

ASSOCIATION FOR LEARNING TECHNOLOGY (ALT) – BRIEFING FOR THE JISC COMMITTEE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING – 9/2/2004

1 Purpose of this briefing

The purpose of this briefing is to:

- summarise what ALT does, how we are organised, and the direction we are taking;
- highlight our strengths (and weaknesses!);
- identify areas for collaboration and ways of avoiding duplication.

2 What we do

2.1 ALT's "take" 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. ALT believes that learning technology can add value to both the efficiency and the effectiveness of the learning process.

That said, should we have been worried by this email received last week?

I am creating a web directory, The-Insight.com <http://www.the-insight.com/religion/christianity/orthodox> and would like to include your website <http://www.alt.ac.uk> under the "religion/christianity/orthodox" category. If you'd like to be added, please follow this url.....

2.2 Vision and mission

ALT is a "professional and scholarly" association which seeks to bring together all those with an interest in the use of learning technology by:

- promoting good practice in the use of learning technologies in education and industry;
- representing the members in areas of policy;
- facilitating collaboration between practitioners, researchers, and policy makers.

Our **vision** is that by 2006 ALT will be nationally and internationally recognised as the leading independent learning technology organisation in the UK. ALT will continue to provide a focus for the expanding community of learning technology practitioners.

ALT's **mission** is to recognise and spread good practice in learning technology and its deployment. It does so by bringing together all those concerned with learning technology, including researchers, developers, service providers, policy makers, information service providers, content providers, publishers, and technology suppliers. At ALT's heart are staff who are actively involved in managing, supporting or enabling student learning through the use of learning technology.

ALT's 3-year Strategy, revised annually, is accessible from <http://www.alt.ac.uk/documents.html>.

2.3 Our main activities

We:

- organise conferences, workshops, visits and exchanges, including ALT-C, and an annual Policy Meeting (last year's saw the formal launch by Charles Clarke of the DfES e-learning strategy consultation, and this year's with a focus on learning technology research policy will be at HP Labs in Bristol on 6 or 7 July, with speakers to include HEFCE's Director of Research, Rama Thirunamachandran);
- publish a quarterly Newsletter (ALT-N), the ALT Journal (ALT-J), a fortnightly members' email digest, and a range of publications aimed at practitioners, sometimes produced in conjunction with other organisations;
- respond to consultations which have a bearing on learning technology;
- use our influence, for example through our Observer status here on JCLT, or our membership of the DfES/Office of the e-Envoy "e-learning Business Stakeholder Group", or our involvement in the steering of the JCALT-supported European Academic Software Awards.

2.4 Membership summary

- ~ 500 individuals (steady);
- ~100 HEIs (up over 10% on September 2002);
- 50 FEIs and equivalent (up nearly 40%);
- 40 Corporate Members (up by over 200%) – new corporate members in 2003 include the BBC, CIPD, DfES, HEFCE, HP, Intel, ILTHE, Learning Lab, e-Learning Network, e-Learning Alliance, LSC, LSDA, NESTA futurelab, NHSU, Question Mark Computing, Scottish Enterprise, Sentient.

2.5 Staffing and governance

ALT is a small organisation, with a gross budget, including the conference of ~£300k. Since January 2004 we have had 4.5 FTE staff, 4 of whom are based in the ALT Office at Oxford Brookes University:

- **Executive Secretary** (0.5) – Seb Schmoller
- **Director** – Rhonda Riachi
- **Operations Manager** – Marion O’Dea
- **Events Administrator** – Hayley Willis
- **Administration Officer** – Sue Garrett

See <http://www.alt.ac.uk/team.html> for brief biographies.

ALT is run by a Central Executive Committee (President: Joyce Martin; Chair: Professor Stephen Brown; Vice-chair: Dr John Cook) to which 5 committees report, with committee chairs appointed by the Central Executive. These are:

- **Events** – chaired by George Roberts;
- **Further Education Advisory** – chaired by Kevin Palmer;
- **Membership** – chaired by Dr Barbara Newland;
- **Publications** – chaired by Dr Jane Seale;
- **Research and Policy** – chaired by Professors John Slater and Robin Mason

Committees meet roughly three times per year.

We also have occasional standing committees and working groups.

2.6 Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

ALT has 3 SIGs. These are:

- Teaching and Learning Technology Officers, chaired by Barbara Newland;
- Learning Technology Theory, chaired by Philippa Levy;
- Labs Group, co-chaired by Dr Sara de Freitas and Professor Stephen Heppel, which had its inaugural meeting on 25/9/2003, and will hold a public “show, tell, and exchange” event at HP Labs in Bristol on July 6th.

2.7 Developments

- **Conference** – from this year ALT is organising the annual ALT Conference rather than subcontracting the event to one or more Universities. ALT-C is the UK’s biggest and most important conference about learning technology, an increasingly key feature of which is its Research Strand. JISC and 9 other organisations including DfES and LSC are “major anchor sponsors”, and the conference will have a strong “thread” of JISC-related sessions. This year’s conference, in Exeter from 14-16 September, has as keynote speakers Vijay Kumar (Assistant Provost for Educational Technology, and Director of Academic Computing, Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Wendy Hall (Professor of Computer Science, University of Southampton, and President of the British Computer Society), and Ron Oliver (Foundation Professor of Interactive Multimedia at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia). See <http://www.alt.ac.uk/altc2004/> for further details.

.... Developments, continued

- **ALT-J** – is our tri-annual international peer-reviewed journal devoted to research in learning technology, which members receive as part of their membership subscription. ALT-J is edited by Professor Grainne Conole, Dr Martin Oliver, and Dr Jane Seale and will be published from March 2004 (Issue 12.1) by the Taylor & Francis Group
- **Consultation responses** – since January 2003, under the guidance of our Research and Policy Committee ALT has been systematic about responding to relevant consultations, for example to Gareth Roberts's RAE Review; the HEFCE e-learning consultation, DfES e-learning strategy consultation, and the 21st Century Skills White Paper. All our responses are on the ALT web site here: <http://www.alt.ac.uk/documents.html>.
- **Research procurement** – we have successfully trialled (with Ufi/learndirect – one of our corporate members) a research procurement process whereby quick access can be given to a large number of active learning technologists, and assistance provided in drawing up tenders, and shortlisting proposals.
- **Accreditation** – last year we were grateful to receive from JISC a £30k grant to enable us to take forward our work on developing an **accreditation scheme for learning technologists**. Following the issue of a competitive tender, we contracted with University College London to develop, a scheme, under the guidance of a Steering Group (on which JISC, LSDA, Becta, and others are represented).

2.8 Membership of ALT

Institutional members of ALT have the following entitlements.

- Attendance at the annual Policy Board.
- Large discounts on employee attendance at all our events, for example Workshops, such as **PDA's and SMS in education: an overview of mobile technologies** on 4 March, and **Click & go: video - access for all** on 19 March, and Conferences, such as **Living & learning: ePortfolios and digital repositories** on 22 April, as well as the ALT Conference itself.
- Access to, and an entitlement to submit content to, our fortnightly e-mail Digest, which summarises announcements, funding calls, vacancies, etc, which will be of interest to the learning technology community, and is sent to over 600 individuals, UK-wide.
- Multiple copies, for internal use, of ALT-N, our quarterly printed Newsletter.
- A subscription to the ALT Journal.

Corporate members (of which the JISC is one) are, in addition, also entitled to:

- have material included, in the mailings which we send our ~500 individual members, and to the key contact in our 190+ institutional and corporate members;
- work with us to organise "focus group" meetings, which provide corporate members with an opportunity to engage in academically rigorous, facilitated consultation with, or product demonstration to, people in the ALT community;
- a 20% discount on the cost of major corporate sponsorship of ALT-C;
- a link from the ALT home page to the URL of their choice on their own web site.

3 ALT's strengths and weaknesses (with a health warning!)

3.1 Strengths

- Cross-sectoral membership and structures
- Maturity, and groundedness in research and practice
- Reasonably narrow focus
- Independence from any one main funder or small group of funders

..... Strengths, continued

- Individual as well as organisational members
- Broadly based, and growing, corporate membership
- ALT-C, and its research strand
- Excellent reach into the LTist community
- Excellent fortnightly “Digest”
- Punching well above our weight
- Active involvement by a large number of volunteers
- ALT-J
- “Representativeness” of the LT community
- Scope to broker dialogue between member organisations

3.2 Weaknesses

- Small staff – 4.5 FTEs – somewhat remedied by recent recruitment and stabilisation
- Financially stretched especially without any core funding
- Insufficient reach into FE, despite recent growth
- Competition from Government-funded entities like NESTA futurelab, Becta, JISC, LSDA, and from other membership organisations in the same domain

4 Areas for collaboration with JISC, and ways to avoid duplication

4.1 Collaboration

- Accreditation for Learning Technologists – continue to help us get a scheme established
- Use ALT as a sounding board for JCLT on issues on which the views of the LT community are needed (resource implications)
- Generally collaborating on the development of Learning Technology as a research discipline and Learning Technologist as a profession
- Enable ALT to observe other JISC Committees (resource implications), and ensure the distribution of briefings such as this one to members and observers of other JISC Committees
- Use ALT as a channel to reach ALT commercial corporate members
- Harness ALT member expertise to provide technology assessment and briefings for the community (resource implications)

4.2 Ways to avoid duplication

- Memorandum of Understanding?
- Develop clarity as to which areas are ALT’s, and which are, for example, the HE Academy’s or AoC/NILTA’s
- Plan events collaboratively to avoid clashes of dates, and needless overlapping of content

5 Contact details

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