



# EdTech Impact Buyers' Guide 2023

From Bett and EdTech Impact

# How this guide will help you

We have created this EdTech Buyers' Guide to help you make the most of your Bett 2023 experience, and provide a systematic process for evaluating the EdTech solutions you meet.

The guide has been written by EdTech Impact - the intelligent marketplace for making smarter buying decisions.

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## Section 1

# Define your objective know your digital strategy

Before you even begin searching for technology solutions, it's important to first define the problem you want to solve. Have you identified a gap within your school's digital strategy? What specific outcomes are you aspiring to improve?

It's very easy to get drawn into conversations for tools that have minimal learning impact, but look fun or impressive. On EdTech Impact, we've mapped solutions against their impact (the outcomes they claim to improve), so that you can quickly filter to the ones that align to your needs. Here's our top-level taxonomy:

### Student outcomes

- Increase attainment
- Close attainment gap
- Build student knowledge
- Increase Student collaboration
- Improve student behaviour
- Improve student wellbeing
- Improve student employability
- Increase digital fluency

### Teacher outcomes

- Improve teacher knowledge transfer
- Improve teacher wellbeing
- Improve teacher efficiency
- Improve the quality of assessment and feedback
- Reduce teacher workload
- Increase digital fluency

### Organisational outcomes

- Save money
- Streamline product rosters
- Improve data and cyber security
- Provide school data
- Improve school processes
- Reduce duplication
- Improve parent engagement
- Embed cultural digitisation

### Tip

Every EdTech provider will tell you they can improve your outcomes. Ask them to be specific and explain to you how they arrived at their answer.

### A word of caution

Avoid the temptation to skip the research stage and jump straight to your favourite option. Poor planning has proven to be the achilles heel for many EdTech projects, leading to wasted money, decreased staff confidence, and another entry into the (virtual) cupboard of shame.

# Evaluate the impact

## Why might this solution work for your school?

The EdTech marketplace is competitive, with wild claims often made about a solution's effectiveness. It is up to you to examine whether these claims hold true.

### Type of evidence

#### Anecdotal evidence

Examples include users' views, testimonials and reflections. While this type of evidence is the easiest to obtain, it is also the weakest form of evidence as it is based solely on impressions and informal observations. Common sources include: blog posts, product endorsements, promotional videos, personal recommendations and reflections.

#### Descriptive evidence

Examples include surveys, case studies, interviews or observations. This type of evidence provides basic characterisation of trends and a snapshot of how things are at a specific time. Descriptive evidence is common to find in marketing materials and news articles, often in the form of graphs and charts.

#### Correlational evidence

This type of evidence can be used to establish relationships between two or more approaches and make predictions for the future. For example, a positive correlation between the use of an app and teachers' satisfaction levels means that one is positively related to the other. Correlation cannot be used to make inferences about one thing causing the other, but it can determine the direction of their relationship: for example, as the use of the app increases, so do teachers' satisfaction levels.

#### Causal evidence

Causal evidence measures whether one thing changes the other and the size of a change. For example, if teachers want to know whether children's increased test scores are attributable to technology use. Scientific methods such as experiments and randomised controlled trials (RCTs) can rule out alternative explanations for the observed change. Achieving this type of evidence is time-consuming and expensive because it involves manipulating natural events and creating an intervention. Nevertheless, if evidence is organised according to a hierarchy of "evidence quality", then causal studies with randomised controlled trials will be placed top.

Only 8%

of schools actually trust the claims made by suppliers. (Research by the EdTech Evidence Group, 2021)

Remember that different types of evidence work in different contexts and each type of study has certain limitations and biases. Evidence-aware educators must make the best possible pedagogical decisions for individual children based on several types and sources of evidence.

## The rise of peer reviews

Peer reviews have become a critical component in today's e-commerce world, revealing authentic insights into what it's like to be a customer, whether the product's performance is improving or declining over time, and how they rank against their competition.

EdTech Impact has published over 10,000 independent peer reviews on education technology solutions, capturing perceptions of impact and how solutions are being used in different contexts.

Awards are given to the top-rated solutions in different categories, and reviews can be filtered by school setting. After all, a review from a small school in the countryside may not be that helpful if you work in a large inner-city school!

## Record your own observations

While existing evidence will help you form an opinion of whether a solution might work, the next step is to put it to the test in your own environment. A useful way to do this is during a trial period.

You will want to collect feedback from a variety of users, and for as long as possible. If you're struggling for time, try recording these simple observations after each lesson:

- Does the solution support and stretch students of all levels?
- Does the solution tell me more than I knew before about a particular group of students?
- Does using the solution enhance my teaching?

### Trial Tip

Many suppliers will extend the trial period if you are willing to share your feedback with them. A win-win scenario.



# Check the small print

## What are you signing up to?

Before you sign any EdTech contract, ask yourself: ***“Am I 100% confident that I know what I’m signing up to?”*** No one enjoys reading contractual small print, but once the contract is signed, your options are limited. These are the common traps to be aware of:

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### Work out the total cost of ownership

The price of a car doesn't include road tax, insurance or your weekly visit to the petrol station. Technology is much the same: the upfront cost may not be the total cost.

The licence (subscription) cost is only one element of the total cost of ownership. Avoid future budgeting issues by being aware of the hidden costs, such as:

- Maintenance fees
- Staff training
- Ongoing support
- Device compatibility
- Product lifespan (if you're buying hardware)

2

### Free still comes with a cost

If you're considering opting for a free, freemium or very cheap solution, ask yourself the paradoxical question: “free at what cost?”

Free solutions tend to be self-service, and rarely come with account management support or training. Be prepared to invest a lot of your own time learning how to use it. Consider how much time this takes from your day.

Be mindful that it can often be your personal data that you are selling. A good example is Facebook, where your data is used to sell third-party advertising.

“We found a free Maths solution in the hope it would help our department, but staff were spending so much time getting their heads around it, it began eating into time they could have been using for lesson planning. After 2 terms we pulled the plug having never fully used it.”



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## Training and support package

Technology doesn't always work first time, and often its success is dependent on the training and support provided.

Be aware of your options. Of the 2000 solutions listed on EdTech Impact, their training and support typically falls into 8 buckets:

- Live online training
- Email / helpdesk
- FAQs / forums
- Group webinars
- Telephone
- Knowledge Base
- In-person training
- Live chat

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## Contract considerations

A growing trend is for suppliers to offer you a 3 year contract. This isn't inherently good or bad, but there are a few things you should consider before agreeing to a long term commitment.

### Have you used the solution before?

If this is your first time, be absolutely sure this is the right solution for you. 3 years can be expensive to get out of.

### Consider requesting a break clause.

Inserting a break clause into the contract is a good way to protect yourself, and gives you the flexibility to end the contract early should the solution fail to deliver upon the agreed outcomes.

### Negotiate a bigger discount.

Many suppliers publicly offer a 5-10% discount for multi-year contracts. If you're happy to proceed, look to negotiate a better price.

### Cancellation procedures.

It is commonplace for contracts to stipulate that you must give them 90 days notice that you intend to cancel, otherwise the contract will automatically renew for another year. In some cases, suppliers stipulate a 180 day notice period. That is 6 months and might easily catch you out, so do read the fine print.

"In the demonstrations, the product looked great and we were told it was easy to set up. After 6 months it wasn't fully up and running and we weren't happy so we decided to find a different solution. When I spoke to the supplier, there was no option to cancel early. We ended up paying for 3 years for something we only used for six months."



# Privacy-by-design and quality benchmarks to look out for

One would assume that all EdTech is compliant with robust policies in place, but this isn't always the case. Moreover, even with data privacy impact assessments (DPIAs), cybersecurity risks, exploitative data practices, poor ethics, algorithmic bias, accessibility requirements and other issues will not be flagged. Dig deeper by asking these questions:

Look out for the EDDS audit certification across all benchmarks for your peace of mind.

## 1 Matters of cybersecurity

- What security controls are implemented internally and externally?
- What controls are implemented that underpin GDPR and other data privacy measures?
- What are the functionalities the product provides? Does it require a webcam, chat, and enables access to third-party apps or content?
- Does it provide interoperability (what data standards are used) and is the product simply 'plug and play'?
- Does the solution allow for single sign-on?
- Does it integrate seamlessly with the school MIS/SIS?

## 2 Data responsibility

- Is the solution GDPR-compliant?
- Is it clear who is the data controller?
- What data does the solution have access to, collect and process?
- Is there any secondary use, sharing and computation throughout its lifecycle?

## 3 Know the student

- How does the solution address school complaints?
- Is there a one-stop for a student/teacher to request for help?
- What provisions does the solution offer for redress?



## 4 Ethical trust

- What is the vendor's awareness of cultural distinction? Is their solution 'one size fits all'?
- Is ethics integrated at the design stage (e.g., is your participation as a stakeholder considered at any stage of the solution)?

## 5 Algorithmic fairness

- What is the computational complexity used by the provider if their solution deploys algorithmic computation?
- On what datasets are its algorithms trained?

## 6 Human resources

- Who are the individuals behind the product?
- What is their culture and ethos with regards to delivering child-centred products?

## 7 Duty of care

- Is the provider displaying clear information about its audit certifications (e.g., such as on any of the above, or GDPR compliance, Edtech Impact pedagogical assessment, and others)?
- Is the provider clearly displaying age use for which its services are intended?
- Is there any transparency or guidelines provided on screen time use?

## 8 Digital accessibility

- Does the solution support SEN/EAL?
- How does the solution adapt to support different types of SEN/EAL learners?
- What accessibility principles does the solution implement?
- What accessibility features such as screen readers, text-to-speech and audio options does the solution provide?

## 9 Age-Appropriate Design Code (AADC)

- Is there a clear display that the EdTech provider adheres to any or all parts of the AADC or other privacy-by-design guidelines?
- Are the solutions' policies written in an age-appropriate language so that its intended user can understand without difficulty?

### Did you know?

25% of EdTech suppliers don't have a visible Privacy Policy on their website! (EdTech Impact market analysis - 2021)

# Key questions to ask solution providers

## 1. What evidence do you have that your product works?

Ask the supplier to show you their evidence portfolio. Some will claim a large impact on students. What evidence do they have to back up their numbers? Did they collaborate with schools and research teams to develop and test their solutions? Check if they have conducted any studies of their product before launch. Perhaps an external research team evaluated the impact of their technology on student outcomes. The more studies, links to published papers, established kitemarks, certificates or awards they have in their evidence portfolio, the more you can be sure that they care about evidence.

## 2. How does the product meet cyber security standards?

What reassurance can the supplier give that its service is reliable and resilient to technical failures, security attacks and third-party failures if it uses third-party sources of content, data, intellectual property or software? Before Bett, speak to your DPO about GDPR requirements for new products and what they would need to approve their use. DPOs would be delighted if company websites clearly signposted the following types of content: template processor agreement, EULAs, list of sub-processors, details of data transfers outside the EU (safeguards and risk assessments), how they meet the requirements of the age appropriate design code and to be happy to complete due diligence questionnaires and contribute to DPIAs. Satisfied DPOs approve things faster! Data Managers will also want to know what data is processed and how it is being used. Is a direct upload via CSV required or will the product integrate with data integration tools? Be aware that it's the school's responsibility to check this and not take it for granted.

## 3. Does the product support SEN/EAL students?

How does the product adapt to support different types of SEN/EAL students so that opportunities are as inclusive as possible? Can you describe/demonstrate what this looks like? Look out for accessibility features, screen readers, text-to-speech and audio options. How will this solution help to narrow any attainment gap?

## 4. What is your sustainability strategy?

Every school is required to develop a sustainability action plan by 2025. Ask suppliers what their sustainability strategy is and how that fits with the lifespan of devices and replaceable parts. Especially in the current climate, find out what they are doing as a company, and how their product might fit into your sustainability strategy (think reduction in printing costs, less duplication of work, power usage).

## 5. Does the product integrate with other EdTech?

Does the product link with existing products you are using in school? For example, products like Thinglink, Book Creator and Mote all link seamlessly with Canva. This direct linking can reduce cognitive overload in terms of familiar user experiences as well as allowing more cross-channel usage of content without having to sign in and out of various products and reformatting to fit.

## **6. How long is the free trial?**

Many products offer 1 month free trials, but it's worth asking if you can extend this to at least 3 months. Anything shorter is rarely long enough to build a full picture of use and potential. Find out what you will lose access to if you don't continue after the trial and what will remain. Some products revert back to their free package at the end of a trial period and any created content is no longer accessible. This can be problematic for pupils wanting to access earlier work, let alone wasted time for teachers who have spent time preparing resources.

## **7. How do you support us with the trial?**

Don't be afraid to ask. Key considerations include staff training, troubleshooting and implementation support. When your trial ends, decisions will be based on evaluating the product's impact, so don't be afraid to ask the supplier how to evaluate their product and what KPIs they would recommend. It's fine to expect the suppliers to be proactive.

## **8. How do you support long term implementation?**

Be honest about your CPD calendar. If it's already set, and the likelihood of getting the school leaders to give up more than an hour of CPD time is slim, be up front about this and discuss other possibilities. Enquire about on-demand training and 'open deep dives' for users who want to learn. These might be webinars, YouTube Lives, monthly video calls or online accredited mini-courses to upskill and inspire users. Ask if the product is being used in nearby schools, or by someone else in your Trust, so you can learn about their implementation experience.

## **9. How does the freemium offer work?**

Many products offer a free package to teachers where you 'earn' additional feature access for recommendations and new user sign ups that you generate. This can be great, but it depends on your reach. You need to consider if you will convert enough adopters to 'earn' what is being offered. Freemium packages can be useful for testing and trialling products amongst colleagues in order to obtain evidence to back a larger pilot.

## **10. How is the price calculated?**

Many EdTech products are priced based on the 'number of pupils on roll' in your school. Depending on your circumstances, this may not be right for you. Explore the possibility of different package levels based on active users or seats. Find out if seats are fixed or if it's possible to reassign at any time. Newer products can be more flexible with pricing compared to more mature companies that operate at scale.

**When talking to Solution Providers, try to cut through the jargon and establish how much they know about their products. If they can't answer all of your questions there and then, don't be afraid to ask for a follow-up.**

**Insist on having your questions answered before making any commitment.**

# Glossary of commonly used terms

AADC	Age-Appropriate Design Code - 15 standards that online services need to follow. This ensures they are complying with their obligations under data protection law to protect children's data online.
Active User	Account holders who are actively using the product.
Account Holder	Account holder but not an active user (potentially wasting a seat/money)
AI	Artificial Intelligence - computer systems performing tasks normally requiring human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages.
Digital Transformation	The integration of digital technology into all aspects of the educational experience, including teaching and learning, and school operations. It can facilitate collaboration and communication, improve access to education, and allow for greater flexibility and individualised tailoring of the learning experience.
DPO	Data Protection Officer - the person ultimately responsible for data protection in your organisation.
Freemium	A free version of a product but with limited features.
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations - a legal framework for keeping everyone's personal data safe by requiring companies to have robust processes in place for handling and storing personal information.
KPI	Key Performance Indicator - a metric used by suppliers to measure the success of the product.
MFA/2FA	Multi/2 Factor Authentication - an additional layer of account security to protect your account and your data.
MIS Integration	Live data is drawn directly from your school's Management Information System - also known as School Information Management System.
ML	Machine Learning - computer systems that are able to learn and adapt without following explicit instructions, by using algorithms and statistical models to analyse and draw inferences from patterns in data.

# Glossary

## of commonly used terms

AADC	Age-Appropriate Design Code - 15 standards that online services need to follow. This ensures they are complying with their obligations under data protection law to protect children's data online.
NIST, IASME/Cyber Essentials, DfE cybersecurity standards	International standards and guidelines on cybersecurity measures for organisations. Most EdTech suppliers do not adhere to such guidelines, so schools should request to see evidence that appropriate cybersecurity measures are put in place.
NOR	Number of pupils on roll - often used for pricing structures.
OS	Operating System - many products are web-based and available on any device but some may be specific to Windows, Mac or Chrome devices.
SaaS	Software as a service - software licensing and delivery model in which software is licensed on a subscription basis and is centrally hosted. SaaS is also known as "on-demand software" and web-based/web-hosted software.
SSO	Single Sign On - enables users to sign in using credentials from an existing system rather than a separate login e.g. Google or Microsoft account.
UI	User Interface - the screens, buttons, toggles, icons, and other visual elements that you interact with when using a website or app.
UX	User Experience - the entire interaction you have with a product, including how you feel about the interaction.
WCAG	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines - an international standard that guides companies that provide online products and services on how to make digital content more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

## Section 6

# Credits

For further reading, visit:

[edtechimpact.com](https://edtechimpact.com)

[bettshow.com](https://bettshow.com)

### With thanks

This guide was created by EdTech Impact and Bett, with thanks to the following collaborators:

**Dr Velislava Hillman, EDDS**

[www.edds-education.org](https://www.edds-education.org)

**James Garnett, United Learning**

[@jamesmgarnett](https://twitter.com/jamesmgarnett)

**Professor Natalia I. Kucirkova, WiKIT AS**

[www.wikit.no](https://www.wikit.no)

**Dr Neelam Parmar, E-Act & Harrow International AISL**

[@neelamaparmar1](https://twitter.com/neelamaparmar1)

**Daren White, Academies Enterprise Trust**

[@Ranga\\_EDU](https://twitter.com/Ranga_EDU)

**Emma Darcy, Chiltern Learning Trust**

[@darcyprior](https://twitter.com/darcyprior)





● A Hyve Event

London  
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