

Taking great leaps forward

The annual BETT show in London drew together, from all over the World, the brightest and best from education and technology to give us a glimpse of the future.



Building blocks

Interactivity, creativity and experience were major themes of many presentations with new VR technologies featuring in many. The presence of LEGO, which took over one of the main café areas, was a big draw. Google also attracted big crowds by showing just how simple and intuitive its software is to use and how effective and adaptable Chromebooks are in the classroom. Teachers were encouraged to sit down and take part in an open class-like setting while they were talked through creating and managing contents and activities.

Amongst the most popular presentations were the opening address from Anne Milton, Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, who said that many companies are struggling to recruit the digital talent they need and called for more focus on making children capable of being more than just 'digital consumers'.

The fervour and enthusiasm for technology in education was self-evident to anyone who attended the BETT 2018 Show in London last week. Visitors were able to see a panoply of specialist software and hardware solutions in action over the four days and hear from some of the world's leading experts in the use of IT in the classroom and beyond.

Out on the floor, major IT companies such as Microsoft and Google were highly visible and conspicuous – as were Samsung, both HPE and HPI, Dell, Lenovo, Promethean and many other well-known vendors. Each of these vendors made determined efforts to show their solutions that are specifically for use in education.



Harnessing potential

Opening a presentation focusing on the future of digital learning, Microsoft's VP of Worldwide Education, Anthony Salicito, told delegates that the new generation of 'digital' students were eager to blend the real and the digital worlds to gain new insights.

'We should empower educators to harness the potential of this change in their schools and institutions and prepare students for the road ahead', he said. It was not now a question of whether technology can be used to improve learning outcomes as, for students today, technology is completely familiar. 'It depends if you've got teachers who are prepared, students who are motivated, leaders who understand the scale of innovation across the school and pedagogy that is inspiring.'

Microsoft highlighted three key paradigms that it believes will impact education in the next few years – VR/MR, AI and quantum computing. It talked about how its Hololens VR system has already been used to give students the experience of walking on the surface of Mars and how these technologies could be used to enable more personalised learning experiences and free up teachers to become more closely engaged with students' individual needs.



Embracing optimism

Salicito concluded the presentation by reiterating that no technology is any good without great teachers and leaders. 'It starts with people and inspiring students to believe bigger, teachers to embrace the opportunity to nurture potential and for all of us to embrace optimism about what's possible and deliver the future.'

While you may not have been able to see the future of technology in education with absolute clarity at BETT 2018, there is no question that it has an enormous and ever-important role to play, which should make this sector of the market an even bigger and more sustained opportunity for the IT industry, and perhaps one of the main areas in which innovations in areas like VR/AR, AI and the mind-blowing potential of quantum computing will make some of their greatest leaps forward.