Economic and Social Research Council

ESRC Education Research Programme

University of East Anglia

University of Glasgow

University of Oxford

ESRC Education Research Programme (ERP)

Key Findings and Actionable insights

Why aren't schools able to procure the technology they need to support high-quality teaching?

Key points

Current challenges in purchasing arrangements for technology in the school sector are inhibiting good decision-making on EdTech quality and design.

Taking more account of teacher perspectives on technology use would lead to a more robust evidence base, product designs better able to support equitable and high-quality teaching and improved teacher job satisfaction and retention.

Enhancing technology use in education

Three projects from the ESRC Education Research Programme (ERP) have been working with teachers to explore how technology is being used in teaching and learning in the classroom and whether its potential is being realised. Findings highlight knowledge gaps that are driving poor decision-making in procurement and how they could be fixed.

The projects are Enhancing Teacher Agency with Technology, at the University of East Anglia; Teaching for Digital Citizenship: Digital Ethics in the Classroom and Beyond, at the University of Glasgow; and the EdTech Equity project at the University of Oxford.

Research Findings

Key problems with procurement

Many teachers do not feel engaged in strategic decisions about education technology in their Schools.

- Teachers are seldom involved in decisions about tech purchases that impact on their work[i].
- Tech provision can overlook basic practicalities. Fixed desktop PCs with slow login and download speeds do not support lesson readiness when teachers move between classrooms.
- Across the sector there are significant disparities in the quality of school and digital infrastructures, types of available devices, connectivity, technology choices and levels of IT support.
- Overly complicated processes of procurement can leave schools locked into contracts that do not benefit them. Private sector digital infrastructure creates uncertainty when products and subscriptions change or are discontinued.
- Differences between schools' EdTech ethos, available equipment, and applications pose particular challenges for early career teachers as they move between schools
- Leaving each school or MAT to conduct their own evaluation and due diligence on each product can lead to poor decisions and significant redundancy and inefficiency within the school system.

Assessing the quality of EdTech on offer

There is no single framework to which schools or teachers can refer to guide their decision making on the quality of EdTech products[ii]

- EdTech is often presented as an effective means to improve educational outcomes. These claims are not borne out by the existing evidence[iii]
- Without good advice schools risk entering into partnerships with EdTech that are inconsistent with broader educational principles or aims.
- There is very little independent evaluation of the learning outcomes for specific EdTech tools and resources and markedly less scrutiny of the value of EdTech compared to the evidence base expected to inform other aspects of teaching[iv]

Shaping the market in technology in line with educational values

As a necessary counterpoint to commercial interests, teacher networks should be actively involved in assessing the educational value of EdTech in the classroom.

- Before purchasing, schools should reflect on what could be achieved equally or more effectively without EdTech, and for what relative cost.
- Schools should consider the different kinds of EdTech the market offers, the function they play in classroom settings, whether they add to or detract from the quality of instruction, and any ethical or equity issues their use might raise. This could include the use of maker and production technologies that to date are rarely purchased.[v]
- Before investing in dashboards, schools need to reflect on: whether the amount of data collected is proportionate and educationally useful; how any commercial interests of the companies supplying the technology and collecting students' data will be managed; and whether they increase rather than reduce workload as they promise.
- Schools should note that newer technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence solutions, are often implemented in ways that are driven by the data collection and processing interests of developers, rather than the pedagogical needs of teachers and learners[vi].
- Teachers value peer guidance on the uses of technology from peers and other schools considered to be using tech well. Teacher-led, co-created, or open access educational technology in the UK can facilitate transformative change, with the appropriate infrastructure and support.
- Induction and training for specific applications should promote critical reflection on whether technology use is supporting or detracting from high quality pedagogy, whether it is decreasing or increasing workload and help schools keep under review its impacts on educational inequalities
- Teacher-led networks can provide a valuable alternative at local and national levels to the training programmes and ambassador schemes some corporate entities offer.

Creating a more rigorous evidence base

Evidence derived from use deserves greater attention in local and national policymaking, and in implementation processes.

- Politicians often asking the wrong questions, prompted by tech innovation, rather than by classroom need.
- A high-quality evidence base, that puts educational values first, is a prerequisite for informed-decision making and better design.
- An evidence base that critically reflects on schools' experiences of using technology can help determine whether current usage reduces or magnifies the significant social and education inequities that exist within and between schools.
- A fuller conception of value for money with EdTech would take into account research-informed and user-centred EdTech product design and its influence on job satisfaction and teacher retention.

Actionable insights For policymakers:

- The DfE should review how the evidence gaps revealed in the quality and standards framework review can be addressed to support equitable and ethical use of technology in schools, MATs and LAs and more clearly identify the design principles that encourage high quality teaching.
- The DfE Teachers' Standards should include a section on developing critical awareness of EdTech use, at levels

appropriate to different points in teachers' careers; DfE may also want to give attention to specific professional learning routes for the emerging group of digital learning leads/champions. These require a distinct skillset from either IT support or Heads of Computer Science.

For schools:

- The EdTech equity project identified 9 evidence requirements that schools and teachers value when deciding whether to buy or use a product in their school.[vii]
- The Teaching for Digital Citizenship project is developing, with teachers, a self-evaluation tool with six areas of school life where data justice needs to be considered, including values & ethos, procurement, and curriculum.
- The Enhancing Teacher Agency with Technology Project is developing guidance and resources to introduce critical awareness and agentic use of EdTech to initial teacher education and development initiatives (e.g. ITAPs)

To encourage clearer processes of deliberation between schools and EdTech developers

- The EdTech equity project identified ten design proposals[viii] that could help inform the design of future EdTech for secondary schools, when read alongside other recommendations, such as the ICO Age appropriate design code[ix] and EdTech quality frameworks[x].
- The Enhancing Teacher Agency with Technology Project is developing tools for school leaderships to collect and compare data about teachers' experiences of using EdTech with their decisions about procurement needs
- The Council of Europe has taken a more proactive approach to shaping the market in EdTech rather than allowing commercial companies to dictate what gets bought and sold. This provides a useful reference point for UK policymakers.

Methods

- The Enhancing Teacher Agency with Technology project worked with 40 participants including classroom teachers, senior leaders and school governors, and teacher educators. From the 38 group and individual interviews conducted between January 2024 and July 2025, we identified 126 small stories, each of which provides insights into one or more of the seven themes the project explored relative to teacher agency with EdTech.
- The Teaching for Digital Citizenship project conducted a Delphi conference with education practitioners, policymakers and technologists; a survey of 9,338 teachers in England, using TeacherTapp; ethnographic fieldwork in 5 schools in Scotland and England; focus groups with 6th form students; and a teacher community of practice drawing on teacher expertise to co-design a self-evaluation tool for schools
- The EdTech Equity project collected data from in-depth ethnographic fieldwork in 6 schools and interviews with classroom teachers, senior leaders and edtech developers.

To find out more, scan here or visit ucl.ac.uk/erp

- Authors: Rebecca Eynon, John Gordon, David Lundie and Gemma Moss

- Date: August 2025
- Funder: ESRC
- Grant Reference numbers: ES/X00242X/1; ES/X002756/1; ES/X002470/1;ES/W004917/1

[i] IFF Research (2023). 2022-23 Technology in Schools Survey Research report. DfE: London. DfE Technology_in_schools_survey__2022_to_2023.pdf

[ii] Department for Education. *EdTech Quality Frameworks and Standards Review.* (2023).

[iii] Kempner, I. (2025) Harnessing the potential of EdTech: a new review on the How. Education Endowment Foundation.

[iv] Kucirkova, N., (2025). 'Academia–industry partnerships in edtech: bridging the gaps in engaged research.' Research for All 9(1). https://doi.org/10.14324/RFA.09.1.07

[v] Gordon, J., Nourie, K. and Steward, H. (2025). 'The role of teacher agency in realising EdTech's potential to reduce teacher workload and improve teacher retention'. British Educational Research Journal (under review).

[vi] KNOX, J., & Lundie, D. (2025). Towards a Taxonomy of AI Learning. In W. Holmes (Ed.), *Handbook of Critical Studies of AI and Education*. Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

[vii] Eynon, R., Couceiro, L. and Hakimi, L. (2025a). Reconfiguring EdTech Evidence: Response to the open call for evidence for the EdTech Evidence Board. SocArXiv https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/gub9z_v1

[viii] Eynon, R., Couceiro, L. and Hakimi, L. (2025b). Ten design proposals for EdTech: evidence from classroom use. Working paper v1. SocArXiv. https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/z6kph_v1

[ix] Information Commissioner's Office. (2020). Age appropriate design code. Available at, https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/childrens-information/childrens-code-guidance-and-resources/age-appropriate-design-code.

[x] Department for Education. EdTech Quality Frameworks and Standards Review. (2023). Available at, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6579d0ac0467eb001355f761/EdTech_quality_frameworks_and_standards_review.pdf.