Learning and Skills Improvement Service National Improvement Strategy: a consultation response from the Association for Learning Technology (ALT)

Name

Seb Schmoller

Job title

Chief Executive

Organisation (if applicable)

Association for Learning Technology (ALT)

Email address

seb.schmoller@alt.ac.uk

Address

Gipsy Lane, Headington, Oxford OX3 0BP

Please insert 'X' next to one of the following that best describes your organisation.

Further Education College	☐
Sixth Form College	☐
Local Education Authority	☐
Higher Education Institution	☐
Trade Union	☐
Independent Training Provider	☐
Employer	☐
Representative Body	☒
Sectoral Body	☐
National Organisation	☐
Regional Body	☐
Voluntary Organisation	☐
School	☐
Other (please specify)	☐

If you are responding as an individual please tick here ☐

In developing this consultation LSIS has adhered to the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Consultation. A copy of this guidance is available at http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file44364.pdf *If you have any complaints about the consultation process please contact the Consultation Coordinator, April Hurney on* april.hurney@lsis.org.uk

General

Question 1 : Our intention is to develop the new NIS on a shortlist of principles supported by LSIS's and partners' corporate plans and a directory of support. To what extent do you agree that this is the best way forward?

Strongly agree	☐
Agree	☒
Neither agree nor disagree	☐
Disagree	☐
Strongly disagree	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments
We assume that you mean "short list of principles" rather than "shortlist". If a directory of support is to be produced it needs to be inclusive and not necessarily limited to LSIS and its partners. It must be based on the sector's own perception of its needs rather than LSIS's perceptions.

Question 2 : What would be your preferred format for a directory or prospectus of support from LSIS and the national partners?

Hard copy publication sent to all providers	☐
Web based directory	☒
Don't know	☐
Don't think a directory of support is necessary	☐

Additional comments
There may be an argument for use of hard copy to promote the directory and to enable users to review the directory "at a glance". But, provided a web based directory is properly designed, accurate, comprehensive, and kept current, then this would be the better option in the longer term, both intrinsically and because LSIS itself is seeking to promote the benefits of technology as you are promoting it to the sector. The "proof of the pudding" will of course be in the extent to which the directory (whether printed or Web based) is used, and in whether it can be cost-effectively maintained. It should not be assumed that the directory will necessarily be proven on either count, and LSIS should be ready to kill the directory off if the case for it is not clear cut. This is a long term project and thought needs to be given to sustainability.

Question 3: To what extent do you agree that the principles of the NIS should focus primarily on self-improvement as its key priority?

Strongly agree	☒
Agree	☐
Neither agree nor disagree	☐
Disagree	☐
Strongly disagree	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments
We believe a whole-organisation commitment to self-improvement, in which staff are allowed and encouraged to exercise professional judgement, is the key to effective change.

Principle 1

Question 4a: How much help do you think your organisation needs with personalising teaching and learning?

A lot	☐
Quite a lot	☐
A fair amount	☐
A little	☐
None	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments

We've left this question blank because we are not a learning provider. That said, we are not convinced that personalisation for its own sake is a particularly useful concept or objective. Personalisation is often found attractive in the short term but poor implementations "pall" after a while. Professor David Hargreaves and Mick Watters statements before the 17/11/2008 Children, Schools, and Families Committee are relevant here[1].

Question 4b: If you need support with personalisation from the national partners what is the most effective way we could provide this?

Consultancy support	☐
Networks	☒
Toolkits	☐
New programme(s)	☐
Training and development	☐
Existing programmes	☐
Peer support/sector-led approach	☒
Publications and resources	☐
Action research projects	☒
Other (please specify)	

Additional comments

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[1] http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmchilsch/uc651-vii/uc65102.htm *- last accessed 21/2/2009*

Principle 2

Question 5a: To what extent do you agree that there should be a major focus in the new NIS on raising the profile and effectiveness of governance in the sector?

Strongly agree	☐
Agree	☒
Neither agree nor disagree	☐
Disagree	☐
Strongly disagree	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments
A clear understanding of the boundary between governance and management needs to be maintained, and care is needed not to anticipate too involved or too detailed inputs from governors who generally have day jobs. The point is that what might be desirable from the point of view of governance and governor involvement in an ideal world may not be all that feasible and many schemes of involvement are started and then rapidly become moribund. (One of the authors of this response is a college governor and another is the chair of governors at a large 11-18 comprehensive school judged outstanding by Ofsted.)

Question 5b: How much help do you think your organisation needs in this area?

A lot	☐
Quite a lot	☐
A fair amount	☐
A little	☐
None	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments
Not applicable.

Question 5c: If you need support with this from the national partners what is the most effective way we could provide this?

Consultancy support	☐
Networks	☐
Toolkits	☐
New programme(s)	☐
Training and development	☐
Existing programmes	☐
Peer support/sector-led approach	☐
Publications and resources	☐
Action research projects	☐
Other (please specify)	

Additional comments
Not applicable.

Principle 3

Question 6a: To what extent do you agree that embedding a culture of continuous improvement in an organisation is critical to achieving success?

Strongly agree	☒
Agree	☐
Neither agree nor disagree	☐
Disagree	☐
Strongly disagree	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments
See comment on Q3. It must also be said that success in relation to certain issues is sometimes elusive for reasons that are outside the organisation's control. This may become increasingly the case over the next period when success may be defined in rather short term ways whereas the benefits of continuous improvement are often longer term.

Question 6b: How much help do you think your organisation needs in this area?

A lot	☐
Quite a lot	☐
A fair amount	☐
A little	☐
None	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments
Not applicable.

Question 6c: If you need support with this from the national partners what is the most effective way we could provide this?

Consultancy support	☐
Networks	☐
Toolkits	☐
New programme(s)	☐
Training and development	☐
Existing programmes	☐
Peer support/sector-led approach	☐
Publications and resources	☐
Action research projects	☐
Other (please specify)	

Additional comments
Not applicable.

Principle 4

Question 7a: To what extent do you agree that the individual professionalism of staff will be crucial in the future?

Strongly agree	☒
Agree	☐
Neither agree nor disagree	☐
Disagree	☐
Strongly disagree	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments
Acknowledging the professionalism of all staff also means acknowledging their expertise in their particular area. It requires that this expertise is listened to and utilised.

Question 7b: How much help do you think your organisation needs in this area?

A lot	☐
Quite a lot	☐
A fair amount	☐
A little	☐
None	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments
Not applicable.

Question 7c: If you need support with this from the national partners what is the most effective way we could provide this?

Consultancy support	☐
Networks	☐
Toolkits	☐
New programme(s)	☐
Training and development	☐
Existing programmes	☐
Peer support/sector-led approach	☐
Publications and resources	☐
Action research projects	☐
Other (please specify)	

Additional comments
Not applicable.

Principle 5

Question 8a: To what extent do you agree that there should be a shift of emphasis supported by funding arrangements to enable providers to support and learn from each other?

Strongly agree	☒
Agree	☐
Neither agree nor disagree	☐
Disagree	☐
Strongly disagree	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments

Sharing of good practice between peers should be a corner-stone of self-improvement both within an organisation and between organisations. LSIS could play a big role in encouraging and supporting this approach, but it must also be noted that if there is a business case for sharing good practice, sharing ought to happen without needing much stimulus. Certainly targeting LSIS resources on sharing good practice rather than on "programmes per se" is to be encouraged. In relation to sharing good practice in the use of technology in teaching and learning, ALT is a partner in the LSIS eCPD Programme, and, with JISCinfoNet, we developed the Collaborative Approaches to the Management of E-Learning (CAMEL) method[2]; and we are confident that its use in Learning and Skills Sector would be cost-effective. We would be happy to advise on its application.

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[2] www.**jiscinfonet.**ac.uk/**camel** - *last accessed 21/2/2009*

Question 8b: What do you think are the barriers to taking this approach?

> It will require a shift of emphasis away from competition to cooperation, particularly at a local level. It will also require a move from "big one-off centralized programmes" to a more distributed approach. This may not be wholly attractive to governments looking for impact headlines.

Question 8c: How might LSIS and the NIS partners make greater use of the sector practitioners in delivering programmes and supporting each other?

> 1) There should be a rolling programme of secondments so that the majority of people working for LSIS should be from within the sector with recent experience of working in it, and the expectation that they will be returning to it. 2) More use should be made of facilitated support networks making good use of the available technology to reduce f2f meetings. See also our response to Question 8a.

Principle 6

Question 9a: To what extent do you agree that the sector should influence national policy development?

Strongly agree	☒
Agree	☐
Neither agree nor disagree	☐
Disagree	☐
Strongly disagree	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments
We are not sure that the phrase 'their voices need to be heard more clearly' (in paragraph 2 page 7 of the consultation document) is sufficient. What matters is that the views of those who understand what needs to be done (and knowledge of what needs to be done is not the sole or even the main preserve of those working in the sector) are listened to and acted upon.

Question 9b: If you agree, how might this work in reality?

This is the big question! The most important thing is for the barriers to and drivers for success to be identified by people on the ground (whether users of or working in the sector), and for national policy to be steered to lessen the barriers and work with the grain of the drivers. A suitably configured joint forum of representative and membership bodies that is able to provide a consensus view to government and its agencies on issues would help, and it must be said that, even if the number of issues on which consensus can be secured is quite small, tackling these issues alone would be immensely useful and helpful. As an example, in relation to the use of technology in learning, by 2000 a consensus existed that the guided learning hour, with its presumption of synchronous contact between teachers and learners, stood in the way of the development of online learning in FE. Had that consensus been noted by government and its agencies, and responded to, the sector would now be making much more use of online learning to the benefit of learners than is presently the case.

Question 9c: Are there any areas in which you think this is especially needed?

ALT's focus is on the application of technology in teaching and learning, on sharing good practice, and on bridging research, policy, and practice. An indicative area in which the kind of approach described in our response to Question 9b could be taken is in setting the standards for what can be expected of a newly qualified teachers in the use of e-learning, as a result of participating in an Initial Teacher Training qualification. (Certainly it is not currently the case that teachers leave ITT with an appropriate set of capabilities.) Another is in respect of drawing together evidence-based rather than policy-driven (or worse, whim-driven!) summaries of what works in the use of learning technology, so as to support the spread of good practice. ALT, with its cross-sectoral focus would be well placed to help with this.

Additional comments

Question 10: To what extent do you agree that these six principles are the right ones for the sector to sign up to and that if achieved will lead to a highly effective, continuously self-improving sector?

Strongly agree	☒
Agree	☐
Neither agree nor disagree	☐
Disagree	☐
Strongly disagree	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments
The principles are rather like motherhood and apple pie, and it is hard to disagree with any of them. The measure of success will be in the implementation.

Question 11: In your opinion are there any principles missing?

Yes	☒
No	☐
Don't know	☐

Additional comments
Our "yes" is better interpreted as "something is missing and it could be articulated as a principle". See Qn 12 below.

Question 12: If you answered yes to the question above please specify what in your opinion is missing from the principles.

Somewhere within the National Improvement Strategy the principle of "equity and fairness" should be clearly stated, and the inclusion of this would give the strategy additional credibility and bite.

About ALT

ALT provides a focus for the expanding community of learning technology practitioners and researchers in further and higher education. At its heart are technical and academic staff who are seeking to support their students' learning through innovative uses of learning technology. ALT was formed 15 years ago, and is a registered charity.

ALT's aims are to:

- represent and support our members, and provide services for them;

- facilitate collaboration between practitioners, researchers, and policy makers;

- spread good practice in the use of learning technology;

- raise the profile of research in learning technology;

- support the professionalisation of learning technologists;

- contribute to the development of policy.

Members

Currently we have as members:

- over 500 individuals;

- nearly all of the UK's main higher education institutions;

- a significant number of further education providers;

- a growing corporate membership including bodies such as Becta, DIUS, LSC, LSIS, HEFCE, SFC, and JISC, as well as large and small software, hardware, telecommunications, and e-learning businesses[3].

Activities

We produce:

- a quarterly Newsletter in web and print formats;

- the ALT Journal (an international peer-reviewed journal devoted to research and good practice in the use of learning technologies within tertiary education);

- a fortnightly members' email digest;

- publications aimed at practitioners, sometimes produced in conjunction with other organisations.

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[3] Institutional and corporate members are listed on our website – http://www.alt.ac.uk/.
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We organise:

- ALT-C, which is the UK's annual main academic conference for learning technologists, which attracts over 600 attendees[4];

- conferences on topics of interest to learning-technology practitioners, as well as occasional free events such as focus groups and regional meetings;

- visits and exchanges with sister bodies;

- regular workshops and symposia, for example on evaluation, peer-to-peer software, accessibility, and learning object design; and Policy Board meetings which bring together senior representatives from member organisations, to consider current significant developments in the learning technology domain.

ALT's perspectives on learning technology

ALT understands learning technology as the systematic application of a body of knowledge to the design, implementation and evaluation of learning resources. The body of knowledge – the fruit of research and practice – is based on principles of good learning theory, instructional design and change management but is grounded in a good understanding of the underlying technologies and their capabilities. Learning technology makes use of a broad range of communication, information, and related technologies to support learning and provide learning resources. ALT believes that learning technology adds value to both the efficiency and the effectiveness of the learning process, by offering:

- opportunities to improve and expand on the scope and outreach of the learning opportunities they can offer students;

- ways to ensure equality of opportunity for all learners;

- alternative ways of enabling learners from cultural and social minorities, learners with disabilities, and learners with language and other difficulties to meet learning outcomes and demonstrate that they have been achieved;

- quality control and quality enhancement mechanisms;

- ubiquitous access opportunities for learners;

- enhanced opportunities for collaboration which may increase the re-usability of learning objects and resources.

However, the value that learning technology can add to the learning process is influenced by a number of important factors, including the following.

- The immaturity and volatility of some learning technology mean that there is a lot of work involved in keeping up with available products, especially with a

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[4]   The 2009 ALT conference *"In dreams begins responsibility" – choice, evidence, and change* will be in Manchester between 8 and 10 September, chaired by Professors Gilly Salmon and Tom Boyle
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april.hurney@lsis.org.uk

market that is shaking out. Accordingly, much effort is wasted through poor understanding of the technology and its application.

- There are a lot of products and services which are not especially suited to UK FE and HE pedagogic models.

- It is possible to make expensive errors when there is a misalignment between technology, pedagogy and institutional infrastructure or culture. These errors are often repeated in parallel between educational institutions.

- Standards and specifications are evolving, hard to understand, easy to fall foul of, and tend to be embraced with zeal, without the cost and quality implications being properly understood.

- Much effort is also dissipated through a poor understanding of the theory and pedagogy that underpins the use of the technology.

- The absence of a widely established and practiced methodology by which rigorously to evaluate e-learning, and through which to develop the secure body of knowledge on which to build learning technology as a discipline.

Completed response forms can be returned by post, fax or email to:

LSIS Consultation Team
Learning and Skills Improvement Service
Friars House
Manor House Drive
Coventry
CV1 2TE

Fax: 024 7622 9839
Email: NewNIS@lsis.org.uk

The deadline for responses is 17.00 on Friday 27 February 2009.

We would welcome early responses to enable LSIS to make progress in developing its plans for next year

Please note that responses may be made public unless confidentiality is specifically asked for.

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