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ALT and e-Learning in the UK

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Summary

The Learning Technology Research Institute (LTRI) and the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) are two organisations within the UK that focus on ICT in the field of learning and teaching.

Learning Technology Research Institute

Tom Boyle gave a short overview of LTRI, which was founded in 2000. It is a university wide research institute that conducts theoretical and applied research into the use of ICT to promote, transform and augment learning. It has over the 20 members with 5 full time researchers.

The institute focus on three main themes where it is doing several projects:

1. Multimedia learning environments like educational multimedia games, virtual classrooms and multimedia design.
2. Dialogue, communication and virtual communities
3. Websites and online communities with international partners.
4. Theory for creation and re-use in e-Learning
5. Journals with discussion material; UK theory group (JIME).
6. Pedagogically informed base for learning object portability and re-use.

One of the other activities of LTRI is to provide pedagogical leadership for the new LTSN National Subject Centre for the Information and Computer Sciences. For more details about these subject centres see report of 'UK perspectives & initiatives in ICT' or the website www.ics.ltsn.ac.uk.

Association of Learning Technology

ALT is an educational organisation, which wants to bring together all those with an interest in the use of learning technology in higher and further education.

To achieve this, it:

1. publishes a journal, newsletter, website and occasional publications;
2. organises a big conference, workshops, focus groups on individual products (hosted by the manufacturer), special interest groups and regional meetings around the UK.

Currently ALT has 130 corporate and 570 individual members and these numbers are still growing. It has several partners and collaborates with organisations like SURF, ASCILITE, LTSN, ILT, and TechDis

Within the UK there is a quite similar history of the developing of ICT in Higher and Further Education. The government stimulates to exploit the technologies in order to save money and make teaching processes more efficient (teach more students).

Results are programmes such as:

- Computers in Teaching Initiative (been and gone)
- Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (3 phases - now finished)
- Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (still going)

Current learning technology initiatives are:

- Learning and Teaching Subject Network (LTSN) - not technology driven
- JISC Resource Discovery Network (RDN) and Distributed National Electronic Resource (DNER) - portals and hubs
- National Grid for Learning (NGfL) and National Learning Network (NLN) - materials for schools and further education

The nature of teaching and learning has changed. Virtual and managed learning environments are widely implemented. The universities are now catering for different learning modes and styles: fewer lectures at universities, but more discussion forums and chat rooms. The expectations of the student are growing (e.g. Brookes HallNet, more PC labs, access from home).

Expectations for the future are:

- finances growing tighter;
- strategic alliances and mergers of universities and FE colleges to capture wider market of increasingly diverse learners;
- quality versus quantity;
- choice: time, place and combinations of study modules;
- less face-to-face contact.

Websites:

- National Grid for Learning: www.dfes.gov.uk/grid
- National Learning Network: www.nln.ac.uk
- Learning and Teaching Subject Network: www.ltsn.ac.uk
- JISC Resource Discovery network: rdn.ac.uk
- Distributed National Electronic Resource: jisc.ac.uk/dner
- ALT: www.alt.ac.uk
- SURF: www.surf.nl
- ASCILITE: www.ascilite.org.au
- Institute for Learning and Teaching in HE: www.ilt.ac.uk
- TechDis: www.techdis.ac.uk
- Learning Technology Research Institute: www.unl.ac.uk/ltri
- Journal of Interactive Media in Education: www.jime.open.ac.uk
- Teaching and Learning Technology Programme: www.ncteam.ac.uk/projects/tltp
- Fund for the Dev. of Teaching and Learning: www.ncteam.ac.uk/projects/fdtl/index.htm