

The UK eUniversities experience of global eLearning

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Abstract

In February 2000 the British Secretary of State for Education at the time, David Blunkett, made a surprise announcement. The Government was going to establish a national "e-university" to help UK higher education offer online courses to a global market. The key characteristics of the project were described as follows:

- *It will establish a new vehicle for delivering higher education programmes through web-based learning.*
- *That vehicle would be jointly owned, established and operated by a consortium of higher education institutions, working with private sector and overseas partners. The project is not designed to set up a new, self-standing HE institution, but will draw on the expertise of existing HE institutions.*
- *It will focus on meeting expanding demand for HE programmes both in the UK and overseas.*
- *It will be established on a scale that will enable it to compete internationally.*
- *It will be established with a central core of founder members, but also involving other HE institutions who wish to take part and who can demonstrate that they have a high quality contribution to make.*
- *It will be identified as a provider of the highest quality, both in its programmes and in the student support structures that underpin them, maintaining and enhancing the*

international reputation of UK higher education.

The presentation will examine just what happened next and how the higher education sector rose to the challenge of collaborating to produce excellent online education for a global market. Significant problems had to be overcome and the whole enterprise stimulated an unprecedented level of e-learning analysis and reflection. A next generation learning environment was created and teams in universities across the country started building e-learning courses in new ways.

Successful innovation requires not only the production of an advanced product or service but also a clear and practical plan for its exploitation. Britain has a history of inventing products of huge significance but then failing to exploit the invention's potential. Television for example was invented by a Scot but made into a commercial reality by the Americans. UK eUniversities has similarly succeeded in establishing a highly innovative and effective method for developing and delivering high quality courses worldwide but did not succeed in creating a rapid commercial success from the operation as the Government funders had envisaged. The presentation will demonstrate how the e-learning experience of UK eUniversities can help all those working to get the best from technology in education.