

Training at scale – Enabling teachers to harness the power of digital technology



The digital strategy put in place at Greenwood Academies Trust (GAT) had the potential to be a game changer in the classroom: transforming teacher workload; radically changing ways of working and contributing to increased outcomes. However, as with all systems, it only makes a difference if users are trained to exploit its potential. Consequently, Stephen Sanderson, GAT Officer, made a critical strategic decision prior to the schools' migration to the new system. That was to appoint a dedicated IT Curriculum Advisor, Natasha Epton.

Natasha was recruited in September 2018. Having previously worked as a senior leader in a GAT school, she was well-placed to understand both the challenges of the old system and the potential benefits of the new one.

Her experience in the classroom was essential in achieving buy-in from teacher colleagues across the Trust. Initially Natasha was provided with training for the role by the Trust's third party training provider. This focused on the MS suite of programmes and looking at the generic needs of all schools who would be migrating to the new system.

Natasha was involved in all the pre-migration meetings, sitting alongside the IT team, to explain to school leadership teams (SLT) the features included in new system. They discussed with SLTs what the system looked like and determined the school's priorities for the initiation phase. They were also able to demonstrate to SLT and staff what the new system would look like and what they could expect from it. These meetings were followed by the first post migration meeting which were consistent in format for all schools across the Trust. Natasha and the team explained and demonstrated single sign in; introduced the Microsoft suite and sat down with staff to demonstrate Airhead and how to set up individual launchpads. School leaders were left with a training launchpad that was an easy way for staff to be further trained in the new systems at a time of their choosing.



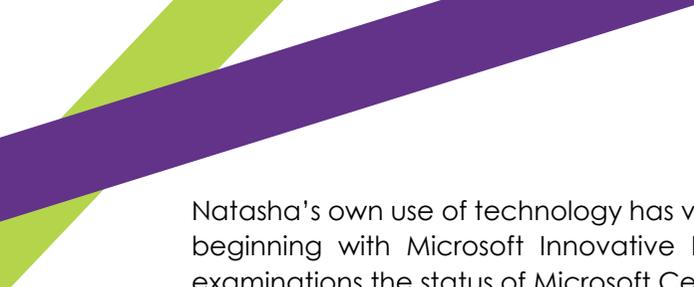
From the second post migration meeting onwards the format of training was determined on a bespoke basis through discussions between Natasha and school Principals. The training covered different aspects of the technology in different schools at different times; entirely dependent upon the needs of that organisation. A common thread was that the training Natasha delivered was focused on pedagogy, rather than technology per se. Natasha was able to deliver messages to teachers in 'teacher talk.' By delivering training free of technical jargon she was able to relate the functionality of software programmes to the lived experience of the teachers using the technology. Natasha was also able to provide support to staff across ages and phases of education and bespoke to specific curriculum areas. As a result of the practical nature of the advice, teachers were able to identify with Natasha as a former teacher in a way they could not relate to the IT purists. As time has gone on Natasha's role has inevitably developed. She has put into place a 3-19 basic skills curriculum that outlines pupil entitlement in terms of IT curriculum. This covers everything from coding to online safety.

From the very start it was clear to Stephen and Natasha that one person acting in isolation can't have the impact needed to transform teaching and learning across 36 schools and 2,500 staff. As a result, they have had to think creatively about the best ways to create capacity. Natasha has created a network of IT coordinators, school staff with responsibility for the digital agenda in each school. This group meet with Natasha, online or virtually once each half term. They discuss common issues, share best practice and receive on-going training. As well as providing a source of expertise in each school the IT coordinators network has the added benefit of ensuring that the coordinators themselves have a constant source of support and guidance. For the last year this work has been complimented by the Digital Champions programme. Natasha has set this up to ensure that there are as many people as possible across the Trust engaging with the EdTech and receiving quality training in its use. All Digital Champions are receiving training from both Natasha and, through the Microsoft Educator Centre, working towards the status of Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert (MIEE).

As time has passed it has become increasingly clear that a second IT Curriculum advisor is needed to support the digital ambitions of the Trust. Leanne Greaves, currently a teacher at Bishop Creighton Academy, and an early adopter of the EdTech will take up post Easter 2020. In addition, the need for bespoke advice for the Central Team of administrators at GAT. To this end Fern Jones, a member of the GAT IT team, has been trained by Natasha to take on this role. This should ensure that all staff across the Trust have access to an advisor to enable them to exploit the potential of the digital technology available to them. This is particularly important given that help is being sought across an increasingly advanced range of education technologies.

Natasha recognizes the challenges of achieving buy-in across a diverse group of staff, operating across different stages and phases of education. However, she is clear that where adopted, the EdTech has provided huge benefits to GAT staff ranging from increased staff well-being (secured because of improved work-life balance) to greater levels of student engagement. From the student perspective, the data shows that use of devices has led to an increase in the amount of learning that children are engaging with outside of school. In addition, children are using MS Teams to collaborate on work outside of school, and this is strengthening relationships. Of course, staff also benefit from the ease of collaboration between staff across the Trust.





Natasha's own use of technology has vastly expanded over the last 18 months. Through engaging with the MEC she has gained various statuses: beginning with Microsoft Innovative Educator; then MIEE; Microsoft Innovative Trainer; Microsoft Innovative Expert Trainer and then, via examinations the status of Microsoft Certified Trainer. She has used TEAMS and the OneNote recording feature to provide increasing quantities of training on an online basis. This enables GAT's 3000 staff to dip in and out of training at a time that suits them and to revisit areas of difficulty. From September 2019 live sessions enabled staff any live session regardless of 'home' academy.

The next steps for Natasha's growing team include a greater focus on the needs of the Trust's Central team through the work of Fern Jones and a focus on MS FLOW. In addition, from this year the Digital Champions programme will offer an administration pathway as well as the pedagogical pathway that has been operating. Training 3000 staff in 36 schools is a huge challenge, but with more staff and creative use of technology Natasha and her team are creating a staff cadre who are upskilled for the challenges of teaching in the 21st century,

What can we learn from the work of Natasha Epton?

1. When rolling out training to teachers you must use other teachers, it can't be a technical person. Training must be relatable and led by someone who understands the issues teacher face.
 2. You must meet the needs of SLT in order to gain buy-in from staff and to ensure rapid progress can be made. It is critical to be available out of hours when teachers are doing their planning, flexibility of working is essential. Teachers need access to immediate help at times when they need it.
 3. Never stop learning, EdTech is constantly changing and improving. IT Curriculum Advisors need to keep up with these changes and commit to their own CPD.
- 