Education Research Report Whitepaper

Smarter technology for all

Lenovo

Your #1 priority: solving the UK education's IT challenges

Google for Education

Introduction

However much we practice working remotely, everyone in education knows that you can't replace face-to-face teaching. It's how students collaborate best.

Over the last year, we've faced remote working challenges from pre-school to post-doctoral study. The pandemic has exacerbated several existing issues. Online learning has increased inequality among students and the need for more digital training for teachers. It's also created new problems, and potentially reduced students' career options.

But despite this disruption, the last year has also shown brilliant stories of resourcefulness and hope. Teachers across the UK have outdone themselves in the ingenuity, creativity and care they have shown for students. Parents have worked hard to fill in the gaps (and often learned a lot themselves in the process). And IT leaders have stepped up to find solutions when they were needed most.

When schools and universities fully reopen, catching up will be the top priority. Students have lost up to six months of learning during lockdown[1], so the road ahead will be bumpy.

Technology has a huge role to play in creating a positive future – by enabling hybrid working, helping students to make up for lost time, and giving them the skills they need for the future.

With that in mind, we recently teamed up with Google to commission some research into the state of education in the UK. We spoke to teachers, students, parents, and IT administrators, to find out exactly what challenges they are facing, where they see technology supporting them, and how they are charting a course forward.

In this report, we've collated that research with our own experiences, working with thousands of educators across the country. Our recommendations are focused on those schools and universities' top priorities.

Learning loss

Your #1 priority: catching up on lost time

47% of university students and 55% of secondary school students believe the pandemic has negatively impacted their education.[2]

Schools will take different approaches to helping their students get up to speed. But we don't know what restrictions may be in place in the future. So it's crucial we put the right infrastructure in place now. To give students the best possible experiences today, and to minimise any future disruption tomorrow.

Extended days, after-school activities, weekend and summer school programmes can all help students to catch up[3]. So can hybrid classrooms, which combine remote and in-person students. Any effort to accelerate learning will involve an element of hybrid working, with students needing to spend more time on devices both in and out of the classroom.

Where technology can help

Over 80% of students expect to use devices more in the future.[4] That means teachers and university staff need better training on how to deliver digital, blended learning. Having the right technology partners will be key to this. Especially if organisations don't have the technical expertise in house to upskill their staff, or to ensure the right infrastructure is in place.

In the short term, it also means equipping students with the resources they need to learn outside of the regular classroom routine. IT buyers should choose durable devices with good battery lives, as students will potentially need to use their devices for longer than usual each day.

In higher education, devices with lots of computing and graphical processing power can enable students to carry out complex work remotely, and spend more time on things like lab work outside of supervised hours. Remote access to on-site workstations can provide students with the power they need to continue their studies at home, even in a virtual desktop environment.

2 PSB, EMEA Education Report, February 2021
3 Learning Policy Institute, 2020
4 PSB, EMEA Education Report, February 2021

The digital divide

Your #1 priority: ensuring no student is left behind

Global lockdowns have highlighted how big the issue of inequality in education is. Wealthier private schools, with smaller class sizes, better equipment and faster internet access, are able to deliver remote teaching 41% more effectively.[5]

Meanwhile, teachers at schools with smaller budgets are unlikely to have the training and equipment they needed to carry out online lessons effectively. They are also less likely to know whether remote students are engaged with their work, or what they are doing during school hours. Hybrid classrooms will exacerbate this issue at schools with larger class sizes, as busy teachers will have in-person students to manage as well.

Where technology can help

With the urgent rush to get devices to students in the early months of the pandemic, many schools and universities resorted to panic buying. Lenovo research from 2020 suggests that as many as 44% of devices bought during the first lockdown may not be fit for purpose in the long run. Many of these devices will need to be replaced, with IT buyers now selecting for the long-term. Students need robust devices that are reliable and powerful enough to cope with modern applications – including high-intensity software used for technical subjects and graphic design.

Classroom management software can enable teachers to control hybrid lessons effectively. It gives them oversight of every student's work, and the assurance that lesson plans are being followed and engaged with. This software goes hand in hand with modern devices – but both are needed for an effective hybrid teaching solution.

5 McKinsey, 2021

Career pressures

Your #1 priority: guiding students through a tough period

Students today will be graduating into a world defined by the fallout of COVID-19, as well as the ongoing threat of climate change.[6] Our research showed that 38% of students in secondary school believe the pandemic has negatively affected their career prospects, while 45% of university students say the same. This was a concern shared by 1 in 3 parents, and 49% of education buyers too.[7]

72% of secondary students and 77% of university students say technical skills are more important than before the pandemic.[8] A third of university students also said that upskilling in STEM subjects was a top priority – perhaps linked to a rise in the prominence of science communications around the pandemic.[9] Now, those priorities are even more pressing: 'work readiness' is strong focus for students in the UK, who feel they are having to grow up faster, whilst being held back at the same time.

Where technology can help

For schools and universities, it's vital to equip students with the tools they need to develop key vocational skills. They need to be proficient with modern software solutions required for their careers, which could include coding, AR/VR solutions, graphic design, data analysis and modelling, and so on. For students in STEM subjects especially, powerful devices are needed to run technical software – especially remotely.

Our research also showed students and IT buyers are exploring the potential of eSports devices. eSports can provide an inclusive, competitive, high-engagement environment to develop many of the technical skills students need today, and it helps develop team skills. Even before the pandemic, Pew Research found that 90% of teens were playing videogames, including 97% of boys.[10] The devices used for eSports support many of the same graphical requirements as STEM software, making them good options for students to use across their personal and academic lives – especially since eSports enthusiasts have a higher tendency to be academic achievers and interested in high-paying, STEM fields.[11]

6 National Geographic, 2020
7 PSB, EMEA Education Report, February 2021
8 PSB, EMEA Education Report, February 2021
9 PSB, EMEA Education Report, February 2021
10 Forbes, 2020
11 Forbes, 2020

Uncertain futures

Your #1 priority: setting a foundation for the next five years

COVID-19 has demonstrated to a lot of schools and universities where the gaps are in their IT estates. IT buyers have been working around the clock to fill those gaps. But the demand for devices is only going to increase, even after the pandemic is over.

Top criteria for new device purchases:

1. **High-quality performance**
2. **Hard-wearing and durable**
3. **Appropriate for both work and leisure**

As well as improving resilience against unforeseen challenges in future, IT buyers can also build an infrastructure that meets longer-term challenges. For example, digital tools can make education more accessible for students who may previously have struggled to engage – such as those with special learning needs, visual or physical impairments, and more.

Another area for focus is cybersecurity. With students working remotely, the attack surface for schools and universities has grown significantly. They are working on unsecured networks, and may be accessing inappropriate sites or materials on their devices. It means there has never been a clearer need for effective device management and cybersecurity policies, as well as training for both staff and students.

Where technology can help

Across the board, the most important criteria for new devices are high-quality performance and durability. Already, a third of all students say their current device is not powerful enough.[12] There's no question that over the next few years students will be using devices more often, for a wider variety of tasks. It makes sense to invest in devices that will still be viable in five years, rather than regularly having to update your IT estate.

Buyers also need to factor in the security spec for new purchases, given the increased risk of cybercrime and data loss. And with software evolving over time, it's also important to consider how easy it is to update technology remotely.

We know that buyers are often hampered by decision-making at local and regional authority level, especially when budgets are tightened during economic hardship. The criteria we've mentioned would all help to ensure that solutions purchased today will be sufficient for years to come, and therefore better value for money.

Taking you to the next level

We work with thousands of schools, universities, teachers, and parents across the UK. We're a world leader in education technology – so we understand the priorities for the people involved in purchasing decisions.

Just as every student has their own unique personality, so does every institution have their own challenges and needs. Along with Google, we've built a flexible suite of technology solutions for the education sector, based on our deep knowledge of the challenges you're facing. Whether that's a headteacher enabling a hybrid classroom, an IT manager strengthening their security systems, a parent looking for a durable device to keep their child engaged, or a university student using powerful software for remote research.

Clearly, the next step for everyone looks different. But whatever your number one priority is, we're here to help.

If you'd like to find out more about our devices, services and partnerships with leading education software vendors, get in touch today.

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