Getting certified. The ins and outs of "CMALT" – the ALT certified membership scheme for learning technologists

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Overview of session

Aims for this session

This session has four main aims, namely to:

- explain the origins of the CMALT scheme;
- familiarise you with CMALT as it now stands;
- outline how ALT intends to take CMALT forward over the next 6 – 12 months;
- obtain feedback from you on what we plan to do.

A note about process

I decided that a short narrative document might be more useful to participants than the customary PowerPoint presentation alone. Depending on numbers present it would be good to get colleagues to introduce themselves. I am happy to take interruptions while I speak, and there will be plenty of time for questions and discussion. The session will take the time it takes rather than, necessarily, the full hour. I am also happy to take comments by email after this conference is over, or on the buff-coloured feedback sheets provided. ALT contact details are on page 4, with relevant URLs in footnotes. If you would like to be kept informed about CMALT developments, please put your details on one of the sheets which are being passed round.

About ALT

Aims

Formed as a Registered Charity in 1993, ALT is a professional and scholarly association which seeks to bring together all those with an interest in the use of learning technology. We aim to:

- promote good practice in the use of learning technology in education and industry;
- represent the members in areas of policy;
- facilitate collaboration between practitioners, researchers, and policy makers.

Activities

We organise:

- ALT-C, which is the UK's main conference for learning technologists - our 2005 conference will be here in Manchester between 6 and 8 September[1];
- occasional conferences on topics of interest to learning-technology practitioners, for example our 2004 joint ALT-SURF Spring Conference and Research Seminar *Living & learning: ePortfolios and digital repositories*[2], or the Annual Open Day of the Lab Group Special Interest Group;
- visits and exchanges – for example ALT members took part in an exchange to visit colleges and universities in the Netherlands, 7-11 April 2003, with support from SURF Educatief (roughly the Dutch equivalent of JISC), and the DfES;
- regular workshops – for example on Moodle, accessibility, and learning object design;
- an annual Policy Board – for example at our 2003 meeting the Secretary of State for Education and Skills launched the DfES's e-learning strategy consultation, and at our 2004 meeting, at HP Labs in Bristol, we consulted on our soon-to-be-published policy on learning technology research.

We produce:

- regular and influential responses to consultations relating to learning technology and e-learning[3];

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[1] http://www.alt.ac.uk/altc2005/

[2] http://www.alt.ac.uk/docs/ALT-SURFseminar_April_2004.pdf

- a fortnightly members' email digest;
- an international peer-reviewed journal devoted to research and good practice in the use of learning technologies, ALT-J;
- a quarterly Newsletter, ALT-N;
- publications aimed at practitioners, sometimes produced in conjunction with other organisations.

Organisation

We have been growing fast in the last 2 years. Over 100 Universities, over 70 FE Colleges, are around 40 commercial and Government organisations are members, along with around 500 individuals[4]. Our office, with 4 staff, is in Oxford at Oxford Brookes University. I work from home in Sheffield. 4 practitioner committees (Further Education, Membership, Events, and Publications) reporting to the Central Executive, decide ALT's policy and direction.

"Learning technology" and "learning technologist"

ALT understands learning technology as the systematic application of a body of knowledge to the design, implementation and evaluation of teaching and learning. The body of knowledge, the fruit of research and practice, is based on principles of learning theory, instructional design and change management, but is grounded in an understanding of the underlying technologies and their capabilities. Thus:

- *learning technology* is the use of a broad range of communication, information, and related technologies to support learning and teaching;
- *learning technologists* apply learning technology in practice and/or do research into learning technology.

A very wide range of people in industry and in private and public sector education have learning technology as a core part of their role: **you do not have to be called or to call yourself a learning technologist to be one!**

Origins of CMALT

2003 membership survey

Every couple of years ALT surveys its membership by means of a web-based questionnaire covering different aspects of what we do. Members (organisational and individual) responded to the 2003 questionnaire with solid support for the development of "a simple, economical, voluntary, peer-based structure to accredit individual members as Learning Technologists, in collaboration with HE, FE, and industry bodies".

Feasibility and development study

Later in 2003 we secured a £30k grant from JISC to take forward work to establish an accreditation scheme, with key features of the project as follows.

Steering Group

Ross Walker (Immersive Education), Victoria Eaton (Higher Education Academy), Lesley Hawkins (JISC), Markos Tiris (LSDA), Claire Killen (Becta/FERL), Jay Dempster and Seb Schmoller (ALT).

Tendering

In August 2003 we issued an Invitation to Tender[5] for consultants to assist us in developing a scheme. Flowing from this we awarded a contract to a team[6] led by Martin Oliver from University College London (now at the Institute of Education)

Work programme

Martin's team began work in November 2003, and their final report was presented in July 2004[7]. The team's work covered the following ground, leading up to a final report summarising the CMALT scheme.

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[3] http://www.alt.ac.uk/documents.html

[4] http://www.alt.ac.uk/corporate_members.php

[5] http://www.alt.ac.uk/docs/ALT_accred_ITT_final.pdf

[6] Julia Duggleby (The Sheffield College), Aileen Earle (Collaboranda), Richard Francis (Oxford Brookes University), Gwyneth Hughes (University of East London), David Jennings (DJ Alchemi Ltd), David Kay (FD Learning Ltd), Martin Oliver (University College London), Rhona Sharpe(Oxford Brookes University).

[7] All the project deliverables can be found here: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/epd/alt-accreditation/

- Literature and scheme review.
- Discussion with, ILTHE, Becta, IITT, etc about the operation of overlapping and abutting schemes.
- Setting up focus groups with categories of potential beneficiaries of / stakeholders in the scheme from HE, FE, and e-learning content developers.
- Producing scheme options identifying for each: costings; strengths and weaknesses; operational issues; inter-organisational interface issues.
- Organising a consultation exercise with a wide range of stakeholders, which will inform ALT's choice of option.
- For the chosen option, setting the scheme up on a small-scale pilot basis.
- Reviewing the pilot, finalising the scheme, and producing all documentation associated with the scheme.

CMALT scheme

Underlying basis

Whereas individuals and organisations can join ALT irrespective of the nature of their work or activities, CMALT will be available to individuals who are individual members of ALT and who achieve certification against the requirements of the scheme.

Process

Applicants supply evidence in a portfolio.

Two assessors assess the portfolio: one nominated by the applicant, and one appointed by ALT.

(The pilot scheme used simple portfolio based on a simple text-processed document. By the time we launch the CMALT it will use a web-based system both for portfolio creation, assessment, and maintenance.)

Principles and values

The central tenet of the scheme is the definition of learning technology agreed within ALT. The other principles and values that inform the scheme are as follows.

- A commitment to exploring and understanding the interplay between technology and learning.
- A commitment to keep up to date with new technologies.
- An empathy with and willingness to learn from colleagues from different backgrounds and specialisms.
- A commitment to communicate and disseminate effective practice.

Core and specialist area(s)

Evidence is required under *Core areas of work*, and *Specialist option(s)*.

Core areas of work

1. **Operational issues.** Applicants should demonstrate both their understanding and use of learning technology. 'Use' might include the development, adaptation or application of technology within teaching, training or the support of learning more generally. This should include evidence of:

a) an understanding of the constraints and benefits of different technology;

b) technical knowledge and ability in the use of learning technology;

c) supporting the deployment of learning technologies.

2. **Teaching, learning and/or assessment processes.** Applicants should demonstrate their understanding of and engagement with teaching, learning and assessment processes. 'Engagement' may include using understanding to inform the development, adaptation or application of technology. This should include evidence of:

a) an understanding of teaching, learning and/or assessment processes;

b) an understanding of your target learners.

3. **The wider context.** Applicants should demonstrate their awareness of and engagement with wider issues that inform their practice. This should include evidence of:

a) understanding and engaging with legislation, policies and standards.

4. **Communication.** Applicants should demonstrate their knowledge and skills in communication either through working with others or through interface design. This should include evidence of either (a) or (b).

a) Working with others.

b) Interface between human and technical systems.

Specialist option(s)

As well as the core areas, applicants are required to demonstrate evidence of independent practice in one or more specialist options. Examples of specialist options include:

- producing learning materials/content/courseware;
- project management, including resource management;
- training, mentoring and developing others;
- evaluating projects;
- research;
- designing tools and systems;
- institutional development/strategic work;
- knowledge and application of standards and specifications for learning technology;
- assistive technologies;
- VLE administration and maintenance;
- interface design;
- managing and sourcing content;
- copyright.

Taking CMALT forward

ALT will be implementing CMALT over the next 6 months. Portfolio software to support CMALT is being developed within *Petal*, a JISC-funded *e-Learning Tools*[8] project led by Oxford Brookes University. Petal will produce, by March 2005:

- a general e-Portfolio Tool based on the Open Source Portfolio Initiative[9];
- an implementation of CMALT within the General e-Portfolio tool.

Some other aspects of the development (including interface design, further piloting, dialogue with Skillset[10]) are being part-funded under the South Yorkshire e-Learning Programme. We intend to launch CMALT fully during April 2005, with an initial review of the scheme's operation in Autumn 2005, and a full review in Autumn 2006. Meanwhile a range of implementation issues remain to be settled. These include:

- cost;
- encouraging organisations which employ learning technologists to begin to identify CMALT in recruitment specifications;
- dovetailing with the wide range of existing and emerging courses, qualifications, programmes, membership schemes, competency frameworks;
- re-certification frequency – our current view is that this should happen every three years.

Finally we will soon be deciding whether and if yes how to extend CMALT to include a "higher" level of membership, i.e. some sort of Fellowship scheme.

Contact details

ALT: http://www.alt.ac.uk/

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[8] http://www.jisc.ac.uk/etools.html

[9] http://www.theospi.org/

[10] Skillset is the Sector Skills Council for Audio Visual Industries (broadcast, film, video, interactive media and photo imaging), which recently began its Consultation on the first draft of the Interactive Media National Occupational Standards.