

The European eLearning Summit

extending educational opportunity

accelerating educational innovation

exploring public private partnerships

**Summit Declaration
May 2001**

eLearning – extending educational opportunity

The strategic goal for Europe, set by the 2000 Lisbon Council, is to become ***“the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.”***

On March 30th, 2001 the Council of the European Union presented a draft resolution on eLearning to the Member States. The European Commission’s eLearning Action Plan sets a number of ambitious challenges to European education and training systems:

- to develop the comprehensive integration of ICT into education and training
- to create flexible infrastructures that will make eLearning available to all
- to promote universal digital literacy
- to create a culture of lifelong learning
- to develop high quality European educational content

To meet these goals, Europe rapidly needs to expand educational opportunity. We need to ensure the entire population achieves high educational standards, and to embed a culture of lifelong learning to respond to evolving skill requirements. The rapid pace of social, economic and technological change, together with concern over the threat to the future competitiveness of European industry, has particularly created renewed urgency to find solutions to the problems of a growing ICT skills gap and inadequate levels of digital literacy in the workforce. eLearning, provides Europe with the means to achieve this expansion in education and training.

The European eLearning Summit held on May 10th and 11th, 2001 brought together for the first time representatives from the private sector with education experts and public sector officials in a dialogue on developing education and training provision in Europe, underlining its importance as an issue for all sectors of the community. The Summit explored the challenges outlined in the eLearning Action Plan. This paper presents an initial set of recommendations developed by the Summit related to the measures suggested by the Commission. The Summit recommendations underline that urgent actions are still required in order to create the conditions where eLearning opportunities are harnessed so that Europe’s education and training systems produce the skilled workers and critical thinkers required by a knowledge economy and where lifelong learning is a reality rather than a distant goal.

The eLearning Action Plan emphasises the potential for public private partnerships (PPPs) to contribute to expansion and innovation in education and training delivery. The Summit particularly attempted to identify areas for sustainable collaboration and partnership in eLearning between the public and private sectors. The paper also recommends actions that are still needed to help clarify the extent to which emerging models of public private partnerships can contribute to the implementation of the eLearning agenda.

eLearning – accelerating change & educational innovation

Europe is rightly proud of its predominantly public sector educational provision and comparatively high educational standards. Early progress has been made in recent years to deploy equipment and infrastructure and provide relevant professional development in order to adapt education to meet the needs of the Information Society.

Nevertheless, major challenges remain. The overarching issue is the need to **accelerate** the speed of pedagogical and institutional change – many aspects of our education systems need to be re-evaluated. This change should be reflected in a revaluing of the teaching profession. In many European countries the conditions needed for developing the role of the teacher and enhancing the status of the profession are simply not progressing at a pace that will allow pedagogical innovation to be spread rapidly so that it becomes a systemic part of the education system.

While there has been substantial investment to support the implementation of eLearning infrastructure, across Europe, governments and education and training bodies recognise that many institutions are still not able to invest to the level required in a relatively short time

frame. Also, Europe has only just taken the first tentative steps on the road to promoting universal digital literacy and much work still needs to be done to create a climate within which Europe's citizens recognise the need, and are provided with the opportunities, for lifelong learning and reskilling. Clearly, the pace and level of investment into the required infrastructure, tools, services and content must be significantly increased.

To address these issues, the European Commission is setting ambitious objectives in its eLearning Action Plan to encourage action by the Member States and the relevant public and private sector players and is moving to support and co-ordinate their efforts at a European level. The eLearning Summit has responded to the Commission's Action Plan by offering a number of strategic recommendations that will help accelerate and **provide a step-change** in the implementation of innovative models of eLearning, the transformation of learning institutions and the social perception of the role and status of educational practitioners. The extent of change required in the education and training sectors parallels the changes that have already occurred in many industrial and commercial enterprises, and experience should be transferred to enable this change to be managed most effectively.

eLearning – exploring public private partnerships

The promotion of eLearning is an essential social investment requiring serious, long-term government support. Governments must recognise and provide for the additional costs associated with improving the quality of teaching, promoting lifelong learning, developing both core and higher order digital literacy competences, and stimulating the development of eContent. However, investment in digital literacy programmes and the development of eLearning communities will allow individuals to assume greater responsibility for their own learning and employability. Over time, new funding models and partnerships with the private sector may also impact on the current paradigm of public sector provision.

The European Commission's eLearning Action Plan identifies the potential to draw together the interest of the education and training sectors to quickly acquire the capacity to deliver eLearning, and to link this to private sector interest in developing new service opportunities and ensuring relevant skills are available in the workforce. The Action Plan proposes that *"partnerships between the public and private sectors will continue to be established, in order to encourage exchanges of experience, technology transfers and an improvement in the way in which businesses' skill needs are taken into account in conjunction with the measures advocated by the European Employment Strategy."*

The eLearning Summit has stimulated a dialogue between the public and private sectors and learning institutions as a precursor to preparing **a fresh stage in sustainable European cooperation**. It has particularly identified a need to consolidate and move beyond existing public private *collaborations* to sustainable public private *partnerships* (PPPs) based on long-term commitment, shared risk and investment by all involved parties.

There are many potential benefits from partnership. Private sector participation in education already stimulates exchange of experience and the transfer of knowledge and expertise but this needs to become more strategic through focusing on partnerships that result in systemic change. Emerging models of public private partnerships may also involve joint investments and new funding models that have the potential to provide a solution to existing capital shortages.

Public private partnerships, however, remain a relatively new phenomenon in Europe and are not conceptualised in a uniform framework. Much work still needs to be done to clarify the potential of public private partnerships as a mechanism for delivering education and training services that correspond to the needs of the Information Society. Nevertheless, the Summit has demonstrated convincingly that the rapid deployment of eLearning in Europe depends on: government, education and the private sector having both a shared vision of how to design tomorrow's education and training and a shared commitment to invest in the learning futures of all Europe's citizens. Active private sector participation in eLearning and ongoing dialogue with the public sector is no longer an option but an urgent necessity.

TEN RECOMMENDATIONS

To remove barriers to access and connectivity, support professional development, accelerate eLearning innovation and content development, address the ICT skills shortage, promote digital literacy and lifelong learning, and explore sustainable public private partnerships.

Recommendation 1

Connect everyone and everything from everywhere.

eLearning must be inclusive and should facilitate continuous learning for all age groups and sectors of society. The key driver is access for *everyone* linked to a process whereby every device can be networked and access is possible from any location. This requires immediate action to remove barriers inhibiting access to interactive eLearning environments. By utilising a diverse set of technical solutions, eLearning can be provided broadly at reasonable cost. Flexible approaches that reflect the different social and cultural conditions in Member States are those most likely to succeed. The following phased approach is proposed that will involve varying degrees of parallel activity in each Member State:

- Phase I: All schools are connected to the Internet (physical connection, e-mail address, url, etc.)
Phase II: Schools are fully networked (LAN, WLAN)
Phase III: Teachers/students' homes (or mobile presences) connected to the Internet.

The use of the Structural Funds could be used to speed up this phased development. As part of a broader eLearning strategy, Europe should also aggressively pursue the goal of providing the best possible connectivity for all citizens everywhere.

Particular attention needs to be given to: developing solutions that meet specific end user eLearning needs, especially those of the disabled; providing all citizens with a digital identity; adopting open standards for connectivity; digital rights' management; security; mobility and remote access to eLearning content.

Recommendation 2

Adopt and participate in the development of open standards for eLearning.

Europe should follow a policy for developing an eLearning infrastructure and digital content based on open standards and proven interoperability. The adoption of international standards, together with technological innovation and free market competition, will deliver solutions at attractive price points appropriate to broad participation in eLearning. More attention needs to be given to interoperability issues and maximising the utility of European goods and services across all markets. A general climate of "openness" should be promoted which strikes a balance between the legitimate IPR concerns of content owners and the creation of mechanisms that encourage maximum possible access to digital content based on flexible agreements between suppliers and consumers.

Recommendation 3

Focus eLearning research on pedagogy, eContent and user-friendly interfaces and devices.

eLearning Research is too often driven by a technology agenda and may involve academic evaluation methodologies that do not fully meet the requirements of training environments. Existing research needs to be consolidated, interpreted and widely disseminated in a range of formats and via eLearning communities that are suitable for both practitioners and private sector suppliers. Future research priorities need to be defined against a clear vision of how eLearning can be implemented in Europe. Private sector engagement is necessary in supporting and using the outcomes of research.

The study of the pedagogical paradigm (how we learn) should be given priority. The research effort needs to be multidisciplinary and additional funding is likely to be required:

- To evaluate current eLearning practices and clarify eLearning pedagogy

- To study the impact of end user devices on the teaching and learning process
- To identify new ways in which individuals can interact with network-based services and online content
- To explore the key pedagogical features and interaction of eLearning and classroom based teaching with particular regard to skills based training that requires hands-on experience
- To determine ways to expedite the scalability of programmes

Recommendation 4

Create the conditions to sustain a commercial market for eLearning content development.

Budgets for learning resources must allow institutions to make substantial purchases of digital content. Digital content, no less than traditional resources, must also be seen as essential elements in effective learning delivery that deserve to make equal demands on institutional budgets. The creation of small learning 'objects' (based on open standards) could facilitate the development of new business models for content development and encourage innovative procurement mechanisms. To ensure that a critical mass of quality content is readily available in all Member States, the private sector should pursue design and development models that facilitate content localisation and adaptation; commercial platforms for exchanging metadata tagged content produced by educators, institutions and publishers could support this process. New approaches should be explored to copyright and IPR for collaborative content development involving public private partnerships.

Recommendation 5

Increase investment in continuous professional development of educators. Enhance their status. Help them develop an understanding of and a pedagogy for eLearning.

Educators must increasingly be recognised as a key profession in the successful development of the Information Society and a knowledge economy. eLearning holds the potential to transform the current learning model and will bring about an inevitable and continuing redefinition of the roles of educators. Entirely new roles may also emerge. Professional development for the next generation of educators must reflect this process and ensure that eLearning theory is supported by professional development practice; a significant proportion of teacher education should be delivered using eLearning tools and methodologies. For real change to take place at local level, leadership competences will also need to be developed and educators generally will need to develop a fuller understanding of the strategic impact of ICT on learning.

Recommendation 6

Develop flexible curricular and assessment frameworks to provide individuals with the skills needed for participation in the Information Age.

To address the recognised shortfall in ICT skills in Europe, educators, policy makers and industry should work together in partnership to close the existing gap and prevent new problems emerging. A proactive policy that looks to future skill demands should provide training opportunities and particularly seek to increase participation from women, the unemployed and disadvantaged groups. National education ministries should review the relationship between vendor certification and national qualification frameworks, including the accreditation of prior learning and experience to promote lifelong learning strategies. A formal mechanism should be established by which industry and education could collaborate on a European level regarding the development of future curricular which address ICT skills building on initiatives such as Career-Space.

The European Commission should build on successful current initiatives (including ECDL) in order to develop and update core digital literacy competences (including higher order skills) for Europe and to share knowledge and best practice from both the private and public sector. The formation of expert groups should be encouraged to address the digital literacy needs of a variety of target audiences including students, teachers and adults engaged in lifelong learning whose levels of digital literacy competence will need regular updating.

Recommendation 7

Expand eLearning communities and forums.

Best practice has been identified and knowledge networks are starting to appear but what is now needed is an easily accessible inventory (possibly in the form of a portal) that would allow systematic and comprehensive tracking of current developments. Such an information source needs to be put in place quickly and should be promoted by a widespread information campaign. As a next step, an evaluation instrument should be developed to help codify and benchmark best practice and provide indicators on pedagogical innovation. Particular attention should be given to the development and support of multilingual eLearning communities to encourage collaboration across borders, and careers advisory services that are aware of eLearning opportunities and can provide route maps to available qualifications and training programmes throughout Europe.

Recommendation 8

Provide financial incentives to promote the take-up of eLearning.

Incentive-based schemes should be used to encourage individuals to assume responsibility for their own learning and skill development and to encourage employers to support eLearning schemes within their own organisations or local communities. Incentives in the form of tax allowances, tax credits, individual learning grants/loans and the provision of low cost retraining schemes could significantly accelerate the implementation and take-up of eLearning and help develop a climate for lifelong learning. Incentive-based schemes should be widespread although specific initiatives may need to be developed to help promote both digital literacy and ICT skills development in small and medium enterprises and among the unemployed and socially disadvantaged groups.

Recommendation 9

Leverage financial instruments to support eLearning.

The Structural Funds should be leveraged to allow quality learning resources and training programs to be developed, translated and localised, particularly in those smaller countries where ICT implementation and eLearning delivery is suffering from a lack of investment. Particular emphasis should be given to providing additional funds to accelerate teacher professional development in the integration of ICT into professional practice. The Summit also calls on the European Investment Bank to step up its lending to the education sector, favouring wherever possible the development of those public private partnerships which are appropriately structured and balanced to deliver efficient eLearning. Further, the Bank should encourage the European Investment Fund to support SMEs active in the origination of digital educational content. Private sector funds should also be called on to support the development of public private partnerships with solid business plans.

Recommendation 10

Explore the potential of public private partnerships.

Industry can play a valuable role in supporting the European public sector in its drive to embrace eLearning by supplementing limited public sector resources and bringing its expertise to accelerate the implementation of the eLearning Action Plan. Partnerships between the public and private sectors have the potential to: provide longer-term investment strategies; encourage the exchange of experience and best practice; promote dialogue on future requirements for multimedia learning materials; enhance technology transfer; and ensure that business skill needs are taken into account. Clearly defined models and infrastructures now should be developed for public private partnerships (PPPs), clarifying the principles for government investment in PPPs and taking into account the recommendations of the first European eLearning Summit.

The Summit particularly calls on the European Commission to stimulate discussion and initiate a major study on sustainable models for public private partnerships under the European research area for new learning environments proposed in the eLearning Action Plan. Within this, an attempt should be made to benchmark PPP activity and best practice in Europe and investigate models for PPPs involving cross border participation as the basis for a programme involving new investment in eLearning.

The European eLearning Summit

The European eLearning Summit was held on May 10th and 11th 2001 at the IBM International Training Centre at La Hulpe in Belgium. The Summit attracted over 350 participants from both the public and private sectors including policy makers from national ministries of education and employment, senior officials from the European Commission and representatives from the IT, telecommunications, audio-visual, training, broadcasting and publishing industries.

A Task Force of five companies led the development of the Summit and formed a Steering Group with a further 25 companies that have agreed to take forward its conclusions.

eLearning Summit Task Force

IBM Cisco Nokia SanomaWSOY SmartForce

eLearning Summit Steering Group

3Com
Apex Interactive
Apple
Auralog
BT
Centra
CEPIS
Ge.world Transware
CompTIA
Courseware Factory
De Wilde CBT
Digitalbrain
EDS
Eskills NTO
European Education Partnership
Granada Media
Intel
Interact Group
Manpower
Marconi
Oracle
Sonera

Contact for further information:

www.ibmweblectureservices.com/eu/elearningsummit