

A young Black male student is the central focus, smiling as he looks at his smartphone. He is wearing a white t-shirt under a dark, striped button-down shirt and has a grey backpack strap over his shoulder. The background is a blurred indoor setting, likely a school hallway. A large, semi-transparent blue graphic element is overlaid at the bottom of the image, containing the main title.

Digitally Future-Proofing Further Education

Adapting to Change

It's a tumultuous time for the 284* FE colleges in the UK. The world is amid a global public health and economic crisis. FE Colleges are facing the same issues they have for years, compounded by challenges delivering learning during a public health pandemic. Further uncertainty comes from a lack of clarity on the detail of a whitepaper for further education due from the government in autumn. Funding pressures continue, meaning that many colleges are looking to make savings and efficiencies by merging together in civic geographies to create larger more connected and resourceful institutions. It seems likely the trend will continue as the FE sector strives to adapt to the pressures it's under. [* as at September 2020]

Colleges educate and train 2.2 million people

1.4 Million

Adults study or train in colleges

669,000

16 to 18-year olds study in colleges

An additional
69,000

16 to 18-year olds undertake an apprenticeship through colleges

13,000

14 to 15-year olds are enrolled to colleges (10,000 part time; 3,000 full-time)

Students aged 19+ in further education generate an additional £70 billion for the economy over their lifetimes.

[The Association of Colleges key facts 2015-16]

Colleges are quite simply the bedrock of high quality technical and professional education and training for young people, adults and employers in the UK. In order to help rebuild the economy and provide the skills needed to repair and secure the future of businesses and communities, colleges need to be at the centre of this, and working in partnership with the government. Colleges prepare over two million students per annum with valuable, employable skills. The average college trains around 1,300 apprentices each year with the sector being responsible for preparing half of all construction apprentices in the UK. As a result, UK Plc. benefits by an additional £70 billion over the lifetime of each student.

The average general FE college trains

1,300
apprentices.

However, in adapting to change, the reality is that mergers are only the start of the need to work smarter and leaner. Digitisation is one area where colleges are currently failing to make the grade, mainly due to fear of the cost of investment. FE is not alone, universities face the same challenges, and examples of failures to digitise in other sectors are numerous.

Our high streets and large newspaper outlets have seen huge decline and even extinction due to failure to digitise fast enough. FE must recognise the return on investment in technology - bringing together students, campuses, teachers and potential employers and making learning more seamless whilst futureproofing the sector as a whole.



Let's not forget that students are also changing. The millennial generation are more digitally savvy, own smartphones, tablets and wearable technology and use social media and apps almost ubiquitously. They have high expectations that technology will provide benefits associated with remote working and the ability to collaborate with colleagues, teachers, friends and potential employers from anywhere. Quite simply, they expect their learning experience to mirror life outside college.

If FE colleges are to continue to prepare students for the world of employment and allow them to become successful in their studies whether that be on campus or online, the delivery mechanism is crucial to meeting student expectations. In this white paper we consider the challenges and opportunities facing further education and how accelerating to a position of digital maturity can help to reform the sector.



The Challenges

There's always room for improvement and for the foreseeable future, efficiency savings will drive the agenda in FE. Digitisation offers further education both the greatest challenges and the biggest opportunities in the history of education so far and requires a top down holistic approach and cultural change. It's the enabler to level up the playing field between those colleges that are on the brink of financial ruin and those that are keeping their heads above water – and delivers a mechanism for newly merged super colleges and those willing to invest in technology to go a step further and excel.



82%
of colleges

at their most recent Ofsted inspection were judged good or outstanding for their overall effectiveness.

Removing duplication, sharing resources between colleges, driving efficiencies, collaboration and delivering measurable outcomes will spur institutions on to build next-generation IT infrastructure. This in turn will support the delivery of smart digital services in order to enhance student engagement, innovation and productivity, whilst helping to reduce costs and meet some of the sector's distinct challenges.



Supporting Diversity

Colleges are known for their diversity. Students learn in a wide range of places, including college campuses, workplaces and private training providers. They offer very niche courses tailored to particular skills. The students often come from disadvantaged backgrounds and challenging circumstances, may not have achieved highly at school or had a successful academic career to date, often have English as a second or additional language and represent a cross section of all ages – from 16 to 60+ years old. 17% of students in colleges have a learning difficulty and/or disability, in 2016 230,000 unemployed people undertook education and training in colleges; 97% of colleges recruit via Jobcentre Plus. This figure is only set to rise during the economic crisis and the tapering off of the furlough scheme.

17%
of students in
colleges have a
learning difficulty
and/or disability.

99,000
college students are
aged 60 or over.

Technology provides the glue to bring people from differing backgrounds with differing abilities and challenges together as one community regardless of where they physically study or the challenges they personally face. The digital campus can support this diversity by removing physical barriers to learning whilst building new online resources that provide help, cohesion and direction for all.

Big data provides the backbone to decision making when looking for these efficiencies and improvements and is essentially becoming integral to urban planning in the 21st century.

As a consequence of such a project, the institution at the heart of the project gains too. It will grow its reputation as a knowledge centre for urban planning and smart city development, and will continue to attract student talent based upon their interest in such subjects, whilst developing degree programmes to reflect the projects they play a central role in.



Personalised learning

One of the greatest challenges for educators is how to personalise the learning experience for students based upon whatever diverse section of the student population they represent. Digitisation provides the ability to do this, helping to improve student chances by assisting everyone to reach their learning potential.

Probably the most talked about area of personalisation is flipped learning where students complete and submit much of their work online up front which allows teachers to track results and analyse them to a higher level of specificity than if they were using more traditional teaching methods. This information can then be fed back to the physical classroom allowing the teacher to tailor resources and content into the specific needs of each individual student – flipping homework to the front of the process, before classroom teaching.



Of course, online teaching also allows an in-depth analysis of individual performance. Data collected from students' digital footprints means that teachers can identify the subject's students are struggling with, allowing targeted intervention. It's possible to predict with a degree of certainty, which students will succeed via their attendance and digital interaction, and to step in to correct issues with those that are on a collision course. This all works towards higher student retention rates and greater overall success.



The digital campus has the ability to help both students and teachers bring about real change to traditional learning practices, blending both on and offline teaching, whilst delivering a personalised learning experience to a traditionally diverse student population. Blended learning has become a buzzword in recent months as education establishments seek to provide the same learning experience for everyone regardless of location and move to a hybrid model of online and in-person teaching and learning.

The average distance between home postcode and learning location for undergraduate students



Colleges provide higher education for local people from non-traditional backgrounds and as the following statistics show, they provide this education for their local communities, too. The average distance between a college higher education student's home and their college is around 15 miles compared to 53 miles to a university higher education student and their home address. It's clear that colleges have a well-defined catchment population - much like a school. The delivery of the digital campus is therefore less about competing with other institutions.



Driving up Standards

Competition exists only to attract students to further their studies, rather than lose them directly to the workplace or the unemployment queue – so in that way, they must still strive to deliver a ‘competitive’ solution that attracts students to further study.

The digital campus also aids employment prospects for students. Technology is used right across every avenue of the business world, and even those students learning traditional ‘trades’ must have matching commercial skills and acumen – technology is the cornerstone of business enablement. Being able to effectively and efficiently use mobile, online apps and software is a fundamental skill sought after by employers right across all sectors and industries and a basic requirement for any student’s CV.

Teaching the use of technology in the context of learning and education as opposed to only in a student’s social engagements is therefore crucial to delivering real world skills that are attractive to future employers and the continued relevance of further education.

And let’s not forget the teachers too. Where staff can easily analyse student data, it’s possible to critically assess their own personal development. It’s much easier to see how their teaching develops students’ skills over time and how changing teaching methods based upon this knowledge can deliver increased student success. Technology has the ability to help the sector drive up teaching standards as well as successful outcomes for students, future-proofing the sector.



What does the future hold?

Digitisation has been accelerated and isn't showing any signs of slowing down. Colleges have always had to work smarter and harder and the recent pandemic has provided no exception to this.

The way students work has changed dramatically and what was a preference or desire in previous years is now a vital must-have requirement for study completion. The ability to access all course content and feel connected to a campus despite location is critical to a student's success.

Budgets are limited and even with promises of increased funding availability looking hopeful in the future there isn't the time for colleges to wait to implement the much-needed technology their institute needs.

Look for a solution that creates those efficiencies and gives your students and your institution the flexibility required for survival.

myday is a complete digital campus. A portal and mobile app solution that improves student engagement, satisfaction & results, supporting the whole student lifecycle.

The myday digital campus software addresses all of the considerations listed within this guide and much more.

Learn more about myday at
www.myday.collabco.com

If you would like to talk to one of our advisers today about any of the information included in this guide or how myday can instantly boost your student experience, and then continue to deliver the rich experience you aspire to achieve then

please call **0800 048 9515**
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