# AOLIN: A meeting place for Australian technology researchers

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The concept of a computer based communication (CMC) system as a meeting place for educational technologists arose out of a collaborative project between the Open University and the Deakin University, completed shortly before the International Conference of Distance Education held in Melbourne in August 1985. The three members on the Project: Lee Stirzaker (Senior Systems Analyst and Network Manager at the Computer Centre of Deakin University), Angela Castro (Senior Tutor in Instructional Design and information technology researcher at Deakin University), and Paul Bacsich (Senior Projects Officer at the Faculty of Technology of the Open University) later received many requests for help with electronic mail on videotex and ASCII systems, and tertiary computer networks in Australia and overseas from people who wanted to get in touch with active educational technologists in the quickest and most efficient way.

At a regional workshop for the Australian and South Pacific External Studies Association (ASPESA) held at Deakin on 14 March 1986, AOLIN was proposed by Angela and Paul, who was a keynote speaker at the Workshop, as a feasible structure to enable such electronic exchanges to take place. This proposal received active support from the people present and later from others and Telecom Australia.

On 1 September, AOLIN started to exist officially as a value added service network on Telememo for academic researchers. Telememo is a public electronic messaging system operated by Telecom Australia (Telememo will be renamed Keylink T in August 1987). AOLIN now has over 100 general members and associate members, many of whom are from the tertiary sectors, eg, members of CHASA (Council of the Australian Heads of Schools of Architecture). The CHASA model has been adopted by the adult educators in NSW universities and regional councils of adult education who have now got their own nodes on the AOLIN organisational structure (see Figure 1).

These members are each responsible for their own AOLIN fees (once only registration of $20, annual membership fee of $50) and monthly Telememo charges (only for what they use, there is no basic minimum charge). They have the benefits of being able to exist as a distinct common interest group on

AOLIN with their closed bulletin board, and to have rapport with other AOLIN members and Telememo subscribers (who are not necessarily AOLIN members) either on a one to one basis or publicly through the central services developed by the executives of AOLIN using the membership fees. These include an electronic newsletter, a computer conferencing venue, a membership directory, user training and a bibliographic database on telecommunications.

The interconnectivity aspect will be investigated in 1989. Meanwhile AOLIN already has a few overseas members from Hong Kong, Canada and the United Kingdom who dial in via packet switched networks to exchange information with Australian members. It must be stressed here that AOLIN is independent of Deakin University or any other organisation. It is an inter-institutional, self supporting network for educators who want to increase their contacts with peers in a group context. It functions as an adjunct for those who already have access to other computer networks, and for others who have no such access, AOLIN provides a friendly and easy introduction to the world of computer based communications. AOLIN is particularly pleased to be able to offer such an opportunity to members of the Australian Society of Educational Technology.

In the next few months, AOLIN will undergo a series of changes to enhance its services and review its executive structure, facilitating more member participation in decisions concerning the future developments of the Network.
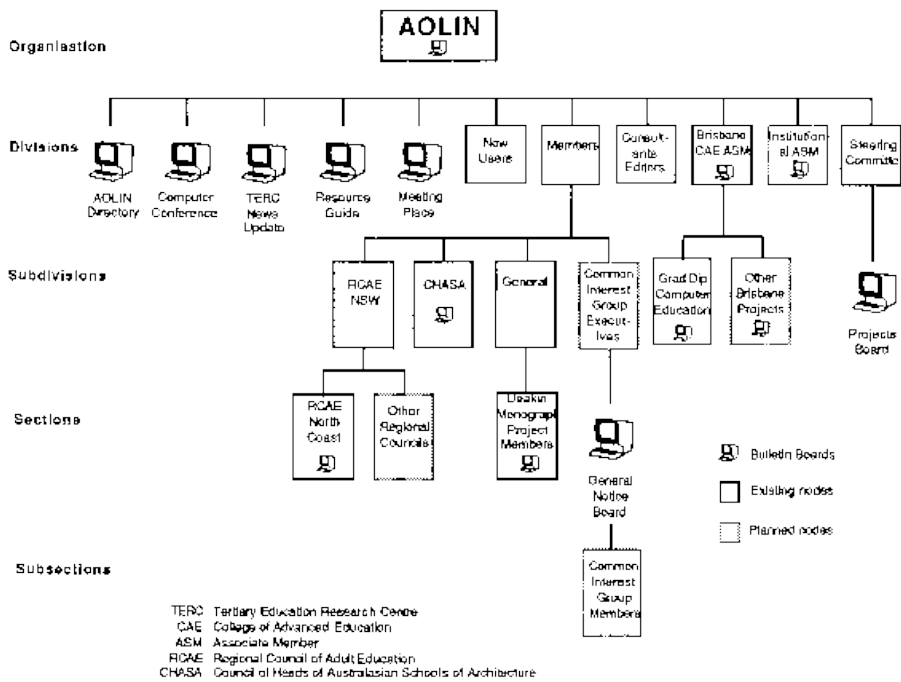


**Figure 1: AOLIN organisation**

*Further information:* People who wish to find out more about AOLIN are welcome to contact Angela Castro at Deakin University, Victoria 3217, Australia. Her office phone number is 052-471255, telex no. is AA35625 and her electronic mail address on ACSnet (the Australian Computer Science Network) is angela@charlie.oz. Enquiries from people on ARPA, UUCP, BITNET, JANET, etc, the overseas computer networks, are also welcome.

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