

The London Learning Network Group

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The London Learning Network Group (LLNG) was set up in April 1999 on the initiative of the M25 Consortium of Higher Education Libraries. The guiding principle of the group, which has a representative on it from each of a range of information providing sectors in London, is to investigate ways in which these various sectors can work together in support of lifelong learning in London.

The members of LLNG represent the following London constituencies, with one member for each except the public libraries, for whom there are two representatives on the group:

- M25 Consortium of Higher Education Libraries (Chief Librarians of the 39 university and HE college libraries in the M25 area)
- ALCL (Association of London Chief Librarians, being the chief public librarians of the 33 London boroughs)
- GLAN (Greater London Archives Network, consisting of local authority archivists in the London area)
- SEMS (South East Museums Service, covering local museum curators)
- Further Education Colleges (one person on the LLNG represents the chief librarians and directors of IT of the London FE Colleges)
- LASER (Development and Networking Agency which supports libraries in the South East, particularly public libraries)
- LMN (London Metropolitan Network, a consortium of 30 universities in the London area through which the institutions get connected to the Joint Academic Network and the internet)

The LLNG, of which I am chair, meets about every 6 weeks and has identified its aims and objectives as follows:

1. To investigate ways of working together across sectors in London in support of lifelong learning
2. To identify suitable London-wide bodies to influence
3. To liaise with appropriate national bodies in the field of lifelong learning
4. To identify lifelong learning needs in London which could benefit from cross-sectoral collaboration
5. To develop possible network infrastructure models for the London learning community
6. To identify, submit, or support appropriate lifelong learning project proposals in London
7. To explore a range of funding possibilities for collaborative proposals
8. To report regularly to the Group's constituencies and to seek feedback from them
9. To disseminate information about the work of the Group

It is worth trying to put LLNG's aims and efforts into the national context of lifelong learning first, given that there are a large and rather confusing number of governmental initiatives in this area. For example, there is CALL (Community Access to Lifelong Learning), a programme of funding for England under the auspices of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, to be distributed by NOF (New Opportunities Fund). Included in the funds which NOF will distribute will be £200 million for network infrastructure in community grids for learning and the public library network, £50 million for content creation and digitisation of learning materials, and £20 million for ICT (Information and Communications Technology) training for public librarians. The CALL initiatives themselves fit into a wider set of lifelong learning strategies which is being spearheaded by the Department for Education and Employment. This includes the Capitalisation Modernisation Fund to raise school standards and modernise the skills of the workforce through ICT Centres; the University for Industry's Learning Centres which will help

companies to develop their staff in ICT; the flagship National Grid for Learning initiative, which aims to link every school to the internet by 2002; and many more.

The danger is that with so many initiatives going on, some sponsored by the DCMS and others by the DfEE, there will be wasteful duplication of effort. Or, worse, incompatibility of systems, which will make difficult if not impossible the ultimate dream of seamless interaction between networks in order to support the full flow of information between the sectors. Surely we want information content and learning materials created for any one network, eg the schools network, to be equally accessible to the general public via the public library network and community grids, to the workforce through the ICT Centres and the Ufi Learning Centres, and to FE Colleges and HE institutions via the Joint Academic Network. **This will only be achievable if there is joined-up thinking backed up by joined-up technology.**

Given the complexity of the national scene in regard to lifelong learning initiatives, it is more than likely that the delivery of the results will be approached on a regional level. Already many of the Regional Development Agencies are beginning to pull together the threads across the various sectors in their regions. But in London we face a more difficult situation. Not only does London not have an RDA, but it is the nation's capital and a major international city as well as a large region in its own right. There are a number of bodies working to pave the way for the establishment of the Mayor's office and to influence its cultural agenda. The LLNG wishes to add its voice too in support of lifelong learning in the capital.

So what has the LLNG achieved so far since its establishment in April 1999? It has identified, written to, and received contact names for, a wide range of London-wide bodies which we think will be important players in developing and sustaining lifelong learning in London. For example, the London Development Partnership, the Government Office for London, the London Research Centre, the London Cultural Strategy Group, and the London Higher Education Consortium. The Group members have also spent some time getting to know one another and exchanging information about our various

sectors, because we have not worked together before. We have set up four task forces to do more focused work and feed back ideas to the parent group. Each task force is chaired by a member of the LLNG but draws for its membership more widely across the sectors, so that in all there are upwards of forty people (university, FE college and public librarians and IT directors; health sector librarians; museum curators; and local authority archivists) involved in LLNG and its four task forces.

The task forces have been set up to explore in detail a range of issues which will underpin lifelong learning and for which funding under the various initiatives described above may be available. The task forces are:

- **Content creation and digitisation.** This group is investigating suitable materials and learning packages across the sectors which could be digitised and made accessible across the network.
- **Information skills training.** This task force is looking at ways of identifying training in the handling of electronic information which could be used for librarians in all kinds of library, archivists, and museum curators alike.
- **Network infrastructure.** This group is working out various models for connecting the various constituencies to the internet in a seamless way, with a strong possibility that using the LMN as the basis for connecting all the non-HE sectors may prove to be the most achievable and cost-effective model of all.
- **Resource discovery and document delivery.** This task force is investigating possibilities for putting more information online (eg more automated catalogues, guides, subject search tools, collection descriptions, all on the web for internet access) which can describe the rich information resources in the London area. And secondly, the group will be looking for ways of co-operating over the delivery of the actual materials to the user/enquirer, whether by traditional interlending means or by electronic delivery to the user's desktop.

LLNG is holding its first major dissemination event, a seminar entitled **Lifelong Learning in London**, at the Royal College of Physicians on Friday 10 December 1999.

The seminar, which is aimed at senior staff from the various constituencies represented in LLNG, together with some specially invited guests from the London-wide bodies which we hope to influence, has two purposes. One is to disseminate information about the work of LLNG so far and the general lifelong learning context both nationally and in London. The other is to seek ideas and input from the delegates, by means of breakout sessions, which will help to inform the LLNG Action Plan for 2000. There will be two keynote speakers, one talking about lifelong learning nationally and the other in the London context. The four LLNG task force leaders will talk about the work of their groups. There will be three demonstrations of existing online information resources, one each in the HE library, public library and FE college sectors, which exemplify the kind of initiative which could be expanded to cover all the sectors. And finally the delegates will be divided into four groups to discuss different themes at breakout sessions, followed by a plenary feedback and discussion session at the end.

So in 2000 the LLNG will move into its second phase, taking with it the ideas that will have emerged from the seminar in December together with the investigatory work being done by the task forces. There will be further surveys, no doubt, to find out from the various information providing sectors what already exists to support lifelong learning and how some of it can be knitted together across the network; what the gaps are that some projects might attempt to fill; and whether there are cross-sectoral initiatives for which the Group could submit proposals for government funding. There will be more exchanges of information about our various sectors, and more dissemination about our activities. Not least, there will be more effort to gain credibility and influence with the London bodies which are likely to play a major part in lifelong learning in London, in order to ensure a place in the scheme of things for cross-sectoral collaboration between the London libraries, IT infrastructures, archives, and Museums which we represent.

