

A transitional plan for digital and technology change

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1. ABSTRACT

This is a challenging time for universities in a global context as they seek to fully harness the potential of being digital and teaching digitally. Over the last five years the University of the Arts London (UAL) has been on a transformative digital journey. UAL is an art based institution consisting of six world class (World University Rankings, 2020) colleges on 18 sites across an international city and a constituency of users that total over sixty thousand.

Since 2015 UAL has been moving towards a more defined governance structure for IT and Digital services, this has largely been developed by working collaboratively with the Colleges and Professional Services. It has become a significant strategic driver that UAL engages in a more strategic approach to the use of digital technology across its wide spectrum of activities. This paper presents a case study of how UAL arrived at its current transitional IT plan that promotes digital transformation .

UAL seeks to fully harness the potential of being digital to advance how we manage our digital services and how we think about the potential to leverage the digital landscape to advance UAL's mission and values. This approach has to include both Learning and Teaching and operational rationalisation. In order to best position UAL for the next three years of growth and success it is essential that this Digital and IT strategy is fully endorsed and fully supported. Over the last twelve months a transitional plan has been developed to enable a transition towards a fully developed IT & digital strategy.

The transitional plan sets out how to prepare for the next mid-term UAL strategy through greater business efficiency in the technology function, ensuring IT plays an enabling role in Learning and Teaching, Research and Knowledge Exchange. This plan has involved a necessary segmentation of approach across UAL which has followed the steps of Digitisation, Digitalisation and Digital Transformation (Andersen, 2018) to advance how we manage our UAL wide digital services and governance.

2. INTRODUCTION

For many universities this is a challenging time when trying to find ways in which to develop a strategic plan for digital and IT change. In 2018 University Arts London (UAL) identified that it had a clear imperative to develop the strategic management of IT. Much of what UAL needs to achieve to maintain its global position (World University Rankings 2020) is reliant on a clear and structured approach to IT. This approach has to include both Learning and Teaching and essential IT infrastructure services. In order to best position a University for the next three years of challenge, growth and change it is essential that a Digital and Information Technology strategy is fully endorsed and fully supported. The CIO has an important role to play in leading this change (Broadbent & Kitzis, 2005).

Taking the approach of a transitional plan rather than a complete plan is a way in which an Institution can set out how to prepare for a mid-term to long term strategic period. The main outcome of UAL's transitional plan is a two-year portfolio of activities, based on service design principles and providing a common, technology-agnostic view of the value to be delivered. This portfolio also prepares the ground for the themes of an emerging IT & Digital strategy.

During the early phase of working towards a UAL Transitional IT Plan UAL approached digital change as Digitisation, Digitalisation and Digital Transformation (Andersen, 2018) as per Figure 1. The first two stages, Digitisation & Digitalisation are well under way and have become business as usual. A transitional plan acts as a bridge for a more developed IT & Digital Transformation strategy.

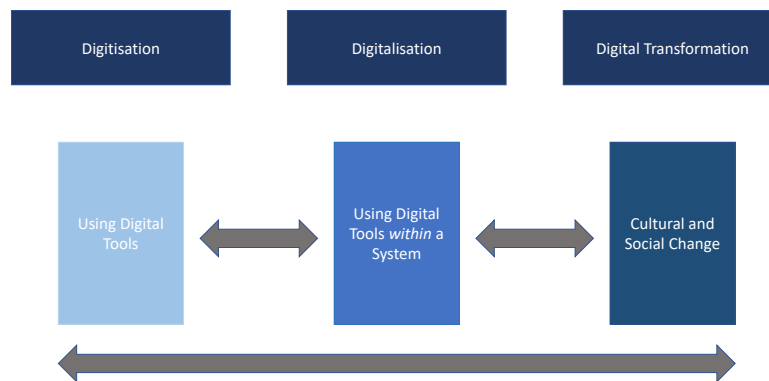


Figure 1. The stages to Digital Transformation (Nottingham adapted from Andersen, 2018)

3. SPECIALIST UNIVERSITY ART AND DESIGN CONTEXT

UALL is a specialist arts institution. Specialist institutions have been a part of the higher education (HE) landscape for some time and are recognised within the sector for their strong links to respective professions and industries for which the students prepare (Universities UK, 2020). UAL as it stands today has been enriched from its independent colleges that merged in the 1980's to form a powerful force within creative Higher Education (NAFAE, 1991; Llewellyn, 2015). UAL has become a world-class centre for creative education and innovation with a global reputation for Learning and Teaching in a variety of arts related subjects (2020). Art and design education is at the heart of the philosophy of UAL's approach to Learning and Teaching (Orr & Shreeve, 2018; Madoff, 2009; Deakin & Webb, 2016). Within the HE sector, specialist institutions such as UAL play a vital role in sustaining the creative industries which in turn play a substantive role across society. In terms of the transitional planning, the idea of communities of practice (CoPs) (Wenger, 1998) has been a key model in assembling specific areas within this art and design community for discussion and resolution of longstanding boundaries within digital practice at UAL.

4. VISION, MISSION, BEHAVIOUR

The vision for this transitional plan is a commitment to centre on the experiences and needs of students, staff, and the wider UAL community. The vision applies a digital lens (JISC, 2018) to all aspects of University activities to enable greater collaboration and cohesion, weaving together strands of development across UAL to realise the benefits and value of technology (Loosemore, 2018).

The mission is to achieve the Vision by recognises that we are all one community within a creative ecosystem. To highlight the connections between digitally teaching, engaging with being digital, the IT infrastructure and the specialist digital resources that exist across UAL.

The behavior is to leverage UAL's world leading research, teaching and learning and knowledge exchange based on the foundations of practitioner enquiry, facilitation, articulation, creativity, co-creation, intellectual challenge, social inclusion sustainability and excellence.

The activities undertaken within this transitional plan need to be underpinned by the following

- Consistently high unified service standards
- Continually listening and responding to the total community
- Partnering between all Colleges, Institutes and University Services departments to deliver the transitional plan
- Being innovative positive agents of change
- Generating evolutionary change with the focus on aligning service, priorities and practice

5. STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT

The essential precondition for the transitional plan is to extend the strategic oversight of the IT Services Department (ITSD) giving ITSD oversight and management control across the IT estate, demonstrating that within a collaborative approach to technology that we are all one community within a creative ecosystem. UAL's existing approach to technology investment favours local impact and infrastructure. This needs to be replaced with a broader consideration of the mid-term strategy and generating cross-UAL change with the focus on aligning service, priorities and practice.

This requires clear lines of communication and escalation, a common understanding of compliance and governance, a common service taxonomy, involvement in and understanding of daily business practice and a more visible support presence. Being able to work together to solve core and cross-boundary issues will be fundamental to the success if the transitional plan.

Through ITSD, UAL must achieve oversight of technology projects and programs with a digital component and all software and all hardware installations across UAL, regardless of whether they are provided by employees, contractors or third parties. This will require a much greater level of central planning and coordination.

UAL is also actively to introducing a standard industry model of distributed management of key digital resources. This benefits user of local tailored services, while providing opportunities for collaboration and partnership in the interest of maximising value. This will ensure local impact while increasing efficiencies, improving risk management and enabling collaboration across UAL and partners

Like many institutions, UAL faces the challenge of enabling successful collaboration amongst its users and stakeholders but without robust information and data strategies to capture and preserve what is needed to make informed decisions. There is a pressing need to address the barriers and ethical concerns of getting the right data to the right people in a secure way.

To achieve this and further enhance the emerging IT & Digital Strategy UAL is commissioning:

- A University-wide review and mapping of systems in use, highlighting business use, future plans, security and operational ownership
- Consultation with all business owners on a standard industry model for the efficient distributed management of technology
- The extended use of monitoring and data assembling technologies to more fully deliver a consistent level of availability, insight and resilience

The core of the commission is:

- Reduce complexity: our users suffer from too much choice through the systems UAL has. This has resulted in a confusing, technically complex and uncoordinated outcome which is not fit for purpose
- Improve security and resilience: we need to mitigate significant UAL-wide risks, in particular putting in place information security standards such as ISO 27001 (ISO, 2019).
- to change the organising principle for IT assets, support structures and staff across UAL in favour of collaboration between business requirement owners and coordination of business systems
- a cross-cutting review of the capacity, capabilities and staffing of IT Services, localised IT support teams and specialist IT resources across UAL
- to create a comprehensive mapping of the IT estate incorporating information about all significant systems, hardware and software across the university.

6. IT GOVERNANCE

UAL has recently enhanced its IT governance structure, this has been carried out by working with Colleges and Professional Services over a period of several years. The new IT Governance Board and the IT Investment Advisory Group are the gatekeepers to structural and investment decisions and will guide the implementation of the transitional plan (Educause, 2020a; Educause, 2020b).

Pivotal to the success of this transitional plan is the newly formed (2019) IT Governance Board and the IT Investment Advisory Group. These groups will provide both guidance and accountability as the transitional plan is implemented. The UAL IT governance structure is illustrated in Figure 2.

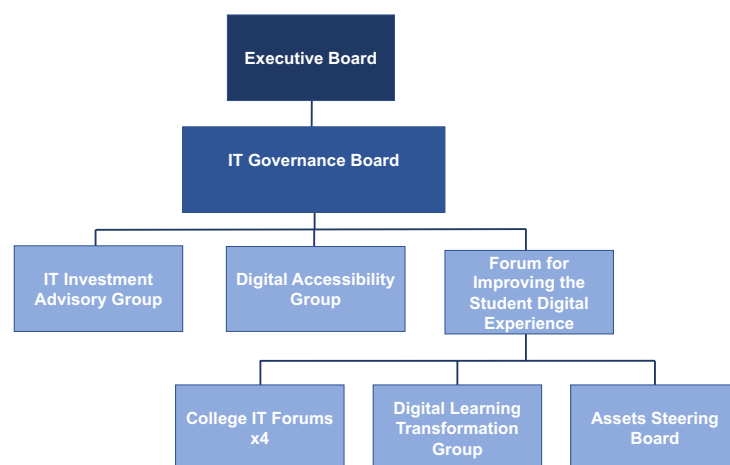


Figure 2. UAL IT Governance Organisational Chart (Nottingham adapted from UAL, 2019)

7. THE UAL TRANSITIONAL IT PLAN

UAL is seeking to develop the management of IT to high sector standards and to leverage the digital landscape to advance UAL's mission and values. Much of what UAL needs to achieve to maintain its global position is reliant on a clear and structured approach to technology (ISO, 2019).

Over the last twelve months a UAL transitional plan has been developed to enable a gradual and collaborative transition towards a fully developed IT and Digital strategy. To work most effectively within resource constraints, there was a need to re-focus program management, technology ownership and analyst resources to prioritise initiatives and manage programs effectively.

Following the completion of the transitional plan, UAL will provide three key services:

- Strategic planning - supporting management decisions, including prioritization, strategic and enterprise architecture alignment, benefits realization management and reporting.
- Delivery support - supporting the delivery of change through a central, flexible resource pool of project management coupled with requirements capture, business analysis, process improvement, digital innovation and capacity planning.
- Centre of Excellence - developing standard methods and processes developing methods and processes that are focused on our users' needs and expectations, consistent working practices and ensuring they are deployed appropriately.

This transitional plan also anticipates that focus to be in line with the following emerging themes of the new mid-term UAL strategy;

THE CONNECTED CAMPUS - creating a seamless experience between and within the digital and physical estate for both student and staff.

DATA MATTERS - harnessing the power of data, ensure it is ethically managed and we remain compliant.

TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION - to improve the student's teaching and learning experience.

BUSINESS EFFICIENCY & INNOVATION - to improve and put in place the right infrastructure for operational efficiency and innovation.

ENTERPRISE & SUSTAINABLE FUNDING - to enable and achieve the ambitious entrepreneurship strategy and maximising UAL income.

The transitional plan sets out how to prepare an IT & Digital strategy for the next mid-term UAL strategy period through greater business efficiency in the technology function, ensuring IT plays an enabling role in learning and teaching, research and knowledge exchange.

The transitional plan centres on the experiences and needs of students, staff, and the wider UAL community. A user-centred approach will enable the development of more effective ways to deliver and embed key existing services and develop and embed new services. It will be delivered by many partners across UAL, who have different levels of IT/digital knowledge and expertise. The aim is to put in place the right infrastructure for operational efficiency and innovation through a unified, evolutionary and collaborative approach across UAL. This will include infrastructure, services, cybersecurity, process, culture and agility.

The transitional plan has five key objectives:

- introduce strategic oversight across University and College IT
- improve availability, resilience, client support and service levels for front-facing systems

- increase operational efficiency and reduce complexity across all software and hardware
- control expenditure and put in place a value for money framework to reduce cost of ownership and of study
- realign our project portfolio towards learning and teaching and the student experience.

8. CONCLUSION

Much of what UAL needs to achieve to maintain its global position is reliant on a clear and structured approach to technology. The establishment of a University governance structure for digital and technology change is the key component of the transitional IT plan. Without a significant change in approach IT would continue as an operational overhead rather than a leading strategic enabler.

UAL and its staff and students have a philosophy of practice that is embedded in the DNA of the specialist arts institution. Carrington has posited that Art and Design school foster seven creative behaviors “rigor, risk, resilience, ambiguity, agency, imagination, and provocation” (2017, p. 6). As a part of this philosophy of practice within the sector, the notion of CoPs (Wenger, 1998) are an essential way in which to recognise existing communities and then assist more formal groups to form and explore common goals to generate and embed change.

Shared practice within CoPs means mutual engagement and learning co-exists with transformation that taps into existing and collaborative experiences within the institutions (Wenger, 1998). These ideas expand to physical and digital spaces, such as stewarding online communities in ‘digital habitats’ (Wenger et al., 2009). The concepts of congruence (Wenger-Trayner et al, 2015) also relate to brokering boundary encounters from shared practice within an existing specialist art school context and cultural configuration. Boundary spanning (Ernst & Chrobot-Mason, 2011) can be used as a method in which CoP’s could think about how to achieve common goals and recognise how institutional boundaries can be overcome by negotiation and consensus. What began with CoPs developed into the Forum for Improving the Student Digital Experience and the IT User Services Operating Group.

Digital transformation is all about the people, culture, environment and community. So much of what UAL needs to achieve in the near future and in a post-COVID-19 world is reliant on a clear and structured approach to IT and the digital. A way to illustrate how this was brokered is in Figure 3.

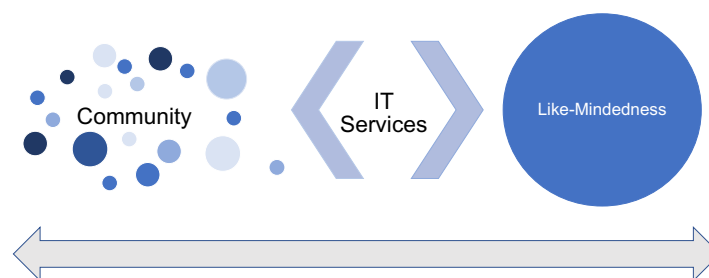


Figure 3. (Nottingham, 2020)

The development of a transitional plan is a good way to have a stepping stone approach to major strategic change rather than a sudden change which a complex organization would be de-stabilizing. So much of what UAL needs to achieve to maintain its leading global position is reliant on a clear and structured approach to the digital (Johnston et al., 2018). There is still much work to be done especially in how UAL as a community needs to enable and socially embed the principles of being digital and digitally teaching.

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Author Biographies



Jim Nottingham is the Chief Information Officer at the University of the Arts London (UAL). UAL consists of 6 world class Colleges of Art & Design, the Colleges include; Central St Martins, Camberwell College of Arts, Chelsea College of Arts, Wimbledon College of Arts, London College of Communications and the London College of Fashion UAL has over twenty-two thousand full-time students and over forty thousand part-time students.

Jim holds a BA(Hons) Fine Art Printmaking degree from Loughborough University and an MFA Terminal Degree which is equivalent to an EdD in Studio Art from Louisiana State University. Jim is a BCS Chartered IT Professional and an active Master Printer. Jim has over 35 years of experience of working in Higher Education in a number of different roles.



Dr Paula Nottingham is an experienced academic practitioner specialising in work-based learning within Higher Education. She is the Co-Programme Leader for a Degree Apprenticeship and supervises doctoral candidates for the Professional Doctorate at Middlesex University. Paula has professional

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