Getting certified. The “ins and outs of” CMALT – a UK accreditation scheme for learning technologists

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Abstract
ALT, the United Kingdom's Association for Learning Technology, has launched CMALT, a peer-based scheme to accredit individuals as learning technologists. Attend this session to learn about CMALT and ALT’s experience with the scheme during its first few months. Contribute your insights into the scheme's long-term development – and explore whether CMALT, or a scheme like it, is relevant for colleagues in your organization.

About this presentation
This handout gives you:
- a thumbnail sketch of ALT;
- background information about CMALT;
- an overview of the scheme’s detailed requirements.

The handout will be used to supplement today’s session, which will involve a mixture of informal presentation, small group discussion, and questioning.

By the end of the session we hope that you will have firstly have gained a good understanding of our scheme, and secondly have contributed your insights into its long-term development.

A pdf copy of this handout is available from http://www.alt.ac.uk/documents.html.

About ALT
Aims
Formed as a Registered Charity in 1993, ALT is a professional and scholarly association which seeks to bring together all those with an interest in the use of learning technology. We aim to:
- promote good practice in the use of learning technology in education and industry;
- represent the members in areas of policy;
- facilitate collaboration between practitioners, researchers, and policy makers.

Scale and organisation
We cover only a proportion of Educause’s ground, in a smaller country. So we are much smaller than Educause! For example our annual 3 day conference attracts ~600 delegates rather than ~6000. We have over 100 Universities, over 60 Further Education Colleges, and around 50 commercial, international, and Government organisations as members, and over 500 individual members. We have 4.5 staff, and an annual budget of around $1m. 5 practitioner committees (Further Education, Membership, Events, and Publications, and Research) reporting to the Central Executive Committee, decide ALT’s policy and direction.

Activities
We organise:
- ALT-C, which is the UK's main conference for learning technologists - our 2005 conference was in Manchester between 6 and 8 September, with Carol Twigg and Etienne Wenger as keynote speakers, and our 2006 conference will be in Edinburgh between 5 and 7 September;
- occasional conferences on topics of interest to learning-technology practitioners, for example our 13 October 2005 one day conference for FE e-learning practitioners in London, or our 2004 joint ALT-SURF Spring Conference and Research Seminar Living & learning: ePortfolios and digital repositories;

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1 some of that ground is covered by the Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association, UCISA – http://www.ucisa.ac.uk/ – with whom we aim to collaborate rather than compete.
2 http://www.alt.ac.uk/corporate_members.php
3 http://www.alt.ac.uk/altc2005/
4 http://www.alt.ac.uk/altc2006/
visits and exchanges – for example ALT members took part in an exchange to visit colleges and universities in the Netherlands, 7-11 April 2003, with support from SURF Educatief (roughly the Dutch equivalent of JISC), and the DfES;

regular workshops – for example on Moodle, accessibility, and learning object design;

an annual Policy Board – for example at our 2003 meeting the UK Government launched it national consultation on the creation of a national e-learning strategy, and at our 2004 meeting, at HP Labs, we consulted on our recently published Learning Technology Research Strategy8.

We produce:

• regular and (in the UK) influential responses to consultations relating to learning technology and e-learning9;
• a fortnightly members’ email digest;
• ALT-J an international peer-reviewed journal devoted to research and good practice in the use of learning technologies10;
• a quarterly printed Newsletter, ALT-N, now also available in web format at http://newsletter.alt.ac.uk, and a range of publications aimed at practitioners, sometimes produced in conjunction with other organisations.

Rationale for and genesis of CMALT

2003 membership survey

Every couple of years ALT surveys its membership by means of a web-based questionnaire covering different aspects of what we do. Members (organisational and individual) responded to the 2003 questionnaire with solid support for the development of “a simple, economical, voluntary, peer-based structure to accredit individual members as Learning Technologists, in collaboration with HE, FE, and industry bodies”.

Feasibility and development study

Later in 2003 we secured a grant from the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) to take forward work to establish an accreditation scheme. Following a competitive tender, we awarded a contract to a team11 led by Martin Oliver from University College London (now at the Institute of Education), with key features of the project as follows.

| Literature and scheme review. |
| Discussion with, ILTHE (as it then was), Becta, IITT, etc about the operation of overlapping and abutting schemes. |
| Setting up focus groups with categories of potential beneficiaries of / stakeholders in the scheme from HE, FE, and e-learning content developers. |
| Producing scheme options identifying for each: costings; strengths and weaknesses; operational issues; inter-organisational interface issues. |
| Organising a consultation exercise with a wide range of stakeholders, which will inform ALT’s choice of option. |
| For the chosen option, setting the scheme up on a small-scale pilot basis. |
| Reviewing the pilot, finalising the scheme, and producing all documentation associated with the scheme. |

The work was completed in June 2004.

Implementation

During late 2004 ALT secured some European Structural Funding to finalise the scheme. Meanwhile, supported by ALT, Oxford Brookes University won funding from JISC for the development of a general web-based e-portfolio

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5 http://www.alt.ac.uk/docs/oct13_flyer.pdf
6 SURF is roughly the Dutch equivalent of JISC
7 http://www.alt.ac.uk/docs/ALT-SURFseminar_April_2004.pdf
8 available from http://www.alt.ac.uk/documents.html
9 see previous footnote
10 http://www.alt.ac.uk/alt_j.html
11 Julia Duggleby (The Sheffield College), Aileen Earle (Collaboranda), Richard Francis (Oxford Brookes University), Gwyneth Hughes (University of East London), David Jennings (DJ Alchemi Ltd), David Kay (FD Learning Ltd), Martin Oliver (University College London), Rhona Sharpe (Oxford Brookes University).
tool known as Petal deriving from software created by the Open Source Portfolio Initiative\textsuperscript{12}. Through this funding we ran a second small scale pilot for the scheme, and procured a bespoke document-flow system with which to manage the CMALT application process, payment of fees etc. We are about to take delivery of this. We launched the scheme formally last month at our annual conference, and we expect between 50 and 100 of the 250+ people who have so far expressed an interest in the scheme to get certified over the next 12 months. Finally, last week we completed the lengthy process of registering CMALT as Collective Mark with the UK Patent Office, entitling holders of CMALT, if they so choose, to identify their work as the work of a holder CMALT.

**Scheme details**

**Underlying basis**

Individuals and organisations can join ALT irrespective of the nature of their work or activities. CMALT is available only to individuals who are individual members of ALT and who achieve certification and re-certification (probably triennially) against the requirements of the scheme.

**Process**

Applicants supply evidence in a portfolio.

Two assessors assess the portfolio: one nominated by the applicant, subject to ALT’s agreement, and one appointed by ALT, who must be a holder of CMALT.

Applicants have the option of submitting a portfolio based on a simple text-processed document, or, at their own risk, using the Petal e-portfolio system, which will not be fully ready for deployment till early 2006.

**Costs**

- **Getting certified** - £95 (~$170)
- **Remaining certified** – annual membership fee of £80 (~$140), as compared to £52 (~$90) for ordinary members.

**Principles and values**

The central tenet of the scheme is the definition of learning technology agreed within ALT. The other principles and values that inform the scheme are as follows.

- A commitment to exploring and understanding the interplay between technology and learning.
- A commitment to keep up to date with new technologies.
- An empathy with and willingness to learn from colleagues from different backgrounds and specialisms.
- A commitment to communicate and disseminate effective practice.

**Core and specialist area(s)**

Evidence is required under Core areas of work, and Specialist option(s).

**Core areas of work**

1. **Operational issues.** Applicants should demonstrate both their understanding and use of learning technology. ‘Use’ might include the development, adaptation or application of technology within teaching, training or the support of learning more generally. This should include evidence of:
   a) an understanding of the constraints and benefits of different technology;
   b) technical knowledge and ability in the use of learning technology;
   c) supporting the deployment of learning technologies.
2. **Teaching, learning and/or assessment processes.** Applicants should demonstrate their understanding of and engagement with teaching, learning and assessment processes. ‘Engagement’ may include using understanding to inform the development, adaptation or application of technology. This should include evidence of:
   a) an understanding of teaching, learning and/or assessment processes;
   b) an understanding of your target learners.
3. **The wider context.** Applicants should demonstrate their awareness of and engagement with wider issues that inform their practice. This should include evidence of:
   a) understanding and engaging with legislation, policies and standards.

\textsuperscript{12} http://www.theospi.org/
4. **Communication.** Applicants should demonstrate their knowledge and skills in communication either through working with others or through interface design. This should include evidence of either (a) or (b).
   a) Working with others.
   b) Interface between human and technical systems.

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**Specialist option(s)**

As well as the core areas, applicants are required to demonstrate evidence of independent practice in one or more specialist options. Examples of specialist options include:

- producing learning materials/content/courseware;
- project management, including resource management;
- training, mentoring and developing others;
- evaluating projects;
- research;
- designing tools and systems;
- institutional development/strategic work;
- knowledge and application of standards and specifications for learning technology;
- assistive technologies;
- VLE administration and maintenance;
- interface design;
- managing and sourcing content;
- copyright.

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**Views of some CMALT members**

**Fawei Geng** – Learning Technologist, Media Workshop, Oxford Brookes University. *Participation in the CMALT accreditation scheme meant that I not only gained the certificate, but made valuable contacts within the teaching and learning community. It was an invaluable learning process which I am sure will help my future career development.*

**Nick Jeans** – Content Team Manager, South Yorkshire E-Learning Programme. *Doing CMALT encouraged me to review and articulate the wide variety of ways I engage with learning technology. The structure of CMALT has helped me improve the way I present my skills to employers, directly leading to a new and much better post than I previously held.*

**Anne Jones** – Emeritus Professor of Lifelong Learning, Brunel University, and Managing Director, Lifelong Learning Systems Ltd. *First it was terrifying, tough and a bit tedious, then challenging and exciting. CMALT made me determined, persistent, and precise. Finally, I was triumphant and amazed to succeed, my confidence and pride considerably boosted. So you can do it, if like me you are primarily an expert in learning and a technologist second? It's good to find a proper home for our strange new breed. I hope through CMALT that more educationalists will join ALT.*

**Ellen Lessner** – ILT Development Coordinator, Abingdon and Witney College. *The CMALT process was an opportunity for reflection - and connection. In a fast moving field like e-learning, taking the time to reflect on and make explicit the connections between learning and a variety of technologies was an opportunity all professionals should be given.*

**Dave Pickersgill** – Digital Development Manager, Sheffield College. *I completed CMALT as part of the 2005 pilot. The process was challenging, and it allowed me to reflect on my practice over the last few years and look forward to future evolution and development. Overall, a process worth experiencing, a process to be recommended.*

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**Contact details and further information**

**ALT:** [http://www.alt.ac.uk/](http://www.alt.ac.uk/)

**Seb Schmoller (Executive Secretary):** seb.schmoller@alt.ac.uk, and +44 (0)114 2586899

**CMALT:** full details of the scheme, including a prospectus, guidance for applicants and assessors, portfolio template are freely available at [http://www.alt.ac.uk/cmalt/](http://www.alt.ac.uk/cmalt/).