

LEARNING FUTURES PROGRAMME FINAL REPORT

Mastering Governance of Technology for Learning

Heart of Worcestershire College

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

City of Coventry College

Sussex Downs College

Havering College

Kirklees College



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Project title

Mastering Governance of Technology for Learning

Name of lead organisation

Heart of Worcestershire College

Project summary

This project has created an online resource to help governors to understand and act upon the issues around implementation of institution wide technology for learning. It is based on the successful practical experience of three sector leading colleges who have achieved or are close to achieving the FELTAG target of delivering an initial 10% learning online across the whole curriculum offer. Each is at a different stage and has a different approach, but all have identified and resolved common challenges. The resource offers guidance to governors on what the key issues are, the questions to ask around these issues and how governing bodies might best organise to deal with them.

The resource complements other Learning Futures projects, including those of FE Sussex, ACER and WEA to help governors to meet their responsibilities in this area. It is designed to support at least two separate levels of interest:

- a sound basic understanding of the issues for all;
- an in-depth insight and knowledge base for those with a special interest in learning with technology.

Who should read this report and why

- Governors of colleges and of other post-16 institutions.
- Senior managers of colleges and of other post-16 institutions.

CPD resources developed

An online module, 'Mastering Governance of Technology for Learning.'

The module includes:

- An overview of implementing technology for learning;
- A guide to learning technology for governors new to the agenda;
- Learning with technology: models, examples and case studies provided by Heart of Worcestershire College, Kirklees College and Reading College;
- A Decision making framework for governors;
- A Capability framework for a Governor Digital Technology champion;
- Additional Resources.

For further details visit the resources section at the end of this report.

Project lead contact details

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Members of partnership

City of Coventry College

Sussex Downs College

Havering College

Kirklees College

What the project set out to do and why

Heart of Worcestershire College (HoW) entered the Learning Futures programme with a particular remit to address governance and to build on its sector-leading work in the application of learning technologies over the past four years. The college won the 2014/15 AoC Beacon Award for Effective Use of Technology in FE and shortly afterwards, the TES Outstanding Use of Technology Award.

Ofsted's inspection of Heart of Worcestershire College in June 2014 noted that "Governance is particularly effective ..and governors are well informed. Arrangements to keep them up-to-date and aware of college developments are very good. "Governors and college managers agreed that the project would provide a basis for further development.

The project proposal was in response to the second phase Learning Futures ITT, which identified a need to strengthen the support for governors coming out of the programme. It was anticipated that the outputs would complement those planned by projects funded under the first phase and in particular the work at FE Sussex.

This project's initial aim was to "ensure that Governors can make confident, effective and well-informed decisions around investment, innovation and development of technology." In the first instance this looked to cover the application of technology across all areas of their college or training establishment: from curriculum delivery and management through to professional management and administration. The particular interest however was in teaching and learning with technology. The project looked to improve the capability and capacity of governing bodies to respond to the FELTAG agenda, which challenges institutions to make best use of innovative technology. Whilst the FELTAG report and subsequent work recognised the importance of governors in delivering its proposals, there was no body of resource specifically supporting governors to understand and engage with the issues.

What we proposed to develop

The initial planned outputs were:

- informed, accurate, reliable and user-friendly frameworks and business models of the key issues around technology; presenting these as a suite of online tools and resources, capable of being tailored to local needs and circumstance;

- co-ordinating with the work of the Learning Futures FE Sussex project to produce a complete, consistent and comprehensive package for governing bodies

We were, nonetheless, aware that this was an action research programme and that we should expect to adapt our proposals in response to:

- the requirements of the Learning Futures programme;
- emerging evidence of need and assessment of the value of our proposals

The process

The starting point for development was to ensure two things:

- the relevance of the proposed outputs;
- completeness' of the Learning Futures governance offer whilst avoiding duplication.

This involved working closely with

- the Learning Futures programme team led by Sue Owen-Evans;
- our project Champion, Chris McLean, currently Deputy Principal at Milton Keynes college;
- project industry mentor, Bob Harrison, Chair of Governors at Northern college and leading member of the FELTAG group;
- fellow Learning Futures projects within the designated governance strand group including FE Sussex and the Workers Educational Association (WEA);
- Governors, managers, staff and students involved in the project at HoW, our partners and case study colleges.

A series of rigorous and challenging meetings of the governance strand of the Learning Futures programme and separately with WEA to examine our initial proposals led to a significant refinement of the project outcomes. The proposed broad view of technology, embedded in the notion of a map of technology across the institution, was narrowed to a sole focus on learning and teaching with technology. In addition the work of FE Sussex was substantially complete and addressed:

- self-assessment of readiness for an institution-wide implementation of online learning;
- the financial implications of such a programme.

This meant there was no scope for co-creation of resources, but it did serve to establish the boundaries of our project, i.e. those elements we needed to address and those we could consider already done.

Subsequent discussions with three other Learning Futures projects with a governance element (Harlow, Swindon and ACER) identified, amongst other things, an alternative self-assessment tool in development at ACER, which the HoW team helped to shape.

The outcome of these discussions was to shift the project away from a set of generic business models towards a specific focus upon learning with technology, which is both the core concern of FELTAG and the area where HoW would claim to have sector-leading expertise. At the behest of Learning Futures, the core element of the project became a set of models/ case studies of the implementation of institution-wide learning with technology to meet the initial FELTAG target of 10% of learning delivered online. The emphasis of these was modelling of the processes they had undergone, the challenges they had faced and overcome and the outcomes.

Gathering information

Five models were initially proposed:

Three colleges:

- Heart of Worcestershire College: four years' experience of delivering 10% learning online;
- Kirklees College: first year of implementation in 2014/15;
- Reading college: pilot prior to full implementation 2015/16 with a different technology model.

Two other organisations were also to be explored:

- Access to Music (ATM);
- Calor Gas Ltd.

Information was gathered by a process of visits and interviews with students, staff, managers and governors. This was supplemented by the collection of selected additional resources including key documents, links and video interviews. Drafts were checked and approved by the institutions and finished versions agreed.

At the same time, a national survey of governors was launched for two purposes:

1. To collect governors' views and opinions on the use of learning technology and a shift towards online learning in place of face to face teaching.
2. To act as a benchmark against which to gauge the impact of the project in future years.

We could find no prior survey or structured gathering of views, so the results were an important input into the project. Their significance was bolstered by the response rate: 166 governors and Clerks answered the survey, nationwide and including institutions outside the Learning Futures project family.

A picture emerged of general approval for increasing use of online learning but a lack of understanding of some important aspects of detail. In particular it was noteworthy that very little formal training had taken place and the most common basis for understanding was briefing by staff. We took this combination of governor interest in the area, coupled with support for the FELTAG initiative and dependence upon staff briefing for information as an endorsement of the need for resources to support governor CPD.

The survey together with the interviews with governors and Clerks proved influential in another part of the project – the creation of a Governor Capability framework. This has two chief components:

- an examination of the ways in which a governing body might organise itself to deal with the issue of technology and learning:
- a capability framework for a governor Digital Technology Champion.

A consultation event was held with governors, industry mentor Bob Harrison, project Champion Chris McLean, Gazelle College Group CEO Fintan Donohue, team members and partner college representation to scope the framework. A clear split emerged between technology professionals, who thought a Champion would be beneficial and governors (at the meeting and in interviews elsewhere) who were opposed to taking special measures. The governors were confident that existing processes and structures were adequate and concerned that corporate responsibility and whole Corporation engagement with the issue should be maintained. It was agreed that a capability framework for a Champion would have value and should be produced, but clearly presented as an option, rather than a recommendation.

At each stage of the process we reviewed the outcomes and feedback received against the proposed outputs. A core element of the action research approach is to find what works and is worth keeping and what is not. This can be quite painful insofar as it can lead to letting go of unproductive developments in order to concentrate on more fruitful opportunities after a considerable investment of time and effort has been put into planning, information gathering and development of content.

In the course of the project we stopped work on:

a. The map of institution-wide technology:

- there was some scepticism over its value to governors;
- a strong preference emerged amongst programme and project teams that our project should concentrate on learning with technology.

b. An indicator tool that would provide a graphical indicator for governors of progress with a number of learning technology variables:

- feedback indicated that existing tools and reporting measures were sufficient for governors' needs.

c. Case studies of private trainer Access to Music and Calor Gas Ltd:

- In both cases the individuals that we spoke with were generous with their time and open in their sharing of information. The information that we were able to collect,

however, did not complement the findings from the research into the three colleges or offer any useful perspective on that work.

d. A slideshow of a Day in the Life of a Learning centre at HoW.:

- this was fully developed, populated with content, loaded into the resource shell and technically slick, but
- it added nothing of value to the learning of governors in the context of the whole final resource.

In their place we devoted increased effort to:

i. The three college models/ case studies.

ii. Creation of an overview of the case studies that would be both:

- a introduction to institution-wide implementation of technology for learning and an entry point into the full resource;
- a freestanding resource for those governors who did not wish to devote their time to the entire pack of resources.

iii. The 'learning technology in context' animation.

In addition we amended the proposals and the form of the capability framework for governor Digital Technology Champions to reflect the strongly expressed views of governors around issues of corporate responsibility.

The results

The project has created an extensive online resource pack for governors based around the practice of colleges who have successfully implemented institution-wide digital technology to support learning. This has engaged the enthusiastic co-operation and collaboration of the case study colleges with the project team at Heart of Worcestershire College. Their openness and generosity in discussions and in sharing additional resources such as planning documents, job descriptions, schemes of work has added a layer of richness to the final resource.

The project has also benefitted from the skills of eLearning Depot, the commercial arm of the HoW Instructional Design team's activities, who have created an online shell, navigation structure and content with professional production values.

We began the project with a belief that not all governors are equally enthusiastic about all matters, even though all are willing to garner sufficient understanding and competence to support their responsibilities as Governors. We therefore envisaged a resource capable of supporting at least two separate levels of interest:

- a sound basic understanding of the issues for all;
- an in-depth insight and knowledge base for those with a special interest.

For the former we have developed two elements of the resource that we think will be of value to all governors:

1. The Oversight of Learning with Technology, which launches the resource pack.
2. Learning with Technology in Context: a graphical examination of the basic concepts.

These can be supplemented with the opportunities for shared reflection embedded in the 'Points to Ponder' questions together with the 'Decision Framework' to put together a substantial programme of development for a governing body.

The entire resource, which constitutes a significant and substantial body of content, is aimed at governors with a special interest in learning with technology and potential digital technology champions.

Impact

We recognised from the outset that the tight timescales of completing the project within a seven month window, taken together with our ambitious plans for the scale of the resource pack, would not allow us to create and refine the resource in time to run training events with governors and even less to gauge true impact which we believe will be felt over a longer time period. We have nonetheless already detected an impact, both qualitative and quantitative.

The volume of take up and interest in our benchmark national survey of governors exceeded both our expectations and our hopes. The estimated number of governors nationwide is 8000. We thought that 80 responses (1% of the national total) would both be statistically significant and rather ambitious given the small number of projects within the Learning Futures programme that might be considered the core audience. We marketed the survey extensively however, through well-established forums such as the ILT Champions mailing list and the national Clerks group, via twitter and with the assistance of WEA and HOLEX to the ACL community, with the specific intention of reaching out beyond the Learning Futures family. This effort was rewarded with a response rate of 166 governors and Clerks that that was twice our ambitious milestone. The gender split of respondents, 46% female/ 54% male contrasts sharply with estimates of the national split ranging between 33/67 and 38/62 to indicate that a disproportionately higher number of female governors had felt motivated to answer the survey. Whilst interpretation of the gender split should be made with care, we took both the number and make up of respondents to indicate both a genuine interest in learning with technology and a willingness to engage with it. Free text responses made clear that the survey of itself had ignited reflection upon practice:

"From my responses to this I have realised that we need to devote some time to bringing governors up to date both in respect of overall trends and our own particular position."

"I know that there is a 10% target for online learning ... but I am not sure I understand what Blended Learning actually is. .. I would like to know more."

"I had not thought of [this] before but the opinions of students and staff would be helpful."

"Not discussed frequently enough at our corporation meetings."

Amongst those involved in the project, the impact has been more immediately discernible. Governors involved in the case study colleges have agreed to join a panel at the AoC annual conference in November of this year when a breakout session will explore the resource and consider the contribution of governors to the successful application of technology in their institutions.

Impact in the medium to long term

It is our expectation that the take up of our resource, together with those created by others in the Learning Futures programme, will improve the confidence and capability of governors around the application of technology. We would expect to see more effective working relationships between the Corporation and managers and professional officers, together with:

- a shift to greater reliance upon technology in learning;
- greater use of electronic communications and social media solutions in the management of Board activities.

We would also expect to see reduced lead times of major innovations and changes in practice (e.g FELTAG proposals) because planning, evaluation and approval of investment is more assured and hence quicker.

We might measure this impact as follows:

- Changes in Corporation capability, understanding and confidence: tested by members' perceived levels before and after training and one year further on;
- Ofsted judgments.

The final observation to be made here is a quote from Bob Harrison, Chair of Governors at Northern College and a leading member of FELTAG made after scrutinizing the finished resource:

“ Good work....important now to get it out there.”

Key learning points

Many of learning points from our project are extensions of good teaching and learning practice: differentiation of learning experience; rigour in creating effective content stripped of duplication, diversions and flashy technical gimmicks and gizmos just because you can.

1. Differentiation applies at all levels of the organisation. It's not just students who need differentiated resources. The levels of interest and motivation to engage with any issue will differ from player to player and it's important to reflect that in the resources that you create if you want to reach everyone.

We worked to identify the core knowledge that constitutes a minimum level of understanding of learning with technology and tried to present it in a form that was relatively digestible, offered a variety of media and in particular the opportunity to listen to short spoken clips together with a mixture of graphics and text. There are numerous

invitations and opportunities to reflect on what the issues under examination might mean in the context of the user's own institution. We make clear in the guidance that these are for shared discussion and exploration with fellow governors, managers and staff to supplement any individual work.

We were careful to ensure that we were selecting, compiling and compressing, not producing a watered down version. For those who wished to dig deeper we have put together the full package, which goes into much greater detail and is supplemented by a number of additional resources, including links to external sources of information and the full video interviews.

2. It's important not to be precious about what seemed a great idea when you started but didn't really work out, or resources you have created that don't do a job in the finished product. We were rigorous in cutting back the unnecessary, weak or duplicating elements in what turned out to be a large body of content. We felt it was important to recognise that the time that governors have to devote to their responsibilities is limited and only a part of that overall time commitment can be given up to any particular issue. It was incumbent upon us not to waste that time on content and activities that were, in fact, diversions from a planned, purposeful and effective narrative thread.

3. Arising from the first two points is the observation that **the resource will work best if it can be divided into digestible chunks** that can be returned to.

4. **We began our project with the intention of concentrating on the college sector, which is where the special expertise of the project lead organisation and the partners lies.** It is also the part of FE and Skills that has the greatest practical experience of actually working to the FELTAG agenda. This was not from a head-in-the-sand unwillingness to look beyond the narrow confines, but rather "to produce a set of resources of the highest quality, focusing on a single sector in the first instance." (Project bid document).

This was accompanied by a belief that our sector is characterised by governors and workforce who understand well the particular needs of their institution and its sub-sector and can translate and transfer the experiences and language of colleges into their own environment perfectly adequately. The Learning Futures programme includes parallel projects and commissioned research looking into developments in work-based learning and adult and community learning.

Resources

Mastering Governance of Technology

The complete set of resources listed separately below, interlinked and presented as an integrated online resource;

A Guide to Using the Resource

Learning Technology in Context: A Guide

A breakdown of technology for learning in four stages from face to face to online autonomous learning

Overview module

An overarching introduction to the implementation of institution wide technology for learning.

Three case studies

- Heart of Worcestershire College
- Kirklees College.
- Reading College.

Detailed model/ case studies of organisation-wide implementation of ILT.

Points to Ponder

Questions for reflection.

A Decision making framework

Sets of questions constituting a structured decision-making framework for Governors around technology and learning from three perspectives:

- Considering a FELTAG proposal;
- Considering the future;
- Considering governors' responsibilities.

A Capability framework for a Governor Digital Technology champion

Set of capabilities for a Governor Champion, together with contextual information

Additional Resources

Selected documents from the models/ case studies.

Video interviews with key players (x 15).

Links to selected external sources of information.