

Wanted: a 'digital' vision

By Maren Deepwell

Last year the Government announced a number of measures that impact on vocational education and training. They included £100 million for an additional 8,000 fully qualified computer science teachers supported by a new National Centre for Computing, a retraining partnership with the Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of British Industry to boost digital skills in the workforce, and £76 million to boost digital and construction skills.

The term 'digital' has become shorthand for anything to do with using, or being influenced by, technology. It is added to existing terms to make new meanings – for example digital education, digital leadership, digital teachers and digital accreditation. Beyond education and training we operate in a digital economy and try to engage with digital democracy. We leave digital footprints, manage digital identities and even sign up for digital detox. 'Digital' is a term that has left its clearly defined roots so far behind that it is challenging to unpack its meaning even when there is a clear context – and in many instances policies seem to fall short of really getting to grips with what needs to be achieved and how it can actually be resourced.

Is current policy-making in the UK effectively addressing the challenges that we face in the (digital) future in vocational education and training and beyond? Seeing Finnish education expert Pasi Sahlberg unpack the strategic direction of policy-making in different countries, including the UK, leads me to question whether a different approach to policy making is needed.

My recent experience of being involved in delivering a national digital skills course, funded by the Ufi Trust, clearly demonstrated how far we are from upskilling the workforce in general, and teachers in particular. It also showed how much we still need to do at all levels, from the most practical to the most strategic, to achieve the kind of culture change that, for example, the original FELTAG (Further Education Learning Technology Action Group) recommendations advocated.

Confidence, competence and critical literacy are all essential components of using technology effectively for learning, teaching and assessment, and must be independent of particular tools or platforms. Just as our approach to training and accreditation needs to adjust, policy-making needs to make its own paradigm shift. Any measure that provides support or funding for providers in a sorely overstretched sector must surely be welcome, but it also needs a vision that is fit for the (digital) future we are facing.



Subject Focus – page 24

Maren Deepwell is chief executive of the Association for Learning Technology (ALT)

Digital Detox goo.gl/uQxqyg

Visit Pasi Sahlberg's website at goo.gl/XDfFAi

For more on the Blended Learning Essentials: Developing Digital Skills course visit Future Learn at goo.gl/7KvDbW

Read the FELTAG report at goo.gl/2CRtTS