Microsoft

The acceleration of hybrid learning

Preparing UK schools for a digital future
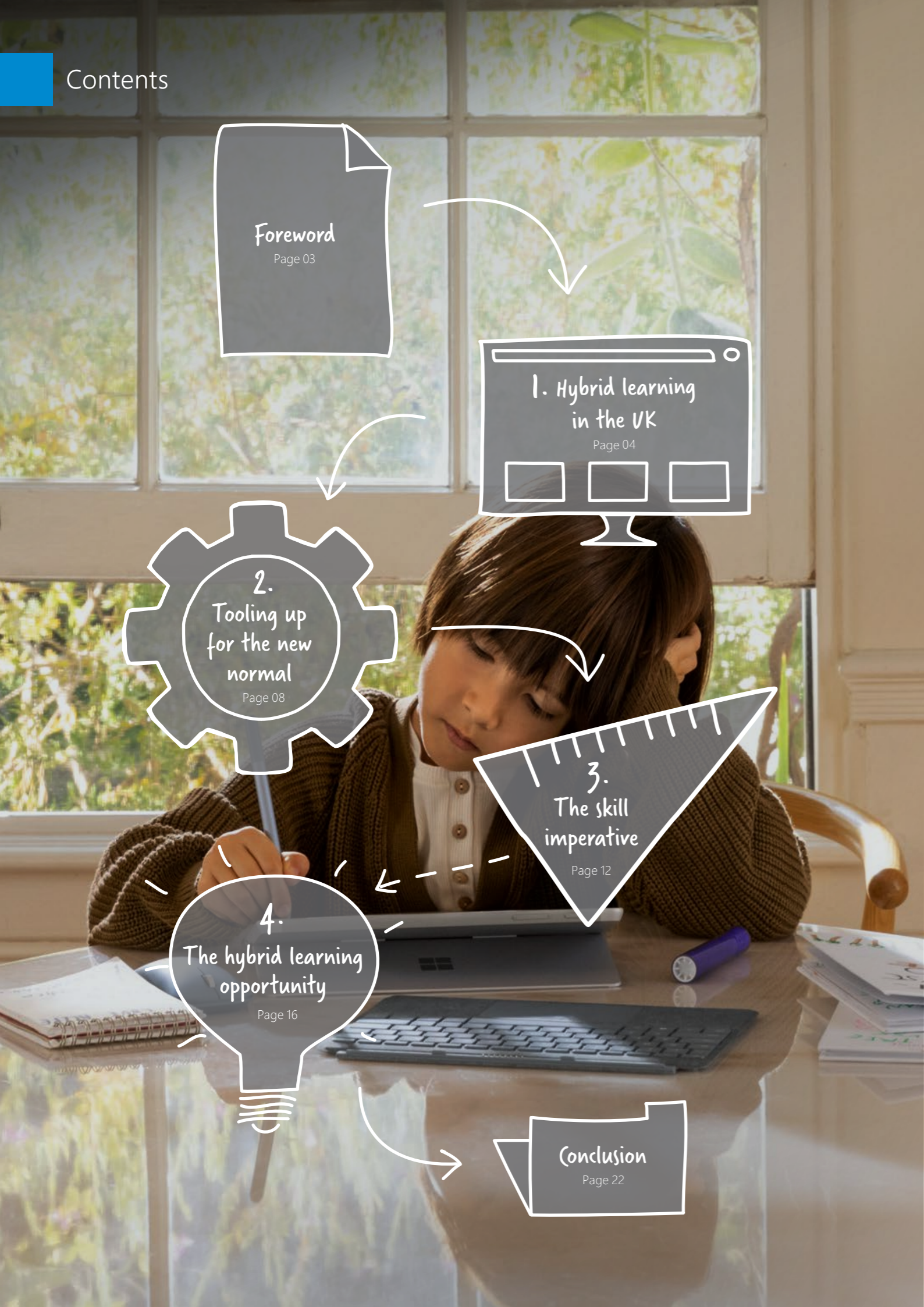
In recent months, the global health crisis and ensuing school lockdowns have pressure-tested UK educators like never before. In the span of mere weeks, they've had to build – and adapt to – an entirely new model for primary and secondary education.

Chris Rothwell
Director of Education,
Microsoft UK

Teachers and schools across the UK have done their best to react quickly, to what has been an unprecedented and very difficult challenge for many – while still supporting their students academically and pastorally. Despite the conditions, education professionals have responded with incredible generosity. By sharing ideas and collaborating on projects to support each other and their wider peer networks – and putting pupils wellbeing above all else.

Two such examples are Ribblesdale High, a Microsoft Showcase School in Lancashire, and Cognita, a global schools' group with over 75 schools around the world, 40 of which are in the UK. As well as using collaborative technology as a channel through which to teach children remotely, Ribblesdale also used insights from Microsoft Teams and administrative data to spot any students that could be having issues. This kind of approach, where schools focused on student welfare first and foremost, and see technology as a means to support that, can create the most positive academic results in the long run.

Cognita created online forums in Microsoft Teams for teachers to discuss learnings, shared challenges and new approaches. This kind of peer-to-peer exchange helps to capitalise on the expertise in school networks, and can also reduce the sense of social and professional isolation so many of us experienced – we must not forget how important taking care of teachers' wellbeing is, too.

Still - with schools having recently opened and students returned for the autumn term, this ongoing, rapid shift continues to raise a number of questions: Do educators feel adequately equipped for the challenges of this new reality, not just as a temporary improvisation, but longer-term? What have they learned during lockdown that they want to keep applying or using? What other emergent benefits and opportunities should be carried into this hybrid learning future?

To explore these questions, we partnered with YouGov to survey 1,000 primary and secondary teachers online across the UK. The results reveal that educators recognise opportunities in hybrid learning, but that some degree of uncertainty and reticence persists, as many teachers expect that hybrid learning will make their jobs harder. The data also shows that most teachers feel supported by their schools, but there is a notable gap in access to technology as well as the skills needed to be successful in a hybrid learning environment.

At Microsoft, our mission is to help every individual and organisation on the planet achieve more. Making tools and software designed specifically for the education sector is key to this mission, as is listening to educators, understanding their needs, and supporting them in their work. This report aims to uncover teachers' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities facing UK primary and secondary educators, highlight the advantages of hybrid learning, and share practical guidance for using digital and online learning platforms, to support our nation's teachers in the crucial months ahead.

Chris Rothwell

1. Hybrid learning in the UK

Since the UK government recommended all primary and secondary school pupils, in all year groups, return to school full-time from the beginning of the autumn term[1], students are now back studying.

In the event that the risk to public health once again makes full-time, in-person education untenable, the National Education Union also recommended developing plans for blended, or hybrid learning – an approach to education that blends interaction on online/digital learning platforms with traditional classroom methods to create learner-centred experiences – with increased support for disadvantaged children, including free internet access to close the digital learning divide. One such example of this kind of support comes from the Department for Education (DfE), which **will fund technical set up and training** for schools on how to use software platforms including Office 365 Education.

Hybrid learning has been on the rise in the UK and around the world in recent years, though the recent public health crisis has been a force multiplier, accelerating hybrid learning adoption and placing it centre stage in the national dialogue around education. Indeed, the new survey results reveal that 88% of teachers surveyed online say the pandemic has accelerated hybrid learning teaching methods and the uptake of digital tools and technologies in the classroom.

However, this rapid adoption has created a steep learning curve for many educators. The data indicates that prior to the lockdown, 40% of teachers surveyed online had not used online or digital learning platforms at the school they work for – a figure that rises to 54% for primary school teachers surveyed.

Overcoming this learning curve and developing a degree of comfort with digital tools will be paramount in the future, as 74% of teachers surveyed expect online/digital learning platforms will be critical moving forward, with 73% considering their use from September onwards.

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools
[2] https://neu.org.uk/press-releases/coronavirus-national-education-recovery-plan

Before hybrid learning can become a reality, there is much to consider. Hybrid learning is more than just presenting lessons online. Educators must re-imagine everything from how they plan lessons, manage their classrooms, connect with students and assess their progress – as Andy Perryer, Digital Learning Adviser at Cognita Schools, explains: "You cannot simply pick up a school and move it online, you cannot just pick up a timetable and move it online. It's about hybrid learning, not online learning. Teachers have had to create a tailored timetable that supports the students with how they learn – metacognition – while making sure they were not overloaded with screen time, and treating the management of their wellbeing as an integral part of hybrid learning."

Also, as Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn, Global Directors at New Pedagogies for Deep Learning say, ensuring students are engaged in active learning even when they are not physically in the classroom will be more critical than ever: "Every child needs and deserves a great education. Across the globe, there is a growing recognition that education systems must improve and try new approaches to live up to that promise. We believe that the sudden shift to remote learning globally, while tremendously difficult, has propelled school system leaders and educators to reflect deeply on what works best for students and what innovations should be taken up."

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What is hybrid learning?

Hybrid learning is much more than virtual classes. It is a holistic, reimagined learning experience that enables all students to continue high-quality education regardless of global health crises, weather, lack of transportation, or other limiting circumstances. A hybrid learning environment is:

- **Multimodal and interactive**

- **Suitable for both standalone tasks or a sequence of learning**

- **Conducive to active engagement**

- **Agile enough to include students in all circumstances**

- **Built on thoughtfully planned infrastructure**

Even before the health crisis, there was a growing awareness that as technology evolves, education too must evolve in order to better prepare students for our new digital world. According to the data, teachers recognise that hybrid learning can unlock opportunities to reimagine the way that education is delivered. UK teachers surveyed have identified the following as the top four opportunities in online learning:

2. Tooling up for the new normal

1. Ensures that students who cannot attend school in person (for health or personal reasons) still have access to lessons (cited by 80% of respondents)

2. Provides opportunity for self-directed learning for students (57%)

3. Introduces a level of flexibility for teachers and students (52%)

4. Equips students with skills they need for the real world (47%)

Teachers surveyed online also feel that the use of data analytics for measuring attendance, engagement level and individual student progress would be beneficial, this is over two thirds (67%) indicating those capabilities would be either fairly useful or very useful.

The good news is these kinds of education insights **are now available**, such as the ability to view student engagement data, which can help school and university leaders better understand how remote learning approaches and pedagogy are performing. These insights can also cover multiple schools and districts, making it easier for educational leaders to discover trends, identify opportunities for improvement, and adapt and personalise teaching and learning strategies.

Understanding the kinds of new tools and capabilities available is important – because in general, teachers currently express more concerns about hybrid learning than they do excitement about opportunities. Few teachers feel online learning promotes student collaboration or provides a dynamic learning experience – results that suggest a possible lack of awareness of the benefits, or of too few opportunities to utilise technology. Overall, 46% of teachers surveyed online feel that a hybrid learning model would make their jobs harder, compared to 31% who feel it would make their jobs easier. Their top 5 concerns associated with implementing hybrid learning are as follows:

1. Ensuring adequate and fair access for students to technology and data (cited by 71% of respondents)

2. Providing adequate support for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND students) and vulnerable students (67%)

3. Lack of face-to-face time (65%)

4. Student welfare, social and emotional development (53%)

5. Ability to teach this effectively was higher (51%)

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The good news is that a majority (67%) of UK teachers surveyed online feel well supported by their school in implementing online/digital learning in the classroom. But a sizeable minority (30%) report the opposite. And when it comes to access to the right digital tools, more than one-third of all UK teachers (37%) feel that they are not well equipped with the right technology to support hybrid learning, a figure that rises to 46% for primary school teachers. In addition to differences among primary and secondary teachers, there's also an apparent North/South divide:

Larger proportions of teachers in Scotland (41%), the North of England (41%) and the Midlands (43%) report not being well equipped with the necessary technology for hybrid learning, compared to London (34%) and the South of England (34%).

Clearly, UK education faces a notable gap in access to technology tools and solutions that can help facilitate effective hybrid learning. While addressing this gap is a significant challenge on its own, as the following section will demonstrate, it is only half of the story.

67%
of teachers feel well supported, but a sizable majority (30%) don't

How to use technology to enhance both teaching and learning

Enable inclusive learning in a single digital hub for improved teacher and student outcomes

- Centralise learning with a complete virtual classroom like Teams where you can chat, stream lectures, upload assignments and track grades.
- Engage students by encouraging them to create their own digital teams for clubs, complete with polls, channels and live file collaboration.
- Build-in accessibility to ensure all learners are included, using functionality like translation and caption features to aid English Language Learners.

Ensure readiness for the back-to-school transition with training, tools, and resources

- Personalise teaching by preparing calendars, tracking assignments, and building easy to create no-code apps to tailor the learning experience.
- Provide online training to teaching staff.
- Set up remote resources by establishing virtual labs or desktop environments and generate class groups automatically based on student timetables.

Transform data, insights, and workflows to support remote operations

- Automate and digitise processes using easy to create no-code apps to simplify administrative tasks and save time and money.
- Track student needs and performance, automate outreach and connect students to personalised resources.
- Develop customised solutions such as web portals for students and parents, data dashboards and in-depth reports.

Case study: United Learning

Lockdown revealed a socio-economic divide when it came to fair access to communications devices across schools, so United Learning used digital online tools creatively to overcome challenges around accessibility and inclusivity – to ensure staff and students in its group of schools were given fair access to learning platforms and lessons.

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, United Learning had to think quickly about how they could help primary and secondary schools meet access challenges and found one solution in Microsoft Sway. The programme not only allowed teachers to include videos, worksheets and notes in their lessons, but, importantly, it also worked well with mobile devices, giving children greater flexibility around which device they could use to access class content from home. This was particularly useful where access to devices was limited, as United Learning found that mobiles were more prevalent and easier to access in some homes, compared to laptops or tablets.

The challenge technology brought with it during lockdown was exclusion in terms of fair access to devices, but digital platforms enabled teachers to try new approaches to get around this – from using voice over PowerPoint and video for students to refer back to, to storing content to letting pupils go at their own pace or revisit content on a different household device.

Going forward, United Learning are putting together a digital strategy to help schools pivot quickly if they need to close again, to ensure all pupils have access to learning no matter their background or situation.

Feeding into this strategy are all the things it found worked well during lockdown – from virtual assemblies and parents' evenings, to online platforms that help staff collaborate and get content out to students.

In the short term, United Learning has found it critical for schools to adopt platforms that can be accessed on multiple devices and make better use of online technologies that support student learning. In the long run, however, it recognises the need to get technology into the hands of all students, so they can progress with their learning, whether at school or at home.

Getting the right hardware and software helps everyone involved, as James Garnett, Director of IT for United Learning, comments: "Online learning only makes teachers jobs easier with the right tools. For example, a teacher can mark electronically and respond through digital inking, which gives the pupil the chance to come back quickly – so they can both collaborate, making for an easier and faster teaching and learning experience".

United Learning used digital online tools creatively to overcome challenges around accessibility and inclusivity

3.
The skill imperative

The national dialogue about the shift to hybrid learning tends to focus primarily on issues of technology access – how to identify the right tools and get them in the hands of teachers and students everywhere. While this is no doubt an urgent issue, ensuring that they have the right skills to utilise the technology is equally important. Technology is only as good as the people using it. For hybrid learning to succeed, equipping UK educators with the right digital skills is critical.

The data shows that 69% feel as thought they have enough or more than enough access to skills in their role. However, 30% report the opposite, and this figure rises to 43% in teachers over the age of 55 and over, while dropping to just 14% among teachers aged 25-34.

In terms of access to adequate training, the country's schools are split – 47% of teachers feel they can't access enough training, compared to 51% who feel that they can. Again, age has a clear impact here – 52% of teachers over 55 feel that they don't have enough access for training in their role, dropping to 38% of teachers aged 25-34.

In order to ensure a quality education for every student in this new digitally enabled era, UK educators need access to ongoing, professional-grade training to keep pace with technology's evolution and its role inside and outside of the traditional classroom. Governments, educational institutions and technology firms therefore have a responsibility to work together to

provide opportunities for robust training and technical support. Armed with the right training, along with a growth mindset that celebrates constant curiosity and lifelong learning, teachers across the UK – regardless of their age, level or specialty – can develop the digital skills to succeed in a hybrid learning environment.

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of teachers aged 55 and over feel that they can't access enough training

> "When it comes to career professional development, schools must get to a position where technology is not seen as something that exists separately from teaching and learning — it is integral to it."
>
> Paul Edge, Deputy Headteacher, Ribblesdale

Resources to help educators and students succeed

Creating a focused learning environment away from the physical classroom isn't always straightforward, and success in remote learning is centered on how well educators adapt to the changing times and evolving classrooms. For this to happen, teacher professional development, technology, teaching and learning must not be treated separately, rather they must be seen as integral to one another.

The following resources can help ensure a smooth transition to hybrid learning
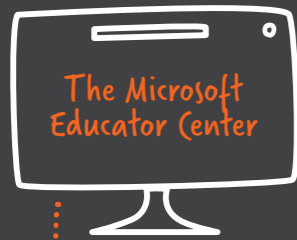
The Microsoft Educator Center

The Microsoft Educator Center – Our Educator Centre is an online platform designed as a one-stop shop to inspire educators, help them find proven training and curriculum, and learn how to reach students in entirely new ways with technology. The Resource Centre aims to provide professional development experiences, tools and tips that can help educators adapt to new ways of teaching – from ready-made lesson plans and project-based activities to support on assessment and tracking. It's built by educators, for educators.

Training

Training – We provide **online training**, **workshops**, from webinars to on-demand sessions. This includes training on how to use OneNote, Teams, and Office 365 in the classroom. Microsoft have recently launched an online **hybrid learning course**, that introduces educators to the elements of the hybrid learning model, how to implement them, and how to use our technologies to create a dynamic learning environment for students.

The Microsoft Education YouTube channel

The Microsoft Education You Tube channel – provides a library of bitesize tips, instructional videos, how to, webinars and playlists that can support teachers to get the most from technology
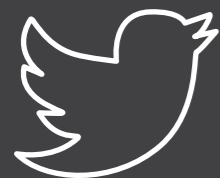
Social channels

Social Channels – Get the latest information and updates by following us on Twitter @MsEducationUK, Facebook @MicrosoftUK Education and LinkedIn @Microsoft

Microsoft Imagine Academy

Microsoft Imagine Academy – For students, we offer the Microsoft Imagine Academy, a program providing industry-recognised technology skills, education, and certifications students need to succeed at college or in their future careers.

COGNITA
An inspiring world of education

Case study: Cognita Schools

Cognita leadership focused principally on the wellbeing of teachers and students when the 2020 lockdown began. This included identifying any concerns from sleep and screen time to exercise and isolation. Technology was then implemented to help address these challenges, which in turn meant reimagining the classroom and traditional education processes.

Cognita's leadership focused heavily on student wellbeing before the existence of Covid and it remained a top priority when the 2020 lockdown began. This included identifying any concerns, from sleep and screen time to exercise and isolation. Technology was used to help address these challenges as part of reimagining the classroom and traditional education processes in response to lockdown.

Training teachers and improving their skills at using collaborative technology had already been essential for the success of Cognita's long-term digital program, and this was amplified during lockdown. Teachers across the group's schools were encouraged to use Teams as a single digital hub for everything from administrative tasks to hosting online meetings, running lessons and holding wellbeing check-ins with students.

Cognita took a deliberately phased approach to learning in lockdown. For the first week, students had a program of purely remote learning – without any 1-2-1 digital teaching. This enabled schools to better prepare teachers for digital teaching that was truly nuanced, supporting and upskilling them in areas where they felt they needed it.

Online learning forums were created in Microsoft Teams for teachers to share their experiences, challenges and new approaches through short, bite-sized videos and 'How To' advice, as well as webinars and peer-to-peer masterclasses on using collaborative cloud technology for education.

Teaching models also evolved to suit the new digital medium, with quick 5-10-minute wellbeing check-in sessions hosted across year groups at the start and middle of the day, supported by Cognita's 'Be Well Charter'. An online learning checklist was also used, to help leadership better understand how the teachers and students alike were faring, assessing everything from wellbeing to curriculum alignment and class engagement. Their guiding principle was if you took care of student and teacher wellbeing, the academics would follow naturally.

In terms of hard metrics, the use of Teams went up by 51,000% during lockdown, and the use of video meetings went up 13,000% – a pace and scale of adoption that could not have happened without Cognita's intensive training and peer collaboration, the result being teachers comfortable with the technology.

More importantly, the key insight from Cognita's work is not simply to attempt to transplant offline learning to an online world – rather, new hybrid approaches must be created which leverage new technology in the service of learning and wellbeing.
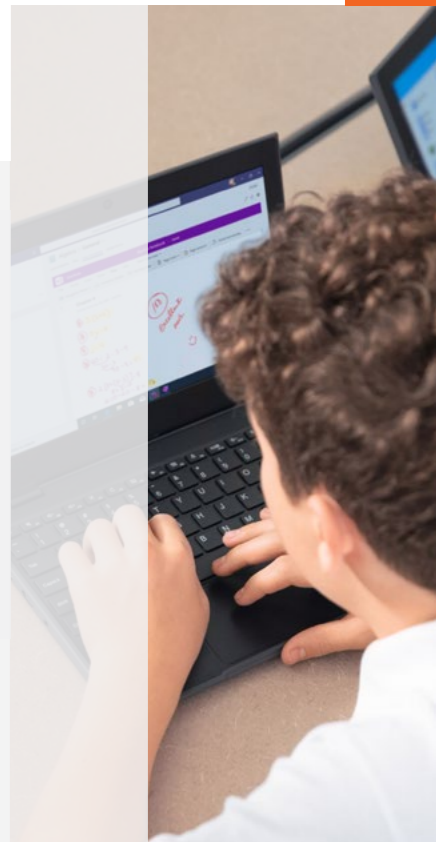
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4.
The hybrid learning opportunity

The UK education sector is at an inflection point. The shift toward a hybrid learning model is not just a way to ensure that the 2020-2021 school year continues uninterrupted. Done correctly, it holds the potential to permanently enhance the way that education is delivered everywhere.

As this survey and other studies have shown, hybrid learning offers a number of well-documented benefits for both teachers and students, including flexibility for educators in how they present material; better student engagement; expanded digital skills and technical competency; personalised learning tailored to students' individual learning styles: and improved ability to measure student progress with data and analytics tools.

In particular, hybrid learning can make it easier for educators to meet the needs of students with special educational needs or disabilities. Connected tools improve accessibility, allow students to work at their own pace, and provide them with new ways of connecting and expressing themselves. For example, at Thornton College, a specialist centre for young people with learning difficulties or physical disabilities, students regularly perform in a Makaton choir – featuring both singing and visual sign language – enabled by Teams.

While as Paul Edge, Deputy Head Teacher at Ribblesdale explains, some children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) "performed better outside of school than they would have done in school because they liked working in an environment that was not as public or visible, yet were still supported by digital tools such as Immersive Reader, Read Aloud and Microsoft translate."

Case study: Ribblesdale

Ribblesdale's approach to hybrid learning has been designed to fit with the school ethos and culture: to help all children become rounded individuals through education. Preparation and planning have been key to using new and existing digital tools successfully throughout their journey. As has support from the senior leadership team which came together with the IT departments and teachers to identify how they can use these tools, to solve problems and have a positive impact on hybrid teaching and learning.

Ribblesdale's plan during lockdown focused on the welfare of the children, using insights in Microsoft Teams and administrative data to identify where students might be encountering issues. Rather than looking at the technology just in terms of how to support academic progress, they started with and remained focused on student welfare. If the technology supported student wellbeing, the school was confident that the right academic results would follow.

To further support this, Ribblesdale created a new curriculum timetable specifically to take advantage of the hybrid learning opportunity - and this was reflected in the amount of time children were expected to spend 'in school'. The school formally ended online sessions at 12:30 every day, to account for everything else that was going on at home for these students during lockdown.
This also encouraged students to use technology in a socially responsible way, and be aware of their screen time each day, supporting the school ethos of educating responsible and well-rounded children.

The school's approach to planning hybrid learning also allowed them to reimagine traditional ways of working. For example, the leadership team noticed some children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) were benefiting from hybrid learning, with some doing better than in the classroom because they self-regulated their learning and were able to go at their own pace.

Ribblesdale has observed that through technology, SEND pupils had a level of responsibility and autonomy they may not have had in the classroom, and which empowered them to make progress independently and grow in confidence. These insights are now encouraging the leadership at Ribblesdale to re-think more of their models around teaching assistance and flexible learning, to further aid SEND students development.

The school's approach to planning hybrid learning also allowed them to reimagine traditional ways of working

Ribblesdale's approach to hybrid learning has been designed to fit with the school ethos and culture: to help all children become rounded individuals through education

"It is as much about the pedagogy impact as it is the technology impact."

Paul Edge, Deputy Headteacher, Ribblesdale

Perhaps more broadly, the hybrid learning model is a more accurate reflection of the world in which we now live. An education system enhanced and augmented by digital technology takes learning out of the classroom and into the world. It equips students with future-ready skills and competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, resilience, independence, flexibility and perseverance – qualities considered critical for future employability in the digital economy. It taps into the intrinsic motivation of students to learn,

and gives them a voice and agency throughout the process, setting the stage for a lifetime love of learning.

If there is a silver lining to be found in our health crisis, perhaps it is a permanent shift toward an education system re-imagined for the 21st century. Our collective challenge will be to apply what we learn from this process, and work together to transform UK education for the digital future.

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> "Hybrid learning gives educators the ability to meet the varied needs of different educational groups like never before. For many students, this model gives them confidence, independence and a voice in their learning experience – all of which have been shown to improve educational outcomes."

Alan Crawford, UK Education Modern Workplace Specialist, Microsoft

✓ Checklist for educators in the new era of hybrid learning[3]

The global health crisis has asked us to consider what kind of learning is required in 2020 and beyond. To reimagine learning, we need to reflect on what we know about learning, UK students, the new role of technology and the complexity of an unknown future. Six key questions can help inspire reflection and offer guidance as we look toward a new and better future for UK education:

1 What knowledge, skills and attributes do our students need to thrive in this complex world?

2 What kind of learning is needed for this current and future complexity?

3 How do we ensure equity?

4 How do we attend to well-being?

5 What have we learned from remote learning?

6 How can technology be best leveraged for learning in the future?
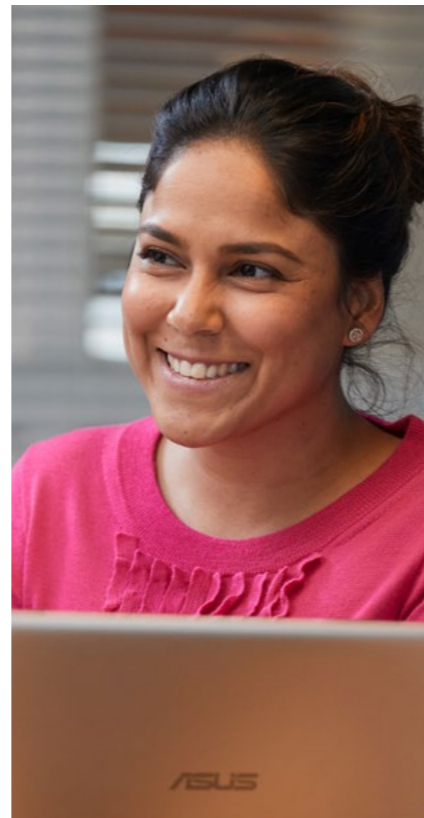
[3]Pulled from 'Reflect & Reimagine' framework within the Education Reimagined report

Hugh Baird COLLEGE

Case study: Hugh Baird College

Students at Hugh Baird College in Liverpool are using Microsoft Teams call and collaboration tools to continue cookery lessons, rehearse their sign-language choir performances and stay connected to each other during the global health crisis. Video calls attended by British Sign Language interpreters allow students with hearing impairments to continue to receive learning, and lessons are recorded so that students can play them back later as needed.

The chat function gives both students and teachers flexibility in communicating and responding to each other based on their individual schedules. These online collaboration opportunities have proved so popular that students are even using Teams to socialise in their spare time – sharing pictures and even collaborating on music playlists – providing an important sense of community that is so critical to a positive educational experience.

> Providing an important sense of community that is so critical to a positive educational experience

Conclusion

As the pandemic continues to change the ways we learn and work, the need for long-term investments in hybrid learning capabilities has never been more urgent. The findings from the Microsoft-YouGov survey show that teachers across the UK recognise the opportunities that hybrid learning offers, but they also have concerns with the hybrid learning model, including gaps in readiness related to technology access and skills training.

To solve for these challenges, we need to work together to ensure that teachers and students everywhere have access to the right technology tools to make hybrid learning possible, as well as provide educators with opportunities to develop the digital skills that will allow them to innovate in a hybrid learning environment.

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At Microsoft, we're dedicated to providing the tools, services and support that will allow educators to confidently transition to hybrid learning and empower students and teachers to achieve their highest potential. To learn more about the results of the study, or to speak to someone about technology options for your school, please visit our webpage **here**. You can also learn more about Microsoft's vision for the future of education in our new paper "**Reimagining education: From remote to hybrid learning**," a collaboration between Microsoft and New Pedagogies for Deep Learning.

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1020 Primary and Secondary Teachers online. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17th - 22nd July 2020. The survey was carried out online.