The impact of COVID-19 and lessons learned for improving digital skills in the future
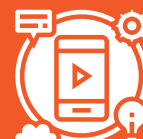
All-Party Parliamentary Group on
Digital Skills

Foreword

COVID-19 has resulted in a rapid change to our working life. Statistics estimate that 49% of the UK's adult population are currently working from home during the coronavirus lockdown. This means that technology is now playing a more prominent role in supporting everyday activities such as online shopping or accessing healthcare, widening the digital divide between those who have access and those who do not.

Many organisations and educators have been creative and flexible in trying to operate as normally as possible, which can be seen as they adapt to remote working, learning and the holding of online exams. The pandemic has also been an opportunity to reach out to those who do not normally go online and support individuals with their digital skills.

We've had a strong response from the sector to learn what issues have emerged across the UK during the last few months. It is clear that as we look to re-build our economy, digital should be considered as a fundamental component in all future policies.

There has never been a more pressing time to develop and implement a cross-departmental digital economic recovery strategy working alongside industry, educators and local authorities.

The Government must act now and set a clear strategy in place or the UK risks a slower economic recovery.

If you would like more information about the APPG, please contact the secretariat at digitalskillsappg@connectpa.co.uk and follow us on Twitter @digiskillsappg.

Julie Elliott MP
Chair
APPG on Digital Skills
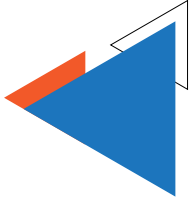
The APPG on Digital Skills is chaired by Julie Elliott MP. It provides a forum for parliamentarians, educators and employers to promote the importance of digital skills and to encourage a greater understanding of digital skills for personal, educational and career development.

The APPG works to build a strong relationship with the Government and collaborate with them in developing policies that support the uptake of digital skills.

The key objectives of the group are to:

1. Raise awareness to parliamentarians and policymakers that digital skills are vital to the UK economy
2. Communicate the urgency of upskilling the population in digital skills and the importance of improving digital skills to enhance the UK's productivity, competitiveness and social mobility
3. Work with MPs and Peers to champion digital skills in communities, education and the workplace

Investment in digital skills has the potential to:

- Support the UK's economic recovery through upskilling and retraining, contributing towards the UK Government's levelling up agenda
- Position the UK as a global leader in education technology
- Close the digital divide and support communities across the UK in all aspects of everyday life

The APPG would like to thank all contributions to the call to evidence which will be published on our website.

The APPG on Digital Skills is sponsored by:

Recommendations

The APPG on Digital Skills believes the Government should take the following steps in both the short term and long term to support and accelerate the growth of digital infrastructure, connectivity, devices and skills.

For the UK to re-build its economy, the Government must act now and invest in digital.

1. The Government must go beyond its recent commitment to publish a Digital Strategy and work with educators, local authorities and industry to develop a cross-departmental digital economic recovery strategy

2. The Government must work with industry and educators to introduce a digital training resources network to provide a basic introduction to digital skills

3. The Government must invest in future proofing the UK's digital infrastructure and provide targeted support for those not currently online

4. The Government must provide financial backing for initiatives like DevicesDotNow that seek to widen access to devices and connectivity

5. There must be further investment in community groups to support training of digital skills

6. Fraud awareness campaigns must continue and adapt to reflect the changes in fraud and scam techniques

7. Creation of lifelong learning hubs in partnership with local and central government, LEPs, employers, educators, charities and community groups

8. Establishment of a Sector Skills Grant Scheme from the Government, this would allow businesses to adapt their training schemes for workers and new starters to upskill themselves and protect businesses against the fallout from COVID-19

9. Awareness-raising campaigns to encourage SMEs to access support available to digitally upskill their companies

10. Reform the apprenticeship levy and ensure that digital skills are built into existing standards as they are reviewed

11. Greater collaboration between academia, industry and Government through the creation of a COVID-19 digital response working group

12. To support remote learning, the Department for Education must provide further financial support for student devices and making the bursary scheme more accessible to students

13. Ensuring the right infrastructure and policies are in place to successfully implement blended learning, including greater flexibility with university and college funding rates and rules and awareness of online learning platforms available

14. Introduction of new standards and accreditation, which should involve the acceleration of the development of digital skills standards

15. Encouraging lifelong learning and reskilling through adopting the Augar recommendation of the Lifelong Learning Loan Allowance

Responding to Covid-19
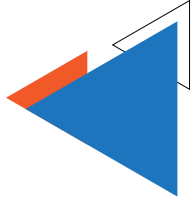
The COVID-19 crisis has shone a light on the significance of digital in supporting people's personal lives, education, workplaces and communities. The importance of staying connected during lockdown has made it essential to ensure the right digital infrastructure is in place, including connectivity, digital devices and digital skills.

There has been a huge shift in people's dependence on digital, particularly in the workplace, with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimating that 49% of people are currently working from home. The pandemic has also led to uncertainty around job security, which the CBI noted by stating that some people's roles will have already become effectively redundant and will no longer exist after the Government's furlough scheme ends in October, with projections of unemployment rates of up to 12%.

The shift to digital and economic uncertainty has meant there has been never been a more pressing time to retrain and upskill. Polling by the Open University stated that 36% of adults in Great Britain are now using this time to retrain. This renewed momentum is something that should be capitalised on. Lloyds Banking Group's Poll conducted in May surveying over 2000 adults showed that 35% have taken action to boost their digital skills, with 31% upskilling for work reasons whilst 37% are using technology more than usual to help with their health and wellbeing. Polling by BT Skills for Tomorrow and Small Business Britain found that 42% of small businesses have moved online due to the pandemic. Research by the Chartered Management Institute found that 89% of managers on furlough were looking to use the time to further develop their skills.

When looking to the future and economic recovery, it is obvious that digital has a significant role to play, but businesses and educators cannot do this alone. In order to support the UK's economic recovery, the Government must go beyond its recent commitment to publish a Digital Strategy and work with educators, local authorities and

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31%
Upskilling for work reasons

37%
Using technology more than usual to help with their
health and wellbeing

89%
Managers on furlough looking to use this time to further develop their skills

industry to develop a cross-departmental digital economic recovery strategy. This should involve all relevant government departments including: the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as well as engagement from 10 Downing Street, the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury to ensure that it is resourced and driven from the centre as a truly cross-departmental exercise.

Having a clear strategy would give confidence to businesses to invest whilst encouraging individuals to continue learning and retraining.

Recommendation

The Government must go beyond its recent commitment to publish a Digital Strategy and work with educators, local authorities and industry to develop a cross-departmental digital economic recovery strategy.

Accessibility and digital inclusion

The pandemic has seen many businesses and individuals adapt to working from home, but it has also drawn attention to the stark reality of the digital divide. The introduction of social distancing measures and the closure of face-to-face services meant that devices, connectivity and digital skills are now essential. Without them, people have become excluded from these services and from online access to support family, friends and their communities. Access to digital devices such as laptops and connectivity has now become an even greater barrier for people across the UK.

Lloyds Banking Group's Consumer Digital Index, launched in May 2020, estimated that 9 million UK adults struggle to use the internet and their devices by themselves. This equates to 16% of the UK population unable to undertake activities such as turning on a device to connect to Wi-Fi or open an app. An estimated 11.7m people lack the ability to find information online, fill out forms, access banking and keep connected.

The Good Things Foundation, a digital and social inclusion charity in the UK, explained that the lockdown resulted in thousands of community organisations being forced to physically close their doors at a time when they were inundated with people looking for digital skills support and help using computing equipment. As funding sources were cut off for many organisations, financial pressures also increased dramatically.

Respondents to the APPG's call for evidence explained that the youngest and oldest people in the workforce are facing the biggest challenges and will require different interventions as they are more likely to be unemployed following a crisis. Young people will be affected as they try to gain work experience and are unable to enter the workforce, whilst older people who have jobs may not have the sufficient basic digital skills to retain them. The fact that 82% of job vacancies now require digital skills creates an urgent need to upskill.

Whilst motivation levels for digital skills have now changed due to lockdown, it can still remain a barrier for some. BT's research suggests that many older people have suffered from a difficult combination of both physical and digital isolation during lockdown. BT polled over 1000 people with a close relative over 70 in May 2020 and found that half of respondents believed their relative is reluctant to try and learn new digital skills. BT and other organisations have introduced measures to try and tackle this problem through programmes such as BT Skills for Tomorrow and working with charities such as the Good Things Foundation. Another example of work being carried out in this area includes Barclays pledge to deliver digital skills training to 500 care homes nationwide by the end of the year. Confidence in using digital is also key to addressing the digital divide. New digital training resources should provide a basic introduction to digital skills before moving onto technical training. Failing to do this could deter potential learners from participating in training.

In addition to this, many frontline organisations are in desperate need of digital devices to be able to continue providing crucial services. In order to tackle this, initiatives such as DevicesDotNow have been launched, targeting 1.7 million households who do not have access to the internet and are digitally excluded. So far, this initiative has helped over 2,300 people.

Data poverty also continues to rise, as many vulnerable people are now facing a choice between food and data. A root cause of data poverty is unaffordable monthly broadband and data bills. One response to the APPG's call for evidence suggested the solution of data gifting. This is a practice of pooling any unused bandwidth to provide connectivity options to those who cannot afford it. Many organisations are working to tackle this, including BT who is working with the Government to provide in-need families with six months' free access to its wi-fi network and providing free cost of access to a range of sites including the NHS website and domestic violence support sites.
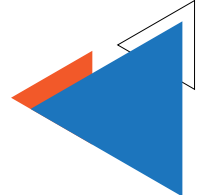
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155,000
UK properties are unable to get decent broadband

Superfast broadband is at approximately 95% of UK homes, but there is more to do across industry and Government to ensure no one is left behind. Ofcom's 2019 mobile and broadband coverage report states that currently, an estimated 155,000 UK properties are unable to get decent broadband. Connecting these homes will require a mix of fixed wireless access -using connectivity over the 4G and 5G mobile networks- and separately, the Universal Services Obligation (USO).

Many organisations understand these issues and are working both independently and in collaboration with the Government to tackle the digital divide. This includes:

- BT Skills for Tomorrow is helping 10 million people in the UK make the most of life in the digital world. BT has brought together a whole host of free resources and information to help people and businesses with the challenges they have faced during lockdown, in partnership with leading digital skills, enterprise and community organisations. BT also removed all data caps on broadband services, which will be a permanent change, whilst providing unlimited data to all mobile customers flagged as vulnerable.

- The EY Foundation has been looking at the impact of COVID-19 on the future of young people from low income backgrounds and launched a new online support scheme.

- The Good Things Foundation opened access to free online content for digital skills, creating new resources, and removed the mandatory requirement to register to use their free digital skills platform.

- Lloyds Banking Group set up a Digital Helpline in partnership with We Are Digital to support those who may be most affected by Government restrictions set due to the COVID-19 outbreak. This helps with tasks such as how to set up online banking as well as helping to access essential services such as food shopping or making GP appointments.

- Open Learn by the Open University is a free learning platform that delivers bite-sized learning experiences designed to fit into daily life, including more than 900 short courses.

- techUK is working with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and has set up a cyber training and skills content repository, identifying a range of free online cyber security training courses and wider skills content to support anyone looking to upskill.
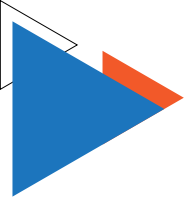
It is clear that digital inclusion is a necessity. People urgently need access to devices, connectivity and digital skills, and funding will be critical to this. The Government has pledged £6.51 billion to provide the country with gigabit-capable broadband but people will not be able to use this infrastructure without digital skills. If just 2% of the infrastructure budget was allocated to digital inclusion, it would make significant progress towards a 100% digitally included nation.

Investing in future proofing the UK's digital infrastructure, broadening accessibility, motivating people to upskill digitally and tackling the digital divide will be essential for supporting the Government's levelling up agenda and the UK's economic recovery. Motivation is essential when it comes to digital and the Government should play a greater role in convening others and investing in campaigns to drive people to develop their digital skills. Clear direction from the Government and a commitment to move the entire UK population online will have huge benefits for people's livelihoods, education and contribute towards economic growth.

Recommendations

- The Government must work with industry and educators to introduce a digital training resources network to provide a basic introduction to digital skills

- The Government must invest in future proofing the UK's digital infrastructure and provide targeted support for those not currently online

The Google Digital Garage focuses on training people, small businesses and charities to acquire the right digital skills to embrace new opportunities ahead. It draws on Google's 20-year history of building products, platforms, and services that connect people and businesses in the moments that matter, helping them grow and succeed online.

Since 2015, the Google Digital Garage has visited more than 500 locations across the UK and trained more than half a million people through free workshops, online training sessions and 1:1 mentoring sessions, enabling everyone to harness the power of the internet.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Google's Digital Garage trainers continued to provide support to people and businesses through new live webinars, which anyone can sign up to for free. The 60-minute webinars run every day, Monday to Friday, covering a selection of courses aimed at helping individuals and small businesses.

Tailored Digital Garage training sessions have also been hosted for particular industries or local areas. MPs have been encouraged to join virtual roundtables with local small businesses ahead of these training sessions to discuss the challenges facing small businesses in their constituency. Following the roundtable, the Google Digital Garage runs a webinar for the participants on a pre-agreed topic. This means training can be tailored for these local businesses and MPs have an opportunity to speak to constituents about the challenges they are facing.

Through these various routes, Google's Digital Garage trainers have continued to help people across the UK during the COVID-19 outbreak, providing a range of courses and avenues of support.

Communities

There has also been an increased sense of community in response to the pandemic. With mutual aid groups being set up across the UK, local community groups have become an increasingly significant tool for connecting to vulnerable adults who are shielding. Community groups will continue to grow in significance as coronavirus remains, particularly if the UK is faced with a predicted second wave of infections which results in new lockdowns. Businesses and charities have worked with community groups across the UK to support those most vulnerable. The DevicesDotNow campaign, which is supported by the Good Things Foundation and FutureDotNow, worked with businesses who donated devices. These were then set up with relevant apps (such as the NHS app and video calling software) and issued to community groups who then identified vulnerable adults and delivered devices safely to support vulnerable people's transition online, many for the first time. The Heely Trust explained that they had provided an IT Tutor to troubleshoot problems and train their users over the phone, providing them with digital support. They had also set up weekly IT skills classes on Zoom, focusing on everyday digital skills whilst loaning devices to local residents. Action like this has seen real benefits in supporting people access healthcare, shop online and connect with family members, whilst providing them opportunities for virtual job interviews.

Many community groups have adapted to the new environment and are supporting initiatives like DevicesDotNow, but are also facing severe funding shortages or cuts that have led to a dramatic increase in financial pressures. Respondents explained that some grants awarded prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 were withdrawn, whilst organisations were unable to provide paid services. Many charities and organisations have stepped up to support community groups financially and address cash flow issues, but Government intervention is required in order to continue this support.

Fraudsters are also taking advantage of the COVID-19 outbreak by playing on people's sense of uncertainty and fear around the pandemic, particularly those who are new to being online. Fraud awareness campaigns must continue and adapt to reflect the changes in fraud and scam techniques. This must include education on money mules, a form of money laundering for criminals to make their profits difficult to trace as well as phishing scams.

With the majority of schools not set to re-open until September, BT has worked with the Department for Education to provide in-need families with six months free access to the UK's largest Wi-Fi network, which extends to 5.5 million Wi-Fi hotspots around the country, to help keep children learning.

Barclays has also worked with families to upskill elderly family members. Their #DigiFamilies campaign encourages grandchildren to play a vital role in supporting grandparents in building their digital knowledge by sharing tips and advice. This means that elderly relatives can engage with technology in a different way whilst spending time with family members. Other resources to unite communities and businesses have also transitioned online such as Google's Digital Garage.

While communities have worked together to support one another, there needs to be greater collaboration amongst local and central government with LEPs, employers, educators, charities and community groups to create what City & Guilds refer to as 'lifelong learning hubs'. These hubs should focus on supporting people who have been displaced by COVID-19 and the changing labour market, as well as those who cannot access the internet, to enable them to learn new skills that will help them transition immediately into new careers and job opportunities.

Recommendations

- Government intervention and financial backing for initiatives like DevicesDotNow that seek to widen access to devices and connectivity
- There must be further investment in community groups to support training of digital skills
- Fraud awareness campaigns must continue and adapt to reflect the changes in fraud and scam techniques.
- Creation of lifelong learning hubs in partnership with local and central government, LEPs, employers, educators, charities and community groups

Four out of 10 people say that they have discovered new digital skills they plan to keep using after lockdown, including booking virtual appointments, mobile banking, and online GP services, according to new BT research on the nation's habits during the lockdown.

Half of respondents claimed they changed their habits for the better during lockdown and, looking to the future, BT research shows the nation is assessing the changes they will keep in place.

As the pandemic unfolded, BT took steps to ensure that as many people as possible could access the support they need during the lockdown. Central to this approach was BT's Top Tips on Tech campaign, a series of videos and guides to help everyone learn about different technologies and how to use them to make the most of life at home.

Originally played during ITV ad breaks, these videos and guides provide a simple set of tips that can be shared with anyone who needs help with tech at this time: https://www.bt.com/tech-tips.

The guides include information on how to get the most out of WhatsApp with Clare Balding; how to stay safe online with Angellica Bell; how to home-school with David Walliams; how to stay fit at home with Gareth Southgate; and how to protect your business online with Peter Jones.

Top Tips on Tech has reached millions of people with help during lockdown with a significant proportion indicating that they learned something new, feel more confident about using technology, put new skills into practice, and shared these tips with someone who needs help with using tech.

Employment

With many businesses now focusing on their economic recovery, digital skills will be essential to supporting future growth. This was recognised by the Chancellor, who identified digital as being a key pillar in the UK's economic recovery.

For this to be achieved, greater investment is required in uptraining and reskilling the existing workforce. In their response to the call for evidence, the Advertising Association and the Market Research Society outlined that many advertising and marketing sector trade bodies have been providing sector-specific training courses for which trainees and their companies would usually have to pay. Nesta is also working with organisations to develop digital solutions to improve motivation and career adaptability for those at risk of losing their jobs due to automation and is funding 20 innovators to develop and test data driven solutions to improve the career advice and guidance available to vulnerable adults. Workstreams like this have been essential for supporting furloughed workers retrain for free, but for this to be sustainable, it will require additional investment from the Government. A solution to this would be the introduction of a Sector Skills Grant Scheme that would allow businesses to adapt their training schemes for workers and new starters to upskill themselves and protect businesses against the fallout from COVID-19.

As recognised in this report, confidence is also key, particularly for small businesses. Many small businesses do not have the digital confidence, knowledge or skills to make the move into the online world. The IET's research states that only 18% of SMEs have optimised their services for mobile use. Organisations have responded to support SMEs with the introduction of free webinars and online training, but the Government needs to raise awareness of, and support these campaigns to reach a mass audience. As 99% of the UK's businesses are SMEs, there needs to be clear direction and support from the Government to ensure that there is no risk of being left behind.

Apprenticeships will be key for embedding digital skills in the workplace and training. The Government's recent summer statement outlined the importance of supporting the UK's future workforce, incentivising businesses to take on apprentices. The apprenticeship levy can support organisations in making a long-term and sustainable investment in training but, due to the complexities of the levy, many organisations have funds that are left unspent with smaller businesses missing out. Reforms should be implemented to the levy which should increase its expiration from two to five years in order to ensure businesses are utilising it. A minimum digital skills standard should also be built into existing standards as they are reviewed.

As businesses are incentivised to take on apprentices, there is a clear need to ensure a stronger partnership between academia and industry, through the creation of a COVID-19 digital response working group. This would help to support direct recruitment opportunities for students in the future and enhance student learning by allowing them to work on real life problems and issues.

Greater investment is needed to support organisations who provide digital skills training and support to those not in education, employment or training, as the cost can sometimes be challenging. To ensure that job seekers can access support at this critical time, additional funding from appropriate sources to both increase uptake of this training and to ensure ongoing support must be considered.

Recommendations

- The introduction of a Sector Skills Grant Scheme which would allow businesses to adapt their training schemes for workers and new starters to upskill themselves and protect businesses against the fallout from COVID-19

- Awareness-raising campaigns to encourage SMEs to access support available to digitally upskill their companies

- Reform the apprenticeship levy and ensure that digital skills are built into existing standards as they are reviewed

- Greater collaboration between academia, industry and Government through the creation of a COVID-19 digital response working group

City & Guilds has adapted to respond and work with our customers during lockdown. Many of its team was used to being on the road and working from home, but customer services and desk based teams now needed to be operational outside of the offices.

Because we took action in early March of what was likely to happen, our IT team made early preparations which enabled our service teams to take equipment away as soon as Lockdown was declared. We were able to adapt with the online environment to keep in touch with our customers and managed issues to create better flexibility with our communications.

City & Guilds quickly switched face-to-face events to webinars and produced guidance to help our customers to adjust to education and assessment in the "new world".

The current pandemic has presented a number of opportunities and what we need to do around learning assessment development for the future:

- How can we support digital as enabler of learning rather than it always being something else to teach
- Challenge the Government to improve the infrastructure and some of the "cast-in-stone" notions on education we have had to date
- Look at our priorities in terms of skilling the nation, making sure that we have those who can use the technology and those that support or develop the technology

City & Guilds worked swiftly and has been able to maintain its business and operations. We do see this way of working as part of our future. We believe we can work with the Government and others across all aspects of digital to ensure we have an educational environment that reflects what many of us now have in place that will benefit all.

Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the way universities, colleges and schools operate, with students, teachers and parents affected by the global pandemic. There is now a real demand for connecting remote learners with their institutions to promote online learning and supporting educators in developing their students.

The shift to remote learning has become essential for all teachers, but previous APPG discussions have found that many teachers do not feel comfortable using digital, due to the lack of confidence with technology. Creating and delivering lesson plans remotely was also a new challenge in itself. Organisations like the British Computer Society have focused on supporting teachers through producing resources for home teaching activities and creating webinars on learning and technology tools to support remote teaching. The changing school structure made it difficult for teachers to implement the planning of digital learning and additional time was required to support families in accessing work on different devices.

Mary Elton Primary School explained that for many schools, online learning delivered directly to children had not formed part of any emergency planning scenario, but schools have now adapted to work with online providers to support home learning. An example can be with Microsoft Teams, which is used to hold assemblies online for children learning at home. With many younger children learning online, safety is a key concern. Google's Be Internet Legends programme helps primary school children across the UK to become safe and confident explorers when online. It is the only PHSE-accredited online safety programme for 7-11 year olds in the UK and has reached two thirds of primary schools, supporting over two million families since launching in 2018. BT, through their

Barefoot learning at home activity, launched new resources for children aged 5-11 years old to keep developing their computing and digital skills at home.

The Association of Colleges explained that a number of colleges were able to quickly adapt to lockdown conditions, moving to a virtual campus mode within a matter of days. Some colleges already had well-established remote learning infrastructure in place; most have had a mixture of online platforms and set work, pre-built content and scheduled lessons to deliver classes. Statistics from the Association of Colleges show that 65% of colleges reported that the majority of their students were continuing learning remotely and 96% had systems in place to continue participating in remote learning.

Respondents stated that the biggest challenge for education institutes has been the growing digital divide between learners who have the devices, connectivity and ability to access online learning and those who do not. This was also apparent between staff who are comfortable and confident with teaching online and those who are less so. Whilst the Government committed to delivering 230,000 laptops and support schemes, such as the device bursary by ESFA, further work needs to be done in this area to support students' education.

As of June, it was announced that 68,000 of 230,000 laptops had not been sent to local authorities and multi-academy trusts across England, the Government must act quickly to prevent people from being left behind. Organisations such as the WEA found challenges remained with students living in areas with poor broadband, those who cannot afford broadband contracts which offer sufficient data, and those who have learning difficulties, physical disabilities or may experience poor mental health.
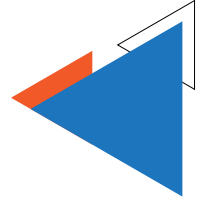
Ada, the National College for Digital Skills, had a smooth transition online due to the existing infrastructure in place, using Google Suite to support their teaching. They explained that challenges arose when trying to monitor whether learning and engagement was taking place as this became increasingly difficult to judge without a physical classroom. With additional pressure of isolation and the lockdown, there was also an increase in demand for mental health support for learners.

It is highly likely that blended learning will be in operation in the next academic year and it will be essential that the right infrastructure is in place for online learning. Grimsby Institute has creatively used their online learning platform, Canvas, to help deliver their courses to students.

A greater focus on digital skills in education should be complemented by independent accreditation and standards. For the UK to remain a world-leader in digital skills, it needs to have thorough scrutiny and recognition of its high standards. As ECTIB recommends, there should be an acceleration of the development of digital skills standards at higher levels than Level 1 for industry to use.

Many universities have had to adapt the way they teach and implement new frameworks for online learning. As a specialist distance learning provider, all of the Open University's courses develop digital literacy skills and their teaching methods have allowed them to reach disadvantaged people and communities not served by other universities. The OU stated that their free online learning platform OpenLearn trebled in visits, with well over 1 million visitors in the first eight weeks of lockdown. Other universities have now adapted by holding their lectures online but are looking to also provide face to face teaching. A recent survey by Universities UK said that 97% of universities are planning to provide some on-campus teaching in 2020, with the remaining 3% saying they would provide teaching only online.

Recommendations

- To support remote learning, the Department for Education must provide further financial support for student devices and making the bursary scheme more accessible to students

- Ensuring the right infrastructure and policies are in place to successfully implement blended learning, including greater flexibility with university and college funding rates and rules and awareness of online learning platforms available

- Introduction of new standards and accreditation, which should involve the acceleration of the development of digital skills standards

- Encouraging lifelong learning and reskilling through adopting the Augar recommendation of the Lifelong Learning Loan Allowance

Case study
TheETA

The Education Technology Alliance has, throughout the previous months, continued to work with both primary and secondary schools, in support of their use of digital skills to make learning more effective, relevant, and enlivening. Schools have continued to put themselves forward for the TheETA award, discussing with us their own position, sharing practice, looking to improve, and continuing to achieve the award as a result. TheETA awards schools when they use digital skills for learning and are able to make learning more efficient. Schools understand that digital skills provide learning, which is simply impossible otherwise, often exciting and fun. A notable feature of conversations with schools is the positivity around their felt need to provide an education which prepares their pupils for life in a world where digital devices, tools and their use are everywhere. As one of our partners explains,

'*there is a third powerful reason for using devices for learning and that is learners live in a world of devices, and any education which seems separate from that world is seen by learners as profoundly irrelevant*'.* Another recurring theme is the difficulty of doing this in the current education climate. Schools have so much to teach that seems irrelevant to the needs of children, and there is a growing understanding that the subject of Computing, while worthwhile in itself, does not cover digital skills.

As a result of achieving the award, there is now a growing body of schools known for their development of digital skills at a nationally moderated good standard. They are part of the Ed Tech Alliance, which includes them alongside other schools, product, service and support providers. Together, we helped schools deal with the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic, and in so doing learned important lessons.

*https://bit.ly/2ZyQjyF
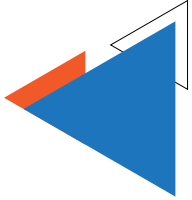
Contributions

The APPG would like to thank the below organisations for their contributions in evidence. All evidence referenced in the APPG report can be found published on our website.

Ada

Advertising Association

Association of Colleges

Barclays

British Computer Society

Beep

BT

City & Guilds

City of London Corporation

Digital Work Research Ltd

ECITB

Good Things Foundation

Google

IET

Lloyds Banking Group

Market Research Society

Mary Elton Primary School

Nesta

Oliver Wyman

techUK

The Open University

TheETA

WEA/Adult Education APPG

All-Party Parliamentary Group on
Digital Skills

For more information about the APPG on Digital Skills,
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