

**"The Regional Dimension of the EU eLearning Agenda"**

**CONTENTS**

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Forward.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Benefits and Results of eLearning .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Obstacles to eLearning .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5. Future eLearning Developments and Concerns .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>6. Current Use of eLearning EU Funding Programmes .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>7. Future Thematic Priorities for EU eLearning Programmes .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>8. Regional Co-operation in eLearning.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>9. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>10. Profiles of Participating Organizations .....</b>	<b>38</b>

# 1. Introduction

## *Policy context*

The need for joint efforts by the European Union (EU) in the eLearning area is undisputed. This is recognised in EU eEurope Action Plans of 2002 and 2005, the eLearning initiative and programme as well as the i2010 initiative. More broadly, it is implicit in the objective set in Lisbon in 2000 by the EU Heads of State and Government of the European Union becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world by 2010.

While the EU enjoys one of the highest levels of education and has the necessary investment capacity, there is much progress yet to be made in the use of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). For Europe's regions, the new technologies are both an opportunity and a challenge: an opportunity because these technologies create new prospects for development, especially in the more isolated regions; and a challenge because of the digital divide between rich and poor regions, urban and rural regions, and even within regions. The challenge for policy-makers is to make sure that Europe's regions are able to make the most of these new opportunities.

## *Regional contribution*

The regional level is therefore key when it comes to promoting eLearning and the adaptation to the knowledge economy throughout Europe. Consequently, representatives of Umeå University Brussels Office, Emilia-Romagna EU Office, East Finland EU Office, Unioncamere Piemonte, Scotland Europa, Wales European Centre, Welsh Assembly Government, Regione Marche, Basque Government, Generalitat de Catalunya, West Sweden, West Norway and South Denmark decided to co-operate actively in the area of eLearning by forming a 'Working Group'. This initiative is also supported by the *European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning, EARLALL*<sup>1</sup>, which also is committed to the area of eLearning. A dialogue between this regional "eLearning-grouping" and the European Commission has been established.

The regions are encouraged by the willingness of the European Commission to maintain this dialogue with the regional offices on eLearning. By working together, the regions can deliver real benefits for the eLearning stakeholders that we represent by facilitating the building of transnational partnerships for joint EU projects. We can also be a channel of communication between the Commission, eLearning practitioners, learning providers and appropriate regional authorities. This knowledge sharing can contribute to maximising the impact of EU eLearning programmes on European competitiveness and human capital.

---

<sup>1</sup> E.A.R.L.A.L.L was established in 2001 and is currently constituted of 19 regional and local authorities – <http://www.earlall.org>

## 1.1. Regional Experience of eLearning

### *eLearning Questionnaire – Introduction and Set-up*

The Working Group sought to contribute to the evolution of the European eLearning programme and the future integrated programme for lifelong learning by sharing the regional experiences of eLearning. To this end, a joint exercise was introduced during spring 2005. This took the form of an eLearning questionnaire seeking information on:

- eLearning activities;
- benefits and results of eLearning;
- obstacles to eLearning;
- future eLearning developments and concerns; and
- the use of EU eLearning programmes.

The questionnaire was circulated to primary and secondary schools, adult education centres, university/higher education centres, research centres, vocational education/training institutions, companies, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), trade unions, community/voluntary organisations, governmental agencies, local authorities and regional government. This resulted in approximately 100 responses in total from twelve regions, of which the university and higher educational bodies provided the majority.

### *eLearning activities*

The respondents had experience mainly of delivering distance learning, using eLearning at work or content production. Other areas of expertise included delivering eLearning in the classroom, developing eLearning policy and pedagogical research on eLearning. About a quarter of the respondents had experience from technological research on eLearning.

This report presents the responses to the questionnaire in a structured way, and provides further eLearning information and contacts about each organization participating in the initiative.

## 2. Forward

**“This report is touching most of the prominent issues in the field of eLearning.**

**It is especially valuable to see that pedagogical issues are stressed, as we can easily be overwhelmed by various technologies, but to make effective use of these in an educational setting is not as easy as it may seem. Often there are tricks of the trade one will only find out by doing it one self, sharing these amongst the organisations involved is a valuable asset of the network.”**



***Fred de Vries (educational technologist) has evaluated EU eLearning programmes and supported the April 2004 'Networking eLearning Practitioners' seminar by giving advice on how to write a successful EU project proposal.***

### 3. Benefits and Results of eLearning

This section provides a summary of key eLearning benefits, seen by the regions surveyed. Although most regions agreed on key benefits, some differences appear in the context of eLearning. Some regions focus on specific benefits of improving and extending “distance learning”, others emphasize the advantages of “transforming the learning experience”, as well as promoting blended learning strategies within the classroom. A few saw the potential of empowering learners through “informal eLearning approaches”, capitalizing on the potential of internet to create flat, horizontal information and learning paradigms.

#### 3.1 Widening Participation/Digital Divide

The key advantage for most regions was enabling wider access to digital learning for “any person, anytime, anywhere”. eLearning’s key benefit was its capacity to overcome the digital divide and extend digital literacy to ordinary citizens, overcoming geographical, time and social barriers. This meant connecting effectively with isolated communities in rural, remote or mountainous regions or to key groups that currently suffer from exclusion, particularly disabled people. Time flexibility was seen as particularly advantageous for workers, enabling a better work/life balance and providing encouragement to small enterprises to more actively promote virtual and blended workplace learning.

*“eLearning gives the students a flexible way of learning. It enables studying independently, at any time, at any place.”*

**Mrs. Maija Suhonen, Learning Co-ordinator, Savonia Polytechnic, East Finland**

#### 3.2 Pedagogical Benefits

For most regions, eLearning was not just about opening up “existing learning structures and content to new customers”. A significant number of regions emphasized the new methodological potential of eLearning to “transform the learning process”. Key advantages are its greater interactivity and connectivity, its adaptability and capacity for promoting digital and key skills.

*“Students can learn following their own time. They can choose a wide choice of material. Explanations and help are available even after the lesson through a blog.”*

**Training Institute for Hospitality Management of San Benedetto del Tronto (AP), Marche**

Its potential for enabling a more stimulating and motivating learning environment for students and teachers alike, is another key benefit.

*"It depends on the users: from my experience with students, the interactive eLearning component is most appreciated because they can take part in discussions about a subject, take their own time in understanding, comparing different points of view and thus achieve a stronger involvement in class life even with large numbers (150-160) of students. Besides, teachers are helped in archiving and/or monitoring student's exercises, grades and their individual use of contents."*

**Mrs. Barbara Demo, Associate Professor Computer Science, University of Turin, Piemonte**

### *Promoting Global Interactivity*

Whether through distance learning or in the classroom, regions highlighted the potential for increased communication between the teacher and the student, as well as student-to-student communication. Teachers could more easily monitor and support individual students' work, whilst connectivity between students was being dynamically used to promote team work, joint projects and student information exchange.

*"The added value is the possibility of widening the knowledge of best practices to solve problems and the access to updated data banks for the spreading of knowledge: It is necessary to foresee some economic/advising support in order to develop eLearning initiatives."*

**Big Omega Services, Enterprise of San Benedetto del Tronto (AP), Marche**

Some regions were already profiting from the potential to promote "global communication" between students and teachers across the globe, whilst others particularly valued the interactive debate promoted by a new "social mix" of students, a direct result of the widening student base.

*"One of our most positive outcomes was that one of the candidates knows the true meaning of distance learning after relocating from Greenock to China for a year. Despite moving to the other side of the world, the customer scheduling manager was able to successfully complete her Diploma in Management thanks to innovative online training system 'Learning Assistant'."*

**Mr. Phil Stretch, Business Development Manager, Learning Assistant, Scotland**

### *Adapting and flexibilizing teaching/learning*

The use of digital materials and methods allowed easy adaptation and updating of material for an increasingly diverse student base, incorporating an ever wider range of teaching tools e.g. the capacity to provide content in 2<sup>nd</sup> or minority languages for specific learner needs. For most regions, digital content meant enabling providers to improve the "digestibility" of learning units, breaking it down into bite-sized chunks,

according to the specific needs, learning styles and time available to the learner. This handed back the control to the learner, deciding on how the materials would be used, adapted to their own needs and resources.

*"Our eLearning services team has developed a unique content management system which allows easy access to learning objects for re-purposing and also offers a unique tracking facility which allows teachers and researchers to view how students with different learning styles engage with the online materials. This information is fed back to the developers to enable further adaptation of the presentation and style of materials to suit a variety of learning styles and improve the learning experience."*

**Prof. Norah Jones, eCollege, University of Glamorgan, Wales**

#### *Driving the digital literacy/key skills agenda*

The use of "eLearning methods", whether in the classroom or in distance courses, implicitly required students to increase key skills as well as ICT proficiency. eLearning was seen as a key method for promoting digital and traditional literacy amongst the general population, providing the necessary tools to participate in the "knowledge society".

It also created a new "learning paradigm" for most students, increasing their autonomy for accessing information and providing them with a safe environment to stimulate real-life experiences. eLearning-based courses provided a comfortable environment for citizens who were technology shy, learning to engage properly with ICT for the first time.

*"A successful model of using eLearning effectively is Coleg Menai (FE) work-based learning where Key Skills experts take a laptop to the workplace and the tuition is done on site. This provides just in time teaching and learning at the right place and the right time, involving a blended learning approach."*

**Edwyn Williams, Development Adviser, DYSG, Wales**

#### *Motivating teaching/learning environments*

All regions reflected on the "transforming and inspiring" potential of eLearning for the teacher and teaching method. On the one hand, it opened up new sources of attractive, dynamic material which could be mixed and matched, downloaded, individually designed or re-purposed and presented in motivating presentations, whether for distance students or within the classroom. This included stimulating graphic material, video and other interactive material. The technology enabled teachers to provide more personalized student support and systematic monitoring.

*“Interactive elements such as animation and video can present things in different ways and can be repeated as many times as the student requires. For example for a nursing qualification, a CD was produced on childbirth and labour. An animated doll was used to show the movement of a baby through childbirth. This is often something midwives find difficult to understand so being able to watch the animation repeatedly is of great benefit.”*

**Dr. Debbie Sapsead and Steve Gilligan, Head of Educational Technology Services, University of Bangor, Wales**

### **3.3 Creating Learning Organisations**

For many regions, the full potential of eLearning and the use of digital technology, has not been fully realised yet.

#### *Integrated knowledge management*

Some respondents were exploring the benefits of extending “new eLearning methodologies” into a total, integrated “knowledge management systems” within the organisation. This might be focusing specifically on common information source and use, or more ambitiously to develop “active integrated strategies and systems for human resources, valorisation and training”.

*“Technology platforms are often generic and there are surprising similarities between the support needs of different courses. The concept of learning objects and reusability is a concrete example where it is clear that, for example, eLearning resources for human biology are sharable between medicine, nursing, health care, pharmacy etc. The potential for more effective management of learning assets across an institution would also be a positive value proposition.”*

**Mr. David Dewhurst, Assistant Principal, University of Edinburgh, Scotland**

#### *Collaborative working*

A key aspect was the increased use of networks and collaborative working, both within and between sectors. Although some regions recognised the problems of “authorship”, there were many positive examples of a new determination to promote open sourcing and to widen the range and quality of materials used within and between key sectors. However, some regions underlined the contradictory influence of the current competitive climate where training providers are forced to compete for funding

### **3.4 Quality and Efficiency**

A final consideration was the potential of eLearning to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the learning process. For many regions, cost benefits had been achieved by increasing students’ access and use at





























































































