

## UNDERSTANDING COMPUTER ASSISTED LEARNING

UNCAL is an independent *educational* evaluation study, commissioned by the National Development Programme in Computer Assisted Learning in January 1974 for three years at a cost of £94,000. Responsibility for *financial* and *technological* evaluation has been located elsewhere by the Programme. Based at the Centre for Applied Research in Education at the University of East Anglia, UNCAL is directed by Barry MacDonald, assisted by David Jenkins, Stephen Kemmis and David Tawney.

## EVALUATION – A DEFINITION

“Evaluation is the process of conceiving, obtaining and communicating information for the guidance of educational decision-making with regard to a specified programme”.

This is the definition adopted by UNCAL.

## EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL PROGRAMME

The National Programme has an unusually prominent commitment to evaluation procedures. Evaluation is a contractual requirement for every project. Through the *Directorate* and the mechanisms of stepped funding review, the internal *project* evaluations are linked to *Programme Committee* appraisals. Alongside this system, UNCAL acts as an additional resource, providing independent accounts of Programme activities for all three parties at prespecified points of policy review, and trying generally to identify and clarify issues and alternatives which face Programme decision-makers. Depending on the phase of the Programme and the concerns of participants and other audiences, UNCAL accounts may focus upon individual projects, or on the aggregate of projects, or on the National Programme as a whole. In addition, UNCAL will seek to offer tentative generalisations about CAL which reach beyond the confines of the Programme.

## UNCAL AIMS

UNCAL's main aims are:

- a) to encourage the process of self criticism within the National Programme by bringing to bear the perspective of an “institutional outsider”.
- b) to advise projects on evaluation procedures appropriate to their needs and preferences.

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- c) to help the Directorate by providing independent checks on their observations, additional evidence of the impact of their actions, and alternative perspectives.
- d) to assist the Programme Committee reviews by providing studies of individual projects and general reports on issues which have implications for overall policy.
- e) to disseminate the ideas and display the work of the National Programme in ways which enable the interested community at large to profit from its experience.

## KEY FEATURES OF UNCAL

UNCAL aspires to make the work of the National Programme — its operations, its issues and its accomplishments — open to public and professional scrutiny. The commissioning of UNCAL was thus a bold initiative by a government programme; one which, if successful, could set a useful precedent. Some of UNCAL's key features may be summarised in this way:

- although commissioned by the Programme, UNCAL is *independent* of its sponsors, subject to neither step-funding nor any veto on publications.
- although many of its reports, because of their confidential nature, have restricted circulation, UNCAL's evaluations are *open* in the sense that they are made available first to those whose work they report, for comment on their fairness, accuracy and relevance. There is no secret evaluation.
- although UNCAL plays consultative and advisory roles within the Programme (mainly in evaluation) it *does not press particular courses of action* and tries to confine its assistance to summaries of accumulating experience and formulations of options.
- although eclectic in its response to problems of evaluation methods at the project level, UNCAL itself prefers to work, largely through unstructured interviews and observations, towards *integrated portrayals* of the Programme, believing that educational decision-making requires attention to the interdependence of circumstance, action and consequence.

For further details on UNCAL please contact Mr. B. MacDonald, CARE, University of East Anglia, Norwich, Norfolk, NR4 7TJ. Tel: Norwich 56161.

National Development Programme in Computer Assisted Learning started in January 1973; its aim is to develop and secure the assimilation of computer assisted and computer managed learning on a regular institutional basis at a reasonable cost, and ultimately to make recommendations about these computer applications to appropriate agencies in the public and private sector.

National Programme is funded by the Department of Education and Science and other departments. The Programme Director reports to a Programme Committee on which sit the seven sponsoring departments.

National Programme is concerned with using computers:

in tertiary education. The programme is concentrating on mathematics and statistics, science, engineering and medicine.

in primary and secondary education.

in training in the Armed Services.

in management and technician training in industry.

The programme supports projects all over the United Kingdom and efforts are made to ensure that all computer programs developed are transferable. Because of this emphasis, the Programme is giving funds mainly to international projects.

For further details of this and other National Programme Projects please contact the Information Officer

National Development Programme in Computer Assisted Learning,  
Mortimer Street, London W1N 7RJ 01-637 0552/580 2226

**Information Leaflet**  
**UNCAL**

**Understanding  
Computer Assisted Learning  
an Educational Evaluation**

**University of East Anglia**

**National Development Programme in  
Computer Assisted Learning**

**CET**