Mindful Education

The increasing role of education technology within Ofsted inspections

Digital: No longer a 'nice to have'

The fact that learner use of technology does not receive a standalone grade is telling. Instead, it is woven throughout the full inspection, acting as a critical component of the curriculum, teaching and training evaluation areas. Far from being an afterthought, education technology has become a fundamental and expected part of the learner journey.

In the 2024-25 academic year, Ofsted published inspection reports for 77 GFE colleges, including monitoring reports. Based on a random, statistically significant sample[2] of these reports, it is clear that colleges and training providers should expect that every inspection will involve scrutiny of their digital provision. In the reports we reviewed:

- Every report had **at least one reference** to 'digital' or 'technology'

- 'Digital' or 'technology' was mentioned 82 times – an average of **3.7 times per Ofsted report**

Introduction

Mark McKenna
Managing Director
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The new Ofsted framework, which came into effect in November 2025, represents a significant shift in the way colleges and training providers are inspected. At its core is a fundamental emphasis on inclusivity, demanding that providers demonstrate how their provision ensures that every learner, regardless of their starting point, can achieve, belong and thrive. This was reinforced by His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver, in his keynote speech at the AoC Annual Conference 2025, when he noted that, given that colleges and training providers are known for "making education work for everyone who comes through [their] doors... recognising inclusivity in our refreshed approach to inspection is a chance for your sector to shine".[1]

Colleges and training providers are increasingly adopting education technology to support delivery, and our breakout session, 'The increasing role of education technology within Ofsted inspections', highlighted the fact that while technology may be ubiquitous, many digital strategies may fall short of the revised expectations for impact and accountability under the new secure fit standard. By analysing a random sample of 2024-25 general further education (GFE) reports, we demonstrated a clear trend that Ofsted no longer views education technology as a 'nice to have' but instead as a fundamental driver of quality.

This thought piece builds on this concept. The first section presents our research into the 2024-25 Ofsted reports, offering insight into how colleges and training providers can expect their digital provision to be scrutinised. We then explore the new framework's central theme of inclusion, referring back to key insights from our own learner data and our accessibility research project, helping you to leverage technology to make a measurable impact.

Qualitative evidence of impact

Ofsted observed a number of different ways that technology could enhance not just learner outcomes, but the whole college approach to teaching, learning and assessment. Inspectors specifically noted where technology supports key quality of education criteria, as evidenced by the following quotes, taken from our sample of the 2024-25 Ofsted reports:

> "In the majority of cases, teachers use a range of well-planned, useful assessment activities to reinforce and check understanding. For example, in adult level 2 accountancy courses, tutors make effective use of online exercises to check that learners have understood a particular theme."
>
> **Boston College[3]**

> "Students with high needs receive effective individualised support from a well coordinated team of learning support assistants. They benefit from using assistive technologies, such as reader pens, speech to text software and specialist therapies such as speech and language therapy and physiotherapy. Students participate in lessons confidently and gain greater independence."
>
> **Blackpool and The Fylde College[4]**

> "Leaders have an effective approach to staff development that staff value highly. They provide informative workshops on topics such as digital innovation and assessment for learning that support staff to enhance their practice. Advanced practitioners show staff how to make the best use of technology in sessions and encourage them to take risks in trialling new digital tools."
>
> **Bradford College[5]**

Areas to review: Key themes for providers

We undertook detailed analysis of over 25% of the full Ofsted reports for GFE colleges published in 2024-25. Here are some of our findings.

As part of this analysis, we collated the specific, bullet-pointed Areas of Improvement listed at the end of each report, and analysed them to identify trends. In total, there were 66 Areas to Improve, which fell into seven main categories:

Categories	Mentions
Improvements to the learner experience for L1 or L2 learners, high-needs learners, and/or ESOL	12
Improvements to the quality of the apprenticeship provision, achievement and/or progression	12
Improvements to feedback and assessment	11
General improvements to TLA; progression; and/or achievement	11
Improving attendance	9
Providing more/better work experience	4
Providing more training on the risk of radicalisation and extremism	3

Having placed the Areas for Improvement into these categories, we then focused on the top three and were able to identify the core challenges that colleges and training providers must overcome in order to achieve a higher inspection grade.

Over the next three pages, we will consider these Areas for Improvement and their associated core challenges in turn, and explore how colleges and training providers might seek to mitigate them through the use of technology.

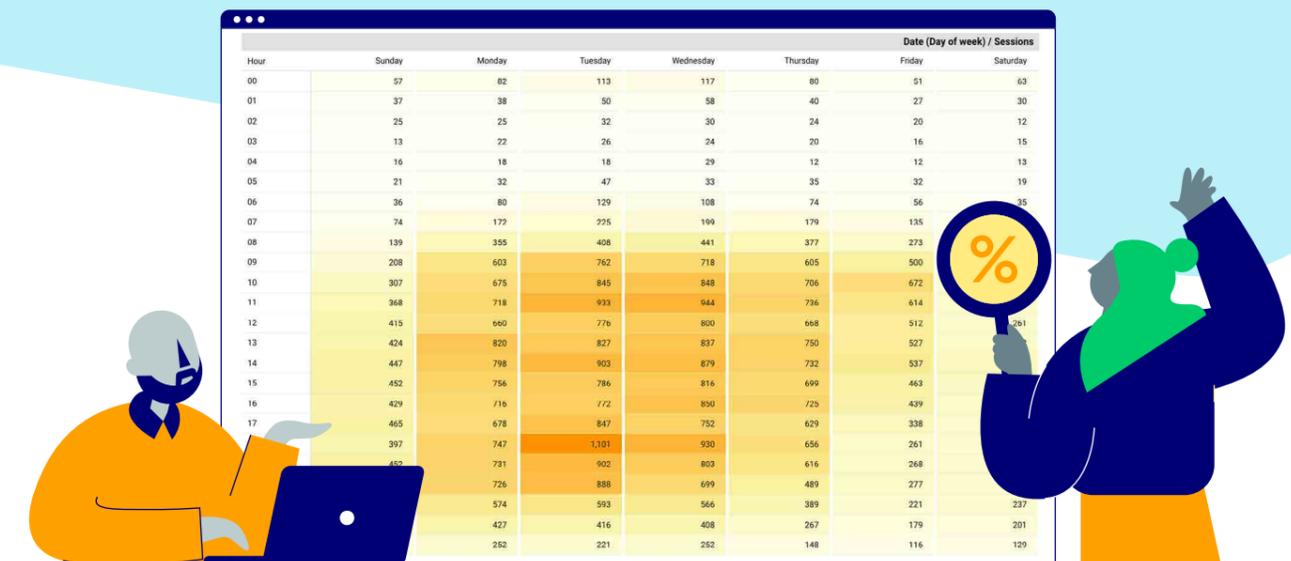| Area for improvement	Core challenge
Improvements to feedback and assessment	Addressing the triple challenge of quality, regularity and speed of feedback for learners
Improvements to the quality of the apprenticeship provision, achievement and/or progression	Ensuring effective accountability and involving employers in progress reviews
Improvements to the learner experience for L1 or L2 learners, high-needs learners or ESOL	Ensuring technology builds independence and adapts teaching for groups with different learning requirements

Using technology to support feedback and assessment

Improvements in the quality, regularity and speed of feedback appeared in 11 reports from our sample. In one report, Ofsted spoke of the need to "provide learners with specific feedback that identifies what they need to do to improve their work".[6]

Under the new framework, in order to meet the expected standard for assessment and feedback, tutors must:

- **Provide feedback that clearly identifies what learners need to do to improve their work**
- **Give feedback quickly and consistently**
- **Use effective assessment methods to check learners' understanding and adapt teaching**

Learner needs – particularly for adult learners – often extend far beyond traditional teaching hours. The table below provides data from Mindful Education's virtual learning environment (VLE) analytics, which shows that there are always learners actively using our platform to study 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Hour	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
00	57	82	113	117	80	51	63
01	37	38	50	58	40	27	30
02	25	25	32	30	24	20	12
03	13	22	26	24	20	16	15
04	16	18	18	29	12	12	13
05	21	32	47	33	35	32	19
06	36	80	129	108	74	56	35
07	74	179	225	199	179	135	
08	139	355	408	441	377	273	
09	208	603	762	718	605	500	
10	307	675	845	848	706	672	
11	368	718	933	944	736	614	
12	415	660	776	800	668	512	
13	424	820	827	837	750	527	
14	447	798	903	879	732	537	
15	452	756	786	816	699	463	
16	429	716	772	850	723	439	
17	465	678	847	752	629	338	
	397	747	1101	930	656	261	
		731	902	803	616	268	
	726	888	699	489	277		
	574	593	566	389	221	237	
	427	416	408	267	179	201	
	252	221	252	148	116	129	

Using technology to facilitate flexible, self-directed learning

If learners are unable to access the support they need when studying outside their tutor's working hours, they may be unable to continue their studies until their query is resolved. This can be mitigated by using platforms that deliver instantaneous, formative assessment – freeing up staff time, and allowing learners to progress quickly. Digital tools like self-marking quizzes are increasingly considered to be essential to meet this demand for 24/7 responsiveness.

Data driven adaptations

Tools such as Mindful Education's analytics, that track learner participation and progress at both the class and individual level, give tutors greater insight into their understanding.

This data-driven insight allows tutors to pinpoint areas where learners are struggling with specific concepts, so they can adapt lesson plans to deliver bespoke sessions that focus classroom time on the areas that require further explanation – improving student retention and driving up achievement rates.

Driving transparency in apprenticeships

Twelve of the 22 reports highlighted the need for improvements in apprenticeship provision, specifically around timeliness and consistent progress. Inspectors are looking for a 'joined up' story where technology links the apprentice, the employer, and the college or training provider.
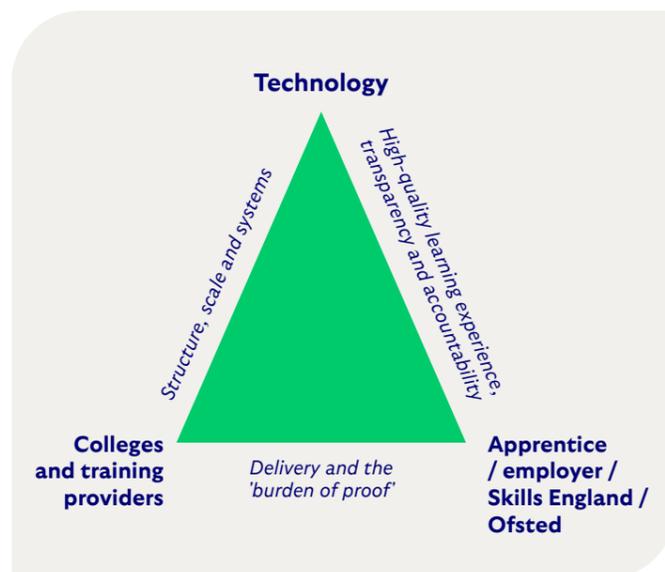
> "Colleges must use technology to harness evidence all in one place, allowing apprentices to record work products that demonstrate real-time skill acquisition."
>
> **Lindsey Smith**
> Assistant Principal – Apprenticeships
> Nottingham College

Apprenticeships represent a unique challenge, seeking to satisfy the needs of key stakeholders – the apprentice, the employer and regulatory bodies – creating a 'high burden of proof'.

Delivering effectively and the 'burden of proof'

When it comes to apprenticeship provision, quality assurance and compliance must be scalable. Used well, technology can go a long way to providing seamless, transparent visibility for all key stakeholders for provision of any size:

1. **The apprentice:** seeks 24/7 access to their learning materials, and a portfolio system to capture a rich evidence of work, and to access support.

2. **The employer:** demands tech-powered transparency to easily understand the progress of their apprentices – this is especially true for large levy payers.

3. **Skills England:** requires assurance that the curriculum maps to the latest Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours and Duties, and that the provider can adapt swiftly to any changes in End Point Assessment.

4. **Ofsted:** wants to understand how the effective use of technology is driving high-quality and inclusive teaching, learning and assessment.

Technology

High-quality learning experience, transparency and accountability

Structure, scale and systems

Colleges and training providers

Delivery and the 'burden of proof'

Apprentice / employer / Skills England / Ofsted

Strategic inclusion: Closing the independence gap

Our analysis of the sample reports identified a recurring theme regarding the provision for Level 1 and Level 2 learners, as well as those with high needs or ESOL requirements.

Inspectors frequently noted that the quality of teaching for these specific cohorts required improvement, particularly by ensuring that sessions are adapted to meet diverse needs. There is an expectation that tutors check understanding throughout the course to ensure that every student reaches their potential.

Beyond immediate academic support, the reports emphasised the importance of fostering long-term autonomy. Colleges and training providers are encouraged to move beyond simple instruction to create learning environments that allow students to cultivate independent thinking skills.

Retention was also a focus, with colleges and training providers required to ensure that learners on foundation courses are fully supported to stay on programme and successfully achieve their qualification.

Using digital tools for self-directed learning

Blended learning and the use of video content can transform the way providers meet the needs of their learners. By shifting the delivery of core theory to high-quality video lectures, learners gain access to digital tools to support their individual learning needs that cannot be replicated in a classroom setting.

Rewind and rewatch video function

- Promotes independent pacing, which allows students to learn at a speed that suits their individual needs
- Gives learners the ability to revisit complex topics, helping to reinforce comprehension
- 92% of Mindful Education's SEND learners agreed that this feature helped them to understand key concepts[7]

Interactive transcripts

- Help learners overcome language barriers, accents, unfamiliar phrases or complex grammar by providing a written record to follow alongside audio
- Clarify technical terminology by providing a searchable record to check specific terms
- 90% of Mindful Education's ESOL learners agreed that these transcripts helped them to understand course content[8]

Flexibility

- Allows learners to study on their own terms, around work schedules and family commitments
- Reduces barriers to entry by ensuring that learners with busy lives or different learning needs can access education on-demand, rather than being restricted to fixed classroom hours

> "The option to rewatch videos really helped as sometimes I find it difficult to understand when I'm learning. With my level of English I wouldn't be able to understand and pass the course just by attending the on campus lessons. I need to read, watch, rewatch and relisten multiple times so that I can learn concepts and improve my English writing."
>
> **Ecaterina**
> Online and On Campus student

Demonstrating impact

Successful digital transformation in further education requires more than just investment in hardware – it demands a strategic culture shift where technology is integrated throughout the learner journey. Rather than viewing education technology as a 'nice to have', forward-thinking providers are using it as a core component of the curriculum to drive quality, inclusion and efficiency.

College leaders are employing a diverse range of strategies to incorporate education technology into their institutions. Ranging from the use of immersive digital suites and virtual reality tools, to digital hubs to encourage experimentation with AI, these tools are underpinned by a clear rationale for their use in order to satisfy the new inspection framework.

Inspectors are seeking evidence and explanation as to why specific technologies have been selected. By grounding their digital strategies in the specific needs of their learners and employers, providers can build a compelling narrative that demonstrates genuine impact on the learner experience.

"For our college, it's about going back to an underpinning philosophy of what inclusive teaching and learning looks like, and being able to clearly explain to inspectors why and how decisions have been made. In a recent consultation with Ofsted, we explored the reasons behind why offering blended learning at some sites helps to meet local needs – it was about understanding the communities we serve and how the technology works.

Ultimately we want people to live and thrive in the world, so we need students to be ready and aware of the technology available, as well as understanding the ethical considerations – especially with AI.

We recently brought together teachers, businesses and AI experts to review our business curriculum with AI in mind, and we're helping to prepare students for the future by building digital hubs on all our main sites which provide a safe place where they can test things and see what works – they can then take that into the classroom when they feel confident about it."

Robin Webber-Jones
Deputy CEO – Executive Director of Curriculum
Bedford College Group

"At Buckinghamshire College Group, we're trying to be holistic and think carefully about how we design technology that's accessible for staff and learners right from the outset – it's not an afterthought. When we were inspected in November 2024, technology featured in three key ways: learner engagement, support and inclusion, and teacher workload and wellbeing.

We use tools such as immersive classrooms to support unemployed adults to return to education and transition into paid clinical roles, as well as assistive technology for our SEND learners that they will be able to access in the workplace or at university. We're also trying to use technology to manage teacher workload so they can focus on teaching – such as assessment marking rubrics, video feedback for learners, or self-marking quizzes."

Jenny Craig
Principal and CEO
Buckinghamshire College Group

"For me, in apprenticeships, it really comes down to what employers want, what technologies they're using in the workplace, and how we can replicate that in a training environment so learners can try things out in a safe space. A key thing for inspection is to make use of the various technologies that support apprentices – not only to track time, assignments and portfolios, but also to evidence workplace interventions in place to support apprentices with additional needs over a period of time.

However, it's important to remember that although someone is an apprentice or an employee, they don't necessarily automatically understand technology, or have full access to it.

We ask all apprentices at the start of their programme what technology they have access to, and work with employers to provide iPads, alarm clocks etc. That upfront investment means that apprentices can take learning that one step further."

Lindsey Smith
Assistant Principal – Apprenticeships
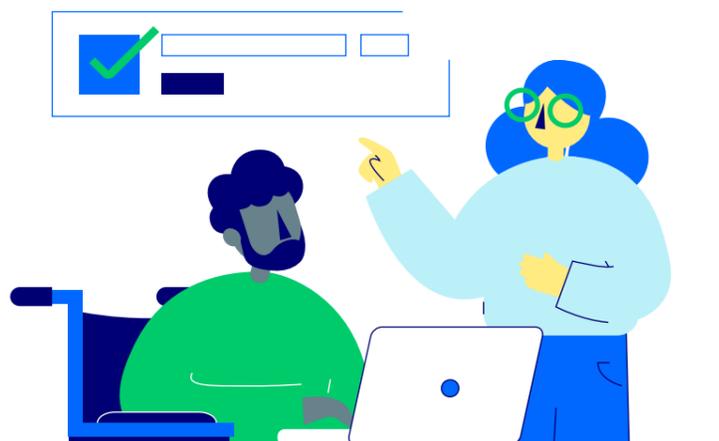Nottingham College

Beyond accessibility: Ensuring inclusion

While accessibility focuses on technical compliance, true inclusion is about the quality of the user experience. A platform can meet accessibility standards but still fail to be inclusive if it does not consider the practical realities of a learner's life. This drive for inclusion is woven throughout the new Ofsted framework which came into effect on 10 November 2025.

Speaking at the AoC Annual Conference 2025, HMCI Sir Martyn Oliver[1] confidently stated that colleges are:

"among the most inclusive institutions in our entire education system".

To meet the new framework's demands, colleges and training providers must move beyond 'tick-box' compliance and ensure that technology and blended delivery actively removes barriers, allowing every learner to participate fully and equitably.

"Better inspection means better education. Better education means better futures for young people and better outcomes for our country… you're changing lives, you're building futures and you're giving people chances that they maybe didn't get earlier in their education journey."

Sir Martyn Oliver
His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Ofsted

Building the workforce of the future

Inclusivity also means ensuring that the technology learners use during their studies mirrors the reality of the modern workplace. Building an understanding of tools such as assistive software and digital collaboration platforms, as well as including writing and spreadsheet skills in the curriculum, helps to establish essential digital literacy that is directly transferable to employment.

By integrating these technologies into the classroom, colleges and training providers encourage learners to become accustomed to the digital environments they will encounter in their careers. This approach ensures that regardless of their starting point, learners enter the workforce with the independence and technical fluency required to succeed in a competitive job market.

"The blended approach using the Mindful Education platform provides learners with the opportunity to further develop their classroom learning, leading to learners knowing and remembering more over time.

The online formative assessments are well used by tutors to assess learners' areas of strength and areas for further development, supporting tutors to individualise learning and enabling learners to have focused input."

Ofsted campus report
Carlisle College, part of NCG

"All the resources on the VLE have been really helpful especially when I need to understand a problem at work – the resources are the solution."

Francisco
Online and On Campus learner

"Mindful Education has the best platform I have found for learning. Assistive technologies like subtitles, and the option to re-watch videos, have really helped with my learning comprehension."

Rhiannon
Online and On Campus learner

For a deeper look at how technology and blended learning can drive a truly inclusive education, click here or scan the QR code to read our detailed thought piece, Tech-powered inclusion: Boosting participation and driving accessibility for learners.

Drawing on data from our own learner surveys, this report examines how digital tools can break down barriers related to geography, the need for flexibility, different learning requirements and language barriers. It offers practical insights into how features such as interactive transcripts and assistive technologies can ensure that every learner has the opportunity to access high-quality education.

References

1. https://vimeo.com/reviews/181775d0-e465-4e20-a333-20c0277152e3/videos/1142005665

2. 28.5% sample size – 22 reports out of a total 77 across 2024-25

3. https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50238963

4. https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50271965

5. https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50262760

6. https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50279603

7. Mindful Education 2024 Online and On Campus past learner survey (SEND)

8. Mindful Education 2024 Online and On Campus past learner survey (ESOL)

Find out more

At Mindful Education, we produce flexible, award-winning, blended learning courses and apprenticeships that continue to set new standards in digital education.

Working in partnership with hundreds of colleges, training providers and employers, we support thousands of learners each year, helping people to take the next step in their careers and realise their ambitions.

If you're interested in partnering with Mindful Education to deliver professional courses and apprenticeships then please email:

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