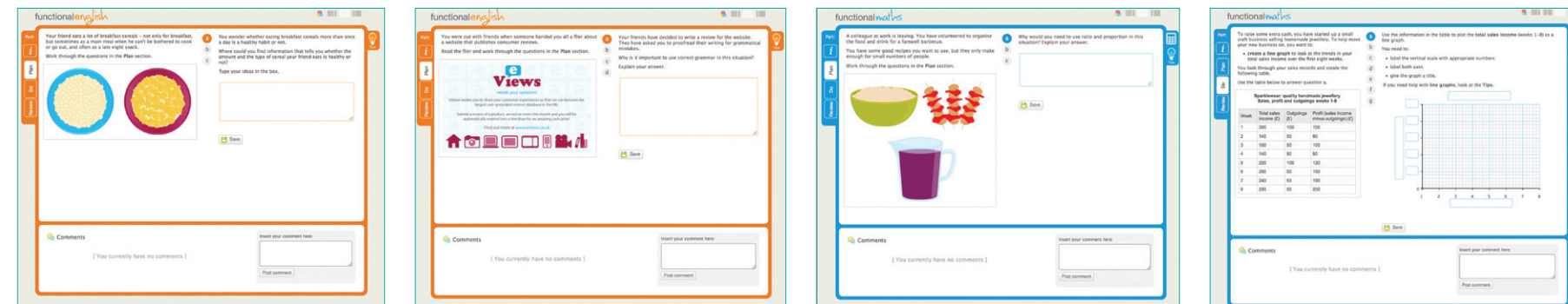
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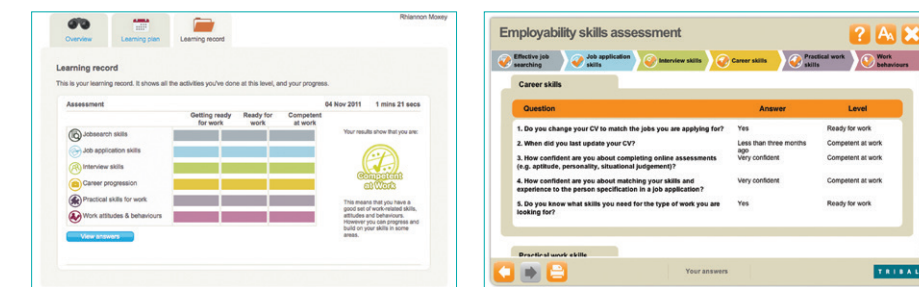
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Making technology compute in college

The days of computers as an alien sight in the classroom or workshop are long gone. But while technological advances have moved those computers on, has the thinking behind having them at all also developed, asks Geoff Rebbeck.

We have seen e-learning strategies since the early 1990s.

The first ones were an inventory — colleges were asked to do a 'kit count' of how many PCs and printers they had and the ratio of technology to staff and students.

Since nobody really knew what good use of technology would look like, the colleges with the most equipment were assumed to be the best.

That evolved into seeing information learning technology (ILT) as a series of processes and procedures that could be universally adopted leading to guaranteed benefit.

Today, we know the benefits lie in the learner and learning experience, so e-learning has replaced ILT and the emphasis has moved from the technology to the experiences it supports.

So e-learning deals with the intervention of technology in affecting behaviour in education, the personal and unique journeys, and our strategies need to focus on the behaviours and experiences of teaching and learning and how technology can be crafted to make them better.

Its two branches are teaching and learning (increasingly in the cloud) and managing pace and progression through central database management.

It is the ubiquitous nature of personal technology in these two areas that can be used, adapted, bent even, to create purposeful pedagogy such that the 'learner and staff day' is efficient, enjoyable and engaging for staff and learners alike.

Colleges don't control the development of new technology. It emerges in society and is then repurposed for our world yet remaining a reflection of society generally.

We have to find and test the benefits technology brings to the educational table. What works is assimilated into college policies (IT, teaching and learning, quality improvement), and what doesn't work is rejected.

The 'shock of the new' is dealt with in e-learning strategies. Fortunately, teachers apply the enduring values of what constitutes good teaching and learning and that is what gives e-learning coherence.



Specifically, e-learning delivers collaborative learning, divergent thinking, the capture of ideas, personalised learning and its presentation.

It will be written around the interaction of three things: the VLE, the Learning Plan and the e-Portfolio and, where the boundaries lie between them. The strategy will have a two-year shelf life due to the rate of 'invention' and pace of progression.

Evaluating the impact of our strategy to the benefit of the learner and learning experience is critical. Our learners must formally report back favourably on their experiences.

Listing action only, on the assumption that something good will happen but we don't know what is harking back to the days of 'kit count' and process and procedure.

To start a strategy, we need to think about what we want learners to experience in studying with us.

They need the ability to access learning and teaching from outside college at times to suit them, and during periods of agreed absence, as well as being able to submit work remotely.

Staff and learners should be able to bring their own hardware and social media sites to their teaching and learning, so learners can access teaching, and demonstrate learning.

Learners should also have access to a range of specific and wider resources in support of their learning, and an online personal learning space and online community.

Through technology, learners should have a sense of learning tailored to meet their personal needs and preferences in collaboration with course tutors.

For the strategy to be successful, it needs to define the mechanism to ask students if this was the experience they had, and a place to capture examples.

Geoff Rebbeck, e-learning adviser at Hadlow College, in Kent; adviser at the University of London's Institute of Education; and, adjunct fellow and leader of the e-Centre Research Group at the University of Greenwich

Tackling the lack of FE research

While FE is at the forefront of innovative learning collaborations, it sadly trails behind in research on such efforts, says Nigel Ecclesfield.

It has been my privilege to manage the Jisc (formerly Joint Information Systems Committee) FES-DRP (FE and skills — development and resources programme) over the last year.

And as the final group of projects finishes off its work, now is a good time to look at some of the lessons coming out of the programme and how this might link up with the Association for Learning Technology's research agenda and engage more FE staff in research.

The FES-DRP involved 33 projects with 120 partners in each region of the UK in projects designed to innovate.

The projects used new technologies and recycled public resources to make them more accessible to learners and staff through networks and mobile technologies using them to reach wherever learner technology might be used e.g. at work and on public transport.

Practitioner research in FE is not often seen in academic journals

Products already available to the sector include new apps for disengaged learners of maths and English, personal timetabling in colleges, augmented reality (AR) materials in plumbing, a complete video glossary of British Sign Language on video for the level one and two awards and materials using Near Field Communication Codes to create flexible learning environments.

There was also a suite of access tools on the web, which includes Access YouTube, and teaching and learning materials for dementia care with an app to ensure the latest developments in dementia care can be offered in FE providers alongside work in the NHS and with charities.

What stands out is the number of collaborations in this programme joining up national bodies such as the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, the NHS with providers from across the sector be they independent specialist colleges, FE colleges, independent work-based learning providers, adult and community learning providers, FE colleges and partners from business, or other public bodies such as the BBC, and universities.

However, what concerns me is that



research into the impact of these projects is more likely to be carried out and written for publication by staff in higher education as practitioner research in FE is not often seen in academic journals, as recent research to be reported at ALT-C will show.

The Journal of Further and Higher Education and Research in Post-Compulsory Education, while publishing more than 50 per cent of their papers with a focus on UK FE, rarely have more than 6 per cent of their authors who work in the sector — a proportion that is gradually decreasing.

With the growth of higher education in FE in the decade from 2000, it might be expected that the amount of research originating and written in the sector would increase, but the reverse seems to be the case.

There are many reasons why research within the sector has a low priority. These include the nature of the sector with its focus on teaching and training and the small size of many providers.

But it is also the case that the sector has been the subject of more research rather than doing the research. With more than 90 per cent of research carried out by higher education or with consultants, the large amount of project work carried out in the sector is rarely reported systematically in the academic press.

Going forward, it seems essential to encourage and promote practitioner research both into the sector to support exploration and to change and find new ways of helping practitioners to turn their experiences into learning for themselves, their learners and their sector colleagues.

Encouraging journals to take an interest in practitioner research would be a good start, but promoting research as a professional development activity in workplaces would do more to encourage systematic exploration of sector activity. How do you think we can move forward?

Nigel Ecclesfield, Association for Learning Technology research committee member

Leadership challenges

Technology can change overnight, rendering college practices and programs obsolete. The answer is a more "agile and responsive education system," according to Bruce Chaloux and Larry Ragan.

E-learning is proving to be a major disruptive force on education across the globe — from primary to advanced study. This force is causing significant upheaval as it challenges long-standing norms of practice in the field.

This impact is being realized at all levels, including students, instructors, program, institutional, national and global.

Many of these forces are causing reflection and questioning of long-held beliefs of what constitutes a "traditional" educational experience.

One of the greatest impacts of e-learning on "traditional" educational models has been a reconsideration of the dynamics of the teaching and learning process.

Most directly, this has impacted the role of the instructor. There are two primary themes of change occurring that often get conflated in this re-envisioning dialog — that of pedagogy and technology.

New understandings of how we learn combined with the affordances of emerging technologies create new and exciting opportunities for learning on both the part of the teacher and student.

Leaders of educational systems must

assimilate and accommodate these converging forces in order to manage and direct the impact on their instructional resources.

For the learner in this rapidly emerging learning system, the world suddenly becomes accessible, open and increasingly less structured.

The opportunities presented by today's complex learning systems require a higher degree of awareness of academic integrity, time management and collaboration — all skills which apply in today's workplace as well. The systems and services institutional leaders provide to enable student's success will determine the overall institutional health for the future.

Without a proper setting of the institutional context, students may seek alternative options for fulfilling their learning needs.

Many institutions are embracing the e-learning platform as a way to address the needs of today's learners by offering new and flexible learning programs targeted towards specific learning outcomes.

Program directors will need to employ a flexible and creative mindset to frame their course of study as relevant, fresh and high quality.

The number of colleges and universities developing or expanding e-learning programming continues to grow at a dramatic rate.

Once the domain of 'non-traditional'



institutions or units within institutions, some of the world's leading academic institutions are developing e-learning programs to maintain competitiveness and to reach new markets.

Similarly, smaller institutions seeking to address declining enrolments in traditional campus programmes are turning to e-learning.

Through these changes institutions are seeking to address new challenges including faculty development and preparation, student learning environments, curricular change, student services, and a broad array of policy changes.

Those that effectively address these challenges will be able to effectively manoeuvre in the global market, while those that can't will not succeed.

The traditional campus and time-based model, still predominant, is being altered, not only by how higher education is delivered, but also by what is offered, when it is available and how learning is recognized.

Programs are being designed to be more responsive to student demands and needs, with a clear emphasis on application. Global 'executive' programs at the graduate level are popular and expensive as 'market pricing' replaces more traditional tuition and fee structures.

Today's rapidly changing global culture of learning presents a new set of leadership challenges.

In essence, the "rules of engagement" have changed and call for a more agile and responsive educational system.

What was once valued by the consumer will no longer be adequate to meet the needs of tomorrow's learners. Today's leaders of educational systems have a new selection of options to draw upon in order to fashion a learning environment that is globally connected, nationally aware and learner-centered.

Bruce Chaloux, chief executive of The Sloan Consortium, and Larry Ragan, director of the Centre for Online Innovations in Learning

Take a look at yourself, FE

The FE sector's record on research isn't great and, as such, it could be missing out on many benefits, says Emma Procter-Legg

Since becoming involved in the Jisc (formerly Joint Information Systems Committee) Advance-funded research project Students4webES (Students for Webinar Employability Skills), I have learned that participation in formal research is not very common within the FE and skills sector.

There are many reasons for the lack of research within FE — an absence of dedicated research time and funding being two of the more obvious ones.

Access to project funding for FE colleges is limited. The Learning and Skills Improvement Service, now gone, had small amounts of funding to support small projects and individual practitioner action research.

Until 2012, Jisc accepted bids for project funding from FE institutions with more than 400 full-time equivalent HE students.

In 2012 Jisc introduced the Jisc Advance funding programme, without the FTE

higher education requirement, to enhance learning and teaching across the FE and skills sector.

The Students4webES project was one of the 33 accepted bids from this programme. Few, if any, FE colleges have a research department.

Historically much of the research that has been conducted within the sector is carried out by higher education institutions or research organisations looking at FE from the outside.

I feel this approach lacks the insider knowledge, the implicit knowledge that those working in FE can bring to research.

Research in FE requires a different approach — the sector has different needs and areas that need to be understood and supported.

I was lucky to be approached to be the project manager of the Students4webES project run at Abingdon and Witney College.

I had previously worked at the college as a lecturer so found it relatively straightforward to understand the project and the nature of the issues that we might face running a project.

I brought with me some research experience having just finished working on an EU-funded project at the time I took on this role.

Understanding the requirements of a research project meant I could bring a great deal of enthusiasm and not be overwhelmed by the paperwork.

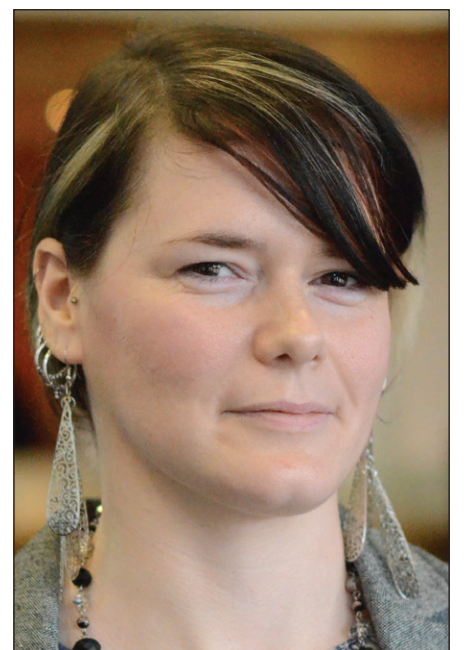
Indeed, without the dedicated time and funding and the invaluable support and training offered by Jisc it would not have been possible to run the project.

Not all research can be run as action research — as part of a lecturer's continuing professional development, a teacher training qualification (be that DTTLS, a PGCE or other) or masters programme.

The funding allowed us to dedicate the necessary time to make the project work, to overcome the various barriers that occurred and to share our findings with others within the sector and beyond.

FE is a complex and multi-level sector, but it is also interesting and under-researched by those who know it best.

Action research or case studies are the normal contribution by FE practitioners



to understanding their own sector.

These are useful and often shared, but properly run research adds value to a wider audience and may help the FE and skills sector, and the wider educational community, gain a more holistic understanding of education, teaching, learning and vocational skills that affects a large number of young people and adults in the UK.

Emma Procter-Legg, learning technologist at Magna Carter College, Oxford

Tweeting a transformation in learning

The key to building a new culture of learning is to use the communication opportunities afforded by technology to foster and support innovation, says Sheila MacNeill.



What is an innovation support centre? And what does someone who works there actually do to support innovation? Well, as Facebook would say "it's complicated".

A central tenant of the Centre for Educational Technology, Interoperability and Standards has been to support and develop the effective use of educational technology standards.

So we have been involved in helping the uptake and adoption of such things as metadata (data about data) in learning resources, formats such as content packaging for sharing and exchanging resources.

The growth of social media has been quite transformational

We've also encouraged extending the use of virtual learning environments, through integration of widgets and the use of the learning technology interoperability specification (integrating different technologies), and most recently learning analytics.

But how do we do that? Well, there is direct contact with standards bodies that involves lots of pretty techie meetings and sharing back and forth actual practice via engagement with our community.

Regular face-to-face meetings have evolved and are increasingly supplemented by online communication and sharing, most notably through our use of blogs and other social media channels, particularly Twitter.

Sometimes I jokingly say what I actually do is type and go to meetings, as most of my life seems to be spent in front of my laptop answering emails, writing blog posts or on a train going to a meeting somewhere, where I usually sit in front of my laptop, tweeting.

However, there is more to it than that. One of the key elements of supporting innovation is fostering open cultures to share ideas and practice.

The growth of social media has been quite transformational in this respect as it makes sharing new ideas almost instantaneous as there's no need to wait

for a face-to-face meeting or to clog up people's email boxes with updates on mailing lists.

I have found my own practice transformed through being able to keep in touch with people in between meetings through lightweight and informal services like Twitter.

At the same time, I've also had some really meaningful interactions with colleagues via Twitter, and have been able to nurture and extend my own professional network.

My blog has also become an increasingly important way for me to share my reflections on, for example, some of the truly inspiring and excellent work carried out by institutions funded through various Jisc (formerly Joint Information Systems Committee) programmes. It also provides a way to easily let people know of other developments such as new standards, and some slightly leftfield ideas I may have.

In many ways, blogs can become a place to store professional memory, and a key way to engage with colleagues in the sector. It is also a reflection of all the good practice I am able to "soak up" from the sector and then share back out, like a kind of innovation sponge.

I am in an incredibly privileged position in that I am paid to engage with many people in the sector, and share that experience without the added complications of teaching commitments.

Providing space (and funding) for this sort of work is essential for innovation to thrive.

But, as we are all too aware, our funding climate is changing and support for innovation is dwindling.

Our job now is to find a way to adapt and thrive in our changing climate to ensure innovation continues to be supported and shared.

Sheila MacNeill, assistant director, Centre for Educational Technology, Interoperability and Standards

Keeping an open mind over online learning

Almost everything is available online nowadays it would seem — including educational materials. Dr Chris Pegler looks at whether the FE sector can benefit.



In 2001 Charles Vest of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) announced it would make nearly all its course materials available free on the World Wide Web. If you spotted this at the time you may have wondered where the catch was in a too-good-to-be-true offer.

There have been limits, but MIT has continued its commitment to open courseware, registering 125 million visits and uploading content from more than 2,000 courses to date.

Meanwhile the word open increasingly crops up across the UK education scene, albeit with contested interpretations.

The acronym Mooc (Massive Open Online Course) is now frequently subject to discussion.

MIT's model, associating top universities with large-scale ready-to-learn open content activity, is a model preserved in Coursera and EDx Mooc initiatives and also in FutureLearn's partnership of 21 top UK universities as Mooc providers.

And Martin Weller, talking about 'big and little OER' (open educational resources), has contrasted the contribution of high-finish formal open courseware with the value of smaller scale home-brewed initiatives.

Meanwhile, Lawrence Lessig in Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy suggested that the internet in Web 2.0 mode allows us to shift from read-only engagement to read-write participation, creating and changing content as well as simply consuming it.

What could be more suited for vocationally-rich FE practices? Drawing on examples such as Coventry University's Open Photography course and the groundbreaking DS106 Digital Storytelling course, here are some ideas about open which may be unfamiliar and could provide some food for action.

Open need not lead to cannibalisation — addressing perhaps the biggest concern about giving content for free, Coventry's Open Photography PHONAR course led by Jonathan Worth teaches 'remote students' for free alongside fee-payers attending face-to-face.

Open can generate its own funds — we see crowdfunding in media projects, why not to create or sustain open education?

The DS106 Kickstarter funded purchase of equipment (a server) to support its open activity.

Open leaves a legacy — content deposited into open repositories, whether as a teaching habit or a pre-retirement push, remains available after the course has finished. It's also in digital, online, repurposeable format for others to use.

Open is open to improvement — open for comment, review, feedback, modification and translation creates potential to improve quality and also to extend audience and use. MIT's 2,000-plus courses are perhaps less impressive than the 1000-plus translations of these by users.

Open is both micro and macro: feel the crowd — crowdsourcing content whether at the level of booksprints or Wikipedia entries, shows how individuals working collectively can create a stream of contextually-rich, informed teaching and reference content.

One of the persistent criticisms of open education is that it lacks a coherent and sustainable business model.

In Oriole (Open Resources: Influence on Learners and Educators) surveys, more than 90 per cent agreed they 'fully support the idea of open content and open education resources', yet in both 2011 and 2013 a substantial proportion also agreed 'open content initiatives lack a coherent supporting business case' (25 per cent in 2011 then 11 per cent fully agreed and 51 per cent partly agreed in 2013).

While the belief that we should engage in open education was very high, there are concerns about how to make this work in practice.

Referring back to conventional business theories such as Michael E Porter's famous model of the five forces that shape competition we can see why.

Focusing on the power of suppliers and buyers or the threat of new entrants and substitutes assumes a zero-sum game for businesses which open education contests.

In the age of the internet open resource activity suggests the conventional business of education may now be open to question and perhaps even, in perception of supply and competition, redundant.

Dr Chris Pegler is a senior lecturer at the Institute of Educational Technology

Learning through gaming

Playing computers needn't be seen as a waste of time that could be better spent learning — it can be a learning process itself if properly harnessed, says Shaun Hughes.

mechanics that work, to education and training content.

Games are great at teaching you how to play and how to play well.

Games-based learning or 'serious games' uses the power of computer games design techniques and mechanics to captivate and engage end-users for purposes other than pure entertainment.

Serious games use the underlying game mechanics and principles behind the incredibly successful commercial games market and aim to utilise these principles for education and training.

However, if you strip away all the techno-wizardry of the discussion and move to a psychological perspective, games are essentially highly experiential software applications which foster deep levels of cognitive activity, for example higher-level thinking skills such as conflict resolution or negotiation, emotional and physical responses.

Some of you may remember the growth of edutainment in the 1990s and may be asking how is this any different?

Edutainment used game play as a reward, or simply as a framework for the content.

What serious games aim to do is learn from the successful games industry and apply the engagement and behaviour

The main purpose of a Serious Game is to develop new knowledge or skills and to ultimately produce a behaviour change

While we are playing, we are constantly making decisions, applying strategies, learning everything we can about the environment, and most importantly learning through failing and trying again.

Whether you are learning about how best to complete a stealth attack, remember a complex route through a maze, understanding binary code to crack open a lock, or combine the right mix of chemicals to complete a titration, games make you care about the tasks and instigate a desire to succeed.

While ensuring learners are engaged and motivated to keep trying until they

succeed, the main purpose of a serious game is to develop new knowledge or skills and to ultimately produce a behaviour change.

This behaviour change is achieved through problem-based learning and constructivist learning strategies.

Serious games allow students to experience a problem first hand and make the decisions that feel most natural to them.

They can then see the impacts of their decisions on the game world and modify their strategy if required.

What's most important is that games allow us to experiment and take risks we perhaps wouldn't in the real world — we are then able to see why a decision did or didn't work, receive immediate feedback and try alternative routes or methods to conquer a problem.

The benefit, beyond the initial impact is that these experiences may otherwise be impossible and/or undesirable to practice in the real world for reasons of cost, time, logistics and safety, such as chemistry lab practice or running a business.

The overarching structure of a serious game will focus on practice, repetition and mastery by using scenarios that introduce new concepts over time when the user is ready.

This approach leads to greatly improved effectiveness in the real world application



of the learning.

However, it is important to remember that we do not learn in isolation, from one source. Rather, we learn continuously and from a number of sources and a number of events.

To that end, serious games should be considered as another option in a teacher's toolkit and should be combined with other activities to extend learning.

A serious game should not be viewed as a silver bullet, as a one-stop shop for learning and development. Rather, it should be considered as a step along a journey, as a sandbox for applying knowledge and playing with concepts, ideas and approaches.

Shaun Hughes, global product manager, Tribal

FUNDING UPDATES 2013/14

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Save the date

Date	Day	Tribal (monthly funding update)
07-Oct	Monday	2-3pm
04-Nov	Monday	2-3pm
02-Dec	Monday	2-3pm
06-Jan	Monday	2-3pm
03-Feb	Monday	2-3pm
03-Mar	Monday	2-3pm
07-Apr	Monday	2-3pm
06-May	Tuesday	2-3pm
02-Jun	Monday	2-3pm
07-Jul	Monday	2-3pm

Lsect webinars delivered by Nick Linford, author of *The hands-on guide to post-16 funding* & editor of *FE Week*

Lsect members will be emailed joining instructions a week prior

Not a member? Sign up for free at: www.lsect.co.uk/join.asp

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A message from conference delegates



What brings you to the ALT conference?

I love coming to see and hear about what people have been doing with technology and learning about new ideas.

What will be the biggest innovation in the next two years?

I am keen on open source learning platforms like Moocs. The principles underpinning these will further take shape across education.

Shri Footring, Jisc RSC London, @shrifootring

What brings you to the ALT conference?

I'm here as a member of the FELTAG group. On day one we held a consultative meeting with the ALT community.

What will be the biggest innovation in the next two years?

The impact that the student voice will have on technology in learning. In most cases we've only begun to pay lip service to the student voice.

Bob Harrison, Education Advisor Toshiba Information Systems, @bobharrisonset



What brings you to the ALT conference?

It's important to participate in your community of scholars and practitioners to ensure that you keep up to date with all that's happening and how that impacting on outcomes.

What will be the biggest innovation in the next two years?

I think that analytics are going to be very important. The way that we use student data to understand how we can better support them in their learning.

Belinda Tynan, Open University, @OpenUniversity

What brings you to the ALT conference?

I have been invited here to participate as the closing key note speech.

What will be the biggest innovation in the next two years?

We need to look at tech that allows individuals to create their own learning. We're moving to an era of creating your own education.

Stephen Downes, National Research Council - Canada, @oldaily



What brings you to the ALT conference?

To present on a visual assessment initiative that one of our lecturers completed.

What will be the biggest innovation in the next two years?

Moocs, which could either do brilliantly or may be too top-down.

Catherine Booth, University of Manchester, @humelearning

What brings you to the ALT conference?

To look at the latest trends in technology in education.

What will be the biggest innovation in the next two years?

This may be slightly biased, but I think that lecture capture technology is going to be hugely important.

Ravi Khakhar, Panopto Education, @panopto



FE features highly in the ALT awards ceremony

The Learning Technologist of the Year Award winners were celebrated with a bang at the conference's gala dinner, which finished with a fireworks display.

Two of the night's major success stories came from the FE sector: Hull College's Film Buffs project (see bottom) scooped best team with its range of 28 learning resource films, many shot and produced by students, which explained techniques and processes in subjects like joinery, construction and electrical installation.

"One of the joinery tutors had an idea that maybe they could improve the quality of resources available to students," said teaching and e-learning manager, Valerie Maybury.

"It's grown from that into something

much bigger and actually much better, because what's happened is the students have gradually taken over production of the films, so we started to film the students doing the task, so the students began to want to be filmed and it started to drive the standard of their practical work higher."

The film-making bug spread across departments in the college, and the videos, loaded onto YouTube, have been picked up and used by colleges across the country.

"I almost burst my buttons when I heard we'd won an award," said Ms Maybury. "It's wonderful to get this national recognition."

Students from New College Nottingham's Tek5 project (see below) clinched Learner of the Year, for their work creating an app to help reduce

non-emergency 999 calls.

Tamara Phillips, Pegah Mehrvand, Chumbeh Njie and Koli Begum, all 17, entered the Technovation Challenge, a competition designed to get more young women involved with technology.

Their RightCall app, which tells users whether to ring 999 or the non-emergency police number, 101, took first place in the competition and led to the team being flown to a glittering awards ceremony at Twitter's headquarters in San Francisco.

Tamara said: "Being in Tek5 has been life changing, now I have a whole new career choice."

Pegah agreed.

"Being part of Tek5 has been amazing, and getting the chance to go to San Francisco and winning an award for the best educational app in the whole world was just great," she said.

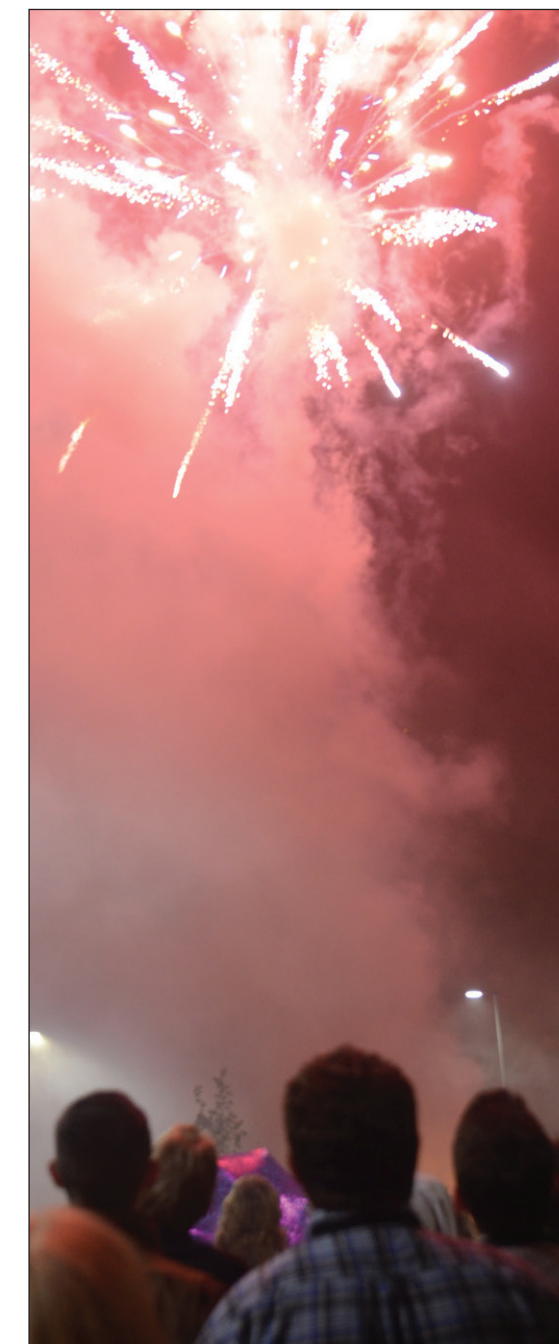
All of the team members thanked their tutors for their help and support throughout the process.

"Our mentors are the nicest and most inspirational people I have ever met," said Chumbeh. "We've had a really amazing experience."

Koli also said she wanted to thank Technovation for "giving me the wonderful opportunity to really build my confidence".



From left: Tamara Phillips, Pegah Mehrvand, Chumbeh Njie, Koli Begum, all 17



Delegates watching the 20th anniversary fireworks display



From left: Valerie Maybury, Mareen Deepwell [ALT], Claire Donlan [ALT], Mike Abel, Rick Gilroy, John Pritchard, Emily Armstrong, Lauri Showler, Ray Sheardown and Steven Cook, all from Hull College

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