

**Key findings for further education colleges  
based on evidence from the evaluation of the ICT Test Bed  
Project**

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## The ICT Test Bed Project

The ICT Test Bed Project (2002-06) was initiated by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to explore how ICT can be used to support the Government's wider agenda for education reform. The project took a holistic approach to ICT implementation in three ICT Test Bed areas of relative socio-economic deprivation. A total of £34 million was invested over four years, which gave the 28 ICT Test Bed schools and three FE colleges access to very high levels of ICT hardware and appropriate software. The funding also provided for investment in staffing release and training support to make the most effective use of this investment. ICT Test Bed work focused on using ICT to:

- raise standards and performance, especially in the areas of school and college improvement, student attainment, and raising the quality of teaching and learning
- enable more effective leadership and management in schools and colleges
- help teachers to concentrate their time on their core task of teaching
- enable more effective collaboration between schools and their local colleges
- provide wider learning opportunities to students, their families and the wider community in a home environment.

All three ICT Test Bed local authorities have high concentrations of deprivation compared to the national average, though manifest in different ways.

## Methodology

The ICT Test Bed Evaluation is based on three strands of data collection and analysis:

### Quantitative data

- Benchmarking of changes in performance on national tests against matched comparator schools and national averages.
- Modelling of e-maturity to track institutional change over four years.
- Annual surveys of teacher, pupil and parent attitudes and working practices.

### Qualitative data

Site visits including classroom observations, interviews with local authority managers, headteachers, teachers, administrative staff, technicians and students, and document analysis.

## **Action research data**

During the project, more than 90 teachers and para-professionals from the ICT Test Bed Project institutions completed 116 action research studies of their innovative work with ICT. 47 of these were written by staff from the FE colleges.

The final summative evaluation reports of all three strands, together with a number of more detailed evaluation reports from the four years of the project listed in Appendix A, will be made available on the ICT Test Bed Evaluation website [[www.evaluation.icctestbed.org.uk](http://www.evaluation.icctestbed.org.uk)].

## **Key findings for the Further Education (FE) sector**

These key findings have been drawn from multiple reports authored by the ICT Test Bed Evaluation team.

In each of the three FE colleges, ICT investment was focused in three different departments (none of which was ICT). Findings relate to these specific departments in the main, rather than to the entirety of the colleges. The very small sample size must be borne in mind.

## **Home and community links**

### **Learning platforms extended students' learning into the home**

Students still use the learning platform from college more frequently than from home. However, increasing numbers of students were found to be using the learning platform to access learning resources from home, and it was well integrated into the course structure/materials. Some tutors have created assessments for the students to do on the learning platform. Students said they liked having assessments available this way, as they helped them to revise by instantly giving them an idea of their weak and strong areas of knowledge.

The ability to access materials from outside college has helped students who could not always get into college, because of illness or employment. Students appreciated being able to access their course materials online. They now have the opportunity to take more responsibility for their own learning and even to take control of the learning, when the tutor facilitates and permits this. Some students used the learning platform from home to 'fast-track' through the course. Meanwhile, others were submitting work electronically and there has been some development of e-portfolios.

### **Students did not have home access to the full range of ICT functionalities**

Most students had access to ICT at home. Libraries may be filling an important need for the minority of students who did not (there was a positive correlation between students who had no access to ICT at home with use of ICT in libraries). However,

access to hardware did not equate to access to the level of functionalities that students experienced at college.

The majority of students reported not being able to use college software at home (68%); not having hardware provision for use in the home (90%); not being able to access their college emails from home (63%); and not being able to access the college network from home to download work completed at college (77%). One positive is that 67% of students could access the college website from home in 2006, an improvement on the 51% from 2003.

### **ICT made linking with employers more efficient**

There have been considerable savings of time and money through using email to communicate with employers and set up work placements.

### **The wider community benefited from the ICT in the colleges**

Community learning courses that targeted skills that had broad appeal, such as operating digital cameras, and were informal, flexible, short and involved small groups were successful. Many students progressed onto accredited courses once they had gained confidence in informal ones. It is important to note that parents returning to formal education is likely to be of benefit to their children.