Institutional Environment Guideline
Descriptions of National Environments
– FRANCE –

e-Learning in Public Higher Education in France

In France, e-Learning takes place in the education system, but also in the business world. Nowadays, these two areas have almost no contact in terms of e-Learning. In the same way, we'll find an important divide between e-Learning in primary and secondary education and e-Learning in higher education. Higher education can finally be split in public higher education and private higher education. e-Learning in public higher education is so just a part of e-Learning in France.

The French Higher Education System

It is important to know the French higher education system to understand the place and the development of e-Learning in that context. According to Eurydice[1] statistics, there were 82 universities or assimilates in France in 2003-2004 and there were 1,941,304 students in public higher education. French State spends 6700 euros by university student[2]. A foreigner-oriented description of the French higher education system can be found on the Edufrance website.

http://www.edufrance.com/en/b-agence/langues.htm
(NB: France is adapting his former diplomas system to the European system. Edufrance website is not completely up to date at this time.)

One of the most important changes in higher education in France for last years is the transformation of a former architecture of university degrees into a three levels system of degrees (*licence*, master and doctorate) for harmonization to the European higher education systems (Bologna process). But this process is more than just a reorganization of degrees. Its declination in France includes also some points that can affect e-Learning. In the article 3 of the decree of the April 8, 2002[3], we find the objectives of the French articulation of the Bologna process. Here are those one that can have an impact on e-Learning.

- To integrate, when needed, multi-field approaches and to facilitate the improvement of teaching quality, information, the orientation and the accompaniment of student;
- To integrate the learning of transverse competences such as mastery of the foreign languages and ICT tools;
- To facilitate the creation of teachings by methods using communication and information technologies and the development of distance learning

e-Learning Situation in Public Higher Education

The development of e-Learning is very considerable these last years in higher education in France, but national statistics about it in public higher education aren't available yet.

[1] http://194.78.211.243/Eurybase/Application/contents.asp?chapter=6
[2] http://www.education.gouv.fr/stateval/grands_chiffres/gchiffres2005/gchif_e4.htm and ftp://trf.education.gouv.fr/pub/edutel/dpd/etat15/etat23.pdf
[3] http://www.amue.fr/TextesRef/TextesRef.asp?Id=235

Indicators of this development can be the vitality and the number of e-Learning actors in France. In addition to higher education institutions, AMUE[4] identified in 2003 more than 70 "networks" or institutions related to ICT working at a national level[5].

Laws and Politics

ICT Policy

The Direction of Technology (DT) of the Ministry of Education tries to give a national direction to the ICT policies of the universities. Universities are autonomous institutions that adopt their own policies. DT can suggest the ways to follow, the standards to adopt, but can't really force universities. In the other hand, DT has some lever to direct universities actions, by example by financing many significant ICT projects (some of these projects are described in the "Action and Infrastructures" chapter).

Teacher Training Policy & ICT & TT Policy

In the absence of any formal system for Higher Education teacher training, whether in pedagogy, ICT or both, it is often the ICT support staff themselves (instructional designers, multimedia developers) who fulfill this role in an informal, unofficial way, accompanying teaching staff in the choice of approaches, tools and media rather than actually training them. This of course has repercussions for the recognition both of the teaching staff's skills and of the trainer role taken on by ICT support staff.

SUPs (university pedagogical departments) were constituted in some universities to train teachers to pedagogy, often in relation with the use of ICT in their teaching. This trend is not yet very developed inside universities.

14 CIES (Higher Education Initiation Centers) in France train voluntary doctorands (monitors). They give them the first elements relative to the teacher-researcher profession. "Beside to their activity of research, monitors follow, ten days a year, within the CIES to which they are attached, a training about teaching techniques and the diffusion of the scientific and technical culture. [The objective of the training] is to prepare them to the teacher-researcher profession. Moreover, they benefit support from a teaching tutor."[6] This training is not only ICT-oriented, when it is.

Background Information

The decree about the status of higher education teachers in France and the way their careers are managed have an important impact on the development of e-Learning:

- In the 7th article of the decree 84-431[7], we read: "the teaching duty in **presence of students** is determined in relation to a standard annual period of 128 hours of courses or 192 hours of directed works or 288 hours of praticals or any equivalent combination". According to this article, to teach online can't be included in the teaching duty.
- Quality of the research is the main criteria for the development of the career of a teacher[8]. Quality of teaching or involvement in e-learning is not taken in account.

[4] Agency for Mutualization of Higher Education Institutions
[5] http://www.amue.fr/Pages/Tabsyn/index.htm
[6] http://www.recherche.gouv.fr/doctorat.htm
[7] http://www.amue.fr/Telecharger/Decret_84-431.pdf
[8] http://www.amue.fr/Telecharger/RapportEsperet.pdf

- The question of author rights of learning resources is not definitively settled. Does the resource belong to the state or to the teacher? Does a teacher can receive author rights for learning resources? As they haven't clear answers to these questions, institutions and teachers have to make their own interpretations, with the risk to be out-of-law.

Actions and Infrastructures

Actions

The general orientations of the Direction of Technology are organized around these major trends[9]:

- The support brought to the projects presented by the institutions in the four-years contracts
- Introduction of the Informatics and Internet Skills Certificate (C2i©)
- Thematic Digital Universities
- Digital Workplaces (development of online services – *ENT*)
- Regional Digital Universities
- Actions of support
    - digital resources for teaching (through CERIMES, Amphis de la 5, Canal-U, etc.)
    - research on uses (Tematice)

Four-Years Contractual Policy

Universities benefit of a renewable institution contract[10] (four years contract) with government. This contract (one per university) is a way for institutions to obtain financing for specific projects. "The projects presented by institutions and prompted by the four-year contracts receive support within the framework of the policy of the DES (Department of Higher Education). To ensure the effectiveness of a system fostering the widespread usage of ICT practices, the Ministry and institutions are building their actions on a policy of contract-based links between institutions and the government: all four-year contracts provide for ICT sections that are intended to facilitate access to resources and digital services for actual teaching as for teacher training."[11]

The ICT related projects must address the following domains:

- new services for students (computer rooms in free access, self-training rooms, e-mails, etc.);
- innovative training settings (distance learning, "tailor-made" learning...);
- training actions for employees (teachers, administrative employees...);
- activities of development of digital learning resources on various supports (CD, DVD, intranet, Internet).

Thematic Digital Universities

From 2000 to 2002, government launched three calls for "Digital campuses" proposals. The main objective of this project were "to succeed in building a quality and competitive national offering for online distance leaning on the international market"[12]. In April 2003, 64 digital campuses have been labeled. The "natural" evolution of these digital campuses are the Thematic Digital Universities. "Thematic Digital Universities are virtual organisations that draw together the University Campuses established in various universities and "Grandes Ecoles" around complementary themes. (...) Essentially, the DTU group together the main subject areas and their content is student-oriented."[13]

[9] http://www.educnet.education.fr/eng/superieur/orientations.htm
[10] http://www.educnet.education.fr/superieur/contrats.htm
[11] http://www.educnet.education.fr/eng/superieur/orientations.htm
[12] http://www2.educnet.education.fr/sections/superieur/campus/
[13] http://www.educnet.education.fr/eng/superieur/unt.htm

At the heart of DTU, we find the will to share digital learning resources. Teacher training is also an objective of DTUs. Recently[14], a trans-DTUs workgroup on TT (to train teacher to use ICT in their teaching) has been constituted.

Digital Workplaces (Development of Online Services – ENT)

A digital workplace is a university intranet offering online services to the members of the university communauty (students, teachers, staff, etc.) "Based on these various recommendations, the Ministry has drawn up a consistent framework for developing and deploying Digital Workspaces (DW): this is the purpose of the SDET (work environment development plan) which, by issuing technical recommendations, will guarantee the interoperability of the different elements developed by the various players. In order to give higher education institutions the opportunity to benefit from a diversified offer of technological solutions, the third request for proposals focusing on digital campuses (2002) included a second part concerning the development of these work environments. Its objective was to lend support to the consortiums, which were tasked with the technological development of Digital Workspaces and an initial deployment phase in higher education institutions that included the provision of content and services, prior to more widespread availability. (…) In February 2006, nearly 600.000 students are granted access to a Digital Workspace."[15]

The daily use by students of an online environment should increase their expectations about learning resources and virtual interactions with their teachers. So, the teachers' needs for e-Learning training should increase in the same time.

Regional Digital Universities

At the initiative of government, universities in a same region joined together to develop ICT-related projects in common. In September 2003, 11 consortiums of that kind were already operative. Many of them include teacher training in their actions plans.

"The development of regional digital universities is based on a contract containing a set of objectives. The contract is signed by every member of the project. These parties include the French Government, higher education institutions, CROUS, regional authorities (and occasionally various local authorities), and other partners if necessary. The contract features the strategic objectives set by the Ministry for National Education, Higher Education and Research, and DATAR and details the operational goals and actions that the different partners are required to achieve. (…) The goal of the RDU is to improve the quality of public services supplied by higher educational institutions by providing on-line services (or digital services) to the entire university community. These services cover most user activities:

- Communication and collaborative work: address books, workspaces and storage areas, agendas, messaging services, forums, chat, web publications, bookmark management, office automation tools (work processing, spreadsheets, desktop presentations, etc.),
- Education and training: on-line training (Distance Learning), on-line courses and learning resources, digital educational environment,
- Administration: study programs, exams, scheduling
- Documentation: catalogues and on-line resources,

Based on a DW (digital workspace), all digital services are organised around two central goals: to improve the working conditions of student and staff users and to improve local and remote services."[16]

[14] April 2006
[15] http://www.educnet.education.fr/eng/superieur/orientations.htm
[16] http://www.educnet.education.fr/eng/equip/digital-univ.htm

Infrastructures and Materials

In 2004, the Direction of technology launched the laptop and wifi for students operation[17]. On one hand, the operation helps students to buy a laptop by making agreements with computers manufacturers and loaning institutions (students can buy a laptop for the price of a coffee [two?] a day… during 3 years). On the other hand, government asked and helped universities to offer services to students owning a laptop, by example by giving wifi access on the campus. 300,000 laptops have been bought by September 30, 2005 within the context of this program[18].

Government finance two important audio-visual resources centers for education: CERIMES[19] and Canal-U[20]. CERIMES is the resources and information center about multimedia [resources] for higher education. It proposes a thematic catalog of 6277 audiovisual, multimedia or Internet resources. Canal-U is the webtv of the higher education. Through a cluster of chains, students, teachers, and general public access to audio-visual programs enriched by pedagogical documents.

ICT, in its larger definition, is a priority of the contracts “Plan État Région 2000-2006” (State-Region plan). About 3,5% of the total amount of the contracts, almost 1,4 milliard of euros, is devoted to the society of information[21]. The ICT in education sections of the contracts represents 101 millions of euros on 7 years[22].

More generally, the penetration of high bandwidth Internet access is growing up very fast in France, probably due in part to the low cost of subscriptions. In December 2005, ART (French Telecommunication Regulation Authority) counted 9,5 millions of subscriptions[23].

[17] http://www2.educnet.education.fr/sections/superieur/wifi/operation_micro-port
[18] http://delegation.internet.gouv.fr/mipe/projet.htm
[19] http://www.cerimes.education.fr/index.php
[20] http://www.canal-u.fr/canalu/index.php
[21] http://www.diact.gouv.fr/datar_site/datar_CPER.nsf/$ID_Chapitre/CLAE-569E4K
[22] http://delegation.internet.gouv.fr/mipe/universites.htm#mesures
[23] http://www.art-telecom.fr/observatoire/haut-debit/index-htdebit0405.htm