



# Introduction

- Networked learning is a new and rapidly developing field of knowledge and professional practice, arising from both global and national strategies which have emerged from new concepts around the Information Society and the era of lifelong learning.


As educationalists designing learning experiences for the 21st Century, we are asked to deal with changes around the Information Society and lifelong learning which are unprecedented and rapid. These changes are also multidimensional and effect four inter-dependent areas:

- (i) research and theory of education,
- (ii) technology,
- (iii) human resource development and
- (iv) organisational and management factors.

Coherent educational planning and implementation arising from the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) in learning can only emerge from balancing and integrating all four areas, yet the pace of change in the different dimensions of implementation is unequal and divergent. The emphasis on implementation to date has been on technology, rather than on how technology can support effective lifelong learning.

The impact of ICT in lifelong learning is shifting the terms of reference for educational delivery and production. It is changing the way in which both “traditional” face-to-face learning and distance learning is delivered and leading to the development of a third generation paradigm in distance learning. It is giving rise to new ideas about access to learning and how ICT in learning can impact on the wider community -extending the resources of institutions beyond their physical boundaries. Many innovative ideas about “virtual organisations” are being developed which can make learning opportunities and resources available to new cohorts of learners. It is beginning to impact on training and development in organisations which can now be based largely on electronic communications and begin to attract global participants. Professional development of teachers and educators in the use of ICT in learning is an urgent priority for the UK. There are examples in this publication of how they can be drawn into strategic change to deliver the innovation and best practice that is required.

The delivery of lifelong learning through ICT requires a rethinking of both theory and practice of learning in order to manage effectively the paradigm shift from traditional learning to distributed and distance learning. Designing and delivering a course for effective on-line learning - and ensuring that quality is embedded both in the course materials and in the learning support and environment -



is a complex task, but it is something that we as educators must take on. Networked learners also require effective learner support and the integration of support services, including libraries, is another theme in this publication.

Partnership and collaboration underpins much of the implementation, many examples presented in this publication. Collaboration is needed to disseminate expertise in the development and design of networked lifelong learning and also for strategic alliances for extending “virtual” markets regionally, nationally and internationally. This requires collaboration between institutions, across education and commercial sectors, across regions and globally. There is also a need for education institutions and regeneration agencies to collaborate more closely as the development of ICT facilities impacts on economic and social regeneration.

The main objective of this Conference on Networked Lifelong Learning has been to link research and knowledge about networked learning with implementation and current practice. We hope this will achieve maximum benefit for all parties through collaboration on the dissemination of good professional practice, sound pedagogy and guidelines for quality assurance.

The Conference was designed as a vehicle for comparison and reflection, and for learning from those in other roles, sectors and countries - learning through praxis: practical as well as research-based presentations. The aim of this publication is to disseminate the experiences, insights from research and evaluation and approaches to common questions and issues to a wider audience.

The Conference has looked at both the theory and practice of networked lifelong learning in relation to four key strands. Each of the four strands has addressed a different set of questions and priorities, and summaries will be found at the beginning of each strand.

### Strand 1

The paradigm shift from traditional learning to distributed and distance learning: pedagogy and design which demonstrates

the relationship between educational theory and research and networked learning practice.

### Strand 2

Internet technologies in learning: innovative delivery, methods and approaches and the practical and organisational requirements for supporting networked learning, with a particular emphasis on the range of technologies available and their potential.

### Strand 3

Networked learning for professional development: the range of opportunities ICT provides for CPD, particularly the use of networked learning in the provision of CPD courses and the professional development of teachers and other education professionals to effectively use ICT in learning.

### Strand 4

Networked learning to improve access for the wider community: how learning through ICT can improve access to lifelong learning for learners wherever they are, how the needs of lifelong learners can be met, how technology can be provided in cost-effective, sustainable and motivational forms, designing networked lifelong learning for widening access, meeting the needs of lifelong learners at home, in the work place, those with special needs and those experiencing economic and social exclusion.

We have been most encouraged by the generosity with which contributors have shared their work in progress, or described transitions in practice. We hope that this will contribute to an understanding of networked lifelong learning and stimulate discussion about its application.