

JISC Strategy 2007-2009

25 September 2006

This is the Association for Learning Technology's response to JISC's consultation on the Draft JISC Strategy 2007-2009. The response has been prepared with the involvement from members of ALT's main operational committees, and from the ALT Central Executive Committee.

The response is organised under the following headings:

- Introduction;
- External environment;
- Autonomy and decision-making powers of the JISC Executive;
- Further Education, Adult and Community Learning, and Work-based Learning; Terminology;
- Partnership issues;
- Minor amendments.

1. Introduction

ALT welcomes both the opportunity to comment on the Draft JISC Strategy, and the strategy itself, which is well-structured, with comprehensive coverage of most of the key issues. This is notwithstanding the comments that follow, and which in the main concern emphasis and clarity rather than errors or omissions.

2. External environment

Section 4 of the draft is too narrowly cast, which gives the erroneous appearance that JISC's external environment is restricted to the UK educational world served by JISC. In reality JISC's sits in an external environment that includes, for example:

- commercial and non-commercial entities like the BBC, Blackboard, Google, Microsoft, News International, Sun, and Wikipedia;
- standards and specifications bodies like BSI, IEEE, IMS, and the World Wide Web Consortium;
- regulatory/framework-setting agencies like the Information Commissioner's Office, the UK and European Patent Offices, or the Office of Government Commerce.

Secondly, section 4 is silent on the nature of the changes that are taking place in the wider ICT world, and, in particular the development of what Lawrence Lessig describes as “the free culture movement”, perhaps best represented by Wikipedia, Creative Commons, and, in the academic world, MIT’s OpenCourseWare initiative, and related UK initiatives such as those recently been announced by the Open University.

We suggest that a new first subsection is included in Section 4 that provides users of the strategy with a broader, more outward-facing, contextual overview.

3. Autonomy and decision-making powers of the Executive

We note the point made in 5.3 concerning the greater autonomy and decision-making powers of the Executive than used to be the case, and we feel that JISC could do more to ensure that its funding priorities are truly driven by the needs of users in the field (both corporate and individual), rather than, as sometimes seems to be the case, by the Executive as a proxy for users.

As an independent membership organisation, ALT is willing to assist in this, as is no doubt also the case for organisations like UCISA, SCONUL, and AoC-NILTA; and we suggest that in 5.3 these exemplar “representative community bodies” are expressly identified.

4. Further Education, Adult and Community Learning, and Work-based Learning

Throughout the document FE, Adult and Community, and Work-based Learning, are referenced rather uneasily. (This is understandable, from an English perspective at least – though less from a Scottish perspective – given that the draft strategy was issued before the announcement of the 3 year agreement with the Learning and Skills Council).

Examples include:

- a. Reference to “universities and colleges” and “institutions” in 2.5.
- b. Absence of FE targets for use of the JANET Roaming and Voice over IP Services in *Aim One priorities and key deliverables #1 ii and iii*;
- c. Confusing reference in 3.12 to the HE Academy in relation to the e-learning strategies of **the** UK Funding Councils (*Aim Two priority and key deliverable #10* is similarly confusing) ;
- d. Wholly institutional focus within 3.14;
- e. No reference to FE under Aim Five “To develop and implement a programme to support institutions’ engagement with the wider community” (even if FE does no “third stream”, and relatively little knowledge transfer, it certainly is engaged with the business community, and in workforce development, and in cultural and community activities).

Amendments are needed to the strategy at various points, for example in the sections referred to above, and in 4 and 5.16, to reflect the fact of the new agreement with LSC, and to ensure that the strategy is generally sector- and country-neutral, except where the sense demands otherwise.

5. Terminology

- a. Inclusion of the term “innovative” in Strategic Aim 1. From the perspective of users it is the efficiency (and effectiveness) of the ICT infrastructure, services, and practice, rather than whether these are innovative *per se* that is important. So, notwithstanding the fact that JISC’s mission is to provide “world-class leadership in the innovative use of ICT to support education and research”, we suggest that the term “effective”, or “efficient and effective”, should be substituted in Aim 1 for “innovative”.
- b. Use of the term “student”. To the extent that a substantial proportion of the “student” beneficiaries of JISC’s activities, especially those who are enrolled on part-time programmes, or who are learning outside of an institutional context, do not consider themselves to be students, the time has now come for JISC to start using the term “learners” or “students and learners” instead of the term “students”.
- c. Use of the terms e-research, e-administration, and e-learning. JISC is “caught” by the fact that partner organisations continue to use terms like e-learning and e-research. During the lifetime of the strategy, we think that terms qualified by “e” will fall into disuse, and we think that JISC should anticipate this by minimising their use in the strategy, except where this is dictated by the need to refer to other organisations’ terminology; and if it is necessary to retain, say, e-research, some effort should be made to define the term when it is first used. (Use of terms which need defining in top level sections of the strategy – such as 3.3 – is problematic.)

6. Partnership issues

We think users of the strategy would benefit from the names of JISC’s Partners and Associate Partners being identified in 5.22.

We strongly welcome *Aim Six priority and key deliverable 15 ii*), “Develop a coherent approach to the management of JISC’s relations with industry”, but would urge JISC to bring forward the deadline for completion of this to July 2007 from July 2008, not least on account of recent developments in the sphere of software patents. Linked to this we believe that the strategy is rather too silent on the importance to FHE’s mission of a) vendors of proprietary software, and b) commercial providers of free or priced services. This is particularly important in relation to, for example, the e-Framework, and to JISC’s Resource Discovery Services.

7. Minor changes

- a. **Acronyms.** Acronyms like JANET, UKERNA and Becta may be widely understood by typical users of the strategy. But this is much less the case for terms like CETIS, OST, and TASI. It would be helpful if all acronyms are spelt out the first time they are used, and, as an absolute minimum, for a list of acronyms to be included at the end of the document.
- b. The draft makes occasional reference to predecessor documents, or to major initiatives within and outside the JISC world (such as the e-Science Core Programme, or the National Text Mining Centre) without referencing them. It would help uninitiated readers as well as those who are intimately familiar with some parts of JISC's activities but not others, if a consistent approach to cross-referencing to other documents etc could be taken.
- c. In 2.3 we suggest that the second sentence be amended to read: "Users are increasingly mobile, demanding reliable access at home, at work and at other locations, including whilst on the move (i.e. on trains, etc)."
- d. In 3.6 the term accessibility needs to be defined, as it is not clear whether it is being used in a "general" or "disability" sense.
- e. In 3.11 we suggest the inclusion of a sentence at the end of the paragraph along these lines: "In particular, there are developments in software patents which may require strengthening of JISCLegal and a stronger role in the archiving and dissemination of the knowledge generated and facilitated by JISC."
- f. In 3.13 we think JISC means that "creation of" rather than "provision of" learning content is not a priority for the JISC, to the extent that JISC's collections are, to a considerable extent, learning content.
- g. Under Aim One [page 8) – 4)i)] we are not sure what is intended by "Establish a developed e-Framework information base", and would suggest that either this should read something like "Establish a better-developed e-Framework information base...." or "Establish and develop an e-Framework information base".
- h. Under Aim Six [page 11) – 14)ii)] we suggest the insertion of "both new and former" at the end of the priority.
- i. In 5.17 we suggest the inclusion of "More care will be taken to ensure that JISC outputs remain available to the community for as long as there is interest or need." at the end of the clause.



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