
CMALT – THE ASSOCIATION FOR LEARNING TECHNOLOGY’S CERTIFIED MEMBERSHIP SCHEME

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Abstract

This paper presents a very brief summary of the key points of a new and innovative accreditation scheme for those working to integrate technologies into teaching and learning. This has only recently been started in the UK. It is an interesting example of clearly identifying and assessing a range of eCompetences which are intimately connected with pedagogical goals and attempts to develop a recognised, professional development framework for that new breed of staff in education and training, known as “Learning Technologists.” Learning technologists are staff who have a foot in both the ICT and in the learning camps: they may, for example, be academics who research or apply ICT in teaching or learning; or they may be support or development staff working with teachers and trainers on the application of ICT to teaching and learning.

In September 2005, the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) launched CMALT, a new certified membership scheme for learning technologists. This article reports on the current state of play with CMALT, as of March 2006. For further information about the scheme visit www.a.t.ac.uk/cmalt/ or email the CMALT Certification Manager: cmalt@alt.ac.uk

1. About ALT

1.1 Aims

Formed as a Registered Charity in 1993, ALT is a professional and scholarly association which brings together those with an interest in the use of learning technology. We:

- 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.

Most of the UK’s universities and many of its further education colleges are members of ALT, as are over 50 commercial and government organisations, and over 500 individual learning technologists. ALT is run by a small paid staff based mostly at our office in Oxford, with extensive involvement from members, exercised through our Central Executive Committee, and our Membership Services, Publications, Research and Further Education Committees.

1.2 Activities

We organise:

- ALT-C, which is the UK’s main conference for learning technologists - ALT-C 2006 will be in Edinburgh between 5th and 7th September;

- occasional conferences and workshops on topics of interest to learning-technology practitioners, for example our 2005 joint ALT-SURF-ILTA Spring Conference and Research Seminar in Dublin;
- visits and exchanges – for example ALT members took part in an exchange visit to colleges and universities in the Netherlands, 7-11th April 2003, with support from SURF (roughly the Dutch equivalent of JISC(UK)), and the DfES (Dept for Education and Science).

We produce:

- an international peer-reviewed journal devoted to research and good practice in the use of learning technologies, *ALT-J*;
- regular and influential responses to consultations relating to learning technology and eLearning – most of these we publish on our web site at <http://www.alt.ac.uk/documents.html>;
- a fortnightly members' email digest and a quarterly printed Newsletter, ALT-N, now also available in web format at <http://newsletter.alt.ac.uk>.

2. Background to CMALT

Our 2003 membership survey showed 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”. With the help of grants from the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC)¹ and from the South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme, we spent 2 years getting ready to launch CMALT, starting with a research and development study undertaken by a team² led by Martin Oliver from University College London (now at the Institute of Education), and involving two successive pilot “runs” of CMALT. During this period the project was overseen by a broadly drawn Steering Group. We launched CMALT at our 2005 annual conference.

Here is a “thumbnail sketch” of how CMALT works, with the detailed requirements of the scheme in the appendix.

2.1 Learning technologists

ALT thinks of *learning technology* as the systematic application of a body of knowledge to the design, implementation, management and evaluation of teaching and learning. The body of knowledge, which is still developing, is the fruit of research and practice. It is based on principles deriving from, for example, learning theory, instructional design and change management; but it is also grounded in an understanding of the underlying technologies and their capabilities.

So, learning technologists (as a professional or employment category) are people who apply the body of knowledge in practice and/or who undertake research relating to learning technology.

¹ The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) supports further and higher education by providing strategic guidance, advice and opportunities to use Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to support teaching, learning, research and administration. JISC is funded by all the UK post-16 and higher education funding councils. On 14/3/2006 ALT and JISC signed a formal Memorandum of Understanding.

² 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).

2.2 Eligibility

Whereas individuals and organisations can join ALT irrespective of the nature of their work or activities, provided they support the aims of ALT, Certified Membership of ALT is open only to individual members of ALT. CMALT requires applicants to provide evidence of, and reflections on, their practice, and it enables the evidence and reflections to be judged by peers.

2.3 Process

Applicants supply evidence in a portfolio. The portfolio is either a **simple text-processed document**, based on a template supplied by ALT, or, since March 2006, an **e-portfolio** developed under the JISC-funded PETAL project, which created for ALT an implementation of the *Open Source Portfolio Initiative* (OSPI) software based around the requirements of CMALT. Later in 2006, irrespective of which form of portfolio applicants submit, the assessment process will be managed using an e-commerce enabled document workflow system.

2.4 Assessment

Two people assess the completed portfolio against the requirements of the scheme: one nominated by the applicant (and approved by ALT), and one appointed by ALT. The ALT-appointed assessor is a holder of CMALT. In the case of applicants who do not wish to nominate an assessor, or whose nominee declines, or is unacceptable to ALT, a second assessor (also a holder of CMALT) is appointed by ALT.

2.5 Guidance

ALT provides applicants and assessors with openly available guidance on how to approach creating or assessing a portfolio. This is freely available at <http://www.alt.ac.uk/cmalt/>.

2.6 Costs

Applicants for certified membership are charged a certification fee of £95 (~€145), payment of which entitles them to submit a portfolio, and to resubmit it (once only) for re-assessment if the assessors judge that it does not meet the CMALT criteria.

3. Judging the success of CMALT

It is far too early to say with much certainty whether CMALT will be a success for ALT. But the omens are positive. Firstly, a wide range of stakeholders have indicated their support for the scheme. Secondly, individuals who have completed CMALT are positive as to its benefits. I conclude with four reflections from CMALT holders.

“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. The process, where I was a member of a group piloting the planned e-portfolio system for CMALT, brought me into contact with like-minded people from a broad spectrum of educational sectors which proved highly stimulating and thought-provoking.” Nick Jeans, Content Team Manager, South Yorkshire eLearning Programme.

“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.” Anne Jones, Emeritus Professor of Lifelong Learning, Brunel University, and Managing Director, Lifelong Learning Systems Ltd.

“The CMALT process was an opportunity for reflection - and connection. In a fast moving field like eLearning, 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.” Ellen Lessner, ILT Development Coordinator, Abingdon and Witney College.

“Going through the CMALT process was a good way of consolidating a view of my experience in the Learning Technology field. Doing this online using an e-portfolio system will make it easier to keep the information up to date and to reflect on my professional practice. I look forward to ALT developing a Fellowship scheme to encourage advanced professionalism in the field.” George Roberts, Development Director, Off-campus eLearning, Oxford Brookes University.

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Appendix: CMALT – detailed requirements

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.

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. Working with others.
- b. Interface between human and technical systems.

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