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Why and how you should run an EdTech pilot

KEY POINTS

- Running an EdTech pilot can result in better decision making.

- The five key benefits of running a pilot:
  1. Identifies gaps and pitfalls
  2. Supports informed decisions
  3. Aids better roll out
  4. Clearer picture on impact on other areas
  5. Development of staff champions

- Seven steps for a successful pilot:
  1. Create a plan
  2. Identify needs
  3. Examine infrastructure
  4. Success criteria
  5. Launch
  6. Collate data
  7. Analysis and decision

Over the past three years, schools and MATs have developed a clearer understanding of EdTech and the value it can bring to improving the learning experience and outcomes. They have learned what works well and what doesn't, as well as gaining confidence in using EdTech to support learning.

EdTech is constantly evolving, and you may find yourself in a situation where you are considering new or replacement technology. You will have had the personal recommendations, you've done your research, you've read the case studies and spoken with different suppliers. Yet do you know how it will work, specifically, in your school or MAT?

Let's explore the benefits of running an EdTech pilot and then how you can go about it.

Why running a pilot is beneficial

Running a trial is an important step to implementing new EdTech for your MAT. Yet, it is often a step that is overlooked or missed out due to the impact on costs and time. The benefits of a trial are:

Identifies gaps and pitfalls
You are likely looking at a piece of EdTech because you think it will lead to improvements across the MAT and so you believe in it. However, you may not have fully understood any potential problems, gaps in functionality or infrastructure limitations. A pilot will really bring these aspects to the fore allowing you to make relevant changes.
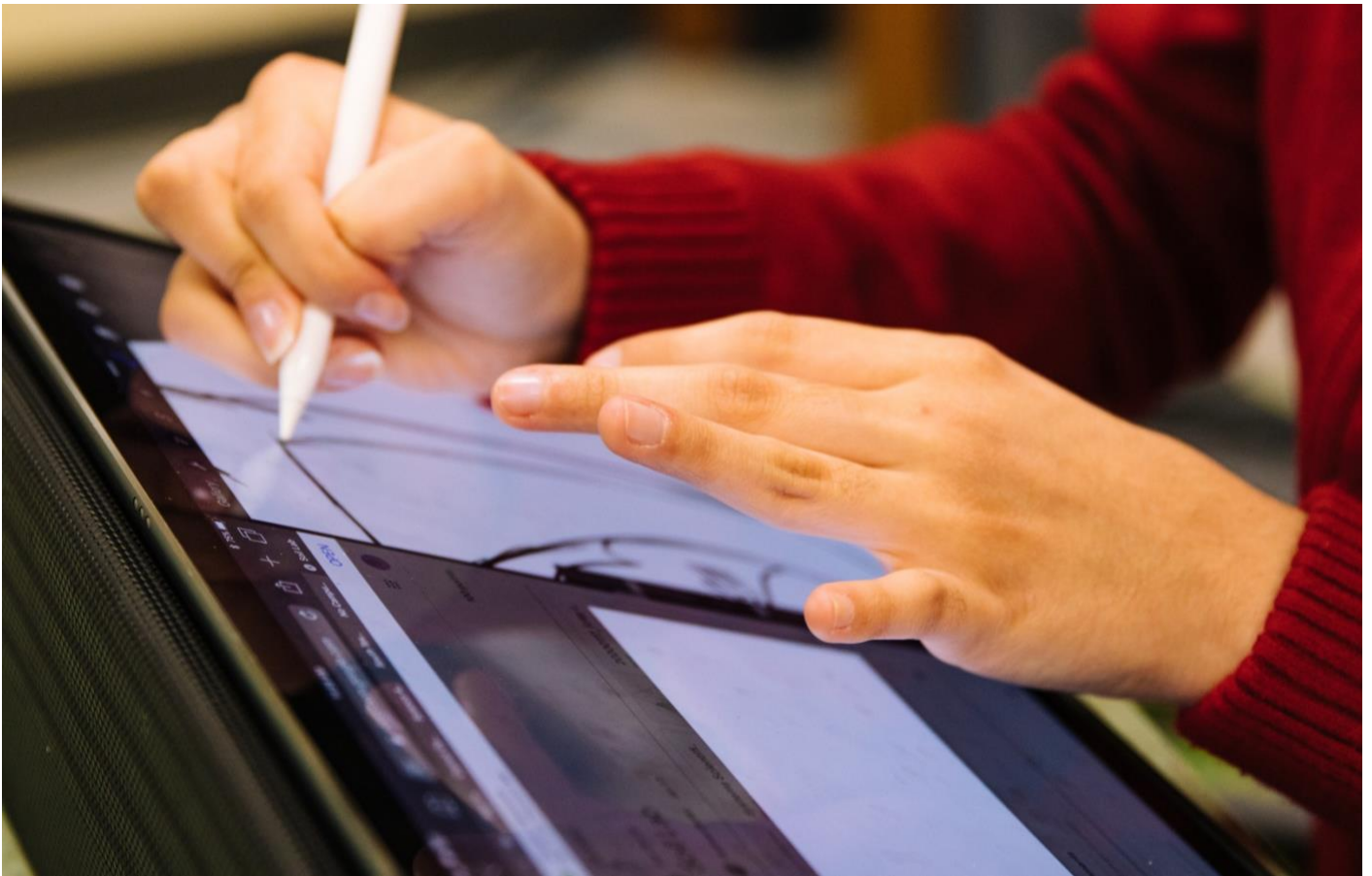
Supports informed decisions
By identifying problems and pitfalls as well as successes, you can ultimately save time and money further into the project. When you understand the challenges, you are then able to ascertain whether they can be overcome for full roll out and avoid the problems on a larger scale or even decide not to proceed. Either way, you are making a decision based on what you've learned and tangible facts.

Aids successful at full implementation 'roll out'
The pilot itself won't necessarily lead to successful implementation, the pilot needs to be analysed so that lessons are learned, and improvements identified. If properly analysed, then full implementation will be smoother.

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Picture of impact on wider school ecosystem
During a pilot, you will be able to see if and what other impacts come about due to the new technology. These may be positive impacts that are a pleasant surprise but conversely there could be negative impacts that you hadn't expected. A pilot will help weed out 'knock on' impacts and then you are in a strong position to overcome any not so desirable impacts.

Staff champions
During a pilot, the staff involved will learn how the technology works and can become advocates for the change that the new technology will bring about. They are then in a strong position to bring their peers on board in a positive way and facilitate staff training when it is fully implemented across the MAT.

How to implement a pilot?

Getting the most out of your pilot is often down to the planning. You've gone to the effort of conducting a pilot, it is therefore important that you make use of the technology during the time

available. There are seven steps you can follow to ensure that you make the most of an EdTech pilot.

1. Create a plan

Consider the timing of your pilot – does it tie in with the school/MAT calendar, budget discussions and purchasing requirements?

In partnership with the supplier, identify which functions of the technology you will pilot and how you will use it.

How long will the pilot run for? Is it long enough to get a clear picture of its suitability?

2. Identify key needs across the MAT

Understand from all your stakeholders (teachers, admin staff, students, and trustees), what they would like to get out of the technology and identify if that can be incorporated into a pilot.

Don't be blinkered by the excitement of new technology, always keep the pedagogical requirements in mind. Will the new technology support the improvement of learning outcomes for the students and the MAT?

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3. Examine your existing infrastructure

While a pilot will identify any infrastructure shortcomings, it is a good idea to give some initial consideration to it prior to the pilot. Your supplier will have a specification of the minimum that is required eg broadband speed etc.

Compatibility with both your infrastructure and existing teaching tools and software is also very important in terms of the ease of integration of the new technology eg are you looking to introduce Mac technology in a purely PC run school?

4. What does success look like?

It is vital that you know what you are wanting to achieve with the new technology, is it better pupil engagement, raised attainment, reduce workload? Regardless of what your goal is, keep it in mind throughout the pilot and be clear on how you will measure its success.

5. Launch

Use any provider support that is available, it can help with running an effective and informative pilot. You've done all your planning and now you are ready to launch your pilot. Great, the pilot is running, the key now is to keep monitoring and evaluating it.

6. Gather data

Feedback from all stakeholders is vital in the evaluation of whether the new technology is right for your MAT. Provide avenues for stakeholder feedback throughout the pilot, such as:

- discussions
- surveys
- focus groups

7. Analysis and decision

While running the pilot, you will have gathered lots of data (anecdotal, functional, and statistical) that you need to analyse. Your analysis will help to identify the positives and negatives of the technology and help you arrive at the decision of whether the technology is right for your MAT.

Key questions to ask are:

- Were there any surprises?
- Did it deliver more or less than expected?
- What infrastructure problems did you identify and how can these be overcome?
- What changes could be made for better success?
- What are the thoughts from the stakeholders?
- Does it deliver on the measure of success? See point 4.

Conclusion

The DfE EdTech 2022 report is very clear that running a pilot is beneficial in the identification of new technology for a MAT and its schools. A pilot can identify successes and challenges and facilitate the final 'go'/'don't go' decision, which saves time, money, and anguish in the long run.

If you are looking at new EdTech and would like support in identifying the right technology and running a pilot, our ICT Consultants can support you.

FIND OUT MORE

Our expert team of ICT Consultants can support you on the selection and implementation of EdTech.

We are independent, objective, and knowledgeable about what ICT in MATs and schools should look like, and experts in creating and delivering ICT infrastructures that work.

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