Digital revolution bypassing UK education

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Teaching and learning in the 21st century needs to be 'turbo-charged' by educational technology rather than using technologies designed for other purposes, according to a new report developed by the Technology-Enhanced Learning Research Programme (TEL) - a five-year research programme funded jointly by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

The report *System Upgrade: Realising the vision for UK Education* is the work of academics, industry and practitioners from across the UK. They warn that to prosper in the 21st century, people need to be confident digital collaborators and communicators, discerning users of the internet, and equipped with computational thinking skills such as understanding how to use and write the computer programs that underpin emails, searches and maps.

Enhancing learning through digital technology can make this happen and should be seen as an investment, not a cost, the researchers say. Without more support, UK schools will be left offering a largely analogue education in a digital world.

"The world is becoming increasingly digital. These technologies have transformed the way we work, communicate, bank, shop and play. But they have not yet transformed our education system," says Professor Richard Noss, director of the TEL Programme at the Institute of Education. "Education needs to catch up. The system needs to be upgraded. If it isn’t, our children and our country will fall seriously behind in the digital revolution. And when that happens we will find computers shaping us rather than us using them to shape the world," says Noss.

System Upgrade makes 12 recommendations with the potential to transform education's use of technology. They include developing virtual worlds to help disadvantaged students, using artificial intelligence to personalise learning, and putting computational thinking at the heart of the curriculum. Digital 'power tools' to help teachers create and share lessons are also on the TEL agenda.

"Schools need to engage the Xbox generation. They need to be able to take advantage of the innovative teaching methods and flexible learning environments that technology enhanced learning offers. Only then will they be able to teach their pupils the skills to enable them to succeed in the globalised, digital workplace," says Professor Noss.

System Upgrade will be launched by Lord Knight of Weymouth, a former Labour schools minister who has long been frustrated by the failure of digital technologies to transform education.

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