III

(Notices)

COMMISSION

CALL FOR PROPOSALS DG EAC/46/02
Preparatory and innovative actions 2002/b

e-LEARNING

(2002/C 179/07)

1. CONTEXT (INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION)

The Commission has adopted the e-learning initiative to adapt the European Union's education and training systems to the knowledge economy and digital culture.

At the Lisbon European Council on 23 and 24 March 2000, the Heads of State or Government set the Union the objective of becoming 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'. Although Europe has one of the world's highest levels of education and has the necessary investment capacity, it still lags far behind in the use of the new information and communication technologies. E-learning has been designed to enable Europe to catch up by intensifying its efforts in this area. This initiative has four components: to equip schools with multimedia computers, to train European teachers and trainers in the use of digital technologies, to develop European educational services and software and to speed up the networking of schools and teachers.

The e-learning action plan, adopted by the European Commission on 28 March 2001, aims at presenting ways and means of implementing the e-learning initiative. Its intention is to involve all those in education and training, both in the private and public sectors, in the realisation of the potential of e-learning methods and resources for lifelong and life-wide learning.

The e-learning action plan operates by the mobilisation of existing resources. For the European Commission, these are found within the existing programmes and instruments, which are suited to the development of e-learning projects. However, the fast evolution and changing nature of e-learning makes it often difficult to place these projects into a specific programme or budget line. For example, an e-learning project could involve different disciplines, pedagogical theories, technological developments and new logistics and concern a wide range of actors.

In view of this, a special budget line has been created to explore in-depth specific e-learning issues. This will be achieved by undertaking a number of pilot projects, which address the key strategic areas of the e-learning action plan. Their aim is to provide the basis for a wide debate at the European level, and to encourage increased coordination of related actions within and between Member States. They should also provide important information on which future community actions can be based.

2. BUDGETARY RESOURCES

The total available budget for this call for proposals is EUR 2,75 millions for 2002.

3. SUBJECTS

The themes for proposals are those identified as priority ones in the e-learning action plan and in the 2002 budgetary perspective. The aim of the call is to support innovative ideas and approaches. Projects proposed must address one of the listed subjects.

All proposals must address the European level, contribute to the creation and/or strengthening of European networks and cooperation platforms, provide for a wide dissemination of results and facilitate the exchange of experience and good practice. Therefore, good documentation of all project data (description of application contexts, profile of participants, positive and negative results of different tools and pedagogical approaches, etc.) is essential.

The subjects are two:

1. Media literacy and image education.

2. Quality.
3.1. Media literacy and image education

The implementation of e-learning methods, when successful, leads to the acquisition of digital literacy. Whereas digital literacy deals with mastering new tools, media literacy, as described below, emphasises the use of these tools, as they become increasingly available throughout society and in all walks of life. In education, work and entertainment, for example. Digital literacy concentrates on the acquisition of capabilities and skills related to new technologies which are required in a growing number of jobs. Media literacy is more general as it highlights the pervading influence of images and information, to which these new technologies have given unprecedented powers of fascination and influence.

Media literacy is thus defined as the ability to communicate competently in all old and new media, as well as to access, analyse and evaluate the power of images, words and sounds which are such an important part of our contemporary media culture. This is a fundamental skill, which is increasingly necessary if we are to fully understand the large number of images, and messages which we are now being confronted with on a daily basis. Whilst there is widespread criticism about mass produced images and entertainment, the evolution of media technologies and the increasing presence of the Internet as a distribution channel are also perceived as a powerful democratising factor in today's society. An increasing number of Europeans can now create and disseminate images, information and contents. As a result, media literacy is widely viewed as one of the major tools in the development of citizens' responsibilities.

The aim of this initiative is to ensure that more and more Europeans, especially young people, have the opportunity to have a better understanding of the differences between information and advertising, between fiction and reality and between ‘virtual’ and ‘real’. In preparing for tomorrow's Europe, it is essential that today's youth develop a considered and critical approach towards media, acquiring the basic skills which are necessary to take advantage of interactive facilities in the new media and to generate new and creative contents.

3.1.1. Intercultural dialogue as a transverse dimension of the proposals

Europe is aware of the need to establish and reinforce a genuine intercultural dialogue with those cultures with different traditions. These differences are geographical and historical, as well as cultural and linguistic, and they are being redefined and challenged by increasing commercial exchanges and migratory fluxes. Also, ICTs are giving birth to original forms of culture which influence the very concept of cultural identity. ICTs are a particularly powerful tool for democratisation, dialogue and exchange, in all respects: scientific, technical, commercial, cultural, political and religious. In the context of the intercultural dialogue, the e-learning initiative seeks to encourage the development of these exchanges as well as to intensify their quality and diversity.

Given the complexities of intercultural dialogue and the various roles played in this respect by ICTs, the European Commission will support projects which make full and creative use of them. Intercultural dialogue may thus be included as a central or secondary feature in projects which are basically addressing media literacy issues. Such projects should propose pragmatic actions, to improve and/or intensify intercultural dialogue and to promote mutual understanding, respect, peace and social harmony in Europe. In all cases, the use of ICTs should be fully integrated in the project.

3.1.2. Scope of projects to be considered

The European Commission, through its media literacy and image education initiative, seeks to encourage projects which undertake some or all of the following:

- analyse and critically reflect upon media and media-conditioned contents, and the impact of multimedia, in an effort to raise awareness as regards clichés, stereotypes, etc.; the areas of interest may be intercultural dialogues, better understanding of differences (gender, race, creed, values, etc.),

- gain greater access to information by means of the new technologies and use these in a creative manner to generate contents and make them available to the wider community,

- create and/or disseminate media content and methods which may enhance reflection on the fascination and dangers of violence and of other objectionable contents in the image media (cinema, television, Internet sites, photographs, etc.),

- establish and/or reinforce networking with a view to establishing stronger links between separated communities or individuals, including handicapped people, minorities, exiled or displaced persons.

3.1.3. Description of the practical implementation of projects to be considered for funding

Projects which will be considered for funding could for example:

1. analyse media representations and media values (with special emphasis on race and gender stereotypes and on the various consequences) in a multimedia perspective;

2. encourage the production and distribution of media literacy and image education related content while using new technologies such as Internet sites, Internet-based magazines and forums, video-conferencing, etc.;
3. Stimulate the use of media in order to improve participation
   in social and community life;

4. Intensify networking around media education related issues
   between partners belonging to formal and non-formal
   education institutions, content-providers and producers,
   research and cultural institutions and individuals active in
   media-literacy operations;

5. Concentrate on the implementation of media literacy
   initiatives bridging the media industry and the education
   world, in a 'hands-on' approach.

3.2. Quality

Quality of e-learning (1) is becoming an increasing concern not
only for the education/training practitioner and the learner, but
also for the commercial supplier of e-learning services, and,
even more so, for policy-making in education and training.
There is general agreement that if ICT are going to achieve
their potential to help re-designing education, then quality
must be improved. And yet there is no common understanding
of what we mean by quality, either in terms of the e-learning
content and services, or in terms of how e-learning is designed
and used in practice.

Proposals addressing this part of the call will advance our
common understanding of quality and provide practical
support to improve it.

Quality framework

Learning is context specific and the quality of the learning
experience depends on many factors, including the
contribution of the teacher, tutor or trainer. Yet most would
agree that there are certain factors which, if present, would
normally increase the quality of content and support services
for e-learning: the use of appropriate experts (e.g. pedagogical,
instructional designers, etc) throughout the development of
learning environments, content and support services; the
need to consider cultural and linguistic requirements, peda-
gogical aspects and the nature of learner interaction during
the design; the application of quality assurance techniques in
the process and the use of available standards; the involv-
ment of educational users from the beginning; the provision of
appropriate teacher/tutor/trainer training; the importance of
maintenance; etc. Put these altogether and we arrive at an
overall quality framework. A framework which should help
to raise the general quality of content and support services for
e-learning to a level whereby the educational user knows that
he or she can use them with confidence as a beneficial tool for
learning.

Many of the elements for a quality framework already exist or
are currently the subject of research. The main challenge,
therefore, is to agree how they should be integrated into an
overall framework and to validate this framework in real
educational settings. This work would involve the whole
range of actors from the development and use of e-learning
in education and training; for formal and in-formal use, both
within the educational system and for wider use in lifelong
learning for work or leisure. The partnership would include
academia, industry, broadcasters, publishers, etc. But most
importantly, it should be led by the educational users.

E-learning in practice

The notion of quality approaches to e-learning in practice
depends very much on the type of application used, the
context, and the nature of the interaction between the
learner and the material, between the learner and other
learners, and between the learner and the teacher/tutor/trainer.
Linguistic and cultural issues are very important. As are moti-
vation of the learner, individual learning styles, and enjoyment.
Indeed, such is the complexity of the learning situation that we
would not expect to have a single definition of what quality is
for e-learning in practice. Rather, we should expect to develop
ideas on what constitutes good practice (2) and innovative
approaches.

The evaluation of e-learning and quality is often focused on an
analysis of the inputs, rather than on the results (both in the
short and long-term) from the point of view of the efficiency of
the pedagogical and organisational approach, and of the
benefits for the learner. Evaluation methods often use a
multitude of questionnaires and checklists, but say little
about the quality of a good pedagogical scenario, or the
pleasure and motivation for learning. If we are to identify
good practice, then we need to further develop our approach
to design and evaluation.

Considerable experience of using e-learning already exists in
Europe and a key challenge now is to build upon this
knowledge by encouraging further analysis of the results,
sharing of experience and lessons learnt, and dissemination
of good practices and approaches. For example, the use of ICT
allows new learner-centred approaches in many fields such as
science, citizenship and language learning.

Scope of projects to be considered

Projects will be considered for funding if they undertake one or
more of the following:

(1) ‘... the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to
improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources
and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration’. The
generic term e-learning will be used throughout the text of the call
with this meaning.

(2) Good practice (or best practice) involves an understanding of what
has worked and what has not worked, in given situations and why.
Good practice is a dynamic body of opinion which evolves with
time and experience.
1. Quality assurance:

— bring together the main actors involved in the development and use of e-learning to further develop a common understanding of quality and suggest criteria for its assessment.

— arrive at an overall quality framework for e-learning which focuses primarily on process issues and quality assurance.

— provide practical support for the general improvement of quality e.g.: guides, recommendations, templates, methodologies, etc.

2. Evaluation of current practices and approaches:

— develop or transfer practical methods, tools and guidelines for educational users to evaluate e-learning in practice.

— collect and disseminate information on the different approaches used in the Member States, or validated in the research programmes, to assess and help improve the pedagogical relevance of e-learning, taking into account such things as the cultural and linguistic diversity of the educational context.

3. Promotion of quality approaches:

— support the identification, analysis and dissemination of good practice and approaches in the use of e-learning. These may include the use of new devices (e.g. e-books, musical devices); virtual environments; science simulations; the development of blended learning, the development of services centred on the needs of individuals and learning communities, etc.,

— support working groups to pursue specific issues of quality (such as consumer protection, open source, educational design, ethical issues, cultural and linguistic diversity, inter-disciplinary contexts) and to raise awareness of these issues for e-learning and for purchasing and using e-learning products, contents and services,

— support peer reviews of e-learning approaches and practices, with a view to identify opportunities for transfer of experience and to develop scenarios for the evolution of e-learning in education and training systems.

Description of the practical implementation of projects to be considered for funding

To be considered for funding, projects must:

— have a balanced partnership which is representative of the various actors and is driven by an educational user or representative organisation with sound pedagogical expertise in the activity concerned by the project,

— produce tangible results and attempt to demonstrate their value,

— build upon and reuse existing results, in particular those from education and training programmes and of research and technological development (RTD) activities (original research will not be funded under this call),

— demonstrate the added European value of their work and the need for community funding.

4. REQUESTED PROPOSALS CHARACTERISTICS

Proposals should address specifically one of the listed themes; have an European dimension concerning their scope, their objectives, and their partners; be large enough to produce significant results and clearly demonstrate the potential of e-learning methods and multimedia resources to improve existing educational and training provision.

Proposals should contain an explicit commitment to sustainable results. This can be a signed letter of intent from partners (for example universities), from public administration departments (for example ministries of education, local education authorities), or from public-private partnerships (for example local or regional authorities together with enterprises).

5. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO SUBMIT PROPOSALS?

Proposals may involve organisations from the public and private sectors which have interest, expertise, and European experience in e-learning matters concerning any of the subjects listed above.

Proposals should be submitted by a single organisation (the applicant) representing a consortium of at least three partners (including the applicant). The consortium must involve organisations from at least three different countries from the European Union. EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) can also participate. At least, one of the consortium partners must be from a Member State.

6. PROJECT DURATION

The duration of each project will be between 12 and 24 months. Eligibility of costs for Commission’s subvention will start from the signature of the contract, which is expected by the end of 2002.
7. SELECTION CRITERIA

Only proposals that are properly completed and received within the deadline stipulated (see point 11) will be taken into consideration.

7.1. Eligibility of applicants

— Applicants may be institutions and/or organisations that have legal status and are from one of the 15 Member States of the European Union or from Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway.

— The proposals presented must ensure the partners' European participation, as described above (see point 5).

7.2. Applicants' technical and financial capacities

The Commission will also make its selection on the basis of both the applicant's financial and technical capacity to successfully complete the proposed project. These capacities will be judged principally on the basis of the following documents:

— the 2001 activity report,

— the accounts for the financial year 2001.

The curricula vitae of those submitting the proposal, 'ad hoc' information on past and current projects in the area of e-learning, as well as the declared partners' letters of intent will also be taken into consideration.

8. AWARD CRITERIA

Overall quality of the proposal

1. European added value: the proposals presented must offer added value for the European Union as well as national and/or regional value. They should achieve this principally by allowing the transfer of experiences and knowledge, or by identifying the conditions for generalising the results and/or activities or products, through, for example, their integration into national systems or at European level. The need for Community financial support must also be clearly argued.

2. Relevance: proposals must demonstrate the relevance of the project to the objectives of the call and the subject area.

3. State-of-the-art and innovation: the proposals presented must be innovative in their approach and 'state of the art' concerning their use of theories, models, standards and methods.

4. Validation: the proposals presented must attempt to validate the usefulness of their results against the original objectives.

5. Transferability of results: the proposals presented must pay special attention to transferability aspects, such as project information and dissemination of the results; standardisation; practical aspects of wider use; or consideration of translation and localisation issues.

6. Sustainability: the main objective of this call is to support initiatives with a potential to evolve into stable structures, networks, products or services. Proposals presented must consider this request and provide adequate proof to this end.

7. Cultural dimension: proposals must demonstrate that they are sensitive to European cultural and linguistic needs, and that they facilitate intercultural dialogue.

Organisational and budgetary aspects, and other administrative conditions

The actions projected in the proposals submitted must not promote either directly or indirectly messages contrary to European Union policies, or be able to be associated with an image contrary to that of the Institutions.

The proposals should contain precise information on the following points:

— an overall summary of the project (objectives, approach and expected outcomes) (maximum 1 page),

— approach and methodology,

— detailed work plan (clarity and correlation between the stated objectives and the means proposed),

— description of the deliverables (what, when, for whom),

— time schedule for the project,

— a balanced distribution of work among the partners (including the partners' financial contributions),

— the responsibilities and the planned use of resources.

9. FINANCIAL CONDITIONS

The Commission will only part-finance the project, the Community subsidy being complementary and subsidiary to the applicant body's own contributions and/or national, regional or local grants. Community funding for the projects selected may not exceed a maximum of 60% of total project costs.
With the exception of proposals of such scope and quality as to demonstrate an excellent cost-efficiency ratio (cf. point 9.1 specifying the quality criteria for allocating subsidies), the Commission envisages that the proposals that it will select will require a Community funding of the order of EUR 100 000 for projects addressing media literacy and up to EUR 500 000 for projects addressing quality.

The request for subsidy must include a detailed draft budget (the model for which is included as an annex), specifying in particular the eligible costs, towards which the Commission's funding must contribute.

The budgets must not include any expenses that pre-date or post-date the indicated project duration period stipulated in the contract.

9.1. Eligible costs

Only the following direct costs are eligible. They must be necessary to carry out the project and must be in line with normal conditions on the market. They must be entered in accounts, identifiable and controllable.

(a) staffing costs for those staff working directly on the project, corresponding to their actual salaries plus social charges;

(b) staff travel and subsistence costs;

(c) direct costs associated with the project:

— the cost of holding conferences and seminars (organisation, travel and subsistence costs for participants and speakers, interpretation costs, fees),

— information dissemination costs (publications, books, CD-ROMs, videos, Internet, etc.), translation, dissemination and distribution costs,

— other direct costs associated with the project.

9.2. Ineligible costs

The following are not eligible:

(a) ongoing operational, depreciation and equipment costs;

(b) overheads;

(c) the cost of consumables and supplies;

(d) capital investment costs;

(e) general provisions (for losses, possible future liabilities, etc.);

(f) contingency reserves;

(g) debts owed;

(h) interest on debts owed;

(i) charges for financial services;

(j) bad debts receivable;

(k) exchange losses, unless specifically provided for in exceptional cases;

(l) contributions in kind;

(m) expenditure on luxuries.

Contributions in kind are not eligible costs (land, immovable property whether in its entirety or in part, durable capital goods, raw material, unpaid charity work by a private individual or corporate body), but are taken into account in calculating the rate of funding granted by the Commission grant for the project.

10. PROCEDURE FOR SUBMITTING APPLICATIONS

10.1. Forms

Applications for subsidies should be made on the official application form, in one of the 11 official languages of the European Union. Only typed forms will be accepted. Forms can be obtained on the Internet in the 11 official languages of the Union, at the following address:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/elearning/index.html

by sending an e-mail request to elearning@cec.eu.int or by writing to:

European Commission — DG Education and Culture

e-Learning call for proposals

For the attention of Mrs Maruja Gutierrez-Diaz

Office: B-100 03/7

B-1049 Brussels

Tel. (32-2) 295 63 46

Fax (32-2) 296 69 92.

10.2. Submission of the application

The application must be sent in five complete copies and drafted precisely and succinctly, and must provide comprehensive and verifiable information with regard to the criteria listed in points 8 and 9. If necessary, further information can be supplied on separate sheets.
Furthermore, the applicant body must attach one copy of its statutes or articles of association, unless it is a public or semi-public body. This document must be provided in one of the 11 official languages of the European Union.

The application must be duly completed, dated and signed, and be accompanied by an official, explicit letter from the applicant.

To facilitate the processing of the applications, applicants are kindly requested to also send the summary description of the project (see above) in either English or French by email to elearning@cec.eu.int

Applications must be sent to the above address by express courier, ordinary or registered mail by 30 September 2002 at the latest. The date on the postmark will be considered the official date of dispatch.

Applications submitted via the Internet, fax or electronic mail will not be accepted. The applicant must mark on the envelope:

'e-Learning call for proposals'
European Commission — DG Education and Culture
For the attention of Mrs Maruja Gutierrez-Diaz
Office: B-100 03/7
B-1049 Brussels.

11. PROCESSING OF THE APPLICATIONS

Applicants will be informed of the receipt of their application within 10 working days.

Only applications that satisfy the selection criteria will be considered for funding.

All unsuccessful applicants will be informed in writing.

The projects selected will be subjected to a detailed approval procedure, during which the Commission may request further information from the project leaders.

Once the project has received the Commission's definite approval, a funding agreement, drawn up in euro, specifying the amount and the terms of funding, will be concluded between the Community and the beneficiary. The beneficiary will sign the original copy of this agreement and return it to the Commission immediately.

12. SUBMISSION OF THE FINAL REPORT AND THE FINAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Under the terms of the funding agreement, the beneficiary must submit a final report meant for public dissemination. This must provide a succinct but comprehensive description of the results of the project and be accompanied by copies of any material produced (brochures, teaching material, videoassets, multimedia supports, press cuttings, etc.), including addresses and descriptive documentation of Internet sites or resources.

In any publication concerning the project, or on the occasion of any activities for which the subsidy is used, beneficiaries must clearly mention the support provided by the European Union, with the following two phrases:

'With the support of the European Commission — Directorate-General for Education and Culture — e-Learning Initiative'.

'The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or the opinion of the European Commission'.

The final financial statement, to be attached to the report, must show actual expenditure and revenue. The beneficiary must keep accounts of the co-financed project and must keep all original supporting documents for five years after completion of the project for audit purposes.

If the actual cost of the project turns out to be less than the total estimated cost, the Commission will reduce its contribution proportionally. It is therefore in the applicant's interest to present a reasonable budget estimate.