

Editorial

Dick Bacon

r.bacon@surrey.ac.uk

CTI Centre for Physics, United Kingdom

Hans Jalling

Hans.Jalling@hsv.se

Council for the Renewal of Undergraduate Education, Sweden

Ian Johnston

director.science@uniserve.edu.au

UniServe Science, Australia

Collaboration between university teachers from different nations is never easy to organize or sustain. Part of the reason is because education is very much a political undertaking and we all have different agendas that we are working to - how teachers teach and students learn depends on what culture they come from. Part of it is also because the content of what is taught also needs to be customized for local markets - where you live cannot help influencing what you need to know. Within this context we are very pleased to publish this second CAL-laborate newsletter in Australia, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

There have been many changes since CAL-laborate 1997 was published. The most obvious is the adoption of the World Wide Web by teachers everywhere. What was merely an interesting new toy just a few years back, is now the great white hope for the future. Enthusiastic teachers are convinced that it will increase the effectiveness of what they are doing. Administrators are convinced that it will increase cost efficiency. And there are signs, from a recent survey in Australia, commissioned by the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching, that both sides may be justified, at least to some extent.

There are several areas in which especially good work is being done all round the world. One is in the area of computer based assessment. There are now quite a few commercial systems, and many more "home grown" ones, to choose from, some of which use the World Wide Web as a delivery tool. Three of the articles in this newsletter feature examples of these. Various attempts have been made over the years to set up data banks of questions to go with these assessment packages, and there have been some successes. This is an area where cooperation between teachers, institutions and countries will surely prove fruitful. If you are interested in becoming involved in such an activity, please contact one of the collaborating organisations.

Advances are also being made in the area of student-teacher and student-student interaction via the web. Again one of our articles deals with this topic. If ever some kind of flexible, computer based instruction (with or without the web) is to become an important part of our teaching, so that it replaces some of the face-to-face lecturing, tutoring, demonstrating that we currently do, we need to keep our eye very firmly on the trial projects that are being done right now, and share information about the outcome of those trials.

The other four articles describe various teaching packages, in chemistry, mathematics and physics. Although some of these have been available for some time, they are still not used as widely as they might be within standard courses throughout science disciplines. The fundamental requirements for the routine use of computers in science teaching are still elusive, as are the benefits that have been promised for so many years. Here too is an area where we can only keep trying to promote cooperation.

The web has enormously increased our ability to communicate with one another, without necessarily making any clearer what we should be communicating about. In our job of teaching university science there is still a very obvious need to collaborate with one another, irrespective of what country we live and work in. We should use the increased communication capabilities of the web to make that cooperation more effective. The publication of the second issue of CAL-laborate is therefore a symbol of our belief in that ideal.