



A simple approach to ICT Strategy for Schools and MATs



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When I ask schools “What’s your three year ICT strategy?” they can’t usually answer because 9 out of 10 schools don’t have one, or it’s so complex they can’t explain it.

Especially when budgets are tight, having a good ICT strategy can save you from making reactive, poor and expensive decisions.

For an ICT strategy to be successful, it needs to be simple and easy for everyone to understand.

Anything too technical won’t be understood and will be ignored. Anything too low-level doesn’t inspire or have meaning to staff, students or parents on a day-to-day basis.

ICT is vital to the safe and smooth running of your school and MAT.

When it goes wrong there is frustration, complaints, lost opportunities and sometimes even anger.

Get it right and creativity, excitement, collaboration and growth all can flourish.

It’s important therefore to get it right.

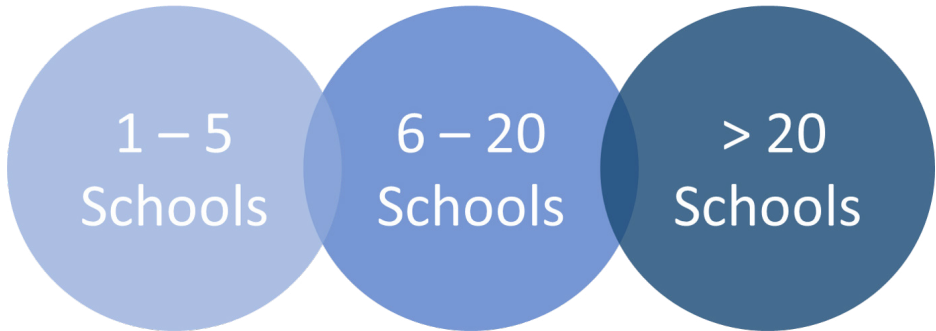
If you don’t have a strategy, this booklet has some ideas to get you started.

Adapt and change them to fit your own unique circumstances. This document is intended as a thought-starter, not an “off-the-shelf-strategy”.

If you have any questions or would like to know more, please contact me at neil.watkins@everythingict.org.

Neil Watkins
CEO, Everything ICT

MAT Characteristics & Challenges



Every school is different. Even within a MAT which has standardised ICT, every one is different because of the people involved.

Each year we deal with thousands of schools from hundreds of MATs. Our smallest school has less than 50 pupils, our largest MAT over 60 schools.

We also work with local authorities who still provide ICT services to their local schools.

Dealing with such a wide range of schools on a regular basis, you start to see patterns emerging.

Often these relate to the MAT size and where they are on their 'growth journey'.

The characteristics and challenges are generalisations, and many may be found across different groups, but hopefully you'll recognise them from your own experience.

1 – 5 Schools

Single schools and small MATs don't usually have central procurement or ICT Teams, or in-depth experience in those areas.

Typically there's no ICT strategy and every school "does it's own thing", often driven by Head Teacher preferences.

The challenges faced by this group often relate to finances. This includes not having annual budgets for device replacement or maintenance; or the scale to

negotiate discounts.

Different contract and ICT support arrangements lead to variable user experiences in different schools.

There are usually many different types, makes, models and ages of devices, which can lead to reliability, security and administration issues.

And there is often a lack of collaboration of resources and experience across the schools.

MAT Characteristics & Challenges



6 – 20
Schools

MATs in this group have small central procurement and ICT teams, typically run by a CFO, COO or Business Manager.

However they often don't have in-depth procurement **and** ICT knowledge.


They can benefit from good external support to increase capacity and/or capability.

There's often an emerging ICT strategy, but usually not well documented.

It can be a big challenge to get agreement on that ICT strategy. Standardising software, infrastructure and equipment can bring savings, efficiencies and increased collaboration. But it can be difficult to agree because of individual school preferences.

School ICT teams sometimes disagree over changes and the sharing of resources, slowing progress for the group. They are also often wary of external suppliers.

MAT Characteristics & Challenges



> 20
Schools

Large MATs have central procurement and ICT teams, and in my experience, very good ones.

However, they, along with everyone else in education, often find themselves extremely busy and over-stretched.

They tend to have strong 3 to 5 year ICT strategies, standardisation and MAT-wide contracts that deliver efficiencies and economies of scale.

They use their size and buying power to negotiate good deals with manufacturers, resellers and service providers.

Their challenges include ensuring compliant procurements (some suppliers won't bid for large MAT work because they think deals have already "been done"); and ensuring schools' discretionary comply with the strategy and work on MAT infrastructure.

Common ICT Procurement Themes



Whatever the size of school or MAT, there are several ICT procurement themes that apply to all.

The first is compliance. All public bodies need to account for their spending and ensure value for money.

Next is the need to mitigate and manage risks, especially around cyber-security. In 2021 Microsoft report that over 60% of all malware attacks globally are against education institutions.

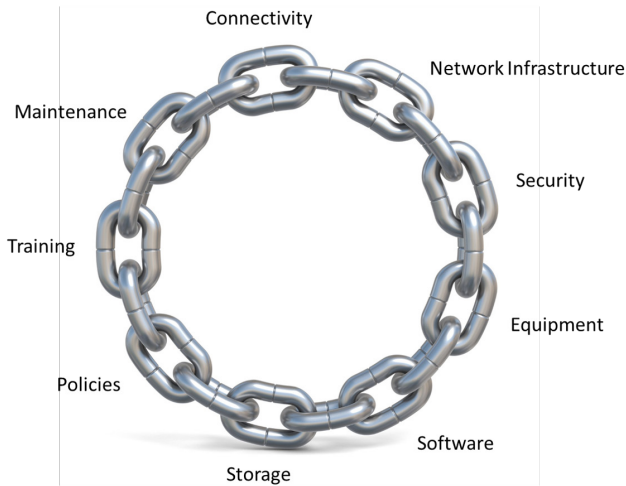
That links to GDPR and the importance of protecting sensitive and personal data.

The need to increase the effectiveness of central teams to support schools. This can be done with centralised contracts and procurement.

And finally, the need to negotiating better deals with suppliers.

All of these can be improved with a good ICT strategy.

What your ICT Strategy is really for



If you don't have an ICT strategy you will make poor, knee-jerk and expensive buying decisions.

Part of the problem is that people don't realise how inter-connected ICT is, and therefore make decisions in one area without understanding the implications for others.

And if there is one weak link in the chain, the whole infrastructure is weak.

During the pandemic, people realised the importance of robust, stable and secure ICT.

But when it comes to creating a strategy, they don't know where to start.

Often they outsource it to a "specialist" but what comes back is something that is very technical and goes into great detail that no one can understand.

That's of no use to anyone.

What your ICT Strategy is really for



Because what your ICT strategy is really for is telling stories.

You need to be able to tell the ‘story’ of what you want your ICT to do for you.

It needs to be in very simple language that can be easily understood by your staff, students, parents and other stakeholders

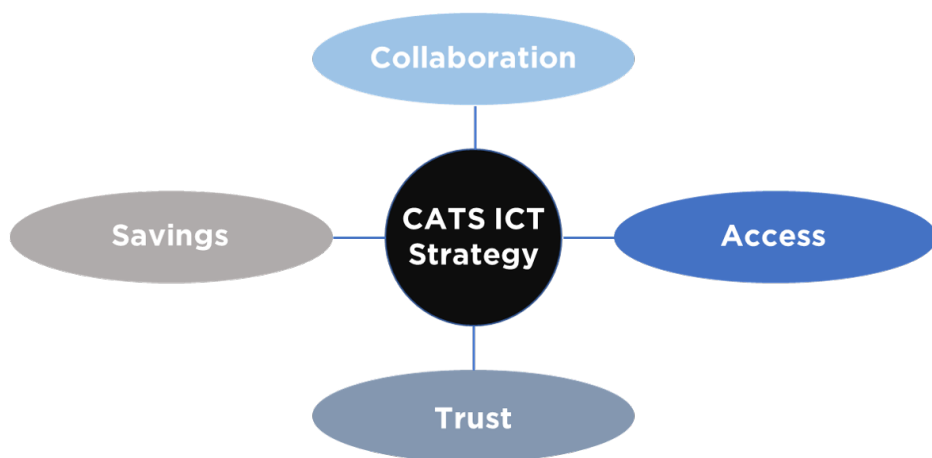
You need to be able to give it to your ICT suppliers and say “Give me this”.

Think in terms of the outcomes you want. Ask “I want to be able to...” questions. For example, “I want to be able to...”:

- “...walk into any school in my MAT and log on from any device”;
- “...access my data securely from home”; or
- “... know that my data is safe even if we get hit with a ransomware attack”.

Think about outcomes; tell stories.

The CATS ICT Strategy



We've seen lots of different formats for ICT strategies. CATS is an example of an outcomes-based strategy.

It's been used as the starting point for a number of successful MAT ICT strategies.

It focuses on four outcomes around collaboration, access, trust and savings, but you could pick any outcomes that are specific to your school or MAT.

Other outcomes we've seen chosen include:

- Safeguarding;
- Security;
- Moving to the Cloud;
- Teaching digital skills; and
- 1-to-1 devices.

There is no right or wrong answer, but whatever you chose has to make sense in the context of your organisation.

As an example, we'll cover each of the four CATS outcomes in more detail.

Collaboration

Collaboration is vital in order to maximise the resources and potential within your School or MAT.

That includes sharing of resources such as lesson plans equipment and people.

Being able to share organisational data such as MIS and Finance information improves reporting and management. For example, cloud MIS solutions allow instant reporting of attendance

data so you can see live information on a daily basis.

The right tools remove silos and data hoarding. They encourage shared usage and ownership across classes, year groups and schools.

And having the right tools increases engagement with staff, students, parents, employers and other stakeholders.

Access

Access - being able to access all your productivity tools, data and applications, on any device, any time and anywhere is now a requirement, not a nice-to-have.

That means you need to think mobile and cloud first when considering any new software applications.

You also need to consider moving legacy data off on-premise servers and into the cloud for both security and access.

The pandemic has proven for many the power of technology to personalise learning, stretching the most able and giving those who need it more time and support to learn at their own pace.

And reliability is critical. The technology has to work first time, every time. That means building in resilience, capacity and maintenance - factors that are often neglected.

Trust

Trust covers a number of important areas, including data security, integrity, and e-safety.

Data security is all about protecting your data from hackers, malware and ransomware. Of course, your data needs to be securely backed up, at least daily. And users must only be able to access the data they are authorised to.

Data integrity ensures that your data is accurate and up-to-date so that you

can make informed and accurate decisions.

E-safety is important. Do staff and students know what it means to be a good 'digital citizen' and protect themselves on-line?

And schools are the front-line for safeguarding issues. How is that highly sensitive data captured, stored accessed and managed?

All of that links to GDPR. Are you sure your organisation is compliant?

Savings

ICT is not a “nice-to-have”. You need it to run your organisation. But costs can build up and often people don’t feel they’re getting value for money.

There are some simple things you can do. One is a regular audit. Do you have an asset register? Do you know what equipment you have, where it is and how old it is? Knowing your starting point is helpful in deciding your priorities and what you need to change first.

Also complete an audit of your ICT service, print and software contracts. Consolidating and aligning contracts gives you more negotiating power.

Before buying new tech, ask how it delivers the outcomes you want. If not why are you buying it?

And wherever possible, use a DfE approved framework to ensure compliance, and save time and money. Well, we would say that wouldn’t we?

What next?



So you have a good ICT strategy - what next?

Here are some tips for successful implementation.

Appoint a senior person to lead the implementation. They will probably need external support, and that's OK, but you need to demonstrate that you're serious about making change happen.

Share the strategy with stakeholders, including ICT suppliers. Get feedback

and change the strategy if needed. It should be a living document, not cast in stone.

Create an implementation plan, but be realistic. Big bang ICT projects often fail, but baby steps will get you there. Don't underestimate the time, effort, money and commitment required to be successful.

All ICT projects have people at their core, so over-communicate to win hearts and minds and take people with you.

About Everything ICT



Everything ICT is a DfE approved framework for schools.

We were created to help schools buy ICT in a rapidly changing and technically complex market, especially those who aren't sure what they want or need. We deliver three outcomes for schools:

1. Cost - value for money through negotiating national deals and constant benchmarking of over 120 suppliers;

2. Compliance - we're a fully compliant OJEU tendered procurement framework, backed by a Public Body and approved by the DfE; and

3. Convenience - we've reduced the admin as much as possible, making it easy for you to buy, and we give you a real person to talk to.

If you'd like to know more about our services or suppliers, contact us at info@everythingict.org.



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www.everythingict.org