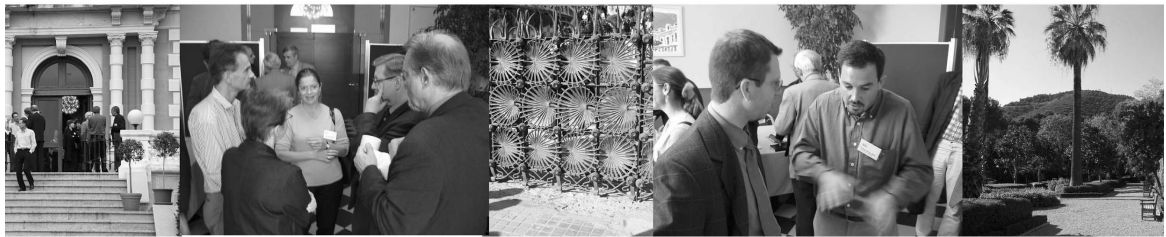


# BARCELONA E-LEARNING WORKSHOP



LES HEURES  
UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA  
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E-LEARNING TASK FORCE  
COIMBRA GROUP OF UNIVERSITIES  
BRUSSELS

## Opening Remarks

Coimbra Group universities, like all others, are under pressure to change, and at the same time are participants in important changes: changes in students - their attitudes to education and technology, and what they can do; changes in the way staff work – in teaching, in research and in administration. But while governments bombard us with documents on the future of education, at the University of Edinburgh at the start of this academic year students still had to stand in long queues to enrol for their courses! Despite the increasing use of ICT, teaching (and its management) in many ways is still very similar to how it was ten, twenty, or even thirty years ago.

As more commercial organisations move into the field of eLearning, there is talk of the “end of universities” and “death of the campus”. At a recent Singapore meeting of Universitas 21 (a higher education global alliance), market analysts compared education to the health industry: healthcare was once a ‘cottage industry’, but investment by industry transformed it into a commercial system, improving access and quality at least for the middle class and above. Education, they argued, will soon go the same way.

Our aim with this workshop is to discuss such questions as: *‘Where are our universities going with eLearning?’*, *‘Where should we and could we go?’*, *‘Do our universities have a vision, and how can we as staff members contribute?’* We also aim to discuss what we are doing now and share our experiences. Universities may not have a specific eLearning **vision**, but their actions on the ground are already transforming education. Do we **have to** rethink learning and teaching?

Our model within the Coimbra Group could be the same one we successfully use in research: namely, to form a network that works together, through shared projects, staff exchanges and seminars such as this. A community that ‘does things’ together is one that is alive and functioning.

In the first session, we ask: *‘How are we as universities moving forward?’* *‘Do we have a vision?’* Although we could all answer as individuals, there could well be some contrast between our own views and our universities’ visions. Our aim is to look honestly at our universities’ strategies.

In the second session we ask: *‘What are we actually doing?’* *‘What explicit and implicit strategies exist?’*

Finally we shall look at options for future activities that will bind us together into a network.

There are a few other points I should like to make here, and these relate to the eLearning Task Force and its role in this workshop and future activities. Recently we surveyed eLearning activities in the Coimbra Group universities, and the results of that survey show substantial activity in all of them, plus ideas for the sorts of cooperation they would like to see the Task Force foster in this area. This workshop is the first such action, and we have selected topics partly from the survey results. Its success will be dependent upon you and your universities, putting effort and a small amount of funding into the follow-up, and the Task Force will coordinate and the Office will support our actions. New rounds of funding will come from the European Commission, and we should take advantage of these to provide projects for us to work together on.

I hope that you find the workshop useful and that it forms the start of a long and fruitful cooperation between us all. Our report will be circulated to all workshop participants and to the Coimbra Group at its General Assembly in Granada next April.

Jeff Haywood  
University of Edinburgh  
Chair, Coimbra Group eLearning Task Force  
November 2002



## Current University Strategies

What are our universities' views about eLearning? Often the unspoken view of the rector determines its direction, creating problems of transition when there is a change of leadership. Do universities need a vision of how to proceed with eLearning, or can they do without? Sample comments from participants representing Coimbra Group universities are summarised here.

### Example 1

We don't have an overall vision, but a few years ago there was a paper on ICT and pedagogy issues. We have the freedom to do as we want, so each faculty has developed its own system. There are plans for a theme day to discuss issues about ICT in teaching; a year ago there was one on ICT and pedagogy. The dream is that teachers will build up their own tradition without having people from outside telling them what to do. An important discussion has started; next year there will be four pedagogy lecturers in place to encourage this.

One of the main concerns is how to get resources. There is an important need for teacher and staff training. We have a cross-faculty project that started with students as its target audience and hopes to get more teachers involved. ELearning is conceived of as the use of IT in teaching and learning in our universities; it should not replace face-to-face teaching and traditional methods but instead complement them.

### Example 2

Our aim is to introduce ICT into teaching activities, with programmes to help train individual teachers to create eLearning projects. The problem is how to improve the participation of teachers and the production of multimedia material. We work with teachers to produce multimedia material using WebCT. It has been difficult to introduce ICT into teaching because promotion for teachers is based on teaching evaluation, so they're reluctant to tamper with their methods and risk bad ratings.

### Example 3

ICT plays an important role in networking and learning. Another focus is the directive from government to streamline study programmes as part of the Bologna process. This will make it more important that students follow programmes rigorously—a substantial part of our funding is linked to numbers of students and graduates—so we have to look into new ways of improving the learning process, and see ICT as an important part of that.

We have an ICT strategy for the period 2003-06, and eLearning is one of the main foci. The aim is to collect information about the tools needed and the relevant contact people, and share it within the university. There is a clear intention to push this policy from the centre to areas where eLearning has not been developed.

So far no central body is taking care of ICT initiatives. This year we appointed a vice-rector for education, who has eLearning as an important part of his responsibility. There is a centre for continuous and distance education; also a strong research group in the social science department doing research into ICT learning. We haven't chosen one system of virtual learning environment (VLE), but eventually will, at least to join together what already exists. We don't yet have a very clear vision of where to go, but want to be strongly involved in ICT learning.

We are interested in seamless boundaries between research and teaching. We don't want to choose delivery systems that bind us, or to produce learning materials that can't be used. The vision is one of using research in teaching. Our learning culture is interested in ICT support issues, not academic issues. But ICT acts as a catalyst for pedagogical change, with a consequent need for change management.

One problem in our country is that we need to facilitate distance education, but our population is so small that it's difficult to get any economy of scale. So our focus is on on-campus programmes, and then seeing what we can take out.

### Example 4

Ours is a very traditional university with a strong research focus. Previously, little attention was paid to learning and teaching; there was no strategy. But we have had a new Vice-Chancellor for one year who has produced a new ten-year plan, and some of the aims have had an impact on learning and teaching,

innovation, and eLearning. There is a commitment to widening participation—a nation-wide aim at the moment—to support different kinds of students with different backgrounds and needs. We're not focussed on distance learning, but increasing numbers of postgraduates study that way, many of them part-time. Our new Vice-Chancellor is interested in eLearning and has been sounding out many people.

We have a learning and teaching support service, which has a bottom-up set of initiatives—with different people supported individually. It's part of Information Services and reports to its director. It's the only such service in the university, so although it is not very strong within the university, it has to support initiatives in this area.

We have produced a draft strategy on eLearning, looking at its educational role and educating senior staff about why we should have it. ELearning is a means to an end, but we're starting to embed it in the university's overall strategy. The learning and teaching committee have agreed to fund a three-year eLearning advisor post, an academic post with the role of integrating strategy in the faculties.

We have adopted Blackboard throughout the university, and are committed to it until 2004; there is a portal steering group looking at whether to develop our own VLE after then or to keep using Blackboard, and at issues of support and ownership. It's difficult to find people who will "own" Blackboard as a support issue; support has fallen to the learning and teaching support service, but there are issues around server maintenance and future growth—there's a lot more work to do.

## Example 5

Our university has a vision for eLearning, but it is not very precise. The future will mainly depend on tangible projects. A two-year project calling for the virtualization of subjects was launched and has been very successful.

We are trying to create a foundation focussing on degree subjects, with four vice-rectors related to eLearning. We are starting to work on eLearning at the lower level. WebCT is the only platform allowed in degree courses; our WebCT licence is for 4000 students only, so we are facing the problem in a year's time of exceeding that number. We intend to have a strategic plan to cover the next 2-5 years.

The system is decentralized but concentrated on several organizations which cover eLearning. Professors decide which courses remain face-to-face and which will be virtual. When producing virtual courses, they get preliminary assistance, then prepare the materials, then get evaluated externally; if their course doesn't meet the required standard they can teach in the usual way. So we are only going with eLearning if it's up to a high standard. A research group in the education faculty is working on virtual projects.

## Example 6

A recent document outlined a vision for introducing a learning management system that is easy to grasp and understand. In five years every teacher should be able to use this for administration and organisation. The question is how to use it to change pedagogy. There is no shared vision, but instead there are different visions around the faculties. In some faculties problem-based learning has been introduced, which is bringing together education and technology.

The document about eLearning strategy found that:

- The importance of eLearning depends on countries and regions. Virtual education is not considered that important in our country.
- Flexibility is very important.
- Competition among universities is also important and is more obvious in smaller countries.

The suggestion is to formulate one or two important projects rather than have many different projects.

## Example 7

We want to remain a top research university, but also to be strong in teaching. In our region, polytechnics and universities are working more closely together as a result of the Bologna declaration. We are looking for bridging programmes between institutions, and look to ICT and eLearning to help with this. Ministers wanted institutions to form local connections, but the universities thought otherwise, believing that we should attract students from everywhere in the region. ICT and eLearning makes that more possible.

We have already seen many initiatives in the last decade from teachers who wanted to be involved in eLearning. The university has supported individual initiatives with research development funding for

innovation in education over the past 6-7 years. There has been a history of individual initiatives, but the university wanted to go one step further and take a more strategic view. It has added ICT to the concerns of its education advisory group, which meets 4-5 times a year to discuss eLearning processes at the university, and advises the university board accordingly.

## Example 8

Our university is at a relatively early stage in its ICT strategies. It has made a general statement to the effect that wherever ICT adds real value to learning and teaching, we will endeavour to use it. The university has a very distributed power structure, which makes for an interesting scenario in terms of central strategy. Resource questions come up in supporting virtual learning environments. We use an open source system, which is much easier to customize than commercial alternatives. Our internal organization is nothing like an American university; in order to design our VLE around final exams it's essential to get at the code to customize it. We cannot order anybody to do anything, so it's all by encouragement; we tell academics they are free to use any system, but this is the one we'll support.

We are moving from helping students and faculty use ICT in learning (Word, Excel) to using it in teaching. The aim is blended, hybrid learning, using distance education in part, and having students come to campus for some of it. ELearning is important for that.

We have been asking which is the best way to continue. One is the TV model—expensive and glossy courses that must have a long life—while the other is the radio model—cheaper and more ephemeral. We might need some of both. Some courses, engineering for example, can't afford a course that has to run for ten years before covering costs.

## Example 9

Six or seven years ago we had pockets of high activity in different faculties sparked by self-starters. There were some failed attempts to link them together; a number of organizations offered to do it for us. The university put a steering group together. Since it is a research-led university, we wanted to know how to leverage eLearning without putting yet more load on academics. Enhancing learning on campus and embedding it in the everyday life of academics was the long-term vision, with culture change the biggest challenge.

The university elects a rector every ten years. Two and a half years into the steering group process there was a change of provost; since then, eLearning has had an even higher role. We are in the first phase of consultation on the university's new strategy; eLearning is embedded in it, not only in teaching and learning but also in student services.

## In Conclusion

Few Coimbra Group universities had an explicit institutional strategy integrating ICT and eLearning into their overall aims and objectives, but most took an incremental view. Certainly there was a strategy in many universities to use the possibilities of ICT in learning and teaching, often as part of a wider aim to increase revenue.



## ICT Strategy: Why and How?

ICT strategies, it was noted, are rooted in the cultures and particular conditions of different institutions and countries. They are heavily influenced by structures within the organization, as well as the general ethos about the importance of teaching relative to research. As some rebalancing between teaching and research is occurring in certain universities, ICT strategy often has to be formulated in an environment of organizational change and uncertainty, even before the wider question of change in ICT is considered.

The first question for some was “why should you start using eLearning?” What influences academics to engage in eLearning: Culture? The availability of technology? Some responses were:

Universities are aware that without eLearning they appear from outside as old-fashioned. Students will vote with their feet. It's not their experience at school that is raising their expectations, but contact with eLearning in universities; once they see some academics using it, they expect others to do as well.

There is a need for strategy; the question is what it should contain. It should not contain very specific choices when it comes to technology. That would be dangerous and wrong: technology evolves too quickly, and we can't be sure of developments in two or three years' time; if we make too firm choices now, we could move in the wrong direction.

Every institution has a support centre. Strategic planning is needed just to decide who is going to develop support materials: will they have a single centre for the university, or a centre in every faculty? Is this a decision that must be taken at a high level?

What is the starting point for eLearning? Is it content, resources, or the teacher? We took teachers as the starting point; when they adopt IT, it flows into courses.

The heterogeneity of students is a challenge. Some are full-time, others part-time; some study only in the evening, and are not on campus every day. Lectures on the Internet are a first step towards distance learning, but we need high quality eLearning systems. Some universities are at a disadvantage when their language is specific to their country; they can't exchange materials. High quality material is often only available in English.

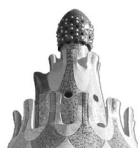
What is the objective of eLearning? Sometimes it's purely and foremost about revenue generation; about increasing student numbers. Another issue is culture change: some universities enjoy considerable autonomy, but others are under more control from government. Also, technological influences: some universities are already tied to particular VLEs. Also, the structure of university: if you have ten campuses even in a local area it makes a difference.

One question was how to measure the success of eLearning:

Often it's number counting—number of courses online, number of students using them—but that's not scalable unless academics know how to create online learning materials. Most universities start with small-scale pilot projects. Ours started back in 1997 with seven made-to-order projects, and learning how we can embed them with academics. But at some stage we had to turn from being developers to consultants for development, and move from developing content to developing people's ability to develop content. You compromise on production—not every academic will be a multimedia developer—but what you don't compromise on is academic value. It's difficult to let go—you'd like every piece of content to be as shiny as possible—but if you hold onto it it's not scalable.

No university, it was agreed, can support made-to-order eLearning projects across the board. Academics should be developing simple resources that can be integrated into standard frameworks, as part of a blended model.

For many, documentation of a vision was not the key issue. The question was instead how best to motivate staff and students to use ICT effectively: with a top-down strategy, or by “letting a thousand flowers bloom”? Approaches to ICT strategy effectively fell into two camps: a distance-learning-based top-down view, and a bottom-up grass-roots approach of using ICT to meet specific needs. Another factor is the speed of implementation: some universities would like to move as quickly as possible by promoting change from the top down; others feel that this creates resistance from below.



## Challenges and Possible Solutions

Challenges arise from the Coimbra Group members being mostly classical universities. For example, one participant said that at Granada “half the staff are against the use of ICT in education”, and Oxford it was said has “some tutors who as a matter of pride do not open their email”.

This culture of resistance is a major problem in implementing eLearning: “We can throw technology at them, have the best learning support, all the rest, but have to tackle head-on the cultural issue.” It may, however, be a generational affair, as younger academics are keener to use ICT in teaching and research.

The first challenge is raising awareness among staff of eLearning and its potential. One university had an annual exhibition of “good eLearning examples”: “We invite everyone from the university community to have a look. It’s a showcase of good practice. We also go out to the faculties to explain how we as a centre can support them.”

Others agreed on the importance of going out to the faculties: “If you organize central events, same enthusiasts turn up, but only if you go out do you get greater penetration.” Even then, two different approaches are needed, as “there are those who have heard of eLearning, and want to know how to go about it, and others who have heard of it, and are scared they’ll lose their job.”

Awareness-raising should be integrated into inductions for new staff, it was suggested, not just by having technologists talk to them, but non-technologists who have used eLearning—for example, classicists.

Three of the objections to eLearning heard from teachers are:

- eLearning is not capable of delivering in educational terms;
- Teachers are losing command of their teaching; and
- The high cost will draw funds away from career prospects.

Participants agreed that technologies should not replace traditional methods; they should be considered as complementary rather than an alternative.

It is important to work on the accessibility and effectiveness of new technologies in order to avoid social discrimination. Employability should also be an objective.

Technical questions also arise when requiring advanced use of the Internet from systems that may not allow it. Starting on the path of ICT use makes the real problems clear; some are always unforeseen.

One participant suggested, “If people say no to eLearning, they are often saying no to resource-demanding concepts. Think instead of what can be done with basic infrastructure: Internet, email, Web, chat groups.”

The main question is how to put the right incentives in place for teachers to use eLearning. Universities could decide that those who participate in a serious way are rewarded in promotional terms. But this has a downside:

Having done a strategic review in the last six months with a group looking at reward and promotion, I agree that we do want to encourage those who use it, but do we want to disadvantage those who don’t? They might have reasonable grounds not to use it. Some think eLearning is being used as a tool to determine what people teach, and in some countries it has in fact been used that way.

Rewards for eLearning use could tie into “innovation in teaching”; the idea of instituting a Coimbra Group prize in eLearning was considered. Some universities approach the question of encouragement by having eLearning “champions” supporting individual faculties, with a small budget to help them out.

Potential solutions to many problems are already under the control of rectors—making money available, creating support systems, linking to international ones (such as Europace)—and can condition what teachers can and should do. Teachers could be trained in eLearning as part of becoming professional academics. One model of success is universities creating a strategic alliance, signing papers committing themselves to action and supporting each other. One participant suggested that “we could benefit from developing common material in cooperation”. (He also wondered whether universities would “continue to offer undergraduate material at all” when that could be taken over by commercial providers, allowing universities to focus on research.)

It was suggested that all staff need to be involved in institutional planning when it comes to eLearning, as it has such wide-ranging implications. A top-down vision of eLearning is good, as long as teachers

see it as supportive to their own work. Awareness-raising should be part of any implementation strategy, to give staff a sense of ownership of its objectives.

Encouraging staff to use IT in teaching and learning will be a slow and difficult process if institutions themselves do not see a need for it. Academics can be very motivated, but if there is no infrastructure or over-arching approach there is nothing much they can do. As such, there has to be an "IT effort" at the rectorate level; demand cannot only come from the bottom. Those at rectorate level should be encouraged to promote the use of IT in an effective way through their words and actions, to foster a climate in which eLearning can develop.

The challenge is that universities must work on all of these levels simultaneously when implementing eLearning: the strategic level and the individual level.

When developing eLearning strategies, it may in fact be easier to collaborate across national boundaries than within (although language barriers may sometimes be present), as more competition exists between universities within the same country. This clearly lends support to promoting greater co-operation in the area of eLearning within the Coimbra Group.



## Infrastructure

Having the necessary basic infrastructure in place is essential. If academics don't have a decent PC, one participant asked, why should they feel involved in eLearning? A related question was whether universities should give every student a portable computer. This has a major effect, as it moves computer support services away from supporting labs towards supporting ad hoc machines. Requiring students to buy PCs also creates student pressure on universities to provide online education. (One participant noted that their university may soon have to demand that students have their own portable computer, with the university providing wireless network access. It might require students to take a course to acquire basic ICT skills to reduce demand for support.)

Support infrastructure means more than technology infrastructure; some learning and teaching centres have been drawn into ongoing support of eLearning software. This prompted some strong warnings: "Once you start supporting WebCT server, it's very difficult to stop. We draw a boundary: WebCT support is like managing the web server for the university. The learning centre should support the teaching use of it, not the technical maintenance, which should be managed by the computing service."

At one university, staff use of Blackboard, which began as a pilot project, had exploded over 18 months to 150 courses, raising the question: at what point does the learning support centre hand over support to computing services? (Another university hired six technical people to support Blackboard server, the leader of whom spends part of his time in computing services and part in the learning and teaching centre.)

Computer Services has to be part of choosing the product, and the next product. We meet with the director of Computer Services every month to discuss the next thing, so that they're embedded in the process all the way. They need to have ownership of the process, just as academics need ownership of course use, because they're the ones on the help desk, getting the blame if a server falls over. Another problem is integrating the VLE with the student records system. You have to have the relevant parties involved to make that happen. It's a really important part of a VLE to have that integration, a big selling point to students and academics, but it's not as easy as vendors say—it needs close co-operation.

There can, however, be difficulties in identifying exactly who should be involved in selecting and implementing a new VLE.

Could the Coimbra Group help to develop scalable projects for use by others? There was agreement that it could, if institutions with comparable experience were able to be matched with one another. An open source approach was advocated: "Sharing information is what we're supposed to do in academic environment; everybody has something that should be shared." But until there are standards for learning objects, it will be difficult to share resources.

The issue of proprietary learning management systems versus open standards was discussed throughout the workshop. All VLEs have a built-in pedagogy, the implications of which must be considered by teachers. Companies selling VLEs have been changing their financial models in recent years, raising their prices once their customers are "locked in". This gives further incentives to universities to explore open source alternatives.

A common aspect of Coimbra Group members is that they have a lot of archives and libraries; instead of buying learning objects from Microsoft, they can digitize their own material and share it within the group.

The role of university in society is knowledge dissemination, teaching and research. One question is how to store our teaching data; it should not be in a commercial format if it's to be useful in years to come. We make use of different material: pictures from medical research; databases in social sciences. Material should be stored as primary data. When developing web-based interfaces it's important not to use a propriety format.

Open source issues were explored further on the final day of the workshop. Participants discussed the possibility of creating a Coimbra Group Open Source Club, in the first instance as a discussion forum to share opinions and discuss challenges. Problems with open source products could be tested in this environment before releasing them to the public. The aim would be to create a European open-source eLearning platform as an alternative to VLEs tailored for North American models of higher education, such as WebCT and BlackBoard.



# Intellectual Property

The possibility of sharing resources in an open-source manner faces more than just practical obstacles, however. One group discussed the centrality of copyright and intellectual property rights issues to any ICT strategy:

Central to any strategy is the question of intellectual property and how it relates to faculty. It needs to be embedded in strategies and also policies of universities. Our university's solicitor has claimed ownership for the university of everything except books. He argues that eLearning should be treated like patents: the university claims ownership of patents and gives royalties to faculty members (90 percent of the first 100,000 euro, then a sliding scale down to zero above 500,000 euro). The question is, at what point does something that somebody puts on Blackboard become the university's property?

When we looked at the intellectual property issue, it was very noticeable that universities had taken a lenient attitude prior to now. There has been an understanding that academics are free to take material with them to another university. Now there's a flip the other way; Columbia University in the US wants everything, arguing that you're an employee, using university equipment, university time and so forth. Our university is going towards a model of shared intellectual property.

One approach to shared ownership, it was noted, had been discussed at a recent Educause conference: that of moving towards negotiated deals in which academics retain intellectual property rights for the products of normal use of university ICT resources, but the university claims anything that requires special technical input by support staff (such as advanced multimedia).

Other problems raised were:

- Faculty members using text from books, making the university liable to large bills from publishers (library resources were also raised in this context);
- Broader issues of third-party claims to intellectual property: the Italian government, for example, claims copyright for all pictures taken in Rome, and says that these cannot be put on the Web without payment.
- Competition of digital resources with traditional forms of intellectual property: "The creation of digital learning materials is a complex problem from the point of view of research universities. Writing high-level textbooks is big business. Is it useful to turn these into digital form?"

It was suggested that the Coimbra Group look at the possibility of influencing international policy on copyright:

At the moment we buy back our own material from publishers; there's now a movement for not-for-profit publishers. For many students the problem is getting in to the library, whether it's two miles away or 1000 miles away; there's a huge convergence of physical resources. Online learning can help overcome that, but it only works in the context of online resources.



## Academic Staff Training

Staff training emerged as a major concern across different groups in the workshop, and was discussed in a dedicated session on the final day. A range of experiences and suggested strategies emerged:

We're not doing a lot—the pedagogical unit runs a 4-day course for new teachers (general training for new academic teachers is obligatory), but outside that nothing is really happening. At the ICT lab we start with discussing how to implement ICT—pedagogical questions and issues—but the pedagogical unit is voluntary. The intention is that each faculty should have a pedagogical supervisor.

We run a full non-compulsory course on teaching development for people coming in; in the programme we have a workshop overview on higher education, where we have integrated aspects of eLearning. In the beginning we ran high-end courses on multimedia etcetera which were a total flop, so we scaled it down to teaching PowerPoint and so on. Pioneers don't need help, but how do we get the majority of faculty who are computer illiterate to the point where they are literate and comfortable? Throughout the universities in our country there is no contact between pedagogical units and IT units. Programmes that go deep into technology neglect the learning aspects, and we have the converse problems. We won't be able to progress in academic training if we don't work together. Our problem is that support staff don't know how to train—or even if they do, people won't enrol in those courses because they're not seen as academic. Whereas if I run a PowerPoint course, it fills up quickly because it's seen as academic. There's a suggestion that all faculty development courses be put online—but if the professors don't go online, what use is that?

The challenge is not to teach the experts. Our unit's task is to design courses—we are the learning centre for university. Our area is very big, so we were forced to think about distance education early. More and more courses are delivered in virtual mode—about 80. Thirty to fifty percent of professors are involved in continuing education; the rest are gradually being involved. Some faculties are not involved at all. The forerunners include theology and the arts faculties, which was not what we expected. There are questions about the faculties of science and technology and how to get them involved.

Others reported similar problems in science and technology departments: they consider themselves experts in the technology, heavily using computers for research, but many do not transfer their skills to teaching.

Differences in ICT skills among academics are reflected in staff and departmental web pages; in some universities these were “all over the place”: “The students complain, so we're looking at providing university templates to tidy them up.” Students are now looking at the Web as their first source of information, and are a considerable source of pressure on universities and staff to improve their eLearning performance. There is also outside pressure—visitors to university sites complain when information on courses is unclear.

Should there, then, be top-down obligation for staff to acquire ICT and eLearning skills? Participants who had been through this debate in their own institutions observed that “diversity is a quality of a university, and we don't want to kill that, but if you want to be a leader you need that overall plan”.

Integrating centres for pedagogical resources and technological support is a precondition to progress in eLearning, it was argued, but having these different strands located in the same area can be difficult; people from different backgrounds must form and then fit in with a new hybrid culture, effectively abolishing some “splendid isolations”.

We have five faculties, each with its own IT set-up. There's a debate about whether we should have a content-management-based home page system. With so many different types and styles, it's a long process. You need some common system when presenting courses.

I thought implementing a common framework would be very difficult, that I'd have to fight with academics, but they're actually reassured by it, and by being part of setting standards. They're aware of the chaos there is, and are eager to take part in bringing order.

One participant told of a university that offered free ICT and eLearning support and then charged for support after approximately 200-300 hours (and charged a higher rate for outside work). Because the support was seen as having a value, departments felt that they had to use up their free hours.

What can the Coimbra Group do to facilitate academic staff training in eLearning? One suggestion was “some kind of exchange program, possibly for teachers to move around”: A common course package, handbook, or website covering the basics of eLearning was also suggested. Help with translation into English on home pages was another suggestion; this would facilitate understanding between Coimbra

Group universities. The Group could also serve as a channel for implementing some of its members' research on faculty development in this area.

The final list of suggestions included:

- creation of a web site;
- exchange of personal experience;
- creation of a mailing list to build common links.

This would require a strong push from rectors, as changes in the learning and teaching environment require a climate of support from the top.

Also raised was the possibility of eLearning audits within the Coimbra Group: at the request of a member university, and with the organizational assistance of the Coimbra Group, a group of dedicated academics from other institutions could audit their use of eLearning. When a similar process was performed at sixteen universities in the UK, those performing the audits found them very helpful in bringing people together and focussing minds.



## Research

All research universities today face the question of how to make use of ICT in applying their research:

The basic question is the role of eLearning in research-based universities. The most active are not the traditional universities but the new ones, as they are closer to private enterprise and focus not on research but on teaching. The model is one of distance learning courses using IT. This type of education is different from the traditional research university model; a research university should think about using IT not for virtual or distance courses but as part of a hybrid model.

Research-intensive universities may sometimes fail to pay enough attention to teaching, or to sufficiently leverage research in their teaching. The improvement of education has often been a result of research initiatives, but adequate recognition for research efforts and incorporation of research into education can be lacking. In recognition of the centrality of research to the Coimbra Group, a final-day session of the workshop focussed on the issue of eLearning research.

Participants reported a wide range of research interests, both of their own and at their institutions. Examples were:

**Michael Meredith (Oxford):** My interests are in community, whether it supports learning, how, and the effects that different types of community have on the learning process; my research is into the production of tools. Also, how to do quantitative and qualitative research in this area.

**Dietrich Albert (Graz):** Knowledge base theory, mathematical models of collaborative learning, creating metadata, cultural issues.

**Jean-Francois Deneff (Louvain-la-Neuve):** I am not personally involved in research, but would raise three projects: the RIRIES project about pedagogical efficiencies; people from the Education Science department looking at the influence of new technology on the behaviour of teachers; and the CLAROLINE open-source VLE.

**Joël Quinqueton (Montpellier):** Corporate memory management; collective memory assistance to individuals and newcomers in the organization; eLearning as a case of collective memory organization.

**Erno Lehtinen (Turku):** Tools for supporting problem and case-based learning in university teaching. I have been developing open-source modular platforms for eight years. The application, WORKMATE, is not based on any particular database, but is as open as possible—all materials produced by this tool are accessible without using the tool, using network protocols. We have used this and other platforms, e.g. Knowledge Forum, in the research side of computing. I am also interested in the pedagogical use of learning objects and how they can be embedded in different teaching and learning processes.

**Vincent Wade (Trinity College, Dublin):** My focus is on the personalization of eLearning—“elite learning for the masses”, “just for you”—by dynamically composing courses for a specific learner at a specific moment in time based on a specific context. A second area is ambient learning and the idea of “smart space”, with processors being embedded in everything in next five years; how to coordinate devices to allow you to do your tasks more efficiently; how to coordinate devices dynamically to create a low-level intelligence all around you that knows what you’re trying to do. I’m interested in pedagogical design tools, especially ones that help tutors and academics design learning strategies. Also M-learning—mobile devices, and how they can be leveraged in pedagogical contexts using a mixed-modal approach, PDA for some parts, tablets for others; how to integrate learning experience across devices and on the move. How do we embed eLearning within an organization into everyday life and make it part of people’s daily routine? A broad topic, but it manifests itself in different ways in different universities.

Other research interests reported across the discussions included:

- Educational principles;
- The semantic web;
- Interoperability of learning management systems;
- Integration of digital libraries with VLEs;
- Searching across digital resources;

- New forms of pedagogy;
- Student-centred learning;
- Student motivation and empowerment;
- Learning strategies and discourse;
- Organizational change (in universities particularly);
- ICT and society more broadly;
- Cultural resistance;
- Creating and managing metadata, and data-mining; and
- Individualization and personalization of eLearning.

It was possible to identify some common areas of interest:

- Platforms;
- The effect of eLearning on learners;
- The effect of eLearning on teachers;
- The effect of eLearning on organizations;
- Cultural resistance;
- Structural organization;
- Content and structuring content;
- Collaboration, collective memory, community; and
- Cross-cultural approaches to learning.

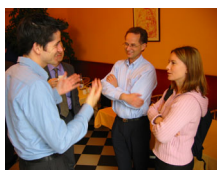
The last point emerged as a high priority, and given the Coimbra Group's composition immediately suggested possible collaborative action: that is, having the Coimbra Group study different cultural approaches to learning. The question of "cultural competence" was seen as central to the new learning culture of eLearning: How can you learn in such a way that you pick up competence in a culture, as opposed to merely knowing about it?

Developing many different learning styles and models and testing those against a target audience is difficult for the small groups that typically constitute eLearning units in universities. Collaboration across the Coimbra Group could allow its members to test different models against similar student audiences.

Let's look at different cultural learning habits, how students behave. Each university could be part of an evaluation, with one or two driving universities and others serving as the field where this research takes place, with the general aim of knowing better the students we welcome in the next year or so. The results would be helpful to anyone. We could have a pilot of one or two universities; the strategy should be to start small, make a grant application, then go large-scale.

A similar suggestion was to share one or two eLearning modules across universities and integrate them into their courses to compare reactions from each university's students.

Another suggestion was to put together a database or directory of eLearning expertise within the Coimbra Group, to help those who might be interested in working together. This could be housed on a simple community website, which could also serve as a place to keep people informed. It would then be possible to build on this community site with a Coimbra Group workshop for eLearning researchers (as opposed to practitioners); many of the eLearning elite are from the Coimbra universities. Participants saw Coimbra Group meetings as a valuable opportunity to communicate with other universities in a non-competitive manner. The potential for the Coimbra Group to help eLearning researchers with administration, co-ordination, and applications for funding was seen as particularly important.



## Concluding Remarks

Throughout the Barcelona workshop, the question behind much discussion of ICT and eLearning policy and strategy was, "What can the Coimbra Group offer its members that we cannot do ourselves?" A range of possible strategies for eLearning development in member universities emerged over the two days. These included:

- Peer review of best practice;
- Creating a database with examples of good eLearning initiatives;
- Listing all online courses offered by Coimbra Group universities;
- Improving the perception of ICT in teaching and learning at rectorate level;
- Creating a Coimbra Group prize in eLearning;
- Establishing guidelines for quality in eLearning, and working on a Quality Standards document illustrated with best practices (international, national and interdisciplinary);
- Deciding on a platform to disseminate eLearning information among Coimbra Group universities;
- Listing contact details and research interests of people working in the field in Coimbra Group universities;
- Participating as a group in new international projects in eLearning; and
- Collaborating on the development of open-source eLearning software and other effective common investments.

These suggestions and others previously mentioned have been summarised in the Action Points document shown in Appendix 3. (The action points were drawn up to encourage joint activity among workshop participants, and are not aimed at a general audience; they are included here for information only.)



## Appendix A – Programme for the Workshop

### Day 1 – Sharing views on eLearning – informal benchmarking and networking

day	time	Session	Topic
Thurs 14	0930-0940		Welcome
	0940-1000		Overview of eLearning and HE – setting the agenda for the workshop – plenary
	1000-1230	A	<p><b>Topic:</b> The role of eLearning in the traditional university – groups</p> <p><b>Activity:</b> Participants describe the role of eLearning in their own university – what has happened, what is planned/expected and explore similarities and differences in their views</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> informal benchmarking, widened group of contacts and networking</p>
	1100-1115		Break
	1115-1215	A	Session A continued
	1215-1300	A	Report back and open discussion
	1300-1430		Lunch
	1430-1615	B	<p>Strategies for eLearning development in Coimbra Group universities</p> <p><b>Activity:</b> group discussion of the strategies that member universities have adopted to develop eLearning</p> <p><b>Outcomes:</b> shared experiences and identification of common groups of strategies – success factors – informal benchmarking</p>
	1530-1545		Break
	1615-1700	B	Report back and open discussion – agree topics and structure of Day 2
	1700-1730	C	Presentation by University of Barcelona of Virtual University developments
	1730		Close day 1
	2000		Dinner

### Day 2 – Planning future activities – identification of areas for collaboration and sharing

Fri 15	0900-1030	D	<p><b>Possible topics to be chosen include:</b></p> <p>eLearning futures – what is coming our way – how do we keep abreast of impending technological developments?</p>	Participants asked to define top 2
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		<p>Academic staff development – how best to give academic staff the skills they need to develop and deliver eLearning?</p> <p>How should the Coimbra Group address the political imperatives such as the EC eLearning Objectives, use of eLearning to further the Bologna Declaration etc?</p> <p><b>Activity:</b> group exploration of challenges and successful approaches within our universities</p> <p><b>Outcomes:</b> definition of areas where CG collaboration/cooperation might yield added value</p>	<p>choices before arrival – we assign to groups – needs chairs and reporters</p>
1030-1100		Break	
1100-1230	E	<p><b>Topics:</b></p> <p>Staff exchanges &amp; visits: mapping the options</p> <p>Collaborations in eLearning – development of joint on-line courses, sharing digital materials etc</p> <p><b>Activity:</b> group exploration of feasible approaches and setting priorities for CG-led action</p> <p><b>Outcomes:</b> priority lists for actions within CG where collaboration/cooperation might yield added value</p>	
1230-1330	F	<p><b>Topic:</b> The way ahead: mechanisms needed to facilitate collaborations within the Coimbra Group</p> <p><b>Activity:</b> plenary discussion</p> <p><b>Outcomes:</b> guidance to TaskForce on how to promote greater interactions between member universities – identification of common ground for collaborative work – priorities for action</p>	<p>Reporters do 5 mins max here then plenary</p>
1330-1500		Lunch	
1500		Close day 2 and workshop	



# Barcelona eLearning Workshop, 14+15 November 2002

## List of Actions for consideration by workshop participants

### Introduction

The first Workshop meeting day was intended for sharing views on eLearning with the aim of informal benchmarking and networking. The participants informed each other about eLearning implementation in their universities and discussed strategies for eLearning development. In the afternoon plenary session the specific themes which had highest priority in the participants' views were identified:

1. Academic staff development;
2. Research and development intentions;
3. Quality issues;
4. Choice of digital platforms;
5. Central vs devolved services.

The next day these topics were deepened in group discussions focusing on the following aspects:

- What are we doing already;
- What should we be doing in, say, the next five years;
- What could Coimbra Group do to assist to get there;
- What practical proposal for collaboration could we make.

Point of departure for common work was decided to be the elaboration, initiation and consolidation of common activities by persons from universities which participated in the Barcelona Workshop, preferably those who share the Barcelona experience, with possible addition of colleagues from some universities that had expressed great interest in the Workshop but could not participate. At a later stage, once new activities would have taken shape and are under way, the inclusion of other member universities may be considered by the Task Force eLearning which is coordinating this work on behalf of the Coimbra Group. The Workshop Closing Session heard reports from the five thematic discussion groups and approved their recommendations for common activities. These are now taken further by the circulation of this note.

In the following sections 1 – 5 the thematic discussions are summarised giving some information on the exchanged views and ending with specific proposals for action. We have added some thoughts on getting each activity started under the caption *implementation*.

In addition individual participants suggested topics which they considered very important/suitable for Coimbra Group action. As far as not covered by the group discussions these will be mentioned at the end of this note as well.

Full Workshop Proceedings are being prepared for information of all Coimbra Group members.

### 1. Academic Staff Development

The discussion yielded quite a number of significant aspects with relation to eLearning (implementation) and identified 12 factors which may influence academic staff attitude.

Based on this analysis the following initiatives were suggested which the Coimbra Group may take to assist universities with eLearning implementation:

1. Analysis/compilation of basic eLearning abilities a university teacher should have, to assist in designing effective approaches.
2. Similarly, an inventory of successful incentives/drivers.
3. Drawing the attention of Rectors to the importance of the creation of an enabling eLearning environment in their university, underpinned by concrete measures such as:
  - creation of a coordinated or integrated Resources and Support structure/unit, bringing together –if applicable in one building- expertise in pedagogics, technology and media (incl. library);
  - adapted career and reward structures/measures;
  - adequate training facilities;
  - some seed money.

### Proposed outcomes and actions:

1. Creation of a special interest group of staff development professionals;

To give attention to, for instance:

- compilation of a list of basic e-teaching competencies;
  - inventory of incentives/drivers which have proved to be effective;
  - joint (applied) research on academic staff training aspects;
  - facilitation of useful contacts, e.g. of teachers within a specific subject area;
  - exchange/web mounting of examples of good practice, of both courses and approaches/processes for the information of the SIG members;
  - creation of specific web site or of links from existing CG home page to selected relevant cases of good practice for independent use by CG academics.
2. Appeal to Coimbra Group Rectors in the Proceedings of the Workshop to see eLearning as a high-priority strategic element in institutional development, and to maintain that sense of urgency in their universities through such measures as outlined above.
  3. Suggestion to the Rectors that all courses in their universities should have a home page, with at least the core course information also available in English. Teachers should be responsible for ensuring that such pages are kept up-to-date, either by themselves or by support staff in consultation with them. Appropriate technical and pedagogical support should be available to ensure this.
  4. Recommendation to Rectors to discuss, e.g. at the Granada General Assembly, the possibility of mutual assistance in their eLearning implementation efforts by audit-like visits of experts from other member universities.

## Implementation

Ad 1 **Workshop participants are now invited to register their interest** in the Special Interest Group Academic Staff Training by sending an email to Noelia Cantero and Jeff Haywood. As soon as sufficient reactions have been received the SIG will be convened by or on behalf of Jeff.

A full record of the group discussions will be provided to the participants.

Ad 2-4 These items will be recorded in the Workshop Proceedings and given special attention in the report of Task Force chairman Jeff Haywood to the Granada General Assembly.

## 2. Research and Development Intentions

One theme that ran through both sessions was the need to get added value in each university of membership in the Coimbra Group. One way to do this could be through using the differences between the universities as a topic of investigation – for example cross-cultural differences in staff and student views of eLearning, and also in resistance to adoption of eLearning. One approach to the former might be joint courses or modules developed and delivered by several universities within which reactions of users could be investigated.

There was also a strong view that the current dominant commercial platforms, WebCT and Blackboard, were presenting problems to universities, both of rising cost and of constraints. An alternative might be to work with open-source systems (some of the universities present had developed these in-house), and to share access and further development. All felt that we need greater personalization of eLearning ('just for you') and also more collaborative learning and sense of community. Alongside this we might be developing new forms of pedagogy, and of content and knowledge representation.

Research needs funds, and the Coimbra Group could assist in supporting this key university activity by helping with collaborative bids for funding, but without inhibiting single member universities in their own search for resources.

## Proposed outcomes and actions

Concrete actions involving mini steps that lead to the specific goals :

Create a simple directory of eLearning research groups within the Coimbra Group universities to enable the formation of sub-networks in special interest areas. This should not be just another database but a community site where interactions between researchers can be hosted and supported.

Organise a Coimbra Group workshop on eLearning research. This could be part of a major conference or stand-alone, and will depend upon the views of the active members of the group.

The eLearning Task Force should identify and promote collaborative bids for eLearning research funding. Research is one of the key business processes of the CG universities and so formation of a 'network of excellence in eLearning research' would be one approach.

We could begin some small pilot research projects. For example, the Coimbra Group offer us all the option of research into cultural differences in eLearning, an area that cannot be investigated by single universities. A simple small pilot study researching cultural issues could be set up, perhaps of 6-9 months duration, followed by an evaluation to determine whether it is worth going forward with a larger study.

## **Implementation**

**Workshop participants are now invited to register their interest**, or propose colleagues in their universities who are well positioned to participate, by sending an email to Noelia Cantero and Jeff Haywood.

Cooperation along the lines indicated above will be initiated by or on behalf of Jeff.

A full record of the group discussions will be provided to the participants.

## **3. Quality in eLearning**

The need for measurement of quality in eLearning is mainly due to increased student exchanges between countries and lack of quality assurance systems in some countries. We have assumed that on-campus education in our universities means high quality, partly due to the collegial and cultural milieu, but if students do not go to the campus, or do so much less, what is our assurance of quality education? Moreover, the Bologna process of a single structure for degree programmes may speed up these processes.

Evaluation systems set in place for traditional campus-based education may not transfer to eLearning, especially if students are at a distance. Another change that eLearning brings is more team teaching and team delivery. Some criterion-based system (standards) is needed with clear objectives. These might include staff and student views, and measures of process as well as content. We also need to decide if cost-effectiveness of eLearning is part of the process, for instance if we are concerned with how effectively staff and students use it. A tool set for evaluation of eLearning courses is urgently needed. There are such for traditional education and for classical distance education, but we are most likely to be using blended learning where there is little experience in traditional universities.

However, we need a light touch process – too heavy a hand will put off those staff innovating in learning and teaching, and for most it is voluntary not compulsory for them to take this approach.

Those CG universities that have made some progress with eLearning may have useful things to tell us – we need to draw on their developing expertise. Examples might include peer reviewing of on-line courses, use of external evaluators, methods for analysing data collected from eLearning delivery systems.

## **Proposed outcomes and actions**

- 1) Draw up a register of staff with expertise in quality in eLearning in the Coimbra Group universities, perhaps beyond
- 2) Collect examples of tools and experiences that can be shared – make these available to all staff in CG universities.

Bring together the staff responsible for traditional quality assurance (or for learning and teaching where quality staff do not exist separately) from CG member universities and those responsible for designing and implementing eLearning. They can work together to map out the issues and some ways to tackle the problems and challenges.

## **Implementation**

Ad 1) and 2) will be done by the Task Force eLearning supported by the Coimbra Group office;

Ad 3): **Workshop participants are now invited to register their interest** in the Special Interest Group eLearning Quality Assurance by sending an email to Noelia Cantero and Jeff Haywood. As soon as sufficient registrations have been received the SIG will be convened by or on behalf of Jeff..

A full record of the group discussions will be provided to the participants.

#### **4. Digital Platforms**

The initial discussion focussed on the current position in each of the institutions represented in the discussion group, and their major concerns and interests of the moment. Some diversity was identified, with some institutions being experienced in the use of their present digital platform, or more typically platforms, and with others being involved in an evaluation and consultation process to try to inform the direction they should take.

Of the institutions with systems already in place, several expressed concern about changes to the licencing structure and costs, and there were reservations about being tied down to any particular commercial system. Generally institutions were exploring mechanisms to integrate their digital platforms with other university wide information systems.

Almost all the institutions represented expressed an interest in open source software, several were considering seriously whether Open Source would offer a more appropriate route forward. It was however noted that Open Source did not mean Free - there are considerable implications for staff resources to install, maintain and develop an Open Source system.

#### **Proposed outcomes and actions**

The discussion group proposed the establishment of an Open Source Club.

Initially this could be a discussion group/list serve to share opinions and information about different Open Source systems.

If there is sufficient interest it could develop in many ways such as

- to share examples of challenging use cases, and to seek suggestions from others about Open Source solutions that might be appropriate
- to provide a test bed for each other's potential software releases into the wider Open Source Community
- to collaborate to produce a European Open Source digital platform
- to provide a voice to approach WebCT/Blackboard etc collectively on licence issues

#### **Implementation**

**Workshop participants are now invited to register their interest** by sending an email to Noelia Cantero and Jeff Haywood. As soon as sufficient reactions have been received the Open Source Special Interest Group will be convened by or on behalf of Jeff.

A full record of the group discussions will be provided to the participants.

#### **5. Central vs Devolved Services**

This group discussed the different models in place in their institutions, and any tensions that surrounded the relationships between central and devolved services. The general picture was of institutions with a central service, and with a number of outlying services, at least equal in size. Medical colleges/faculties seemed to be consistently well provided for. Different models were used to facilitate interaction between staff in the central unit and staff in the satellite units - coffee & cake/ wine & cheese seemed to be a popular strategy although not always successful. Many central units were able to incentivise their support provision - either through a credit system, or through competitive submission of projects. Almost all central units expressed some concern that faculties were looking at top sliced payments with a critical eye and that as well as the need to provide detailed information about the work and the value added that central units were providing, there was a feeling that to devolve such services would not be efficient, although there was a lack of concrete case studies to point to.

#### **Proposed outcomes and actions**

It was therefore proposed that this group should work collaboratively to produce an academic paper illustrating 3 or 4 (fictitious) universities and the models by which they organise their support services. These models should describe a range of aspects such as organisation, management, finance,

marketing, integration with other services ... The paper could then be used to make recommendations to CG rectors.

## Implementation

**Participants in this particular discussion group are now stimulated to undertake the proposed activity** and to notify Noelia Cantero and Jeff Haywood of their intention.

A full record of the group discussions will be provided to the participants in this activity.

## Suggestions made by individual participants

The following suggestions were made at several stages in the Workshop. The Task Force would welcome these themes to be taken forward but cannot take responsibility for their initiation at the present moment, given the amount of activities announced above. However, **initiatives by the proponents, or others in coordination with them, would be highly appreciated.**

- A common distance learning course on distance teaching (adaptation of existing French language course made by U. C. Louvain; mentioned by J.-F. Deneff/Louvain)
- Involvement of Coimbra Group universities in test/implementation phase of faculty development R&D project (project done by Geneva; mentioned by N. Rege Collet)
- Close following of European developments in IPR/copyrights (mentioned by T. Wyatt; Oxford)
- Creation of a Special Interest Group of IT managers (mentioned by T. Bu, Bergen)
- Creation of a Special Interest Group of Continuing Education providers (mentioned by T. Bu, Bergen)

Finally, the creation of a Coimbra Group prize for 'e-innovative teachers/initiatives' has been suggested and was welcomed by the Workshop participants. Task Force chairman Jeff Haywood will report this suggestion to the Rectors at the Granada General Assembly together with other Workshop recommendations.

## Cooperation opportunities mentioned in eLearning Survey

Summaries of the survey on eLearning in Coimbra Group member universities conducted February – April 2002 and refined later in 2002 were circulated before the Workshop and used as documentation for the discussions. At the closing session some potential items for cooperation which had not been covered by the Workshop as such but got a high interest rating in the survey were highlighted:

- Initial and continuing (school) teacher training: this interest has been mentioned to the coordinator of the ODETTE project, Dr Pieter Vroegop in Leiden.
- Creation of Virtual Laboratories: this interest has been mentioned to Professor Luigino Benetazzo in Padua, who is developing such labs.
- HUMANITIES-type blended learning cooperation development: for the attention of the Task Force meeting at the Granada General Assembly. For that discussion **immediate suggestions by member universities for blended learning development in certain subject areas would be highly appreciated.** Please send email to Noelia Cantero (cantero@coimbra-group.be) and/or Jeff Haywood (jeff.haywood@ed.ac.uk).

Edinburgh/Leiden/Brussels, 10 April 2003

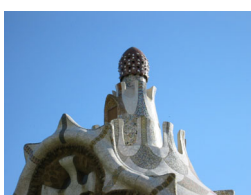
The Workshop Organizing Team

Noelia Cantero, Jeff Haywood, Peter Floor

Denise Haywood, Nora Mogey, Rory Ewins



<b>Name</b>	<b>Institution/University</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Institution/University</b>
Albert, Dietrich	University of Graz	Lindroos, Paula	University of Åbo
Aslaksen, Knut	University of Bergen	Mac Labhrain, Iain	National University of Galway
Baldry, Anthony	University of Pavia	Meldgaard, Helle	University of Aarhus
Buelens, Herman	University of Leuven	Meredith, Michael	University of Oxford
Bu, Tor	University of Bergen	Mogey, Nora	University of Edinburgh
Cantoni, Virginio	University of Pavia	Norman, John	University of Cambridge
Cantero González, Noelia	Coimbra Group Office	O'Leary, Ros	University of Bristol
Carstensen, Doris	University of Graz	Peric, Tomás	University of Prague
Cordón García, Oscar	University of Granada	Quinqueton, Joël	University of Montpellier
Cornet Calveras, Albert	University of Barcelona	Rege Colet, Nicole	University of Geneva
Denef, J F	University of Louvain-la-Neuve	Sánchez Mesa, Domingo	University of Granada
Dorup, Jens	University of Aarhus	Spunda, Miloslav	University of Prague
Dupuis, Marc	University of Leiden	Ten Pujol, Agustí	University of Barcelona
Ewins, Rory	University of Edinburgh	Timmis, Sue	University of Bristol
Ferrer Alemany, Isabel	University of Barcelona	Torrissen, Merete	University of Bergen
Floor, Peter	Coimbra Group	Van Petegem, Wim	University of Leuven
Haywood, Jeff	University of Edinburgh	Verstelle, Marja	University of Leiden
Kayser, Bengt	University of Geneva	Wade, Vincent	Trinity College Dublin
Kühnlova, Hana	University of Prague	Wasson, Barbara	University of Bergen
Lehtinen, Erno	University of Turku	Wiersema, Bert	University of Groningen
		Wyatt, Tristram	University of Oxford



Coimbra Group of Universities  
119 rue de Stassart  
Brussels B-1050  
Belgium

+32 2 513 83 32  
cantero@coimbra-group.be  
<http://www.coimbra-group.be>



Dr Jeff Haywood  
Chair, e-learning Task Force  
Scottish Centre for Research into On-Line Learning & Assessment  
University of Edinburgh, School of Education  
Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ, UK

+44 131 651 6545  
jeff.haywood@ed.ac.uk  
<http://www.scrolla.ac.uk>

