Response from the Association for Learning Technology to the 'Statement of the position of e-learning in Higher Education in Wales'

This form is available electronically with the main document at www.hefcw.ac.uk under Publications/Circulars. Completed forms should be e-mailed to cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk no later than **15 March 2007**.

All responses may be disclosed on request, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. The Act gives a public right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case HEFCW. This includes information provided in response to a consultation. We have a responsibility to decide whether any responses, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential. We can refuse to disclose information only in exceptional circumstances. This means responses to this consultation are unlikely to be treated as confidential except in very particular circumstances. Further information about the Act is available at www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

1.   Respondent's name Seb Schmoller

2.   Position Executive Secretary

3.   Is this an:

- individual response?   No
- or a response on behalf of an organisation?   Yes

4.   If responding on behalf of an organisation,

- please state the name of the organisation:

Association for Learning Technology (ALT)……………..…………..

- and indicate the type of organisation below with an 'x':

☐	Higher education institution
☐	Further education college
☐	Student union
☐	Other (please specify)	Professional and scholarly association

Questions from Annex A: Statement of the position of e-learning in Higher Education in Wales.

(i)   Do you feel that this e-learning statement is an accurate and fair reflection of the practices being carried out in your experience?

Broadly yes. The statement is relatively silent on some of the major changes that are taking place in the external environment. These have resulted in organisations that use, or affect the use of, learning technology being increasingly linked together through formal and informal networks that transcend organisational and national boundaries, with new methods of knowledge generation and dissemination playing an increasingly important role.

Secondly, the statement does not sufficiently acknowledge the extent to which development of technology relevant to e-learning is taking place primarily in the business world (albeit strongly influenced by the Open Source community and by R&D in academia), with development in the use of technology to support teaching, learning, and assessment, being driven forward both in the business world and in the public sector. There is also substantial activity in what is sometimes referred to as the "Free Culture movement", characterised, for example, by Wikipedia, Creative Commons, and Open Access.

(ii)   What is the definition of e-learning that you use?

We do not use one. We define learning technology as "the broad range of communication, information and related technologies that can be used to support learning, teaching, and assessment".

(iii)   What do you think are the priorities of any future developments in e-learning?

1. Finding ways and means to do things on a larger scale than can typically be managed by a single institution.
2. Linking with text-book publishers, who are increasingly offering e-learning facilities to purchasers. For obvious reasons publishers can amortise content development costs across a much larger range of users can any singly university.
3. Adjusting to the new reality in which many of the content and support resources that are relevant to e-learning are no longer provided by institutions, but are "out there on the public Internet".
4. Anticipate the need to accommodate a much more diverse "device and application culture" in which users demand to:
   - use their own devices on institutional networks;
   - access the institution's resources over the public Internet;
   - render the institution's content locally in their browser, or public content within the institution's environment.
5. Staff and organisational development. The more e-learning becomes central to the learner's experience, the more the whole institution needs to be able to handle and otherwise support e-learning in a professional manner. ALT's own "Certified Membership" scheme (CMALT) may be relevant here. See http://www.alt.ac.uk/cmalt/.
6. Supporting e-learning research so that decision-making can be properly informed by evidence. ALT is playing a part in this through the work of the ALT Research Committee – see http://newsletter.alt.ac.uk/e_article000565141.cfm for details of its membership.

(iv) What are the principal barriers to e-learning at your institution?

N/A

(v) What are the principal drivers for e-learning at your institution?

N/A

(vi) What measures of success are used in relation to e-learning at your institution?

N/A

(vii) What scope is there for collaboration in e-learning, within Wales, across the UK or globally, and how could this be facilitated?

There is extensive scope.
Last year, with JISC, the Higher Education Academy, and JISCinfonet, ALT completed a development project called CAMEL (Collaborative Approaches to the Management of E-Learning). We think that CAMEL has worthwhile lessons on how to develop collaboration between organisations in their development and use of e-learning. For more on CAMEL see http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/camel/

From an ALT perspective, the key areas for collaboration include:
1. Professional development;
2. Research;
3 Cross-sectoral collaboration, to ensure that:
- as learners move between stages, provision is organised in a way that fits their expectations and needs;
- good practice and good content are shared.

A substantial proportion of Welsh HE learners are from English, Northern Irish, or Scottish schools and colleges, and v/v; the HE curriculum differs only marginally across the UK; and staff move between regions of the UK. Therefore collaboration, whether cross-sectoral or within HE should be organised across the UK. ALT is ready to play a part in this process.

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

ALT has over 200 organisational and sponsoring members, including most of the UK's HEIs, JISC, the HE Academy (with whom we have formal Partnership Agreements), Becta, HEFCE, the Welsh Assembly, LSC, and the Scottish Funding Council. We would gladly welcome HEFCW as a member organisation.

For an overview of ALT see http://www.alt.ac.uk/, and, in particular, our 2007-2010 Strategy at http://www.alt.ac.uk/docs/ALT_strategy_2007-2010.pdf, from which the following short extract is taken:

"Our vision is for ALT to be the UK's leading independent organisation in the learning technology domain, providing leadership in policy, practice, and research, and to be so recognised nationally and internationally.
Our mission is to ensure that use of learning technology is informed by research and practice, as well as grounded in an understanding of the underlying technologies and their capabilities. Specifically, we aim to:

- *represent and support our individual, organisational, and sponsoring members, and provide services for them;*
- *facilitate collaboration, networking, and dialogue between practitioners, researchers, and policy makers;*
- *spread good practice in the use of learning technology;*
- *raise the profile of research in learning technology, establishing learning technology as a discipline in its own right;*
- *support the professionalisation of learning technologists;*
- *contribute to the development of policy."*