Editorial

ALT-J has a new editorial team from this issue. I'm glad to say that Gabriel Jacobs will remain involved with the journal as Executive Editor. The new Editor is David Squires from King's College London but he will not be able fully to take over until the next issue. I have been appointed as Deputy Editor.

Looking back over the past editorials and journal editions, it is clear that there are a number of recurrent themes. The issue of learning technology as a valid research area and how it can be counted in the next RAE, integration into mainstream teaching and learning – shifting from the innovators to the majority, and commitment from senior management and formulation of policy and strategy. These themes are reflected in the articles in this issue, and no doubt will be evident again in the special conference edition (7.1).

The question then has to be asked: 'Are we getting anywhere?' or 'Is any of the lobbying and research work we are all actively engaged with making a difference?' Some would say no – that learning technology still remains at the fringes of teaching and learning, with little commitment from senior management and poor regard for 'learning technology' as a genuine, valid, 'respectable' area of research. I disagree. Whilst I think we still have a long way to go, the increase in the presence of learning technology within higher education has risen dramatically in the last five years. For example, most universities now have some form of central-, faculty- or school-based support specifically concerned with the use and integration of learning technologies. I suspect it is a common agenda item at senior management meetings on a regular basis in many universities (that is certainly the case in my own university). The potential (and importance) of communications and information technologies was reiterated throughout the Dearing report and – more recently – in the Government's proposals for a National Grid for Learning. Credit for all of this must in part be given to those at the ground level, i.e. ALT members, who continue to lobby and to evaluate the effect of learning technologies and to research new ways of using it. So I think we deserve a pat on the back – while the war is not won (yet), the battles are going well!

This issue is fundamentally reflective in nature. Many of the points raised above are discussed. Hawkridge's paper reflects on the validity of using Web pages to support learning, and in particular looks at issues of quality. Brown goes to the heart of the issue of embedding learning technologies through appropriate strategy and policy by outlining how De Montfort have been 'reinventing the university' through their electronic campus project. The remaining four papers outline case studies illustrating the use of specific technologies within a teaching context. Duncan *et al.* deal with how they have been using video-conferencing to share a series of short lectures between several universities. Goodyear and Steeples report on the use of asynchronous multimedia conferencing to support collaborative continuing professional development. Nicholson reports on the use of both the Web and computer conferencing to support teaching and learning. Finally, Clark *et al.* give a critical appraisal of the highly successful WinEcon software and its use in a first-year undergraduate Economics programme.

So we are moving forwards (even if sometimes it feels like one step forward and two back), and it would be fair to say that learning technology is an increasingly important part of day-to-day university life. None the less, we still have a long way to go. A significant proportion of academics still need convincing of the usefulness of learning technologies, and many more need to be shown how they can be used. Academics and senior management need ongoing evidence of the educational and cost benefits. Many of the technologies we are dealing with are still in their infancy; we have barely scratched the surface of their potential. *ALT-J* has an important role to play in this, by publishing the latest case studies on innovation and evaluation, and by providing a voice for key activists and innovators. The next great challenge will be to ensure that the journal reaches mainstream teaching staff and senior management.

Gráinne Conole

May I take this opportunity of thanking Gráinne Conole for her work in putting this issue together? As readers of my last editorial will know, I said that it was my last. But there were delays in appointing the new Editor and Deputy Editor, and I almost had to do this issue at a very late stage. Dr Conole plugged the gap and saved my skin (if I may be allowed, just this once, to mix metaphors). It will seem like a cliché to say that I look forward to working with the new team. It is nevertheless sincerely felt.

Gabriel Jacobs