

World's Largest E-Learning Programme set to benefit English Schools

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Images Available

Distributed learning specialist, Interactive University has unveiled plans to take the Heriot-Watt SCHOLAR programme south of the border. SCHOLAR, the world's largest single online learning programme, which is currently used in all 432 Scottish secondary schools, will be piloted in English schools and colleges in the post 16 sector.

The SCHOLAR programme has been subject to a three-year evaluation in Scotland, where it has been hugely successful. It is used by all 60,000 school pupils studying for Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications, delivering a total of 4.5 million learning hours per annum. The programme has now been adapted for five A-Level subjects, covering maths, sciences and computer studies.

The current pilot in Cumbria, supported by the Learning and Skills Council, has been very well received and SCHOLAR is being used by around 2000 pupils and 200 teachers within the county. There is a high level of interest from other regions of England which are hoping to join the pilot later in the year. A key difference between the SCHOLAR approach and the myriad sources of e-learning already available, is that SCHOLAR includes an extensive range of learning services such as staff development, tutor support and the creation of learning communities. Developed by Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, SCHOLAR is planned to support all three A-Level syllabuses; OCR, Edexcel and AQA.

Professor Roy Leitch, now CEO of Interactive University and his colleagues developed the concept based on the three elements of Content, Context and Community.

Keith Duckitt, Head of ICT and E-learning at the Learning and Skills Council, said: "LSC's National Learning Network (NLN) Programme is committed to working in partnership to improve learning through technology. We are delighted to support this pilot which will enhance the high quality, flexible e-learning resources available, to the 14-19 group in particular, in schools and colleges. SCHOLAR's focus on student-tutor relationships reflects our objective of putting the learner first and is wholly in keeping with our view that learners achieve most when offered a rich variety of learning resources."

Additionally, Interactive University plans to take SCHOLAR overseas. Five colleges in China have signed a contract to start offering the programme in September 2004 and a pilot project is already underway in India. Students in Hong Kong experienced SCHOLAR in May 2003 during the SARS outbreak when 30,000 pupils were given access to the programme while the schools were closed.

David Farquhar, Chief Operating Officer of Interactive University said: "SCHOLAR is valued throughout schools in Scotland and we're very pleased that English students will be able to take advantage of the programme too. SCHOLAR supports the tutor as well as the learner. It can improve exam success and, as a result, we feel sure that it will help enhance the English post-16 education system's excellent reputation."

Irene Krechowicka, e-learning consultant for the County's 14-19 Pathfinder Project said "Teachers in

Cumbria are delighted that their schools are the first in England to access the programme and we have high expectations of the benefits this will bring.

“The materials are highly interactive and can be incorporated into classroom teaching as well as providing anytime anywhere learning. It also has the potential to provide easy access to additional learning, for example a student doing Physics A level could dip into the Maths and younger gifted students could also make use of SCHOLAR.”

Statistics show that SCHOLAR has an acceptance rating by teachers of over 75% and typically over 90% of the students said they would recommend the programme to a friend. Perhaps the most surprising statistic is that a peak usage time for students competes directly with prime-time television, between the hours of 7pm and 9pm Monday to Thursday. Feedback has shown that parents believe using SCHOLAR to support homework and revision actually contributes to improvements in exam grades and helps University entry.

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About the Interactive University www.interactiveuniversity.net
Interactive University is a market-led organisation specialising in the development and delivery of accredited distributed learning programmes within the global post compulsory education sector. The university's primary objective is to become Scotland's centre of excellence in e-learning and the leading source of e-learning products, services and technology.

About SCHOLAR: <http://scholar.hw.ac.uk/>
SCHOLAR is a programme of Heriot-Watt University initiated in 1998 to develop extremely high quality interactive materials for delivery over the internet. It was developed in partnership with secondary schools and further education colleges. According to Heriot-Watt Professor Phillip John, Chair of the SCHOLAR Forum the success in Scotland is not only due to the quality of the materials but the associated professional development programme designed for classroom teachers. SCHOLAR is published and distributed by the Interactive University on behalf of Heriot-Watt.

About Heriot-Watt University www.hwu.ac.uk
Edinburgh's Heriot-Watt University is a leading provider in science, engineering and business education with courses designed for business, industry and the professions. The University has wide experience of

international degree programmes and supported e-learning, with currently more than 10,000 students studying in 130 countries world-wide. Overseas programmes include the distance learning MBA, one of the largest and most popular in the world.

About the Learning and Skills Council www.lsc.gov.uk

The Learning and Skills Council is responsible for funding and planning education and training for over 16-year-olds in England. Its mission is to raise participation and attainment through high-quality education and training which puts learners first. Its vision is that, by 2010, young people and adults in England will have the knowledge and productive skills matching the best in the world.

With a budget of £8.0 billion (2003-04) the Council operates through 47 local offices and a national office in Coventry. Established in April 2001 its work covers:

- further education
- work-based training and young people
- school sixth forms
- workforce development
- adult and community learning
- information, advice and guidance for adults
- education business links.

The Learning and Skills Council is responsible for all post-16 education and training in England other than in universities.

About the National Learning Network (NLN) www.nln.ac.uk

The national learning network (NLN) is a national partnership programme designed to increase the uptake of Information Learning Technology (ILT) across the learning and skills sector in England. Supported by the LSC and other sector bodies, the NLN achieves this by providing network infrastructure and a wide-ranging programme of support, information and training, as well as the development and provision of ILT materials for teaching and learning.

The initiative began in 1999 with the aim of helping to transform post-16 education. To date, the Government's investment in the NLN totals £156 million over a five year period. Initially for the benefit of further education and sixth form colleges, the NLN programme of work is now being rolled out to workplace learning and Adult and Community Learning.