



Department
for Business
Innovation & Skills

FELTAG PROGRESS REPORT

An update on progress since the publication of the Further Education Learning Technologies Action Group (FELTAG)

FEBRUARY 2015

Contents

Contents

FELTAG PROGRESS REPORT.....	1
Contents	2
Foreword	3
Introduction.....	4
What is FELTAG and what did it say?	4
How Government responded	4
What’s happened since June?.....	5
Colleges, Providers and Individuals	5
Infrastructure	5
Online delivery.....	5
Workforce Capability and Capacity	7
Innovate UK	7
Ofsted.....	8
Ofqual.....	8
How is the technology agenda being taken forward?	9
Conclusion	9

Foreword



Technology has become part and parcel of everyday life almost without people realising it. The ambition of FELTAG was to ensure this was also true of the FE sector, with education technology not seen as an optional extra but as an integral part of teaching and learning.

The FELTAG report was issued in March last year and the Government response in June. For some of the recommendations it is still too soon to see significant change but for others quite a lot has happened. This note is not intended as a comprehensive check on progress but as a snapshot on what has happened and how different organisations have responded.

Jisc and the Education and Training Foundation have stepped up to the mark and we have seen many colleges take advantage of the funding to enhance their internet resilience. The Skills Funding Agency is working hard with the sector to fill the evidence gap about the current level of on-line delivery. And perhaps the most encouraging outcomes are two that were not recommendations. The first is the extent to which FELTAG seems to have entered the general FE consciousness – no conference or exhibition seems complete without a FELTAG session. The second is that the sector has seized the FELTAG agenda and is taking this forward through the “FELTAG Coalition”.

That’s how it should be. Government will remain engaged but it is for the FE sector to shape how technology is best used to deliver the most efficient and effective learning outcomes.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Nick Boles". The signature is written in a cursive style and is contained within a thin blue rectangular border.

Nick Boles MP, Minister of State for Skills and Equalities

February 2015

Introduction

This short paper reports on the progress that has been made since the Government published its response to the FELTAG report in July 2014.¹

What is FELTAG and what did it say?

The Further Education Learning Technology Group was set up in January 2013 by BIS Ministers as a sector group to make practical recommendations aimed at ensuring the effective use of digital technology in further education².

The Group produced a report in March 2014 which was designed to nudge the culture of the FE and Skills sector towards more extensive and effective use of virtual, blended and online learning of all kinds – whether academic or vocational – and taking account of the different needs of different learners. The Report focused on leadership, infrastructure, regulation, workforce digital skills development, learner engagement and the role of employers.

It advised that funding, assessment, audit and inspection should not be a constraint on innovation. Highlights of FELTAG's recommendations included faster, more useful and better-value advice on procurement and purchasing; coherent, impartial advice made accessible to the sector to deal with competing ecosystems; more consistent and resilient, high-speed Wi-Fi broadband; and more effective strategic budgeting and planning for technology by providers; as well as a learning technology workforce training plan to address how, where and when to support and deliver learning.

How Government responded

In its Response (June 2014), Government set out the action that would be taken by key partners to deliver on the ambition to ensure more effective use of technology and BIS committed itself to monitoring progress, to continuing to emphasise the policy rationale, to maintaining momentum across Government partner bodies and, to encouraging on going commitment by the sector itself.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-learning-technology-action-group-feltag-recommendations-government-response>

² <http://feltag.org.uk/>

What's happened since June?

Colleges, Providers and Individuals

FELTAG sought to nurture a culture change in the sector, and many individual providers have since taken up the challenges set out in the Report, with sector organisations holding FELTAG events and briefings or publishing their own 'responses' to FELTAG's proposals (eg NIACE webinars, City & Guilds "FELTAG and Beyond", ALT policy debates, AELP's "Digital Actions"). The level of engagement by providers and individuals has been very encouraging and shows no signs of abating.

Infrastructure

Through funding from BIS, Jisc has undertaken a programme to deliver enhanced internet resilience for FE colleges. This will underpin the shift to Cloud based and online services and provide protection for mission critical systems. Almost 100 colleges took advantage of the BIS funding available for this upgrade.

Eduroam take up in FE has doubled to 86 colleges. This offers single sign on and connectivity to wi-fi away from the home (college) location.

Jisc is developing a suite of resources and programmes to support colleges and providers use technology. This includes access to digital content, advice on training, legal advice or cost reduction, cloud, connectivity or security issues. There are clear examples of the positive impact this work is having on the teaching and learning offer available to learners and on the efficiency of FE institutions.

Jisc is also working with the Education and Training Foundation on a programme to support adoption of technology across the sector, including exploring what it can do to support the independent sector. As part of its leadership, management and governance work, the Foundation is working with the sector to support leaders and governors ensure wise investment decisions are taken about the technology infrastructure for their organisations.

Online delivery

Although FELTAG recommended that there should be targets set for the level of on line delivery, Government has reviewed this in the light of concerns raised about setting a target without first testing the impact.

As a result, the Skills Funding Agency has issued advice confirming that it will undertake information gathering via the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) to help baseline current

levels of online activity³. It is also running four pilots to provide more information on how online delivery works in practice and asking the sector to complete a “temperature check” survey on current online delivery.

The feedback from this survey, together with AY 2014 to 2015 ILR data returns, will be used to gauge the current volume of online delivery and establish a baseline to inform funding policy development and implementation for future years.⁴

³https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/320156/ILR_ProviderSupportManual_2014_15_v1_June2014.pdf

⁴ The full SFA statement is at : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-learning-technology-action-group-recommendations-sfa-response/delivering-online-learning-sfa-response-to-feltag-report>

Workforce Capability and Capacity

BIS has looked to the Education and Training Foundation to lead the development of a plan for further developing workforce capacity and capability in online delivery, working with Jisc. The Foundation is the guardian of the new professional standards for teachers and trainers in education and training which reflect the increased emphasis on the role of learning technologies in supporting effective teaching and learning and improving outcomes for learners.

In response to FELTAG, and the results of a strategic consultation with the education and training sector in spring 2014, the Foundation has commissioned a £1m Learning Futures technologies programme with its grant funding from BIS. This is a one-year programme, being delivered by a Gazelle-led consortium, to develop the capacity and capability of FE leaders, managers and the teaching and support workforces to use learning technologies effectively. Thirteen projects are already being supported and create strategies to help practitioners embed technology in an evolving culture of blended learning. Further projects are currently being developed to support leaders and governors and to build partnerships between providers, and employers and LEPs so that learners on vocational programmes have access to industry-standard technologies.

A self-assessment tool has also been commissioned by the Foundation that allows providers to track their progress and action plan for improvement in the use of learning technologies.

The Foundation will also be exploring how MOOCs and VOOCs are, or might be used, to support learning delivery, in partnership with key stakeholders, including working with UFI Trust.

Innovate UK⁵

Innovate UK is the new name for the Technology Strategy Board. Its role is to fund, support and connect innovative businesses to accelerate economic growth.

There are two current SBRI (Small Business Research Initiative) programmes worth £1m co-funded by Innovate UK and BIS for assistive technology. Assistive technology allows disabled people to access employment or educational opportunities. SBRI programmes work by defining the problem and asking for innovative solutions, rather than the more orthodox tender which specifies exactly what solution is required. These programmes are targeted at issues around STEM subjects and independent mobility. They have both now entered the next phase with 5 of the projects being funded through to product commercialisation.

Innovate UK is also supporting 15 design feasibility projects from November 2014 to stimulate innovation in education technology⁶.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/innovate-uk/about>

Ofsted

Whilst Ofsted does not advocate a preferred method of teaching, basing their judgements on the effectiveness of teaching and learning in a particular context, they implemented the recommendation that it should increase its training and guidance for inspectors. Ofsted staff are collaborating with NIACE (through contributions to Webinars), the AoC through collaborative online seminars and the Education and Training Foundation through routine online meetings and project work steering groups. Ofsted staff are also shadowing the Jisc-led co-design workshops (the “FELTAG Coalition” work) and contributing to a variety of conferences considering the post-FELTAG landscape. They have also added a new learner view question on the use of online resources. Inspection reports since September 2014 are showing an increase in judgements on the effectiveness of technology.

Ofsted recognise Jisc is a valuable resource for providers to utilise when the need for improvement has been identified and have made HMI more aware of Jisc’s potential through training and guidance and maintain regular contact with Jisc staff. Where Ofsted identifies a provider as needing improvement Jisc will offer to work with the provider to identify and address any weaknesses where technology can help. In a similar way Jisc will offer to support providers where the FE Commissioner has identified improvement is needed. As an example Jisc helped South Worcestershire College to improve from a Grade 4 to Grade 2; in the later inspection the improved use of technology was specifically cited in the inspection report.

Ofqual

Ofqual puts the validity of qualifications at the heart of its regulatory approach. A valid qualification effectively and reliably measures the skills and knowledge it is designed to provide. This means that the assessment methodology must be designed around the particular skills and knowledge being assessed, whether that is observation of practical skills, or skills that can be demonstrated through written or on-screen assessment. It is for awarding organisations to decide on how technology should be used in assessments; Ofqual’s concern is that whatever approach is used is valid. Awarding organisations use technology in a wide range of ways to effectively deliver and award valid assessments: not only via on-screen or online assessment, but also in marking and standardisation.

As part of Ofqual’s focus on validity, it has recently reviewed its regulations to make sure that they are not prescriptive and do not stand in the way of innovation. As a result of this review Ofqual is withdrawing the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) Regulatory Arrangements. Although Ofqual has found no evidence that its existing regulations create any unintended barriers to valid online or onscreen assessment, the removal of the QCF rules will enable high quality vocational qualifications to be designed around the needs of employers, rather than a detailed set of structural rules.

⁶ Education technology can be defined as the effective use of technological tools in learning. It does not necessarily mean “hi-tech”; nor is it confined to technology that can only be used in education or indeed the technology itself. The Wikipedia entry is a good lay introduction to the concept:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Educational_technology

Ofqual will continue to engage with awarding organisations and wider stakeholders to make sure that its regulations continue to allow awarding organisations to innovate and to develop qualifications using valid onscreen and online assessment.

How is the technology agenda being taken forward?

In February 2014, the Education Technology Advisory Group (ETAG) was created to address parallel issues across FE, HE and schools, coordinated by DfE, with support from BIS. Its report and recommendations will be released at BETT in January 2015.

FELTAG placed a considerable responsibility on the Education and Training Foundation and Jisc. They have issued a joint statement⁷ setting out how they will work together on:

- developing the technology capabilities of leaders, managers and governors
- helping providers and practitioners to create better digital content
- engaging employers so as to improve access to cutting edge industry-standard technologies
- providing support and combining the networks and contacts of both organisations to ensure maximum audience reach

Separately Jisc has drawn together all the key sector parties from FELTAG and created a “co-design” vehicle – the FELTAG Coalition. The aim is to provide a framework with actions for developing the FELTAG agenda further over the next 12 months.

Conclusion

The FELTAG report and the Government’s response have significantly raised the awareness potential of technology to help the Government realise its policy aims more effectively and efficiently. Many colleges and providers are realigning their teaching and learning strategies accordingly but there is more to do and it will be the leadership in the sector that will make it happen.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

January 2015

⁷ <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/education-and-training-foundation-and-jisc-announce-collaborative-working-agreement-to-deliver>



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BIS/15/71