



The University of Edinburgh

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ALT-C conference in Edinburgh

11-13 September 2001

The Association for Learning technology—ALT—is an educational organisation which seeks to bring together all those with an interest in the use of learning technology in higher and further education, by:

- promoting good practice in the use of learning technologies, education and industry
- representing its members in areas of policy
- facilitating collaboration between practitioners and policy makers

ALT-C 2001 is the 8th ALT conference, and is open to all academic and support staff in Higher and Further Education. The conference theme of ‘changing learning environments’ will include sessions of interest to:

- teachers
- staff developers
- library and information service providers
- IT and LT support staff
- educational researchers
- multimedia and software designers
- senior managers with teaching and learning or IT portfolios

It is organised by the four universities in Edinburgh (Heriot-Watt University, Queen Margaret University College, Napier University, and the University of Edinburgh) and will be hosted by the University of Edinburgh in the city centre. People can register for individual days if they don't want to attend the whole conference, and there will be an exhibition in the Appleton Tower concourse to which anyone may drop in.

ALT-C 2001 is being run in collaboration with the 9th Improving Student Learning Symposium to be held in Edinburgh on 9th to 11th September with the theme ‘Improving Student Learning using Learning Technologies’. The Symposium provides an international forum for researchers into learning in Higher Education and practitioners wishing to improve their practice.

The draft programme and registration details are on the conference Web site at <http://www.ed.ac.uk/altc2001/>

If you would like further information, please contact Jeff Haywood (email Jeff.Haywood@ed.ac.uk) or Nora Mogyey (Nora.Mogyey@ed.ac.uk).

CETIS, the JISC-funded Centre for Educational Technology Interoperability Standards, has postponed the Workshop it was due to hold in July until October or November, and to fill the gap is holding a one-day pre-conference workshop at the ALT-C 2001 conference, on 10th September. This will examine current developments in learning technology standardisation initiatives, including IMS, IEEE, CEN/ISSS and Prometheus. Further details are provided at <http://cetis.bangor.ac.uk/cetis/100901.html>

Jeff Haywood (MALTS)

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Neighbourhood Statistics Service

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) now provides small area statistics on a number of policy-relevant topics through a Web-based free service called Neighbourhood Statistics. The service was launched in February and has been incrementally adding datasets to the site, such as population estimates, benefits claimant data, hospital episode statistics, and employment information. Data are currently available for wards, local authorities, and health board areas.

The Web site, accessible from the National Statistics home page at <http://www.nationalstatistics.gov.uk/>, provides easy access to downloadable ASCII or spreadsheet files through a clickable map of UK regions. Alternatively, users may enter a postcode or go straight to the dataset catalogue to make their data selections.

A number of ambitious enhancements to the service are planned over the next few years. Administrative data from local governments will be added after consistency checks have been carried out, and analytical tools will make a range of estimation techniques possible.

In 2002 a full geographic information system (GIS) will be incorporated, including point-referenced data (such as location of services and infrastructure).

Then, in 2003, the Small Area Statistics from the decennial Census will be added at output area level (20 times more detailed than wards). When the service reaches its full service stage, new datasets will be added that match the Census output geography.

Robin Rice (EUCS)

New at the UK Data Archive

The UK Data Archive has released a number of major datasets to browse, explore and download via NESSTAR.

Anyone can search for and view the full metadata (catalogue record and codebook), and non-commercial users registered with the UK Data Archive can also analyse and download data.

Survey data include selected years from the major data series:

- General Household Survey
- Quarterly Labour Force Survey
- Health Survey for England
- British Election Surveys (also available to unregistered users)
- British Social Attitudes Surveys
- Other popular datasets such as the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey and the ONS Omnibus survey

This online service will be extended to other data collections within the UKDA on a continuous basis, with more datasets being mounted on the system over the coming months.

NESSTAR

NESSTAR is a set of Internet-based tools to provide an enhanced online service for data providers and data users that gives easier and quicker access to data and information about that data. Users can:

- search for and list datasets
- browse dataset documentation
- browse and analyse data
- visualise data
- bookmark searches and analyses
- download data in a number of formats (including SPSS, SAS and STATA)

Instructions on using NESSTAR are at <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/usingData/neststar.asp>

Louise Corti (Data Archive)

Contemporary African and Asian visual art online

The Visual Arts Data Service (VADS) is featuring nearly 2,000 digital images from the African & Asian Visual Artists Archive (Aavaa)—a comprehensive slide archive of contemporary visual art by artists of African and Asian descent working in the UK.

The slide collection is in two main areas: views of exhibitions, and 12 individual artists' work representing an important cross section of artforms in the collection.

Aavaa is searchable online at <http://vads.ahds.ac.uk/>

VADS now provides nearly 12,000 cross-searchable visual arts images for use in research, learning and teaching.

Brenda Brinkley (VADS)

Columbia Gazetteer of the World

Edinburgh University Library has subscribed to the Columbia Gazetteer, making it available on any computer in the University domain. Users can search for place-names, type of place, or a full-text description, at <http://www.columbiagazetteer.org/>

The simplest kind of gazetteer is the alphabetical list of places in the index of an atlas or map. More extensive gazetteers include brief descriptions with the listings; the Columbia Gazetteer of the World goes further still, providing an encyclopedia of geographical places and features.

Ann Sutherland (EUL)

Search for images with Google

Google has launched an image search service accessing over 150 million images. A search for a keyword generates a page of thumbnail images each pointing to its source page.

The Google Image Search is at <http://images.google.com/>

Nick Stroud (EUCS)

Improving Your Web Presence

Computing Services runs a search service using the Inktomi (formerly Ultraseek) search software. This regularly scans Web sites in the University to index pages and provides a variety of search options. Use of this search engine (rather than most others outside the University) does not incur network charges so should be the preferred search option. For searches of the wider Web a link is provided to Google.

Search the University and beyond at <http://www.catalogue.ed.ac.uk/>

Boosting your search ranking

Results for any search are ranked in relative order depending on a 'quality' assessment which is based largely on the 'metadata' provided by the author.

Authors should check that their pages:

- are valid HTML
- have a useful <title> field
- include a 'description' giving a summary of the page in around 200 characters
- include well chosen 'keywords'

Pages that do not follow these guidelines will tend to appear far down the list of search results (often much lower than users will read).

Limiting the pages indexed

The search software does a much better job of finding pages when irrelevant pages are excluded from the index. For example:

- Archives of documents (such as previous years' editions of *BITS*) are best excluded from the main search results.
- Mailing list archives don't generally search well.
- It is generally not a good idea to have each slide in a presentation

individually indexed. Instead, a well designed title page (with keywords and description) can be used which links to the individual slides. The slides themselves may be excluded from the index.

If you do want to permit searches of such documents, they may be included in a separate 'collection' and a customised search page developed (such as that provided for *BITS*, for example, at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/bits/>).

In addition, pages may be indexed for public (worldwide) or internal (University of Edinburgh only) searches.

Further information is provided at <http://webhelp.ucs.ed.ac.uk/services/search/improving.html>

I am happy to discuss Web search requirements with Web publishers: email Graham.Rule@ed.ac.uk.

Graham Rule (EUCS)

Rights and responsibilities in the use of information

An increasing amount of British and European legislation affects how we may collect and use data. This is designed to protect the rights of the individual and the rights of institutions such as the University of Edinburgh. It therefore gives both institutions and individuals responsibilities to protect the rights of others.

A new Web page has been set up in EUCSinfo to point to some of the Government Acts and publications, and other information, which are designed to ensure that individuals and institutions can go about their legitimate business without infringing the rights of others.

The URL is <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/legalese/>

Jack McAulay (CITS)

New Computing Regulations

The new issue of the University's Computing Regulations—version 14—comes into effect on 1st August. This year's revision makes only fairly minor changes, such as permitting transferable access to computing accounts if sanctioned by the Head of Department, highlighting other software agreements (such as that with CHEST) which must be observed, and reminding users that Investigatory Powers are now Regulated.

The new Regulations, by which all computer and network users in the University are required to abide, are at <http://www.cpa.ed.ac.uk/calendar/prefh/o23.html>

Marian Dunbar (Secretary's Office)

SCRAN reaches the million mark

Hot on the heels of winning its Silver Muse award (mentioned in last month's *BITS*), SCRAN (the Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network) has just reached its target of *one million records* online—two months before the target date set five years ago.

SCRAN has been working towards this target since its birth in 1996 as a Millennium Project. Every single one of the million records is publicly available, creating a diverse and inspirational resource for cultural research and education. 125,000 multimedia resources are already connected to these records, and this number itself is steadily growing.

But there will be no resting on laurels. Thanks to SCRAN's pivotal role in managing the Resources for Learning in Scotland (RLS) consortium, which has just won a £4m grant (see <http://www.rls.org.uk/>), a raft of wide-ranging new projects will find their way on to SCRAN between now and 2003, expanding our resource base still further.

SCRAN is at <http://www.scran.ac.uk/>
Bruce Royan (SCRAN)

Library catalogue upgrade

The Library is upgrading its main computer system and online Catalogue in the two weeks up to Friday 10th August. (The Library is anyway shut for the second of these weeks, for the maintenance of its air-conditioning system.) The new version of the Catalogue should provide a more intuitive interface, integrating familiar Web features which should simplify the presentation of search options, and allow users to process their search results more precisely. We have been working with our supplier to address issues which have concerned users.

The existing online Catalogue will be available almost continuously throughout this period, though it might seem a little slow at times. There will be a few short interruptions, which will be advertised under Service Alerts in Library Online: at these times we recommend the use of COPAC, the combined catalogue of University Research Libraries which includes the Edinburgh University Library Catalogue. The address is <http://www.copac.ac.uk/>

At times it will not be possible to access user information, or self-renewal. As much advance notice as possible about this will be given on Library Online. Book circulation will still be available, but some delays may occur with recalls placed after 27th July. During periods when self-renewal is not available, please contact the relevant site Library. Self-issue machines in the Darwin Library, Erskine Medical Library and Main Library will not function during the upgrade process.

A preview version of the new Catalogue software is under development, using a test database, to illustrate the new interface with local customisation and demonstration data only. This is available along with other news at <http://www.lib.ed.ac.uk/lib/news/upgrade01.shtml>

Simon Bains (EUL)

Computing lab upgrades

The upgrading of the open-access Computing Labs which EUCS carries out every summer is now well underway.

We have taken delivery of almost 200 PCs for Holland House, the Main Library, the Erskine Medical Library, several other residences and libraries, and—as an unexpected bonus—for Moray House, bringing the Lab in the Library there up to 50 seats. We also have over 70 new iMacs for the Main Library, Holland House and KB Centre.

We plan to release the new lab software environments early in August, simplifying the login process for both Windows and Macs and bringing the software up-to-date. The print prepayment software is also due for updating, to provide more information for users about their printing accounts.

Full details are at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/fmd/mft/labupdate.html>

Christine Rees (EUCS)

Transatlantic traffic charges

UKERNA has announced the distribution of charges for 2001/2, raising the University's charge by 4% to £41,305. EUCS will continue to apportion this based on each group's usage for the quarter preceding the billing period. An explanation of the charges can be found at <http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/nsd/nsd-janet-charge.html>

If you wish to see how we compare to others, the full list can be found at <http://bill.ja.net/>

Scott Currie (EUCS)

The ubiquitous Internet

The Internet Engineering Task Force has a plan to extend the Internet out into Space, to establish or improve communications among spacecraft, asteroids, satellites and planets. The Interplanetary Internet Regions draft is at <http://www.ietf.org/internet-drafts/draft-irtf-ipnrg-arch-oo.txt>

Nick Stroud (EUCS)

Summer vacation services

The Library is operating its vacation opening hours from now until 7th October. The Main Library is therefore open only from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, and to 9pm on Wednesdays, except for the week 6th to 10th August, when it is completely closed for the maintenance of its air conditioning system. During this closure week there will be no access to Computing Services Reception, the three Support teams based in the Library, the Learning and Resource Centre or the Data Library; the Support teams will however offer a limited service via email and telephone.

Every computing lab is likely to be closed for at least two days some time during the vacation, because of the annual upgrade programme (see article alongside). The Macs on level 4 of the Main Library are being replaced altogether, so this Mac lab has been closed since 25th June, but should be open again before the end of August.

David Muxworthy (EUCS)

Edinburgh BITS

Editor:

Nick Stroud, EUCS.

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Contributions:

Email: BITS@ed.ac.uk
Telephone: 0131 650 3345

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David Muxworthy
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Contributions to *BITS* are welcomed from all readers.

Copy deadline for September BITS:

Friday 17th August