The forum for standards in online learning

eLearn Accredit is an international project, exploring what might be the steps ahead in the development of internationally agreed quality standards in the provision of on-line learning. During November 2002, a staged online conference will be hosted by **eLearn Accredit**, during which we will explore what the current position is, and how we might move forwards from here. The outcomes of this online conference will be presented at the physical conference, which will be held in Lisbon in May 2003.

The objective is not to insist on one particular model, but is rather to pool existing ideas and to discuss where there are interests in common, shared values, or values which we can agree as being equally rigorous, even if not directly equivalent.

Different discussion strands have been set up, so that different educational sectors are able to discuss areas of importance to their sector separately. However, the strands will be running more or less in parallel, with similar areas to be covered and addressed in each week. The objective for the moderators will be to lead the discussion through the different components of an e-learning value chain, particularly in the first two weeks, pooling documentation on where we are already and where we need to be, before focusing on where we would like to get to.

Please note that the **eLearn Accredit** discussions are not expected to include issues of equivalences of qualifications. The focus is on the provision of online learning, not of the qualifications to which that learning might lead.

Presenters are expected to include:

- Professor Grainne Connole, University of Southampton, (UK)
- Professor Bill Dutton, Oxford University Internet Institute, (US/UK)
- Dr Kauko Hämäläinen, Secretary General, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council & Secretary General, European Network for Quality Assurance (Finland)
- Sally Johnstone, WCET (US)
- Jane Massy, Consultant, (UK)
- Dr Pamela Pease, Jones International University (US).
- Serge Ravet, EifEL (France)
- Adrian Snook, IITT (UK)
- Scott Wyatt, GATE (US)
- Julie Young, Florida Virtual High School, (US)

Details of other presentations are being added all the time. The objective, particularly during the first week, when we will be pooling perceptions of the current situation, is to share and to have the opportunity to benchmark against good practice elsewhere. There is no intention for the current list of scheduled presentations to be taken as indicative of a particular solution which is being proposed. Other suggestions for presentations are welcome at any time.

If there is a person or an organisation you know of who have not yet heard of **eLearn Accredit**, then why haven't you told them, and invited them to get involved?

Detailed descriptions of the aims for each discussion strand:

• Central:
  Presentations and discussions of issues which do not fit neatly into any of the other areas, or about the nature and development of the project itself.

• Technological Issues
  This strand will address issues to do with the reliability of the technology, the appropriacy of the technology for the tasks which it is being asked to carry out. The discussion will largely be over technical standards, and the existing excellent work which has already been carried out in this area by several different national and international bodies and companies. However, this strand also offers the opportunity for those who might have thought that they were less technical to discuss the way in which the technology actually offers useful tools educationally, not simply reproducing classroom or individual reading environments, but actually considering some of the educational theory developments over the past 50 or so years to make online learning actually more effective (at least in some ways) than is classroom based learning.

• Institutional Issues
  A quality marque will need to assure the learner that issues of financial probity have been checked, and that the resources claimed are there and that they are suitable to achieve the learning goals advertised, and so on. It is not enough to restrict learning provision to large, established bodies, such as universities or private multi-national companies, as there may very well be excellent niche players who can use the web to respond to a specialist educational need in a way which a physically restricted educational body could not. It is therefore important to be able to assure learners that smaller providers are up to the job, and perhaps also that the larger ones are too!

• Teaching and Learning on line:
  e-Learning is not JUST about web-based training/teaching, but this is certainly a part of it. This strand offers a combination of a focus on what it is to be appropriately qualified or trained to be an online teacher balanced against a perspective on aspects of how learning takes place on line.

The following strands will focus more specifically on some of the issues in online learning relevant more closely just to these particular areas. If the pressure for some of the strands is too high, we are happy to consider splitting the strands into smaller areas (e.g. separating Business Education from Higher Education), and we would also be very happy to discuss hosting discussion strands in languages other than English, if there is sufficient demand. We would like to ask that discussion strands in languages other than English still submit a weekly summary in English, so that all the other participants can learn from their discussions as well as from their own.

• Schools and materials for school age learners:

• Higher and Further Education (including Business Education):

• Language Learning:

• Lifelong Learning and Professional Development:

All of the discussion strands will be encouraged to consider the different components of an e-learning value chain, including:
  • Learning Infrastructure: learning Technology standards, platforms, implementation...
  • Learning Resources: contents, development process, values, accessibility
  • Learning Support: learning centres, online and onsite support, teaching, coaching, mentoring
  • Learning Organisation: can we define standards for a learning organisation (for example, could systems such as Investors in People be a first step?) -- this includes, schools, universities and corporate alike!
  • Service Providers: training providers (internal and external), service providers and consulting organisations
  • People: competences, continuing professional development, certification of competence
  • Markets: quality labels per sector -- language, business, FE, schools etc.