

ASSOCIATION FOR LEARNING TECHNOLOGY NEWSLETTER

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HEFCE's E-learning Strategy

LIZ FRANCO

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has developed a 10-year strategy to integrate e-learning into higher education. This 'HEFCE strategy for e-learning' is intended to enable all universities and colleges to make the best use of information and communications technologies in their learning and teaching. It reflects responses to the consultation on our draft strategy and has been developed jointly with the Higher Education Academy and the Joint Information Systems Committee.

Funding

Around £31 million in capital funding will be available to higher education institutions to support investment in e-learning. Allocations are listed in Circulator Letter 05/2005 which is available on the HEFCE website. A further two million pounds will be allocated to support e-learning in directly funded further education colleges. Also a total of eight million pounds will fund 'pathfinder' projects which aim to embed e-learning in institutions individually or through collaboration, and to provide case studies.

Background

In the White Paper 'The future of higher education' the Government asked us to work to embed e-learning in a full and sustainable way within the next 10 years. The Government's own strategy (Harnessing Technology: Transforming learning and children's services, March 2005) provides the context for our work. We believe that innovation and the enhancement of quality in the learning experience, to support more diverse student and employer needs, will be significant factors in higher education in the next decade. This is reflected in our strategic plan. As part of this focus, we want to take a strategic view of different approaches to learning and teaching.

Related Websites

Circulator Letter 05/2005 at:
www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/circlets/2005/cl05_05/
Consultation on the draft strategy at:
www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/circlets/2003/cl21_03.htm
HEFCE strategy for e-learning at:
www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05_12
HEFCE Strategic Plan at:
www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2004/04_17/
The White Paper 'The future of higher education' at:
www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/strategy/hestrategy/foreword.shtml
The UK Government's strategy at:
www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/e-strategy/

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Delegates at the Spring Conference in Dublin enjoyed a veritable hothouse of ideas, exploring e-portfolios, digital repositories and ubiquitous computing. On Thursday evening many took a well-earned break at the Cafe en Seine (left) before resuming work at the research seminar on Friday. Reports from the seminar will be published in July. Presentation slides are available at www.alt.ac.uk/conferences.php

Photo: Eline Noorbergen, Leiden University.



'IT won't work here' - Lifelong learning

GILL FERRELL

Following the success of our event, "When Worlds Collide", last year jointly organised by JISC infoNet/ALT/UCISA, we were keen to collaborate further. We have found that joint working brings together communities that do not often get the chance to network with one another and that differences in approach and perception can lead to some interesting discussions. We chose the title 'IT won't work here' for a seminar on the theme of lifelong learning. The premise behind the title being that technology is the easy part and there are many other issues to be addressed if we are to make lifelong learning a reality. The format of the day was designed to encourage the maximum amount of interactivity and discussion.

The venue set the tone for the day: the Orange Studio in Birmingham is designed to encourage creativity. The registration desk is a fish tank and all of the rooms have inspiring names and quotations on the walls such as 'Open: minds are like parachutes - they only work when open'. Our seventy-six delegates were from further and higher education and involved in the support of learning technology, learning resources and management information systems. We began the day by asking four speakers from very different backgrounds to outline their perspectives on how we were overcoming the 'IT won't work here' attitude with regard to lifelong learning.

Chris Cobb from the London School of Economics and Political Science started with an Orwellian vision of how far from our high ideals the reality of lifelong learning could have become. As a member of the Working Party on MIAP (Managing Information Across Partners) Chris had the job of negotiating with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department for Work and Pensions or, as they came to be known,



Rhonda Riachi from ALT and Gill Ferrell from JISCinfoNet

the Ministry of Love and the Ministry of Truth, to ensure a sensible approach to information exchange resulting in the development of a Unique Learner Number (ULN). His final verdict on the project was that 'All's Well' rather than Orwellian and that during 2006 MIAP will deliver improved services to learners by improving the way in which data is collected, stored and shared.

Doug Gowan, Chief Executive of the educational charity, the Open Learning Partnership, outlined his experience of delivering union education online for the Trades Union Congress (TUC). The project delivered short modular courses (typically 30-60 hours). Working throughout the United Kingdom they had to deal with a range of issues relating to the divergence of the education systems in the four home countries. Doug ended his session on a similarly totalitarian note with a quotation from Chairman Mao 'You've got to stand for something or you'll fall for anything'.

Tony Toole continued by discussing the development of the Wales e-Training Network covering all further and higher educational institutions in Wales. He gave his views on the structures, processes and procedures that serve as barriers to achieving the full potential of e-learning and lifelong learning. In particular he noted the lack of flexibility in the traditional academic cycle and some of his suggestions for change included scrapping the notion of the academic year, increased home working and performance related pay.

Finally we heard from Bob Sharpe from the University of Plymouth who talked about the JISC funded SHELL (South West Hosts Enhancing Lifelong Learning) Project. The Project achieved single registration for students and rapid transfer of data across the partner institutions. They also achieved a real understanding of just how difficult a task this is. SHELL grew out of an established consortium but nonetheless faced a number of cultural issues both within organisations and across the sectors. Not least of these was an unequal relationship between further and higher education.

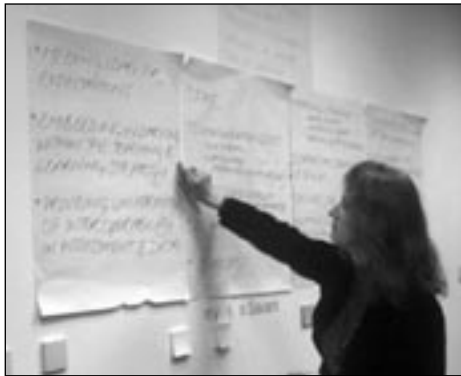


Sal Cooke of TechDis opposing the motion

Mark Stiles defending the motion



A panel formed to answer audience questions - this was indeed a lively session and at one point during the morning matters had to be calmed down by the judicious timing of a fire alarm test. There were no serious injuries during the session but Tony Toole had to cope with a barrage of questions. We continued with a debate on the motion that 'Joining up learning across organisations is for the benefit of the institutions/government and not the learner.' Mark Stiles of Staffordshire University gave a staunch defence of the motion with Sal Cooke of TechDis opposing the motion, including bribing the audience with a plate of chocolate muffins!



Participants select their three topics

Following lunch we broke into groups for a Think Tank session. Each of the groups was asked to identify at least three areas to be addressed to ensure effective and successful collaboration between further and higher education on e-learning and to find some practical examples of steps that can be taken to address the issues. There was much heated discussion about approaches, terminology, funding, culture and a range of other issues but each

of the groups managed to find some examples. The top three topics chosen by each group were collated into a giant voting chart and each delegate had six votes to apportion as they wished. The key issues identified were staff development, embedding and aligning to learning and teaching strategies, meeting learner expectations and communication/cultural change. Fending off allegations of vote rigging aimed at all of the major players involved, Paul Bailey focussed on the positive energy generated during the day and the sound ideas to be taken forward. Further information

about the discussions and the outcomes will be available shortly on the JISC infoNet website: www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk.

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Director's corner

ALT-C 2005 registration

Authors will receive news about the status of their submissions in May. All authors must register by 10 June; the early bird rate expires on 30 June (see back page for details).

Nominations for vacancies

There will be 3 vacancies for the Central Executive Committee to be elected at the AGM in Manchester this September: the Vice-Chair and two Trustee positions. Nominators should complete the form on the website or contact me for more details (rriachi@brookes.ac.uk).

New Publications Executive members

We are delighted to welcome three new deputy editors for ALT-N who will help us bring the online version into existence in July:

Graham McElearn, Sheffield University

Morag Munro, Dublin City University

Julie Voce, University College London.

In addition, **Peter Sloep**, Open University of the Netherlands, will assist **Gayle Calverley** with Occasional Publications. The Chair of the Publications Executive is **Paul Bacsich**, Middlesex University.

ALT-C 2006 co-chair

We are seeking a co-chair to work with **Prof Ron Oliver** for ALT-C 2006. The venue next year is Edinburgh, a welcome return to Scotland for ALT-C. For more details about co-chairing please contact me. Deadline for applications: **Thursday 12 May**. A call for committee members will go out when the co-chair has been confirmed.

ALT-J online

If your organisation is a member of ALT you should be reading ALT-J online. If not, contact **Marion O'Dea** to activate your access (marionodea@brookes.ac.uk).

JORUM steering group

I have been invited to serve on the JORUM steering committee. JORUM will set up a repository service for all Further and Higher Education Institutions in the United Kingdom, providing access to materials and encouraging the sharing, re-use and re-purposing of them between teaching staff. For more information go to www.jorum.ac.uk/

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Developments in the ALT Research Strategy

JOHN SLATER

The ALT research strategy, launched in 2004, has recently been updated. In the interim a number of other strategies and related roadmaps for eLearning (eL) or Learning Technology (LT) research have appeared. These include work of the Research Councils, the JISC and of the eLRC. There are also major strategic documents from DfES and from HEFCE (see page 1). It is pleasing to note that the ALT strategy has proved congruent with all of these although different emphases and priorities are inevitably placed on themes and actions by different bodies.

At the heart of the ALT overall philosophy is the importance of research and that this research should underpin the effective deployment of technology in support of the learning process in further and higher education. ALT believes there to be an ongoing requirement to bring together researchers, practitioners, developers and budget holders in order to ensure effective deployment. Only in this way can the “embedding” of eL, sought by the funders, be achieved.

Much research in LT has been accused of being irrelevant or failing to address the problems facing practitioners. Whilst some of this criticism is well founded, the majority stems from the inevitable abstraction and choice of language of researchers and also from a lack of understanding of institutional contexts. Our strategy attempts to put research questions in a form and language to which institutional management will relate whilst still allowing the other groups to identify their work as being included.

One argument for a growing maturity of any research area is the widening of the gap between leading edge research and industry practice. For this to be defined there has to be an agreed set of knowledge, values and skills that are used by practitioners and are grounded in research. That is addressed directly by other ALT strategies but is key to understanding the research one. The current LT state is that a gap is beginning to appear but is still essentially narrow suggesting a rather immature area.

Relationship between Technology and Learning

It is tempting to view the relation between learning and technology as one that is led either by technology or

learning. It is equally tempting to view teacher centric learning (eTeaching) as essentially technology led and learner centric learning (eLearning) as primarily pedagogy led. Whilst modern literature strongly favours a constructivist approach and LT can help support that, technology cannot be assumed to completely follow pedagogy. It is unhelpful (and common) to design structures that cannot be delivered by the technologies and within the resources available.

The eleven generic questions are:

1. How do we make learning reusable?
2. How do we integrate new systems into existing environments?
3. How do we deliver a personalised experience within a mass system?
4. How do we deliver to an increasingly global, diverse set of learners?
5. How do we make learning opportunities fairer?
6. How do we ensure a good completion rate for the learning?
7. How do we devise and utilise appropriate diagnostic, formative and summative assessment?
8. How do we ensure cost effective efficient learning?
9. How do we build in quality assurance support?
10. How do we ensure student control of the learning?
11. How do we harness informal technology based learning to support formal learning?

ALT asserts that there is genuine interplay between pedagogy and technology. New technologies should cause thought as to whether they can help if they are sensibly deployed. New pedagogical work should cause thought about resources and technologies that facilitate deployment. Learning Technology research should focus on the relation (in a formal sense) between learning and technology. It is essentially a new area of study at the join of Education and Computer Science.

Eleven Overarching Questions

Given a relationship between two sets each of which varies with time, standard technique suggests identifying aspects of the relation that are constant - are there ongoing enquiries that are independent of both pedagogy or technology? The ALT strategy identifies eleven such but there may be others (see inset).

Any given piece of research will address one or more of these questions in a situation of specific learning and technology. We suggest that the principles and techniques used will also be largely independent of that placing and form the basis of the skills and knowledge that practitioners need.

As an example of how the questions map onto a core set of principles, values, and techniques that themselves can form the basis of practitioner accreditation, we take the example of reusability. Principles here include the need for the definition and appropriate use of standards, the need for consistent user models, and embedded support for customisation and revision. Techniques include evaluation of similar attempts at reuse, formal testing in a variety of situations, and the definition and use of key personnel. This is a key area where research and development need to work in tandem to prevent the development of standards that

nobody wants to use. For institutions reusability needs a context: full reusability is still only glimpsed by the pure.

The full strategy can be found on the ALT website through www.alt.ac.uk/documents.html.

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Seb's review

SEB SCHMOLLER

New members for ALT's Further Education Advisory Committee. Following the recent open call, 6 additional people have been invited to join the ALT FE Advisory Committee (FEAC), which is now chaired by Cathy Ellis, Vice Principal of Brooklands College in Surrey. (Kevin Palmer, who chaired FEAC from its inception in 2003, stood down at the beginning of this year.) FEAC's membership is now as follows.

- Christine McAllister - Blackpool and the Fylde College.
- Stephen Brown - ALT President.
- David Dyet - Reid Kerr College, Paisley.
- Cathy Ellis - Brooklands College, Surrey.
- Rachel Harris - Inspire Research Ltd, Glasgow.
- Iain Howie - Stow College, Glasgow.
- Marion O'Dea - ALT Operations Manager.
- Kevin Palmer - Salford City Learning Centres
- Fred Pickering - Barnsley College.
- Pete Richardson - Coleg Llandrillo Cymru.
- Malcolm Ryan - University of Greenwich, London.
- Seb Schmoller - ALT Executive Secretary.
- Dave Sugden - Dewsbury College.

ALT Learning Technology Research Policy. Our Learning Technology Research Policy, a draft of which was discussed at the July 2004 ALT Policy Board, has been finalised and can be downloaded from www.alt.ac.uk/documents.html

Research Assessment Exercise 2008. I reported in ALT-N 47 that ALT had nominated two individuals to be members of the RAE 2008 Education sub-panel. Readers will be pleased to know that Robin Mason, from the Open University Institute for Educational Technology, whom ALT nominated, has been appointed to the Education Sub-panel.

Membership categories and entitlements. I reported in ALT 48 that the Central Executive would be reviewing ALT's organisational membership categories, structure, entitlements, and fees. The results of this review include the following.

1. We will base the organisational membership fee on the organisation's size, rather in the way in which JISC operates a banding system for subscriptions to information resources.
2. We will introduce a new category of "sponsoring" membership for funding bodies, large commercial organisations, at

a fixed rate. This category will take the place of the current "large corporate" category.

3. When we move to the new fee-structure we will implement a common annual renewal date, with pro-rata payments to cover the period between an organisation and the renewal date.
4. Subject to consideration by ALT's Membership Committee, we will introduce benefits for staff of member organisations. (Options to be considered include: a discount on individual membership, and, subject to an assessment of the impact on income, free membership for the institution's prime contact).
5. We will investigate and price the development/purchase of a web system for organisational and individual members to maintain their own membership record, define who are their contacts etc, and pay their subscriptions.

We will be making the changes described over the next 12 to 18 months.

CMALT. Our launch deadline for the ALT Certified Membership scheme (CMALT) has now slipped to June 2005. From the ALT home page you can join a low volume e-mail list through which we will subscribers keep informed of progress. Please do so if you are potentially interested in applying for Certified Membership of ALT.

HEFCE Joint e-Learning Partnership Board. Following the publication by HEFCE of its "Strategy for e-learning" - www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2005/elearning.htm (discussed on page 1 of this edition of ALT-N by HEFCE's Director of Learning and Teaching) I have been invited to be a member of the Joint Partnership Board. This Board, established by HEFCE, to oversee the implementation by HEFCE, the JISC, and the Higher Education Academy, of a range of HEFCE-related e-learning activities, includes the HEFCE Strategy for e-Learning, the e-Learning Research Centre, the National e-Learning Advisory and Support Centre, and e-China.

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CASE STUDY

Using a VLE to support staff at The Islamic University of Gaza

ANTHONY 'SKIP' BASIEL
AND RALPH COMMINS

An invitation to tutor a group of academic staff in the use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) WebCT may seem like a straight forward request: one encountered by e-learning teams and staff developers on a regular basis. What made the work of our team so different was that the academic staff involved worked at the Islamic University of Gaza. Due to the security situation in the area, the tutoring staff in the United Kingdom were unable to meet their Palestinian colleagues. These circumstances, in combination with low bandwidth and irregular infrastructure, led to the development of a highly flexible and blended approach to delivering learning events.

Therefore, the staff at the University of Middlesex developed a series of two-hour online seminars rather than the usual face to face training course lasting a week which had been envisaged by the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG). These sessions, delivered over five weeks, using asynchronous VLE activities, aimed at promoting reflection, comprehension and retention. For Skip Basiel, project leader and learning development tutor at Middlesex University's National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnerships, it was clear that flexibility was essential for the project's success. From a pedagogic perspective the initiative focused on student-led curriculum design with each participant establishing individualised learning agreements. These agreements were modelled on the system used at the National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnerships (NCWBLP).



Figure 1: Established in 1978, the Islamic University of Gaza was the first higher education institution for the Palestinian people in the Gaza territory.

WebCT and Macromedia Breeze were used for learning activities and online discussions (see figure 2) with a specific focus on developing online tutoring skills. The project team was clear that technology should be an enabler, not a driver, "we wanted the online learning and communication tools to meet the needs of the learners not vice versa."

Back-up systems were in place to cope with any technical or pedagogical failures. For example, a 'blended approach' of using real-time tools such as Macromedia Breeze and ISDN video conferencing in conjunction with asynchronous tools such as the WebCT discussion board and the telephone. This was supported by external email, and sometimes, due to irregular connectivity, hard copy handouts!

Celtic WebCT Users Group

The second meeting of the Celtic WebCT Users Group took place at Reid Kerr College, Paisley on Friday 25th February 2005. Representatives from institutions hosting WebCT across Scotland and Ireland, met to hear and discuss presentations from Richard Burrows and Derek Jones (WebCT) on Campus Edition 6, due for release later this year, and also from Joan Archibald, on Reid Kerr's WebCT rollout.



The Group heard of the significant changes that WebCT CE6 will bring, both in terms of the system architecture, the user interface and enhanced functionality. The system is set to provide opportunities for institutions to further extend and customise their installations through the availability of individual Vista modules for CE6. In addition, the standard installation of CE6 will provide greater user friendliness through the much improved interface and additional granularity of user control.

Joan Archibald, of Reid Kerr College, then provided an overview of the rollout of WebCT at Reid Kerr. The Group was particularly interested in the focus on processes they have developed at the College to produce and encourage the use of learning objects in WebCT courses. This has been achieved through Dreamweaver and Flash extensions for content creation and multidisciplinary development teams for the creation and design of courses.

The Celtic WebCT Users Group will meet next at the University of Stirling on Friday 22nd April, 2005. For further information about the Group and its events, see: www.celticwebct.org.uk.

Catherine Durkin c.durkin@mis.strath.ac.uk
VLE Project Leader, Strathclyde University

CASE STUDY



Figure 2: IUG Mindmapping Exercise in the Macromedia Breeze whiteboard

The project's pedagogical and technical challenges were overcome through flexibility, negotiation and the development of working relationships. Skip recalls that the IUG staff used terms like 'my brothers' to communicate over the discussion boards. Initially he had thought this was used as a title given to a fellow academic but soon realised that their shared learning community had drawn them together. Despite the political tensions surrounding the learning event, the IUG staff stayed focused on the tasks at hand. Debates and discussions on e-learning did not often venture out of the pedagogical or technical arena. Skip believes that it was this focus which, in part, led to the successful completion of the project.

One goal of the project was to promote eLearning capability in the IUG Academic staff. This was particularly challenging with-

out meeting the stakeholders face-to-face. We wanted an online pedagogical model that was not linked to a specific virtual learning environment (VLE) software system but one which the British Council could adapt and apply to various international political circumstances. We established the role of the 'local facilitator' who was confident in English and ICT (Information and Communication Technology) to motivate the local staff. Managerial support was strong thus providing the stakeholders with additional follow-up sessions and technical help.

Although the circumstances of the initiative were unique, the lessons learned, regarding the use of flexible, blended approaches and the importance of building human relationships in an online environment, are transferable to a range of situations. Winning the eTutor Competition has provided the team with an opportunity to share their experience and knowledge throughout the UK which matched the British Council agenda. Additional information about this research can be found at: www.elearning.mdx.ac.uk/research/ or if you are interested in educational web-based video conferencing visit our network site at: www.lle.mdx.ac.uk/lle/alt/

Entry information for the 2005 eTutor Competition can be found at www.heacademy.ac.uk/etutor.htm

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Plenty of time in Dublin

Edited highlights from Wijnand Aalderink's weblog of the Spring Conference

"When God made time he made plenty of it", so the Irish say. Today was a full day in Dublin, starting of at 7:30 with bacon and eggs. The first day of this year's Spring Conference of ALT and SURF (including ILTA this time) was very rewarding. We had a very good keynote on e-Portfolios and PDP for students and staff members broadcast from Auckland, New Zealand, over the Internet. The speaker used a similar process model as we do at Windesheim. The talk inspired me to initiate working with e-portfolios for staff members at our institution as well, because we should teach and practise what we preach.

The portfolio session of my Dutch colleagues of INHOLLAND, reporting on their massive top-down institute-wide implementation, quite stunned the audience, including the Dutch folks who weren't familiar with their story. From a pedagogical perspective their approach is very much like ours and others in universities of professional education in the Netherlands. At the end I plugged our Dutch special

interest group, NL Portfolio. All the material I provided was gone within seconds.

In the afternoon I went to a workshop on collaborative learning with wiki's (weblogs for groups) by two colleagues from Scotland; an example of constructivist learning, building upon each others knowledge. The closing keynote of the day included a nice demo of working with LAMS (Australian open course software for learning design) that is not about structuring content, but about creating processes in a form that is very appealing to teachers. Later on I spoke to two colleagues who are working in pilots of LAMS. I have the feeling that it might be a good thing to explore in the e-Portfolio case, which is also very much about process design between stakeholders and systems.

God provided a lot of time this day again, which was very rewarding. I'll come home with plenty of inspiration and fruitful contacts."

The full web log is at wijnandaalderink.web-log.nl/log/2212036

NL Portfolio SIG site: elearning.surf.nl/portfolio

EVENTS

ALT WORKSHOPS

The DialogPlus Toolkit for Learning Activity Designers

Southampton University

14 July 2005

£95 (ALT members) £150 (non-members)

This hands-on workshop will introduce the online toolkit developed, as part of the JISC/NSF funded DialogPlus project, to guide and support teachers as they create, modify and share learning activities and resources. It can be used as a step-by-step guide to developing learning activities and choosing appropriate tools and resources, a database of learning activities that can then be adapted and reused for different purposes, and a mechanism for abstracting good practice and metamodels for e-learning.

Presenters: Dr Christopher Bailey and Karen Fill, University of Southampton

Booking deadline: 30 June 2005

Other workshops to be announced shortly:

- Learning Theory and Course Design
- Weblogs and RSS
- Moodle

What workshops would you like ALT to run?

Please email your suggested workshop topics to Hayley Willis, ALT Events Administrator, hwillis@brookes.ac.uk

For booking forms and more information please visit www.alt.ac.uk/workshops.php

ALT-C 2005

Exploring the frontiers of e-learning: borders, outposts and migration

6-8 September 2005
Manchester, England

Keynote speakers

Alan Gilbert

President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manchester

Carol Twigg

President and CEO, National Center for Academic Transformation, New York

Etienne Wenger

An independent thinker, researcher, consultant, author, and speaker

Theme speakers

Architectures and Infrastructures: **Oleg Liber**

Collaboration: **Gary E Miller**

Design and Development: **Tom Boyle**

Implementation: **Sal Cooke**

Quality and Standards: **Stephen Downes**

Online registration will be available in May

Conference fees

Before 1 July On or after 1 July

Full conference

ALT Members £310 £370

Non-members £370 £420

Single day rate

ALT Members n/a £132

Non-members n/a £195

www.alt.ac.uk/altc2005

ASSOCIATION
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ALT-N

Articles, comment, reviews and previews are welcomed for the next issue. Please contact the Editor for further details and a style guide.

Please note that any articles submitted for the newsletter may be published in parallel on the ALT web site.

Advertising rates
£300 for quarter page advert or £400 to insert a one-page flyer (no VAT)

Deadline: 15 June 2005

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