

WEDNESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 0900-1030

GROUP 28 DESIGN ISSUES

281

The Learning Environment: Holistic Support for Open and Distance Learning

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This paper describes a prototype online Learning Environment supporting open and distance learning. This has been developed and trialled through the *Learning Environment Club* - a two-year collaboration involving eleven Further Education Colleges.

The key aim has been to provide a model and online support for the whole enterprise of open, flexible learning, bringing together:

- support for the entire learning process. This is seen as a cycle of planning - doing - reflection and assessment;
- a flexible curriculum which can be adapted to individual students' changing needs;
- on-line access to varied resources - including multimedia and interactive resources;
- tracking of individual student progress;
- collaborative learning involving students' peers, and a team of tutors;
- support for both structured learning and students' research to locate materials
- management overviews of programmes and groups of students;
- support for authoring and re-cycling of learning modules and materials.

The Learning Environment is implemented in a networked client-server environment, and will support both online learning within an institution, and true distance learning. Learning materials (which may or may not be multimedia) may be held on the server, or may be external resources - eg Internet / Intranet Web pages, CD-ROM resources.

For each user (learner, tutor etc) the online environment centres around their workspace. This contains the key items they are currently working on, and the immediate context in which they belong. In addition, it offers a number of search options to facilitate research, and integrated communications facilities (eg email, bulletin boards).

The design, implementation and use of the environment are described, along with feedback from educational institutions, and lessons learned regarding the management and support of online learning.

Extract from the Conference Handbook of the 1997 Association for Learning Technology Conference, held in Telford, England.

The URL for this document is http://www.schmoller.net/documents/learning_environment_19970917.pdf