

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INFORMATION SYSTEMS

CORPORATE WORKSHOP

Monday, 4 December 2000 - Hotel Sofitel Rive Gauche, Paris

Introduction.

1. The meeting was attended by members of EUNIS, representatives of sponsors (or potential sponsors), representatives of the French Ministry of Education, the CSIESR Chairman and the EUNIS/US Liaison Officer.
2. The meeting consisted of 15-minute presentations by the EUNIS country delegates followed, and interspersed, by discussions with the corporate sponsors. The following countries made presentations: France, Portugal, UK, Czech Republic, Denmark, Poland, Germany, The Netherlands, Estonia, Ireland and Finland.
3. The following more detailed information is available on the EUNIS Web pages (www.eunis.org):
 - Full attendance list with e-mail addresses,
 - Copies of the visual aids used by delegates during their presentations,
 - A survey of networking infrastructure and usage costs in many European countries carried out by Kristel Sarlin (HUT, Finland) in the 2nd quarter, 2000.
4. What follows is a summary of the main points raised during the presentations and in the subsequent discussions.

Meeting Notes.

5. The European Union is currently made up of 15 countries. This could rise soon to 23 countries. There are about 1000 universities and other HE establishments in the countries. Together they spend between 10 and 15 billion Euro per annum on IT-related products.
6. Vendors should ideally see the EU as a single market with common policies and pricing structures, even if they continue to need separate sales and technical specialists based in the individual countries.
7. However, HE funding is still organised nationally and most of the grant is devolved to individual universities. Most of the universities themselves have a high degree of autonomy to manage their budgets, as also do the separate departments and research groups. Top slicing is not popular but is recognised as necessary for projects such as countrywide networking and other prestigious national initiatives.
8. University funding used to be almost entirely by direct grant from

the national government. Increasingly now up to 50% may come from direct sponsorship of special projects or from EU grants. Almost always, however, the central funding from government is on a year-by-year basis, which makes it difficult for universities to reap the benefits of longer-term arrangements with preferred vendors.

9. Universities recognise the benefits of negotiations carried out at national level with vendors to establish contract and licence conditions, but ultimately they (and departments and research groups) want to speak directly with the sales representatives – and not with agents or other 3rd parties. This problem would be more severe if there was an attempt to negotiate blanket deals at the EU level. The Czech Republic has produced a booklet, now available in English, on how to behave with vendors at each stage of the purchasing cycle.

10. Although universities said that they wanted to talk directly with vendors, many also said that they nevertheless wanted to buy ‘solutions’ – not ‘products’. This would usually imply that discussions would take place with a ‘system integrator’ and not with the vendors of the individual products.

11. For the first time, many countries now find themselves with more bandwidth on their national and local networks that can be currently used. The analogy with new motorways was discussed and it was agreed that network traffic would inevitably expand to fill the capacity. However, that bandwidth rarely extends today to individual homes, except at relatively high cost. High bandwidth to the home was seen as a necessary development to support the changing ways in which future students will work. There was some debate about what students might be willing to pay to get high speed and fixed cost networking into their homes.

12. Universities themselves are changing – and having to change to survive. Some academic staff and administration staff need a lot of help to change working patterns which they have developed over many years. This problem is most severe if the senior management of a university refuse to adopt new methods of working. In all cases IT needs to support change, but in the most progressive universities IT itself is often the agent for change. Students, who may be very IT-literate, see this clearly when they have to deal with university staff who may have to work with outdated systems and procedures. The status of the IT or IS manager may be important. In the most progressive universities this post-holder is a part of the senior management team.

13. Students themselves are changing. In many countries, government policy now requires that students make a significant contribution to their course fees. Also, one job for life is no longer always possible and mid-life re-training is increasingly common. So, students may have to work to earn money, have to pay fees and are increasingly outside the traditional 18-21 age group. Consequently they see themselves as customers and are prepared to complain if they think they are getting an inferior service. A qualification can be acquired from modules offered by different universities which are often

studied at home and at unsociable hours. There is a general shift from universities having to 'teach' students to a model where they offer facilities for students to 'learn' at times and places convenient for them. One speaker asked "How long before we see a Disney University?"

14. A number of the sponsors reported that their companies recognise HE in Europe as a strategic market and are organising themselves accordingly with consistent pricing and licensing terms. Sun said that they were keen to continue dialogues with individual departments and research groups because this was often to their mutual benefit. Oracle added, however, that they eventually needed to know who was able to make purchasing decisions. Sun further commented that universities are very paper-based and for many routine purchases e-commerce techniques should be authorised and used more.

15. Blackboard commented that they would be happy to negotiate on licensing and contract terms at university or even country level, but then talk to individual departments about the technical merits of their particular product. SCT added that they were often able to offer good terms for consortium purchasing but that the bureaucracy in universities then got in the way. Informix said that they usually regarded the university or the IT department as the customer – but the research and teaching departments as users. Ginit added that universities both compete and collaborate and they need a business model that supports these concepts. EUNIS commented that universities are often poor at business procedures and may need help to improve.

16. EUNIS asked the corporate members what they wanted from the joint relationship. Several vendors replied saying that it should improve their marketing effectiveness. Information they supplied would get to a wider audience and they could reduce the number of meetings and conferences they felt obliged to attend. There would also be improved feedback about how the market is developing for advanced IT products.

17. There was further general discussion about how the relationship between EUNIS and its sponsors could be developed. Professor Epelboin said that EUNIS would need feedback from sponsors about the usefulness of such meetings and whether more of them should be arranged. He pointed out, however, that EUNIS elections will take place in March when a new Board will be elected. It would be for this new Board to arrange future meetings but he was confident that it would want to develop the relationship to its fullest.

Ron Chisnall
EUNIS Executive Secretary