From Hawaii to Glasgow: The International Network for Learning and Teaching Geography in Higher Education (INLT) Five Years On

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ABSTRACT This paper examines and reflects on the activities of the International Network for Learning and Teaching Geography in Higher Education (INLT) from its founding at the Association of American Geographers’ Annual Conference in Hawaii in 1999 to the post-International Geographical Congress workshop in Glasgow five years later. It provides a context and introduction to the following six papers, which resulted from the Glasgow workshop. It is suggested that, despite some of the proposals in Hawaii proving over-ambitious, several other projects have emerged and the INLT continues largely to meet the goals and purposes set out in 1999. Although the desire of the INLT to move beyond its Anglo-American and Australasian origins largely remains a challenge to be met, the INLT has established itself as a valuable forum for the geography higher education community to identify and reflect on similarities and differences in national practices, to engage in debate virtually and face-to-face on issues concerned with learning and teaching, and to bring geographers from different countries to work together on educational projects.

KEY WORDS: International Network for Learning and Teaching Geography in Higher Education, INLT, discipline-based network, scholarship of teaching and learning, community of practice, collaborative projects

Establishing the network was the easy bit; the challenge resides in developing and sustaining it to meet its intended aims. (Healey et al., 2000a, p. 219)

Introduction

The International Network for Learning and Teaching Geography in Higher Education (INLT) was founded at a workshop held prior to the Association of American Geographers’ Annual Conference in Hawaii in 1999. The aim of the INLT was to bring together geographers interested in learning and teaching in higher education in order to identify and reflect on similarities and differences in national practices, to engage in debate virtually and face-to-face on issues concerned with learning and teaching, and to bring geographers from different countries to work together on educational projects.
Geographers’ Annual Conference in Hawaii in April 1999 (Shepherd, 1999; Hay et al., 2000). The idea for the Network developed from a discussion the previous April between two of the organizers (Ken Foote and Mick Healey) about ways in which national networks concerned with learning and teaching geography in higher education, such as the Virtual Geography Department (USA) and the Geography Discipline Network (UK), could be encouraged to collaborate and an international dialogue be stimulated (Garcia-Ramon & Monk, 1997; Healey, 1998a; Foote, 1999; Healey et al., 2000a). Iain Hay was invited to join the organizers and a call was sent out for interested participants. It was agreed in preparatory electronic discussions, and confirmed at the one-day pre-AAG conference meeting by the 28 geographers present, that the goal of the INLT would be “to improve the quality and status of learning and teaching of geography in higher education internationally” (Hay et al., 2000, p. 224). Three main purposes were set for the INLT:

- to promote innovative, creative and collaborative research as well as critical reflection on the learning and teaching of geography;
- to facilitate the exchange of materials, ideas and experiences concerning the learning and teaching of geography and to stimulate international dialogue;
- to create an inclusive international community in higher education aimed at raising the profile and status of learning and teaching of geography.

In the discussions leading to the establishment of the Network, it was useful to reflect on the previous experience of international teaching and learning initiatives in geography, such as the ERASMUS programme on geography and gender (Drooglegter Fortuijn, 2002) and the National Centre for Geographic Information and Analysis Core Curriculum project. Since the first workshop the INLT has run sessions at five different conferences, three in the United States and two in the United Kingdom. In addition it held a 48-hour workshop, following the International Geographical Congress (IGC), in Glasgow in August 2004. One of the outputs of that workshop is the set of papers in this *JGHE Symposium*. The aim of this article is to contextualize these papers by reviewing the activities of the INLT in the five years since it was established. But to understand how the INLT has developed it is necessary to examine it in the context of some of the other higher education teaching and learning initiatives which have affected geography in this period.

The Wider World of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

The five years 1999–2004 have seen many changes in the wider world of teaching and learning in higher education, which provide a background to the development of the INLT. Encouragingly there are indications, at least in some countries, that a more strategic and scholarly approach is being taken to the development and enhancement of teaching and learning. In the UK the largely government-funded Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILT HE) and the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) both developed in this period and in 2004 merged into the Higher Education Academy. A not dissimilar body, the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, was established in Australia in 2004. In New Zealand the *Tertiary Education Strategy* calls for “a research culture within which undergraduates learn to take a research-based approach to their lifelong educational development” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 60) and in 2005 is funding teaching and learning research and development through the *Teaching Matters*
Forum. In the United States, where government higher education policy is decentralized, the American Association of Higher Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching have both undertaken significant nationwide initiatives. For example, the jointly run Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching Campus Program has a presence at over 200 universities.

Prestigious awards for excellence in teaching have also been established in the 1990s and the first few years of the twenty-first century. These include the Australian Awards for University Teaching, the 3M Teaching Fellowship Program (Canada), the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (UK) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) Award for Distinguished Teaching Scholars (US). The US also has the Carnegie Scholars Program but this is not an award for teaching excellence; nor is it a teaching-improvement workshop. Its purpose is, rather, to bring together outstanding academic staff committed to investigating and documenting significant issues in the teaching and learning of their disciplines.

Although most education policy initiatives are restricted to particular countries, the development of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is beginning to spread from one country to another. SoTL is characterized by a critical reflection on practice, contribution to the pedagogical development of the subject, researching the learning and teaching of the discipline, and disseminating its findings (Healey, 2000; 2003a; Breslow et al., 2004). Although stimulated by the Boyer (1990) report, the way it has developed varies between countries. For example, in the US the issue of roles and rewards has been important (e.g. Abler et al., 1995), while in the UK the discussion has been dominated by the relationship between research and teaching and the impact of the Research Assessment Exercise (e.g. Jenkins, 2000). A few attempts have been made to stimulate an international debate on the nature and practice of the SoTL. For example, the International Conference of Educational Developers was established in 1993, and three years later the Conference founded the International Journal for Academic Development. In October 2004 the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning held its inaugural conference in Bloomington, Indiana.

Nearly all the above initiatives are predominantly generic. The period has also seen the growth of interest in discipline-based approaches to educational development and the scholarship of teaching and learning (Jenkins, 1996; Healey, 2000, 2003b; Healey et al., 2000; Huber, 2000; Healey & Jenkins, 2003). This trend is based on the arguments that, first, for most academic staff their primary allegiance is to their discipline, and, second, that it is important not to separate pedagogic developments from the disciplinary contexts in which they are to be implemented. The clearest example of the recognition of the power of this argument was the establishment of 24 national subject centres in the UK in 2000 by the LTSN. The Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES) Subject Centre quickly established itself as one of the leading centres, being one of the first to introduce an annual discipline-based residential workshop for new staff (Clark et al., 2002) and to develop pedagogic research capacity among its community (Cousin et al., 2003). It also contributed to the LTSN ‘Linking teaching and research through the disciplines’ project (Healey, 2005). It was able to ‘hit the ground running’ because of the relatively long history of innovation in teaching and learning in its constituent disciplines, particularly geography (Healey, 2003b).

Specific geography-related projects include the US NSF-funded project ‘The Geography Faculty Development Alliance’ based in Boulder, Colorado (Solem &
Foote, 2004) and the UK Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded ‘Supporting disabled students undertaking fieldwork and related activities’ project and the ‘Inclusive Curriculum Project’ run by the Geography Discipline Network (GDN) based at the University of Gloucestershire (Gravestock & Healey, 2002; Hills & Healey, 2005). Particularly exciting, not least for the size of funding they have attracted, are four geography-related programmes funded by HEFCE under their Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning initiative: Centre for Active Learning (CeAL) in Geography, Environment and Related Disciplines (Gloucestershire); Education for Sustainable Development (Plymouth); Experiential Learning in the Environmental and Natural Sciences (Plymouth); and SPLINT: Spatial Literacy in Teaching (Leicester). Each centre will attract up to £4.5 million between 2005 and 2010 for a mixture of capital and recurrent expenditure. All of them refer to international links. For example, CeAL plans to develop joint student projects with 10 overseas universities.

A number of other specifically international geography-related projects have started in the last few years. These include: the ‘The Online Center for Global Geography Education’, run from the Association for American Geographers; the ‘DialogPlus Digital Libraries in Support of Innovative Approaches to Learning and Teaching in Geography’ project involving the Pennsylvania State University and the University of California, Santa Barbara in the US and the University of Southampton and the University of Leeds in the UK; and the HERODOT Thematic Network for Geography Teaching and Training in higher education across Europe, run from Liverpool Hope University. Together these various developments and initiatives show an increased interest in the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education, and geography specifically, over the last few years. More attention is also beginning to be given to developing international perspectives. It is in this context that the development of INLT needs to be interpreted.

A list of useful web resources is provided in Table 1.

Hawaii Revisited

Geography was one of the first disciplines to establish an international network for learning and teaching (Healey et al., 2000b). Six ‘projects’ were identified from the 1999 Hawaii symposium (Hay et al., 2000, pp. 225–226):

1. Publication of discussion papers in *JGHE*.
2. Establish a communication network.
3. Develop a database and clearinghouse.
4. Explore and establish links with other organizations and projects.
5. Link student projects internationally.
6. Establish a pilot project to explore learning and teaching strategies.

Of these, the first, second and fourth have largely been achieved. The nine discussion papers, plus an introduction, were published in *JGHE* 24(2) (Healey et al., 2000a). A listserv was established at Flinders University (currently over 250 members); an INLT website was constructed at the University of Texas at Austin; and a twice-yearly *INLT Newsletter* was established and edited from the University of Gloucestershire. Since the first workshop, five events have been held as part of the meetings of professional geography organizations (Annual Conference of American Association of Geographers (AAG) at Hawaii, 1999; Annual Conference of Royal Geographical Society
Table 1. Useful websites

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<tr>
<td>Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching</td>
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<td>Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning:</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/CASTL/highered/index.htm">http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/CASTL/highered/index.htm</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education</td>
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<td>DialogPlus Digital Libraries in Support of Innovative Approaches to Learning and Teaching in Geography project:</td>
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<td>Geography Discipline Network: <a href="http://www.glos.ac.uk/gdn/">http://www.glos.ac.uk/gdn/</a></td>
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<td>Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences Subject Centre: <a href="http://www.gees.ac.uk">http://www.gees.ac.uk</a></td>
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<td>Geography Faculty Development Alliance:</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.colorado.edu/geography/gfda/gfda.html">http://www.colorado.edu/geography/gfda/gfda.html</a></td>
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<td>HERODOT Thematic Network for Geography Teaching and Training:</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.zgis.at/herodotnet/">http://www.zgis.at/herodotnet/</a></td>
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<td>Higher Education Academy: <a href="http://www.hea.ac.uk">http://www.hea.ac.uk</a></td>
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<td>International Network for Learning and Teaching Geography in Higher Education (INLT):</td>
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<td>INLT archived site: <a href="http://www.colorado.edu/geography/inlt/index.html">http://www.colorado.edu/geography/inlt/index.html</a></td>
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<td>INLT pre-Glasgow Internet Discussion:</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.gees.ac.uk/events/2004/inlt/iguevent.htm">http://www.gees.ac.uk/events/2004/inlt/iguevent.htm</a></td>
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<td>International Consortium for Educational Development:</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.osds.uwa.edu.au/about/activities/hosted_sites/iced">http://www.osds.uwa.edu.au/about/activities/hosted_sites/iced</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>International Geographical Union Commission on Geographical Education:</td>
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<td><a href="http://igu-cge.tamu.edu/">http://igu-cge.tamu.edu/</a></td>
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<td>International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning:</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.issotl.indiana.edu">http://www.issotl.indiana.edu</a></td>
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<td>Online Center for Global Geography Education:</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.aag.org/education/center">http://www.aag.org/education/center</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>HEFCE-funded Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Geography and related disciplines</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Gloucestershire, the Centre for Active Learning in Geography, Environment and Related Disciplines (CeAL):</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Leicester with University College London and the University of Nottingham, Spatial Literacy in Teaching (SPLINT):</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Plymouth Experiential Learning in Environmental and Natural Sciences:</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Plymouth Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for Education for Sustainable Development:</td>
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with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG) at Plymouth, 2001; Annual Conference of AAG at Los Angeles, 2002; IGC at Glasgow, 2004; and Annual Conference of AAG at Denver, 2005), while the INLT Glasgow workshop was held following the IGC. Links with other organizations were established largely through holding joint meetings. For example, the sessions at the IGC were a joint meeting of the INLT, the International Geographical Union’s Commission on Geographical Education (IGU-CGE), the Higher Education Research Group (HERG) of the RGS-IBG and the JGHE. Other links were established through undertaking a survey with the Geography Discipline Network (GDN) of the ways in which national geography organizations support the professional development of teaching of geography in higher education (GDN, 2000).
The remaining three projects (3, 5 & 6) never really got off the ground. However, two other international collaborative projects emerged from discussions generated by INLT. One examined learning styles and concepts of geography among students in 12 universities in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and US (Milicich et al., 2003; Bradbeer et al., 2004; Healey et al., 2005; Kneale, 2005). The other is a Web-based international collaborative learning project that led to the founding of the Online Center for Global Geography Education. Several of the participants in both these projects were at the Glasgow workshop.

Glasgow Explored

The success of the structure of the Hawaii workshop, with pre-written papers discussed on the Internet and a publication output, encouraged the organizers of the Glasgow workshop to follow a similar process. Invitations were sent out in July 2003 on various listservs asking for expressions of interest to participate in the 48-hour workshop immediately following the IGC in Glasgow, either in person or at a distance. Potential delegates were asked to select from a range of topics those that they would be interested in working on in groups. The six most popular topics were chosen:

1. fieldwork;
2. problem-based learning;
3. ICT, distance learning and the curriculum;
4. enhancing employment, key skills and the curriculum;
5. teaching for social transformation, including diversity issues (e.g. race, disability);
6. linking research and teaching.

Thirty-eight delegates from 10 different countries expressed an interest in participation and they were allocated to topic groups according to their expressed preferences so that each group consisted of approximately six to eight people from as wide a range of countries as possible. One person in each group was invited to act as chair and convenor for their group. Over the next few months, some delegates dropped out and some others joined. Altogether 32 people from 10 different countries (Australia 1, Canada 1, Chile 1, Finland 1, Hungary 1, Italy 2, Netherlands 1, New Zealand 5, Singapore 1, United Kingdom 12 and United States 6) participated in person at the workshop with groups varying in size from three to eight participants. An indication that the INLT is attracting new participants is that over 80 per cent of the people participating in person at Glasgow had not been present in Hawaii. Each group had a further one to three people who, although unable to be present, participated to a greater or lesser extent at a distance in the pre- and post-workshop deliberations.

The key pre-workshop activity was the preparation of a 2500-word outline paper on the group’s topic. This was intended to stimulate discussion. To kick-start the groups the organizers circulated a list of some key references on each topic. The outline papers were put on the INLT main event pages of the GEES website and each delegate was asked to comment on at least one paper—two-thirds of whom contributed between one and 10 messages. The discussion was also advertised on various geography and educational listservs. Over the four weeks the discussion was open, a total of 61 contributions were received, all but five of which were from the organizers or members of the groups.
However, many other people visited the pages. In the months of July and August the INLT main event page was the second most popular page on the site (with over 550 hits); only the site’s home page received more hits. The most popular paper, on PBL, was downloaded more than 150 times.

Delegates at the workshop had two main tasks. On the first day feedback from the Internet discussion was reviewed and the implications for revising each paper and who was going to do what were discussed in preparation for submission of this edited collection. On the second day the task was to devise a draft international project to which group members could contribute, which would address one or more of the areas identified for further work in the review paper. Group work was interspersed with plenary sessions at which the groups presented on progress and discussed common themes arising from the discussions. Various social events, including a visit to the Glasgow School of Art’s Rennie Macintosh designed building and an INLT dinner in one of the grand late nineteenth-century buildings of the University of Glasgow, provided opportunities for delegates to meet informally.

The emphasis on discussion, reflection and social interaction was critical in attempting to encourage people to work together effectively and take ownership of their tasks, as most people had not previously met other members of their group, let alone the other delegates. The feedback on the event itself was very positive. However, perhaps inevitably, once the euphoria of the event had dissipated, other priorities intervened and not everyone felt able to contribute to completing the drafts of their group’s papers and project proposals. This applied particularly, but not exclusively, to those who were participating electronically. As with students, some groups worked more effectively than others, but unlike most student groups the ‘assessment’ was voluntary and there was no system in place for redistribution of ‘marks’ between team members, except for possible non-inclusion in the list of authors (Healey & Addis, 2004). Nevertheless, despite these papers being co-authored internationally by people, most of whom had not met before, all the groups managed to submit papers to this symposium. Although the Internet discussion was invaluable, the feedback emphasized the key role of face-to-face contact in preparing the papers.

The participants at the Glasgow workshop were highly positive about the event and its organization, structure and purpose. Hence it is planned to operate the next INLT workshop, to be held in Brisbane following the IGC meeting in 2006, in a similar way. Early expressions of interest suggest a significant increase in participation.

Reflections Five Years On

A year after the founding of the INLT the co-chairs listed five challenges the new organization faced (Healey et al., 2000b). The extent to which these are being met is reflected on in this section.

(1) Meeting the Needs of Participants

One indication that needs continue to be met is that similar numbers of people participated in the Hawaii and Glasgow events. There were, respectively, 55 and 61 contributions to the pre-workshop Internet discussions, and 28 and 32 people who participated in person at the workshops.
(2) Promoting and Increasing Numbers of Participants

It might be thought that it was disappointing that there was only a slight increase in participants between the two events. However, to maintain the small-group activities, bookings for the Glasgow workshop were closed when they reached the low thirties. Perhaps a better indication that INLT is meeting the needs of its participants and attracting a growth of interest in its activities is the numbers who have signed up to the listserv. These have increased gradually from 188 in 2000, to 223 in 2002, and 252 in 2004.

(3) Extending Beyond its Anglo-American and Australasian Origins

This remains a challenge and only modest inroads into diversifying membership have been achieved in the period (Shepherd et al., 2000). In 2004, 87 per cent of the INLT members were from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK or USA. In 2000, members’ email addresses indicate participants from at least 16 different countries; by 2004 this had increased to 21. The number of different countries represented in person increased from four at the Hawaii workshop to 10 in Glasgow. All proceedings at INLT events are in English. This may discourage some delegates from non-English-speaking countries from participating, although this practice is in line with most other international conferences, whether they are about geography or about teaching and learning in higher education. Holding meetings outside the ‘usual’ countries is a possibility, but viability is a critical issue. The best opportunity may be to link with a major international conference, such as the IGC, when it meets outside Anglo-America and Australasia. Meetings that coincide with academic terms may also make it difficult for participants from some countries to participate.

(4) Raising Finance and Sponsorship to Support Projects

The INLT has no resources of its own and is dependent on members finding their own funding to attend events, which for the same reason are deliberately held in connection with major conferences. This may also help, at least in part, to explain the almost complete dominance of Western countries as regards the origin of the participants at these events. Apart from relatively small amounts of sponsorship for events and projects from organizations such as JGHE and GEES, realistically the best that INLT can do is to support members’ applications for funding for travel grants to participate in INLT events and for INLT-related project grants from national and international bodies, such as NSF, Fulbright and the European Union. The only occasion on which a fee has been charged for a meeting was for the Glasgow workshop and this was set at a level so that it could be waived for a few deserving cases for delegates who could not afford to participate otherwise.

(5) Persuading Volunteers to Put in the Time and Effort Needed to Maintain and Develop the INLT

An organization like INLT is entirely dependent on interested colleagues being prepared to undertake and organize its activities. Fortunately, several different colleagues have volunteered in this way. The continuing challenge will be to bring new people into
the INLT, some of whom will be prepared to take a leadership role in organizing events. Encouragingly two new co-chairs of the INLT began work in 2005, Michael Solem and Eric Pawson, who replaced Ken Foote and Iain Hay respectively.

Conclusion

In conclusion the INLT appears to have established itself on the geography scene over the last five years. It complements the predominant, nationally focused teaching and learning networks in higher education and the IGU Commission on Geographical Education, whose main focus is on pre-university education and school teacher training. It is encouraging that most of the INLT events have been undertaken in collaboration with other educational groups. Despite some of the proposals in Hawaii proving over-ambitious for the level of commitment delegates were able to provide, several other projects have emerged and the INLT continues largely to meet the goals and purposes set out in 1999. Although the desire of the INLT to move beyond its Anglo-American and Australasian origins largely remains a challenge to be met, the INLT has established itself as a valuable forum for the geography higher education community to identify and reflect on similarities and differences in national practices, to engage in debate virtually and face-to-face on issues concerned with learning and teaching, and to bring geographers from different countries to work together on educational projects.

Acknowledgements

The author is very grateful to all those who have participated in the activities of the INLT over the last five years and particularly those who were involved in person or at a distance in the INLT Glasgow 2004 workshop. Special mention should be made of Iain Hay, Ruth Healey and Eric Pawson for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

Notes

1 The website subsequently moved to the University of Colorado. This site has now been archived. Current information on the INLT, along with copies of past Newsletters, may be found on the INLT Web pages on the Geography Discipline Network site at the University of Gloucestershire (see Table 1). The site for the INLT pages is due to move to the University of Canterbury, New Zealand by early 2006.
2 The Glasgow INLT workshop was organized by Mick Healey (INLT), Brian Chalkley (GEES), Martin Haigh (*JGHE*) and Pauline Kneale (RGS-IBG HERG). Steve Gaskin (GEES) was the pre-conference manager and Ruth Healey managed the event itself. Mike Sanders (GEES) designed the workshop web pages and managed the web discussion. We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of GEES and *JGHE*.
3 As the titles of the following papers indicate these topics were interpreted by each group.
4 An exact figure is not possible because approximately 5 per cent of INLT members use non-country-specific email addresses, such as hotmail.

References


