

12. Symposium: Networked Learning and Networked Information

OVERVIEW

If networked learning is to become commonplace or even the norm, and government and EU policy in this area is to be achieved, then we will require provision of many resources – including published information resources – either at the desktop or through other devices using ICT affordances. The idea of a digital or virtual university can only be realised in so far as digital information resources are made available in ways that allow key stakeholders in universities to integrate them into the changing practices of HE – and as yet the integration between digital information/library services and MLEs/VLEs is poorly developed.

Various observers have noted that the nature of scholarly communication and of information access is changing fundamentally as ICTs become dominant (see, for example, HEFCE, 2003). In the UK, the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) plays a prominent national role in encouraging and funding the development of a networked “Information Environment” (IE) available to all tutors and learners across higher and further education.

In 1999, the JISC announced a major funding Programme, with an investment of well over £10million, to develop the Information Environment – then known as the Distributed National Electronic Resource (DNER) – to make it more relevant to, and more widely used by, learners and teachers, and thus to rebalance the investment beyond research-oriented services (JISC, 1999). In excess of 50 individual projects were selected, involving a significant proportion of the UK’s higher education institutions. For the first time, JISC also funded an in-depth formative evaluation of the whole Programme, entitled EDNER (formative Evaluation of the Distributed National Electronic Resource), an initiative which evolved into formative evaluation of the whole of the IE development. Led by Manchester Metropolitan University’s CERLIM and Lancaster University’s CSALT, this is the first in-depth exploration of such a complex, national IE from a learning and teaching, as well as information service and technical, standpoint.

The lead paper in this symposium, by the Director of EDNER, Professor Peter Brophy, will explore the meaning of an ‘Information Environment’ which is intended to support learning and teaching and reflect on the major lessons from EDNER’s three years of engagement.

The lead paper will be supported by three more specific contributions:

- Disciplinary differences: the view from academic departments, university libraries and the classroom (Dr C. Jones, Dr. M. Zenios and Ms J.R. Griffiths)
- Digital Libraries and Online Learning Environments (Ms M. Markland and Dr R. Kemp)
- Towards an evaluation framework for large scale networked learning initiatives (Ms S. Fisher)

The symposium will aim to integrate the three papers into a broad discussion. The symposium will consist of short presentations from each contributor and a space for discussion of the issues that they raise.

REFERENCES

Higher Education Funding Council for England (2003) *Research Support Libraries Group: Finale Report*. Bristol: HEFCE.

Joint Information Systems Committee (1999) Developing the DNER for Learning and Teaching. http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=circular_5_99

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