

Trans-Tasman e-learning first: New Zealand hosts global LAMS launch

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The New Zealand Ministry of Education (MoE) Te Tahuhu o te Matauranga today hosted the official global launch of Version 1.0 of the Learning Activity Management System (LAMS), a revolutionary new e-learning system developed at the Macquarie University E-Learning Centre of Excellence (MELCOE) in Sydney, Australia.

LAMS is an innovative software program that allows teachers to design, manage and deliver online collaborative learning activities. They can sequence individual tasks, small group work and whole class activities, and can quickly and easily change the sequence by using a 'drop and drag' feature, or adapt their lesson plan for other topics.

LAMS can dramatically increase student engagement: in one K-12 school pilot evaluation, only 16% of students were comfortable discussing ideas in front of their peers in the classroom, but 83% of the same students were comfortable discussing their ideas via 'chat' and other collaborative facilities within LAMS.

LAMS is effective in various modes of delivery (face to face, distance), and while it has obvious applications within the K-12 school and university sectors, it can be equally well applied to corporate and vocational training.

"The great advantage of LAMS is that it recognises that collaboration is essential to the learning process – you can't just give students access to content and expect them to learn," says Professor James Dalziel, inventor of LAMS.

LAMS has been through a period of extensive beta testing and trials for over a year, culminating in today's release of the full Version 1.0 system. "We've known from many trials that LAMS has a profound impact on both teachers and students, and could transform not just e-learning, but education itself," says Professor Dalziel.

A highlight of today's launch is a major cross-sectoral LAMS initiative in New Zealand starting in early 2005, including 30+ schools, and input from polytechnics, universities and the National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa. The MoE, in collaboration with the National Library, will become the world's first LAMS partners to conduct a co-ordinated investigation of the implications of such tools when deployed across these sectors. The outcomes of this investigation will be used to provide guidance to schools and tertiary institutions with future e-learning developments.

"We are delighted to host the global launch of LAMS," says Elizabeth Eppel, Deputy Secretary, MoE. "We recognise the great potential of LAMS to improve student learning outcomes and make the life of teachers easier when they use educational technology. We look forward to working with LAMS and associated developments across education in New Zealand. It links in well with a range of other initiatives such as the E-learning Collaborative Development Fund and the Learning Federation Digital Developments."

National Librarian and Chief Executive of the National Library Penny Carnaby is delighted with this initiative. "It takes the digital library to another level by making it an integral part of the LAMS experience, providing an opportunity for New Zealanders to connect with their digital heritage collections in an activity-based e-learning environment. This is a significant step in this country's journey towards information democracy," she said.

Apart from the Ministry of Education, new LAMS Beta Partners announced today include: Nanyang Technological University (Singapore), University of Sussex (UK), University of Huddersfield (UK), and the Tasmanian Department of Education (Australia) who are also conducting school trials in early 2005. They join existing Beta Partners from Australia and the UK, including prestigious universities Oxford, Cambridge and ANU, and government backed trials in the UK involving up to 100 schools, 20 universities and 20 further (vocational) education colleges.

As announced at a UK Department for Education and Skills hosted function in July 2004, the code behind the LAMS software will become 'open source' in February 2005, allowing users to freely view, use and modify it. The software is owned by the not-for-profit LAMS Foundation, with implementation services provided by LAMS International Pty Ltd. Both are supported by Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. See www.lamsinternational.com for details.

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