

Buying the right EdTech for your school



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As the EdTech agenda in the UK continues to grow and the availability of new technologies increases, consumers and practitioners have had to become more discerning. The need to evidence how technology is supporting learning is greater than ever, especially for schools, where shrewd stewardship of resources is essential.

At EDUCATE, we have been working alongside educators to help them make the most of the opportunities that EdTech can bring to teaching and learning. This guide is a culmination of our direct work with schools, as well as our expertise in educational research.

Over the coming months, we'll be piloting face to face workshops where we'll provide more in-depth guidance on how to go about buying EdTech. If you'd like to be involved in these workshops, please make sure you sign up to our mailing list at: educateventures.com/subscribe and we'll notify you once the workshops are available.

How to buy the right EdTech



Step 1:

Work out what you need (and make sure everyone agrees)

Technology serves learning best when people understand what it is they want to achieve, and when developers understand how people learn. So, to really take advantage of educational technology, we need to think about learning holistically – what do we want/ need to achieve?

Before you even start looking at different types of technology, the first thing you need to do is identify your school's priority needs. The best way to do this is to conduct a needs assessment.

A good needs assessment will provide a complete evaluation of your school's needs in relation to the priorities outlined in your school development plan, or other metrics you already have in place for planning and tracking your school's progress.

When conducting a needs analysis, you'll need to think about the following:

1. **Urgency:** What is your greatest challenge at the moment? Which gaps or issues in your school development plan or curriculum need to be addressed the most urgently?
2. **Audience:** Whose needs are you trying to meet? Teachers? Pupils? Or both? Who might you need to involve/consult throughout this process?
3. **Outcomes:** What should be different as a result of any new technology you adopt? What might people be saying or doing differently as a result of successful implementation?

Once you've identified the core needs and prioritised them against your development plan, the next thing to consider is whether these needs are best met through technology, or if you can address them through some other means. Any needs that can be met without the use of new technology can then be removed from the list.

Bear in mind that at this point, the emphasis shouldn't be on trying to choose between different types of technology – that will come later. For now, just think about what your main priorities are. It may seem obvious, but having a clear understanding of what you need is really important; not only will this help with gaining internal buy-in, it will also give you clear markers of success that will make decision-making about which technology to buy much easier later on.

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We came to EDUCATE asking what technology solution we could implement; we came away realising we actually didn't need new technology at all – we already had the tools to achieve our objectives.

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Morven McLean
Managing Director, Original Editions Ltd.

Need help conducting a needs analysis? Speak to us today at hello@educateventures.com about our consultancy services as part of our EDUCATE for Schools programme.

Step 2:

Identify your resources

Many schools turn to technology as a way to remedy a lack of resources, most commonly a lack of time and capacity to keep up with workload. Before purchasing any technology, you need to think carefully about the resources you have available to support its successful implementation, both at the initial point of purchasing and beyond.

When thinking about resources, you essentially want to make two lists – one for the resources you already have, and another for the resources you’re likely to need. In both cases, you’ll need to consider the following factors:

1. Software, hardware and technical infrastructure:

It’s possible that you already own the EdTech solution to address your needs, but that few teachers are using it. You’ll want to inventory the software and online apps that are already in use at your school, as well as your hardware and technical infrastructure. Depending on your needs, you may need to look at technology that is used across the entire school or just within one specific department.

2. Time: Even if the technology you’re adopting is going to save you time in the long-run, be careful not to underestimate how much time you may need to invest initially in getting things set up. Carrying out your inventory could take longer than planned, and may add to workload in the short-term.

3. Money: Apart from the initial costs of purchasing, some new technology has other ongoing costs and may require investment in other areas. For example, if your current Wi-Fi or Broadband connection is not strong enough to support multiple users of the product simultaneously, but you’re planning for the product to be used by all teachers, you will need to spend more than just the cost of the product in order to get best use of it – there’s nothing worse than having a great product, with an internet connection too slow to support it.

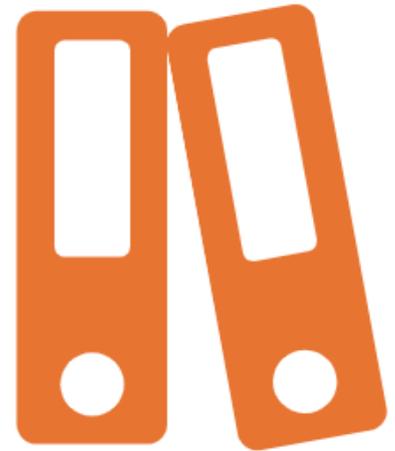
All of the above factors are useful to have in mind when speaking to EdTech companies and will make sure you get all of the information you need to make the best decision possible.

TIP: Don’t try and complete a resource review on your own. Even if you’re the main decision-maker/purchaser, you’ll need input from the rest of your team. You can do this quite simply in one of your weekly meetings by holding a brainstorming session. You’ll probably need at least 20 - 30 minutes for this, depending on the size of your team and your school.

Step 3:

Try before you buy

Whether it's a cupboard full of old technology that was passed down from a predecessor, or paying for expensive software licenses for products that only a few people use, many schools have found themselves saddled with products which held great promise initially, but didn't quite have the impact that was hoped for. Technology suppliers often offer a free trial period before a final commitment needs to be made, but how can you make the most of this?



This is where your initial needs assessment and your resource review will really start to come in handy, as you'll be armed with a clear vision of what you need and what you have available to you (or not, as the case may be). When planning a trial or pilot of any product, be sure to do the following:

- 1. Consider your sources:** Research shows that many teachers will purchase products based purely on anecdotal recommendations from other teachers and social media¹. The problem with this, is that not every product will be immediately applicable to the specific educational outcomes and objectives that your school is working towards, and even teachers who have had good experiences may be working under very different circumstances to you. The good news is, there are a number of new EdTech comparison sites on the rise, including EdTech Impact, which provide objective reviews and comparisons of EdTech products.
- 2. Look for evidence:** However you find a potential supplier, be sure to look at what evidence is available as to the product's efficacy. Most companies will provide anecdotal feedback such as testimonials in their marketing materials, but on its own this is not sufficient evidence for you to make a purchasing decision. If the supplier has conducted thorough research in the process of developing their product, they should be able to supply you with other data and information on how they know their product meets its claims.



¹BESA conducted research which found that 48% of teachers choose products based on social media, 47% choose based on word of mouth from a friend or colleague, and 70% do a general web browser search.

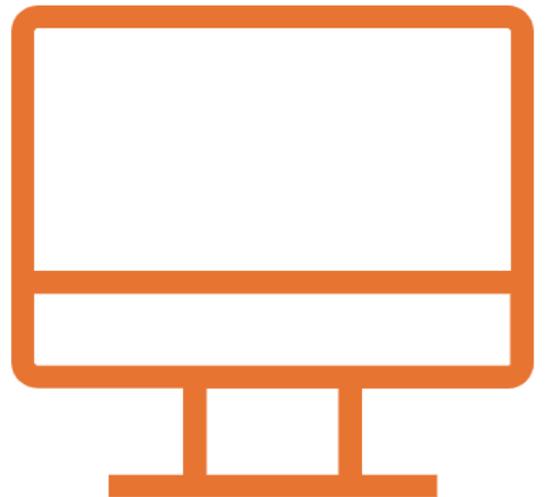
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- 3. Choose a realistic timeframe:** As well as dictating which products you trial, your needs assessment should drive the timeframe for any product pilot you do. It's possible that some educational outcomes will be easily assessed after a 21-day trial, whilst others may require two months before you can say with confidence that the product has achieved the outcomes you were aiming for. If this is the case, you may need to negotiate a longer trial period with the supplier, or a more flexible contract term if you do have to pay, so that you're not locked in for longer than you need to be.

You'll also need to think carefully about when your trial should start and be mindful to deduct weekends, public/school holidays and set-up time from the trial period as well. If not, you may find that a 21-day trial actually only gives you two weeks to test a product.

- 4. Get everyone's commitment:** Given that any trial you do will be for a limited period, it's really important that all of the right people from your team actively participate in the process. Whether your trial is being carried out at departmental level or school-wide, you'll only get an accurate picture of the results if everyone engages with the product. Be sure to give your team prior notice of when the product trial will be starting and ending, and what's expected of them during that time.
- 5. Know what data you're collecting and how:** It's important that you plan ahead of time exactly what data you'll need to collect in order to review the success of the pilot. Again, this should be driven predominantly by your needs assessment and resource review, but you'll need to make sure that you have processes in place for this.

Most products will come with some sort of reporting system with basic metrics such as how many members of staff/pupils logged in to a system and how frequently, but this data may not actually be what you need to make a final purchasing decision. Be sure to have an upfront conversation with the supplier about what data they'll be able to supply so you can make arrangements to capture anything they can't. This will also give you an idea of how much work it might take to monitor progress on an ongoing basis if you were to eventually implement the product.



Step 4:

Make a decision

If you've followed all of the steps above, this last stage should be quite easy. We say "should", because we know that making big decisions which will impact people's work isn't always as straightforward as we'd like it to be – especially where money is involved.

Here are our top tips for making your final purchasing decisions:

- 1. Remember that evidence is king:** Examine the data you collected during the course of your pilot and measure it against your needs assessment and resource review. This will give you your final selection criteria which you can score your chosen EdTech solution(s) against, giving you an objective outcome and hopefully a product which is fit for purpose.

The hardest thing at this point will be resisting the urge to choose personal preference over evidence. During the course of your pilot, there will be some staff who loved the product, some who hated it, and some who were ambivalent. Ultimately, the outcomes that you identified during your needs assessment have to take precedence above personal likes and dislikes, otherwise you run the risk of buying something to please people now, that won't make the impact you want it to later.

- 2. It's ok to walk away:** If you've spent two or three months carrying out a needs analysis, resource review and product pilot, you may feel that you have to implement the product in order to justify the time you've spent exploring it. Even if you choose not to buy a product, any time you've spent will prove valuable in helping with future purchasing decisions and you'll probably find that you're far better placed to have conversations with other suppliers so that you can find the right product more quickly.



EDUCATE is home to the UK's leading EdTech research accelerator programme. Our mentoring and consultancy services combine world-class pedagogical research with best practice business intelligence to uncover innovative solutions in teaching and learning.

We work to create an EdTech ecosystem which has evidence at its heart, understanding what truly works for learners and how to use technology to serve its users effectively.

Since EDUCATE's launch in 2017, we have seen over 270 EdTech startups successfully complete the programme, with many going on to gain additional investment, building their networks and partnerships, and vastly enhancing the effectiveness and credibility of their products.

It is this focus on pedagogical research and 'what works' that makes our programme stand out. Entrepreneurs and innovators can be confident that access to reputable evidence will assist them in developing world-class products and services that are effective and marketable, and fit for purpose.

To find out more, visit educateventures.com today

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