

ICT KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE LAUNCHED IN BERLIN

WORLD'S LARGEST E-LEARNING CONFERENCE SEES LAUNCH OF NEW PAN-EUROPEAN ICT BODY

The Knowledge Exchange was officially launched on December 1st at the Online Educa conference in Berlin. Made up of four national European Information and Communication Technology (ICT) education bodies, the new organisation aims to develop closer working relationships in order to increase the return on national investment in ICT infrastructure, services and projects.

The founder members of the Knowledge Exchange are the SURF Foundation (Netherlands), JISC, the Joint Information Systems Committee (UK), the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, Germany) and Denmark's Electronic Research Library (DEFF). With the international dimension increasingly important both in education and research and in the use of ICT, these organisations will work together under the umbrella of the Knowledge Exchange to share information, increase the profile of national research and development activities, and where appropriate work towards a common infrastructure based on international standards.

Another key aim of the new body is to inform European policy. Senior representatives of the European Union attending Online Educa also attended the Knowledge Exchange launch and heard from its founder partners about the organisation's plans for the first year, and its vision of a partnership of four countries, sharing knowledge, exploring differences, collaborating and promoting international dialogue.

The Knowledge Exchange will be coordinated from a central office, located with Denmark's Electronic Research Library, in Copenhagen for the first three years. Bo Öhrström, Deputy Director to the Danish National Library Authority and host for the Knowledge Exchange office welcomes this opportunity: »DEFF look forward to a closer co-operation with prominent, national organisations in the digital learning, teaching and research areas in order to secure a common infra-

structure environment for all partners. The KE initiative will surely help us to achieve better, quicker and cheaper digital development results. Especially within DEFF we are sure that the establishment and results of KE can support the Danish government in turning Denmark into a Knowledge Society«.

Founder member Norman Wiseman, Head of Outreach and Institutional Support, JISC toasted the launch of this experimental initiative by saying: »Each of the four countries brings to the Knowledge Exchange its own perspective, background, strengths and its own leadership role. It's time for stronger partnerships because that's the only way we can all achieve our goals. The strength of this partnership is our working together towards common standards, looking for compatible structures and innovative solutions together, while retaining our distinct identities. This four country partnership may be just the beginning.«

Bas Cordewener, founder member from SURF anticipates the benefits Knowledge Exchange might bring: »For a small country like the Netherlands, this is an ideal opportunity to join forces with others at the leading edge of information and communications technology for education and research. We firmly believe that by joining forces, by drawing upon our strengths and emphasis, we can really make a difference. Supporting the European agendas to enable access to information and mobility for students requires infrastructure and services developed in collaboration. We hope Knowledge Exchange will facilitate our efforts.«

Dr. Sigrun Eckelmann, Programme Director in the Group Academic Libraries and Information Systems at the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft emphasizes the contribution the initiative can make to researchers: »Creating the optimal virtual environment for researchers means needing to choose from a wide array of possible strategies and technologies. By creating a forum for the exchange of thoughts, practices and ideas among funding organisations, Knowledge Exchange allows us to make more informed decisions in our own policies and creates the possibility of developing projects in tandem with other countries.«

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