

**Report from Group A – Wednesday, 24 May 2006**  
**EARNEST Meeting**  
**Berlin, 23 - 24 May 2006**

Group A comprised a mixture of delegates from the commercial world, users and service providers.

**Question 1**

The group believed that the NRENs were different from the commercial ISPs for a number of reasons as follows:

- NRENs are not driven by profit unlike the commercial ISPs
- NRENs are keen to work with the end organisation to identify their requirements and collaborate to provide the best solution.
- NRENs can articulate the needs of the academic user community – they are the knowledgeable supplier.
- NRENs can broker deals on behalf of the community for example bandwidth or equipment
- NREN can influence funding bodies and obtain funding for new innovative networks.
- NRENs have access to other funding sources such as the European Commission which are not available to individual organisations.

NRENs must continue to innovate otherwise if they stagnate then they do not have a long term future. The NRENs must continue to maintain contact with their customers and to update their service portfolio in response to the customers' requirements.

NRENs are happy to widen the community served to the whole education community. Connecting schools is seen as an opportunity to develop new services and review existing services for their continued applicability to the community. There was concern that if the community widened too much then there was a danger that the contact with the customers was reduced especially the university and research users who provide the majority of the funds for the NREN.

NRENs were being approached from other communities such as public libraries for the provision of certain services especially in the area of security and AAI.

Widening the community to include all of education and research was seen to be a positive step forward but if it widened further then there was concern that the focus on education may be diverted.

## **Question 2**

All members of the group agreed with the need to collaborate to provide services and this was happening in different ways in each NREN. The collaboration should be encouraged rather than imposed on the local support staff. In some circumstances funding of joint projects may include funding of the local support to ensure that the local staff have the time to participate in the project. The joint provision of services with local support staff gives the NREN access to a wider set of experiences and skills.

The group was reminded that services that were best delivered locally should be delivered locally while those that were best delivered centrally for both technical and economic reasons were delivered centrally.

## **Question 3**

The group emphasised that there was a difference between uniformity and standardisation. If all NRENs decided to choose the same router manufacturer that would be a uniform solution. NRENs were actually interested in standardisation but did not believe that they could influence this area of work. However, it was recognised that there were many academics who were involved in the standardisation area.

A key issue for NRENs was ensuring interoperability between different vendors' equipment. The group was reminded that the EU funded GN2 which was undertaking interoperability projects.

## **Question 4**

Group A felt that there was a great deal of attention paid to the high-end users within the research community. They were a small group of users who were easily targeted by the NREN. However, the traffic figures predicted by these groups had not yet materialised. The majority of the community accessing the general internet was seen to be the main reason for the traffic figures increasing.

It was important to maintain contact with all users of the NREN and to ensure that they were informed of the services offered. In the case of supporting low-end users this required targeted support with key members of their organisation to demonstrate the services available and how they could be used.

NRENs should be aware of all their users' requirements so that they could identify the new killer applications before they became an issue.

S A Wood, 24 May 2006