Response from The Association for Learning Technology (ALT) –
http://www.alt.ac.uk/ – to HEFCW's Circular W07/42HE 'Enhancing
Learning and Teaching Through Technology: A Strategy for Higher
Education in Wales.'

30/11/2007

1	Respondent's name	**Seb Schmoller[1]**

2	Position	**Chief Executive**

3	Organisation/group	**Association for Learning Technology (ALT)**

4	Type of organisation:	Higher education institution	☐
		Further education college	☐
		Students' union	☐
		Other (please specify)	
		Cross-sectoral UK-based professional and scholarly association	

5	Is this an:	Individual response	☐
		Response on behalf of an organisation/group	**X**

(i)   Do you agree with the stated strategy?

1. In general, yes, although the document is "high level" and therefore rather anodyne. We offer the following comments.

2. We welcome the view in paragraph 9 that institutions should create conditions in which technology-enhanced learning is considered a normal part of mainstream provision, processes, and practices. We think that this view should be explicitly stated at the start of the strategy proper, rather than being articulated, somewhat obliquely in, for example, paragraphs 21 and 23.

3. There are one or two places where the strategy retains an apparent but probably unintended bias towards distance learning.

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[1] Dr Gayle Calverley, Professor Paul Bacsich, and Peter Richardson helped with the drafting of this response.

4. The strategy is silent on three major changes that are taking place in the environment: i) the arrival of "big players" like Microsoft and Google as suppliers of services that are traditionally provided by HEIs and FECs themselves (email, for example) and which are highly relevant to the practical implementation of the strategy; ii) the increasing tendency for staff and students to own their own technology (mobile phones, laptops etc) and services (email accounts, social bookmarks etc) and to expect these to work seamlessly with those provided by their institution; iii) the extent to which knowledge creation and dissemination is increasingly taking place "in the commons", as represented by Open Access journals, and Wikipedia.

5. The reader could be forgiven for thinking that FE plays a much less significant role in the provision of HE courses in Wales than is in fact the case.

6. The strategy feels perhaps too UK focused. From the point of view of institutions in Wales there is much to be learned from countries like Canada, New Zealand, and Eire, and some reference to this would be beneficial, perhaps in relation to benchmarking.

(ii)   Do you agree with the stated objectives?

7. We think the stated objectives are uncontroversial, and that your indicators of success (in paragraphs 36 and 37) are appropriate.

8. We suggest removing "maintaining competitiveness" from under the heading "The optimum learning experience" and placing this elsewhere.

9. It would be helpful if some definition of the 'threshold for the optimum student experience', or at least an indication as to how such a definition will be derived and then updated, could be included.

(iii)   Can you think of any additional objectives that the strategy should have?

10. The 'mainstreaming' of TEL is fundamentally about: i) lecturer engagement and the adoption of new attitudes and new ways of working into everyday practice; ii) effective leadership at senior and middle management level; iii) diffusing innovation and good practice within and between practitioners, sectors and institutions. The strategy could usefully make a bit more of all three of these factors, for example in paragraphs 29, 36 vi) and 37 vi). In particular the strategy is largely silent on the importance of discipline and practice communities (of which ALT is one) as vehicles for the spread of good practice; and on the extent to which HE can learn about mainstreaming (and management….) from other sectors.

(iv) Is there any other role you think we could play in helping to mainstream the use of technology?

11. Change can happen quickly in education when the funding, quality assurance, audit, and accreditation regimes are each structured to as to encourage the same kinds of changes, and when institutional decision-makers know this to be the case. For this reason the inclusion of a short, tabular summary showing how each of these regimes supports the strategy would form a beneficial addition.

12. Organisations such as ALT, UCISA, JISC, and the Academy Subject Centres, should be explicitly mentioned in the strategy proper as having an important role to play, especially in relation to diffusion of good practice, with Welsh institutions given active encouragement to engage with them.

(v) Can you think of any other elements which should be included within the strategy?

13. The staff development section of the strategy could usefully reference the Association for Learning Technology's CMALT accreditation scheme as one appropriate vehicle for enhancing staff capability in learning technology, and giving them professional recognition.

14. Some explicit recognition of the learner pathway from School to FE to HE (whether or not via employment) would be beneficial, with particular reference to the way in which students arrive at each stage with prior experience and expectations of technology and its role learning.

15. HEIs have an important role to play in creating the tools and systems that will support and enable "the learning of the future", with programmes like the ESRC/EPSRC TEL Research Programme significant here. This should be acknowledged so as to avoid HEIs in Wales being seen as passive recipients rather than as, potentially, important contributors to the development of these tools and systems.

(vi) Are there any other appropriate measurable indicators by which we will know if we have achieved our goal?

16. There is a lot of useful current work in HE and FE in the UK on benchmarking, indicators of success etc. One possible approach would be for HEFCW to review the fruits of this work, during 2008, with the intention of introducing a suitable indicator regime later in 2008 or in 2009.

(vii) Are there are other means, in addition to those described in para 30, which we might utilise to enhance ownership of this strategy by the sector?

17. Two possible courses of action would be for HEFCW to give active encouragement to institutions to: i) collaboratively investigate and learn from large scale international initiatives such as those of the Swiss Virtual Campus and the National Centre for Academic Transformation (NCAT) in the US; ii) use what has become known as the "CAMEL approach" in promoting and sharing their approaches to acting on this strategy – see http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/camel/. With Jiscinfonet, ALT had a major hand in developing the original CAMEL method, and would be happy to assist HEFCW with this.

(viii) Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

18. ALT brings together practitioners, researchers and policy makers from across the learning technology domain. We think it would be in HEFCW's interests (as well as ALT's!) for HEFCW to be a member of ALT, alongside the English and Scottish Funding Councils, and the Welsh Assembly, all of whom are already members.