



BRINGING BORDERLESS EDUCATION OUT OF BETA AND INTO THE LIMELIGHT

Transnational Education (TNE) is an area of significant growth across the globe, providing education developed in one country and delivered in another. But with the variety of national education systems, the changing political climate, the diverse models of TNE delivery and fundamentally, the technology to support and access such education systems, there are challenges for everyone involved.

To meet these challenges, NRENs from across the globe have come together to create a Special Interest Group for TNE (SIG-TNE), and share expertise in delivering truly borderless education.

GÉANT SIGs are established under the auspices of GÉANT in order to create an open forum where experts from its community exchange information, knowledge, ideas and best practices about specific technical or other areas of business relevant to the research and education networking community.

The focus of SIG-TNE is very much on education in its entirety for the members of its steering group; with representatives from CERNET, Internet2, SURFnet, GARR and Jisc, the remit of this SIG goes beyond research collaboration.

Words
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Along with GÉANT, Jisc has been working in partnership with NRENs and commercial internet providers to improve the connectivity that students depend on wherever they may be globally – and it really does improve learning experiences.

In China, for example, CERNET, the country's NREN, provides reliable, fast access to the 10Gbit/s ORIENTplus link between Beijing and London (via GÉANT). What this means beyond the technical jargon, is that TNE students and staff in China can reliably access services and learning environments hosted in the Europe, from both on or off campus.



The reasons – and the gains – for countries adopting a transnational approach are as diverse as the cultures that drive their education programmes on home turf.

In the Middle East and North Africa, partnerships are being born, in an effort to improve the quality and speed of internet connections. The region is already a hub for higher and further education partnerships with, for example the USA and Europe, TNE can be further enhanced by developing collaborative relationships with ASREN and our peer NRENs in the region.

The benefits of developing educational connectivity extend beyond the student experience. TNE can also benefit host countries, by helping support local economies; by establishing and enabling research collaboration; and, in the long term, by fostering closer links across the globe.

Aside from the economic benefits and the skills boost TNE can bring, there's a lighter side to the imperative for borderless education. TNE breaks down the barriers that previously existed, allowing for equal participation in partnerships between countries and the organisations, like Jisc, who exist to support education establishments with their digital needs.

Technology as an enabler isn't a new concept in education, from roots to shoots, our modern-day learners have become accustomed to hardware and software alike, forming part of their student experience. With transnational education, the tech isn't a nicety to facilitate blended learning, or assessments on the go, it provides the lecture hall and the space within which learning can take place.

Future challenges are also unlikely to be felt in isolation by members of the GÉANT community, so collaboration on the tools to improve TNE is of mutual benefit – one such area is learning analytics.

Self-assessment in our day to day lives is becoming normalised with ever-growing of sales of activity-tracking

wearables and apps. Not only is there an expectation from students that tech will support their learning needs, but it could also boost retention rates, and save our education institutions some financial headaches.

In an online world, with less face-to-face opportunity for intervention, learning analytics could become the future-proofing tool to ensure the investment we make in our students pays off, and really delivers the outcomes they also need, in a globally competitive workforce.

Ultimately, the vision for SIG-TNE is to facilitate these learning outcomes for the education institutions we all support, but could we also aim high amongst ourselves, as a community of NRENs?

The aspiration to come to an agreement that delivers connectivity across networks for all our education establishments, with consistent/aligned policies and processes, shouldn't be seen as too lofty....TBC!

ARE THERE PRACTICAL TOOLS THE SIG CAN OFFER?

Well, yes – the UK is developing a toolkit to support universities and others delivering TNE. This will be expanded to create an NREN toolkit, giving members both a guide as their TNE is developing but also the means to better support their own education institutions. This is a fundamental part of the SIG-TNE work.

SIG-TNE gives members an opportunity to shape not only how we collaborate in Europe, but across the rest of the world, and this world really is online; a recent UK Government report pointed out, loud and clear, that 48% of crime is now orchestrated online – this group is a route to deliver borderless communications for the greater good.

To find out more about the group and to become involved, visit <https://wiki.geant.org/display/TNE/SIG-TNE+Home>

“SIG-TNE is a terrific place to share the information from different countries/NRENs - the needs, challenges, best practices, and so on. The SIG can also do the research on how to improve the services to all transnational education activities, and provide guidance to NRENs and organisations.”

William Wan, Chief Technology Officer and overall program coordinator of TNE at CERNET (China Education and Research Network)

“We’ve seen that Transnational Education is an area of increasing importance and focus for Internet2’s higher education members whose international collaborations span the globe. We are excited for this opportunity to work in support of our members’ global needs, partnering more closely with the SIG-TNE NRENs to define, address and share best practices around some of the TNE challenges we all face.”

Urszula Chomicka, Global Engagement Manager, Internet2

“The history of the Netherlands, when it comes to international activities, goes back centuries. So, it’s not surprising that there are many partnerships between educational organisations connected to SURFnet and organisations based in other countries. In the SIG-TNE we will share ideas and work on instruments for identifying, connecting and servicing these organisations.”

Alexander van den Hil, Product Management, SURFnet