

Service Comparisons

A large part of my current project involves looking at other companies or services that offer Jupyter notebooks. The University has decided that it wants to provide notebooks but we also have to justify creating our own service. If there is something else that does what we need is it worth making our own version of it?

With this in mind, I have been creating a shortlist of services that are comparable and also drawing up a list of criteria to compare.

Here is the list of services:

Microsoft Azure Notebooks

Google Colaboratory

CoCalc

Anaconda Enterprise

And here's a list of the criteria against which they will be compared:

Pricing (how much do they charge and how do they charge it, what do you get access to when you pay, is there a free tier etc.)

Technical Specifications (e.g. RAM, CPU cores, Storage)

Extensions Available (e.g. nbgrader, RISE)

Supported Languages (There are many varied use cases throughout the university so how do we make sure all are supported, how quickly does the service add requested kernels.)

Focus/Audience (e.g. Azure is focused on Machine Learning,

Google Colab is focused on collaborative programming)

Business Model (e.g. Azure is currently in a preview stage and may not be continued)

Community (This includes using the community as a measure of sector involvement and also how quickly the service administrators respond to feature requests or issues)

This comparison will take place over the summer and then I will publish our results. This is all about making sure that we are providing the best service that suits the needs of our users.

If you have anything you would like to add or think we have left any service or criteria out then let me know.

Noteable's place in the City Region Deal

Heard of the City Region Deal for Edinburgh? No?! Well go check it out now, I'll wait here for you.

City Region Deal Homepage

Interesting right? Well, I managed to gather some more information recently from one of the launch events currently making their way around the University. After you've gotten over the astounding £1.1bn investment there are some even more intriguing numbers on display. The one that I am mostly drawn to is the target to produce 100,000 students with a formal certification in Data Science related skills. Thankfully this is spread out over 15 years and is also shared with Heriot-Watt University but this is still a very significant

commitment.

This doesn't mean that we will become a factory churning out Data Scientists but it does mean that many of our students will leave with some amount of training and understanding of data science and the associated digital skills which Edinburgh and the wider world demands. Integrating key data science skills into a wide variety of areas of study means that more students will be equipt to compete in a digital world and we can also help to create new data initiatives based on the varied insights of our students.

There is also a social side to this deal which means that the benefits are not confined to the University but to the wider region both in terms of the economic benefit of new or improved businesses but also providing digital skills training to the public to further help drive the digital economy of the area.

So where does the Noteable service come into all this? The Noteable service provides a platform for learning how to programme and manipulate data. This platform is especially helpful for introducing students and learners to the basic concepts of a language quickly as it doesn't need any pre-install. It may be a small cog in a very big machine but it shows that the University of Edinburgh is committed to helping to develop digital skills by providing such a platform. As well as supporting teaching 'in-house' the service is also well geared towards introductory courses for the public as it requires little setup or programming knowledge beforehand.

All I need to do now is find some willing instructors.....

If you have any ideas on how you could become involved in the City Region Deal then the official advice is to contact your Head of School however if you are planning on using Noteable then let me know – james.slack@ed.ac.uk