Appendix 5
EURIM Working Group Minutes

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THE EUROPEAN INFORMATION SOCIETY GROUP EURIM

Minutes of EURIM's e-Skills Working Group Meeting with Diana Laurillard

26th November 2003, kindly hosted by SEMTA, 22 Old Queen Street, SW1

Meeting Notes

1 **Chairman's Introduction**

1.1 The Chairman welcomed everyone and outlined the objectives of the meeting: to discuss members' responses to the recent White Paper "21st Century Skills – Realising our Potential" and The DfES Consultation Document "Towards a unified e-learning strategy" with Diana Laurillard who had kindly agreed to give some background on the consultation and to answer queries.

1.2 All present were enthusiasts for using technology in the education sector. However, they were frustrated by government tendency to give money to pilots but rarely follow them up, and by the cyclical pattern of government skills consultations that seemed to raise similar issues over the years but did not lead to implementation of the required changes. There had just been a consultation to set up the Sector Skills and Local Skills Councils and then before the ink was dry, yet more white papers and consultations were being pushed out. What was the purpose of this latest exercise and how could respondees best make their frustration felt to government?

2 **Skills Consultation – Diana Laurillard**

2.1 Despite the exciting possibilities of interactive technology and its applications to learning, new technologies had come and gone and there had been lots of government investment, but the quality of education had not been radically transformed. The purpose of this consultation was to build on previous work and look at skills from a unified perspective for the first time.

2.2 It was important to understand that this was a long term project, with substantial government funding over quite some time, and to appreciate the good work that had been done in the sectors, for instance in schools. Roll-out within the schools system would not happen overnight so the benefits were only just being seen in some cases.

2.3 The technology was new and constantly changing and therefore it presented continual challenges to teaching and learning methodologies and to the way the whole system was organised. It was a continuous learning process to work out how the latest technology could make a contribution to education.

2.4 It was now recognised that IT could make a real difference to education and that it would be here for the long term, so the time for pilots, initiatives and short term funding was over. The focus was on embedding IT over the long term.

2.5 To provide for a genuine knowledge economy, the education system had to be constantly innovating and responding to change. New ways of learning had to deliver better value and ultimately create a better workforce. It was about raising standards and improving choice across all ages and skills strategies, and raising levels of engagement in learning.

2.6 The objectives of the current DfES strategies were to raise standards, improve quality, remove barriers to achievement, broaden participation and prepare individuals for employment.

Strategic Actions to Embed e-learning across all Sectors

2.7 The e-learning strategy identified a minimum number of strategic actions that had to be taken to ensure e-learning was embedded. It was partly an issue of leadership, partly one of supporting innovators effectively, and partly seeing things from the learners' perspective. The joining-up of systems required to unify learner support as they moved through the education system was not just a technical issue. Individual learner numbers and ID cards were human and political issues.

2.8 Assessment must be aligned with the skills that young people were developing and kept up to date with new pedagogies.

2.9 The e-learning market needed improvement. The government was a huge, unintelligent customer with a long chain of command to buyers who were not the end users. It was a difficult market for suppliers with lots of individual schools. That market had to work better for government, industry, educators and learners.

2.10 There were lots of different standards that needed to be interoperable within a framework. QA standards had not been reworked for e-learning.

2.11 It was vital to identify the basic things that needed to be in place so that the system could be sustainable and affordable. Tranches of new government funding would not continue in the long term.

Achievements to Date

2.12 There were many ways in which e-learning could contribute to education, in terms of individualised learning, personalised support, tools for innovation, the creation of virtual environments and online communities, enabling flexible study, and disseminating good practice. From the individual learning perspective, ICT could dramatically improve the range of an individual teacher, which if handled correctly, could be very cost-effective. E-learning was about providing collaborative tools for learning, not slogging away alone at a machine.

2.13 The ratio of computers to students was increasing: more than 99% of schools were connected to the internet and broadband for schools was now rolling out which enabled the internet to be used as a resource (90% of secondary schools had 2mbps). As the capabilities were understood, demand for bandwidth would grow and so the analysis of what was needed would continue. A real transformation was being achieved with 35% of teachers (150,000) with personal access to ICT.

2.14 An online educational content portal was now available with over 25,000 e-learning resources and ICT was being embedded in learning and teaching materials across the curriculum. 96% of teachers were trained in ICT skills and 99% of schools had signed up for or completed their ICT training.

2.15 In HE, JANET connected all HE and FE institutions and the Research Councils. Innovation in ICT was supported by JISC which provided network, digital resources, research and development. E-learning content was supported in HE through the activities of UKeU, through the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund and the Learning and Teaching Support Network and linked to the HEFCE e-Learning Strategy which aimed to harness ICT to best effect.

Outstanding Issues

2.16 There was still the problem of content creation, which had to involve teachers. It could not be left to the software industry alone.

2.17 Teachers were not being trained fast enough in ICT skills and this was a big issue. Leadership was key. It was less important for teachers to go on a day course than to operate in an environment where they could apply what they had learned within a supportive peer group.

2.18 Broadband was not enough on its own. Broadband had not transformed teaching and learning in the HE sector, although content had been enhanced with initiatives from the funding council and the establishment of the learning and teaching support network. Again, leadership and skills were key. The focus was on creating a sense of entitlement to level 2 skills whilst building on the sector skills councils. Learn Direct was having a transformational effect on its 800,000 online students. There were some excellent case studies to learn from.

2.19 The consultation tried to take a unified approach, recognising the progress made but accepting that there was a long way to go and that everyone had to work together to achieve it.

3 Particular Problem Areas

3.1 The Chairman asked whether there were particular areas where help was needed in defining or identifying forward strategy, or any particular hurdles where input would be welcome.

3.2 A number of the strategic actions identified were going to be very problematic, and input would be very welcome. These were: leadership, sustainability, supporting innovation, unifying learner support and aligning learning assessment.

- Leadership:- Trainers and leaders had to become skilled and take ownership.
- Sustainability:- Having the right amount of equipment and being able to afford to keep renewing it. As schools became better equipped, there was less need for government to make special budgetary provision.
- Supporting innovation:- research councils had to recognise the importance of this and allocate funding accordingly, develop workshops and centres in schools, etc..
- Unifying learners support:- this was one of big challenges where help was needed. It was a case of joining up databases, systems, people, organisations. All these systems had to be interoperable to make unified learning support a reality.
- Learning assessment:- QCA and the awarding bodies had the job of aligning assessments. The difficulty was making it comparable with previous qualifications. If there were similarities there were always problems of falling standards – eg in GCSEs and A-levels and if they were radically different it was impossible to compare. This became a political as well as a pedagogical problem.
- Building a better e-learning market:- this was a very difficult issue in terms of the degree of intervention required, allocating roles, to make that market operate effectively. Private sector input was needed. The DCF (Digital Content Forum) was involved as they had a real interest in the growth and operation of this market and made it easier for schools to do the right thing.
- In the area of technical standards there was the important issue of IPR which would become increasingly important to individual teachers creating intellectual content. How could knowledge and learning techniques be "commodified" and how could distribution be charged for? How should cross border access to UK learning resources be handled when they were created with tax-payers money?
- On technical and quality standards, BSI and QCA were used to define what was a good quality learning experience and mapped out standards through e-learning support using criteria like the time taken to answer an email. Technical standards were more difficult – ensuring interoperability, avoiding proprietary lock-in. The e-Envoy's e-GIF was part of the way forward.

The chairman thanked DL for her comments and opened the discussion to the floor.

4 Capturing and sharing good practice

4.1 Q The DfES objectives were good, but how could teachers be persuaded to share their practice? There were plenty of statistics on teaching people to use ICT, but less work on helping teachers teach with ICT and communities of practice. Taking something good – whether content or practice - and sharing it with others could be the most effective way to move e-learning forwards. All that was needed were tools and common standards to enable teachers to "bottle" their knowledge and provide a vehicle for disseminating it. A single data interchange standard was needed for good practice, not just for content, so that any tool could be available to other teachers elsewhere in the system.

Helping teachers communicate was another problem as they could be very reluctant to share their material.

A The e-learning standards going into the e-GIF were content-related and useful in that content could be taken from one system and run in another system, but they did not come with the practice standards that needed to accompany them.

4.2 **Q** More clarity was needed in defining good pedagogy to make it easier for people to create good content.

A Although it was important to be able to articulate and capture good practice, there would never be a definitive "best role" for e-learning because it would always be developing and ideas would always be changing. A strategy that supported innovation rather than giving definitions might be more helpful.

4.3 **Q** The National Learning Network had developed some standards to define quality learning. Teacher evaluations were also useful feedback, particularly on things that were not working well.

There were many tools to create content with and "bottle" good practice eg. an MS office programme called “Innovative Teachers”. A standard should not describe what tool should be used but ensure that once created, it could be applied elsewhere.

A Bottling good pedagogy depended on developing appropriate tools, but MS Office was not one. Social learning could create a collaborative community environment for learners which could be used as a tool to capture pedagogy by defining the learning practice for a particular topic and then reapplying it elsewhere.

4.4 **Q** The “robot teacher issue” was an emotive one. In industry it had taken 15 years from the point where people were getting PCs to the point where organisation were getting full value from ICT. The 35% of teachers with laptops needed to rise to 100% as soon as possible to give a critical mass of individuals who could experience the advantage of having their own information device. Schools that were leading in e-learning had invested heavily in laptops and everyone was used to the computer being a part of the learning process.

A It was important for people to get on with what they had, building on and disseminating good practice, and not hold back because of notional barriers. These – such as all teachers having laptops, or schools having 10 meg connections - would always exist. There would always be a stage process, with some schools ahead and some behind.

4.5 This was why leadership was so important. Even if every teacher in a school was equipped with a laptop and a whiteboard, engagement depended on leadership.

5 Targets, Assessment, measurement and statistics

5.1 Figures and statistics did not always mean much – 99% of schools connected to the internet did not mean that 99% of schools were using that connection effectively, or at all. More meaningful statistics were needed before a strategy could be evolved.

5.2 That was exactly what the consultation is trying to achieve. Ministers needed to set targets so that activity was focused on getting everyone to one stage so that things could move on to the next stage. Targets were needed so that there were transparent deliverables for public expenditure.

5.3 99% of school connectivity was delivered by BT who worked with OFTEL to reduce prices for school connections in order to reach that target. The problem was that if targets were wrong, the effects would be wrong. PC ratios and connectivity were the wrong targets because they encouraged people to tick boxes rather than exploit the technology to contribute to their pedagogical strategy.

5.4 Targets should be a management or strategic tool to highlight priorities and should not be over-interpreted. A school with an internet connection was still a stage further on than a school without one.

5.5 As time went on, connectivity statistics became less relevant. Broadband installation led to practice changes in schools once people realised that the connection was robust, and there was multi-user access. Teachers had more confidence that the technology would work. It would be instructive to compare practice in schools with broadband as opposed to dial-up.

5.6 Ofsted had a huge database of information about good practice that was not made available because it never got out into the public domain. That data was needed to provide national benchmarks for schools and to set up appropriate partnering between schools.

5.7 Computer-aided learning was not new. The problem was that it had been viewed as a replacement technology rather than an enabling tool. Where in the strategy was an evaluation of the objectives? How would success be identified and measured? Should successful applications be applied broadly or just targeted where they could do the most good?

5.8 Applications should be targeted where the combination of learning, teacher, context, subject and the nature of the learning objective come together in the decision to use it – which should be in every subject.

5.9 Over the years governments had set out education strategies with targets, such as class size or teacher qualifications. Head teachers would increasingly be asked to think about using ICT to help deploy their budget for cost-effective learning.

6 Improving the e-learning market

6.1 A better e-learning market was needed but that depended on a better environment in which schools could innovate, a support network that allowed those who were innovators to propagate their thinking approach and inform practice.

6.2 Building a better e-learning market required a sustainable model where schools were free to use different learning networks, whether commercially or publicly driven.

6.3 Embedding ICT into the curriculum effectively, both into the learning process and the home environment, was key to making the market work and linked all the strategic actions – leadership, affordability and sustainability. However, there were some major issues around quality of service and learning support, and more fundamental issues about who would pay for it, particularly for home access which might not be for strictly educational purposes. ICT spend was about 2bn - about 5% - 7% of the total amount of money spent on the education process. Engaging the supplier community was key to conserving this marketplace.

6.4 DTI was looking at engaging innovative suppliers through the DCF. Increasing numbers of people investing in home PCs and the expectation that people would increasingly pay more personally for their lifelong learning and adult education would contribute to private sector initiatives in building the market. The important thing was creating the workforce that the economy needed and for this a unified, not a fragmented, market was needed.

6.5 There were two sorts of market – the employers who needed what the education system was providing, and the suppliers who the education system had to interact better with. Making this market work better was key.

7 Re-engaging employers

7.1 Hardly any employers used publicly funded training, which was a major disconnect in the market. Private sector education spending was 6-10 times that of the public sector. Employers now disregarded government programmes because they were not relevant for their needs and were seeking to answer their skills needs overseas. Re-engaging them should be a government priority. Government focus was all on NVQ2 and below yet the areas where input was needed were those in which the UK was uncompetitive – technician-level skills.

7.2 Consultations were not the way to re-engage employers in the process. Microsoft's 11-strong skills unit had 3000 requests to attend consultations per year. Market research was the answer yet the DfES spent practically nothing on market research within its £12 million research budget and much of the £4million spent on researching educational needs was reworked earlier information.

8 Training the trainers

8.1 Currently, teachers did not need to renew their skills, and unlike other professions there was no mechanism for CPD so they needed some means of spreading best practice.

8.2 Higher level qualifications were needed for those wanting to progress in this way, not just in e-learning which was just a catalyst for other kinds of change. However, this approach might not ensure that e-learning was embedded.

8.3 Although it was acceptable to justify expenditure by increasing productivity or improving standards, the education system could not ignore the technology of the age. The problem facing the NGFL was not technology, it was teachers' understanding of the learning process and pedagogy and their ability to manage change.

9 Strategy

9.1 Current DfES strategies were about expanding education, raising standards and improving participation by removing barriers to lifelong learning. There was about 25% more education going on and funding would have to come from a mix of public, private and personal. This meant that as a nation the increased proportion of GDP spent on education had to translate back into an improved workforce and improved economy and the role of e-learning was to make teaching more cost effective and to use learners' time more efficiently, so that the additional spending was affordable.

9.2 It was possible for government priorities to be ignored at grass roots level. Prioritising e-learning was only one of many pressures on head teachers and if many other transformational practices were categorised with e-learning they all might be ignored. A better market was key and had to be about better ways for schools to change the way they did things.

9.3 E-learning was being prioritised at top level, in terms of the whole departmental strategy. The critical question was whether there should be a separate e-learning strategy or whether e-learning should be embedded across the overall DfES strategy. The strategy document did not have an action area on technology because it was embedded as a *sine qua non.*

10 UK Competitiveness

10.1 The UK was bottom of the OECD league in workforce skills. Employers had walked away from every government initiative because they were focused on NVQs and below and not on technician level skills. There was a need for global networks that brought together professional and technical updating through alumni networks.

10.2 Skill levels were not necessarily falling, the forms of accreditation were inadequate and were therefore not reflecting new skillsets, so this was affecting the statistics.

10.3 Tax breaks had been promised for personal e-learning but they went with the demise of the ILA and the UK was still the only OECD nation where training could not be set against tax. Would there be a follow-on for the Learn Direct and UK Online Centres, whose funding would cease shortly?

10.4 The “salary sacrifice” programme was going well, where employees gave up some company pay in return for a PC which came with e-learning content and an array of things to start them off. The company saved on the NI which they could plough back into the system if they wished. It was effectively a tax loophole that was favoured by Treasury.

10.5 The advantage of tax break schemes like these were that they do not involve Treasury.

11 Any other Business

11.1 There was no other business, so the chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.